UBUNTU LEADERSHIP AS A UNIQUELY AFRICAN CONCEPT

by

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Abstract: Ubuntu leadership as a uniquely African concept

Background: Ubuntu leadership, rooted in African cultural traditions, is often positioned as an emic framework with strong potential to support advancement in Africa. Yet, without systematic and especially quantitative inquiry, its actual capacity to contribute meaningfully to Africa's development remains unverified.

Aim: This study seeks to establish a foundational definition of Ubuntu leadership, trace its prevalence and expression across African contexts, assess its influence on key organisational outcomes, and determine whether it operates primarily as an emic construct.

Methodology: Anchored in a critical realist framework, the study adopted a multimethod design. Evidence was drawn from academic literature, research reports, global datasets, and primary survey data. Analyses combined thematic reviews with reinterpretation of research reports and the application of descriptive and inferential statistics to both existing and newly collected data, with a consistent emphasis on quantitative evidence.

Results: The study reveals a broad consensus regarding the meaning of Ubuntu leadership; however, in quantitative research, it is often operationalised in a simplified manner, in contrast to the conceptually rich portrayals found in qualitative scholarship. Values and leadership practices associated with Ubuntu are not exclusive to Africa but are more salient in Sub-Saharan contexts, reflecting both emic roots and etic resonance. Quantitative evidence demonstrates that Ubuntu leadership produces strong and consistently positive organisational outcomes, with these effects evident across diverse cultural settings.

Conclusion: Although Ubuntu is frequently appropriated in politics, philosophy, and everyday rhetoric, its true significance emerges when clearly defined, quantitatively operationalised, and systematically assessed. Framed in this way, Ubuntu leadership reveals a distinctive potency, grounded in cultural specificity yet resonant in its global applicability. By advancing humane values and enhancing organisational effectiveness, Ubuntu leadership can support Africa's broader project of decolonisation and transformation.

Keywords: Ubuntu leadership, Africa, humane values, organisational outcomes, emic and etic, decolonisation

Opsomming: Ubuntu-leierskap as ’n uniek Afrika-konsep

Agtergrond: Ubuntu-leierskap, wat gegrond is in Afrika-kulturele tradisies, word dikwels geposisioneer as 'n emiese raamwerk met die potensiaal om vooruitgang in Afrika te ondersteun. Tog, sonder sistematiese en veral kwantitatiewe ondersoek, bly die werklike vermoë daarvan om betekenisvol tot Afrika se ontwikkeling by te dra, ongeverifieer.

Doel: Hierdie studie het gepoog om 'n fundamentele definisie van Ubuntu-leierskap te vestig, die voorkoms en uitdrukking daarvan oor Afrika-kontekste na te spoor, die invloed daarvan op belangrike organisatoriese uitkomste te beoordeel en te bepaal of dit hoofsaaklik as 'n emiese konstruk funksioneer.

Metodologie: Geanker in 'n kritiese realistiese raamwerk, het die studie multimetode-ontwerp gevolg. Bewyse is verkry uit akademiese literatuur, navorsingsverslae, globale datastelle en primêre opnamedata. Analises het tematiese oorsigte gekombineer met herinterpretasie van navorsingsverslae en die toepassing van beskrywende en inferensiële statistiek op bestaande en nuut versamelde data, met die klem op kwantitatiewe bewyse.

Resultate: Die studie het breë konsensus onthul oor die betekenis van Ubuntu-leierskap; in kwantitatiewe navorsing word dit egter dikwels op 'n vereenvoudigde manier gedoen, in teenstelling met die konsepsuele ryk uitbeeldings wat in kwalitatiewe studies gevind word. Waardes en leierskapspraktyke wat met Ubuntu geassosieer word, is nie eksklusief tot Afrika nie en is meer opvallend in sub-Sahara-kontekste, wat emiese wortels en etiese resonansie weerspieël. Kwantitatiewe bewyse toon dat Ubuntu-leierskap sterk en konsekwent positiewe organisatoriese uitkomste lewer, met hierdie effekte duidelik sigbaar oor diverse kulturele omgewings.

Gevolgtrekkings: Ubuntu se ware betekenis, wat dikwels in die politiek, filosofie en alledaagse retoriek toegeëien word, kom na vore wanneer dit duidelik gedefinieer, kwantitatief geoperasionaliseer en sistematies beoordeel word. Op hierdie manier geraam, onthul Ubuntu-leierskap 'n kenmerkende krag wat gegrond is in kulturele spesifisiteit, maar resonant is in sy globale toepaslikheid. Deur menslike waardes te bevorder en organisatoriese doeltreffendheid te verbeter, kan Ubuntu-leierskap Afrika se breër projek van dekolonisasie en transformasie ondersteun.

Sleutelwoorde: Ubuntu-leierskap, Afrika, menslike waardes, organisatoriese uitkomste, emiese en etiese, dekolonialisasie

I-Abstract: Ubuholi be-Ubuntu njengesiqubulo sase-Afrika esihlukile

Isizinda: Ubuholi be-Ubuntu, busekelwe yizinkolelo zamasiko ase-Afrika, evamise ukubekwa njengohlaka olweseka ukuthuthukiswa e-Afrika. Kepha, ngaphandle kocwaningo oluhlelekile futhi ikakhulu olunobuningi, amandla alo angempela okunikela ngempumelelo ekuthuthukiseni i-Afrika awakaziwa.

Inhloso: Lolu cwaningo lwaluhlose ukusungula incazelo eyisisekelo yobuholi be-Ubuntu, lulandelele ukuvela nokuziveza kwayo ezimweni zase-Afrika, luhlola umthelela wayo kwimiphumela ebalulekile yenhlangano futhi lunqume ukuthi isebenza ikakhulukazi njengokwakhiwa kwangaphakathi noma cha.

Indlela Yokwenza: Kususelwa ohlakeni lwangempela oluhlakaniphile, ucwaningo lwamukela indlela yokwenza ehlanganisa izindlela eziningi. Ubufakazi bathathwa ezincwadini zezemfundo, imibiko yocwaningo, amasethi edatha omhlaba wonke kanye nedatha yophenyo lwangempela. Ukuhlaziya kuhlanganisa ukubuyekezwa kwezihloko ngomcabango, ukubuyekezwa kabusha kwemibiko yocwaningo kanye nokusebenzisa izibalo zokuchaza nezibalo zokuphendula kudatha ekhona eqoqiwe entsha, kugcizelelwa ubufakazi obuncike enanini.

Imiphumela: Ucwaningo luveze ukuthi kunokuvumelana okukhulu mayelana nencazelo yobuholi be-Ubuntu; kodwa-ke, ocwaningweni oludingayo izibalo, kuvame ukuhunyushwa ngendlela elula, ngokungafani nezindlela ezicebile neziningi ezitholakala ocwaningweni olunzulu. Izimiso nezindlela zobuholi ezihlotshaniswa ne-Ubuntu azikho kuphela e-Afrika kodwa zibonakala kakhulu ezindaweni ezingaphansi kwe-Sahara, ziveza imvelaphi yendawo kanye nomthelela wayo. Ubufakazi obusekelwe kwizibalo bubonisa ukuthi ubuholi be-Ubuntu bukhiqiza imiphumela enamandla futhi ejwayelekile emihle enhlanganweni, futhi le miphumela iyabonakala ezindaweni ezahlukahlukene zamasiko.

Isiphetho: Kuvame ukusetshenziswa kwezepolitiki, izimfundiso zokucabanga kanye nezingxoxo zansuku zonke, ukubaluleka kweqiniso kwe-Ubuntu kuvela lapho kuchazwa kahle, kulawulwa ngendlela ebalulekile futhi kuhlolwe ngendlela ehlelekile. Ngokubheka kanjalo, ubuholi be-Ubuntu bubonisa amandla akhethekile, asekelwe emasikweni, kodwa futhi bubalulekile emhlabeni wonke. Ngokuphakamisa izimiso zobuntu nokuqinisa ukusebenza kwenhlangano, ubuholi be-Ubuntu bungasekela iphrojekthi ebanzi yase-Afrika yokukhipha ubukoloni nokuguqula izimo.

Amagama asemqoka: Ubuholi be-Ubuntu, i-Afrika, izimiso zobuntu, imiphumela yezinhlangano, i-emic kanye ne-etic, i-decolonisation

Declaration

I, Renier Steyn, student number 30017963, declare that this thesis is my original work, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality-checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or any part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification, or at any other higher education institution.

Renier Steyn Date: 5 December 2025

Dedication and acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my employer, the University of South Africa (UNISA), for its continued support of individual development. The university not only provides financial assistance to employees pursuing further studies, but also maintains a world-class library. In addition, the university's language services were instrumental in completing the thesis, and these experts' work was outstanding. Thank you, UNISA.

My sincere thanks go to my supervisor, Prof. Pumela Msweli, for her guidance throughout this project. She always made time to support me and allowed me to experiment with manuscripts that were beyond the conventional. I am deeply grateful for your confidence in me.

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Preface

Although Ubuntu is frequently portrayed as a uniquely African and admirable ethos, there is limited empirical scientific evidence to substantiate this claim. Without a rigorous scientific understanding of Ubuntu and its relevance and effectiveness in society, the concept risks remaining dormant as a potential tool for meaningful transformation. Before questions of prevalence and impact can be addressed, a more fundamental question must be answered: What is Ubuntu?

This thesis, *Ubuntu Leadership as a Uniquely African Concept*, attempts to answer this question by clarifying the meaning of Ubuntu, examining its potential as an instrument of change, and specifying its distinctive connection to Africa, with a primary focus on leadership and organisational contexts.

This doctorate is undertaken by publication, with the resulting publications organised into three thematic groups. The first group comprises articles focused on the conceptualisation of Ubuntu. The second group presents articles that explore the admirable outcomes associated with Ubuntu. The final group of articles addresses the uniqueness of Ubuntu as an African concept. These articles are framed by an introductory chapter that provides the background and theoretical foundations of the study, and a concluding chapter that synthesises the findings and integrates the contributions of the individual articles.

The doctorate by publication format presents certain challenges, also to the examiner. The first element concerns the titles of the publications. While the sequence of topics within the thesis was carefully planned by the author, there is little control over the titles ultimately assigned to the published works. As a result, the titles may not flow elegantly and, when read together, can appear somewhat disjointed.

A second challenge lies in the consistency of the thesis's presentation as a single document. The doctorate by publication format necessarily brings together works accepted by different publishers. Thus, structures, formats, referencing styles, and editorial requirements vary across the individual publications, resulting in noticeable differences in appearance, as dictated by the respective journals and conference proceedings.

A further challenge is the integration of the individual publications into a coherent whole, while avoiding unnecessary repetition of previously presented material. This makes the writing of the concluding and integrating chapter particularly demanding. Nevertheless, the synthesis provided aims to demonstrate how the separate works collectively advance knowledge and contribute to the central argument of the thesis, without excessive duplication.

The publications included in this thesis are presented below, together with their current publication status.

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2023). Exploring the concept of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership: Leveraging artificial intelligence for 'creative' and possibly valuable support in scoping reviews. *Proceedings of the 16th International Business Conference*, Swakopmund, pp. 104-123. ISBN 978-0-7961-2665-8 (e-book)

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2024). Developing a Unified Ubuntu Scale and AI-driven psychometric innovation. *Proceedings of the 17th International Business Conference*, Stellenbosch (pp. 184-202: 18 pages). ISBN 978-0-7961-8362-0. https://internationalbusinessconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CP28-Steyn-Msweli-AI-as-tool-final-corrected.pdf and https://drive.google.com/file/d/1E4d-qLdVpEu3dVfpb-h5mItHxW6mYU_k/view

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025a). Conceptualising through triangulation: The case of Ubuntu. *Proceedings of the 18th International Business Conference*, Dar es Salaam. (pp. 2339-2352) ISBN: 978-1-0370-7935

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025b). Leadership styles in Africa: Quantifying the uniqueness of the humane orientation. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual South African Institute for Management Sciences Conference*, Sun City. (pp. 1171-1193). ISBN: 978-1-0370-9898-7

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025c). Leveraging psychometric properties of Ubuntu measures to reveal its structural components. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies, 5*(1), a05-a05. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.1.05

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025d). Ubuntu as an emic belief system: A quantitative analysis of humane orientated practices. *Journal of African History, Culture, and Arts (JAHCA), 5*(3), 130-140. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17678414

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026a). Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo world. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 52*(0), a2355. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v52i0.2355

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026b). Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies, 8(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v7i2.2828

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026c). Ubuntu leadership across cultures: A comparative study of its prevalence and outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom. *Journal of African Business*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2026.2670888

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2027a). The impact of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses. Paper available from the first author – paper presently under review.

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2027b). Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct: Expression and outcomes among Black and White South Africans. Paper available from the first author – paper presently under review.

Steyn, R. (2026). Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs. In M. Twum-Darko (Ed.), *Book of contemporary multidisciplinary research* (pp. 82–105). BP International. https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/mono/978-81-998711-6-8/CH4

The two papers that have not yet been published are marked as published in 2027 as a placeholder. At the time of submission, these articles were still under review.

Chapter 1: Orientation

This chapter begins by outlining the study's background through a brief literature review, followed by the problem statement, aim, and objectives. It then presents the conceptual model, theoretical framework, and research methods. The chapter also delineates the study's scope, highlights its importance, and concludes by explaining the structure of the remainder of the dissertation.

1.1 BACKGROUND

The concept of Ubuntu continues to generate significant scholarly discussion regarding its relevance in contemporary African societies (Assié-Lumumba, 2018; Eliastam, 2015; Genger, 2021; Mukuni & Tlou, 2021; Louw, 2019; Nweke, 2021; Zondi & Makhoba, 2018). The 275 000 documents including the keyword Ubuntu, and the 4 220 documents with Ubuntu in titles of scholarly publications, as listed on Google Scholar, are indicative of the broad academic interest in the topic. Ubuntu is also a topic of interest in the public domain, with no fewer than 1 970 000 000 hits on Google.

Although some scholars have sought to consolidate a shared understanding of Ubuntu (Nolte & Downing, 2019; Louw, 2006; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005), these efforts have not resulted in consensus and have even prompted calls to rethink the concept entirely (Louw, 2019). Without conceptual clarity, it is difficult to build a coherent body of knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al., 2011), leaving the field fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped.

The effects of Ubuntu also remain insufficiently understood. While it has been framed both as a set of values widely shared among Africans (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Ntibagirirwa, 2024) and as a strategy to mobilise and inspire collective action (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2019), empirical evidence of its practical impact is limited. Some studies suggest that value alignment between leaders and followers can yield positive outcomes (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2021; Witesman, 2021), implying that Ubuntu may be particularly effective in African contexts (Aliye, 2020; Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019).

Finally, Ubuntu is perceived as a uniquely African philosophy grounded in the notion that "I am human only because you are human" (Tutu, 2000). Deeply rooted in Sub-

Saharan traditions (Gade, 2012) and centred on communal interdependence and mutual respect (Metz, 2011), it represents an emic system of thought. If such systems indeed align more closely with local realities and are more effective in addressing regional challenges (Mazonde & Carmichael, 2020; Sadler & Fuller, 2020), then Ubuntu may hold distinctive potential for solving African problems.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although Ubuntu leadership is often promoted as an admirable and laudable leadership style (Akinola & Uzodike, 2018; Sambala et al., 2020; Littrell et al., 2013), its definition remains unclear. Efforts to describe its nature (Nolte & Downing, 2019; Louw, 2006; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005) have produced ambiguous and sometimes conflicting conceptualisations (e.g., Mutsonziwa, 2020, versus Goldman et al., 2019), many of which are philosophical in nature (Chowdhury et al., 2021; Mabovula, 2011; Molefe & Magam, 2019).

The absence of evidence-based, quantitative definitions has hindered the development of a universally agreed-upon and operational understanding of Ubuntu. Similarly, the impact of Ubuntu is insufficiently evidenced. While it is often described as a coherent set of values (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Ntibagirirwa, 2018) and as a means to mobilise collective action (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2019), few studies have rigorously measured its effects, particularly using quantitative approaches (Brubaker, 2013; Littrell et al., 2013; Motsepe, 2020; Muller et al., 2019; Van Heerden, 2017).

Finally, although Ubuntu is widely regarded as a uniquely African philosophy rooted in Sub-Saharan traditions (Tutu, 2000; Gade, 2012; Metz, 2011), the extent of its prevalence and influence in contemporary African societies remains underexplored. Without clear evidence of its definition, impact, and enduring relevance, claims about Ubuntu's ability to address uniquely African challenges remain largely aspirational rather than empirically substantiated.

As a single sentence problem statement, it could be said that "the lack of conceptual clarity, limited empirical evidence of impact, and insufficient examination of its uniquely African character leave Ubuntu's role and relevance in addressing African challenges largely unsubstantiated".

This study seeks to address these gaps by providing a (largely) quantitative examination of what Ubuntu is, how it operates, and to what extent it remains a distinctly African construct (capable of addressing African problems).

1.3 AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the project is to conceptualise Ubuntu comprehensively, report on its impact, and specify the extent of its African nature.

Concerning the conceptualisation part (Aim A), the following objectives are set:

A1: To define Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership through an extensive literature review.

A2: To conceptualise Ubuntu leadership by focusing on characteristics assessed in measures of Ubuntu leadership.

A3: To adapt or develop a questionnaire that will assess the level of Ubuntu leadership practised by a leader – this will entail operationalising the concept.

Regarding the impact part (Aim B), the following objectives are set:

B1: To describe the organisational effects of Ubuntu leadership through a systematic review of empirical research results.

B2: To assess the prevalence of Ubuntu behaviour among leaders.

B3: To test the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and desirable organisational outcomes.

Concerning the African nature part (Aim C), the following objectives are set:

C1: To specify the African nature of Ubuntu by comparing Ubuntu-aligned values across countries.

C2: To articulate the African character of Ubuntu by contrasting its relevance and impact among individuals rooted in African cultural traditions with those from Western cultural backgrounds.

These two objectives regarding the African nature of Ubuntu are closely related; however, the first has a broader focus than the second, and each will be pursued using

different methodologies. The first objective will be addressed through secondary data analysis, while the second will be achieved using primary data collected for this study.

Meeting these objectives will solve the research problem.

1.4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

A conceptual model is presented to illustrate the relationships between the main constructs and to provide a visual representation of the study's focus. The conceptual framework for the study is presented below. Figure 1 is representative of the research questions: what exactly is Ubuntu, what is its impact on the world, and is it African?

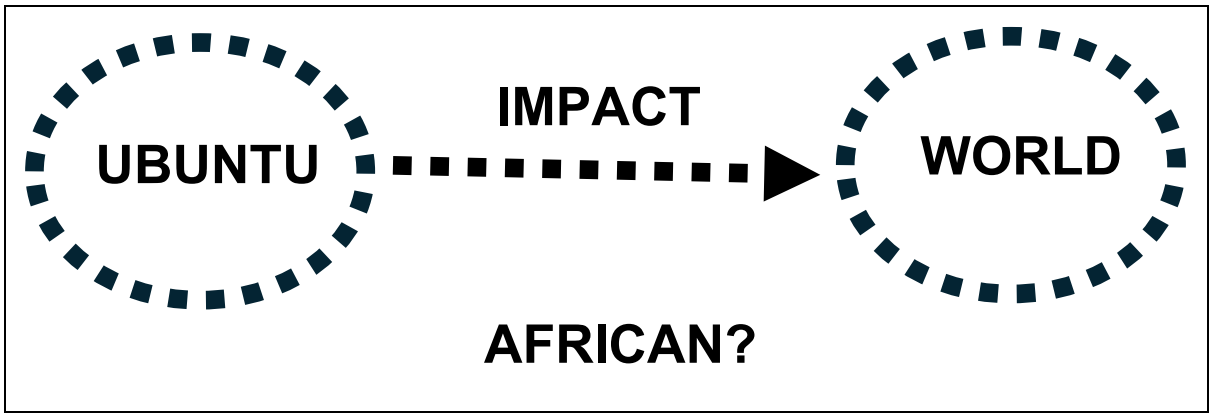

Figure 1: Conceptual model before the investigation

Presented in Figure 2 is the objective of the study: to define Ubuntu, to quantify its impact, and to conclude on its African nature.

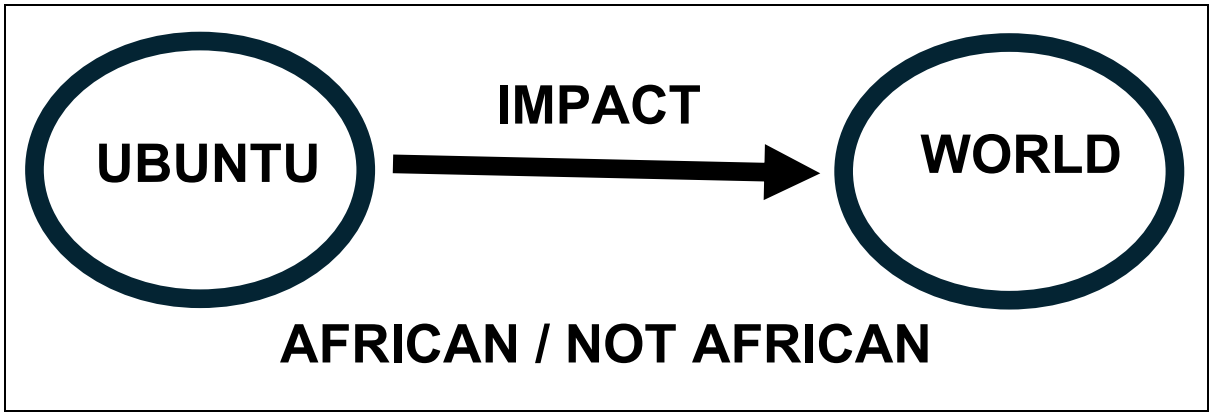

Figure 2: Conceptual model as per objectives

Presented in Figure 3 are the outcomes of the study: a comprehensive definition of Ubuntu, a clearer explanation of its impact, and a more nuanced articulation of its Africanness.

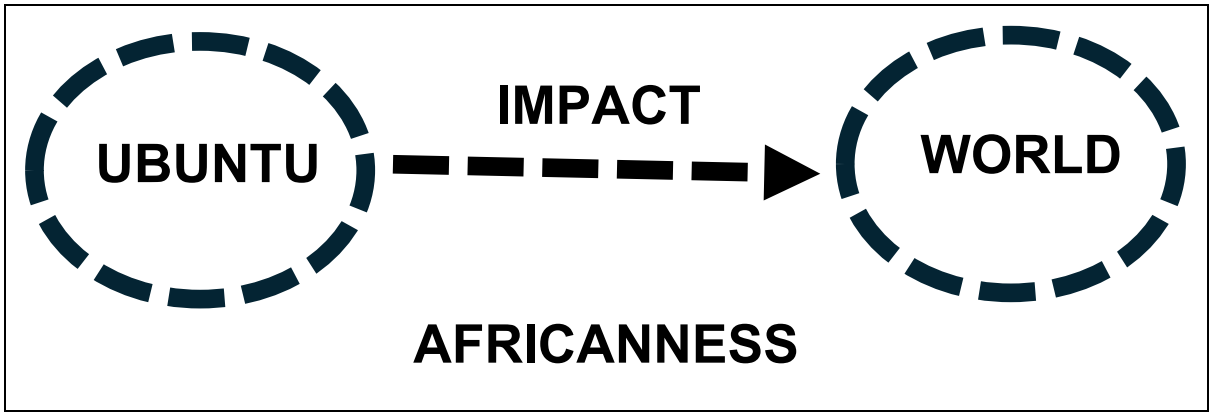

Figure 3: Conceptual model following the investigation

The conceptual model is closely aligned with, and informed by, the theoretical framework, which is presented in the following section.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in critical realism, a philosophical stance that provides both the ontological foundation and the epistemological guidance for the investigation. Ontologically, critical realism asserts that reality exists independently of human perception, comprising structures and mechanisms – such as Ubuntu leadership – that have causal powers whether or not they are directly observable (Bhaskar, 2008, 2010). Epistemologically, the study recognises that our knowledge of these realities is inevitably mediated by social, cultural, and linguistic processes, requiring careful methodological design to approximate truth (Maxwell, 2012).

Positioned between positivism, which assumes reality can be fully known through observation, and strong constructivism, which denies an objective reality, critical realism maintains that while social phenomena are real, their effects are contingent on context (Easton, 2010). In this study, the framework underpins three aims:

- Conceptualisation – defining and operationalising Ubuntu leadership to uncover its underlying structures;
- Impact – identifying the link between Ubuntu leadership and organisational outcomes; and
- African nature – examining variations in Ubuntu leadership across socio-cultural contexts.

Methodologically, critical realism supports and considers mixed methods as essential, combining qualitative approaches (e.g., literature and systematic reviews) with quantitative analyses (e.g., surveys and cross-cultural comparisons). This pluralism

aligns with its commitment to triangulating evidence for a richer, more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena (Danermark et al., 2002).

Critical realism also embraces epistemic fallibilism, the view that all knowledge claims remain provisional and open to revision in light of new evidence (Bhaskar, 2008; Sayer, 2010). While reality exists independently of human understanding, researchers can never claim absolute certainty that they have fully captured its underlying mechanisms. Instead, scientific inquiry seeks increasingly accurate explanations through the accumulation and triangulation of evidence. This position aligns with statistical hypothesis testing, where researchers may reject a null hypothesis but do not thereby prove an alternative hypothesis to be unquestionably true. Consequently, this study presents its conclusions regarding Ubuntu leadership as the best current explanations of the phenomenon, while recognising that they remain open to refinement as new evidence emerges.

In summary, critical realism provides the ontological claim that Ubuntu leadership exists as a structured social reality, and it offers an epistemological approach that enables its investigation through a strategically combined set of research methods to illuminate its nature, effects, and contextual relevance. However, throughout this thesis, a deliberate effort is made to distinguish between causal claims, which are inferred from theoretical explanation and qualitative inquiry, and the observable, measured constructs and statistical associations reported in the empirical studies.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODS

This section outlines the research methods employed, detailing the approach, design, data collection, and analysis procedures.

Approach

A mixed-methods approach was adopted, integrating both quantitative and qualitative strategies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), to provide a comprehensive understanding of Ubuntu leadership. This approach allows the study to triangulate findings from multiple sources, enhancing validity and capturing both measurable patterns and context-specific insights.

Design

The study incorporated complementary designs for the quantitative and qualitative components:

Quantitative design: A cross-sectional design (Babbie, 2020) was used to collect data at a single point in time, combined with a correlational design to examine relationships between Ubuntu leadership and organisational outcomes without implying causation.

Qualitative design: A systematic literature review (SLR) synthesised conceptualisations, theoretical perspectives, and empirical findings on Ubuntu from previous publications. The analysis followed the stepwise process outlined by Cronin et al. (2008).

Data collection

Data was sourced from five key streams:

- Published academic work on Ubuntu, including theoretical/philosophical articles, qualitative studies, and quantitative studies.
- Published data from the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004), to examine cross-cultural patterns and the African-specific nature of Ubuntu.
- Secondary data from World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2022), to examine cross-cultural patterns and the African-specific nature of Ubuntu.
- Primary data specifically collected for this study, using surveys to assess the prevalence and impact of Ubuntu leadership in organisational settings.
- Generative AI (ChatGPT) as a supplementary tool to conceptualise and integrate existing data and ideas. This tool was used to synthesise information and support the development of constructs (Haber et al, 2025), rather than as a source of empirical evidence.

The use of data from multiple sources is grounded in critical realism and facilitates data triangulation.

Data analysis

Different analytic tools were applied according to the data type:

Systematic literature review: Data was analysed thematically to identify patterns, gaps, and recurring conceptualisations of Ubuntu leadership (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Secondary quantitative data: Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, correlations, and regression analyses to test relationships between Ubuntu-aligned values and organisational outcomes. Most of these analyses were conducted using SPSS (IBM Corp, 2023) and interpreted relying on Field (2018)'s guidelines.

Primary quantitative data: Surveys were analysed using inferential statistics (e.g., t-tests, ANOVA and structural equation modelling) to examine the prevalence and effects of Ubuntu leadership.

AI-assisted content: Outputs from ChatGPT were critically evaluated, coded, and integrated with literature findings to support conceptual clarification.

Ethical matters

Ethical concerns may arise from the collection of primary data, the use of secondary quantitative data, and the incorporation of AI-assisted content. All aspects of this research was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership under approval numbers 1726 and 3781. For the primary data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and no ethical concerns were reported or encountered during the study. In the case of secondary data, appropriate acknowledgement and credit were given to the owners and original sources of the data. The use of artificial intelligence was fully disclosed, and all AI-assisted contributions were reported transparently in accordance with contemporary scholarly and ethical guidelines.

1.7 DELINEATION OF THE STUDY

The scope of this study is delineated to Ubuntu as presented in academic literature. The focus was placed on Ubuntu rather than on emic African leadership for three reasons: first, Africa is not a culturally homogeneous entity; second, Ubuntu is often regarded as a primary and distinctive African way of being; and third, this focus assists in delineating the sampling of respondents, largely to Sub-Saharan Africa and, in particular, South Africa.

In this study, Ubuntu is conceptualised as a set of values espoused by African thought leaders. While some scholars caution that reducing Ubuntu to values is overly simplistic (Ramose, 2002), arguing instead that it represents a broader philosophy

rooted in African languages and lived experiences, this narrower delineation is adopted for analytical clarity. The study, therefore, focuses on Ubuntu as a constellation of values, explicitly excluding its treatment as a general philosophy, as well as any discussion of its relation to religiosity or the supernatural.

The aforementioned delineation is also informed by the adoption of a predominantly quantitative focus and approach. In conceptualising Ubuntu, priority was given to quantitative research, thereby grounding the construct in empirical evidence rather than in philosophical, political or religious discourse. Consistent with this orientation, data collection and analysis were based on quantitative measures, with attention directed to numerical values, coefficients, and their differences, to minimise subjective interpretation. Following this approach would have been impossible if Ubuntu were studied as a philosophy.

Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as pertaining to Ubuntu conceptualised as a measurable value system within organisational settings, rather than as a comprehensive account of Ubuntu as a broader African philosophy or way of life. These delimitations reflect methodological precision by deliberately focusing on quantitative data while acknowledging the trade-off between greater empirical rigour and reduced conceptual depth and breadth.

1.8 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in the centrality and widespread acceptance of the Ubuntu leadership concept within the African context, alongside the fragmented and frequently non-empirical nature of existing scholarship on Ubuntu. The clarity the research aims to bring will allow scholars and leaders to fully engage with the concept and reap the fruits often associated with Ubuntu.

This study is also critical regarding the multi-methodological approach followed in finding an answer to the research question. A wide array of data was extracted and analysed, using diverse techniques, and the reporting was done in different formats, all providing an opportunity for a rich and multifaceted perspective on Ubuntu.

The study can be considered important for its role in stimulating critical debate on both the concept of Ubuntu and the methodological approaches employed. During the review process of articles submitted for publication, as well as in conference

presentations, it became evident that neither the results nor the methodologies employed were uncritically accepted. Several desk rejections by editors, together with critical feedback from reviewers and conference audiences, underscored the novelty and relevance of the research. In this way, the work made a meaningful contribution to scholarly discourse by generating debate at both conceptual and methodological levels.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Following this chapter are four chapters on the conceptualisation of Ubuntu (Chapters 2 to 5) and four on the impact of Ubuntu (Chapters 6 to 9). Chapters 10 to 12 address the conceptualisation of Ubuntu as an emic African construct. Chapter 13 serves as the concluding chapter, presenting an overview of the study and an evaluation thereof.

The following figure graphically, and in more detailed, present the structure of the thesis.

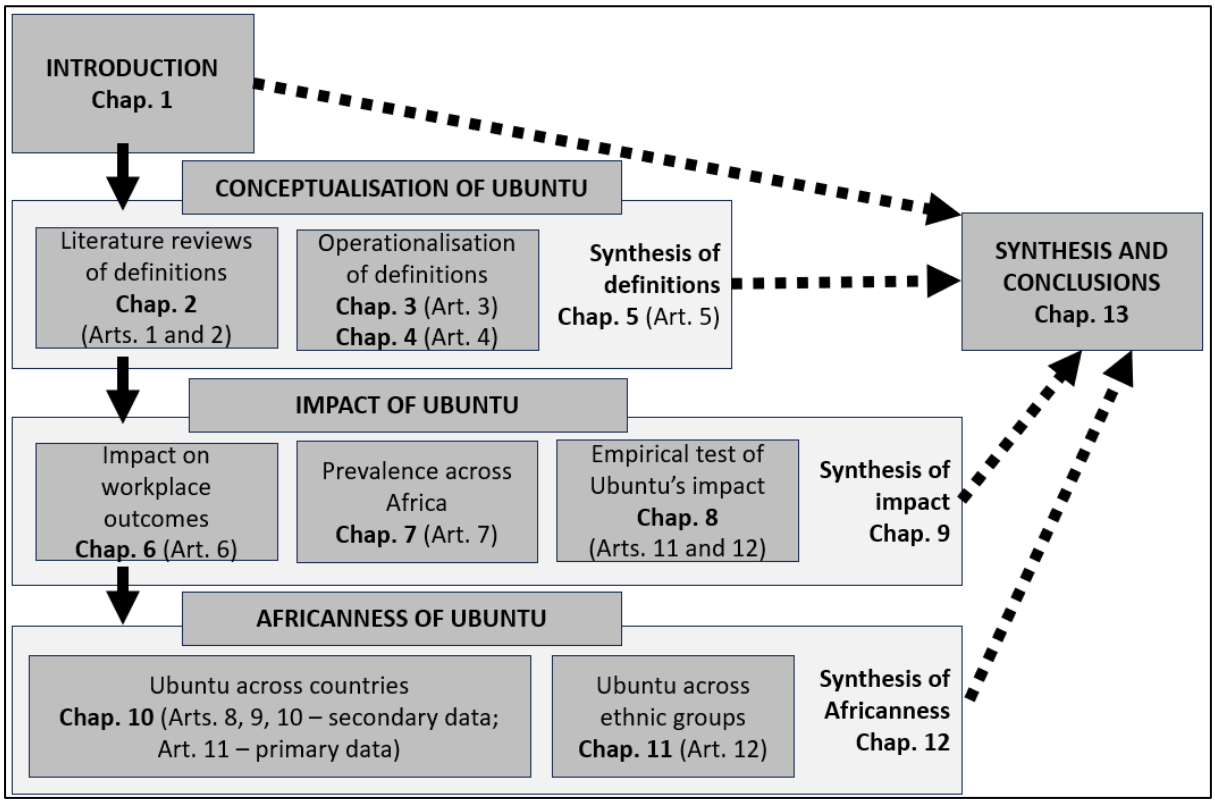

Figure 1: Scematic representation of the thesis "Ubuntu leadership as a uniquely African concept"

The thesis concludes with a reference list containing the sources cited in Chapters 1 and 13.

1.10 CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 outlined the study's background, problem statement, aim and objectives, conceptual model, theoretical framework, research methods, scope, significance, and structure. Together, these elements establish a clear foundation for the chapters that follow.

REFERENCES

References for this chapter are presented together with those of Chapter 13, as the substantial overlap in content and sources was deemed appropriate for a combined reference list.

Chapter 2: Defining Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: A literature review

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	**A**	**A1**	**1, 2**	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective A1 (To define Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership through an extensive literature review). This objective was partially achieved through the published papers presented below:

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026b). Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. *African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies, 8*(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v7i2.2828

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2023). Exploring the concept of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership: Leveraging artificial intelligence for 'creative' and possibly valuable support in scoping reviews. *Proceedings of the 16th International Business Conference*, Swakopmund, pp. 104-123. ISBN 978-0-7961-2665-8 (e-book)

The word partially was used intentionally, as research objectives are seldom fully achieved within a single study. Furthermore, the findings from the individual papers will be integrated and synthesised, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. This approach is consistent with critical realism, which recognises that knowledge is necessarily partial and provisional, and that a fuller understanding of reality emerges through the accumulation and triangulation of evidence from multiple sources and methods.

Article 1: Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu

Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu

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Abstract

Ubuntu, often described as an African worldview, is central to the African social ethos. However, it appears in both academic literature and everyday discourse in many different forms, and this plurality can blur its conceptual boundaries, risking dilution and misuse. This research seeks to establish a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu[1] by synthesising its diverse expressions into a unified framework. Inclusivity and comprehensiveness are essential to defining Ubuntu, preventing misuse of the word and enhancing its academic and practical utility. Using desktop research, the study analysed the 50 most cited articles on Ubuntu (via Harzing's "publish or perish" tool), as well as additional key definitions from Google Scholar. A thematic analysis of these sources identified three distinct approaches to defining Ubuntu, which together form the basis for a comprehensive and inclusive definition. Ubuntu, rooted in the Nguni proverb "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" ("a person is a person through other persons"), embodies an exemplary Southern African way of life and philosophical orientation that places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the centre of personal development and the shaping of societal thought among Africans. The study's integration of definitional streams clarifies Ubuntu's meaning, moving beyond its prior "catch-all" usage to delineate what is authentically African and conceptually specific. This research provides a multidimensional conceptualisation of Ubuntu, integrating existing perspectives to foster a nuanced understanding. It offers a foundation for unified scholarship and clearer applications, enhancing both theoretical and practical engagements with Ubuntu.

Keywords: Ubuntu, African philosophy, conceptualisation, definition, literature review

INTRODUCTION

The anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko (2015 / 1978) refers to Ubuntu as a "special contribution to the world in the field of human relations," or a great gift of "giving the world a more human face." Ubuntu is described by many as a distinctly African concept. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020, p. vi), for example,

[1] Praeg (2014), a leading scholar in this field, also interested in the meaning of Ubuntu, argues that many debates about Ubuntu arise because people do not clearly distinguish between ubuntu (lowercase), the lived, pre-colonial, everyday way of being in community, and Ubuntu (uppercase), which is the modern, philosophical interpretation of that older way of life.

describe Ubuntu as “a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin” hold, and through which people become authentic human beings. Bennett (2011) writes that Ubuntu articulates a voice that is distinctively African. Seehawer (2023) is more specific, describing Ubuntu as an indigenous Southern African paradigm. Metz (2021) also mentions Ubuntu’s Southern African origins, and the word’s use in the Nguni linguistic group.

Overson (2011) contrasts Ubuntu to Western views, and argues that Ubuntu is “a moral and ethical framework that stresses collectively and collective agency that are relevant for behaviour management and character formation that may contribute to sustainable lifestyles”, contrasting with Western frameworks “that overly emphasise individualism and individuality especially the stress on the individual’s intellect, mental intelligence, and abstract thinking at the expense of individual and collective values necessary to realise sustainable lifestyles” (p. 84). Msengana (2006) endorses this view, stating that Ubuntu does not address challenges and excellence, but rather tends to preserve, stabilise and maintain the status quo. She further states that whilst a Western worldview actively promotes individualism, Ubuntu instead aims to encourage a team-oriented approach. Taken together, these distinctions echo the stance of Waghid et al. (2023), who similarly argue that Ubuntu offers a relational, community-centred alternative to Western models that prioritise individualism, autonomy, and market-driven rationality. Shutte (2001) provides a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that Western notions of individual freedom and Ubuntu can be integrated into an ethic that enriches our understanding of humanity and provides practical guidance for fostering a genuinely humane, multicultural South Africa.

Ubuntu is also seen as a praiseworthy construct from the past. Mabovula (2011), for example, writes about how traditional African values are neglected, and how these could be revived, and the possible usefulness of Ubuntu in present-day applicability. Letseka and Letseka (2021) engage Basotho community elders to understand the concept of Ubuntu, seeing them as custodians of Ubuntu, rather than seeking this information from a younger generation. Metz (2021) states that it is common for black people indigenous to the continent to believe that one’s basic aim in life should be to exhibit Ubuntu, which can be achieved by embracing communal relationships with other people. Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) state that, since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a concerted effort to revive the notion of Ubuntu, also reiterating the praiseworthy nature of Ubuntu. Murove (2012) sees Ubuntu as indispensable to the reconstruction of post-colonial African societies and explains that it is valued as the ideal for human conduct in all spheres of life. It is said that Ubuntu could provide meaningful principles that can support a strong and defensible approach to reform in Africa, and could be central to rethinking African institutions (Waghid, 2020).

Tutu (1999) illustrates how Ubuntu is recognised in everyday talk. In saying “Yu, u nobuntu”, translated as “Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu”, the term functions without further specification, as the meaning that the person is good or commendable is understood implicitly. However, some question the presence of Ubuntu in contemporary society, with Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) discussing *The end of Ubuntu*. Letseka’s (2012) *In defence of Ubuntu* and Chimakona’s (2016) *The end of ubuntu or its beginning in Matolino-Kwindingwi-Metz debate: An exercise in conversational philosophy* also reflect the concerns regarding the prevalence of Ubuntu in contemporary Africa. Mabovula (2011) talks about the erosion of African communal values, with Mawere and Van Stam (2016) critically reflecting on the abundance of

Ubuntu in present-day sub-Saharan Africa. More recently, Diouf et al. (2023) state that there is a cavernous gulf between presenting Ubuntu as an ethic and "doing" Ubuntu.

Who qualifies to define Ubuntu is a matter of some debate. Metz (2007) and Ramose (2015) have argued for a critical ethnophilosophical approach to define Ubuntu (Taylor, 2023). In some cases, definitions are solicited from South Africans of African descent (SAADs) (Gade, 2012). In other cases, white South African scholars, such as Broodryk (2002) and Louw (1998; 2007), and individuals from a Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) background (see Hailey, 2008; Outlaw & Jeffers, 2022; Seehawer, 2018; Swanson, 2007) are involved. Taylor (2023) goes one step further, arguing that white philosophy professors "start mining resources from African cultures" without learning the relevant languages the way they would learn Greek to study the Stoics in earnest. This aligns with a further problem, namely, conveying the concept of Ubuntu in a non-African language. Mokgoro (1998, p. 1) notes that "the concept of ubuntu, like many concepts, is not easily defined. Defining an African notion in a foreign language and from an abstract, as opposed to a concrete approach, defies the very essence of the African worldview and may also be particularly illusive". Tutu (1999, p. 31) states that "Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language".

Ubuntu is increasingly used as a "catch-all" term to characterise the norms and values that are inherent in many traditional African societies (Hailey, 2008). Also, the public, widespread and concerted "ubuntu-isation" and the aggressive promotion of Ubuntu in post-apartheid South Africa (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013), contributed to the Ubuntu concept being presented and interpreted in a haphazard manner, which is detrimental to the development of a comprehensive body of knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al., 2013). Eliastam (2015) contests that the concept is vague and open to abuse. Ewuoso and Hall (2019: 93) describe literature on Ubuntu as "confusing, and characterised by several competing interpretations". Diouf et al. (2023) identifies the need to clarify what Ubuntu truly means, showing how it is often misused, romanticised, or emptied of meaning. Mboti (2015), aligned with that notion, wrote an article called "May the real Ubuntu please stand up?"

While Ubuntu was credited for its applicability to solve everyday problems (Broodryk, 2002; Shutte, 2001), it remains a central concept within the research agenda in Southern Africa for the same reasons (Longweni & Mdaka, 2023; Waghid et al., 2023; Wood & Bischoff, 2022). It is seen as pivotal to organisational change management (Mangaliso et al., 2022), and, more specifically, to reshaping human resources management (Kahn & Louw, 2023) to fit the cultural context. Ubuntu relates to workplace ethics (Matolino, 2020; Sambala et al., 2020), of which human resources management is the custodian, and to employee engagement (Chetty & Price, 2024; Tauetsile, 2021), another objective of human resources management practices. Its relevance also lies in understanding African leadership (Elkington, 2020; Laloo, 2022); a matter of great interest for the human resources practitioner."

Conceptual clarity and a standard definition of Ubuntu seem to be lacking. Without a standard or consensual definition (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al., 2013) of Ubuntu, the debate on its applicability for managing or explaining phenomena in Africa, and the development of an integrable body of knowledge around the concept, would be difficult. The present research aims to address this matter by providing a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ubuntu will not be discussed further in this literature review, as the topic was introduced in the introduction, and the primary focus of the results will be consolidating Ubuntu literature, specifically defining the concept. The need for a consensual definition and the nature of a good definition are, however, discussed in this section.

The need for a consensual definition

Science thrives on collaboration and is characterised by meticulous, in-depth, and methodical exploration (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The scientific process is methodically organised, building on fundamental elements such as concepts, statements (definitions, hypotheses, propositions included), conceptual structures (encompassing typologies, models, theories), and overarching frameworks or paradigms (De Vos et al., 2013). Without clarity about the foundational elements, higher-order enquiry is not possible (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). This study narrows its scope beyond the most fundamental concepts and focuses on a specific statement and specific definitions. The concept of the word Ubuntu is well established, but what it entails, or its definition, is not clear. Statements of definition provide precise interpretations of terms like Ubuntu, fostering mutual comprehension among researchers. Such definitions not only specify the use of terms within specific contexts, as noted by Mouton (1996), but also facilitate clearer communication by delineating their meanings. A distinction is made between theoretical (connotative) and operational (denotative) definitions. Theoretical definitions articulate the relationship between a concept and related concepts within a theoretical framework, focusing on connotations. Operational definitions, in contrast, detail how a concept is operationalised, outlining how it will be observed and measured, therefore specifying conditions for its appropriate use (Mouton, 1996). In this research study, the focus will be on both theoretical and operational definitions.

Types of definitions

From the aforementioned, the importance of a consensual definition in the development of the body of knowledge is clear. Kibin (2024) describes the elements of a good definition in terms of clarity (avoiding ambiguity or confusion), the essential meaning and sufficiency of definitions (it should not be overly broad, nor too narrow, excluding relevant aspects), precise wording (avoiding vague or overly general terms), non-circularity (meaning it does not define a term by using the same term within its definition) and applicability (where a good definition is applicable across contexts and situations). Pap (1964) simply states that definitions should enhance clarity, facilitate communication, and contribute to the progress of scientific understanding. These principles will be used when developing a definition of Ubuntu that is comprehensive and representative of all the aspects that should be included in a definition.

Alberts (2019) presents a list of 12 definition types, of which five should be avoided. This list serves as a guideline to identify and formulate acceptable definitions. In Table 1, an explanation of each definition type is presented.

Table 1

Types of definitions

Type of definition	Description and example
1 Genus-differentiae definitions	The genus and the differentiae are present in the definition. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy (genus) typically associated with Southern African thinking (differentiae).
2 Definition-through-denotations	The elements of a concept are described. E.g. Ubuntu consists of four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion and lastly respect and dignity.
3 Contextual definitions	This involves describing the concept as it materialises. E.g. Ubuntu is present when individuals share the social values of group survival, solidarity, compassion as well as respect and dignity.
4 Partial definitions	Such a definition involves listing the parts of the concept. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview of African humanism.
5 Paraphrase definitions	Here the concept is described in simpler language. E.g. Ubuntu does not pertain to four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity, but rather to humaneness.
6 Definitions-through-synthesis	The concept describes the integration of a large body of knowledge. E.g. Ubuntu originates from Southern Africa and consists of four social values, namely group survival, solidarity, compassion and lastly respect and dignity.
7 Ostensive definitions	A graphic representation is necessary and included in these definitions. E.g. given this Venn diagram, it is clear that solidarity is central to Ubuntu, whilst respect and dignity are of lesser prominence.
8 Synonym definitions – to be avoided	The concept is described by a synonym. E.g. Ubuntu = humaneness.
9 Incomplete definitions – to be avoided	Only the higher-level concept is described. E.g. Ubuntu is a philosophy. Yes, Ubuntu is a philosophy, but it is a Southern African philosophy, specific to that region.
10 Severely limited definitions – to be avoided	A critical aspect of the concept is missing/not presented. E.g. Ubuntu is African. There are many other aspects which are also African, but not related to Ubuntu.
11 Extremely broad definitions – to be avoided	The concept is described so broadly that a distinction from other concepts is impossible. E.g. Ubuntu is the African philosophy – excluding philosophies from other regions of Africa.
12 Circle definitions – to be avoided	Here, the concept defined is repeated in its definition without providing clarity. This phenomenon is known as a tautology. E.g. Ubuntu is the association with Ubuntu values.

From Table 1, it is clear that overlaps between the different types of definitions occur. However, Alberts's (2019) typology provides the reader with a list of aspects to include in a comprehensive definition and also clearly indicates which elements should be avoided. Furthermore, it provides a guideline on how to evaluate the quality of definitions.

METHOD

The initial aim was to compile a long list of definitions of Ubuntu and to synthesise them to arrive at a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu, aligned with Albert's (2019) "definitions-through-synthesis". Harzing's "publish or perish" was the first search engine used, as it provides the most cited outputs within the Google Scholar environment. The search was for "Ubuntu" in the title. A search was also conducted using Google Scholar, targeting research outputs with "Ubuntu" in the title, refined by the keyword terms "definition," "define," or "conceptualisation." The following was the instruction: intitle:"Ubuntu" (definition OR define OR conceptualisation).

Though PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) provides a comprehensive checklist and a flow diagram to ensure clarity and transparency (Moher et al., 2023), as does the Cochrane Collaboration in their Handbook for Systematic Reviews (Higgins et al., 2023), this research followed a more open-ended approach, somewhat aligned with traditional narrative literature analyses (Cronin at al., 2008), where the researcher is less restricted by methodology and reporting processes, and focuses on accumulating findings. This route was also followed for practical reasons, as systematic reviews are labour-intensive, complex (Stovold et al., 2014), and time-consuming (Andersen et al., 2020), beyond the capabilities of an individual researcher.

The results of both searches were combined, and a long list of Ubuntu articles was created. In all cases, the abstracts were first scrutinised to assess if the work was indeed about Ubuntu as an African concept. Noteworthy is that Ubuntu is also a "Linux distribution based on Debian and composed mostly of free and open-source software" and does not refer to any African way of living or philosophy.

The selected articles were then read to find definitions of Ubuntu. The aim was to create a shorter list of 50 articles on Ubuntu, which could include information on defining the concept. Apart from Harzing's and Google Scholar, as well as associated outputs found in the reference lists of these outputs, the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, a very reputable source of definitions, was used to ultimately define Ubuntu.

Once all the research outputs were assembled, the search for definitions was intensified. This short list of definitions was analysed and thematically grouped together. The grouping of the definitions was done by the first author and verified by the second author. Unbeknownst to the authors when planning this research, Gade's (2012) conceptualisation of Ubuntu as either the moral quality of a person or as a phenomenon (for instance, a philosophy) was effective as a guide to categorising Ubuntu definitions. Additionally, in the analyses of the definitions, several synonym definitions (Alberts, 2019) were observed, which emerged as the third theme in defining Ubuntu.

Following the thematic analysis, these themes were incorporated to provide a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. This was done by incorporating as many aspects and elements of Ubuntu as possible to ensure a comprehensive definition, while also making it inclusive by reflecting the wide range of existing approaches to defining Ubuntu. This synthesis was qualitative in nature, relying on the researcher's interpretive skills in identifying patterns and themes in a flexible and iterative manner,

sharing ideas and writing narratives with the co-author. Such a subjective approach to data analysis is well recognised as appropriate within the social sciences domain (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS

Harzing's "publish or perish" search provided a list of publications, ranked from most cited to least cited. The 200 most cited articles were requested. The list of Ubuntu definitions is very long, as Google Scholar suggests that at least 5 620 outputs with Ubuntu in the title were published and listed on that search engine. The Google Scholar list was very long, when entering intitle: "Ubuntu" (definition OR define OR conceptualisation) – 1690 hits. The outputs presented by Harzing's "publish or perish" phrase were very useful. After reading these outputs, 50 abstracts were identified and judged sufficient to define Ubuntu. Using these 50 outputs and the two definitions from the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, the process of identifying themes within the definitions began. Presented below are the three distinct categories of Ubuntu definitions identified in the literature, each of which is further articulated to show how it is typically specified or presented.

Synonym definitions

A variety of synonym definitions is provided. Metz (2021) states that the word Ubuntu, from the Southern African Nguni linguistic group (including Zulu and Xhosa languages), literally means humanness[2]. Ramose (2015) echoes this interpretation of Ubuntu as referring to humanness. Sibanda (2014) refers to "Hunhu/Ubuntu" as an African conception of humanism. Ramose (2015) points to the importance of distinguishing between humanness and humanism, where the former suggests both a condition of being and the state of becoming, which is opposed to any-ism, including humanism, for this would indicate a condition of finality, a closedness or a type of absoluteness which is resistant to any further movement. Swanson (2007) provides only a few words to describe the concept, defining Ubuntu as "humble togetherness" (p. 54).

Moving beyond single-word synonyms (such as humanism or humaneness), other definitions remain similarly brief and fail to clarify the nature of Ubuntu, leaving readers to infer – or even construct – the concept for themselves. Sambala et al. (2020), for example, identify a group in their definition and explain Ubuntu as "because we are". Mbiti (1990/1969) introduces a reciprocal element to the definition, and states that Ubuntu means "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am" (p. 106). Many authors (Follesdal, 2022; Gade, 2012; Letseka, 2013; Mboti, 2015; Ramose, 2002) use the phrase "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", where Ubuntu has the meaning that "a person is a person through other persons". This contributes little to our understanding of the concept.

[2]This is not Metz's only description of Ubuntu; rather, it represents one example among several, as he also provides far more detailed accounts of the concept. The same pattern is evident among many authors who offer synonym-type definitions alongside more specific and elaborated formulations. Nevertheless, these concise synonym-based expressions cannot be dismissed. First, they appear in the literature as though they constitute legitimate definitions in their own right. Second, they reflect how Ubuntu is commonly invoked in public discourse, typically without further qualification. When individuals are asked to define Ubuntu, they often respond with phrases such as "I am because we are," indicating how such shorthand expressions function as everyday, de facto definitions.

Differing from the popular definitions provided above, is the Radzik and Murphy (2023) translation of Ubuntu from Zulu, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, which equates “a person depends on others to be a person”. The reference to depending on others seems to allocate a more active role to others in defining Ubuntu. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) refers to the isiZulu aphorism, “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, stating in a similar fashion that “a person is a person because of or through others”.

The findings above are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Ubuntu translations

#	Author(s)	Ubuntu and indigenous language use of Ubuntu	English Translation
1	Metz (2021)	Ubuntu	“humanness”
2	Ramose (2015)	Ubuntu	“humanness”
3	Sibanda (2014)	“Hunhu/Ubuntu”	African humanism
4	Swanson (2007)	Ubuntu	“humble togetherness”
5	Tutu (1999)	“Yu, u nobuntu”	“hey, so-and-so has ubuntu”
6	Sambala et al. (2020)	Ubuntu	“I am because we are”
7	Mbiti (1990 / 1969)	Ubuntu	“I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”
8	Letseka (2013)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”	“a person is a person through others”
9	Mboti (2015)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”	“persons are persons through other persons”
10	Gade (2012)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”	“a person is a person through other persons”
11	Follesdal (2022)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”	“a person is a person through other persons”
12	Ramose (2002)	“umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu” (Nguni) “motho ke motho ka batho” (Sotho)	“a person is a person through other persons”
13	Mboti (2015)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (Nguni), “motho ke motho ka batho” (Sotho)	“a person is a person through other persons”
14	Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (isiZulu)	“a person is a person because of or through others”
15	Radzik and Murphy (2023)	“umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (Zulu)	“a person depends on others to be a person”

This table encapsulates the varied interpretations and translations of the Ubuntu concept as provided by different authors. Basically, the definition varies from humanness, and more so, to a person is a person through another person. However, Mboti (2015: 126-127) said, following a review of 23 definitions of Ubuntu, that “the settled definition of choice that seems to always return, again and again” is “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (in Nguni languages) and “motho ke motho ka batho” (in Sotho languages), which means “a person is a person through other persons” or “I am because we are”. This research came to the same conclusion regarding the literal meaning of the word.

Following Alberts's (2019) typology (see Table 1), these definitions are "severely limited definitions", as a critical aspect of the concept is missing or not presented. The definitions are vague and communicate very little about how a person becomes a person through or because of others. Worth noting is that "most authors today refer to the proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' when describing ubuntu, irrespective of whether they consider ubuntu to be a human quality, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview" (Gade, 2011, p. 303).

As a human characteristic

Sibanda (2014) refers to "Hunhu/Ubuntu" as a traditional African philosophy which thrives on the vision of a perfect and virtuous individual. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) write that a person is, in effect, a person through what one does. Such actions either make one umntu onobuntu (a humane person) or umntu ongena buntu (an inhumane person – one without Ubuntu). A humane person is understood as a person who possesses acceptable moral qualities and who puts them to good use. Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005, p. 235) state that Ubuntu is a philosophy that "puts the person at the centre of all things", and is "concerned with both the character and behaviour of a person", which "becomes partially understood through human acts or the lack of relevant human acts". "These acts are normally motivated by a good inner state or disposition", and Ubuntu aims "to conserve, develop and perfect a human person. It is concerned with self-understanding, self-preservation and growth" (p. 235). Murove (2012) states that Ubuntu implies character qualities such as compassion, kindness, courtesy and respect for other persons. Metz (2021) claims that it is common among black people indigenous to the continent to believe that one's basic aim in life should be to exhibit Ubuntu, which can be achieved by praising communal relationships with others. As stated earlier, Tutu (1999) individualised Ubuntu as a praiseworthy attribute, "Yu, u nobuntu", which translates to "Hey, so-and-so has ubuntu", implying that the person possesses commendable character.

Seehawer (2018) emphasises the evolving nature of Ubuntu, which encompasses becoming human and being human. This evolution occurs through the acceptance of certain values and living in accordance with them. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020) claim that these Ubuntu values and practices make people authentic human beings. An authentic individual human being forms part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world.(p. vi). It is clear from the above that Ubuntu is unmistakably seen by some authors as a way of living.

As a philosophy

Sambala et al. (2020) suggest that Ubuntu philosophy presents attractive alternative conventions of moral decision-making and a useful language for understanding moral reasoning and ethics. The outputs from the Harzing's "publish or perish" search confirm its wide application. The following serves as evidence of the broad use of Ubuntu as a philosophy in various fields:

- Business and management (Igulu, 2023; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013; Msengana, 2006; Sambala et al., 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Taylor, 2014).
- Social change and rebuilding society (Mabovula, 2011; Mawere & Van Stam, 2016; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Ogude, 2019; Tschaepe, 2013).
- Law (Bennett, 2011; Himonga et al., 2013; Letseka, 2014; Louw, 2007).

- Education (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Grange, 2012; Venter, 2004).
- Ecology (Etieyibo, 2017; Overson, 2011; Ramose, 2015).
- Theology and pastoral care (Cilliers, 2008; Chisale, 2018; Gathogo, 2008; Louw, 1998).
- Social work (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; van Breda, 2019), caring (Tolsma & Downing, 2016) and mental health (Wilson & Williams, 2013).

Many outputs refer to the understanding of Ubuntu as a philosophy (Chimakonam, 2016; Ehlers, 2017; Eliastam, 2015; Gade, 2011; Hailey, 2008; Mangena, 2016; Masango, 2006; Metz, 2021; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005; Murove, 2012; Praeg, 2008; Sibanda, 2014; Shutte, 2009; Taylor, 2023; Van Niekerk, 2013), an ethic, or a worldview. Some leading authors and their seminal contributions were omitted from the list above. These include Ramose (1999), who treats Ubuntu as an onto-epistemology, an approach that intertwines being, knowing, and the production of knowledge, Murove's (2009) interpretation of Ubuntu as relational relationality, and Molefe's (2017, 2020) work on Ubuntu in relation to humanity, dignity, and personhood. These contributions are undoubtedly significant within the field of philosophy, yet they were not identified in the Harzing "publish or perish" search. Their omission may be due to the algorithms employed by the software or the specific Boolean parameters used in the search process. Nevertheless, although these excluded works have shaped African philosophical thought, they are not essential for defining the concept itself, which has evolved and attained a reach that extends beyond them.

As in the case where Ubuntu was considered as a human characteristic, it is clear from the above that Ubuntu is perceived as a philosophy, with widespread applications, already articulated in 1991 by Shutte. This presentation of Ubuntu as a philosophy is confirmed by the number of authors cited above.

From the findings, it can be stated that the word Ubuntu is derived from the Nguni[3] proverb "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu", which translates to "a person is a person through other persons", referring to a way of being (a characteristic) and a phenomenon (a philosophy, an ethic, a worldview). Two further aspects could be incorporated, from the introductory part of the article, namely that Ubuntu is a traditionally Southern African concept (Metz, 2021; Seehawer, 2023) and secondly that the concept is seen as an ideal, something to aspire to (Mabovula, 2011; Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013; Murove, 2012).

However, a definition as sketched in the previous paragraph is not satisfactory. It is partly a synonym definition, an incomplete definition, or a severely limited definition. It can also be described as an extremely broad definition (see Table 1), and such definitions should be avoided when defining concepts (Alberts, 2019). However, by treating the available text above as the genus in a genus-differentiae definition and adding the differentiae, perhaps better framed as denotations, in what may be described as a definition-through-denotations approach (see Table 1), it becomes possible to construct an acceptable definition. The denotations associated with Ubuntu are presented next.

[3] Alternatively, 'motho ke motho ka batho' (in Sotho languages), but the Nguni languages constitute a larger pool of languages, and reference is more often made to the Nguni languages.

Denotations

Given a thorough review of the literature, a synthesis could be drawn of the main denotations of Ubuntu. The literature is quite extensive, overlapping, and difficult to integrate, but the use of the term "associated values" in Broodryk's (2002: 13) definition of Ubuntu as humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion, and "associated values" is valuable, as many synonyms are used when defining Ubuntu.

The outputs from the Harzing's "publish or perish" search were used to specify the words associated with Ubuntu, as a human characteristic, and as a philosophy. The words associated with human characteristics and philosophy were presented in different formats, but as it turned out, their denotations were the same. What is presented in the following four paragraphs are distinct characteristics associated with living Ubuntu, as well as elements embedded within the broader philosophy. The frequency with which these expressions appear in the literature will inform a denotative account of Ubuntu.

Tutu (1999) claims that individuals displaying Ubuntu are generous, hospitable, friendly, caring, and compassionate, and that they share what they have. Murove (2012) argues that Ubuntu implies character qualities such as compassion, kindness, courtesy, and respect for other persons. Eliastam (2015) suggests that Ubuntu is generally defined as depicting hospitality, compassion, humaneness, sharing, and respect. Letseka and Letseka (2021) profess that Ubuntu encapsulates moral norms and virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, benevolence, courtesy, respect, and concern for others. Follesdal (2022) emphasises the harmonious relationships between persons as constitutive of the individual, underscoring compassion and commitment to one another's growth. Mabovula (2011) provides a long list of the core humanistic attributes of Ubuntu, including caring, humble, thoughtful, considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous, and blessed: character attributes that veer away from confrontation towards conciliation. These denotations are largely related to the characteristics of Ubuntu.

In a similar vein, Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) write that Ubuntu aims to conserve, develop, and perfect a human being. It focuses on self-understanding, self-preservation, and growth. The community plays a crucial role in achieving this objective by aiding in the shaping and defining of an individual. Every person has rights that must be respected, including receiving help, protection, sustenance, and being shown compassion and love. These rights are granted without discrimination, for one qualifies simply by being human. Rather than viewing these rights as entitlements, they are seen as conferring responsibilities and obligations towards others. Seehawer (2018) declares that Ubuntu is realised through the lived experience of community and respectful, caring relationships with other living beings and the environment. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) describe Ubuntu as the ability to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality, aimed at building and maintaining communities characterised by justice and mutual care. Mutsonziwa (2020) highlights humanness, interconnectedness and compassion as core to the Ubuntu concept.

Focusing more on the philosophy behind the concept, Ewuoso and Hall (2019: 93) narrate that "Ubuntu is an essentially relational ethics, which prises relationships of interdependence, fellowship, reconciliation, relationality, community friendliness, harmonious relationships, and other-regarding actions such as compassion and actions that are likely to be good for others, in which actions are morally right to the extent that they honour the capacity to relate communally, reduce discord or promote friendly

relationships with others, and in which the physical world and the spiritual world are fundamentally united." Bennett (2011), within the context of law, professes that Ubuntu adoption can lay the foundation for a cohesive, plural, South African legal culture, characterised by notions such as reconciliation, sharing, compassion, civility, responsibility, trust and harmony. Letseka (2013a, p. 339) writes that "Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity." Sambala et al. (2020) state that Ubuntu is based on and emphasises humanity, compassion, and social responsibility. According to Mawere and Van Stam (2016, p. 291), Ubuntu is associated with a range of positive attitudes that express respect for human life and passion for community, helpfulness, conviviality, sharing, caring, trust, and unselfishness.

Mnyaka and Motlhabi (2005) claim that Ubuntu aims to conserve, develop, and perfect a human person. It is concerned with self-understanding, self-preservation, and growth. The role of the community in accomplishing the aforementioned is to assist in shaping and defining a person. A person has rights to be respected, and is to be helped, protected, fed, and shown compassion and love. There is no discrimination when it comes to respecting these rights; one qualifies merely by being a human person. The rights one has are not perceived as statements of entitlement, but rather as responsibilities and obligations towards others. Seehawer (2018) declares that Ubuntu is realised through lived community and respectful, caring relations with other living beings and the environment. Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) suggest that Ubuntu can be described as the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring. Mutsonziwa (2020) mentions humanness, interconnectedness, and compassion as central to Ubuntu. Karsten and Illa (2005, p. 607) state that "Ubuntu is seen as humaneness, a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness, that individuals display for one another." According to Kamwangamalu (1999, p. 5), Ubuntu represents the core values of African ontologies, including respect for all humans, human dignity, sharing, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, and communalism.

Given the set of denotations presented in the preceding four paragraphs, it was decided to use their frequency of occurrence as an indicator of the centrality of the identified denotations. Most frequently appearing in the text above is the term "compassion" (15 times), followed by "caring" (9 times), "respect" (7 times), "community" (6 times), "sharing" (5 times), "dignity" and "humanity" (4 times each), and "humanness", "hospitality", "growth", "human", "relationships", "reciprocity", and "harmony" (3 times in each case). The enumeration of these words reflects the pivotal themes around which the discussion is centred, emphasising the significance of compassion, mutual respect, communal living and the foundational values associated with Ubuntu.

In the next step, similar denotations were grouped together; that is, synonyms and terms thematically associated were consolidated into broader thematic categories. The central theme, namely empathy, emphasises "compassion" (15 times) and "caring" (9 times), reflecting the text's advocacy for empathy and proactive support towards others' well-being. Next, respect, incorporating "respect" (7 times), "dignity" (4 times), and "humanity" (4 times each), along with "humanness" (3 times), underscores the narrative of recognising the intrinsic worth of every individual. Another significant theme is community, revolving around the terms "community" (6 times) and "reciprocity" (3 times), highlighting the vital role of mutual support and exchange in building strong, cohesive communities. Closely followed by generosity,

encapsulating “sharing” (5 times) and “hospitality” (3 times), the text advocates for generosity and the idea of sharing resources. The final core theme, harmony, includes “relationships” (3 times) and “harmony” (3 times), underscoring the significance of fostering peaceful and cooperative interactions. The recurrent emphasis on specific aspects was taken as indicative of their conceptual centrality, permitting these elements to be identified as the principal denotative markers of Ubuntu..

DISCUSSION

The outputs based on Harzing's “publish or perish” phrase were used as the core data source for this study. Though reliance on Google Scholar suggests an incomplete database, it still constitutes a huge index. Some concern may be expressed regarding the reliance on Harzing's “publish or perish” principle for citation metrics, as the guideline does not provide a qualitative assessment of the research impact of the publications’ substance. However, Harzing's “publish or perish” concept was seen as a reliable tool to gather the most popular works on Ubuntu. The first 50 outputs generated by Harzing's “publish or perish” method were used, and these texts provided rich data and strong leads to other influential literature on the topic.

The present research aimed to establish consensus on the meaning of Ubuntu through the amalgamation of the different uses of the word. An important step toward achieving the objective was the following passage from Gade (2011), regarding the history of the use of the word Ubuntu. He finds that the word has been in use since at least 1846, and that prior to 1950 Ubuntu was always defined as a human quality. During the 1990s, authors started defining Ubuntu more broadly as a philosophy, an ethic, and as a worldview. It was also during the 1990s that “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” (translated as a person is a person through other persons) was used for the first time to describe Ubuntu. Gade (2011, p. 303) states that “most authors today refer to the proverb when describing ubuntu, irrespective of whether they consider ubuntu to be a human quality, African humanism, a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview”. Given this background, the aim was to identify commonalities in the proverb’s use as both a quality and a phenomenon.

From the outputs of the Harzing's “publish or perish” search, only small differences in the interpretation of the word Ubuntu could be found, and it was therefore easy to follow Mboti’s (2025) lead and to declare that general consensus exists regarding the translation or meaning of the word. It can be stated with confidence that Ubuntu stems from “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”, translated as a person is a person through other persons.

The Harzing's “publish or perish” outputs also provided evidence of the different uses of the term. Some of the findings presented Ubuntu as a characteristic. It is clear that a large portion of the outputs refer to Ubuntu in this manner, describing it as a noble characteristic and a quality people should strive towards. Ubuntu is also presented as an overarching African worldview applied within the domain of education and human sciences, but also serving as a guide for social change. The majority of Ubuntu writers refer to it as philosophy.

Gade’s (2011; 2012) general structure resulted in a definition which was not satisfactory. As reported above, Ubuntu was defined as “derived from the Nguni proverb ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’, which

translates to ‘a person is a person through other persons’, which refers to a way of being (a characteristic) and a phenomenon (a philosophy, an ethic, a worldview)”. It was also stated that, deviating from Gade’s (2011; 2012) structure, two additional aspects could be incorporated into the definition, namely the fact that Ubuntu is a traditionally Southern African concept, and that this idea is seen as an ideal or a standard to aspire to. The result resembles a definition-through-synthesis (see Table 1), but is not deemed as satisfactory since it is partially a synonym definition, an incomplete definition, a severely limited definition, and an extremely broad definition (see Table 1); all unwanted qualities when defining a concept (Alberts, 2019).

It was therefore decided to use the Harzing's “publish or perish” outputs to derive differentiae data, as the present definition could serve as the genus to a genus-differentiae definition. In effect, the intent was to create a definition-through-denotations (see Anbert, 2019; Table 1), and to add the result to the preliminary definition.

The Harzing's “publish or perish” outputs were rich in detail and were originally presented as both a characteristic and a philosophy. This finding was also reflected in the discussion above. Considering the number of times specific concepts appeared in the lists of denotations of Ubuntu, themes central to Ubuntu were extracted. Five denotative themes were identified, namely empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony. A pure definition-through-denotations would therefore conclude that Ubuntu focuses on five aspects, namely empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony.

The integration of all gathered information ultimately facilitated the development of a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu.

> *Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' which translates to 'a person is a person through other persons,' embodies an exemplary Southern African way of life and philosophical orientation that places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the centre of personal development and the shaping of societal thought among Africans.*

This amalgamation could be seen as a consensual definition of Ubuntu, necessary for advancing any body of knowledge (Babbie & Mouton, 2011; De Vos et al., 2013). Although this proposed definition includes aspects of undesirable definitions (Alberts, 2019), it is nevertheless considered adequate in its present form, as it captures the majority of Ubuntu’s core elements as presented in the existing literature. Moreover, it accommodates commonly used populist synonyms while still providing a clear specification of the concept’s meaning. The research aim of producing a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu was therefore achieved.

A definition of this kind requires careful construction. Defining a phenomenon simultaneously as a way of life and as a philosophy is inherently problematic, because a definition should convey conceptual clarity (Kibin, 2024; Pap, 1964). The employment of the conjunction serves only to obscure the ontological and conceptual status of the phenomenon, thereby undermining definitional clarity. Praeg (2014) offers a conceptual solution to this dilemma. He distinguishes between ubuntu (lowercase), the lived, precolonial, everyday mode of being in community, and Ubuntu (uppercase), the modern, philosophical interpretation and reconstruction of that earlier way of life. This distinction provides conceptual clarity and resolves the

ambiguity created by the "or." It also highlights an important element embedded within the definition itself: the exemplificatory relationship between ubuntu and Ubuntu. In this sense, Ubuntu (uppercase) may represent a reflective, contemporary longing to recapture certain communal qualities believed to have characterised life before colonial disruption (Praeg, 2014).

Limitations and future research

This research is constrained by the corpus of outputs it depended on, primarily the Harzing's "publish or perish" tool. However, as discussed above, the limitation is not a deal-breaker, since the research focused on the most cited research studies. Focusing on a citation matrix also excludes more recent research from the study.

It could be argued that if the study's first author is neither a South African of African descent nor a Nguni or Sotho speaker, the research may be compromised. This limitation is partially mitigated by the fact that the second author is a South African of African descent and a native Nguni speaker. Nevertheless, this analysis of outputs has been undertaken by African scholars whose origins lie within South Africa. As noted in the introduction, many prominent authors writing on Ubuntu, including those whose work is widely cited and often regarded as authoritative, are white, and several of these were not born in Africa. This study, therefore, aligns with the broader scholarly landscape, where insights into Ubuntu arise from a diversity of positionalities, each contributing in its own way to the evolving academic discourse.

The primary aim of this study was to influence future researchers to adopt the same concept of Ubuntu as they embark on their research journeys. The amalgamated definition of Ubuntu, provided above, should serve as the standard definition of Ubuntu. However, it is important to recognise that, although its origins are longstanding, the conceptualisation of Ubuntu has continued to evolve. Any definition offered here reflects the best possible synthesis at this point in time, and future developments in scholarship may further refine or extend its relevance.

Contribution

The research provides, based on the work of the most cited researchers in the field of Ubuntu, an amalgamated definition of the term. This amalgamation could be presented as a consensual definition, which could contribute to building an integrated body of knowledge around the concept of Ubuntu.

DECLARATIONS

Data availability statement: Data sharing not applicable. No new data generated.
Conflict of interest: No potential competing interest was reported by the authors.
Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI): ChatGPT (December 2024 version) was used as an aid to improve sentence construction and grammar in the text.
Authors contributions: Both authors contributed to the conceptualisation and design of the study. The first author was responsible for data collection, analysis, and drafting the initial version of the manuscript. The second author provided critical feedback and revisions to enhance the work. Both authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.
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Article 2: Exploring the concept of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership: Leveraging artificial intelligence for 'creative' and possibly valuable support in scoping reviews

Exploring the Concept of Ubuntu and Ubuntu Leadership: Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for 'Creative' and Possibly Valuable Support in Scoping Reviews

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Abstract

Ubuntu, a philosophy originating from sub-Saharan Africa, emphasises human interconnectedness and community building. However, the widespread and careless use of these terms has led to a diluted understanding of its true meaning. This scoping review aims to provide an inclusive conceptualisation of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership from academic literature to foster a shared understanding. The research strategy involved consulting ChatGPT for direct verbatim citations of definitions and characteristics of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership from academic sources. Eight distinct definitions of ubuntu and nine of ubuntu leadership were generated. Additionally, seven typologies of ubuntu characteristics and ten of ubuntu leadership were synthesised. The scoping review allowed for a complex and nuanced definition of both concepts, relying on the vast amount of diverse text data ChatGPT extracted from the Internet. However, despite the elegance of the ChatGPT responses, some inaccuracies and "fabrications" were detected. ChatGPT adeptly generated coherent and contextually appropriate text from

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diverse sources, proving to be immensely valuable. Benefiting from the advanced language model access to a large number of sources and integrating these, the resulting scoping review presents a comprehensive conceptualisation of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership. Nevertheless, the review is limited in its dependence on ChatGPT, particularly when evaluating the credibility of its verbatim quotations of falsified sources.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Academic circles have extensively discussed the presence of ubuntu in modern Africa, as evidenced by works from notable scholars such as Assié-Lumumba (2018), Eliastam (2015), Genger (2022), Mukuni and Tlou (2021), Louw (2019), Nweke (2022) and Zondi and Makhoba (2018). The remarkable academic attention accorded to this topic is reflected in the staggering number of scholarly publications on Google Scholar, which include over 275 000 documents that feature ubuntu and 4 220 documents with ubuntu in their titles. Additionally, ubuntu has garnered significant interest in the public domain, as evidenced by over 1.97 billion hits on Google.

1.2 Problem statement

Despite several attempts to establish a definitive understanding of ubuntu (Nolte & Downing, 2019; Louw, 2006; Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005), a consensus has not been reached. This has left many questions unanswered and even sparked calls for a revaluation of the concept (Louw, 2019). In the absence of a clear and widely-accepted definition of ubuntu, the creation of a coherent body of knowledge would be challenging (De Vos et al., 2011; Mouton, 1996).

1.3 Research objective

This study aims to adhere to the guidelines set forth by De Vos et al. (2011) and Mouton (1996) by focusing on the first two foundational blocks of scientific knowledge on ubuntu and ubuntu leadership, which define the concepts and outline their characteristics. While the aim of this study was never to critique the use or value of artificial intelligence (AI) language models, the use of the ChatGPT advanced

language model (developed by OpenAI) during this research, directed the study in that direction too.

2 Literature review

As can be seen from the research objective, the outcome of the research is a literature review. For the sake of completeness, a very short review of literature is presented here. The bulk of the literature review will be presented in the findings section of this article.

Ubuntu can be interpreted as both a set of values that is commonly shared among Africans (Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019; Ntibagirirwa, 2018) and a leadership approach that aims to motivate groups of people (Karsten & Illa, 2005; Woermann & Engelbrecht, 2019). This study will focus on both ubuntu as an African philosophy (i.e., a coherent collection of shared values) and as a leadership style (i.e., motivating groups of people). While there are various conceptualisations of ubuntu (Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Mwipikeni, 2018), aligning shared values of communities or employees with similar leadership styles is likely to produce favourable outcomes (Owusu-Sekyere, Hansson & Telezhenko, 2021; Witesman, 2021).

The aforementioned statement aligns, at an intrapersonal level, Festinger's 1957 cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), which focuses harmony between behaviour and beliefs. At an interpersonal level it aligns with leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), which stresses mutual trust, respect, support, and open communication. Such exchange is common among those who share a culture and this is supported by the meta-analytic empirical findings reported by Kristof-Brown et al. (2005), who state that fit or similarity is key to understanding and success. As such, the ubuntu leadership style may prove to be particularly effective within an ubuntu context (Aliye, 2020; Asamoah & Yeboah-Assiamah, 2019), where leaders and followers share a common culture.

3 Research methodology

A scoping review was used as methodology to this article. This is discussed first, followed by ethics related to this article.

3.1 Scoping reviews

A scoping literature review strategy was followed. The aim of such reviews is to explore the extent, range and nature of existing research on a particular topic (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Levac et al., 2010) and to provide an overview of the key aspect of the literature (Grant & Booth, 2009). It is not an in-depth analysis of the content of the articles (Levac et al., 2010), but rather is used to identify current issues, such as reporting on concepts, theories, and findings. This was also the aim of this study – to understand the conceptualisation of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership. Scoping reviews, rather than answering research questions, assists in generating research questions and identifying gaps in the literature that can be addressed in future research (Peters et al., 2015). It can also be used to find the most appropriate research methods for future studies (Pham et al., 2014). Overall, a scoping literature review is a valuable tool for exploring and synthesising existing research on a topic (Smith, 2015), which can serve as a useful foundation for future research and policy development (Jones, 2018).

The guidelines depicted in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) extension for scoping reviews (Smith & Doe, 2020) was broadly adopted in structuring this study. Along these lines, Tricco et al. (2018) suggest that all scoping reviews should include a checklist reporting on 20 areas and these guidelines were also considered when structuring this article and the investigative process.

The process was two-fold: first to find the data and then to analyse the data. The targeted information to be sourced were publications that focused on ubuntu and ubuntu leadership. As there is such an abundance and intimidating amount of information available on the topic on research engines such as Google Scholar and as many of the items found there were not useful, it was decided to use ChatGPT as an aid. The advanced language model developed was primed with questions on the topic, such as the following:

“Please provide me with different verbatim definitions of ubuntu, per author.”

“List the characteristics of ubuntu, verbatim, if possible, also presented per author.”

As ChatGPT often provides only four or five examples, it was prompted for more responses, with questions such as the following: “Could you provide me with more recent examples?”, “Can you provide an example from articles that focused on quantitative research?”, “Can you focus only on the seminal authors in the field?” and “Can you provide any examples from African scholars?” This was done for ubuntu as a construct by itself and “ubuntu leadership”. No time limit was set for the publications, but ChatGPT only used data captured before and including 2021. This cut-off date was not seen as a limitation, as the basic concepts were under investigation, and historic sources may provide conceptualisations closer to the core of the concept.

The next step was to analyse the data. The central element of the analysis was to find repeating themes in the data. For this reason, the data (i.e., definitions and typologies) was presented per author so as to compare them, and to find the themes in the data. With lists of definitions and typologies, it was possible to find repetitive ideas, which were interpreted as central themes. These commonalities were used to define the constructs as well as dominant characteristics. This analysis first done separately by each author, and then together, in order to reach some consensus on what is emerging from the given text. These were the findings of this article.

True to the guidelines of Trico et al. (2018), the discussion included a summary of the main findings and the limitations of the study. The implications of the findings for practice, policy and future research will also be addressed.

3.2 Ethics

This research was desktop research and forms part of a larger project regarding conceptualisation. It involved no contact with humans. Approval was provided for it by the University of South Africa’s Graduate School for Business Leadership, with the following number: 2022_SBL_AC_001_SD.

4 Findings

First the findings related to ubuntu and then to ubuntu leadership will be presented. In both cases, the findings are presented in two waves: firstly, looking at definitions of and then at typologies.

4.1 Definitions and elements of ubuntu

4.1.1 Definitions of ubuntu

Ubuntu was defined in the following ways:

- "Ubuntu is a word from the Bantu languages spoken by the Nguni people of southern Africa. It is often translated as 'I am because we are,' and also as 'humanity towards others,' or 'the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity.'" (Tutu, 1999, p. 31);
- "Ubuntu is about interconnectedness, cooperation, and support. It is about the belief that human beings are interconnected and that we cannot survive without each other." (Mbigi, 2005, p. 23);
- "Ubuntu is essentially a morality-based philosophy that emphasizes the importance of community, family, and sharing, and it is based on the idea that the well-being of an individual is inextricably linked to the well-being of the community." (Mokgoro, 2006, p. 2);
- "Ubuntu emphasizes the importance of social harmony and interconnectedness, as well as the need for individuals to act in the best interests of the community rather than solely in their own self-interest." (Muthien, 2011, p. 388);
- "Ubuntu is a southern African concept that denotes a shared identity and human interconnectedness. It is based on the idea that people are not separate from one another, but rather part of a larger whole." (Nussbaum, 2011, p. 198);
- "Ubuntu is about interconnectedness, harmony, and mutual support. It is a holistic philosophy that emphasizes the importance of social relationships and the interconnectedness of all things." (Langa, 2014, p. 1);
- "Ubuntu is a concept in African philosophy that speaks to the interconnectedness of humanity. It is based on the idea that 'a person is a person through other persons,' meaning that we cannot exist in isolation from others." (The Conversation, 2020); and
- "Ubuntu is a South African philosophy that places emphasis on human connectedness and interdependence. It is about understanding that we are all

connected and that our actions have an impact on others." (University of Michigan, n.d.)

From these definitions several common themes can be identified:

Interconnectedness and interdependence: The definitions consistently emphasise the importance of human interconnectedness and interdependence. Ubuntu is described as a philosophy that recognises that individuals cannot exist in isolation from others and that the well-being of an individual is linked to the well-being of the community.

Community and social harmony: Ubuntu is presented as a philosophy that places a strong emphasis on community, social harmony, and the importance of acting in the best interests of the community rather than solely in one's self-interest.

Morality and ethics: Several definitions suggest that ubuntu is a morality-based philosophy that emphasises the importance of sharing, compassion, and empathy and that it is based on a set of ethical principles that guide human behaviour.

Holistic philosophy: The definitions suggest that ubuntu is a holistic philosophy that takes into account the interconnectedness of all things, including social relationships and the environment.

As a single sentence definition, ubuntu is a southern African philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of humanity; a holistic approach that values social harmony, community building, sharing, and a morality-based philosophy that prioritises the well-being of the community over individual self-interest; and it emphasises the importance of relationships, empathy, compassion, inclusivity and mutual respect, as it seeks to build trust and foster collaboration among individuals and groups.

More precisely, ubuntu can be defined as a southern African philosophy that values social harmony, community building and prioritises the well-being of the community over individual self-interest, which emphasises the importance of relationships, empathy, compassion, inclusivity and mutual respect to foster collaboration and build trust among individuals and groups.

4.1.2 Characteristics of Ubuntu

The characteristics of ubuntu are described below:

- Wiredu (1996) argues that ubuntu is based on several elements, including communalism (the belief in the importance of the community and the common good), humaneness (the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being), communal responsibility (the belief that each member of the community has a responsibility to contribute to the well-being of the community), respect for elders (the recognition of the wisdom and experience of older members of the community) and respect for ancestors (the recognition of the importance of one's ancestors and the belief that they continue to have an impact on the present).
- Desmond Tutu, a South African Anglican bishop and human rights activist, broadly described ubuntu as a belief in "the interconnectedness of all humanity" and the idea that "my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours" (Tutu, 1999, p. 31). He further specified this and stated that ubuntu is characterised by interconnectedness (the idea that all people are connected and that one's actions can have an impact on others), compassion (the ability to understand and share the feelings of others), forgiveness (the willingness to let go of anger and resentment towards those who have wronged you), hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home) and respect for others (the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being).
- Ramose (1999) stated the following as elements of ubuntu: human interdependence (the belief in the interconnectedness of all human beings), moral obligation (the sense of responsibility that each person has towards others), communitarianism (the belief in the importance of the community and the common good), hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home) and respect for the environment (the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living things and the need to preserve the natural world).
- Mbigi (2005), one of the seminal authors on ubuntu, stated that it is characterised by interconnectedness (the idea that all people and things are

connected and that each person's actions have an impact on others), empathy (the ability to understand and share the feelings of others), respect (the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every person), hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home) and harmony (the promotion of social cohesion and the resolution of conflict through dialogue and negotiation).

- Brouwer (2008) suggested the following as elements of ubuntu: communalism (the belief in the importance of the community and the common good), humaneness (the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being), hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home), solidarity (the willingness to support and stand by one's fellow community members), and trust (the belief that others can be relied upon to act in good faith).
- Gade (2012) proposed that ubuntu comprised five elements: community (the belief in the importance of the community and the common good), human dignity (the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being), interconnectedness (the idea that all things are connected and that each person's actions have an impact on others), compassion (the ability to understand and share the feelings of others) and hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home).
- Oyowe and Ofulue (2013) name human dignity (the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every human being), communalism (the belief in the importance of the community and the common good), hospitality (the welcoming of others into one's community or home), respect for elders (the recognition of the wisdom and experience of older members of the community) and trust (the belief that others can be relied upon to act in good faith) as elements of ubuntu.

In summary, Wiredu (1996) mentioned communalism, humaneness, communal responsibility, respect for elders and respect for ancestors; Tutu (1999) referred to interconnectedness, compassion, forgiveness, hospitality and respect for others; Ramose (1999) listed human interdependence, moral obligation, communitarianism, hospitality and respect for the environment; Mbigi (2005) noted interconnectedness,

empathy, respect, hospitality and harmony; Brouwer (2008) focused on communalism, humaneness, hospitality, solidarity and trust; Gade (2012) noted community, human dignity, interconnectedness, compassion and hospitality; while Oyowe and Ofulue (2013) posit human dignity, communalism, hospitality, respect for elders and trust.

In total, 35 concepts were listed by these seven authors, which amounts to an average of five characteristics per author. Communalism and interconnectedness (both named three times), with human interdependence (named once), is common in describing ubuntu. Mentioned three times in total was communal responsibility, communitarianism and community, which is also a dominant theme. The reference to moral obligation suggests that ubuntu sees this as a responsibility to care. Linked to communalism may be harmony and solidarity.

Hospitality is mentioned by six authors and is the third most common theme in ubuntu. Humaneness was mentioned twice, which could be linked to human dignity, which was also mentioned twice. Respect was also a strong theme, with it being referenced to respect, respect for others, respect for elders (mentioned twice), respect for ancestors and respect for the environment. Compassion is another strong theme, mentioned by name twice, which could be seen as being similar to empathy, mentioned only once. Trust is mentioned twice. Forgiveness was not a central theme, only mentioned by Tutu (1999).

The central characteristics of ubuntu thus seem to be a belief of interrelatedness of humans, particularly within communities, where harmony is prioritised. Respect (for others, elders and the environment) is also important, which could be linked with compassion and empathy, and another strong theme, humaneness, related to treating people with dignity. Lastly, a very strong theme is hospitality, which relates to the welcoming of others into one's community or home.

4.2 Definitions and elements of ubuntu leadership

4.2.1 Definitions of ubuntu leadership

Definitions of ubuntu leadership were far less abundant than the definitions found for ubuntu. They are listed below:

- Mbigi (2010, p. 20) states that "Ubuntu leadership is based on the principles of interconnectedness, cooperation, and mutual support. It emphasizes the

importance of relationships, and the idea that a leader should not see themselves as separate from those they lead, but rather as part of a larger community".

- "Ubuntu leadership is rooted in the belief that all people are connected and that the well-being of the community is inseparable from the well-being of its individual members. It emphasizes the importance of social harmony and interconnectedness and it seeks to build trust and collaboration among team members", as defined by Muthien (2015, p. 137).
- According to Mabey and Wijesinghe (2015, p. 12), ubuntu leadership is defined as "an approach to leadership that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all individuals and the importance of empathy, collaboration and community building".
- Ngcobo and Du Plessis (2017, p. 4) suggest that ubuntu leadership is "a collective leadership approach that seeks to enhance the well-being of all stakeholders through shared responsibility, respect, empathy and a focus on long-term sustainability".
- Makhubu and Bezuidenhout (2018, p. 55) define ubuntu leadership as "a leadership style that values relationships, respect, and compassion and aims to create a sense of unity and belonging within a group or organisation".
- "Ubuntu leadership is characterised by a focus on relationships, an emphasis on the common good, and a commitment to social justice. It emphasizes the importance of dialogue, empathy, and mutual respect and it seeks to build trust and foster collaboration among team members," as per Storr (2018, p. 412).
- Drury (2020, p. 93) defines ubuntu leadership as "a people-centred approach to leadership that promotes collaboration, community building and social responsibility".
- Hesselbein and Goldsmith (2021, p. 57) describe ubuntu leadership as "a leadership style that emphasizes community, cooperation and service to others".

- Njoroge and Phaal (2022, p. 15) define ubuntu leadership as "a values-driven leadership approach that emphasizes compassion, empathy, inclusivity and interconnectedness".

From these definitions some central themes could be extracted: Based on the definitions of ubuntu leadership provided by the authors cited, the following themes can be identified:

Interconnectedness and community building: Ubuntu leadership is grounded in the belief that all individuals are connected and that the well-being of the community is inseparable from the well-being of its individual members. It emphasises the importance of relationships and building a sense of unity and belonging within a group or organisation.

Emphasis on empathy and compassion: Ubuntu leadership emphasises the importance of empathy and compassion towards others. Leaders, who practice ubuntu leadership, are expected to demonstrate care and concern for the well-being of their followers and stakeholders.

Focus on collaboration and cooperation: Ubuntu leadership emphasises the importance of collaboration and cooperation among team members. It seeks to build trust and foster collaboration among team members towards a common goal.

Values-driven approach: Ubuntu leadership is a values-driven approach to leadership that prioritises shared responsibility, respect, inclusivity and social justice. It emphasises the importance of dialogue, mutual respect and a commitment to social responsibility and long-term sustainability.

Overall, ubuntu leadership can be defined as a people-centred approach to leadership that prioritises the well-being of the community and values relationships, empathy, compassion, collaboration and shared responsibility.

4.2.2 Characteristics of ubuntu leadership

The following were listed as characteristics of ubuntu leadership:

- De Jongh (2011) listed the following as characteristics of ubuntu leadership: servant leadership, respect for human dignity, compassion and empathy, focus

on community and social responsibility, and an emphasis on relationships and interconnectedness.

- Okpara's (2012) elements of ubuntu leadership include servant leadership, emphasis on relationships and interconnectedness, compassion and empathy, respect for human dignity and personal growth and development.
- Okpara and Eyisi (2013) list servant leadership, concern for community and social responsibility, respect for human dignity, consensus building and participatory decision-making, and emphasis on relationships and interconnectedness.
- Booysen and Nel (2013) refer to values-driven leadership, community focus and social responsibility, respect for human dignity, emphasis on relationships and interconnectedness, as well as collaboration and teamwork.
- Shava and Chikoko (2017) refer to the following when talking about ubuntu leadership: values-driven leadership, focus on community and social responsibility, emphasis on relationships and interconnectedness, compassion and empathy, as well as consensus building and participatory decision-making.
- Nkomo (2018) describes ubuntu leaders as ethical and demonstrating high levels of integrity, demonstrating compassion and care towards their followers; them being inclusive and valuing diversity; and, lastly, being humble and recognising that their role is to serve the community.
- Jena (2020) lists humility, empathy, listening, servant leadership and being visionary – ubuntu leaders have a clear vision for the future of the community and work towards achieving it – as components of ubuntu leadership.
- Omondi (2021) refers to aspects of ubuntu leadership as being community-oriented, respect for diversity, collaboration and servant leadership - ubuntu leaders prioritise serving the community rather than exerting authority over them.
- Matshalaga and Nihongo (2021) refer to ubuntu leaders as those who prioritise collective welfare over individual interests, who are relational and build strong relationships with their followers, have compassion and demonstrate care for their followers and are servant-oriented and prioritise serving the community.

- Poole and Nemakhavhani (2021) focus, in their discussion of ubuntu leaders, on them prioritising collective interests over individual interests, them being empathetic and demonstrating care for their followers, being inclusive and valuing diversity and who also prioritise building relationships with their followers.

The list of characteristics of ubuntu leaders is long. Central is servant leadership, justified by the frequent use of the word itself, but also mentions words such as selflessness, humility, empathy, collaboration and teamwork. Respect for human dignity is also high on the list and is based on words such as equality, fairness, justice, respect, and dignity. Interconnectedness and responsibility beyond the workplace are also mentioned often, with words such as community and social responsibility.

Compassion and empathy is another theme, with kindness, sensitivity, compassion, sympathy and caring as words found to substantiate this theme. Focus on social responsibility is justified as a theme by references to social justice, community development, sustainability, accountability and responsibility. Values-driven leadership is also a theme, with words including integrity, ethics, morality, values and principles. Consensus building and participatory decision-making is another theme, with collaboration, teamwork, communication, cooperation and consultation being central words. Finally, inclusivity and diversity could be a theme, given the mentioning of words such as diversity, inclusivity, respect, equality and fairness. Personal growth and development are sometimes mentioned, but it was not included as a theme, due to the low frequency of mentions, but also as it is not well-aligned to the selfless nature by which ubuntu leadership is characterised.

Based on the above, it could be stated that ubuntu leadership is characterised by being servant (leadership) in nature, with such leaders acting in a respectful way towards others and being aware of others' dignity. They act with compassion and empathy towards others and are committed to inclusivity and an appreciation for diversity. They are committed to consensus building and participatory decision-making. They have an awareness of interconnectedness of the universe and take responsibility beyond the workplace, and are thus also characterised by a keen sense of socially responsible mannerisms. Given the aforementioned, it is not surprising that they are described as unwavering in values-driven decision-making.

Overall, ubuntu leadership emphasises a relational and community-oriented approach to leadership that prioritises the well-being of the community and its members and is guided by a set of values and principles that promote compassion, empathy, respect, and inclusivity.

5 Discussion

General matters will be discussed first, followed by the limitations of the study and then comments on the use of AI in academic writing.

5.1 General findings

An essential first step towards developing a comprehensive body of knowledge is to assure the conceptualisations are done and that some consensus is achieved regarding the definition of the construct and its characteristics (De Vos et al., 2011; Mouton, 1996). This article aimed to address this issue, as particularly in the public domain, the word, ubuntu, is used in a reckless or irresponsible manner, with the users often being unaware of the meaning of the word.

Both ubuntu and ubuntu leadership were defined based on consolidations of definitions provided in previous publications. It was found with Ubuntu that authors are quite aligned with their definitions, and not many variations – apart from using synonyms – were detected. After considering eight definitions of ubuntu, including those of authoritative authors such as Tutu (1999) and Mbigi (2005), ubuntu was inclusively defined:

> *Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy that values social harmony, community building, and prioritizes the well-being of the community over individual self-interest, which emphasises the importance of relationships, empathy, compassion, inclusivity, and mutual respect to foster collaboration and build trust among individuals and groups.*

The definitions of ubuntu leadership were more diverse and often focused on the responsibility of the ubuntu leader. The following lean definition of ubuntu leadership followed from the nine definitions analysed:

Ubuntu leadership can be defined as a people-centred approach to leadership that prioritises the well-being of the community and values relationships, empathy, compassion, collaboration, and shared responsibility.

Specifying the characteristics of ubuntu was a tedious job. Given the data collected, seven characteristics could be identified:

The main characteristics of ubuntu is a belief of interrelatedness of humans (1), particularly within communities (2), where harmony is prioritized (3). Respect (for others, elders and the environment) is also important (4), which could be linked with compassion and empathy (5), and, another strong theme, humaneness (6), which is related to treating people with dignity. Lastly, a very strong theme, is hospitality (7), which relates to the welcoming of others into one's community or home.

When analysing the characteristics of ubuntu leadership, important authors such as Booysen and Nel (2013) and particularly Nkomo (2018) were included. Here nine characteristics were found to be inclusive of what the authors proposed:

Ubuntu leadership is characterised by being servant (leadership) in nature (1), with such leaders acting in respectful way towards others and being aware of others' dignity (2). They act with compassion and empathy towards others (3) and are committed to inclusivity and an appreciation for diversity (4). They are committed to consensus building and participatory decision-making (5). They have an awareness of interconnectedness of the universe (6) and take responsibility beyond the workplace (7), and are thus also characterized by a keen sense of socially responsible behaviour (8). Given the aforementioned it is not surprising that they are described as unwavering in values-driven decision-making (9).

While it is not the aim of this article to criticise the philosophy underpinning ubuntu or its leadership, failing to acknowledge the virtues of selflessness and nobility inherent in the philosophy would be a lost chance.

The definition of ubuntu is more elaborate than ubuntu leadership, but both address the same matters. With regard to the characteristics, ubuntu seems more passive, while, as may be expected, ubuntu leadership is more active, focusing on specific

behaviours. Unlike the general nature of ubuntu as an ideal, ubuntu leadership is specific, almost demanding from the leader to embody all these praiseworthy demands.

Another significant finding was the absence of hospitality in ubuntu leadership – a major feature of the general ubuntu philosophy. Maybe the philosophy in general is inclusive (i.e., hospitality) while leadership may imply protecting your community, thus leaders being more protective of the communities. It may also be that ubuntu (the philosophy) is more aimed at a smaller community, focusing for example on my ancestors, while ubuntu leadership seems to have a broader focus – the community of those in its proximity. A focus on this difference with relation to the description of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership may be superfluous, but the concept of community and who benefits from the philosophy of leadership could be important.

The concept of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Dubos, 2017) is important within the context of ubuntu (Chis & Kayange, 2021). While a tightly-knit community or network creates bounded social capital, which fosters trust, cooperation, and support among its members, it can also create barriers and hinder interactions with outsiders, perpetuating inequality, limiting access to resources and opportunities, and creating social fragmentation (Portes & Landolt, 2000). Who or what is included when referring to community and society when ubuntu is practiced? Can the indigenous African philosophy, which embraces community, be all inclusive – inclusive of all individuals, including those with origins outside sub-Saharan Africa? Often, outsiders are not really welcome in bounded relationship networks (Chrisman et al., 2014). Is ubuntu not an elitist project conceived by the new black elite for the black elite, which failed the masses, resulting in an “ethical crisis facing the new elite and ‘our people’?” (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013, p. 197).

This article aimed to provide an inclusive conceptualisation of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership from academic literature to inform the general public and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on African leadership. The first two building blocks of scientific knowledge on ubuntu and ubuntu leadership, namely defining the concepts and describing their characteristics, were achieved, meeting Mouton and Marais (2009) prescripts for developing a research field.

5.2 Limitations

The article had some serious limitations, which materialised only after completing the write up of the findings. In the search process for definitions and characteristics of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership, care was taken to ask ChatGPT for direct quotes from articles or books. These were provided and are presented in the text above. The focus on direct quotations and requesting page numbers were done so as to avoid the ChatGPT algorithm from interpreting the work of authors. However, when searching for additional information on the sources quoted from, for example the DOI particulars, these sources could not be located. A search for the publications used by ChatGPT revealed that in some cases the publications did not exist, not in terms of authors, titles, issues, or page numbers. These fake references are highlighted in the reference list of this article, for ease of access. These citations were listed as fictional, and indicated as fabricated in the reference list. Thus, if the articles did not exist, the verbatim text presented and the page numbers supplied by ChatGPT are also fictitious.

5.3 ChatGPT and academic writing

The ChatGPT language model was confronted with these inaccuracies, and what follows below is the “conversation” with ChatGPT:

Q: You are providing me with detailed content of both articles, however, neither me nor my librarian can locate these articles. Are these articles and your detailed comments fictional, fabricated or an hallucination?

A: My apologies, it is possible that my previous response was not helpful. I can assure you that I do not provide fictional or fabricated information. It is possible that the articles I mentioned may not be available in your library's database or may require a subscription to access. If you are unable to locate the articles, you may try searching for alternative sources of information on ubuntu leadership, or consider reaching out to a subject matter expert or academic librarian for assistance in finding relevant resources.

Q: I inspected the mentioned journals, the issues and the numbers, and these articles do not exist. So, where did you get your information to create these direct verbatim definitions, which you have provided?

A: I apologize for any confusion I may have caused. It appears that there has been a misunderstanding. As an AI language model, I do not have access to or the ability to create information that is not available in public sources. I must have made an error in my response to your initial question.

To answer your original question, I cannot find the source of the quotation you provided because the articles do not seem to exist. Therefore, I cannot confirm the accuracy of the quotation you provided.

Q: Some people talk about ChatGPT hallucinating? What does that mean?

A: As an AI language model, I do not have the ability to hallucinate or experience any form of altered states of consciousness. Hallucination is a sensory perception that appears to be real but is not based on external stimuli. Since I am a machine and do not have any sensory organs or the ability to perceive anything beyond the data I am trained on, I cannot hallucinate or experience any form of subjective experience.

It is possible that the term "hallucinate" is being used metaphorically or colloquially to describe a situation where I may provide incorrect or irrelevant information in response to a query. However, such errors are likely due to limitations in my training data or programming, and not due to any intentional action or perception on my part.

Again, I apologize for any confusion I may have caused, and please let me know if there is anything else I can assist you with.

The obvious question, which then begs answering, is what the worth of the article is. Clearly it has academic feet of clay. However, the final results seem very believable. When considering the genuine definitions provided, such as Tutu's 1999 definition, which may be argued as being seminal, the other definitions seem well aligned. If it is argued that ChatGPT produces, through aggregation, summative definitions or typologies, these may actually be valuable within the context of creating general definitions and when conceptualising. Thus, if ChatGPT use a chunk of data to provide one definition of a construct and another chunk of that data for an additional definition, and if the language model does this for multiple definitions of the same construct, integration of these definitions into a single definition may present a definition representative of a very large amount of data, maybe only accessible via AI. This outcome may be valuable in terms of the information used to create the content, but

also because of the speed at which these definitions are created. This may even be ideal.

However, if it is concluded that this article is based on the presentation of false sources (made up references) and false text quotations (presented with page numbers), it cannot be presented as academically sound and could never be justifiable. In some cases, the sources and text were pure fabrications. It should thus be concluded, from a pragmatic perspective, that creating text with ChatGPT may be useful, particularly in when the aim is to do conceptualizations, however, the way ChatGPT create these answers, as if it directly quoted text substantiated by specific authors and specific page numbers, are illaudable.

6 Management implications

The advent of AI and large language models, such as ChatGPT, has revolutionised the creation of comprehensive, plausible, and convincing arguments. It is undeniable that these technologies have the potential to accelerate the research process, making them attractive to academics, students, and anyone with access to such tools. However, recent research sheds light on a crucial concern - despite the elegant presentation and apparent academic soundness, the output of these processes is often fundamentally flawed.

It is imperative for the education sector and academia to pay attention to this article, seemingly well-crafted but harbouring inherent flaws. Students and researchers alike must take diligent care to verify the accuracy of the content and references in their assignments and articles to uphold the credibility of information dissemination.

The educational sector should adopt a well-considered stance on the use of these powerful and time-saving tools. While they undeniably offer benefits, the question arises whether the use of large language models should be regulated or even prohibited. Alternatively, detection mechanisms aimed at identifying AI-generated content through changes in writing styles and dedicated software could be implemented to address the issue more effectively.

In light of this, investing in technologies designed to identify AI-generated text is highly recommended. By doing so, we can strive towards maintaining the integrity and

trustworthiness of information in an age where AI-generated content is becoming increasingly prevalent.

7 Conclusions and future research

This scoping review succeeded in providing a thorough and plausible conceptualisation of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership. Given that these conceptualisations were the product of a large mass of data, they cannot be discarded. However, given flaws found in the text presented through ChatGPT, the academic community and general ethics would make the adaptation of these conceptualisations by a broader community of scholars difficult.

Two definite recommendations for future research are apparent. Firstly, this research should be redone in the traditional manner, collecting publications from reputable sources, and then analysing the content from these publications to answer the said research objectives. It would obviously be very interesting to compare the findings of such a study to those of this study. Secondly, the more effective use of ChatGPT, and similar resources, needs to be investigated. Can ChatGPT be assisted to prevent hallucination, maybe through proper or more intelligent prompts? How can the model be trained to be prevented from using false references?

As a final observation, it should be concluded that AI language models, such as ChatGPT, seem very useful in creating seemingly credible text, but fail many tests on academic integrity. Policy makers, and maybe at a more fundamental level, algorithm writers, should be aware and endeavour to manage AI better within the academic ecosystem.

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Chapter 3: Conceptualizing Ubuntu leadership through measurement characteristics

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	**A**	**A2**	**3**	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective A2 (To conceptualize Ubuntu leadership by focusing on characteristics assessed in measures of Ubuntu leadership) by examining Ubuntu leadership through the lens of existing measurement instruments.

This objective was partially achieved through published article with the following reference:

> Steyn, R., & Msweli, P. (2025c). Leveraging psychometric properties of Ubuntu measures to reveal its structural components. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies, 5*(1), a05-a05. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.1.05

This is referred to as Article 3.

Article 3: Leveraging psychometric properties of Ubuntu measures to reveal its structural components

Leveraging Psychometric Properties of Ubuntu Measures to Reveal its Structural Components

Abstract: Ubuntu is an African worldview often shaping policy and social ethos, yet its distinct meaning remains unclear due to primarily philosophical discussions. This study seeks to define and measure Ubuntu's dimensions operationally and quantitatively using psychometric literature. Limited conceptual clarity has hindered research on Ubuntu. This study aims to define Ubuntu given the materialization of the concept, and its components, when measured, and to provide a usable measurement tool to advance research. A comprehensive review of Ubuntu measurement tools was conducted, focusing research which included discussions of exploratory factor analysis (EFA), confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and measurement invariance (MI). Five Ubuntu measures were identified, revealing similar constructs but inconsistent terminology. EFA helped refine constructs, while CFA validated frameworks. MI was applied once, showing cross-context adaptability. This study reveals that Ubuntu is frequently described as having more structural components than those that emerge from psychometric scrutiny, and it calls for a standardized framework and an agreed-upon, consistent measure of Ubuntu, to advance empirical research. It provides a foundational list of items for a comprehensive measure, bridging the gap between philosophical and empirical approaches to Ubuntu.

Keywords: Ubuntu, conceptualisation, scale, measurement, validity

1. Introduction

Ubuntu is important, as "it is seen as the authentic African ethical concept, a way of life, an authentic mode of being African" (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013, p. 197). Thus, it is perceive as a practical guide to action and policy, an emic approach to living in Africa, which could create value and boost efficiency (Broodryk, 2002). More than that, Ubuntu is also view as an ethic indispensable to the reconstruction of post-colonial African societies (Murove, 2012). There is also a lively debate on the value of Ubuntu as an ethic (Enslin & Horsthemke, 2004; Molefe & Muade, 2024), with Louw (1998) and Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) suggesting its end, while Chimakonam (2016), Cordeiro-Rodrigues and Molefe 2024), as well as Letseka (2012) are still committed to the utility of the concept.

"The Ubuntu concept , like many other concepts, is not easily defined. Defining an African notion in a foreign language and from an abstract, as opposed to a concrete approach, defies the very essence of the African worldview and may also be particularly illusive" (Mokgoro, 1998, p. 1). Many echo this sentiment that language differences make the conceptualisation of Ubuntu difficult. Tutu (1999, p. 31), for example, explains it as follows: "Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a western language".

Many definitions of Ubuntu are presented. Mboti (2015, pp. 126-127), as an example, states that following a review of 23 definitions of Ubuntu, "the settled definition of choice seems to always return, again and again, to the saying 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' (in Nguni languages), 'motho ke motho ka batho' (in Sotho languages), 'a person is a person through other persons' (in English), and so on. Other variations such as 'I am because we are' are also advanced". John Mbiti (1990 [1969]) explained 'the African view of man': "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'" (p. 106).

Such definitions are problematic, as they tell us little about the concept itself. The literature provides us with more detailed information on Ubuntu. The definitions of Thaddeus Metz (2007; 2021) and Mogobe Ramose (2002; 2015), as the main proponents of the concept (Taylor, 2023), will be provided here. Metz (2021), in the Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research, defines Ubuntu as a word from the African Nguni linguistic group, which literally means humanness. "To have ubuntu is to be a person who is living a genuinely human way of life, whereas to lack ubuntu is to be missing human excellence or to live like an animal. It is common for black people indigenous to the Africa continent to believe that one's basic aim in life should be to exhibit ubuntu, … which one can do by prizing communal relationships with other people" (no page). Ramose (2015) presents botho/hunhu/ubuntu also as humanness, multi-layered and the incessant interaction of humans, where "it means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (p. 70). It is clear from these definitions that there are

two clusters of defining Ubuntu, the first defining Ubuntu as a moral quality of a person (e.g. Metz), while the second cluster defines Ubuntu as a philosophy, an ethic, or a worldview (e.g. Gade, 2012; Ramose, 2002).

Many more descriptive definitions are found in the literature. Kamwangamalu (1999), for example, states that Ubuntu refers to respect for all humans, human dignity, sharing, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, and communalism. Eliastam (2015, p. 4) refers to familiar terms like hospitality, compassion, humaneness, sharing and respect, used when discussing Ubuntu. Also, "Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity" (Letseka, 2013, p. 339). Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013, p. 673) use similar words when defining Ubuntu "as the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring". These definitions or descriptions have value as abstract constructs, but how could this materialise in practice? How can the agility of these constructs be verified?

One step closer to conceptual clarity could be derived from measurement instruments developed for assessing the presence of Ubuntu. In the test development, and particularly using exploratory factor analysis, the underlying constructs can be identified, or using confirmatory factor analysis, the validity of theorised concepts could be tested (Pett et al., 2003). This research aims to find and evaluate measures of Ubuntu and by using that as a source, to contribute to the comprehensive and objective conceptualisation of Ubuntu.

2. Literature review

No comprehensive definition of Ubuntu is provided here, as it was partially addressed in the introduction. However, further insights into the conceptualization of Ubuntu are presented in the findings section, where its structural components are explored—an essential step in specifying the concept. This literature, however, focuses on the necessity of a structurally sound, operationalized definition for the advancement of science. This sound structure could be revealed through extensive psychometric analyses of existing measures of constructs. Consequently, the characteristics of a robust psychometric measure are also discussed. Thorough psychometric analyses can enhance our understanding of Ubuntu as a multidimensional construct, identifying a functional operationalization structure grounded in empirical and statistical evidence.

2.1 Definitions in science

Science is inherently collaborative and results from rigorous, detailed, and systematic investigations (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). The scientific method is structured, with the foundational elements being concepts, statements (such as definitions, hypotheses, and propositions), conceptual frameworks (including typologies, models, and theories), and paradigms (De Vos et al., 2013). This research focuses on the concepts and definitional statements related to Ubuntu, limiting the subsequent discussion of these aspects. Concepts, like Ubuntu in this context, are words or phrases that encapsulate abstract or broad ideas, conveying meaning through both their connotations – the subjective attitudes or emotions they evoke – and their denotations – and their objective descriptions (Mouton & Marais, 1996; Riahi-Belkaoui, 1995, p. 32). Thus, concepts form the fundamental components of knowledge. When a concept is systematically defined for use in developing scientific theories, it becomes a construct (Hox, 1997). The aim of this research is to achieve this through empirical inquiry. To facilitate the collaborative essence of scientific work, as mentioned above, and to enable researchers to communicate effectively and build upon each other's contributions, it is essential to define concepts clearly (Babbie & Mouton, 2011). Definition statements provide precise meanings for words such as Ubuntu in this context, ensuring a shared understanding among scholars. These definitions clarify the contextual use of words (Mouton, 1996), enhancing communication by specifying their meaning. Definitions can be categorised as either (1) constitutive, where a concept is defined using other concepts, terms, or words; or (2) operational, which outlines the procedures for measuring a concept (Ary et al., 2010). This research will concentrate on operational definitions.

Mouton (2013) states that "the search for 'truth' or 'truthful knowledge' is the overriding goal of science" (p. 138). What then constitutes an effective or truthful definition of Ubuntu? Three principal theories come into consideration: the correspondence, coherence, and deflationary theories (Badenas, 2012). Many definitions of Ubuntu appear aligned with the deflationary theory, which posits that affirming a statement's truth is merely to assert the statement itself (Armour-Garb, 2023). Galinon (2015) elucidates that deflationism argues the "truth predicate lacks explanatory power", essentially viewing truth as "a mere expressive tool" (p. 268). In contrast, the correspondence theory maintains that truth involves a "match between a statement and reality" (Badenas, 2012, p. 8), implying that a proposition is true only if it accurately reflects an actual fact. The coherence theory, on the other hand, deems a proposition true if it harmonises with a specific set of propositions (Young, 2018).

According to the correspondence theory, a definition of Ubuntu must factually resonate with aspects of the psyche, whereas the coherence theory might limit Ubuntu's association to, say, Africans. This study will primarily explore the correspondence theory in order to strive towards a "good approximation of reality" (Babbie & Mouton, 2011, p. 10).

2.2 **Sound psychometric measures**

There is a platitude of requirements for a good psychometric measurement. Rust and Golombok (2014) discuss four such principals, namely reliability, validity, standardisation as well as equivalence. These are typical textbook headings (see Goldstein et al., 2019) and are often mentioned in standard guidelines (see the American Psychological Association, 2020; British Psychological Society, 2024).

Under reliability, Rust and Golombok (2014) discuss test-retest, parallel-form, half-spilt, and interrater reliability, as well as internal consistency and standard-error of measurement. Internal consistency is commonly reported in research and may be regarded as the standard method for reporting – this will be discussed in a bit more detail. Internal consistence is frequently expressed as Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach & Shavelson, 2004), which is commonly employed in test development, wherein items that reduce the coefficient alpha are typically removed (Taber, 2018). In general, when assessing the reliability of a full instrument, the recommendation is that the minimum acceptable Cronbach's alpha should align with the intended application of the instrument (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). For instruments used in making substantial decisions, the alpha coefficient should exceed 0.90. When applying a previously validated measure in a new environment or research context, an alpha above 0.70 is advised. However, in exploratory research, alpha coefficient as low as 0.60, is considered acceptable (Taber, 2018).

The second principle of psychometrics discussed by Rust and Golombok (2014) is validity, which refers to face, content, predictive, concurrent, construct and differential validity. Relevant to this article is construct validity, which is concerned with how well a test or tool measures the construct that it was designed to measure. Factorial validity is a special case of construct validity (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), where the factorial structure extracted from the dataset affirms or disproves the theorised structure. The focus in this research is the use of factor analysis in the development of a measuring instrument, which could contribute to conceptual clarity. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) are two common techniques used in scale development and scale adaptation studies (Flora & Flake, 2017). If the relationship among the items is not known, it is recommended to use EFA, but if the relationship is tested and the factors and related items are known, CFA is recommended to be used. EFA is a statistical method commonly utilised in social sciences to identify latent variables, or factors, underlying observed data. This technique is particularly valuable when there is no prior understanding of the relationships among the items within a scale, including the number of factors present and the specific items each factor influences. EFA serves to elucidate the inherent structure within the data, offering insights into how various items group together to form factors. Unlike EFA, CFA is used when there is a strong model assumption (Orçan, 2018). With CFA, the existence of a previously proven structure is investigated with a new data set. In scale development studies, CFA should be used to test the validity of the structure (Flora & Flake, 2017; Orçan, 2018). When a researcher anticipates that a set of items should correspond to a particular number of factors, they can employ either EFA or CFA to verify if empirical data align with their expectations. If the findings do not support the initial hypothesis, the researcher might reconsider the theoretical framework underlying the measurement of the proposed constructs or conclude that the questionnaire requires minor adjustments. These adjustments could include the elimination of certain items that demonstrate low factor loadings or poor communality estimates, aiming to refine the instrument's effectiveness (Flora, 2012; Flora & Flake, 2017).

The other form of validity relevant here is differential validity, which is about the extent to which a test is valid for different subgroups, often in terms of bias or fairness. Test of measurement invariance is relevant here. Measurement invariance (MI) assesses the psychometric equivalence of a construct across groups or across time. MI is used to test whether individuals respond in a similar manner and interpret a given measure in a conceptually similar manner (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). MI is often used in cross-cultural research (Boer et al., 2018; Selig et al., 2008). With regard to Ubuntu measures, if the measure of Ubuntu is a uniquely African construct, non-invariance should be expected if MI is tested across African and non-African groups. Measurement non-invariance suggests that a construct has a different structure or meaning to different groups or on different measurement occasions in the same group, and so the construct cannot be meaningfully tested or construed across groups or across time (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Non-invariance could be expected when using African and non-African groups, but not when comparing groups of men and women that both belong to the African group. MI is a tested framework of multiple-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Dimitrov,

2010). Increasingly restrictive models are tested, and most tests of measurement invariance include configural, metric, and scalar steps (Dimitrov, 2010); in a few cases, residual invariance is also reported (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Berry et al. (2011) add conceptual equivalence as the first and most basic form of invariance and where the measured construct is specific to a particular group, which makes it impossible to find a comparable operational pattern of relationships across the groups (Fontaine, 2008). This cannot be statistically tested directly, but Berry et al. (2011) state that evidence of configural invariance supports claims regarding conceptual equivalence. Within the context of Ubuntu, the claims of uniqueness (Venter, 2004; Swanson, 2007) could result in conceptual in-equivalence or uniqueness.

The third principle of psychometrics highlighted by Rust and Golombok (2014) is standardisation, which encompasses norm and criterion referencing. This principle is mentioned to ensure a comprehensive enumeration of principles, although it is not elaborated upon, as standardisation is typically employed in performance tests rather than in personality assessments.

The fourth and last principle of psychometrics discussed by Rust and Golombok (2014) is equivalence, and here they cover differential item functioning, measurement invariance, and adverse impact. Equivalence as portrayed by Rust and Golombok (2014) relates more to the fair treatment of subgroups, which is very important, but not the focus of this research.

2.3 **Research goals**

The goals of this research are firstly to find instruments measuring the Ubuntu concept and report on the components measured. The idea is that these components will be representative of an "empirical" conceptualisation of Ubuntu, which could assist in the understanding of Ubuntu, which is dominated by subjective conceptualisations. It is also envisaged to identify the psychometric instrument with the best psychometric properties, and to put this forward as an instrument to use. As an additional outcome of this research, a list of items will be created which future researchers may use to develop measuring instruments of Ubuntu.

3. **Methodology**

An extensive literature search was conducted to identify measures of Ubuntu and to determine whether the conceived instruments (reflecting subjective elements) aligned with the psychometric data obtained from the administration of these instruments (reflecting more empirical findings). This effort aimed to provide a more objective understanding of the underpinning structure of Ubuntu.

Though PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) provides a comprehensive checklist and a flow diagram to ensure clarity and transparency (Moher et al., 2023), as does the Cochrane Collaboration in their Handbook for Systematic Reviews (Higgins et al., 2023), this research followed a more open-ended approach, somewhat aligned with traditional narrative literature analyses (Cronin at al., 2008), where the researcher is less restricted by methodology and reporting processes, and focus on accumulating findings. This route was also followed for practical reasons, as systematic reviews are labour intensive, complex (Stovold et al., 2014), and time consuming (Anderson et al., 2020), beyond the capabilities of an individual researcher.

The approach to the literature can best be described as a critical review, with the objective "to demonstrate [that the] writer has extensively researched [the] literature and critically evaluated its quality. [It] goes beyond mere description to include [a] degree of analysis and conceptual innovation" (Grant & Booth, 2009). The search focused on academic documents with the word Ubuntu in the title, employing descriptive keywords such as "scale," "test," "measurement," and "questionnaire," alongside terms associated with evaluating these measures, including "psychometric," "development," "validity," and "reliability." The Summon discovery tool was used to retrieve relevant academic sources, integrating a variety of databases including ProQuest (e.g., ProQuest Central), commercial publishers (e.g., Elsevier, Springer), and open-access repositories (e.g., DOAJ, arXiv).

The searches were conducted for Ubuntu in combination with each of the mentioned terms. The documents were screened to determine whether measures of Ubuntu were indeed developed or whether existing measures of Ubuntu were assessed. The aim was to find data on exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the alignment between theory (the subjective) and data (the empirical). Additionally, the examination of measurement invariance (MI) results was considered, as it could illuminate the cross-cultural applicability of the construct.

2.2 Ethical Consideration

This research was desktop research, and no human or animal data were collected. Permission for the research was granted by the University of South Africa's Graduate School for Business Leadership on 2 May 2024, with reference number 2024_SBL_AC_011_EX-3781.

4. Presentation of findings

In total, five scales were found following an extensive search, which met some of the requirements of using statistics to validate their conceptualisations. The number of scales was surprisingly low, given the substantial corpus of publications on this topic. One possible explanation is that publications on Ubuntu predominantly originate in the humanities, where the focus is on cultural and philosophical dimensions, rather than in the social sciences, where quantitative and empirical approaches—and an emphasis on measurement—are central. Listed below identified five studies:

- Brubaker, T. A. (2013). Servant leadership, Ubuntu, and leader effectiveness in Rwanda. Emerging Leadership Journeys, 6(1), 114-147.
- Molose, T. (2019). The experience of Ubuntu to a hospitality organisation: Scale development and validation. Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences, 5(3), 113-128.
- Mutsonziwa, I. (2020). Ubuntu: development and validation of a scale to measure African humanism. (Doctoral dissertation, Pretoria: University of Pretoria.) https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/2263/79761
- Sigger, D. S., Polak, B., & Pennink, B. J. W. (2010). 'Ubuntu' or 'humanness' as a management concept. CDS Research Journal, 29(6), 1-46.
- Terblanché-Greeff, A. C., & Nel, P. (2023). Measuring context-specific collectivism: The Metzian Ubuntu Inventory. South African Journal of Philosophy, 41(4), 401-414. https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2023.2206343

The highlights from the five documents are presented below.

Table 1

Overview of articles

	Authors				
	Brubaker (2013)	Molose (2019)	Mutsonziwa (2020)	Sigger et al. (2010)	Terblanché-Greeff & Nel (2023)
Sample	102 (120)[1]	212 (336)	300 (9 523)	211	316
Items – pre-analyses	12	26	34 (87)[2]	44	14
Items – post-analyses	12	26	17	41	9
Constructs – pre-analyses	4	5	3	4	2
Factors – post-analyses	1	4	3	1	2
EFA performed	No -	Yes 54.45% TCV[3]	Yes 62.87% TCV	Yes 35.00% TCV	Yes No TCV data reported
CFA performed	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
- CFI	-	-	.957	-	.900
- RMSEA	-	-	.042	-	.083
- SRMR	-	-	.058	-	.060
MI tested	No	No	Yes	No	No
Reliability tested	.910	.880, .860, .730, .760[a]	.906, .831, .877[b]	.822	.851, .826[c]
Other validity tests	Discriminate	-	Construct	-	Construct

Full list of items available	Available Annexure 1	Available Annexure 2	Available Annexure 3	Available Annexure 4	Available Annexure 5

[1] In parenthesis is presented in the sample frame – the number of respondents targeted – if absent, the sample frame was not specified in the research. [2] In parenthesis is presented in the sample frame – the number of items used in an earlier round of item elimination/selection. [3] TCV = Total Common Variance, the variance in the data that can be explained by the factors. [a] Compassion, collectivism, survival, respect and dignity; [b] Humanness, interconnectedness, compassion; [c] Identity, solidarity.

Brubaker (2013): This author developed a unidimensional scale mostly based on the work of Sigger et al. (2010) and Poouvan et al. (2006). He defined Ubuntu as four social values, namely survival, spirit of solidarity, compassion, and lastly, as respect and dignity combined (see Brubaker, 2013, p. 120). He used three items per value and reported a total Cronbach alpha of 0.91 for the full scale. He did not perform EFA or CFA. The study did not focus primarily on the development of the instrument but provided valuable information on validity. Brubaker (2013) found that Ubuntu and servant leadership were positively and significantly related to leader effectiveness, that the impact was similar, and that evidence for the discriminant validity of ubuntu-related leadership was not distinct from servant leadership. Brubaker (2013) also contributed to present literature by providing a list of items, which may measure Ubuntu (see Annexure 1).

Molose (2019): Molose and his colleagues (see Goldman et al., 2019) – developed a 26-item measurement definition representing five Ubuntu-related constructs, namely survival (4 items), respect and dignity (4 items), compassion (6 items), group solidarity (6 items) and collectivism (6 items). Molose developed these items from his own collaborative work (Goldman et al., 2019), and borrowing from Brubaker (2013) and Sigger et al. (2010). Following EFA, Molose concluded that the data represented four, not five constructs. Molose (2019, p. 113) concluded that Ubuntu comprises of four key elements: "compassion (care, empathy, being there physically and emotionally), survival (ability to survive in spite of difficulties, a shared will to survive and focus), group solidarity/collectivism (the idea of achieving collectively; organisation exists to benefit employee community), and respect and dignity (valuing the worth of others)". Though Molose (2019) listed 26 items (four items for survival, four for respect and dignity, and six each for compassion, group solidarity, and collectivism respectively), he did not specify which items resort under which construct, and thus presented a unidimensional instrument (see Annexure 2).

Mutsonziwa (2020): This author identified 82 indicator values of Ubuntu using a literature review. Following focus groups and in-depth interviews, Mutsonziwa developed 87 items linked to three nascent and emerging components of Ubuntu: humanness, interconnectedness, and compassion. Following a three-wave study and relying on EFA and later CFA, he reduced the original 87 items to 17 items, with acceptable reliability and adequate factorial validity. Mutsonziwa (2020, pp. 158-9) reported "demonstrated evidence of construct validity (including one-dimensionality, reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity and nomological validity), model fit and invariance of the Ubuntu instrument". The reported CFA fit was good: CFI=.957 (good), RMSEA=.042 (good) and SRMS=.058 (adequate). The measurement invariance was tested for an online version and a telephonic version, and evidence of configural and metric invariance was found. The final questionnaire is attached in Annexure 3. When concluding, Mutsonziwa (2020) defined the three constructs fundamental to Ubuntu. Humanness is defined as "the belief that all people possess the innate characteristic of being human, which is to say being aware of self and of other people" (Mutsonziwa, 2020, p. 159). Humanness accounts for more variance than any other factor, suggesting that the dimension carries more weight than the other dimensions. Interconnectedness is defined as "the belief that all people are bound together by virtue of their shared humanity" (p. 160). Mutsonziwa (2020, p. 161) reported that "interconnectedness are more frequently mentioned (than constructs such) as interdependence and collectivism" in the literature consulted. Compassion, the third dimension, is defined as "the belief that other people should be treated with concern due to a common humanity. Compassion is the most frequently mentioned dimension as an indicator value of Ubuntu among the three dimensions" (Mutsonziwa, 2020, p. 162).

Sigger et al. (2010): Sigger et al. developed a measurement tool to confirm the existence of the philosophy of Ubuntu within the workplace. An effort was made to measure four constructs, namely survival, solidarity, compassion, and lastly, respect and dignity, as suggested by Mbigi (1997). Survival has to do with the dependence on each other for the "survival of each individual" and the "survival of the organisation" (Sigger et al., 2010, p. 48). Solidarity is concerned with cohesion and a collective mindset, where personal interests are less important, while especially the team feeling and interconnectedness are emphasised. Compassion has to do with a shared vision, especially the sharing and caring part, reaching out to others, and having co-workers

understand that they have to share and give in order to receive. Respect and dignity are concerned with respect for religion and beliefs, respect for each other's opinion, and that all is treated equally, allowing everyone to give their opinions and to be heard. By relying on the Kaiser criterion, 14 components explained 64.58% of the variance, while analysing Cattell's scree plot, eight components were identified – not matching the theoretical four factors. Four factors explained only 35% of the variance in the data. Individual Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .527 (survival); .543 (compassion); .549 (solidarity); and .690 (respect and dignity). Given the above, it seems that Sigger et al. (2010) opted to present Ubuntu measure as a unidimensional measure (see Annexure 4).

Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023): Terblanché-Greeff and Nel developed an instrument based on the Ubuntu theorisation of Thaddeus Metz (2011, 2016, 2017, 2019), who also gave input regarding the item generation. Ubuntu is seen as "a collectivistic cultural value based on two forms of harmonious interaction: 1) identity, which refers to a shared way of life which is achieved through coordination and a sense of belonging; and 2) solidarity, which refers to caring for others and their quality of life through the offering of aid and exhibiting sympathetic altruism" (Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023, p. 7). After several rounds of EFA and CFA (of which little evidence is provided in the article), they ended up with nine items – five on identity and four on solidarity. The CFA fit was adequate: CFI=.900 (good), RMSEA=.083 (adequate) and SRMS=.060 (adequate). They found a weak correlation between the constructs (r=.11, p=.031), and stated that "high reciprocity is not required; nonetheless, relations must be based on both identity and solidarity" (p. 9), suggesting a unidimensional interpretation. More detail of the study can be found in the thesis Terblanché-Greeff wrote, which forms the basis of this development process (see Botha, 2022). The questionnaire is presented in Annexure 5.

5. Discussion of findings

An extensive search was conducted for measures related to Ubuntu, employing descriptive keywords such as "scale", "test", "measurement", and "questionnaire", alongside terms more closely associated with the evaluation of these measures, including "psychometric", "development", "validity", and "reliability". A systematic review was not undertaken due to the limited and dispersed nature of the relevant literature across the internet. Titles were screened to determine their direct relevance to instrument development. Within these documents, the constructs underlying the measures and their operationalisation through statistical analyses were examined. The focus was on analysing reported exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to evaluate the alignment between theory and data. Additionally, the examination of measurement invariance (MI) results was considered crucial, as it could illuminate the cross-cultural applicability of the construct.

A comprehensive search across multiple search engines and an examination of the reference lists of the identified documents yielded only five relevant sources. Other tools for measuring leadership in Southern Africa have been developed by researchers such as Brynard (2018), Buys (2019), and Enslin (2023), but their frameworks did not specifically aim to encapsulate the principles of Ubuntu. This addressed our first aim, to find the documents.

Equipped with these instruments, the second objective was addressed: To present the constructs foundational to the measures (the theory) and how they are operationalised via statistical analyses. The insights gained are partially depicted in Table 1. For enhanced clarity, Table 2 showcases the theorised themes alongside their operationalised counterparts, illustrating the impact of empirical processes on the theoretical framework.

Table 2

Theorised and materialised constructs

	Authors				
	Brubaker (2013)	Molose (2019)	Mutsonziwa (2020)	Sigger et al. (2010)	Terblanché-Greeff & Nel (2023)
Constructs –pre-analyses	Survival, compassion, solidarity, respect and dignity (four constructs)	Survival, compassion, group solidarity, collectivism, respect and dignity (five constructs)	Humanness, inter-connectedness, compassion (three constructs)	Survival, solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity (four constructs)	Identity, solidarity (two constructs)

Factors – post-analyses	Ubuntu (uni-dimensional interpretation)	Survival, compassion, collectivism, respect and dignity (four factors)	Humanness, inter-connectedness, compassion (three factors)	Ubuntu (one factor)	Identity, solidarity (two factors)

Table 2 shows that the theoretical structure was more elaborate compared to the structure derived from post-analysis narratives. Despite the developers investing significant time in creating the instrument and ensuring content and face validity, empirical evidence from three cases necessitated a simplification of their initial complex concepts. However, in two instances, the originally conceptualised constructs were maintained after empirical refinement, even though some items were removed during the process. Notably, this preservation of constructs only happened in scenarios where CFA was conducted after EFA. Table 2 also reflects a significant consensus regarding the theorised structure, with compassion and solidarity appearing in four of the five cases. Survival, along with respect and dignity, are mentioned in three cases. Other constructs mentioned once include collectivism and the closely related concept of interconnectedness, as well as identity. Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023) define identity as "a shared way of life achieved through coordination and a sense of belonging" (p. 7). Considering its recurrent inclusion across various scales and the conceptual overlap among the terms, Ubuntu can be understood as a composite construct encompassing compassion, solidarity, survival, and lastly, respect and dignity.

Selecting a preferred measure of Ubuntu would be challenging. Based on the information above, Mutsonziwa's (2020) scale might be favoured for two reasons: Its psychometric properties and its alignment with the constructs developed by other test creators. Terblanché-Greeff and Nel's (2023) scale is shorter in length and attractive for that reason, but its psychometric properties were weaker than that of Mutsonziwa's (2020) instrument and it falls short in aligning with the mainstream conceptualisation of Ubuntu.

The final goal of this research was to source a list of items which researchers may use as a pool from which a new instrument may be developed. This information is presented in Annexures 1 to 5, each linked to the different developers.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The limited number of quantitative measures related to Ubuntu underscores the need for a measure that accurately reflects this complex and diverse construct. Only five quantitative measures of Ubuntu were identified. A relative consensus was found in their theoretical conceptualisation of Ubuntu. However, when testing the materialisation of these theoretical constructs, primarily through factor analyses, simplification emerged as a consequence of the empirical process, calling into question the construct's multidimensionality on an empirical level. This is a significant step forward in operationalising the construct. The identification of Mutsonziwa's (2020) scale as a potentially preferred measure, owing to its psychometric robustness and alignment with mainstream conceptualisations of Ubuntu, is also an important outcome of this research. This effort not only illuminates the current state of Ubuntu measurement and how it can be operationalised, but also paves the way for future instrument development. Annexures 1 to 5 serve as a foundational resource pool for researchers aiming to further refine and advance the measurement of Ubuntu.

7. Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation (R.S. & P.M.); Literature review (R.S.); methodology (R.S.); software (N/A.); validation (P.M.); formal analysis (R.S.); investigation (R.S.); data curation (N/A), drafting and preparation (R.S.); review and editing (P.M.); supervision (P.M.); project administration (R.S.); funding acquisition (R.S.). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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Annexure 1: Brubaker's (2013) list of items

Brubaker (2013) used a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = definitely no and 5 = definitely yes.

1 My leader provides me with counsel to succeed in my job.
2 My leader provides me with resources to fulfil my responsibilities.
3 My leader treats me as if I were a member of his/her family.
4 My leader is a meaningful part of our work community.
5 My leader sees him/herself as one of us.
6 My leader makes decisions based on the consensus of the group.
7 My leader is sensitive to employees' problems.
8 My leader shares in my suffering.
9 My leader is willing to reach out and help others.
10 My leader is concerned about fairness in our organisation.
11 My leader respects me and my contribution.
12 My leader shows respect for those with age and experience.

Annexure 2: Molose's (2019) list of items

Molose (2019) provided a list of 26 questions, to which the expected responses were 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (disagree); 3 (neutral); 4 (agree); and 5 (strongly agree).

1. My manager is usually present (emotionally) to share my pain during difficult times.
2. My manager is usually available (physically) to suffer with me during difficult times.
3. My manager encourages me to remain polite even when I disagree with what the guest says.
4. My manager responds selflessly to free me from suffering when I am under pressure (e.g., manager involvement during busy group guest check-in).
5. I feel happy when I see my manager notices that I have personal problems that may potentially affect my work performance.
6. I feel a genuine authenticity/realness/honesty about my manager and this is demonstrated in his/her empathetic interactions with me and guests alike.

7. I believe each employee should be willing to share (the little) they have with others as a way of brotherly care.
8. It is common practice for employees to sacrifice their time for the good of other team members.
9. I feel that sharing my difficulties (grief) with other colleagues makes me strong.
10. My manager shares his/her burden during hard times (e.g., budget cuts, salary pay cuts, restructuring or change of top management) as part of a team.
11. I feel that my manager treats me with utmost respect and dignity.
12. My manager greets me whenever he/she sees me.
13. My manager expects me to respect his/her decisions.
14. My manager treats each staff member as if he/she was a member of the family.
15. I have genuine backing (support) of my co-workers, such that they are willing to help me when I need it.
16. I actively contribute to work goals that benefit a wider group, particularly when they are worse off than me.
17. I generally trust my co-workers in matters of lending or extending a helping hand.
18. I have to be alert or else someone is likely to take advantage of me.
19. I do helpful things that will benefit me and the colleagues I know.
20. When something unfortunate happens to me (e.g., loss of a family member), my co-workers get together to help me out.
21. I see myself as part of a diverse work team rather than as an individual from a different cultural background or nationality.
22. I feel that all employees should stick together as a family no matter what sacrifices are required.
23. I feel it is my duty to take care of my co-workers, even if I have to sacrifice what I want.
24. Being a valuable team player is more important to me than my personal identity.
25. The well-being of my co-workers is important to me.
26. It is important to me that I respect the decisions (e.g., how to serve the customer) made by my co-workers.

Annexure 3: Mutsonziwa's (2020) list of items

Mutsonziwa (2020) listed three sets of questions to which the respondents needed to express the extent to which they agree with each statement. The scale was interpreted as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

B1: Instructions: First, I am going to read out some statements about how you might view other people. To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. You treat other people with dignity.
2. You recognise other people.
3. You treat other people the way that you want to be treated.
4. You value other people.
5. You believe in the humanity of other people.
6. You respect other people.

B2: Instructions: Next, I am going to read out some statements about what you might have in common with other people. To what extent do you agree that they describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. Your life is interconnected with the lives of other people.
2. You share possessions with other people.
3. You like living together with other people.
4. Your life is richer because you share it with other people.
5. When you are connected to other people, you feel a sense of harmony.

B3: Instructions: Now I am going to read out some statements about how you might behave towards other people. To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. You have a caring attitude towards other people.
2. You are concerned about the well-being of other people.
3. You are thoughtful of other people.
4. You try to be a blessing to other people.
5. You exhibit good will towards other people.
6. You are helpful to other people.

Annexure 4: Sigger et al.'s (2010) list of items

Sigger et al. (2010) listed three groups of questions, to which the respondents needed to answer strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4) or strongly agree (5).

The co-worker

1. My co-workers are friendly and helpful.
2. I care about the well-being of my co-workers.
3. I respect the religion of my co-workers.
4. I respect the beliefs and customs of my co-workers.
5. I believe that older co-workers have more knowledge and skills than the younger co-workers.
6. When a co-worker gets a promotion and I don't, I am happy for him/her.
7. My co-worker is someone I inform about my personal life.
8. I rely on my co-workers for support when things at work or at home are not going well.
9. I see myself as an active listener towards my co-workers.
10. My co-workers and I get together outside of work time.
11. Relatives of my co-workers should have an advantage over outsiders in competing for job openings.
12. I take the time to greet my co-workers.

The team

13. The organisation encourages teamwork.
14. I have to work closely with others to do the job well.
15. I feel I am really part of the team.
16. I have confidence and trust in the team.
17. I enjoy, above all else, to work as part of a team.
18. I have the right to say "no" to the team.
19. I have the freedom to take my own approach.
20. I am willing to give up personal needs for the good of the team.
21. I always put the interest of the whole team before my own interest.
22. A crisis in the team will be solved in a harmonious way.
23. Long discussions take place in the team meetings.
24. All opinions receive a fair hearing and consideration.
25. I am proud to work for the organisation.
26. I value sharing what I have with my family.

The organisation

27. The organisation has different levels of authority.
28. In the organisation, all decisions are made by the leader.
29. The organisation prevents job loss, even in difficult times.
30. The organisation has the well-being of its employees as a major objective.
31. The organisation provides equal opportunities for all.
32. In the organisation, all the employees are equal.
33. Different ethnic groups work together in harmony.
34. In the organisation, ceremonies and personnel parties are organised.
35. The organisation and its employees are like a family and its members.
36. My family is always welcome to visit the organisation.
37. Many of my family members work in the organisation.
38. Dialogue is an important means in organisational life.
39. There is open communication in the organisation.
40. The organisation provides all employees open access to information.
41. The organisation encourages diversity of opinions.

Annexure 5: Terblanché-Greeff and Nel's (2023) list of items

Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023) solicited responses on a six-point Likert scale of agreement.

UI1 I prefer being part of an in-group.
UI2 My identity is linked to the identity of my in-group.
UI3 The people in my in-group help me to be the person that I am.
UI4 I work together with other people to reach the goals that we share in my in-group.

UI5 I like the feeling that I belong to my in-group.
US3 I engage in helpful behaviour.
US4 I care about the quality of life of others.
US5 I exhibit compassion out of concern for others.
US6 I exhibit generosity out of concern for others.

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Chapter 4: Developing a unified Ubuntu leadership questionnaire

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	**A**	**A3**	**4**	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective A3 (To adapt or develop a questionnaire that will assess the level of Ubuntu leadership practised by a leader) by reporting on the development of a unified Ubuntu leadership scale.

This objective was partially achieved through a published proceeding referenced as:

> Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2024). Developing a Unified Ubuntu Scale and AI-driven psychometric innovation. *Proceedings of the 17th International Business Conference*, Stellenbosch (pp. 184-202). ISBN 978-0-7961-8362-0. https://internationalbusinessconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CP28-Steyn-Msweli-AI-as-tool-final-corrected.pdf

This is referred to as Article 4.

Article 4: Developing a unified Ubuntu scale and AI-Driven psychometric innovation

Developing a Unified Ubuntu Scale and AI-Driven Psychometric Innovation

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Keywords

Ubuntu;

Measurement scale;

Artificial intelligence;

Test development

Abstract

Ubuntu, a key philosophical concept from Africa focusing on community and human connections, lacks a robust, standardized measurement scale. This study aimed to develop a comprehensive Ubuntu scale by synthesizing elements from existing tools and employing artificial intelligence (AI). Extensive review of existing Ubuntu measurement tools lead to compiling a comprehensive list of 104 items across five measures. These items were then processed through an AI language model (ChatGPT) to simulate exploratory factor analysis (EFA) for initial scale development. Subsequently, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)-like approach was used to refine the scale, adhering to a structured Ubuntu framework. The initial analysis led to two new measures. The EFA simulation identified five themes resonating with Ubuntu's essence, while the CFA-like approach, constrained by the 104 items, was less effective, yielding a suboptimal item selection. Removing these constraints and allowing ChatGPT to access broader resources resulted in a more effective Ubuntu scale. This scale demonstrates strong content validity and relevance. This research not only presents a new, comprehensive tool for measuring Ubuntu but also highlights AI's potential in developing psychometric instruments by leveraging extensive data pools. This scale is recommended for further research and application in studies involving Ubuntu.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Ubuntu, an African philosophical concept that underscores communal values and human interconnectedness (Metz, 2021), suffers from the absence of a universally accepted definition and a standardised measurement scale endowed with strong psychometric properties. The current measures vary significantly in format and lack conceptual consistency across the scales (see Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023).

1.2 Problem investigated

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001), the development of a unified body of knowledge hinges on the establishment of a generally accepted conceptualization of the concepts central to that field. While philosophical conceptualization is useful for the advancement of the body of knowledge, operationalizing of concepts is necessary (De Vos et al., 2013), particularly within the domain of quantitative research, where the development of a body of knowledge depends on the development and use of measurement tools to assess the constructs adequately. No such generally accepted or standardized measure currently exists with regards to Ubuntu. Consequently, quantitative studies on Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership produce data that cannot be integrated, which hampers the development of a substantial body of quantitative knowledge on this topic.

1.3 Research objectives

The present research endeavours to develop a comprehensive Ubuntu measurement scale by amalgamating elements from existing scales and employing artificial intelligence (AI), particularly the language model ChatGPT, to assist in this task. The proposition is that leveraging the analytical capabilities of ChatGPT to synthesize or merge items from existing scales could result in the creation of a more refined spectrum of items and, consequently, a better measure of Ubuntu. The application of ChatGPT in social sciences will be explored in the second section of the literature review.

2 Literature review

Two matters are discussed here. Firstly, the conceptualisation of Ubuntu is reviewed, and secondly, the use of artificial intelligence, especially ChatGPT, in social science research will be looked at.

2.1 Ubuntu conceptualised

Ubuntu is not easy to conceptualised (Mokgoro, 1998; Tutu, 1999), and above that Eliastam (2015) contests that the conceptualization of Ubuntu is vague and open to abuse, while Ewuoso and Hall (2019, p. 93) state that the literature on Ubuntu as “confusing, and characterised by several competing interpretations”. Mboti (2015) eloquently relates the conceptualization dilemma by naming his article “May the real Ubuntu please stand up?”

Central to this dilemma is the absence of some standardisation on the use of terminologies and particularly the oporationalization on the concept. By focusing on the authors who have tried to operationalise Ubuntu through the development of scales to assess the phenomenon, valuable insights could be gained.

In total, text material related to five efforts to develop an Ubuntu scale was sourced (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023). Table 1 presents the dimensions of Ubuntu, initially outlining the expected elements and subsequently the factors retained after conducting factor analysis – a method for identifying underlying variables or factors that explain the correlation patterns among a set of items (Pett et al., 2003).

Table 1. Conceptualisation of Ubuntu, pre -and post-factor analyses

Authors	**Constructs – pre-analyses**	**Factors – post-analyses**
Brubaker (2013)	Survival, Compassion, Solidarity, Respect and Dignity (four constructs)	Ubuntu (unidimensional interpretation)
Molose (2019)	Survival, Compassion, Group Solidarity, Collectivism, Respect and Dignity (five constructs)	Survival, Compassion, Collectivism, Respect and Dignity (four factors)
Mutsonziwa (2020)	Humaneness, Interconnectedness, Compassion (three constructs)	Humaneness, Interconnectedness, Compassion (three factors)
Sigger et al. (2010)	Survival, Solidarity, Compassion, Respect and Dignity (four constructs)	Ubuntu (one factor)
Terblanché-Greeff & Nel (2023)	Identity, Solidarity (two constructs)	Identity, Solidarity (two factors)

Note: A lists of items used by these authors are presented in Annexure 1 to 5.

Most of the construct content described in Table 1 is self-evident, though survival and identity have a unique interpretation within this context. Molose (2019, p. 113) describes survival as the “ability to survive in spite of difficulties, a shared will to survive and focus”. Identity, only used by Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023), refers to this concept as "a shared way of life achieved through coordination and a sense of belonging" (p. 7). In Table 1 there is some consensus regarding the theorised structure of Ubuntu, with compassion and solidarity appearing in four out of the five proposed structures. Then, survival as well as respect and dignity, are mentioned in three out of the five cases. Other constructs mentioned are closely related, with collectivism intimately linked to the concept of interconnectedness, as well as identity. Given the conceptualisations as mentioned above, Ubuntu can be understood as a composite of four elements: compassion, solidarity, survival, and lastly respect and dignity. From Table 1 it should also be noted that the original conceptualisation was trimmed down to a simpler model, which may point to high correlations between constructs and multiclonality. The segmentation of Ubuntu may therefore be unnecessary, or unwanted.

Important to this research is that all the listed authors provided a list of the items they included in their measures of Ubuntu. This creates a large pool of items which could potentially be used to develop an Ubuntu scale.

2.2 Artificial intelligence, particularly ChatGPT, and the social sciences

In this section, ChatGPT was used as the leading source. The language model was confronted with the following question:

> I plan to compose a brief essay on the impact of artificial intelligence, especially ChatGPT, on social science research. The essay will be organised into five paragraphs, with each containing five sentences. The paragraphs will address the following topics: 1) The nature of ChatGPT, 2) ChatGPT's proficiency in social science research, 3) The constraints of ChatGPT within this field, 4) The prevailing criticisms regarding ChatGPT's application in social science research, and 5) The prospective role of ChatGPT in the future of social science research.

Presented below is the response to the request:

> ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI, is a cutting-edge language model that mimics human-like text responses. It's built on deep learning algorithms, enabling it to understand context and generate relevant content. This AI tool can engage in meaningful conversations, answer queries, and even produce written content that feels authentically human. Its ability to process vast amounts of data allows it to cover a wide range of topics, making it a versatile tool in various fields, including social science research (OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

Next the proficiency of ChatGPT in social science research is presented:

> In social science research, ChatGPT's capabilities can be particularly beneficial. It can assist researchers by conducting thorough literature reviews, synthesising qualitative data, and suggesting new research angles. ChatGPT's efficiency in handling and analysing large datasets can significantly speed up the research process, allowing social scientists to uncover insights and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. This makes ChatGPT an invaluable resource for expanding the scope and depth of social science studies (OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

This aligns well with the intended use of ChatGPT in the present research, where there will be a need to synthesise qualitative data, analyse data at high speed, and possibly uncover insights and patterns that might not be immediately apparent. Next, the constraints were presented:

> Despite its strengths, ChatGPT has limitations in social science research. Its knowledge is confined to the data it was trained on, potentially leading to outdated or biased information. The model might struggle with highly nuanced or emerging social science topics that require

> in-depth, domain-specific understanding. Moreover, the absence of critical thinking and ethical reasoning in AI poses challenges, necessitating careful oversight by researchers to ensure the validity and reliability of AI-generated insights (OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

The absence of access to data, and the outdated nature of the data to analyse, are not relevant to this study, as the qualitative data will be presented. As will be discussed in more detail in the method section, the 104 items from five scales (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023) will be used as the corpus of the data to be analysed by ChatGPT. The authors of this paper will be alert to the challenge of critical thinking and ethical reasoning in AI processes and will evaluate them item by item. More about this follows in the method section. Next, prevailing criticisms regarding ChatGPT's application in social science research were addressed:

> Critics of ChatGPT's use in social science point to issues like intellectual authenticity and the potential perpetuation of biases. There are concerns about data privacy and the ethical implications of using AI in research, particularly regarding consent and the transparency of AI-driven analyses. These criticisms underscore the need for a cautious and critical approach to integrating ChatGPT into social science research, ensuring that it complements rather than undermines traditional research methodologies (OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

The issue of authenticity certainly raises concerns; however, this research concentrated on analysing a specific number of sentences (the items of the scales), thereby prioritising the examination of qualitative data rather than generating new data. As highlighted in the concluding sentence of the response, the intention behind incorporating ChatGPT in this study is to augment existing research methodologies. Lastly, the prospective role of ChatGPT in the future of social science research was addressed.

> Looking ahead, ChatGPT and similar AI technologies hold promising potential to transform social science research. As these tools evolve, they could offer more nuanced and sophisticated analyses, contributing to theoretical advancements and methodological innovations. The democratization of research through AI could make advanced analytical techniques more accessible to a broader range of scholars. However, the successful integration of AI in social sciences will depend on addressing ethical concerns and developing robust frameworks to guide its use, ensuring that AI aids rather than detracts from the pursuit of knowledge in the social sciences (OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 21, 2024).

This research aims to fulfil the potential of ChatGPT in driving theoretical advancements and methodological innovations. As detailed in the results and discussion sections, this aim has been realised.

3 Method

An extensive literature review was conducted to identify measures of Ubuntu and to harvest items which measure the construct. Once the measures were identified, a long list was created from all the items. All instructions, headings and subheadings were removed. Then items were presented through an AI language model (ChatGPT), with the following instruction:

> I am in the process of creating a multidimensional scale using a collection of items detailed in the attached file. Could you help in identifying the fundamental themes within these items? After identifying the themes, I would appreciate it if you could choose five items that best exemplify each theme from the list provided. Each item is assigned a distinct number; please ensure these numbers remain intact in your final selection to allow for easy reference back to the original list and the creators of the items. Please, do not introduce new items to the scale. As a last request, could you please provide a name for the scale.

This was called the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) process, as the scale with subscales was developed without any prior knowledge of the emerging themes. Subsequently, a model similar to the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was applied. Here the themes/structure were provided, and ChatGPT were prompted with the following instructions:

> I am in the process of creating a multidimensional scale of Ubuntu using a collection of items detailed in the attached file. Ubuntu consists of compassion, solidarity, survival, and lastly respect and dignity. I would appreciate it if you could choose five items that best exemplify each theme from the list provided. Each item is assigned a distinct number; please ensure these numbers remain intact in your final selection to allow for easy reference back to the original list and the creators of the items. Please, do not introduce new items to the scale.

The outcome of these two analyses proses would be compared, firstly focusing on the themes identified with the EFA-like analyses. If these would match the traditional Ubuntu labels, it would be an indication of content validity. Also, the name provided to the scale by ChatGPT would be interesting. Should it be Ubuntu or humaneness, this could provide strong evidence of the validity of the items. The results of CFA-like analyses would focus on face validity, answering the question of the items "naturally" fitted the predetermined themes.

3.1 Ethical considerations

No new data were created or analysed. The University of South Africa's Graduate School of Business Leadership RERC approved the study on 1 December 2023, with reference number 1726.

4 Results

Five measures of Ubuntu were identified (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023). The analyses of 104 items from the five distinct Ubuntu scales led to the development of two new measures. These items are presented in Annexure 1 to 5. The results from the EFA-like strategy, explained in the method section, are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2. Organisational cohesion and leadership empathy scale (OCLE)

Themes	Items
1. Leadership Compassion and Support	b1: My leader provides me with counsel to succeed in my job.
	b2: My leader provides me with resources to fulfil my responsibilities.
	b7: My leader is sensitive to employees' problems.
	b9: My leader is willing to reach out and help others.
	m4: My manager responds selflessly to free me from suffering when I am under pressure (e.g., manager involvement during busy group guest check-in).
2. Team Solidarity and Shared Suffering	m8: It is common practice for employees to sacrifice their time for the good of other team members.
	m10: My manager shares his/her burden during hard times (e.g., budget cuts, salary pay cuts, restructuring, or change of top management) as part of a team.
	m22: I feel that all employees should stick together as a family no matter what sacrifices are required.
	S220: I am willing to give up personal needs for the good of the team.
	S221: I always put the interest of the whole team before my own interest.
3. Respect and Dignity in Workplace	b11: My leader respects me and my contribution.
	m11: I feel that my manager treats me with utmost respect and dignity.
	B11: You treat other people with dignity.
	B13: You treat other people the way that you want to be treated.
	S12: I care about the well-being of my co-workers.
4. Community and Interconnectedness	B21: Your life is interconnected with the lives of other people.
	B24: Your life is richer because you share it with other people.
	S215: I feel I am really part of the team.
	S335: The organisation and its employees are like a family and its members.
	tUI5: I like the feeling that I belong to my in-group.
5. Empathy and Altruism	m6: I feel a genuine authenticity/realness/honesty about my manager and this is demonstrated in his/her empathetic interactions with me and guests alike.

m9: I feel that sharing my difficulties (grief) with other colleagues makes me strong.

B34: You try to be a blessing to other people.

tUS3: I engage in helpful behaviour.

tUS5: I exhibit compassion out of concern for others.

Analyses: OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 19, 2024.

These themes align well with the "compassion, solidarity, survival, and lastly respect and dignity" elements, as used when following the CFA-like strategy. It could also be seen as an almost perfect fit with the list of Ubuntu characteristics provided by Steyn (2024), when interpreting Table 1, where he list compassion, solidarity, survival, respect and dignity, with collectivism and the closely related concept of interconnectedness, and identity, as the major elements of Ubuntu. Interesting however, is that ChatGPT did not use Ubuntu in providing a name to the scale, instead "Organisational cohesion and leadership empathy scale" was presented.

Next, the CFA-like analysis, as prompted by the text provided in the method section, was performed, and the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Ubuntu Compassion and Community Scale (UCCS) and its Face Validity

Components and items	**RS**	**PM**
1. Compassion		
b9: My leader is willing to reach out and help others.	H	H
m6: I feel a genuine authenticity/realness/honesty about my manager and this is demonstrated in his/her empathetic interactions with me and guests alike.	H	H
B34: You try to be a blessing to other people.	M	M
tUS3: I engage in helpful behaviour.	M	H
tUS5: I exhibit compassion out of concern for others.	H	H
2. Solidarity		
S215: I feel I am really part of the team.	M	H
3. Survival		
m24: Being a valuable team player is very important to me than my personal identity.	L	L
S217: I enjoy above all else to work as part of a team.	L	L
S335: The organisation and its employees are like a family and its members.	H	L
4. Respect and Dignity		
S12: I care about the well-being of my co-workers.	M	H

Analyses: OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 19, 2024.
Note: RS=First author, PM=Second author.
Note: Face validity: L=Low, M=Medium, H=High

The CFA-like instrument is far from perfect. One of the primary reasons is that the tool is composed of items about leaders, the groups and the self, without any nuances. This makes it difficult to design a general instruction on how to answer the questions. Also problematic is that some items did not have great face validity, as assessed by the authors of this article. The findings on face validity are presented on the right side of Table 3. Interesting to note was the name of the scale proposed by ChatGPT, namely "Ubuntu Compassion and Community Scale".

The responses provided by ChatCPT provide a valuable step towards integrating the items provided by previous developers of Ubuntu scales. However, the results presented in Table 2 and Table 3 harness information from 104 items. It was argued that allowing ChatGPT to access all information available to this instrument may produce an interesting result. The following instruction, based on Sigger et al. (2010)'s conceptualisation of Ubuntu, was provided to ChatGPT:

> I am developing a multidimensional Ubuntu Scale, which embodies the principles of compassion, solidarity, survival, as well as respect and dignity. It's important to understand that within the Ubuntu framework, 'survival' emphasises the interdependence necessary for the well-being of individuals and the collective strength of an organisation. I would value your assistance in crafting five illustrative items for each of these themes. Please consider compassion, solidarity, survival, and respect and dignity as multifaceted constructs, offering a range of items that reflect their complexity. The items should ideally reflect leadership qualities that resonate with Ubuntu principles. Additionally, I would appreciate suggestions for a suitable name for this scale.

The results of the above instruction are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS)

Components and items	**RS**	**PM**
1. Compassion		
1.1: My leader[8] actively listens and responds empathetically to the concerns of team members.	H	H
1.2: My leader goes out of his/her way to support others during difficult times, demonstrating genuine care.	H	H
1.3: My leader encourages a supportive and understanding environment where everyone feels valued.	H	H
1.4: My leader recognises and addresses the personal and professional needs of team members.	H	H
1.5: My leader promotes a culture of kindness, where helping others is prioritized.	H	H
2. Solidarity		

[8] If "My leader" is replaced with "I", this could be called the "Ubuntu Employee Reflection Scale (UERS)".

2.1: My leader fosters a sense of unity and teamwork, emphasising collective goals over individual achievements.	H	H
2.2: My leader advocates for inclusive decision-making, ensuring all voices are heard and considered.	H	H
2.3: My leader leads by example in collaborating across different departments or groups to achieve common objectives.	H	H
2.4: My leader strengthens bonds within the team by celebrating collective successes and learning from shared challenges.	H	H
2.5: My leader encourages the sharing of resources and knowledge to enhance team cohesion and effectiveness.	H	H
3. Survival		
3.1: My leader emphasises the importance of mutual support and cooperation for the team's and organisation's sustainability.	H	H
3.2: My leader advocates for strategies that ensure the long-term well-being of all team members, not just short-term gains.	H	H
3.3: My leader encourages resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges, emphasising the strength of working together.	H	H
3.4: My leader promotes a culture where team members are prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good of the team and organisation.	H	H
3.5: My leader ensures that the organisation's practices sustain both the social and environmental ecosystems it operates within.	H	H
4. Respect and Dignity		
4.1: My leader treats all individuals with equal respect, valuing diverse perspectives and backgrounds.	H	H
4.2: My leader upholds ethical standards and integrity, setting a positive example for others to follow.	H	H
4.3: My leader encourages an environment where everyone feels respected and empowered to contribute their best.	H	H
4.4: My leader addresses any form of disrespect or discrimination swiftly and effectively to maintain a dignified workplace.	H	H
4.5: My leader promotes transparency and fairness in all dealings, ensuring that every team member feels valued and respected.	H	H

Source: OpenAI's ChatGPT, personal communication, February 20, 2024.
Note: RS=First author, PM=Second author.
Note: Face validity: L=Low, M=Medium, H=High
Note: Respondents could rate these items on a scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to assess the extent to which leaders embody these values.

The scale outlined above was highly regarded by the authors, not only for its consistent presentation of items but also for its diversity. In contrast to the previous version of the scale, shown in Table 3, where some items were similar – leading to redundancy and a reduction in the scale's content validity – the improved version, as indicated on the right side of Table 4, received unanimous approval from both

authors for its strong face validity. The “Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale” seems to be the most useful of the three scales presented.

4 Discussion

The objective of this study was to develop a measure of Ubuntu by employing a test bank comprised of items previously utilised in Ubuntu assessments. The test bank's content was validated, as the use of the EFA-type approach revealed that the key themes extracted closely aligned with the theoretical framework of Ubuntu. However, challenges arose during the CFA-like analyses, when alignment to the theoretical structure was required. ChatGPT's effectiveness in aligning items with themes was less than perfect, including the AI selection of similar items to evaluate the same theme and, occasionally, a weak relationship between the theme and the selected items. However, in the next phase, when extending the scope beyond the initial 104 items identified in the literature, and allowing ChatGPT access to its full range of resources, a more comprehensive and articulate scale was developed. This new scale featured a wide array of items addressing the themes, demonstrating strong content and face validity. A multidimensional Ubuntu scale, which embodies the principles of compassion, solidarity, survival, as well as respect and dignity, was developed.

This study also showcases the potential of AI in crafting psychometric tools, highlighting the advantages of granting access to a vast data pool over a limited dataset. With reference to small pools of data, AI seems better equipped to do "inductive analysis", analysing text and providing themes emerge from the text, than "deductive analysis", analysing text with pre-determined themes which needs to be confirmed. This finding should be noted by those interested in qualitative research.

5 Managerial implications

The primary focus on this research is its contribution to the understanding of the concept of Ubuntu and its measurement. For managers interested in the topic, the proposed instrument could be useful. The “Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale” seems to be a comprehensive measure of a construct, which some deem central to the African way of being, and as a practical guide to action and policy, as well as creating value and boost efficiency (Broodryk, 2002; Chimakonam, 2016; Murove, 2012; Letseka, 2012). However, the implication in terms of those using AI to manage data the implications are also significant: Limiting the chatbot to analytic focus on a small and well-defined set of data handling data does not heal superior results. Only when allowing ChatGPT to speed it tentacles, the results were satisfactory.

6 Conclusions, limitations and future research

6.1 Conclusions

This study introduces a new and comprehensive Ubuntu scale, with high face and content validity. It also demonstrates the potential of AI in crafting psychometric tools and provides some instructive text which could be used to prompt Chat GPT when developing a multidimensional scale. It also demonstrates and specifies the limitations of AI in generating syntheses.

6.2 Limitations

The scale developed is not without its limitations. The items may have face and some intuitive content validity, but it is merely face and content validity, validity types not necessarily quantifiable, and at the lower end of the validity pyramid. In the same way as other scale developers, this test needs to be applied in the field. It is recommended that EFA, CFA and measurement invariance tests be performed when validating the proposed scale. With measurement invariance tests separating leaders' background, being African or not, should be conducted, given that Ubuntu is often claimed to be an African ethic many scholars (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013; Mbiti, 1990 [1969]; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020).

6.3 Future research

Researchers are invited to incorporate the scale into their studies. As stated in the previous paragraph, researchers are encouraged to perform EFA, CFA and measurement invariance tests when validating the proposed scale. External validation tests, such as predictive validity tests, are also recommended. The authors extend permission for its use in its current form. While the authors would appreciate receiving data from those who employ the scale, sharing this data is not a requirement for its utilisation.

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Annexure 1: Brubaker's (2013) list of items

Brubaker (2013) used a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = definitely no and 5 = definitely yes.

1 My leader provides me with counsel to succeed in my job.

2 My leader provides me with resources to fulfil my responsibilities.

3 My leader treats me as if I were a member of his/her family.

4 My leader is a meaningful part of our work community.

5 My leader sees him/herself as one of us.

6 My leader makes decisions based on the consensus of the group.

7 My leader is sensitive to employees' problems.

8 My leader shares in my suffering.

9 My leader is willing to reach out and help others.

10 My leader is concerned about fairness in our organisation.

11 My leader respects me and my contribution.

12 My leader shows respect for those with age and experience.

Annexure 2: Molose's (2019) list of items

Molose (2019) provided a list of 26 questions, to which the expected responses were 1 (strongly disagree); 2 (disagree); 3 (neutral); 4 (agree); and 5 (strongly agree).

1. My manager is usually present (emotionally) to share my pain during difficult times.

2. My manager is usually available (physically) to suffer with me during difficult times.

3. My manager encourages me to remain polite even when I disagree with what the guest says.

4. My manager responds selflessly to free me from suffering when I am under pressure (e.g., manager involvement during busy group guest check-in).

5. I feel happy when I see my manager notices that I have personal problems that may potentially affect my work performance.

6. I feel a genuine authenticity/realness/honesty about my manager and this is demonstrated in his/her empathetic interactions with me and guests alike.

7. I believe each employee should be willing to share (the little) they have with others as a way of brotherly care.

8. It is common practice for employees to sacrifice their time for the good of other team members.

9. I feel that sharing my difficulties (grief) with other colleagues makes me strong.

10. My manager shares his/her burden during hard times (e.g., budget cuts, salary pay cuts, restructuring or change of top management) as part of a team.

11. I feel that my manager treats me with utmost respect and dignity.

12. My manager greets me whenever he/she sees me.

13. My manager expects me to respect his/her decisions.

14. My manager treats each staff member as if he/she was a member of the family.

15. I have genuine backing (support) of my co-workers, such that they are willing to help me when I need it.

16. I actively contribute to work goals that benefit a wider group, particularly when they are worse off than me.

17. I generally trust my co-workers in matters of lending or extending a helping hand.

18. I have to be alert or else someone is likely to take advantage of me.

19. I do helpful things that will benefit me and the colleagues I know.

20. When something unfortunate happens to me (e.g., loss of a family member), my co-workers get together to help me out.

21. I see myself as part of a diverse work team rather than as an individual from a different cultural background or nationality.

22. I feel that all employees should stick together as a family no matter what sacrifices are required.

23. I feel it is my duty to take care of my co-workers, even if I have to sacrifice what I want.

24. Being a valuable team player is more important to me than my personal identity.

25. The well-being of my co-workers is important to me.

26. It is important to me that I respect the decisions (e.g., how to serve the customer) made by my co-workers.

Annexure 3: Mutsonziwa's (2020) list of items

Mutsonziwa (2020) listed three sets of questions to which the respondents needed to express the extent to which they agree with each statement. The scale was interpreted as follows: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

B1: Instructions: First, I am going to read out some statements about how you might view other people. To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. You treat other people with dignity.

2. You recognise other people.

3. You treat other people the way that you want to be treated.

4. You value other people.

5. You believe in the humanity of other people.

6. You respect other people.

B2: Instructions: Next, I am going to read out some statements about what you might have in common with other people. To what extent do you agree that they describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. Your life is interconnected with the lives of other people.

2. You share possessions with other people.

3. You like living together with other people.

4. Your life is richer because you share it with other people.

5. When you are connected to other people, you feel a sense of harmony.

B3: Instructions: Now I am going to read out some statements about how you might behave towards other people. To what extent do you agree that the following statements describe you on a five-point scale where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree?

1. You have a caring attitude towards other people.

2. You are concerned about the well-being of other people.

3. You are thoughtful of other people.

4. You try to be a blessing to other people.

5. You exhibit good will towards other people.

6. You are helpful to other people.

Annexure 4: Sigger et al.'s (2010) list of items

Sigger et al. (2010) listed three groups of questions, to which the respondents needed to answer strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4) or strongly agree (5).

The co-worker

1. My co-workers are friendly and helpful.

2. I care about the well-being of my co-workers.

3. I respect the religion of my co-workers.

4. I respect the beliefs and customs of my co-workers.

5. I believe that older co-workers have more knowledge and skills than the younger co-workers.

6. When a co-worker gets a promotion and I don't, I am happy for him/her.

7. My co-worker is someone I inform about my personal life.

8. I rely on my co-workers for support when things at work or at home are not going well.

9. I see myself as an active listener towards my co-workers.

10. My co-workers and I get together outside of work time.

11. Relatives of my co-workers should have an advantage over outsiders in competing for job openings.

12. I take the time to greet my co-workers.

The team

13. The organisation encourages teamwork.

14. I have to work closely with others to do the job well.

15. I feel I am really part of the team.

16. I have confidence and trust in the team.

17. I enjoy, above all else, to work as part of a team.

18. I have the right to say "no" to the team.

19. I have the freedom to take my own approach.

20. I am willing to give up personal needs for the good of the team.

21. I always put the interest of the whole team before my own interest.

22. A crisis in the team will be solved in a harmonious way.

23. Long discussions take place in the team meetings.

24. All opinions receive a fair hearing and consideration.

25. I am proud to work for the organisation.

26. I value sharing what I have with my family.

The organisation

27. The organisation has different levels of authority.

28. In the organisation, all decisions are made by the leader.

29. The organisation prevents job loss, even in difficult times.

30. The organisation has the well-being of its employees as a major objective.

31. The organisation provides equal opportunities for all.

32. In the organisation, all the employees are equal.

33. Different ethnic groups work together in harmony.

34. In the organisation, ceremonies and personnel parties are organised.

35. The organisation and its employees are like a family and its members.

36. My family is always welcome to visit the organisation.

37. Many of my family members work in the organisation.

38. Dialogue is an important means in organisational life.

39. There is open communication in the organisation.

40. The organisation provides all employees open access to information.

41. The organisation encourages diversity of opinions.

Annexure 5: Terblanché-Greeff and Nel's (2023) list of items

Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023) solicited responses on a six-point Likert scale of agreement.

UI1 I prefer being part of an in-group.

UI2 My identity is linked to the identity of my in-group.

UI3 The people in my in-group help me to be the person that I am.

UI4 I work together with other people to reach the goals that we share in my in-group.

UI5 I like the feeling that I belong to my in-group.

US3 I engage in helpful behaviour.

US4 I care about the quality of life of others.

US5 I exhibit compassion out of concern for others.

US6 I exhibit generosity out of concern for others.

Chapter 5: Integrating conceptualizations of Ubuntu

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	**A**	**A1+A2+A3**	**5**	**Synthesis of A**
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter integrates the work on Objectives A1, A2, and A3, providing a synthesis that addresses the broader task of conceptualizing Ubuntu. This aim was attained through conference proceeding with the following title:

> Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025a). Conceptualising through Triangulation: The Case of Ubuntu. *Proceedings of the 18th International Business Conference*, Dar es Salaam. (pp. 2339-2352) ISBN: 978-1-0370-7935

This is referred to as Article 5.

CONCEPTUALISING THROUGH TRIANGULATION: THE CASE OF UBUNTU

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Abstract

Conceptual clarity is fundamental to the advancement of scholarly dialogue and scientific progress. Without robust definitions, scholars are ill-equipped to build upon one another's work, develop theory, design valid measurements, or influence practice. This article aims to demonstrate how a triangulation design can sharpen construct clarity on Ubuntu. Guided by the logic of convergence, four complementary studies, drawing on a pool of qualitative definitions, psychometric item sets, factor-analytic results, and a systematic text analysis of 50 articles, were integrated. Through this triangulated approach, a set of convergent elements, dignity-respect, empathy-compassion, and relational interconnectedness, was identified, forming the nucleus of the Ubuntu definition. Additionally, complementary elements, collective survival and Sub-Saharan provenance, were retained to enrich the conceptualisation without contradiction. Emergent elements not corroborated across sources were excluded. The working definition demonstrated high thematic consistency across epistemologically diverse studies, supporting a critical-realist perspective that partial insights can approximate a more comprehensive understanding of reality. This study also contributes to concept-building methodology by illustrating how triangulation can move scholarship beyond abstract rhetoric toward empirically grounded insights.

Keywords

Triangulation, critical realism, African philosophy, Ubuntu, construct definition

JEL Classification

M14

Introduction

The introduction consists of three parts: the background, the problem statement, and the research objectives.

Background

Conceptualisation lies at the heart of scholarly inquiry, serving as the foundation upon which theory, measurement, and application are built (Mouton, 2001; De Vos et al., 2011). Yet,

defining complex constructs, particularly those rooted in cultural (Fischer et al., 2025; Van de Vijver, 2015) or philosophical (Grève, 2015; Williamson, 2021) traditions, poses a challenge to researchers. This article argues for the use of triangulation as a robust strategy to strengthen construct clarity. Rather than privileging one epistemological lens, triangulation enables researchers to draw from varied approaches to arrive at a more holistic understanding (Flick, 2017; Turner et al., 2017).

Problem statement

Achieving conceptual clarity in complex, culturally or philosophically grounded constructs remains a persistent challenge in scholarly inquiry. Such constructs often suffer from ambiguity, inconsistent definitions, and fragmented interpretations, limiting theoretical and practical contributions. This article addresses the problem by exploring how triangulation can strengthen conceptualisation, using Ubuntu as a case in point.

Research objectives

In this article, the aim is to demonstrate how triangulation can aid the conceptualisation of complex phenomena, using the case of Ubuntu. Ubuntu, as an example, was selected due to its complexity as a philosophy or worldview linked to a specific culture (Steenkamp & Fourie, 2023; Taylor, 2023). A critical realist stance was adopted, assuming that although constructs like Ubuntu are socially constructed and contextually interpreted, an underlying reality exists that can be approximated through a convergence of evidence (Bhaskar & Hartwig, 2016; Edgley et al., 2016). The goal is not merely to explore Ubuntu, but to exemplify how triangulated research can enhance the process of concept formation itself.

Literature review

The literature introduces only two key elements: triangulation as an integrative research strategy, and Ubuntu as an ambiguous concept in need of clarification. Further details on triangulation will be provided in the methodology section, while Ubuntu will be more clearly explained in the presentation of the findings.

Triangulation as an integrative strategy

Triangulation, a term derived from cartography and military navigation, refers to the practice of using multiple vantage points to locate a phenomenon with greater precision (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). In the context of social research, it signifies the deliberate use of multiple methods, data sources, theories, or investigators to enhance the depth and credibility of findings when examining a single construct. Denzin (1978) identifies four core types of triangulation that remain widely recognised in contemporary scholarship (Donkoh & Mensah, 2023; Noble & Heale, 2019):

- Data triangulation: This involves drawing on different types of data or information sources, such as archival documents, survey responses, and interview transcripts. By comparing evidence across sources, researchers can reduce the risk of bias stemming from a single dataset and achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the construct under study.
- Investigator triangulation: Here, multiple researchers or analysts are engaged in examining the same phenomenon. The involvement of different investigators brings varied perspectives and interpretive lenses, which helps to counteract individual subjectivity and strengthens the credibility of conclusions.
- Theory triangulation: This entails applying multiple theoretical frameworks to interpret the same data. Different theories highlight distinct dimensions of a

construct, and their juxtaposition allows for a richer and more nuanced explanation that transcends the limitations of any one perspective.

- Methodological triangulation: Perhaps the most widely utilised, this form combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. By integrating diverse methods, such as surveys, experiments, and interviews, researchers can capitalise on the strengths of each, offset their weaknesses, and generate findings that are both generalisable and contextually grounded.

This article primarily employs methodological triangulation (Heesen et al., 2019), while also drawing on elements of data and theory triangulation during the interpretation process. Such blending is not uncommon in contemporary research (Hellgren, 2019), as it facilitates a synthesis of findings rather than privileging one approach over another. Triangulation proves especially valuable when dealing with abstract constructs such as Ubuntu, which resist simple or singular definition. Recent scholarship on mixed methods underscores this point, emphasising not only the complementary strengths of qualitative and quantitative approaches, but also the pivotal role of instrument design in shaping what is ultimately known (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fetters & Freshwater, 2015).

From a critical realist perspective, triangulation is not merely a tool for validation but a way of uncovering different layers of reality. Critical realism assumes that social phenomena are shaped by underlying mechanisms that are not always directly observable. Triangulation thus helps researchers move beyond surface-level patterns toward deeper causal explanations by showing how different kinds of evidence converge or diverge (Danermark et al., 2002). In this view, triangulation is less about eliminating bias and more about building a richer, more nuanced understanding of reality that accounts for both empirical observations and the generative mechanisms producing them.

By integrating these multiple angles, researchers can transcend the limitations inherent in any one approach and move closer to conceptual clarity.

Conceptual ambiguity and the case of Ubuntu

Ubuntu, often translated as “a person is a person through other people” (Tutu, 2004, p. 25), represents a foundational African worldview emphasising community, interdependence, dignity, and shared humanity (Metz, 2021; Mokgoro, 1998; Molefe, 2019; Ramose, 2021). Despite its growing presence in organisational science (Chetty & Price, 2024), education (Ngubane & Makua, 2021a), psychology (Chigangaidze et al., 2022) and leadership (Sachikonye & Ramlogan, 2024), Ubuntu remains conceptually ambiguous. Definitions are often abstract and fragmented (Gade, 2017; Mwipikeni, 2018), or overly idealised (Koenane & Pius Olatunji, 2017; Zimunya et al., 2015). This definitional fluidity, while reflecting its philosophical richness, poses a challenge for empirical research and practical application.

Ubuntu’s conceptualisation is further complicated by its contested status. While some regard it as a guiding African philosophy, others argue that it is eroding under the pressures of modern individualism. Several authors highlight this tension, with Fagunwa (2019, p. 1) claiming Ubuntu “expresses the humanistic tendencies that are fast going into extinction in today’s individualistic society.” Mabovula (2011) similarly laments the erosion of African communal values, while Mboti (2015, p. 125) provocatively asks: “May the real Ubuntu please stand up?” Louw (1998, p. 38) further questions whether “Africans still adhere to Ubuntu or, at least, aspire to do so”. This raises a crucial challenge: can something that is fading, contested, or inconsistently practised be conceptualised in a clear and coherent way?

Given these complexities, triangulation is essential for studying Ubuntu, as it integrates multiple methods, data sources, and theoretical perspectives to produce a more balanced account. From a critical realist perspective, Ubuntu is a “real” phenomenon with causal

powers, yet our knowledge of it remains partial, requiring methodological pluralism to capture its depth and stratification.

Methodology

The methodology includes the rationale for using Ubuntu as a case study, describes the design of the research, and finally, outlines the data, which consists of four articles on Ubuntu.

Rationale for the triangulation strategy to conceptualise Ubuntu

Given the multidimensionality of Ubuntu, single-method studies often fall short. Qualitative narratives may lack generalisability while quantitative findings risk decontextualisation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), and instruments may reflect Western conceptual biases (Doğruyol et al., 2019). Triangulation enhances construct validity (Moon, 2019), offering a synthesis that is both deep, generalisable, and practically usable (Gibson, 2017).

Triangulated research design

This study employs a four-stage triangulation design, with each stage offering a complementary contribution to achieving the study's aim of conceptual refinement. Triangulation was chosen to address the conceptual ambiguity surrounding Ubuntu, ensuring that the diverse aspects of the research reports and their empirical manifestations are adequately captured in a single outcome.

There are many ways of investigating triangulation in social research. For example, Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) emphasise mixed methods designs that integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches; Denzin (1978) identifies more than methodology, referring to data, investigator, and theory triangulation; Flick (2017) highlights triangulation as a strategy to enhance the validity of qualitative research. In this study, we decided to follow the strategy proposed by Jick (1979), which emphasises convergence, complementarity, and the identification of unique findings.

The design unfolded in four stages. First, the four individual studies (articles) forming the basis of the triangulation were presented, each contributing a unique lens on Ubuntu. Second, the core elements of their results were systematically extracted, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and divergences. Third, these extracted elements were organised into a triangulation matrix, which served as an analytical tool for mapping relationships across the studies. Fourth, following the logic of convergence outlined by Jick (1979), the results were synthesised by highlighting convergence (shared findings), complementarity (mutually enriching perspectives), and unique contributions (novel insights offered by individual studies).

In this process, stratification occurred at three levels: core elements (findings consistently present across all studies), supported elements (findings observed in more than one study), and emergent elements (findings identified in a single study but offering theoretical promise). This layered approach resonates with the critical realist notion of stratified reality (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark et al., 2002), in that it acknowledges both stable underlying patterns and contextually contingent insights.

The outcome of this process is not simply a descriptive summary but a conceptual synthesis. By systematically integrating convergent, complementary, and emergent elements, the triangulation yields a working definition of Ubuntu that is both empirically grounded and theoretically coherent.

Data (Studies used in this study)

Four studies were used in this research:

- Study 1: Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2023). Exploring the concept of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: Leveraging artificial intelligence for 'creative' and possibly valuable support in scoping reviews. In *Proceedings of the 16th International Business Conference, Swakopmund* (pp. 104-123). ISBN 978-0-7961-2665-8. https://internationalbusinessconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/IBC-2023-CP-74-Steyn-Final.pdf
- Study 2: Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2024). Developing a unified Ubuntu scale and AI-driven psychometric innovation. In *Proceedings of the 17th International Business Conference, Stellenbosch* (pp. 184-202). ISBN 978-0-7961-8362-0. file:///C:/Users/steynr/Downloads/IBC%202024.pdf
- Study 3: Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025). Leveraging the psychometric properties of Ubuntu measures to reveal its structural components. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies, 5*(1), a05-a05. https://doi.org/10.38140/ijss-2025.vol5.1.05
- Study 4: Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026). Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu. African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies African Journal of Inter/Multidisciplinary Studies, 8(1), 1-16. https://doi.org/10.51415/ajims.v7i2.2828

Each study is epistemologically distinct but can contribute analytically to a common goal: to describe the construct in a multilayered but coherent manner.

Ethics

This study, as well as the studies used for triangulation, were approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership under approval numbers 1726 and 3781. No ethical concerns were reported or encountered.

Findings

The findings are presented in accordance with the methodology section of the paper. These findings pertain to the studies used, the triangulation matrix, the convergence (with stratification), and, lastly, the integration (working definition).

Studies used

Four studies were used:

Study 1: Exploring the concept of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: Leveraging artificial intelligence for "creative" and possibly valuable support in scoping reviews.

Data Sources: ChatGPT was consulted to provide direct, verbatim definitions and characteristics of Ubuntu from academic sources.

Analytical Approach: The content of the listed definitions and characteristics was thematically analysed, without the assistance of ChatGPT.

Key Observations: Ubuntu was defined as "a Southern African philosophy that values social harmony, community building, and prioritises the well-being of the community over individual self-interest; which emphasises the importance of relationships, empathy, compassion, inclusivity and mutual respect to foster collaboration and build trust among individuals and groups". Furthermore, the "main characteristic of Ubuntu is a belief of human interrelatedness (1), particularly within communities (2), where harmony is prioritised (3). Respect (for others,

elders and the environment) is also important (4), which could be linked with compassion and empathy (5), and, another strong theme, humaneness (6), which is related to treating people with dignity. Lastly, a powerful theme is hospitality (7), which relates to the welcoming of others into one's community or home".

Study 2: Developing a unified Ubuntu scale and AI-driven psychometric innovation.

Data Sources: A total of 104 items, derived from five measures of Ubuntu (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023), were used as core data.

Analytical Approach: The 104 items were presented to ChatGPT to create an instrument measuring the five underlying constructs, with four items each.

Key Observations: The following themes were extracted by Chat GPT from the 104 items: 1. Leadership Compassion and Support; 2. Team Solidarity and Shared Suffering; 3. Respect and Dignity in the Workplace; 4. Community and Interconnectedness; 5. Empathy and Altruism. No formal definition of Ubuntu was presented. However, "A multidimensional Ubuntu scale, which embodies the principles of compassion, solidarity, survival, as well as respect and dignity, was developed" (Steyn & Msweli, 2025, p. 194).

Study 3: Leveraging psychometric properties of Ubuntu measures to reveal its structural components.

Data Sources: Primary elements of Ubuntu, as identified by test developers (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023), were used as core data.

Analytical Approach: Theorised elements, as well as the factors which emerged post-scale verification (the product of exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses), were scrutinised to reveal the operationalised rather than theoretical nature of Ubuntu.

Key Observations: Survival, compassion, solidarity, respect and dignity; Survival, compassion, group solidarity, collectivism, respect and dignity; Humanness, inter-connectedness, compassion; Survival, solidarity, compassion, respect and dignity; and Identity, solidarity are proposed as theoretical elements of Ubuntu. In two cases, Ubuntu ended up as being defined as a unidimensional construct. Unique elements of Ubuntu that were operationally sustainable included Survival, compassion, collectivism, respect, and dignity; humanness, interconnectedness, and compassion; and Identity, solidarity. A definition of Ubuntu was presented as follows: "… (a) conceptual overlap among the terms, Ubuntu can be understood as a composite construct encompassing compassion, solidarity, survival, and, lastly, respect and dignity" (Steyn & Msweli, 2025, p.9).

Study 4: Towards a comprehensive and inclusive definition of Ubuntu

Data Sources: A general search for academic articles with Ubuntu in the title of the document was conducted, and following several rounds, 50 full-text documents published in English were selected for analysis.

Analytical Approach: A comprehensive list of definitions of Ubuntu was compiled and analysed to identify words or constructs frequently mentioned in the definitions.

Key Observations: "The central theme, namely empathy, emphasises "compassion" (15 times) and "caring" (9 times), reflects the text's advocacy for empathy and proactive support towards others' well-being. Next, respect, incorporating "respect" (7 times), "dignity" (4 times), and "humanity" (4 times each), along with "humanness" (3 times), underscore the narrative of recognising the intrinsic worth of every individual. Another significant theme is community, revolving around the terms of "community" (6 times) and "reciprocity" (3 times), highlighting the vital role of mutual support and exchange in building strong, cohesive communities. Closely followed by generosity, encapsulating "sharing" (5 times) and "hospitality" (3 times),

the text advocates for generosity and the idea of sharing resources. The final core theme, harmony, includes “relationships” (3 times) and “harmony” (3 times), underscoring the significance of fostering peaceful and cooperative interactions. This repetitive emphasis on specific values illustrates their central role in the narrative making them stand out as key denominators of Ubuntu.

A definition of Ubuntu was also developed as part of the study: “Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' which translates to 'a person is a person through other persons,' embod[ies] an exemplary Southern African way of life or a philosophy, which places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the core of personal development as well as in structuring societal thinking” (Steyn & Msweli, 2026, p. 10).

Triangulation matrix

Presented in Table 1 is a triangulation matrix of Ubuntu, stemming from the definitions provided in the four studies used as data.

Table 1: Triangulation matrix of Ubuntu themes across four studies

Theme	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3	Study 4
Respect and dignity	“mutual respect”	“principles of … respect and dignity”	“respect and dignity”	“respect and dignity”
Compassion and empathy	“empathy, compassion”	“principles of compassion”	“compassion”	“empathy”
Interconnectedness (Solidarity, community and harmony)	“values social harmony”, “community building”, “foster collaboration and build trust”	“principles of solidarity”	“solidarity”	“community … harmony”
Survival	—	“principles of survival”	“survival”	—
Sub-Saharan African origin/context	“a Southern African philosophy”	—	—	“originating from the Nguni proverb”, “Southern African way of life”
Generosity	—	—	—	“generosity”
Inclusivity	“inclusivity”	—	—	—

Note: Verbatim extracts are quoted directly from the source material. The studies include both published and unpublished work by Steyn and Msweli. Dashes (—) indicate the theme was not explicitly mentioned.

Convergence

Using Jick’s (1979) three-fold logic, the matrix reveals how the four studies on Ubuntu intersect and diverge:

Convergence (found across all four studies): Respect and dignity emerged as the clearest and most consistent concepts across the four studies. All verbatim definitions included respect, which was grouped with dignity, as recognising another's dignity is often a precursor to showing respect. Compassion and empathy were each mentioned in two studies, and, given their conceptual closeness, were grouped together. Elements related to interconnectedness, embedded in the themes of solidarity, community, and harmony, were found in all four studies. These highly recurrent constructs anchor the concept of Ubuntu and provide the strongest empirical justification for inclusion in any overarching definition.

Complementarity (unique but enriching findings): Survival is framed in Studies 2 and 3 as a "principle" but is absent from Studies 1 and 4. The Sub-Saharan African origin/context was identified in Studies 1 and 4 but not in Studies 2 and 3. These elements broaden the understanding of Ubuntu. Rather than contradicting the core, they deepen it and highlight the richness of Ubuntu across different research designs.

Contradiction (productive divergence): Generosity (Study 1) appeared explicitly in only one study but was retained, as it may stem from the presence of empathy and compassion (Lim & DeSteno, 2016; Stevens & Taber, 2021). Similarly, inclusivity appears only in one study (Study 4). This concept was also retained, as it contributes to the debate regarding the applicability of Ubuntu in broader societal contexts. Letseka (2012, p. 48) suggests that "Ubuntu is best understood as a moral quality that manifests itself in community life, particularly in settings where human interdependence is palpable and personal relationships are maintained." Metz (2011, p. 540) supports this view, stating that "Ubuntu ... [values] are easier to maintain in relationships of familiarity and proximity." Generosity is treated here as an emergent theme (present in only one study but theoretically coherent). At the same time, inclusion is viewed not as contradictory but as context-dependent, in line with Jick's (1979) three-fold logic of convergence.

Integration: A working definition of Ubuntu

Convergent elements possess maximal evidential weight and form the non-negotiable nucleus of an Ubuntu definition. Based on this, Ubuntu can be defined as:

> *… an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for others, manifesting as empathy and compassion, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, and community-building.*

Complementary elements enrich this definition, adding nuance. These elements, though not present in all four studies, appeared in at least half and thus signal their significance. They reflect contextual and methodological variation but remain conceptually aligned with the core. Incorporating these, the definition may be extended as follows:

> *Ubuntu is an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for others, manifesting as empathy and compassion, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, and community-building, which embraces the principle of collective survival and is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values.*

Emergent and contradictory elements merit further exploration. Their appearance may reflect the context, study design, or stage of conceptual development. Generosity, though noted in only one study, is conceptually consistent with empathy and compassion, and could therefore be considered implied by empathy and compassion, its precursors (Lim & DeSteno, 2016; Stevens & Taber, 2021). Being implied, generosity was left out of the final definition. Inclusion, while potentially valuable, is more problematic. Its absence in three of the four studies may reflect a tendency toward exclusion and suggests that Ubuntu is best understood as a value system most relevant within small groups marked by familiarity and proximity, where inclusion is relational, face-to-face, and may stand in contrast to hospitability, mentioned in Studies 1 and 4. Hospitality, though mentioned, was not included in the integrated definitions provided in any of the studies. For these reasons, neither the emergent nor the contradictory elements were included in the final definition.

The definition presented above is based solely on convergent and supplementary elements, and was retained in its original form and not edited for smoothness or flow, as it reflects the conceptual hierarchy of elements established through the triangulation process: Core elements are presented first, followed by supplementary elements. As a thought experiment, incorporating the emergent and contradictory elements, a further definition was developed. It could read as follows: "Ubuntu is an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for

others, manifesting as empathy, compassion and generosity, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, and community-building, which embrace the principle of collective survival and is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values, finding its fullest expression in small-scale, relational settings rather than in large, impersonal systems." The last-mentioned definition could be considered diffuse, cumbersome, and overly elaborate, and such extremely broad definitions should be avoided (Alberts, 2019). It is thus not presented as a final outcome.

Discussion

This study was not intended to produce a wholly new definition of Ubuntu but rather to demonstrate the methodological value of triangulation for conceptual refinement. Following Jick's (1979) argument that triangulation enables convergence, complementarity, and the discovery of unique insights, the design illustrates how diverse studies can collectively strengthen conceptual clarity. Anchored in critical realist assumptions about a stratified reality (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark et al., 2002), the approach recognises both stable features of Ubuntu and contextual variations in its expression. In line with Denzin's (1978) typology and Flick's (2017) emphasis on validity, the study employed methodological triangulation, drawing on four epistemologically distinct investigations. In doing so, it demonstrates how triangulation can be used as a systematic and transparent process for refining complex social constructs.

The triangulation exercise itself did not generate a brand-new definition of Ubuntu; an unlikely outcome given that the contributing studies provided definition-through-denotation and definition-through-synthesis (Alberts, 2019). Instead, the result was a consolidated definition confirming that Ubuntu's conceptual heart lies in relational humanism (Chigangaidze, 2021; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019), with dignity and respect for others, empathy and compassion, and interconnectedness of people (solidarity, harmony, and community-building) at its core. By demonstrating that these dimensions recur across all four methodologically diverse studies, the findings strengthen confidence in Ubuntu as a stable construct, offering both theoretical clarity and an operational lens for future research. At the same time, complementary contributions add functional and cultural depth: Survival highlights Ubuntu's forward-looking concern for group flourishing, while the explicit Sub-Saharan locus situates the ethic historically and geographically.

Managerial implications

Managerially, the refined definition signals to leaders that implementing Ubuntu means cultivating dignity/respect norms, empathic practices, and structures that foster solidarity and harmony, rather than relying on ad hoc appeals to "African values." Similar suggestions were made by Nkomo (2011), Mangaliso (2001), Ibeh et al. (2022), and Mangaliso et al. (2022), who emphasised the importance of aligning managerial practices with emic traditions such as Ubuntu. For educators, the framework clarifies the Ubuntu concept and provide a clearer structure to develop pedagogies for social-justice-oriented teaching. Many scholars have advocated for this practice, including Le Grange (2012), Letseka (2012), and later Ngubane and Makua (2021b), as well as Mugumbate et al. (2024), who reiterate the importance of Ubuntu in decolonial and transformative education. Psychologists gain an empirically aligned construct that links interpersonal warmth with communal resilience, inviting coherent and integrative well-being interventions. Within the domain of care, Ubuntu is often invoked. Haegert (2000) and Muhammad-Lawal et al. (2023), as well as Waghid (2014) and Ngubane and Makua (2021a), provide examples of its application in nursing and higher education, respectively.

Limitations and future research

This study is subject to several limitations. First, only four studies, conducted by the same team of authors, were included in the triangulation process. This may limit the breadth of perspectives captured. It could be argued that broader triangulation, incorporating independently sourced datasets, might have produced more inclusive and generalisable results. However, it is important to note that these four studies themselves were integrative efforts, synthesising findings from previous empirical work. Therefore, the generalisability of the identified core-complementary hierarchy remains reasonably robust.

A second limitation pertains to the use of AI-assisted thematic extraction (via ChatGPT prompts) in Study 1. While this approach proved fruitful in generating initial themes, one could argue that it may have introduced selection bias. Nevertheless, all AI-generated outputs were critically reviewed, and instances of large language model "hallucinations" were identified and corrected. Moreover, Study 4 relied solely on human-coded data, which adds to the methodological robustness of the overall investigation.

This work remains largely conceptual in nature. Further empirical research is needed to explore whether the identified elements co-vary in lived practice and experience across individuals and communities. Of particular interest is the question of inclusivity and the scope of Ubuntu: is Ubuntu intended for "my people," or for all people? Related to this is the concept of hospitality, previously mentioned, which merits deeper exploration.

Future research should also examine how Ubuntu interacts with non-African ethical systems, whether it is truly unique to Sub-Saharan Africa, and how its core principles may shift in diasporic contexts. Additionally, studies could investigate how Ubuntu is enacted in contemporary settings, particularly within digital communities, where notions of familiarity and proximity are redefined by virtual engagement.

Conclusion

This study successfully demonstrated triangulation both as a methodological strategy and as a way of clearly presenting complex, multi-source findings. As Jick (1979) and Denzin (2012) argue, triangulation strengthens validity while providing richer insights, and our work illustrates how such an approach can be executed systematically and communicated transparently. By combining diverse studies into a coherent framework, the process showed that triangulation is not only feasible but also highly effective for advancing conceptual clarity.

By systematically overlaying multiple methodological angles, this study offers a template for using triangulation to tame conceptual ambiguity. Ubuntu emerges not as an amorphous ideal but as a layered construct with a clearly demarcated nucleus and an empirically defensible periphery. Such clarity equips scholars and practitioners to deploy Ubuntu with precision, designing measurements, interventions, and policies that remain faithful to its dignitarian, empathic, and communal essence while remaining sensitive to context-specific elaborations. The approach illustrated here can be replicated for other culturally rich but academically diffuse constructs, advancing theory-building across the social sciences.

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Chapter 6: Organisational effects of Ubuntu leadership: A systematic review

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	**B**	**B1**	**6**	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective B1 (To describe the organisational effects of Ubuntu leadership through a systematic review of empirical research results) by systematically reviewing empirical studies on the organisational outcomes of Ubuntu leadership.

This objective was partially achieved through a paper presented with the following title: The impact of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses. The article is currently under review and is included in the reference list with the designation 2027a as a placeholder pending publication:

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2027a). The impact of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses. Paper available from the first author – paper presently under review.

This is referred to as Article 6.

Article 6: The impact of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses

The impact of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership:

A review of quantitative analyses

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Abstract

Introduction: Ubuntu is often described as a way of interacting that emphasizes empathy, respect, generosity, and community harmony, in contrast to Western individualism.

Aim: This research explores the impact of ubuntu and ubuntu leadership on employees and organizations by reviewing previous studies. The goal is to provide an evidence-based understanding of ubuntu's effects.

Method: A comprehensive review of quantitative studies was conducted using keywords like "ubuntu," "leadership," "quantitative," and "scale." After a rigorous screening, 46 studies were selected and analyzed.

Results: The analysis showed that ubuntu is a distinct African construct with strong predictive power for employee engagement, organizational commitment, and performance. Researchers often equate ubuntu leadership with servant leadership and use different scales to measure it.

Discussion: The lack of consistent outcomes and measurement tools across studies makes comparison and meta-analysis difficult. As a result, it's challenging to determine the exact impact of ubuntu.

Contribution: This study underscores the need for more quantitative research and a standardized measurement for ubuntu. Forming an ubuntu research group could help specify its impact, complementing the abundant qualitative research available.

Keywords: Ubuntu; African philosophy; quantitative research; outcomes

Introduction

Ubuntu is perceived as a philosophy that embodies the African ethos, or a collection of noble traits (Gade, 2012), exemplified by individuals like Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela. The Ubuntu philosophy is frequently advocated as a foundation for creating Afrocentric systems (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013; Mupedziswa et al., 2019; Overson, 2011), while the individual characteristics associated with ubuntu are hailed as a model for leadership in Africa (Igulu, 2023; Karsten & Illa, 2005; Sigger et al., 2010). These principles and traits are believed to deeply resonate with people of African descent, as ubuntu itself is rooted in African soil (Bennett, 2011; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020).

This research focuses on ubuntu and ubuntu leadership, and on their impact on the attitudes and behaviour of employees. Thus, what is the impact of ubuntu, and how does ubuntu leadership affect employees' attitudes and behaviours?

Literature

According to Robbins and Judge (2019), the Input-Process-Output model (IPO) could explain human behaviour and how individuals respond to their environment by receiving stimuli (input), processing that information through cognitive and emotional pathways (process), and then exhibiting behaviours or actions in response (output). The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model can be applied to understand and analyse the dynamics between leader behaviour, employee attitudes and employee behaviour – as many seminal authors have done in the past in research on leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Edmondson, 1999; Kahneman, 2011; Meyer & Allen, 1991). The basic idea is that leader behaviour represents the input and encompasses the actions, communication styles, decision-making processes, and leadership strategies employed by leaders and managers in an organisation. The processing stage in this context refers to employee’s attitudes, including their perceptions, feelings and beliefs about their work environment, their leaders, their roles, and the organisation as a whole. The cognitive and emotional processing of leadership behaviours displayed by employees leads to the formation of these attitudes, which in turn influence how employees will behave. This

behaviour consists of the actions and reactions of employees in the workplace, which can include their performance, cooperation with team members, communication, innovation, and overall contribution to the goals of the organisation.

Systems theory (Von Bertalanffy, 1968) could be seen as the broader theoretical context within which IPO operates. Within systems theory the ideal may be to identify all variables in and outside the system, to make accurate predictions. However, this is unlikely, and it should be expected that variables other than those identified will influence the outcomes (Meadows, 2008). Thus, it should be well expected that IPO models present less-than-perfect predictions (see Galais et al., 2021).

Within the IPO framework, the process part functions as a mediator between the inputs and the outputs (Fan et al., 2022; Zhang, 2022). It would thus be expected that leadership style (input), effects (process), and attitudes influence employee behaviour (outcomes). On an operational level the correlations between leadership style and employee behaviour should be less than the correlations between attitudes and employee behaviour. Ubuntu leadership is thus also expected to influence the attitudes and behaviours of employees.

Ubuntu and other leadership styles

When one considers ubuntu leadership, transformational leadership, as presented in the Full Range Leadership Theory (FRLT) (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, 1985; Bass, & Avolio, 1994), comes to mind to mind. The transformational leadership model emphasises the influential role of leadership in shaping employees' attitudes and, subsequently, their behaviours.

Transformational leadership is geared towards inspiring and motivating employees beyond immediate self-interest and focuses on the greater good of the organisation or community. Transformational leadership operates through four main components:

1. Idealised influence: Leaders act as role models, earning respect and trust, and in this way they influence followers to adopt similar values and beliefs.

2. Inspirational motivation: Leaders communicate a clear vision and demonstrate commitment, inspiring followers to share in this vision and engage with enthusiasm and optimism.

3. Intellectual stimulation: Leaders encourage innovation and creativity, challenging followers to think critically and solve problems in new ways.

4. Individualised consideration: Leaders offer support and encouragement to individual followers, attending to their needs and fostering personal development (Avolio & Bass, 2004; Bass, & Avolio, 1994).

Through embodying idealised influence and providing inspirational motivation, transformational leaders can impact followers' attitudes towards work and the organisation, to feel a stronger sense of purpose and a heightened commitment to the organisation's goals. Intellectual stimulation is not central to the conceptualisation of ubuntu, but individualised consideration certainly is. Individual consideration could contribute to a work environment where employees are recognised and respected as members of the organisational team, which could relate to better performance and increased organisational citizenship behaviours, such as helping others and going beyond formal job requirements.

Although ubuntu does not perfectly match transformational leadership, the fit is much better than with transactional leadership, or a laissez-faire leadership style, which forms part of FRTL. In the analyses that follow, it will be observed that several researchers compared transformational leadership with ubuntu leadership.

Closely related to ubuntu leadership is servant leadership, first proposed by Greenleaf (1977). Unlike the FRTL, where the constructs are well defined, the servant leadership operationalisations are less coherent. Rachmawati and Lantu (2014) listed several measures of servant leadership but ended up supporting Dierendonck (2010) who suggested six factors in servant leadership: (1) empowering and developing people, (2) humility, (3) authenticity, (4) interpersonal acceptance, (5) providing direction, and (6) stewardship. Washington et al. (2014) supports the notion that servant leadership involves (1) unique conceptual skill, (2) empowering others, (3) helping subordinates grow and succeed, (4) putting subordinates first, (5) behaving ethically, (6) emotional healing, and (7) creating value for the community. Dennis and Bocarnea (2005), when referring to the work of Patterson (2003), extends existing literature and includes the following constructs as typical of the servant-leader: (1) leads and serves with love, (2) acts with humility, (3) is altruistic, (4) is visionary for the followers, (5) is trusting, (6) is serving and (7) empowers the followers. While “there is no consensus on the definition of servant leadership” (Parris & Peachey, 2013, p. 337), it is difficult not to see similarities with ubuntu leadership.

The terminology of servant leadership is well aligned with that of ubuntu leadership. Besides, it will be shown in the analyses that follow that servant leadership is often discussed along

similar lines as ubuntu by researchers, and that servant leadership is in fact used as a substitute for ubuntu leadership. The implications of such reasoning are further discussed after presenting the findings.

Method

A search of the literature on the quantitative impact of ubuntu leadership on attitudes and behaviour could involve investigating several attitudes, including job satisfaction, organisational commitment, trust, empowerment, engagement, and sense of belonging, and behaviours such as performance, innovation, collaboration, prosocial behaviour, turnover intentions, and adaptability (personal communication with ChatGPT, 10 March 2024). These terms were originally used in a search aimed at finding quantitative links between ubuntu leadership and attitudes and behaviour. The following is an example of the search in Google Scholar: intitle: Ubuntu, “leadership” “job satisfaction”. The other keywords, such as “organizational commitment”, were used in successive searches. This strategy was tiresome, as qualitative and quantitative studies formed part of the retrieved outputs, but most importantly, the strategy yielded a very small number of interpretable research outputs. The strategy was altered, applying a new search strategy using three sets of searches, namely (1) intitle:Ubuntu “quantitative” , (2) intitle:Ubuntu "leadership" "scale", and (3) intitle:Ubuntu “leadership” “questionnaire”. This strategy yielded satisfactory results. The selection of outcomes was based on the presence of retrievable qualitative data related to the outcomes. Because there was such a large number of master’s and doctoral studies included in the findings, these were also analysed. In the findings section, these were marked with an asterisk (*), as the rigour of the scrutiny of these results may be questioned.

No statistical analyses were performed. The primary aim was to report on what was researched (what dependant variables are associated with ubuntu and ubuntu leadership) and the impact of ubuntu leadership on these dependant variables (attitudes and behaviour). The expectation was not to find large effect sizes, as leadership is only one of many factors that influence attitudes and behaviour. For example, in a meta-analyses of the effect of transformational leadership on attitudes and behaviour, Nohe and Hertel (2017) reports a .48 correlation with job satisfaction (k=84, N=32 667), .44 affective organizational commitment (k=100, N=34 873), and .27 with organizational citizen behaviour (k=48, N=11 766), and similar sizes were expected in this study.

Secondary objectives comprised gauging the prevalence of ubuntu – stated differently, the level of its endorsement and the consistency in using specific scales to measure ubuntu leadership, and also to report on the geographical contexts in which the research was performed. The findings will be presented in a table and then paraphrased.

On a tertiary level, the balance between qualitative and quantitative research on ubuntu leadership was investigated. Here the search hits of (1) intitle:Ubuntu “quantitative” , (2) intitle:Ubuntu “leadership” “questionnaire” and (3) intitle:Ubuntu "leadership" "scale" were compared with (4) intitle:Ubuntu “qualitative” and (5) intitle:Ubuntu “leadership” “interviews”. It was expected that the quantitative research would be much less than the qualitative research, and the use of questionnaires would be less than those who used interviews.

Ethical considerations

This research was desktop research, and no human or animal data were collected. Permission for the research was granted by the University of South Africa’s Graduate School for Business Leadership on 2 May 2024, with reference number 2024_SBL_AC_011_EX-3781.

Findings

In Table 1 the outcomes of the literature research are presented.

In the first column the keywords used with ubuntu in the search are presented. This is followed by the number of hits. Column two shows the number of outputs selected based on the titles and screening of the content of the abstracts. Outputs in which evidence of quantitative results were presented were selected. The last column contains general comments regarding the outputs identified.

Table 1

Ubuntu literature search outcomes

Keyword: Intitle: Ubuntu and …	Total number of hits	Selected based on the abstract	Note
Quantitative	266	27	An interesting observation from this search was the predominance of qualitative studies, when searching for quantitative studies. Additionally, a notable number of dissertations and theses were among the listed results. It was also intriguing to

			find a significant number of non-Africans actively involved in ubuntu research.
Leadership and questionnaire	126	34	Several mixed-method studies are included here, incorporating quantifications of qualitative data, relying on questionnaires as well as interviews.
Leadership and scale	409	23	Scale was seen as a "synonym" for "questionnaire". However, large and small scale, as well as national and global scale, was often found in these outcomes, which explains the large number of original hits.
Qualitative	647	n/a	These outcomes were not analysed, as they were not the focus of this research. The search was merely conducted to compare the number of qualitative studies with quantitative ones.
Leadership and interviews	468	n/a	These outcomes were not analysed since they were not the focus of this research. The search was conducted to compare the number of qualitative studies with quantitative ones.

In total 84 articles were identified using the three strategies to collect quantitative research. There were in total 36 overlaps, leaving 46 outputs to be analysed. Presented below are the main findings from these studies.

Table 2

Quantitative research on ubuntu: Key associations and findings

Output	Sample	Summary of findings
1. Abdullah, A., Bentum, H., Frederico, M., Mensah, F., Jordan, L. P., & Emery, C. R. (2023). Protective indigenous collective value of ubuntu and child neglect: Implications for rural child protection practice. *Child & Family Social Work, 28*(4), 1035–1045.	Ghana (N=1100)	Ubuntu norms were significantly endorsed in rural communities compared with the urban communities; higher levels of ubuntu are associated with lower odds of child neglect; and the relationship remained significant only in the rural sample.
2. Boag, L. P. (2022). The influence of ubuntu and transformational leadership on employee engagement in virtual teams (Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=109)	Ubuntu leadership, more than transformational leadership, has a significant positive relationship with employee engagement; demographics (industry and ethnicity) had no significant influence on the results.
3. Brink, A. J., Messina, A. P., Maslo, C., Swart, K., Chunnilall, D., & Van den	South Africa (N=n/a)	Ubuntu was not used as a variable in the study.

Bergh, D. (2020). Implementing a multi-faceted framework for proprietorship of hand hygiene compliance in a network of South African hospitals: Leveraging the Ubuntu philosophy. *Journal of Hospital Infection, 104*(4), 404–413.		
4. Brubaker, T. A. (2013). Servant leadership, Ubuntu, and leader effectiveness in Rwanda. *Emerging Leadership Journeys, 6*(1), 114–147.	Rwanda (N=120)	Servant leadership and ubuntu leadership are positively and significantly related to leader effectiveness; servant leadership and ubuntu are not significantly different in the strength of their relationships with leader effectiveness; servant leadership and ubuntu leadership are positively and significantly related, providing negative evidence for discriminant validity of the two constructs.
5. Burt-Miller, J. F., Rismani, M., Hopkins, A., Cunningham, T., Farquharson, D., Balcázar, A. G., ... & Kennedy, A. B. (2024). "I realized I was not alone": A mixed-methods investigation of the implementation of Ubuntu groups to reduce burnout and social isolation in an allopathic medical school in the Southeastern United States. *Medical Teacher*, 1–11.	United States of America (N=unknown)	Following ubuntu-inspired intervention, statistically significant decrease in social isolation among staff and students; staff exhibited reduced burnout compared to students; students reported increased feelings of belonging. [No control groups are mentioned.]
6. Chinyena, E. (2022). Religious faith traditions tussle with rampant corruption toward sustainable development: Search for the missing links in light of ubuntu. *Acta Theologica*, 42(1), 15–27.	Zimbabwe (N=100 and n/a)	Though the abstract suggest that quantitative data was collected, there was no report of such data in the article.
7. Dowdeswell, K. E., & Hoobler, J. M. (2022). Ubuntu–"I Am Because We Are" Servant Leadership in South Africa. In The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership (pp. 1–24). Springer International Publishing.	South Africa (N=several studies)	This is an excellent article on servant leadership; servant leadership behaviours may be a viable option representing the spirit of ubuntu; empirical findings on the relationship between ubuntu and servant leadership are mixed.
8. Gade, C. B. (2012). What is ubuntu? Different interpretations among South	South Africa (N=n/a)	This is a seminal article defining ubuntu, but it contains no quantitative data; experts were interviewed.

Africans of African descent. South African Journal of Philosophy = Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Wysbegeerte, 31(3), 484–503.		
9. Harris, A. D. (2021). Corporate governance and Ubuntu: a South African and Namibian perspective. (Master's dissertation, University of Cape Town (Cape Town)).	South Africa Namibia (N=n/a)	This is a conceptual paper, and thus wrongly included as quantitative research.
10. Heinecke-Müller, M., Quaiser-Pohl, C., Kariuki, P. W., & Arasa, J. N. (2022). Feeling capable in an Ubuntu way: Kenyan comprehensions of control beliefs compared with the German perspective. *Open Psychology, 4*(1), 60–83.	Kenya (N=91) Germany (N=52)	The control measurement tool was not measurement invariant, thus an uncritical transfer of the control beliefs measure from one culture to another is inappropriate; no warranted comparisons could be made, only that control is perceived differently across cultures.
11. Jefferson Jr, L. (2021). Fearless Ubuntu: Community organizing in the black church and black community. (Doctoral thesis, Virginia Union University (United States of America)).	United States of America (N=27)	Pre- and post-intervention scores, on a Likert-type questions, were compared, and percentagewise increases and decreases were interpreted; in general, the intervention had the envisaged effect; given gained knowledge and skills, participants' willingness to engage in community organising efforts increased.
12. Khomba, J. K., Bakuwa, R. C., & Kangaude-Ulaya, E. C. (2013). Shaping business ethics and corporate governance: An inclusive African Ubuntu philosophy. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research, 13*(5), 30–42.	Malawi (N=387)	The main contribution of the article is providing norms for a measurement developed by the authors; no external validity information is provided.
13. Kinyanjui, M. N. (2016). Ubuntu nests and the emergence of an African metropolis. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 37*(3), 418–431.	Kenya (N=573)	The researchers compare traders and artisans, and demonstrate differences in their solidarity with family, friends and ethnicity, working together to improve their socio-economic well-being; however, ubuntu is mentioned only in passing.
14. Kramer, M. (2023). More than a principal: Ubuntu at the heart of successful school leadership in the Western Cape. *South African Journal of Education, 43*(3), 1–10.	South Africa (N=38)	Mean scores are presented on perceptions of leadership effectiveness; no differences were found in the expected direction.

15. Littrell, R. F., Wu, N. H., & Nkomo, S. (2013). Pan-Sub-Saharan African managerial leadership and the values of Ubuntu. In *Management in Africa* (pp. 252–268). Routledge.	Namibia Nigeria South Africa Blacks South Africa Whites Zambia Zimbabwe (N=several studies)	Managerial leadership behaviour preferences of black and white businesspeople in South Africa are very similar, discharging the concept of ubuntu as an unique African concept.
16. Magalo, L. (2022). The mediating role of ethical climate on the relationship between ubuntu leadership and sustainable performance (Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=209)	Ubuntu leadership has a direct positive influence on sustainable performance; ethical climate fully mediated the relationship between ubuntu leadership and sustainable performance; voluntary environmental behaviour did not mediate the relationship between ubuntu leadership and sustainable performance.
17. Makhonza, L. O., Lawrence, K. C., & Nkoane, M. M. (2019). Polygonal ubuntu/botho as a superlative value to embrace orphans and vulnerable children in schools. *Gender and Behaviour, 17*(3), 13522–13530.	South Africa (N=303)	Access to teachers whom vulnerable children can talk to when they have problems was used as a proxy for ubuntu values, and it was concluded that teachers did not embrace the ubuntu values of providing care, love, unconditional support and empathy.
18. Manganyi, T. (2017). Development of a short course to inculcate the spirit of Ubuntu amongst student nurses at Limpopo College of Nursing (Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=115)	Ubuntu is practised by more than half the nurses; training is required to improve the levels of service delivery based on ubuntu.
19*. Mangaroo-Pillay, M. (2020). A South African Ubuntu analogy of lean philosophy (Doctoral dissertation, North-West University (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=10)	Descriptive statistics of a self-designed survey are presented; the questions designed were philosophical rather than empirical questions – "The Lean principle of 'Base your management decisions on a long-term philosophy' correlates with the ubuntu principle of 'Loyalty to the organisation'"; the results are not reliable.
20*. Mankowitz, D. J. (2018). The African philosophical concept of Ubuntu as applied to the emotional intelligence of adolescents: Challenging the appropriateness of Western-derived concepts (Master's	South Africa (N=16)	Emotional intelligence and ubuntu are used as interchangeable constructs; both concepts are measured, but the correlation is not reported on; the quantitative data contribute little to the analyses performed.

dissertation, University of South Africa (South Africa)).		
21. Mapadimeng, M. S. (2007). Ubuntu/botho culture: A path to improved performance and socio-economic development in post-apartheid SA: Beyond rhetoric (Doctoral dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=60 or n/a)	Though reference is made to questionnaires, only interviews were conducted; this is thus not a quantitative study.
22. Migheli, M. (2017). Ubuntu and social capital: A strong relationship and a possible instrument of socio-economic development. *Cambridge Journal of Economics, 41*(4), 1213–1235.	(N=n/a)	Despite the article's title, this is not a quantitative study.
23. Molose, T. (2019). The experience of Ubuntu to a hospitality organisation: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences, 5*(3), 113–28.	South Africa (N=212)	An instrument was developed with reasonable reliability and factorial validity; differences from the middle values are interpreted as indicative of ubuntu ways of working.
24. Motsepe, K. M. B. (2020). Investigating the relationship between leadership styles and organisational commitment in selected South African Universities: The mediating role of Ubuntu (Doctoral dissertation, North-West University (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=205)	Ubuntu and participative leadership had a medium effect on employees' affective commitment, while authentic leadership had a significant effect on employees' affective commitment; ethnic differences in ubuntu scores are reported, with blacks having the highest scores.
25. Muller, R. J., Smith, E. E., & Lillah, R. (2019). Perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in the workplace. *Journal of Contemporary Management, 16*(1), 20–51.	South Africa (N=428)	The spirit of solidarity dimension of ubuntu leadership influenced employee engagement significantly and positively; the survival and spirit of solidarity dimensions of ubuntu had a significant and positive influence on organisational performance.
26*. Munir, F. (2020). Ubuntu in the engineering workplace: Paying it forward through mentoring. *Commonwealth Youth and Development, 18*(1), #8379.	South Africa (N=50)	Endorsement of statements such as "Do you think ubuntu can improve mentor-mentee relationships?"; respondents generally agreed with these statements.
27. Mutsonziwa, I. (2020). Ubuntu: Development and validation of a scale to measure	South Africa (N=500)	A rigorous research process was followed in developing this questionnaire; acceptable reliability and

African humanism. (Doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).		factorial validity were demonstrated; evidence of nomological validity is presented, with discriminant validity and predictive validity in terms of charitable and altruistic behaviours.
28. Nam, I., Klemz, B. R., Boshoff, C., & Mazibuko, N. E. (2009). Retail perception differences in two collectivist cultures: Kiasu versus ubuntu. *The Journal of Applied Business and Economics, 10*(1), 37–52.	South Africa (N=?) Singapore (N=?)	Reported significant differences in the influence of assurance and empathy on the customers' willingness-to-buy between collective cultures; collective cultures differ significantly; evidence that motivation behind retail behaviour differs.
29. Nanyunja, C., Sadoo, S., Kohli-Lynch, M., Nalugya, R., Nyonyintono, J., Muhumuza, A., ... & Tann, C. J. (2022). Early care and support for young children with developmental disabilities and their caregivers in Uganda: The Baby Ubuntu feasibility trial. *Frontiers in Pediatrics, 10*, #981976.	Uganda (N=126)	An ubuntu and standard care group was created; no quantitative evidence of support proving the impact of the programme on care; qualitative data provided rich information.
30. Ndoda, G. R., & Sikwila, M. N. (2014). Ubuntu-praxis: Re-modelling the balanced scorecard model at a university, an Afrocentric perspective. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 25*, 1–27.	Zimbabwe (N=157)	Topics such as "Ubuntu/Unhu culture enhances corporate performance"; the authors claim to have developed a valid questionnaire.
31. Ngcobo, J. (2018). The relationship between an employee's perception of a leader's propensity to practice ubuntu and employee engagement in South Africa (Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=247)	Ubuntu leadership relates to employee engagement; neither race (ethnicity) nor gender influences this relationship.
32. Niankara, I. (2018). Organisational management culture and employers' health insurance offering strategies in the USA: An Ubuntu-based random utility modelling approach. *Global Business and Economics Review, 20*(4), 503–520.	United states of America (N=1061)	The relationship between management culture and health plan offering strategy is dependent on several covariates; when companies have groups and formal committees managing culture, they are less likely to choose a multiple plan strategy over a single plan strategy; culture committees enable diverse opinions in companies.
33*. Obert, S., Okay, Z. P., & Desderio, C. (2016).	Zimbabwe (N=100)	The methodology applied is not explained clearly; only p-values are

Determinants of unethical behavior by stakeholders in the medical insurance industry in Zimbabwe: An African humanism (Hunhu/Ubuntu) approach. *Engineering Management Research, 5*(2), 63–71.		reported; it is concluded that ubuntu is associated with ethical behaviour.
34. Okereke, C., Vincent, O., & Mordi, C. (2018). Determinants of Nigerian managers' environmental attitude: Africa's Ubuntu ethics versus global capitalism. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 60*(4), 577–590.	Nigeria (N=377)	Economic motives – not ethical considerations – influence environmental orientation and behaviour; this is contrary to mainstream corporate social responsibility literature in Africa, which suggests the dominance of the culturally based, altruistic African ubuntu philosophy.
35. Omodan, T. C., & Tsotetsi, C. T. (2019). Framing Ubuntu philosophy to reconstruct principals' behaviour and teachers' effectiveness in secondary schools. *Journal of Education Research and Rural Community Development, 1*(1), 25–45.	Nigeria (N=720)	No hypotheses related to ubuntu or proxies to ubuntu were tested.
36. Papageorgiou, E., Fortuin, G., Shamsoodien, S., Mothelesi, C., Koza, T., & Plant, K. (2022). Preparing first-year students in higher education for ethical decision making: Identifying and understanding personal values in a South African Ubuntu context. *Southern African Journal of Accountability and Auditing Research, 24*(1), 51–64.	South Africa (N=4 120)	From 51 value items, students selected their top ten values; students selected family, authenticity, hard work, integrity, balance, care, economic security, faithfulness, success and purpose as the 10 top values; the researchers conclude that "family" was considered the most important value, it indicates a strong ubuntu orientation; all race groups (not only black students) followed an ubuntu perspective when reflecting on their personal values.
37. Racheal, M., & Dinah, M. M. (2016). The use of Ubuntu principle in enhancing the intellectual wellness of juvenile learners in a correctional school in Gauteng province. *Journal of Educational Studies, 15*(1), 23–46.	South Africa (N=52 or n/a)	No quantitative data that was analysed was generated.
38*. Senooane, B. (2014). Corporate social responsibility as a practicality of Ubuntu to	South Africa (N=246)	Though quantitative data were collected, mean differences were the primary method of analysis – and this

build brand loyalty: A case of mobile telecommunication in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(25), 167–175.		was done on mere differences, not any statistical analyses; the results have very little empirical value.
39. Sigger, D. S., Polak, B. M., & Pennink, B. J. W. (2010). 'Ubuntu' or 'humanness' as a management concept. *CDS Research Paper, 29*, 1–46.	Tanzania (N=211)	A measure of ubuntu was developed; participating Tanzanian managers score high on the four dimensions of ubuntu; the researchers wonder if Westerners will respond in a similar manner to the questions.
40. Siraz Chowdhury, J., Wahab, H. A., Mohd Saad, M. R., Mathbor, G. M., & Hamidi, M. (2023). What does Ubuntu manifest in this pandemic. In *Ubuntu Philosophy for the New Normalcy* (pp. 73–100). Springer Nature Singapore.	(N=n/a)	Article does not contain quantitative data.
41*. Tauetsile, J. (2021). Employee engagement in non-Western contexts: The link between social resources Ubuntu and employee engagement. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 21*(2), 245–259. / Tauetsile, J. O. (2016). Employee engagement: Extension of the job demands resource (JD-R) model with the Ubuntu construct (Doctoral dissertation, Bournemouth University (United Kingdom)).	Botswana (N=438)	A relationship between ubuntu, colleague support and employee engagement is reported; hypotheses that ubuntu mediates the relationship between supervisor support (and colleague support) and employee engagement were tested and affirmed – although this is not theoretically based, nor tested with standard statistical tests.
42. Terblanché-Greeff, A. C., & Nel, P. (2022). Measuring context-specific collectivism: The Metzian Ubuntu Inventory. *South African Journal of Philosophy, 41*(4), 401–414.	South Africa (N=316)	A two-dimensional test of ubuntu was developed and validated; no external validation information is provided.
43*. Tworeck, C., Hemminga, D., Huber, D., & Dhillon, D. (2015). The Ubuntu philosophy as a management strategy. (Student report, Stenden University (Netherlands)).	Netherlands (N=18)	Naïve questions, such as "Do you agree that ubuntu could be translated to a management strategy?", were posed; just more than half of the respondents stated that this was a possibility; in general the quality of this research is questionable.
44. Urban, T., Degeling, M., Holz, T., & Pohlmann, N. (2019, December). Your hashed	(N=n/a)	This article was selected based on a large sample size mentioned in the abstract, and the use of the word

IP address: Ubuntu. In *Proceedings of the 35th Annual Computer Security Applications Conference* (pp. 702–717). San Juan.		ubuntu; however, it contains no reference to the Southern African philosophy of ubuntu.
45*. Van Heerden, A. (2017). *Exploring military performance motivation from an African Ubuntu perspective.* 1st Pan-African Psychology for Society Congress, 18-21 September 2017, Durban, South Africa. http://hdl.handle.net/10204/9708	South Africa (N=n/a)	The abstract states that "Results from our quantitative and qualitative analyses confirmed the significance of the African Ubuntu philosophy linked to positive psychology constructs like Sense of Coherence, Internal Locus of Control, Self-efficacy and Hardiness as sources of coping mechanisms"; no evidence of these claims could be found in the source document.
46. Waterkeyn, J. A. V. (2023). Recreating social capital through nurturing ubuntu in community health clubs for disease prevention. *Medical Research Archives, 11*(11), 1–18.	Zimbabwe (N=102)	The ethical code of ubuntu was understood by 95% of respondents; 75% in the current generation of parents socialised their children accordingly; ubuntu is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas.

Note: These references are not replicated in the reference list.

In total, 46 outputs were selected, deemed to present quantitative measures of ubuntu, possibly presenting data on the relationship between ubuntu and other measured constructs. However, merely indicating a large sample size in the abstract, referencing quantitative analyses, or using questionnaires does not necessarily guarantee that quantitative data are presented or analysed. Articles 3, 6, 8, 9, 21, 22, 27, 40, 44, and 46 were excluded after reading the articles, based on the fact that they did not include quantitative data. Given these exclusions, only 37 articles actually provided quantitative data, and are presented as the findings of this research.

Findings

The aim of the study was to report on qualitative studies on ubuntu, and specifically to indicate what ubuntu relates to. However, before discussing the findings, attention is paid to the literature that was found.

An overview of the literature

A central feature of this review of outputs was the inconsistent operationalisation of ubuntu. While seminal authors such as Broodryk (2002), Louw (2001), Metz (2007) and Ramose (2002) were mentioned in the literature section of most of the articles, the method of measuring

ubuntu differed to such an extent that none of the outputs used the same measurement scale. The scales were self-designed in all cases, and in a few cases the purpose of the output was to develop an instrument to measure ubuntu (for example, see Articles 23, 27 and 42). A valid and reliable measure of ubuntu is needed, to ensure that all researchers assess the same construct when they do research in this area.

The review also revealed research projects with questionable methodologies. Firstly, several studies used questions implying relationships, asking respondents to indicate their level of concurrence with statements such as "The Lean principle of 'Base your management decisions on a long-term philosophy' correlates with the ubuntu principle of 'Loyalty to the organisation'", "Ubuntu/Unhu culture enhances corporate performance" (Article 26), and "do you agree that Ubuntu could be translated to a management strategy" (Article 43). Surely there are better ways of establishing the existence of a relationship between variables. There are also questionable interpretations of data. Having a mean score higher than the middle value of a scale does not translate to a high score (for example, see Articles 23, 26, 38 and 43) or the prevalence of a phenomenon. In not one of these cases a one-sample t-test, which could be advisable, were performed. Also, in Article 5, changes in mean scores, following an intervention, are deemed indicative of change, without performing a t-test and checking for statistical or practical significance, nor using any control groups. The review revealed many methodological flaws in the research presented; too many to mention.

Servant leadership is seen as a synonym for ubuntu leadership (see Article 7) and access to teachers as proxy for ubuntu values (see Article 17). While a significant correlation between servant leadership and ubuntu leadership is reported (see Article 4), such generalisations surely don't do justice to the concept of ubuntu.

Although ubuntu is portrayed as a uniquely Southern African concept (Bennett, 2011; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Overson, 2011), the research showed many samples in countries above or on the Equator where ubuntu is expected to be prevalent, including Nigeria (Article 34 and 35) and Ghana (Article 4). Other countries, such as Kenya (Articles 10 and 13) and Uganda (Article 29), that are not typically regarded as Southern African, were also surveyed to assess the prevalence of ubuntu. This review thus affirms that ubuntu is increasingly used as a "catch-all" term to characterise the norms and values that are inherent in many traditional African societies (Hailey, 2008).

Ubuntu as a quantitative research construct

The quantitative outputs from Table 2 are discussed below. Although the main aim was to find what is directly related to ubuntu, the findings were surprising and more complex. The findings are organised under the following subheadings: the prevalence of ubuntu, ubuntu as a uniquely black African construct, ubuntu outcomes (the original aim), and ubuntu substitutes in quantitative research.

The prevalence of ubuntu

The evidence presented in Article 1 and corroborated by Article 46 suggests a significant rural-urban divide in the endorsement of ubuntu norms, with a stronger presence in rural areas. This raises questions about the universality and adaptability of ubuntu principles in increasingly urbanised and cosmopolitan societies. However, in both Article 1 and Article 46, a high prevalence of ubuntu is reported. This is a signal that ubuntu is prevalent, at least in rural areas. In Article 36, a high endorsement of "family" by respondents is interpreted as a high prevalence of ubuntu, though this may be questioned as selecting family as something important – after all, a proxy for ubuntu does not capture the dynamic interplay between the individual, the family, and the community under the ubuntu philosophy. The authors of Article 23, when developing an instrument with reasonable reliability and factorial validity, report ubuntu scores higher than the middle score, and based on this, they conclude that ubuntu is prevalent.

In Article 18, it is reported that just more than half of the nurses they sampled practised ubuntu, suggesting a need for more training in this regard. Thus, they consider the prevalence to be too low. With Article 17, "teacher accessibility" is presented as a proxy for ubuntu values, and the authors report that this was low, suggesting an absence of ubuntu. In an indirect manner, in Article 34 the assertion is that economic motives overshadow ethical considerations within the context of ubuntu, again questioning the fabric of ubuntu. Lastly, the discussions in Article 43 about translating ubuntu into a management strategy reveal scepticism about the practicality of integrating ubuntu into formal organisational structures. This also suggests a low uptake or endorsement of the ubuntu philosophy.

The results from the quantitative studies are contradictory. In some cases ubuntu is said to be prevalent, and in other cases not. Given the absence of a standard tool for the measurement of the construct, this question may remain unanswered.

Ubuntu as a uniquely black African construct

Article 23 indicates that ethnic differences are significant in ubuntu scores, with black individuals exhibiting the highest adherence. This might suggest that ubuntu, while universally applicable in principle, may be more deeply ingrained in the cultural practices and value systems of black Africans. The findings in Article 15, revealing similar managerial leadership behaviour preferences between black and white businesspeople in South Africa, challenge the notion of ubuntu as exclusively or predominantly black African. This may suggest that the principles underlying ubuntu, such as mutual respect and collective success, may have universal appeal and applicability beyond racial and ethnic lines. In Article 36, the fact that all racial groups (i.e. not limited to black students) adhered to an ubuntu perspective in reflecting on their personal values, further complicates the portrayal of ubuntu as a uniquely black African construct. The finding in Article 31 that neither race (ethnicity) nor gender impacts the ubuntu-employee engagement relationship suggests that ubuntu can foster positive work environments, irrespective of demographic differences. Along similar lines, in Article 2, demographics (industry and ethnicity) had no significant influence on ubuntu employee engagement relationships results. Finally, the critical question in Article 39, about how Westerners would respond to ubuntu-oriented questions, opens an avenue for critical exploration of cultural relativism and the global transferability of ubuntu.

The mentioned quantitative research suggests that Ubuntu was found predominantly amongst black Africans, but also that group differences do not exist, and that, in some cases, race (ethnicity) did not impact on the effects of ubuntu practises. It should be concluded that it is not clear if ubuntu is only practised among black Africans.

The outcomes of ubuntu

Focusing on the quantitative associations of ubuntu, the reviewed articles present outputs across various organisational and social contexts. Employee engagement was most often found as a possible outcome. Articles 2, 25, 31, and 42 highlight that ubuntu leadership is significantly positively related to employee engagement[9]. Notably, ubuntu also mediates the relationship between supervisor and colleague support and employee engagement, although its moderating

[9] Chetty and Price (2024) published, when this study was already completed, quantitative research on ubuntu leadership and employee engagement, and reported that ubuntu leadership, as perceived by employees, significantly predicted employee engagement, but they did not report on the correlation between ubuntu leadership (as a total score) and employee engagement (as a total score). Only correlations between subscales were reported.

effects were not supported (Article 42). Theoretically, though, it is more likely that ubuntu could be a moderator, rather than a mediator, in the supervisor support-engagement relationship.

More than employee engagement, employee commitment could theoretically be a viable outcome of ubuntu leadership (Jackson et al., 2013; Kwantes, 2009). This was found in Article 24, where ubuntu and participative leadership moderately affect employees' affective commitment. In contrast, and perhaps surprisingly, authentic leadership has a larger effect.

Both ubuntu and servant leadership are positively and significantly related to leader effectiveness, as discussed in Article 4. In the same article, it is reported that servant leadership and ubuntu leadership are positively and significantly related. Article 26 indicates general agreement among respondents that ubuntu can improve mentor-mentee relationships. It is assumed that effective leadership and a good relationship go hand in hand (Maxwell, 2013).

Ubuntu is also related to organisational performance. Article 16 reports a direct positive influence of ubuntu leadership on sustainable company performance, with the ethical climate fully mediating this relationship. In alignment with this, Article 33 concludes that ubuntu is associated with ethical behaviour in the workplace. More specifically, considering the dimensions of ubuntu, Article 25 provides valuable information: the spirit of solidarity dimension of ubuntu leadership significantly and positively influences organisational performance (Article 25).

There are also several social outcomes associated with ubuntu. Article 1 associates ubuntu with lower odds of child neglect in rural areas, with no significant materialisation in urban settings. Article 5 reports a statistically significant decrease in social isolation and reduced burnout among staff and students following an ubuntu-inspired intervention, along with an increase in feelings of belonging. Furthermore, Article 11 finds that ubuntu increases the willingness to participate in community activities. ubuntu is also related to charitable and altruistic behaviours, as mentioned in Article 27.

These findings collectively underscore the multifaceted impact of ubuntu, demonstrating its positive associations with employee engagement, leadership effectiveness, ethical behaviour and both organisational and sustainable performance, as well as social and community outcomes. Although the range of outcomes is broad, the number of studies on specific outcomes is limited, replication studies are absent, and there is not enough data available to perform meta-analyses to verify the results.

Ubuntu substitutes in quantitative research

The findings across Articles 7, 4, and 20 reveal a treacherous relationship between ubuntu and various constructs presented as substitutes to ubuntu. The first concern relates to servant leadership. Finding a direct and significant relationship between servant leadership and ubuntu leadership, as reported in Article 4, is not per se worrying, as it indicates a conceptual closeness or compatibility between the two. Servant leadership (Dierendonck, 2010; Greenlea, 1977; Rachmawati & Lantu, 2014), characterised by prioritising the well-being of employees and serving their needs, echoes the ubuntu philosophy of mutual respect and collective success. This alignment suggests that servant leadership behaviours could naturally embody the spirit of ubuntu, proposing that these leadership styles may not be entirely distinct – but rather complementary or even interchangeable in certain contexts. However, Article 7 introduces a layer of complexity by noting mixed empirical findings regarding the relationship between ubuntu and servant leadership. It implies that while servant leadership might represent the spirit of ubuntu in some settings, the extent to which these two concepts are compatible or can be equated might vary.

The mention in Article 20 that emotional intelligence and ubuntu are used as interchangeable constructs further complicates the discussion. Emotional intelligence; the capacity to be aware of, to control, and to express one's emotions; and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically (Goleman, 1995), share ubuntu's emphasis on empathy, community, and interpersonal relationships. Nonetheless, equating these constructs might oversimplify the unique cultural underpinnings and philosophical depth of ubuntu, reducing its rich cultural heritage to a set of emotionally intelligent behaviours. The use of proxies, previously mentioned, such as family (Article 36) and teacher accessibility (Article 17) as proxy for ubuntu is simplistic and particularly worrisome.

Discussion

The review of the literature highlights significant methodological concerns in the field of ubuntu research, particularly pertaining to the inconsistent operationalisation and measurement of the ubuntu construct. The reliance on self-designed, non-standardised scales across studies undermines the comparability of findings and limits the accumulation of a coherent body of knowledge. This inconsistency complicates efforts to synthesise research findings and draw generalisable conclusions about the impact and nature of ubuntu. Moreover, the methodological flaws noted, such as questionable interpretations of data and a lack of robust

statistical testing, further dilute the reliability of the research outcomes. This, combined with the fact that none of the research projects analysed used the same measurement instrument, makes the comparison between research results and meta-analyses almost impossible. It is thus difficult to determine the exact outcome of ubuntu.

The alignment of ubuntu with servant leadership is noteworthy, as it suggests a conceptual overlap that may enrich the understanding of leadership practices in different cultural contexts. However, the equivalence of these constructs is not fully established, suggesting variability in how they are perceived and implemented across studies. This equivalence potentially limits the distinctiveness of ubuntu as a unique Southern African cultural and philosophical framework, raising questions about the implications of blending or conflating these models in leadership research and practice.

Linked to the aforementioned is the notion of ubuntu as a strictly Southern African construct, showing its application and relevance in a broader geographical context. Not only Southern African samples are used, but also samples from other countries. The concept of ubuntu and its principles might have a global appeal. It was also observed that ubuntu interventions were designed for people in the United States of America, for example. It seems that adding the word to the title of an article provides some prestige to the publication. Whatever the reasons, such practices raise important questions about the cultural specificity and integrity of the ubuntu philosophy when it is applied outside its traditional context.

This brings us to the core of this research – to find reports on the matters relating to ubuntu leadership. The findings were disappointing. Not only was the number of quantitative studies low; a diversity of constructs were researched and only a few overlaps were found. Tested most often, was the effect of ubuntu on employee engagement (four studies) and organisational performance (three studies). It should be concluded that quantitative research where the effects of ubuntu are assessed is limited, and in very few cases do researchers focus on the same outcomes. This lack of empirical evidence limits the application of ubuntu in professional settings and creates scepticism about the practical implementation of ubuntu.

Contribution

This research contributes to the ongoing efforts to develop ubuntu leadership as a respectable concept engraved in a coherent body of knowledge. In the first place, there is a scarcity of well-designed quantitative studies in the field. Secondly, this research highlights the call for the development or adoption of a valid and reliable measure of ubuntu. The development of such

an instrument is crucial for advancing the theoretical understanding and practical applications of ubuntu in various domains.

The resemblance between ubuntu and servant leadership could be valuable. The exploration of the relationship between ubuntu and servant leadership provides an opportunity to redefine ubuntu as a leadership model for culturally nuanced and ethically oriented practices. This could firstly lead to the development of an ubuntu leadership theory that is more inclusive of non-Western perspectives, potentially enriching the global leadership discourse. Secondly, ubuntu may be researched as an African version of servant leadership. In this way ubuntu may tap on the vast amount of literature in the servant leadership field.

By demonstrating the positive associations of ubuntu with various organisational outcomes, such as employee engagement and organisational performance, the research supports the integration of ubuntu principles into organisational practices. The endorsement of ubuntu in workplaces fosters more humane and community-oriented workplace environments and aligns organisational goals with African ethical and communal values. Beyond that, these principles could be exported to other countries, creating caring communities across the globe.

This research primarily highlights the need for more quantitative research on ubuntu and the use of a standardised measure of the construct. Moreover, the establishment of an ubuntu research group may be necessary to specify, beyond qualitative research, what ubuntu is and what effect it has on people's lives. Quantitative research is needed because qualitative research, which some may deem to provide a very positive viewpoint, is subject to subjectivity and particularly confirmation bias (McSweeney, 2021; Roulston & Shelton, 2015).

Limitations and future research

This research was delineated by accessing research outputs primarily through Google Scholar. Although Google Scholar is a very effective search engine, it has the limitation that lesser journals and research that are not well scrutinised by scholars are also included in the domain, which may provide research of a substandard quality. This was very clear form the outputs found in this particular search. Another possible limitation is that the research outputs considered were only those published in English. Literature contributions from other Southern African countries, particularly Mozambique and Angola, converse in Portuguese.

As far as future research is concerned, researchers are encouraged to produce more quantitative research on ubuntu leadership and its outcomes, as ubuntu could be central to motivating and

empowering workforces who resonate with the principles of ubuntu. Researchers should shy away from qualitative research, as that body of knowledge has largely delivered its verdict, which necessitates a quantitative response. These researchers are encouraged to contribute to the present body of knowledge by using existing definitions and scales when conducting their research, as to allow them to build on the work of others.

Author contribution

Conceptualisation, RS and PM; methodology, RS and PS; validation, PM; formal analysis, RS; investigation, RS; resources & data curation, RS; writing – original draft preparation, RS; writing – review and editing, PM; supervision, PM. RS and PM have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this article is publicly available in the published articles used to inform this study. No new data were created.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interests to disclose.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

ChatGPT (December 2024 version) was used as an aid to improve sentence construction and grammar in the text.

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PLEASE NOTE: The references listed in Table 2 are not reflected again.

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Chapter 7: Prevalence of Ubuntu behaviour among leaders

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	**B**	**B2**	**7**	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective B2 (To assess the prevalence of Ubuntu behaviour amongst leaders) by assessing the prevalence of Ubuntu behaviour across leaders.

This objective was partially achieved objective was partially achieved through conference proceeding with the following title:

Steyn, R. (2026). Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs. In M. Twum-Darko (Ed.), *Book of contemporary multidisciplinary research* (pp. 82–105). BP International. https://doi.org/10.9734/bpi/mono/978-81-998711-6-8/CH4

This is referred to as Article 7.

Article 7: Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs

Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs

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Abstract

Ubuntu is often celebrated as an African worldview that emphasises compassion, dignity, and the collective good. While frequently described as a core social ethos in Africa, some sceptics question whether it remains widely practised today. Revitalising Ubuntu is seen as a potential means of unifying and morally regenerating Africa, offering an alternative to individualistic Western ideologies. This study aimed to assess the prevalence and endorsement of Ubuntu across Africa. A systematic search identified 84 quantitative studies involving Ubuntu as a variable, of which 36 were analysed. The geographical distribution of studies and findings on Ubuntu's presence and impact was summarised. Only English-language publications were included. Most studies originated from South Africa and neighbouring countries. Findings on Ubuntu's current relevance were mixed, some confirmed its presence, others challenged it, and several suggested its values extend beyond Africa. Many studies focused on defining or measuring the concept, while others explored its organisational impact. Overall, the limited number of quantitative studies highlights the need for further research. While Ubuntu holds philosophical appeal as a foundation for African unity and reform, its widespread adoption is uncertain. A more objective, quantitative understanding is necessary to support its meaningful application across the continent.

Keywords: African philosophy, endorsement, prevalence, Ubuntu

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1. Introduction

The concept of Ubuntu is a commendable construct, often used to describe the ethos of inclusive and communal African coexistence (Mbiti, 1990 [1969], Metz, 2021). It presents an alternative to the Western individualistic and capitalistic lifestyle that has been imposed on Africa (Overson, 2011). “Capitalism has distorted the relationship among humans in Africa” (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 1). Ubuntu holds the potential to bring harmony and reconstruction across the continent. Along these lines Murove (2012, p. 36) declares that “… since Ubuntu implies character qualities such as compassion, kindness, courtesy and respect for other persons, the ethic of Ubuntu remains indispensable to the reconstruction of post-colonial African societies”. Van Stam (2014, p. 38) support this notion and declares that “without Ubuntu, there is no peace in Africa.”

However, Ubuntu is seemingly under threat, as it is not consistently manifested in the daily lives of Africans. Several authors suggest this, with statements such as Ubuntu “expresses the humanistic tendencies that are fast going into extinction in today’s individualistic society” (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 1). Similarly, Mabovula (2011) writes about the erosion of African communal values, when appraising the Ubuntu philosophy. Also, statements such as "May the real Ubuntu please stand up?" (Mboti, 2015, p. 125) are used by scholars questioning Ubuntu’s presence in contemporary African societies.

This research wishes to address two questions the philosopher (and psychologist) Louw (1998) already posed in 1998. The first issue is whether Ubuntu could be seen as African, practised by Africans (across the continent). The second question pertains to whether “Africans adhere to Ubuntu or, at least, aspire to do so?” (p. 38). Stated differently, is Ubuntu seen as exemplary? This research will not attempt to answer these questions from a philosophical perspective; nor will an answer be provided from a qualitative research point of view. This study will consider quantitative data only and report on the prevalence or uptake of Ubuntu across African countries, the extent to which this ethos is practiced, and the key behaviour with which Ubuntu is hypothesised to be associated.

The philosophical questions posed by Louw (1998) hold practical significance when considering initiatives such as the African Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA). Trade could be facilitated by a unifying force that links traders, such as a shared identity (Huddy, 2001) or

value system (Fitzpatrick, 2007): Africans (identity) sharing Ubuntu (a common values system). This would be even more advantageous if this shared value system encompassed humanistic values (e.g. caring for others), which is embedded in Ubuntu (Nussbaum, 2003). This study aims to empirically explore these propositions and assess the extent to which Ubuntu may serve as a unifying framework in Africa.

2. Literature review

The literature presented below focuses on Ubuntu as a concept embraced across Africa. This will be done by focusing on Ubuntu's linguistic origins, its definition as an African concept, the relevance of Ubuntu, and the need to revisit traditional African values.

2.1 Ubuntu's linguistic origins

Defining Ubuntu is a difficult task, as some scholars suggest that the word itself is so loaded with meaning within the African linguistic context that it cannot easily be translated into English (Mokgoro, 1998; Tutu, 1999). Metz (2021) states that Ubuntu has its origins in the southern African Nguni linguistic group, which includes the Zulu and Xhosa languages, and explains that it literally means humanness. Mboti (2015: 126-127) presents the meaning of Ubuntu in three languages, stating that "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" (in Nguni languages) and "motho ke motho ka batho" (in Sotho languages) translate to "a person is a person through other persons" (in English). Other English variations, such as "I am because we are", are also presented. Ubuntu is, therefore, a southern African word.

However, Ubuntu is said to be present in most African cultures, though the terminology (understandably) differs depending on language (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020; Van Breda, 2019). In the western African Yoruba and Akan cultures, the ethos is known as "Àjé", encompassing a sense of community welfare and generosity, and "Biakoye", signifying unity and collective responsibility. In east Africa, the widely spoken Swahili language contains the term "Ujamaa", referring to brotherhood and familyhood and promoting cooperative economics. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020, p. vi) conclude that while "the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to" a single phenomenon (Ubuntu). From the aforementioned, it seems that although Ubuntu may be a southern African word, the concept is also embraced in other African regions.

2.2 Ubuntu as an African value

The uniquely African nature of Ubuntu is described by many scholars. John Mbiti (1990 [1969]) explained Ubuntu as “the African view of man” (p. 106). Gade (2012, p. 484) talks about “African humanism”. When referring to Ubuntu, Venter (2004) states that community and belonging to a community are part of the essence of traditional African life. Broodryk (2002) refers to Ubuntu as a comprehensive, ancient African worldview. Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013, p.197) talk about Ubuntu as “the authentic African ethical concept, a way of life, an authentic mode of being African”. Gathogo (2008, p. 39) states that Ubuntu is “expressed in virtually the entire life of an African”. Mugumbate and Chereni (2020, p. vi) declare that “Ubuntu refers to a collection of values and practices that black people of Africa or of African origin …” share. “Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity” (Letseka, 2013, p. 339). Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) explicitly state that the Ubuntu ethos is pervasive in almost all parts of the African continent, “integrated into all aspects of day-to-day life throughout Africa and is a concept shared by all tribes in South, Central, West, and East Africa amongst people of Bantu origin” (p. 672). It is clear that many authors refer to Ubuntu as an African concept.

However, it would be improper not to report that some researchers refer to Ubuntu as a southern African concept only. Seehawer (2018), for example, writes about decolonising research in a sub-Saharan African context and then proposes “exploring Ubuntu as an indigenous southern African research paradigm” (p. 453). Swanson (2007, p. 53) writes specifically about the “southern African indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu”. Sambala et al. (2020) applied Ubuntu as a decision-making model within a sub-Saharan African setting. Mawere and Van Stam (2016) write about Ubuntu as a phenomenon observed especially in the countryside of the sub-Saharan region. This suggests that Ubuntu is only practiced in some regions of Africa.

2.3 The relevance of Ubuntu

One may question the contemporary relevance of Ubuntu in Africa and the extent to which it shapes or influences current social, political, or organisational issues across the continent, with some actively questioning its role. A lively debate on the relevance of Ubuntu was captured by Chimakonam (2016). Matolino and Kwindingwi’s (2013) essay "The end of

Ubuntu" was challenged by Metz (2014), who responded with an essay, "Just the beginning for Ubuntu: Reply to Matolino and Kwindingwi". This was followed up by Matoline (2015) with "A response to Metz's reply on the end of Ubuntu". Later, the same topic was discussed by Koenane and Pius Olatunji (2017) in an essay named “Is it the end or just the beginning of Ubuntu? Response to Matolino and Kwindingwi in view of Metz’s rebuttal”. These exchanges emphasise the active debate on the topic, but also push the conversation into a different direction, with Chimakonam (2016) arguing not for the restoration of Ubuntu, but for the reinvention of Ubuntu (using the conversational thinking tool).

While some see Ubuntu as a tool in decolonising (sub-Saharan) Africa (Seehawer, 2018), others question Ubuntu as a resource of moral formation and assess its relevance in contemporary Africa (Anofuechi, 2022). Mboti (2015, p. 125) contests the “greatest harmony” account of Ubuntu, according to which “Africans are harmonic collectivists and sharers, linked together by community-defining conveyor-belts of moral and ethical goodwill gifts.” Enslin and Horsthemke (2004, p. 545) add to this debate, as they “question the purported uniqueness of Ubuntu and its value and efficiency as a practical guide to action and policy” within the education context.

2.4 Revisit traditional African values

“Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, there has been a concerted effort at reviving the notion of Ubuntu” (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013, p. 197). Mabovula (2011, p. 38) requests a reappraisal of the African Ubuntu philosophy and asks “How can we retrieve the communal cultural values of tolerance, humanity, respect and some of the common elements of our cultural treasures of Ubuntu that African communities used to be proud of?” It is suggested that Ubuntu should be reassessed as a potential social force for resistance that can pave the way for the emergence of a scientific socialist African society (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 1). Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013) do not ask for Ubuntu to be revived, but rather request systems to be realigned with Ubuntu, and claim that “Africa-based organisations must be founded on this Ubuntu philosophy”.

In summary, the literature presented allows for questioning statements that Ubuntu is a philosophy embraced across the entire African continent. In addition, it could also reasonably

asked whether “Africans in fact adhere to Ubuntu or, at least, aspire to do so?” (Louw, 1998, p. 38).

3. Methodology

A targeted literature search was undertaken to identify quantitative evidence on the impact of Ubuntu leadership on attitudes and behaviour. Three search strings were employed: (1) intitle: Ubuntu “quantitative”, (2) intitle: Ubuntu “leadership” “scale”, and (3) intitle: Ubuntu “leadership” “questionnaire”. The terms “scale” and “questionnaire” were included to specifically capture studies employing quantitative measurement instruments. Quantitative studies were prioritised because qualitative approaches, while valuable, are inherently more subjective and susceptible to confirmation bias (McSweeney, 2021; Roulston & Shelton, 2015). Such subjectivity may produce overly favourable interpretations of Ubuntu (Mays & Pope, 2000), whereas quantitative data provide a more objective and empirically grounded basis for analysis.

A major limitation of the study is that only English-language publications were analysed and that only “Ubuntu” was used as a keyword in the searches. However, these aspects could also be seen as delineations, as the author of this article is fluent in English only, and the focus was Ubuntu, and not similar concepts. The research questions related to Ubuntu specifically, and not to other similar concepts such as Àjé, Biakoye, or Ujamaa.

The first objective of the study was to ascertain in which countries Ubuntu research is conducted. This could indirectly answer Louw’s (1998) question of whether Ubuntu is African. Should Ubuntu be examined systematically across the African continent, it is reasonable to infer that the evidence would demonstrate its presence, relevance, and application across multiple cultural and linguistic contexts. Such a finding would support the position that Ubuntu is not merely a region-specific construct but, rather, an ethic with continent-wide resonance, embedded in diverse African moral, social, and philosophical traditions. The second objective was to look at the endorsement of Ubuntu, partially answering Louw’s (1998) question of whether “Africans in fact adhere to Ubuntu or, at least, aspire to do so?” (p. 38). The focus in this section was on endorsement. This objective was pursued by assessing the extent to which Ubuntu is endorsed, either through above-mean scores on established Ubuntu scales or by comparing the scores of African respondents with those of non-African

counterparts. In addition, the collected data were used to identify the variables that researchers posit as outcomes of Ubuntu, that is, the constructs to which Ubuntu is theorised to give rise, and to evaluate the extent to which these proposed relationships are empirically supported. This analysis provides insight into the tangible and practically significant effects attributed to Ubuntu in the scholarly literature. No statistical analyses were performed.

This literature review was granted ethics approval by the University of South Africa's Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC, on 1 December 2023, with reference number 1726.

4. Findings

In Table 1 the outcomes of the literature research are presented. In the first column the keywords used with "Ubuntu" in the search are presented. This is followed by the number of hits. Column three shows the number of outputs selected based on the titles and screening of the content of the abstracts. Only outputs in which evidence of quantitative results was presented, were selected. The last column contains general comments regarding the outputs identified.

Table 1: Ubuntu literature search outcomes

Keyword: Intitle: Ubuntu and …	**Total number of hits**	**Selected based on the abstract**	**Note**
Quantitative	266	27	An interesting observation from this search was the predominance of qualitative studies, when searching for quantitative studies. Additionally, a notable number of dissertations and theses were among the listed results. It was also intriguing to find a significant number of non-Africans actively involved in Ubuntu research.
Leadership and questionnaire	126	34	Several mixed-method studies are included here, incorporating quantifications of qualitative data, relying on questionnaires as well as interviews.
Leadership and scale	409	23	Scale was seen as a "synonym" for "questionnaire". However, large and small scale, as well as national and global scale, were often found in these outcomes, which explains the large number of original hits.

In total, 84, articles were identified using the three approaches to collect quantitative research. There were, in total, 37 overlaps, leaving 46 outputs to be analysed. When reading the full papers, an additional 10 outputs were removed, as despite promising quantitative data, no such analyses were found in these articles. This left 36 articles to be analysed. As the available literature was limited, master's and doctoral studies were not excluded. However, the quality of some of the outputs and the rigour of some studies were questionable. These were marked with an asterisk (*).

Table 2: Quantitative research on Ubuntu: Key associations and findings

Output	**Sample**	**Summary of findings**
1. Abdullah, A., Bentum, H., Frederico, M., Mensah, F., Jordan, L. P., & Emery, C. R. 2023. Protective indigenous collective value of Ubuntu and child neglect: Implications for rural child protection practice. *Child & Family Social Work, 28*(4): 1035-1045.	Ghana (N=1100)	Ubuntu norms were significantly endorsed in rural communities compared with urban communities; higher levels of Ubuntu are associated with lower odds of child neglect; and the relationship remained significant only in the rural sample. In sum, Ubuntu is prevalent and influential in rural areas.
2. Boag, L. P. 2022. The influence of Ubuntu and transformational leadership on employee engagement in virtual teams (Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=109)	Ubuntu leadership, more than transformational leadership, has a significant positive relationship with employee engagement; demographics (industry and ethnicity) had no significant influence on the results. In sum, Ubuntu has an impact, but is not specific to Africans.
3. Brubaker, T. A. 2013. Servant leadership, Ubuntu, and leader effectiveness in Rwanda. *Emerging Leadership Journeys, 6*(1): 114-147.	Rwanda (N=120)	Servant leadership and Ubuntu leadership are, similarly, positively and significantly related to leader effectiveness. In sum, Ubuntu has no superiority when applied in Africa.
4. Burt-Miller, J. F., Rismani, M., Hopkins, A., Cunningham, T., Farquharson, D., Balcázar, A. G., ... & Kennedy, A. B. 2024. "I realized I was not alone": A mixed-methods investigation of the implementation of Ubuntu groups to reduce burnout and social isolation in an allopathic medical school in the	United States of America (N=unknown)	Following Ubuntu-inspired intervention, there is a statistically significant decrease in social isolation among staff and students; staff exhibited reduced burnout compared to students; students reported increased feelings of belonging. In sum, Ubuntu can be applied effectively outside the African context, impacting non-Africans positively.

Southeastern United States. *Medical Teacher*, 1-11.		
5. Dowdeswell, K. E., & Hoobler, J. M. 2022. Ubuntu– "I Am Because We Are" Servant Leadership in South Africa. In *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership* (pp. 1-24). Springer.	South Africa (N=several studies)	This is an excellent article on servant leadership. Servant leadership behaviours may be a viable option representing the spirit of Ubuntu. Empirical findings on the relationship between Ubuntu and servant leadership are mixed. In sum, Ubuntu may be equivalent to Western-style leadership.
6. Heinecke-Müller, M., Quaiser-Pohl, C., Kariuki, P. W., & Arasa, J. N. 2022. Feeling capable in an Ubuntu way: Kenyan comprehensions of control beliefs compared with the German perspective. *Open Psychology, 4*(1): 60-83.	Kenya (N=91) Germany (N=52)	The control measurement tool was not measurement invariant, thus an uncritical transfer of the control beliefs measure from one culture to another is inappropriate; no warranted comparisons could be made, only that control is perceived differently across cultures. In sum, Kenyans differ in the way they perceive control items, which adds little to the Ubuntu debate.
7. Jefferson Jr, L. 2021. Fearless Ubuntu: Community organizing in the black church and black community. Doctoral thesis (Virginia Union University (United States of America)).	United States of America (N=27)	Pre- and post-intervention scores were compared, and percentage-wise increases and decreases were interpreted as signs of change. In general, the intervention had the envisaged effect; given gained knowledge and skills, participants' willingness to engage in community organising efforts increased. In sum, Ubuntu can be applied effectively outside the African context, impacting non-Africans positively.
8. Khomba, J. K., Bakuwa, R. C., & Kangaude-Ulaya, E. C. 2013. Shaping business ethics and corporate governance: An inclusive African Ubuntu philosophy. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research, 13*(5): 30-42.	Malawi (N=387)	The main contribution of the article is the provision of norms for a measurement developed by the authors; no external validity information is provided. Mean scores were above the middle score. In sum, it seems that Ubuntu was endorsed by the respondents.
9. Kinyanjui, M. N. 2016. Ubuntu nests and the emergence of an African metropolis. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 37*(3): 418-431.	Kenya (N=573)	The researchers compare traders and artisans, and demonstrate differences in their solidarity with family, friends and ethnicity, working together to improve their socio-economic well-being. However, Ubuntu is mentioned

		only in passing. In sum, social networks, much more than Ubuntu, were researched.
10*. Kramer, M. 2023. More than a principal: Ubuntu at the heart of successful school leadership in the Western Cape. *South African Journal of Education, 43*(3): 1-10.	South Africa (N=38)	Mean scores are presented on perceptions of leadership effectiveness; no differences were found in the expected direction. In sum, Ubuntu is credited for positive change, but no such quantitative results are reported.
11. Littrell, R. F., Wu, N. H., & Nkomo, S. 2013. Pan-Sub-Saharan African managerial leadership and the values of Ubuntu. In *Management in Africa* (pp. 252-268). Routledge.	Namibia Nigeria South Africa Blacks South Africa Whites Zambia Zimbabwe (N=several studies)	Managerial leadership behaviour preferences of black and white businesspeople in South Africa are very similar. In sum, Ubuntu is not endorsed uniquely by black Africans.
12. Magalo, L. 2022. The mediating role of ethical climate on the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and sustainable performance (Master's dissertation, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=209)	Ubuntu leadership has a direct positive influence on sustainable performance; ethical climate fully mediated the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and sustainable performance. In sum, the generalist ethics nullify the effect of an African-specific Ubuntu.
13. Makhonza, L. O., Lawrence, K. C., & Nkoane, M. M. 2019. Polygonal Ubuntu/botho as a superlative value to embrace orphans and vulnerable children in schools. *Gender and Behaviour, 17*(3): 13522-13530.	South Africa (N=303)	Free and open access to teachers by vulnerable children with problems was used as a proxy for Ubuntu values. It was concluded that teachers did not embrace the Ubuntu values of providing care, love, unconditional support and empathy. In sum, Ubuntu was not endorsed by South African teachers.
14. Manganyi, T. 2017. Development of a short course to inculcate the spirit of Ubuntu amongst student nurses at Limpopo College of Nursing (Doctoral dissertation, University of Limpopo (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=115)	Ubuntu is practised by more than half of the nurses; training is required to improve the levels of service delivery based on Ubuntu. In sum, Ubuntu is endorsed by more than half the population.
15*. Mangaroo-Pillay, M. 2020. A South African Ubuntu analogy of lean philosophy (Doctoral	South Africa (N=10)	Descriptive statistics of a self-designed survey are presented; the questions designed were philosophical rather

dissertation, North-West University (South Africa)).		than empirical questions: "The lean principle of 'base your management decisions on a long-term philosophy' correlates with the Ubuntu principle of 'loyalty to the organisation'". The results are not reliable. In sum, given the sample size and the poor design, this output can be disregarded.
16*. Mankowitz, D. J. 2018. The African philosophical concept of Ubuntu as applied to the emotional intelligence of adolescents: Challenging the appropriateness of Western-derived concepts (Master's dissertation, University of South Africa (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=16)	Emotional intelligence and Ubuntu are used as interchangeable constructs. Both concepts are measured, but the correlation is not reported on. The quantitative data contributes little to the analysis performed. In sum, given the sample size and the poor design, this output can be disregarded.
17. Molose, T. 2019. The experience of Ubuntu to a hospitality organisation: Scale development and validation. *Journal of Advances in Humanities and Social Sciences, 5*(3): 113-128.	South Africa (N=212)	An instrument was developed with reasonable reliability and factorial validity; differences in mean scores from the middle values are interpreted as indicative of Ubuntu ways of working. In sum, South Africans endorse Ubuntu values.
18. Motsepe, K. M. B. 2020. Investigating the relationship between leadership styles and organisational commitment in selected South African universities: The mediating role of Ubuntu (Doctoral dissertation, North-West University (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=205)	Ubuntu and participative leadership had a medium effect on employees' affective commitment, while authentic leadership had a significant effect on employees' affective commitment. Ethnic differences in Ubuntu scores are reported, with Blacks having the highest scores. In sum, Black Africans endorse Ubuntu more than others.
19. Muller, R. J., Smith, E. E., & Lillah, R. 2019. Perceptions regarding the impact of Ubuntu and servant leadership on employee engagement in the workplace. *Journal of Contemporary Management, 16*(1): 20-51.	South Africa (N=428)	The spirit of solidarity dimension of Ubuntu leadership influenced employee engagement significantly and positively. The survival and spirit of solidarity dimensions of Ubuntu had a significant and positive influence on organisational performance. In sum, Ubuntu is a positive influence in South Africa.
20*. Munir, F. 2020. Ubuntu in the engineering workplace: Paying it forward through mentoring. *Commonwealth*	South Africa (N=50)	Endorsement of statements such as "Do you think Ubuntu can improve mentor-mentee relationships?" Respondents generally agreed with these statements.

Youth and Development, 18(1): #8379.		In sum, Ubuntu could be seen as a positive influence in Africa.
21. Mutsonziwa, I. 2020. Ubuntu: Development and validation of a scale to measure African humanism (Doctoral thesis, University of Pretoria (South Africa)).	South Africa (N=500)	A rigorous research process was followed in developing this questionnaire; acceptable reliability and factorial validity were demonstrated; evidence of nomological validity is presented, with discriminant validity and predictive validity in terms of charitable and altruistic behaviours. Sadly, no descriptive statistics of Ubuntu are provided. In sum, Ubuntu can be conceptualised effectively within the South African context.
22. Nam, I., Klemz, B. R., Boshoff, C., & Mazibuko, N. E. 2009. Retail perception differences in two collectivist cultures: Kiasu versus Ubuntu. *The Journal of Applied Business and Economics, 10*(1): 37-52.	South Africa (N=?) Singapore (N=?)	Reported significant differences in the influence of assurance and empathy on the customers' willingness-to-buy between collective cultures; collective cultures differ significantly; evidence that motivation behind retail behaviour differs. In sum, this output contributes little to the Ubuntu debate.
23. Nanyunja, C., Sadoo, S., Kohli-Lynch, M., Nalugya, R., Nyonyintono, J., Muhumuza, A., ... & Tann, C. J. 2022. Early care and support for young children with developmental disabilities and their caregivers in Uganda: The baby Ubuntu feasibility trial. *Frontiers in Pediatrics, 10*: #981976.	Uganda (N=126)	An Ubuntu group and a standard care group were created. No quantitative evidence of support proving the impact of the programme on care is provided. Qualitative data provided rich information. In sum, no quantitative support of the functionality of Ubuntu could be provided. This affirms the notion of qualitative data prone to confirmation bias.
24*. Ndoda, G. R., & Sikwila, M. N. 2014. Ubuntu-praxis: Re-modelling the balanced scorecard model at a university, an Afrocentric perspective. *Research in Higher Education Journal, 25*: 1-27.	Zimbabwe (N=157)	Topics such as "Ubuntu/Unhu culture enhances corporate performance" are used. The authors claim to have developed a valid questionnaire. In sum, while the research is questionable, Ubuntu is hailed as an effective tool within Zimbabwe.
25. Ngcobo, J. 2018. The relationship between an employee's perception of a leader's propensity to practice Ubuntu and employee engagement in South Africa (Master's dissertation,	South Africa (N=247)	Ubuntu leadership relates to employee engagement. Neither race (ethnicity) nor gender influences this relationship. In sum, Ubuntu is useful, but not related to ethnicity.

University of Pretoria (South Africa)).		
26. Niankara, I. 2018. Organisational management culture and employers' health insurance offering strategies in the USA: An Ubuntu-based random utility modelling approach. *Global Business and Economics Review, 20*(4): 503-520.	United States of America (N=1 061)	An inclusive management culture fosters nondiscriminatory health plan offerings. The use of the word Ubuntu in the research seems arbitrary. In sum, inclusion limits discrimination, but Ubuntu goes beyond inclusion. Thus, this research contributes little to the Ubuntu debate.
27*. Obert, S., Okay, Z. P., & Desderio, C. 2016. Determinants of unethical behavior by stakeholders in the medical insurance industry in Zimbabwe: An African humanism (Hunhu/Ubuntu) approach. *Engineering Management Research, 5*(2): 63-71.	Zimbabwe (N=100)	The methodology applied is not explained clearly. Only p-values are reported. It is concluded that Ubuntu is associated with ethical behaviour. In sum, this research provides little empirical knowledge regarding the Ubuntu debate.
28. Okereke, C., Vincent, O., & Mordi, C. 2018. Determinants of Nigerian managers' environmental attitude: Africa's Ubuntu ethics versus global capitalism. *Thunderbird International Business Review, 60*(4): 577-590.	Nigeria (N=377)	Economic motives, not ethical considerations, influence environmental orientation and behaviour. This is contrary to mainstream corporate social responsibility literature in Africa, which suggests the dominance of the culturally-based, altruistic African Ubuntu philosophy. In sum, this research suggests the absence of Ubuntu.
29. Omodan, T. C., & Tsotetsi, C. T. 2019. Framing Ubuntu philosophy to reconstruct principals' behaviour and teachers' effectiveness in secondary schools. *Journal of Education Research and Rural Community Development, 1*(1): 25-45.	Nigeria (N=720)	No hypotheses related to Ubuntu or proxies to Ubuntu were tested. In sum, this research only reflects an interest in Ubuntu from Nigerian researchers.
30. Papageorgiou, E., Fortuin, G., Shamsoodien, S., Mothelesi, C., Koza, T., & Plant, K. 2022. Preparing first-year students in higher education for ethical decision making: Identifying and	South Africa (N=4 120)	From 51 value items, students selected their top ten values; family, authenticity, hard work, integrity, balance, care, economic security, faithfulness, success and purpose. The researchers conclude that "family" was

understanding personal values in a South African Ubuntu context. *Southern African Journal of Accountability and Auditing Research, 24*(1): 51-64.		considered the most important value. It indicates a strong Ubuntu orientation; all race groups (not only black students) followed an Ubuntu perspective when reflecting on their personal values. In sum, Ubuntu seems to be endorsed in South Africa, across ethnic lines.
31. Senooane, B. 2014. Corporate social responsibility as a practicality of Ubuntu to build brand loyalty: A case of mobile telecommunication in South Africa. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5*(25): 167-175.	South Africa (N=246)	Though quantitative data was collected, mean differences were the primary method of analysis, and this was done on mere differences, not by any statistical analyses. The results have very little empirical value. In sum, this research shows a low uptake of corporate social responsibility, interpreted to be indicative of low levels of Ubuntu.
32. Sigger, D. S., Polak, B. M., & Pennink, B. J. W. 2010. 'Ubuntu' or 'humanness' as a management concept. *CDS Research Paper, 29*: 1-46.	Tanzania (N=211)	A measure of Ubuntu was developed. Participating Tanzanian managers score high on the four dimensions of Ubuntu; the researchers wonder if Westerners will respond in a similar manner to the questions. In sum, this study shows a high prevalence of Ubuntu.
33*. Tauetsile, J. 2021. Employee engagement in non-Western contexts: The link between social resources Ubuntu and employee engagement. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management, 21*(2): 245-259.	Botswana (N=438)	A relationship between Ubuntu, colleague support and employee engagement is reported; a hypothesis that Ubuntu mediates the relationship between supervisor support (and colleague support) and employee engagement was tested and affirmed – although this is not theoretically based, nor tested with standard statistical tests. In sum, this research suggests that Ubuntu has a positive effect.
34. Terblanché-Greeff, A. C., & Nel, P. 2022. Measuring context-specific collectivism: The Metzian Ubuntu Inventory. *South African Journal of Philosophy, 41*(4): 401-414.	South Africa (N=316)	A two-dimensional test of Ubuntu was developed and validated; no external validation information was provided. In sum, the study revealed that traditional cultural stereotypes around race and culture were not supported and in fact counterintuitive, supporting the notion that Ubuntu is not exclusive to Back Africans.
35*. Tworeck, C., Hemminga, D., Huber, D., & Dhillon, D.	Netherlands (N=18)	Naïve questions, such as "Do you agree that Ubuntu could be translated to a

2015. The Ubuntu philosophy as a management strategy. (Student report, Stenden University (Netherlands)).		management strategy?", were posed; just more than half of the respondents stated that this was a possibility. In general the quality of this research is questionable. In sum, this research supports perceived value of Ubuntu.
36. Waterkeyn, J. A. V. 2023. Recreating social capital through nurturing Ubuntu in community health clubs for disease prevention. *Medical Research Archives, 11*(11): 1-18.	Zimbabwe (N=102)	The ethical code of Ubuntu was understood by 95% of respondents; 75% in the current generation of parents socialised their children accordingly. Ubuntu is more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas. In sum, this research shows that Ubuntu is prevalent, and particularly so in rural areas.

Note: These references are not replicated in the reference list.

In total, 36 outputs were selected, deemed to present quantitative studies of Ubuntu. The findings provided in Table 2 will be analysed in the second part of the discussion, provided below.

5. Discussion

The aim of the study was to establish the prevalence of Ubuntu in Africa and its endorsement by Black Africans, considering quantitative studies on Ubuntu. This information will be used as a census of Ubuntu to assess the magnitude of interventions which are needed to possibly revive the Ubuntu ethos. However, before discussing the findings in detail, attention should be paid to the literature that was identified.

5.1 An overview of the literature

In the literature review it was claimed that Ubuntu has its linguistic origins in southern African languages, but also that other African languages possess similar words. It was also established that the word itself is so loaded with meaning within the African linguistic context that it cannot be translated into English easily (Mokgoro, 1998; Tutu, 1999). The conclusion is that the word could be seen as uniquely African.

The second point made is that Ubuntu is an African set of values, representing "the African view of man" (Mbiti, 1990 [1969], p. 106), and that Ubuntu forms part of the African continent, "integrated into all aspects of day-to-day life throughout Africa … a concept shared

by all tribes in South, Central, West, and East Africa amongst people of Bantu origin" (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013, p. 672).

This is in contrast to the third point made by some researchers that Ubuntu is a sub-Saharan regional phenomenon (Mawere & Van Stam, 2016), or even more specific, a southern African indigenous philosophy (Swanson, 2007). From this literature different scopes are visible, with some seeing Ubuntu as continental, and others as a more regionally-based ethos.

The fourth last point made in the literature review was that Ubuntu is not practised in present times (Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013), and no longer serves as a moral foundation for contemporary African societies (Anofuechi, 2022).

For the purposes of this study, the literature review highlights the contested prevalence of Ubuntu, ranging from claims of its continental ubiquity to arguments of regional limitation or even its decline in contemporary practice. What remains unclear is the extent to which Ubuntu continues to be embedded in African societies today. Addressing this gap requires a systematic, quantitative investigation to establish the degree of its presence and relevance in present contexts.

5.2 Analyses of the findings

The geographical reach of Ubuntu was established. Twenty of the 36 articles presented in Table 2 used data originating from South Africa. Fifty-five percent of all the articles measured Ubuntu in South Africa. Zimbabwe was mentioned four times. Other African countries referred to were, from south to north, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya (twice), Uganda, Nigeria (twice) and Ghana. This represents 12 of the 54 countries, or 22.2% of African countries. All of these are in sub-Saharan Africa, and most of the outputs were from southern Africa. In addressing Louw's (1998) first question, whether Ubuntu is an inherently African phenomenon practised by Africans across the continent, this pattern raises important questions about regional representation. Academic interest and research on Ubuntu are largely informed by data and reports from southern Africa. The prevailing consensus is that the question of whether Ubuntu is equally embedded in the cultural practices of other African communities has, to a significant extent, been settled, indicating that Ubuntu is best understood as a distinctly southern African construct.

The discussion rests on a questionable assumption, namely that the phenomenon known as Ubuntu is researched primarily in areas where it is prevalent. While this assumption is reasonable, the lack of research on Ubuntu in a specific country does not negate its existence there. Nonetheless, based on the available information, it is accurate to state that Ubuntu has been researched far more extensively in southern Africa, particularly in South Africa, than in any other region of Africa. No North African countries have conducted quantitative research on Ubuntu. Given the information in Table 2, it would therefore be irresponsible to state that Ubuntu is prevalent across the continent. Instead, the evidence calls for a more nuanced interpretation, suggesting that the research focus reflects historical and academic trends as much as it does the actual distribution of Ubuntu's cultural resonance. This observation directly connects to Louw's inquiry by questioning whether Ubuntu is a widespread practice amongst all Africans.

Next, matters regarding the endorsement of Ubuntu are at play. Many research projects investigated the coexistence of Ubuntu with admirable attributes, mostly reported as correlations or within regression analyses. In Articles 2, 3, 12, 19, 20, 24, 27, 33, and 35 such reports are presented, which suggests that researchers appreciate the possible positive effects of Ubuntu. Also, training in Ubuntu principles seems popular (see Article 4, 7, and 23), indicating that Ubuntu is regarded as an admirable concept. It could be concluded that some researchers see Ubuntu as a praiseworthy construct. This observation resonates with Louw's second question, whether Africans adhere to Ubuntu or, at least, aspire to do so. The findings hint at an aspirational quality in Ubuntu values, even if not uniformly practised, suggesting that cultural admiration exists for this way of living.

Several studies reported high or above mean scores on Ubuntu and interpreted this as an endorsement of Ubuntu; see Articles 8, 14, 17, 32, and 35. These results suggest that the general public, besides researchers, endorses Ubuntu values. It should also be noted that other studies report the absence of Ubuntu in African societies (Articles 13, 28, and 31). Ubuntu seems more present and impactful in rural areas than urban areas (Articles 1 and 36), where older people resides. This uneven endorsement across geographical and socio-cultural contexts emphasises the dynamic nature of cultural values (Greenfield, 2014). While some communities appear to strongly embrace the Ubuntu philosophy, particularly in settings

where traditional practices are more intact, others may be influenced by modern, urban realities that diverge from traditional norms.

It may be expected that Black Africans in Africa score higher on Ubuntu, as Ubuntu is seen as an indigenous African knowledge system of philosophy. This was true in one study (see Article 18). However, more studies indicated that no differences exist across ethnicity (see Articles 2, 11, 25, 30, and 34). This finding was surprising and suggests that the appeal of Ubuntu might extend beyond ethnic boundaries. It challenges conventional assumptions about the exclusivity of indigenous knowledge systems and invites further reflection on whether Ubuntu is being reinterpreted in a globalised context. Such complexity underscores Louw's probing questions about whether Ubuntu remains a uniquely African phenomenon or if its values are universal, with Africans not being the sole stewards of these values.

A last comment regarding the dissonance between Ubuntu and Western conceptualisations is that Ubuntu leadership is often presented as equivalent to servant leadership, with many overlapping characteristics (see Articles 3 and 5). This conceptual bridging may not only serve to validate Ubuntu in a broader, cross-cultural context but also offers insights into how African and Western leadership models can inform one another. It suggests that while Ubuntu is rooted in African traditions, its principles may be universal, and that it offers a valuable framework for ethical leadership not only in Africa, but also globally. This overlap broadens the discussion about cultural relevance and adaptation, highlighting the potential of Ubuntu to contribute to leadership paradigms across diverse contexts.

From the four paragraphs above, on the uptake of Ubuntu, it is evident that the Ubuntu concept is seen as a valuable asset to Africans and that it is embraced by some, but rejected by others. Those individuals who endorse Ubuntu are mostly from a rural background. However, the endorsement of Ubuntu is not exclusive to Black Africans, nor is the basic concept of Ubuntu (leadership). In light of Louw's (1998) inquiries – first, whether Ubuntu is truly African and practised by Africans across the continent, and second, whether Africans adhere to or aspire to Ubuntu, this discussion illustrates a complex and uneven landscape. While Ubuntu is undoubtedly a cherished cultural construct in certain contexts, its uptake and interpretation vary widely across different African regions and social settings. This variation calls for further empirical and qualitative studies that could illuminate the evolving nature of

Ubuntu in contemporary African societies, thereby providing richer answers to Louw's longstanding questions.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the prevalence of Ubuntu in Africa and its endorsement by Black Africans through quantitative research. The findings indicate that Ubuntu is not uniformly prevalent across the continent. While the Ubuntu ethos is generally regarded as a commendable way of fostering social cohesion in Africa, its endorsement is more prominent in rural areas. It is not exclusive to any single ethnic group.

In considering the implications for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and broader developmental strategies, it is clear that Ubuntu, as currently manifested, does not resonate uniformly with all Africans. A call to "take hands in the spirit of Ubuntu" may find limited traction beyond the southern African context. However, there is a general consensus that the underlying principles of Ubuntu hold the potential to engender positive societal outcomes, including the facilitation of free trade. Although some evidence suggests that the practice of Ubuntu can yield beneficial effects, the findings remain mixed.

Given these complexities, Ubuntu in its present form appears unlikely to serve as a direct catalyst for the materialisation of the African free trade agreement. As argued by Chimakonam (2016), rather than attempting to restore Ubuntu in its traditional guise, it may be more effective to reinvent or adapt its principles to better suit the diverse socio-cultural realities across Africa. Such a reinvention could provide a more pragmatic framework for promoting ethical leadership and cohesive development in the context of continental integration.

6.1 Contribution

This research contributes to the debate on the broad, yet uneven, acceptance of Ubuntu as an African philosophy. In addressing questions raised by Louw (1998) about whether Ubuntu is an exclusively African ethos or one with potentially universal appeal, the study not only examines the geographical spread of Ubuntu but also evaluates its level of acceptance across different African contexts. By grounding the argument in quantitative research, this work highlights that while Ubuntu is widely recognised and valued in certain regions, particularly

in southern and rural Africa, its endorsement is far from uniform across the continent. Consequently, this research challenges the notion of Ubuntu as a pan-African way of being, suggesting instead that its philosophical and practical relevance may be limited to specific regions or communities within the continent. The findings underscore the need for further inquiry into whether the rediscovery or reinvention of Ubuntu could serve as a viable framework for fostering both cultural cohesion and developmental strategies across diverse African societies.

6.2 Limitations and future research

One limitation of this research is that only articles published in English were considered. Although a search using the term "Ubuntu" did reveal a few articles in other languages, these were minimal and of negligible impact. Additionally, the study combined diverse research outputs that varied in quality and scope, none of which specifically addressed free trade agreements or cross-border cooperation. This heterogeneity led to certain inferential leaps – for example, linking the volume of research outputs with the prevalence of the concept – which, while less than ideal, still provided valuable insights. For future research, it is recommended that scholars focus on conducting more rigorous quantitative studies on the prevalence and outcomes of Ubuntu leadership. Given Ubuntu's potential to unite Africa and facilitate free trade, developing and utilising a reliable and valid measure of Ubuntu is essential. Such quantitative approaches could enrich the discussion by providing empirical data that goes beyond the affirmational insights typical of qualitative research. It also mitigates the risk of confirmation bias.

Declarations

Conflict of interest: The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Data availability statement: This review is based entirely on publicly available data and information sourced from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and other academic publications cited in the manuscript. No new primary data were generated or analysed during this study. Readers may refer to the cited sources for detailed information.

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PLEASE NOTE: The references listed in Table 2 are not reflected again.

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Chapter 8: Ubuntu leadership and organisational outcomes

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	**B**	**B3**	**11, 12**	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

Introduction

This chapter addresses Objective B3 (to test the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and desirable organisational outcomes). This objective was not achieved through a freestanding publication; however, the results reported in Articles 11 and 12 (See Steyn and Msweli, 2026c; 2027b) reveal these relationships. A summary of the findings from Articles 11 and 12, specifically those applicable to the quantifiable outcomes of Ubuntu, is presented below.

Ubuntu leadership and desirable organisational outcomes

The results reflect the strength of the correlations between Ubuntu leadership and desirable organisational outcomes, job satisfaction (JS), normative organisational commitment (OC), and psychological well-being (WB). Ubuntu leadership was assessed using the 20-item Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS; Steyn & Msweli, 2024), which was developed explicitly for this study. JS was measured using the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (Thompson & Phua, 2012; four items). OC was assessed using the Normative Commitment Scale (Jaros, 2007; six items), which builds on the seminal model proposed by Meyer and Allen (1991). WB was measured with the World Health Organisation Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5; World Health Organisation, 2024; five items). These scales capture distinct constructs, as discussed

in Article 11 and further demonstrated in Table 2 of Article 12. Both articles also report Cronbach's alpha coefficients above .90 for all scales and across all groups, which indicates excellent internal consistency.

The key statistics requiring interpretation in the table below are the correlation coefficients (r). According to Cohen (1988), correlations of around .10 are considered small, those around .30 are medium, and .50 or higher are regarded as large.

Table 1 presents the correlations between ULRS and JS, OC, and WB, as reported in Article 11, which included the larger sample (N = 301).

Table 1: Correlation between Ubuntu leadership and JS, OC, and WB, by nationality

Group	Scale	r	Sig.	N	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Fisher Z	Z-test	Sig.
SA	JS	.681	<.001	150	.584	.758	0.832	-	-
UK	JS	.757	<.001	151	.680	.818	0.990	-1.36	.174
SA	OC	.748	<.001	150	.668	.811	0.969	-	-
UK	OC	.805	<.001	151	.740	.855	1.113	-1.24	.215
SA	WB	.687	<.001	150	.592	.763	0.843	-	-
UK	WB	.762	<.001	151	.685	.821	1.001	-1.36	.174

Note: SA=South Africa; UK=United Kingdom; Fisher Z's were calculated manually; p-values are two-tailed; in the last column, the statistical significance of the differences between the correlations is presented.

The most notable finding from Table 1 is the consistently strong correlations between ULRS and the three variables – JS, OC, and WB. The lowest correlation was observed between ULRS and JS in the South African group ($r = .681$, $p < .001$), while the highest was between ULRS and OC in the UK group ($r = .805$). According to Cohen (1988), correlations above .50 are considered strong, indicating that all observed relationships in this study can be regarded as substantial and practically significant.

This provides empirical quantitative evidence of the impact of Ubuntu leadership on organisational behaviour; evidence which previous qualitative studies could not adequately explain. In this regard, the present research makes a valuable contribution by adding robust quantitative data to the debate.

Also presented in Table 1 are the results of Z-tests performed to ascertain whether the correlations differ across groups. Z-tests are commonly used to compare two correlation coefficients by first transforming them into Fisher's Z scores. This allows the differences between the correlations to be expressed in standardised units. Statistically significant differences, as determined by the Z-test, are then interpreted

as practical differences between the correlation coefficients. In this study, no such significant differences between South Africa and the UK were observed, reinforcing the conclusion that Ubuntu leadership has a consistent influence across groups.

Table 2 presents selected results from Article 12. Similar to Table 1, it reports the correlation coefficients between Ubuntu leadership and desirable outcomes. In this instance, however, the focus is limited to the South African sample, which is further divided into the subgroups of White and Black South Africans. The total sample size for this analysis was 150.

Table 2: Correlation between Ubuntu leadership and JS, OC, and WB, by race, in South Africa

Group	Scale	R	Sig.	N	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Fisher Z	Z-test	Sig.
Black	JS	.714	<.001	112	.528	.827	0.895	–	–
White	JS	.592	<.001	38	.344	.767	0.681	1.10	.270
Black	OC	.752	<.001	112	.575	.847	0.978	–	–
White	OC	.742	<.001	38	.433	.941	0.955	0.12	.910
Black	WB	.692	<.001	112	.526	.801	0.852	–	–
White	WB	.668	<.001	38	.387	.855	0.807	0.23	.820

Note: Black=Black South Africans; White=White South Africans; Fisher Z's were calculated manually; p-values are two-tailed; in the last column, the statistical significance of the differences between the correlations is presented.

Table 2, much like Table 1, demonstrates that Ubuntu leadership strongly influences desirable organisational outcomes – an expected result, given that the Table 2 sample is a sub-sample of the one discussed in Table 1.

What Table 2 adds, however, is evidence that these correlations with the outcomes do not differ across racial groups within South Africa. This finding reiterates the universal and robust impact of Ubuntu leadership.

Conclusion

The results presented in Tables 1 and 2 provide compelling evidence that Ubuntu leadership has a strong and consistent influence on desirable organisational outcomes, specifically job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and psychological well-being. The high correlations observed across national (South Africa and the UK) and racial (Black and White South Africans) groups underscore the robustness of these relationships. This research therefore makes a valuable contribution by

providing rigorous quantitative evidence of the practical utility of Ubuntu leadership in diverse organisational contexts.

Chapter 9: Integrating evidence on the impact of Ubuntu

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	**B**	**B+B2+B3**	**-**	**Synthesis of B**
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

Introduction

This chapter integrates the work on Objectives B1, B2, and B3, offering a comprehensive analysis of the organisational impact of Ubuntu leadership, as captured in Aim B. The synthesis presented below draws from Articles 6 and 7, as well as Chapter 8. Chapter 8, in turn, is informed by the quantitative data presented in Articles 11 and 12, which provide empirical evidence of the impacts of Ubuntu leadership. No freestanding article was produced for the overarching analysis of Aim B; instead, the integration presented here addresses this aim.

Article 6: The impact of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses

Article 6 offers a systematic attempt to assess Ubuntu's impact across Africa. From 46 usable studies, the analysis found Ubuntu to be a distinct African construct with strong predictive power for employee engagement, organisational commitment, and performance. However, the study also highlighted serious challenges, especially the diversity of scales used to measure Ubuntu, which complicated compatibility and interpretation. Interestingly, Ubuntu leadership was often presented as equivalent to servant leadership, raising questions about its distinctiveness as a uniquely African construct.

Beyond Africa, Ubuntu has been applied in broader contexts, including interventions in the United States, and its inclusion in article titles appears to carry prestige value. While this points to Ubuntu's global appeal, it also raises concerns about cultural integrity when applied outside its traditional setting.

The literature on Ubuntu research reveals significant methodological weaknesses. Inconsistent definitions and the use of self-designed, non-standardised scales undermine comparability, making it challenging to build a coherent evidence base. Flawed interpretations and limited statistical rigour further reduce reliability, while the absence of a common measurement instrument prevents cross-study comparisons or meta-analyses.

Considering the 46 publications retrieved, the evidence base on the effects of Ubuntu remains limited. Quantitative research on Ubuntu leadership is insufficient, with a few studies focusing on the same outcomes. Although Ubuntu shows promise as a predictor of positive workplace outcomes, the lack of standardisation and replication continues to restrict its broader application and undermines confidence in its practical implementation.

Article 7: Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs

Article 7 builds on the analysis in Article 6 and examines the prevalence of the Ubuntu ethos across Africa, particularly in response to sceptics who question whether it remains widely practised. A total of 36 quantitative studies were reviewed, all in English, with most originating from South Africa and neighbouring countries. The findings were mixed: some confirmed Ubuntu's relevance, others questioned its prevalence, and several suggested that its values extend beyond Africa, where it has been applied as an intervention.

The evidence indicates that Ubuntu is not uniformly practised across the continent. It features more prominently in rural areas and is not confined to any single ethnic group. In its current form, however, Ubuntu does not resonate uniformly with all Africans, meaning calls to unite in its "spirit" may have limited traction beyond Southern Africa. Still, its underlying principles are recognised as valuable for fostering ethical leadership, social cohesion, and continental integration.

This research contributes to the debate on whether Ubuntu is an exclusively African ethos or one with broader universal appeal. While widely recognised and valued in Southern and rural Africa, endorsement across the continent is uneven. The findings, therefore, challenge the notion of Ubuntu as a pan-African philosophy, suggesting instead that its relevance is regionally and contextually bound. They also highlight the need to consider whether a reinvention or adaptation of Ubuntu could provide a more pragmatic framework for promoting cohesion and developmental strategies across diverse African societies.

Articles 11 and 12: Ubuntu leadership across cultures and Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct

The results presented in Articles 11 and 12 address many of the concerns raised in Articles 6 and 7. These studies provide robust evidence of the impact of Ubuntu, drawing on relatively large samples and a variety of organisational outcomes. Together, they demonstrate that Ubuntu leadership has a strong and consistent influence on desirable outcomes, specifically job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and psychological well-being. The high correlations observed across national groups (South Africa and the UK) and racial groups (Black and White South Africans) underscore the robustness of these relationships. Articles 11 and 12, therefore, make a valuable contribution by offering rigorous quantitative evidence of the practical utility of Ubuntu leadership.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings across Articles 6, 7, 11, and 12 reveal both the promise and the challenges of positioning Ubuntu as a leadership framework. While the earlier reviews highlighted methodological inconsistencies, limited replication, and uneven prevalence across Africa, the subsequent empirical studies provided much-needed evidence of Ubuntu's strong and consistent impact on key organisational outcomes across cultural and racial groups. This integration underscores the importance of moving beyond fragmented definitions and measurement tools toward more standardised, rigorous approaches. Ultimately, Ubuntu leadership demonstrates tangible organisational benefits and retains potential as both a culturally grounded and globally relevant leadership construct. However, its broader adoption will depend on further refinement and contextual adaptation.

Chapter 10: Cross-country comparisons of Ubuntu-aligned values

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	**C**	**C1**	**8, 9, 10, 11**	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective C1 (To specify the African nature of Ubuntu by comparing Ubuntu-aligned values across countries), specifying the African nature of Ubuntu through cross-country comparisons of Ubuntu-aligned values. This objective was partially achieved through with four papers. The title of the papers have the following references:

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025b). Leadership styles in Africa: Quantifying the uniqueness of the humane orientation. *Proceedings of the 36th Annual South African Institute for Management Sciences Conference, Sun City*. (pp. 1171-1193). ISBN: 978-1-0370-9898-7

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2025d). Ubuntu as an emic belief system: A quantitative analysis of humane orientated practices. *Journal of African History, Culture, and Arts (JAHCA), 5*(3), 130-140. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17678414

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026a). Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo world*. SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 5*2(0), a2355. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v52i0.2355

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2026c). Ubuntu leadership across cultures: A comparative study of its prevalence and outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Journal of African Business, 1–22.
https://doi.org/10.1080/15228916.2026.2670888

This represents Articles 8, 9, 10 and 11.

Article 8: Leadership styles in Africa: Quantifying the uniqueness of the humane orientation

Leadership styles in Africa:

Quantifying the uniqueness of the humane orientation

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ABSTRACT

Ubuntu, widely seen as the embodiment of African humanness, is believed to underpin effective leadership in Sub-Saharan Africa (S-SA). This study investigates whether humane-oriented leadership (HOL), as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership, reflects African views on effective leadership. Using GLOBE study data, the analysis compares HOL scores across regional clusters, focusing on S-SA and the Anglo cluster, and examines HOL's ranking among six leadership styles. Results show that S-SA's mean HOL score is significantly above the global average, though not the highest overall. The Anglo cluster's score is only slightly lower. In both regions, HOL ranks fourth on leadership effectiveness. While HOL is strongly associated with S-SA, it is not exclusive to the region and shows unexpected similarity to Anglo leadership preferences. The study offers quantitative support for HOL's relevance in Africa, while also highlighting the surprising alignment between African and Anglo leadership values, an insight often overlooked in qualitative research.

Keywords: Ubuntu; African humanness; GLOBE study; humane-orientated leadership; emic framework, WEIRD, cross-cultural

INTRODUCTION

Ubuntu is often described as African humanness and is deeply rooted in Southern African traditions (Allais, 2022; Udom, 2024). While interpretations of what Ubuntu exactly entail vary, there is broad scholarly consensus that it embodies a uniquely African philosophy (Mbigi & Maree, 2005; Metz, 2020). African ways, and Ubuntu, are

often contrasted with Western thought (Gaim & Clegg, 2021; Nkomo, 2011). However, despite widespread claims that Ubuntu represents a distinctly African worldview, these assertions are primarily made by philosophers (Molefe, 2024; Ntibagirirwa, 2024) and politicians (Omodan, 2022; Risimati, 2023), and are largely supported by qualitative research (Abubakre et al., 2021; Mickson Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2012). Empirical evidence demonstrating a higher prevalence of Ubuntu among African populations remains limited (see Grobler & Koen, 2024; Muller et al., 2019). The predominantly qualitative nature of these claims raises important questions about the uniqueness or universality of Ubuntu across regions and invites a closer examination of its African foundations.

This research aims to examine whether humane-orientated leadership (HOL), as a proxy to Ubuntu leadership, is more prevalent among indigenous African populations than among those from other global regions, and if it is the dominant leadership style in Sub-Sahara Africa (S-SA). The use of HOL, as defined in the Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness (GLOBE) study (House et al., 2004), is a tolerable proxy to Ubuntu leadership, as humane orientation is per definition closely associated with Ubuntu and some even calling Ubuntu African humanness (Gathogo, 2008; Metz, 2021; Murove, 2012) or African humanism (Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sibanda, 2014; Tschaepe, 2013). Exploring the unique bond between Ubuntu and Africa could offer valuable insights into African cultural identity and enrich our understanding of leadership in African societies. This is important, as Ubuntu, both in philosophy and practice, is widely hailed as a means to overcoming Africa's struggles and reclaiming its past greatness (Chowdhury et al., 2023; Naude, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature will explore the dynamic between the West and other regions, particularly the perceived predominance of Anglo-Saxon thought and its influence on global discourse. It will also examine HOL, as presented in the GLOBE study, alongside Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership. The discussion of Ubuntu will highlight its overlap with HOL, a key focus of this research. The section will conclude with a synopsis as well as setting the hypotheses.

Geography, culture, the West and globalisation

Geographical location plays a role in shaping behaviour and behavioural patterns (Hoerger et al., 2019; Rentfrow, 2014; Rentfrow & Gosling, 2021; Rentfrow & Jokela, 2019; Wei et al., 2017), and leadership styles are no exception (House et al., 2004). Behavioural patterns in different regions often reflect local cultural influences, shaping how people act and interact, which reinforces the culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This reciprocal relationship between culture, environment and behaviour is referred to as the "scientific theory of culture" (Malinowski, 2015). Behaviour, and by extension leadership styles, within a given context can be understood as a process in which symbolic resources—namely, culture—serve as primary self-configuring tools that shape behaviour, a concept referred to as "culture configuring" (Đorđević, 2021, p. 460). Consequently, it can be inferred that geographical context not only affects behaviour but also contributes to shaping broader social structures, which, in turn, reinforce human behavioural patterns (Steyn, 2023).

Cross-cultural studies, along with the many journals dedicated to this field, are founded on the premise that individuals from different geographical regions exhibit distinct behavioural patterns. Extensive cross-national research has substantiated these differences, exploring whether certain behaviours are universal or shaped by regional cultural influences. Such studies often differentiate not only between countries (Allik, 2013) but also between broader geographical regions (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). Contemporary cross-cultural comparisons, such as the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004) and the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2014), further highlight how geographical and cultural contexts shape human behaviour.

A significant portion of behavioural theories and assessment tools in psychology have been developed based on research conducted primarily within Western, industrialised academic settings (Henrich et al., 2010a, 2010b; Jones, 2010). This also applies to the development of leadership theories (see Bass & Avolio, 1994; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Lewin et al., 1939), many of which continue to be taught in universities worldwide. This has led to the use of the acronym WASP (Western Academic Scientific Psychology) to describe how "the discipline [that is] is culture-bound, limited in its origins, concepts, and empirical findings to only this small portion of the world" (Berry, 2015, p. 342). Similarly, the term WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich,

and Democratic) highlights the limitations of applying Western psychological frameworks universally (Henrich et al., 2010a). Researchers are increasingly urged to recognise that psychological constructs derived from Western contexts may not always hold the same relevance in non-Western societies (Berry et al., 2002). These calls for rethinking Western influence are commonly referred to as given calls for decolonisation (Betts, 2012; Minga, 2021; Molefe, 2022).

The premise of decolonisation is that those who were colonised think, act and have a culture distinct from that of their oppressors (Drabinski, 2019; Outlaw Jr., 2022). Globalisation is reshaping cultures (Chiu et al., 2011; Jensen et al., 2011), narrowing cultural divides between nations (Sergeeva et al., 2018) and promoting commonalities across once-diverse societies (Kajonius & Mac Giolla, 2017). Across the globe, there is a widespread aspiration for economic growth, modernisation and improved living standards (Ergashev & Farxodjonova, 2020), characteristics commonly associated with Western societies and amplified through access to mass media (Castells, 2000; Scheuerman, 2023). As globalisation, some say (Daramola & Oyinade, 2015; Ogar et al., 2019), largely shaped by Western influences, continues to unfold, the imitation of Western norms has proliferated across various regions (Rosenmann, 2016). This illustrates how globalisation contributes to cultural transformation. In some instances, it may even foster cultural homogenisation (Voisey & O'Riordan, 2010), while also giving rise to cultural hybridisation, where diverse traditions merge to create a globalised cultural fusion (Pieterse, 2018).

Ubuntu and humane-orientated leadership (HOL)

Synonym definitions (Alberts, 2019), such as those by Mboti (2015, pp. 126-127), who declares that “the settled definition of choice seems to always return, again and again, to the saying ‘umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ (in Nguni languages), ‘motho ke motho ka batho’ (in Sotho languages), ‘a person is a person through other persons’ (in English), and so on”, contribute little to the understanding of the behaviour associated with the concept. However, it points to the African routes of Ubuntu. Along these lines, Mbiti (1990 [1969]) describes “the African view of man” as “Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual”. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and

since we are, therefore I am'" (p. 106). The words of Mbiti reiterate the Africanness of Ubuntu.

Thaddeus Metz (2017; 2021) and Mogobe Ramose (2002; 2015), seen as thought-leaders on Ubuntu (Taylor, 2023), describe Ubuntu as humanness. Metz (2021) states that Ubuntu is a word from the African Nguni language group that denotes humanness, and being a good person. "To have ubuntu is to be a person who is living a genuinely human way of life, whereas to lack ubuntu is to be missing human excellence or to live like an animal. It is common for black people indigenous to the African continent to believe that one's basic aim in life should be to exhibit ubuntu, … which one can do by prizing communal relationships with other people" (Metz, no page). Ramose (2015) states that botho/hunhu/ubuntu should be interpreted as humanness but goes a step further and explains that "it means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (p. 70). The concept of "humanness" is, in classical (Western) philosophy, well-aligned to the humanness (Ramose, 2015). For Aristotle, humanness is defined through rationality and virtuous action (Kraut, 2023), for Kant, it revolves around autonomy and moral reasoning (Johnson & Cureton, 2024), and for Sartre, humanness is created through individual choice and responsibility (Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024). Virtuous action, moral reasoning and responsibility imply the recognition of others.

From the aforementioned, we could conclude that Ubuntu is African and related to humanness, but more is needed to understand the behaviour associated with Ubuntu. Several definition-through-denotations (Alberts, 2019) shed light on it. Kamwangamalu (1999) states that Ubuntu embodies qualities such as respect for all people, human dignity, sharing, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence and communalism. Eliastam (2015, p. 4) includes terms such as hospitality, compassion, humanness, sharing and respect as central to discussions of Ubuntu. Letseka (2013, p. 339) emphasises that "Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity." Similarly, Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013, p. 673) define Ubuntu as "the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and

mutual caring.” These denotations provide insights into the behaviour that could be indicative of a leader who acts in an Ubuntu manner.

The proxy that will be used in this study of Ubuntu leadership is HOL as defined and presented in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). HOL is one of nine cultural dimensions of leadership behaviour; the others are power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation and performance orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004), on which societies differ. In the GLOBE study, "humane orientation" refers to the degree to which a culture encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring and kind to others (House et al., 2004). GLOBE highlights societal values related to compassion, tolerance and concern for the well-being of others as elements of humanness (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). In the GLOBE study, questions such as "In this culture, effective leaders are [very concerned about others / not at all concerned about others]" and “Effective leaders in this culture are [very sensitive towards others' feelings and needs / not at all sensitive towards others' feelings and needs]", provide insights into what humane-orientated leaders do. All of these align well with the definition-through-denotations (Alberts, 2019) of Ubuntu.

Synopsis and hypotheses

It could be argued that, given Ubuntu's prominence as an ideology in Africa, it is more widely practised there than in any other region. Similarly, as Ubuntu originates from Africa, it is likely to be more strongly endorsed in Africa than in Anglo-Saxon societies. Furthermore, among various leadership styles, HOL, presented here as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership, could be regarded as the most effective leadership style in Africa.

1 H10: Worldwide leaders who display humanness are deemed effective. H1a: Humanness and leader effectiveness is primarily a Sub-Sahara African (S-SA) link.
2 H20: HOL is endorsed in S-SA as much as in the West (the Anglo cluster). H2a: HOL is endorsed more in S-SA than in the West (the Anglo cluster).
3 H30: HOL is ranked as the most effective leadership style in both S-SA and in the West (the Anglo cluster). H3a: HOL is ranked as more effective as a leadership style in S-SA compared to the West (the Anglo cluster).

The alternative hypotheses may point to several matters, including that Ubuntu is a universal concept, with little variation across regions, making Ubuntu not uniquely African. The alternative hypotheses may also expose the importance of Ubuntu as a leadership style in Africa, and its ranking across the globe.

METHODOLOGY

Design

Cross-sectional survey data, as collected under the supervision of the Globe Coordinating Team, with R. J. House as principal investigator (House et al., 2004), were analysed. The data used comes from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004), Chapter 18 (Humane orientation in societies, organizations, and leader attributes) and Dorfman et al. (2004) report, in Chapter 21 (Leadership and cultural variation: The identification of culturally endorsed leadership profiles) of the GLOBE study.

Data collection

Data collection in the GLOBE study involved a multi-phase process of collecting quantitative survey data, where researchers gathered information from over 17 370 middle managers across 951 organisations and 62 countries (House et al., 2004). At the country level, country co-investigators collected data.

Measurement

Leadership orientations were measured with the GLOBE Leader Attributes and Behaviour Questionnaire (LABQ). The LABQ includes 112 items, spanning 21 leadership subscales and six global leaders' behaviour dimensions. The six leadership dimensions identified in the GLOBE study are charismatic/value-based, team-oriented, participative, humane-oriented, autonomous and self-protective leadership (House & Javidan, 2004).

HOL is the primary focus of this study. Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) report that HOL is characterised by being concerned about others, being sensitive towards others, being friendly and tolerating mistakes. The following is a sample question: "Effective leaders in this culture are [very compassionate and supportive / not at all

compassionate and supportive]". Practices were measured on a seven-point scale (Hanges & Dickson, 2004), where a low score reflects behaviour or characteristics that greatly inhibit a person from being an outstanding leader and a high score reflects behaviour or characteristics that contribute greatly to a person being an outstanding leader.

Reliability and validity

The reliability and validity of the data will be presented in the results section of the paper.

Analyses

The analyses conducted to assess the perceived effectiveness of the HOL was an inspection of Table 18.16 from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004). Mean scores and standard deviation (SD) are reported per cultural cluster (N=61). The presented data in the abovementioned table can be interpreted directly to address the first hypothesis. Should the means not be the same, H10 could be rejected. H1a could be accepted, should the S-SA countries have the highest mean.

To quantify mean differences, S-SA's standing compared to the rest of the world, Cohen's d-values ($d = Mean^1\text{-}Mean^2 / ((SD^1 + SD^2)/2)$) (Cohen, 1988) were calculated. This determines if the mean groups differed on a practical level, thus practical significance (Kirk, 1996), reflecting meaningful real-world differences and implications. The guideline followed for effect sizes was that d .2 was considered negligible, d between .2 and .5 indicated subtle but real differences, d between .5 and .8 was classified as moderate, and d>.8 represented large and practically significant differences (Cohen, 1988). Does S-SA have a higher mean than the rest of the world? The rest of the world's mean, SD and minimum and maximum scores on HOL were found in Table 18.15a, from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004), which allowed for comparison.

To compare S-SA with the Anglo cluster, the effect size of the difference between the Anglo cluster and the world mean, as well as the difference between the Anglo and S-SA clusters were determined. In this case, Cohen's d-values were calculated again.

For H20, the practical significance of the difference between the Anglo and S-SA clusters was decisive.

Data captured in Table 21.5 (Dorfman et al., 2004) were used to address H30. Here, the S-SA cluster was contrasted to the Anglo cluster. The analyses simply involved an inspection of the table that represented the endorsement of different leadership styles in both clusters.

Ethical considerations

The GLOBE study's results are open to all interested parties and are referenced in this document extensively (see House et al., 2004). No data were collected specific to this research and existing data, from the GLOBE study were analysed. At a university level, the use of this secondary data was approved by the local ethics committee: 2022_SBL_AC_001_SD.

RESULTS

Results are presented below, first focusing on the demographics and the psychometric matters, and then on the results related to the set hypotheses.

Sample

The sample constituted 17 370 middle managers (1 943 from phase 1 and 15 427 from phase 2) across 951 organisations and 62 countries (Hanges, 2004).

Reliability and validity

Hanges and Dickson (2004, p. 137) report internal consistency of .76 and interrater reliability of .93 for the HOL part of the LABQ. Hanges and Dickson (2004, p. 145) report that the instruments developed represent "culturally shared implicit theories of leadership" and that scales were found to be aggregatable, unidimensional and that "evidence for construct validity of the cultural scales was provided from several sources".

Descriptive statistics

Only data pertaining to HOL (assessed with LABQ) is presented as this was the focus of the study. For the total sample, the HOL mean score was 4.89 (Standard deviation (SD)=.40, minimum=3.82, maximum=5.75, n=61) on a seven-point scale, where low values indicate that the set behaviour or characteristics inhibit a person from being an outstanding leader and high scores reflect that the behaviour or characteristics contribute to a person being an outstanding leader. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Perceived effectiveness scores for humane-orientated leadership (HOL)

Cultural cluster	Mean	SD	Rank
Anglo: United States, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa (white sample), New Zealand.	5.08	.19	3
Latin Europe: France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (French- and Italian-speaking regions).	4.45	.33	9
Nordic Europe: Denmark, Finland, Sweden.	4.42	.27	10
Germanic Europe: Austria, Germany (former East and West), Netherlands, Switzerland (German-speaking regions).	4.71	.19	7
Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Bolivia.	4.85	.18	5
Eastern Europe: Greece, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Albania, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Slovenia.	4.76	.53	7
S-SA: Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Nigeria, South Africa (Black sample).	5.16	.25	2
Middle East: Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Kuwait, Qatar.	4.80	.45	6
Confucian Asia: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan.	5.04	.26	4
Southern Asia: India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand.	5.38	.24	1

Source: Adapted from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004, p. 591). Note: N=61; Though counterintuitive, Iran forms part of the Southern Asia cluster (see Gupta and Hanges (2004)).

From Table 1, it can be observed that HOL is revered across the globe, at various levels, with S-SA scoring relatively high. S-SA, the cradle of Ubuntu, had a mean score of 5.14, with a standard deviation of .25. Using this data, and the overall mean score, Cohen's d-value ($d=Mean^{Total}-Mean^{S-SA} / ((SD^{Total}+^{SDS-SA})/2)$= (4.89-5.16 / (.40+.25)/2) =-.76, which indicates a moderate and very close to large effect (Cohen, 1988). S-SA scored higher than the world population. It can also be observed that S-SA has the second-highest mean, just behind Southern Asia, with the Anglo cluster in position number three. From these results, hypothesis 1 could be addressed: H10 could be rejected as we can see in Table 1 that mean scores differ, and it was calculated, then in some instances, S-SA versus the total, these differences are significant. However, H1a could not be accepted as Southern Asia, more than S-SA, displayed an appreciation of HOL as being effective.

Comparing the Anglo cluster with the world mean ($d=Mean^{Total}-Mean^{Anglo} / ((SD^{Total}+ SD^{Anglo})/2)$= (4.89-5.08 / (.40+.19)/2)=-.64), the difference is also practically significant. Thus, the Anglo mean was moderately higher than the world mean. More importantly for hypothesis 2 is that the difference between S-SA and the Anglo cluster was significant ($d = Mean^{S-SA}-Mean^{Anglo} / ((SD^{S-SA}+SD^{Anglo})/2)$ = (5.16-5.08 / (.25+.19)/2)=.36). The difference was subtle (Cohen, 1988). Thus, S-SA scored higher than the Anglo cluster. H20, “HOL is endorsed in S-SA as much as in the West (the Anglo cluster)” could thus be rejected, and H2a, “HOL is endorsed more in S-SA than in the West (the Anglo cluster)”, should be endorsed.

Table 2 presents the relative rankings of different leadership styles, comparing S-SA, with the Anglo cluster. Is, as suggested with hypothesis 3, HOL the preferred leadership style in Sub-Sahara Africa?

Table 2:

Leadership scores for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo cluster

Cluster	Dimensions					
	Charismatic/ value-based	Team-oriented	Participative	Humane orientation	Autonomous	Self-protective
S-SA	5.79	5.70	5.31	5.16	3.63	3.55
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6
Anglo	6.05	5.74	5.73	5.08	3.82	3.08
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Adapted from Dorfman et al. (2004 p. 680).

From Table 2 it can be observed that HOL is not ranked as the leadership style most often seen as indicative of effective leadership in S-SA, nor in the Anglo cluster. In fact, it only ranked fourth, behind charismatic/value-based, team-oriented and participative leadership. It is interesting to note that the ranking from S-SA mirrored, without exception, that of the Anglo cluster, the cluster often used to contrast African values. Thus, H30 (HOL is ranked as the most effective leadership style in both S-SA and in the West (the Anglo cluster) should be rejected. However, H3a (HOL is ranked as more effective as a leadership style in S-SA compared to the West (the Anglo cluster), cannot be accepted. What should be concluded is that HOL is not the preferred leadership style in S-SA, nor in the Anglo cluster, and that counterintuitively, the Anglo cluster mirrors the S-SA cluster.

DISCUSSION

The study explored the prevalence of HOL within the context of the S-SA, with HOL, as measured by the GLOBE study, as a proxy for Ubuntu. Ubuntu is presented as a distinctive cultural trait endemic to African societies, particularly among indigenous populations of S-SA. Comparisons were also drawn with the Anglo countries, given our familiarity with the English language and culture and the extent to which it is promoted via the mass media and its prominence in the globalisation movement.

Data was collected from 17 370 middle managers across 951 organisations and 62 countries (Hanges, 2004). The result of the study is based on the HOL data provided.

Dorfman et al. (2004) and Kabasakal and Bodur (2004), embedded in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004), a highly influential study, cited more than 5 760 times (Google Scholar, 2025). HOL data proved to be reliable and valid (Hanges & Dickson, 2004).

The analyses of the data involved the inspection of tables, adapted from the original authors (Dorfman et al., 2004; Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004), and organised in such a manner as to address the set hypotheses. To advance a more statistical manner to interpret the mean differences reported in the tables, Cohen's d-values were calculated. This allowed for the comparison of mean differences, expressed in shared SD. The analyses exposed practically significant differences, more important than statistically significant differences (Kirk, 1996), which can easily occur when the sample size is large, as was the case here.

Regarding hypothesis 1 (H10: Worldwide leaders who display humanness are deemed effective. H1a: Humanness and leader effectiveness is primarily a Sub-Sahara African (S-SA) link.), the null hypothesis could be rejected. Table 1 shows large differences between clusters, with the highest score for Southern Asia (Mean=5.38; SD=.24) and the lowest for Nordic Europe (Mean=4.42; SD=.27). The alternative hypothesis could however not be accepted, particularly with the claim that Ubuntu is an exclusively African concept. Southern Asia scored higher than S-SA and many regions had HOL scores above zero. However, S-SA scored high on HOL, with a large effect, indicating that, compared to the rest of the world, S-SA is more HOL orientated than most other regions. This tarnishes thoughts that Ubuntu is an exclusively African way, forwarded by Mboti (2015), Mbiti (1990 [1969]), Metz (2017; 2021) and Ramose (2002; 2015). Ubuntu is a way, high in Africa, but not exclusively.

With hypothesis 2 (H20: HOL is endorsed in S-SA as much as in the West (the Anglo cluster). H2a: HOL is endorsed more in S-SA than in the West (the Anglo cluster)), a practically significant difference between the means of S-SA and the Anglo states were found (d=.36). The difference was subtle (Cohen, 1988). The null hypothesis could be rejected and the alternative embraced: HOL is endorsed more in S-SA than in the West (the Anglo cluster). From an African perspective, it could be said that, compared

to the Western world, S-SA is most exposed to (the Anglo cluster) and Africans are more inclined to Ubuntu.

The results in Table 2 address hypothesis 3 (H30: HOL is ranked as the most effective leadership style in both S-SA and in the West (the Anglo cluster). H3a: HOL is ranked as more effective as a leadership style in S-SA compared to the West (the Anglo cluster)). Inspection of the table reveals that HOL was not ranked as the most effective leadership style in S-SA or the Anglo cluster. H30 could thus be rejected. However, H3a could not be embraced as charismatic/value-based leadership was most endorsed in S-SA and HOL was only fourth in the line of six leadership styles.

S-SA and the Anglo cluster scored very similarly on the leadership styles. After proofing that S-SA scores higher on HOL compared to the Anglo cluster (H2), it can be observed that preferred leadership styles mirror each other on all six leadership styles. Two aspects of the results pertaining to H2 are important. As stated, HOL is not perceived as the most effective leadership style among S-SA managers. This implies that other leadership styles were selected as being more effective. Secondly, charismatic value-based was selected as the most effective by S-SA respondents, and the least effective, the self-protective leadership, which could well be interpreted as an aversion to individualism – often associated with Western culture. However, what is perceived as effective and ineffective in S-SA is also perceived as effective and ineffective in the Anglo region (see Table 2). These results were surprising, and it could well be asked if this is the effect of colonisation, WEIRD influences (Henrich et al., 2010a, 2010b; Jones, 2010), the mass media (Castells, 2000; Scheuerman, 2023) or are effective leadership styles universally?

CONCLUSION

The study supports the argument that Ubuntu embodies a strong humane orientation in African cultures, particularly in S-SA, where the indigenous people demonstrate higher humane orientation scores compared to Western populations (Gade, 2012; Kamwangamalu, 1999). However, while the findings highlight humane orientation as central to African identity, they also revealed that this value may not be exclusive to Africa, as similar high scores were observed in other global clusters. This calls into

question the cultural specificity of humane orientation and suggests a shared global dimension, as reported in the GLOBE study (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004).

Though Ubuntu, expressed as HOL, is prominent in Africa, HOL is not the primary leadership style associated with effectiveness in S-SA. Managers who use other leadership styles were deemed more successful. Humane orientation is on the lower part of the chart when Africans rank leadership styles' effectiveness. Why would Ubuntu not be preferred? Also, why would the Anglo and African preferences be so similar? Is specific leadership universally effective? And if so, should calls for decolonisation (Betts, 2012; Minga, 2021; Molefe, 2022) imply the elevation of Ubuntu to a principal leadership style then not detract from what is known to be effective leaders?

To conclude:

> *Humane-orientated leadership (Ubuntu leadership) is not unique to Africa, it is not seen as the most effective leadership style to adopt in Africa, and African perception of effective leadership mirrors those of people living in the (Anglo) West.*

Limitations

The scope of the available data was limited as only five Sub-Saharan African countries were included. Additionally, the West was represented solely by the Anglo cluster, which comprised only English-speaking nations, excluding Germanic, Latin and Nordic Europe—regions also associated with the West. That said, in countries such as South Africa, Zimbabwe and Zambia, the Anglo influence has historically played a more significant role in shaping society than broader European influences.

With regard to the measurement instrument, the GLOBE team has acknowledged potential biases in their methodologies (House et al., 2004). However, these are not indicative of flawed work but rather a humble recognition of the inherent imperfections in human endeavour. It should, however, be acknowledged that the GLOBE study has Western underpinnings and applies Western standards in measuring HOL, whereas Ubuntu could be assessed on different terms, drawing on African epistemologies or participatory field research.

A possible limitation could be the use of HOL as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership. While these concepts are not identical, the authors believe that the literature section provides sufficient evidence to support the convergence between the constructs. It should, however, be acknowledged that Ubuntu is philosophically broader than a leadership style, as Metz (2011, 2021) frames it as an ontology encompassing ethical and relational dimensions. The reliance on HOL as a stand-in for Ubuntu risks conceptual flattening.

One potential criticism of this study is its reliance on data from 2004. However, the dataset remains highly valuable due to its depth, uniqueness and the lack of comparable studies since its collection. If cultural values and practices evolve gradually, as suggested by Inglehart and Baker (2000), the findings may still hold relevance today. Conversely, if significant cultural shifts have occurred, the study should be viewed as a historical snapshot, offering insights from a rare and comprehensive dataset.

Future research

The collection of new data using the GLOBE instruments is recommended to provide updated insights. This would allow for an examination of current values and behaviours, as well as comparisons with past trends. While the results from GLOBE 2020 are not yet available (see GLOBE Project), they should be incorporated into future research as soon as they are published.

This article focused on HOL as an indicator of Ubuntu leadership. Future studies could adopt a broader approach by incorporating other indicators of Ubuntu, such as institutional collectivism, which assesses the extent to which resource sharing and collective action are encouraged and rewarded (Gelfand et al., 2004) in the analyses. Institutional collectivism could serve as an additional proxy for Ubuntu leadership.

Furthermore, this research engages with philosophical debates on the interplay between globalisation (including Western influence), decolonisation (which often emphasises emic perspectives) and efficiency. Addressing these complex issues will likely require interdisciplinary approaches, combining insights from cultural studies, political philosophy and organisational behaviour.

DECLARATIONS

Author contribution

Conceptualisation, RS and PM; methodology, RS and PM; validation, PM; formal analysis, RS; investigation, RS; resources and data curation, RS; writing – original draft preparation, RS; writing – review and editing, PM; supervision, PM. RS and PM have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The data used in this article is publicly available in the published articles used to inform this study. No new data were created.

Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

ChatGPT (December 2024 version) was used as an aid to improve sentence construction and grammar in the text.

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Article 9: Ubuntu as an emic belief system: A quantitative analysis of humane orientated practices

Ubuntu as an emic belief system: A quantitative analysis of humane orientated practices

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Abstract: Introduction: Ubuntu is often described as African humanness, uniquely rooted in Southern African cultures and distinct from practices like performance orientation, which is typically associated with Anglo-Saxon cultures. Aim: This research aims to determine whether humane orientation, as measured in the GLOBE study, is more prevalent in indigenous African societies compared to other regions globally. Method: Data from the GLOBE study was analysed to assess the extent to which humane orientation is emic to Africa, Southern Africa, and specifically, the indigenous people of South Africa. Mean scores for humane orientation were used for comparative analyses across regions, countries and within South Africa. Results: More African countries scored higher than the world mean on humane orientation. Among the 10 regional clusters identified in the GLOBE study, Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the second-highest humane orientation score. However, significant differences in humane orientation were found across Africa, indicating it is not uniformly endorsed. Within South Africa, black South Africans, more than white South Africans, perceived their society's practices as humane oriented. Discussion: The findings confirm a strong link between humane orientation and Africa, particularly when compared to the Anglo-Saxon cluster. Nonetheless, humane orientation is not exclusive to Africa and is observed in other parts of the world. Additionally, Africa itself is marked by diverse worldviews, with variations in the endorsement of humane orientation. Contribution: This research contributes empirical and quantitative evidence to support the argument that humane orientation, per proxy an essential part of Ubuntu, forms an integral part of being African. The study also provides empirical evidence of the presence of humane orientation outside Africa. Lastly, the research emphasises Africa's cultural diversity.

Keywords: African humanness, Emic framework, GLOBE study, Humane orientation, Ubuntu

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1. Introduction

Ubuntu is often described as a form of African humanness, deeply rooted in Southern African traditions (Allais, 2022; Udom, 2024). While interpretations of Ubuntu vary, there is broad scholarly consensus that it embodies a uniquely African philosophy (Mbigi & Maree, 2005; Metz, 2020), especially when contrasted with the individualistic values commonly associated with Western thought systems (Gaim & Clegg, 2021; Nkomo, 2011). However, despite widespread claims that Ubuntu represents a distinctly African worldview, these claims are most often presented by philosophers (Molefe, 2024; Ntibagirirwa, 2024), politicians (Omodan, 2022; Risimati, 2023), and supported by qualitative research (Abubakre et al., 2021; Mickson Kayuni & Tambulasi, 2012), while empirical evidence supporting a higher prevalence of Ubuntu among African populations remains limited (Grobler & Koen, 2024; Muller et al., 2019). The predominantly qualitative origins of these claims raise important questions about the uniqueness or universality of Ubuntu across regions and invite closer examination of the African underpinning of Ubuntu.

This research aims to examine whether humane orientation, as a proxy to Ubuntu, and as conceptualised and measured in the GLOBE study, is more prevalent among indigenous African populations than among those from other regions. The use of humane orientation as a proxy is tolerable, as it is closely associated with Ubuntu. Some even refer to Ubuntu as African humanness (Gathogo, 2008; Metz, 2021; Murove, 2012) or African humanism (Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sibanda, 2014; Tschaepe, 2013). Exploring the unique bond between Ubuntu and Africa could offer valuable insights into African cultural identity and enrich our understanding of African societies.

2. Literature review

This section addresses the two central concepts of this research: Ubuntu and humanness. The literature review aims to highlight the overlap and differences between these concepts, and ultimately demonstrates the appropriateness of humanness as a proxy to Ubuntu.

2.1. Ubuntu

The concept of Ubuntu has been defined in numerous ways. Mboti (2015, pp. 126-127), for instance, notes that after analysing 23 separate definitions of Ubuntu, "the settled definition of choice seems to always return, again and again, to the saying 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' (in Nguni languages), 'motho ke motho ka batho' (in Sotho languages), 'a person is a person through other persons' (in English), and so on. Other variations such as 'I am because we are' are also advanced." Along this line, John Mbiti (1990 [1969]) states about Ubuntu that "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am'" (p. 106).

These descriptions are on a higher philosophical level, and tell the reader little about Ubuntu on a practical level. However, some scholars explain Ubuntu in more descriptive terms. Kamwangamalu (1999) suggests that Ubuntu embodies qualities such as respect for all people, human dignity, sharing, obedience, humility, solidarity, caring, hospitality, interdependence, and communalism. Eliastam (2015, p. 4) includes terms like hospitality, compassion, humanness, sharing, and respect as central to discussions of Ubuntu. Letseka (2013, p. 339) emphasizes that "Ubuntu implies the capacity in African cultures to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony, and humanity." Similarly, Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013, p. 673) define Ubuntu as "the capacity in an African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, humanity, and mutuality in the interests of building and maintaining communities with justice and mutual caring."

What should be noted from the latter descriptions is the emphasis that these qualities relate to an African way of being. Tellingly, Mbiti (1990 [1969]) describes Ubuntu as "the African view of man". Similarly, Thaddeus Metz (20i7; 2021) and Mogobe Ramose (2002; 2015), who are regarded as key thinkers on the subject (Taylor, 2023) elaborate on the Africanness of Ubuntu. In the Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research, Metz (2021) explains that Ubuntu denotes humanness: "To have ubuntu is to be a person who is living a genuinely human way of life, whereas to lack ubuntu is to be missing human excellence or to live like an animal. It is common for black people indigenous to the African continent to believe that one's basic aim in life should be to exhibit ubuntu, … " (no page). Ramose (2015) adds that botho/hunhu/ubuntu (concepts expressed in African languages) reflect humanness, where "it means that to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others and, on that basis, establish humane relations with them" (p. 70).

The essence of these statements and definitions provided above is that Ubuntu is seen as distinctly African and that humanity and humaneness form an integral part of defining Ubuntu.

2.2. Humanness

The concept of "humanness" has been explored by various philosophers throughout history, often touching on what it means to be human, the qualities that define humanity, and the moral obligations we have as human beings. Some of the earliest contributions come from ancient philosophers like Aristotle, who emphasised the rational nature of humans as central to their humanness. For Aristotle, being human was about fulfilling one's potential through reason and virtuous action, a concept rooted in his notion of eudaimonia (flourishing or well-being) (Aristotle, 350 BCE in Kraut, 2023). Immanuel Kant's philosophy focused on human dignity and autonomy, arguing that humans are ends in themselves and should not be treated merely as means to an end. For Kant (1785), humanness involves the capacity for moral reasoning, where individuals act in accordance with moral laws derived from reason, a perspective that significantly influences contemporary understandings of human rights (Johnson & Cureton, 2024). Existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1943) offered a different view, suggesting that humanness is not defined by inherent qualities but is instead created through individual choice and action. Sartre's concept of existence preceding essence emphasises that humans are not born with a predetermined nature, but rather create their own essence through their choices, actions, and responsibility (Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024). In

more contemporary terms, philosophers like Martha Nussbaum (1993) focus on capabilities as an integral aspect of humanness. She suggests that human flourishing involves developing and exercising fundamental capabilities that allow individuals to function fully within society. It seems that philosophers focus on the individual's virtues when explaining humanness, and on virtues of individuals when interacting in their societies, but with little reference to the reciprocal elements embedded in Ubuntu.

2.3. The GLOBE study

In the GLOBE (Global Leadership and Organisational Behaviour Effectiveness) study, humane orientation is one of the key cultural dimensions that affect individuals' behaviour (House et al., 2004), with the other elements being power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, and performance orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). In the GLOBE study, the definition of humanness is broader than the philosophical understanding of humanness, as described above. According to the GLOBE study, "humane orientation" refers to the degree to which a culture encourages and rewards individuals for being fair, altruistic, friendly, generous, caring, and kind to others (House et al., 2004). GLOBE highlights societal values related to compassion, tolerance, and concern for the well-being of others as elements of humanness. The GLOBE study's definition goes beyond the individualist focus and embraces moral responsibilities toward one another as being part of a group, and the GLOBE definition is well aligned with Ubuntu, Eliastam (2015), Kamwangamalu (1999), Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013), and Letseka (2013), mentioned above.

2.4. Ubuntu, humanness and the GLOBE study

The concepts of Ubuntu and the GLOBE study's humane orientation are well aligned, with both emphasising compassion, generosity, and the intrinsic value of communal relationships. Ubuntu stresses that one's humanity is realised through others, which resonates strongly with the GLOBE study's humane orientation, where fairness, kindness, and concern for the well-being of others are culturally valued traits (House et al., 2004). In contrast, traditional philosophers like Aristotle, Kant, and Sartre discuss humanness from different angles. For Aristotle, humanness is defined through rationality and virtuous action; for Kant, it revolves around autonomy and moral reasoning; and for Sartre, humanness is created through individual choice and responsibility (Kraut, 2023; Johnson & Cureton, 2024; Reynolds & Renaudie, 2024). These philosophical perspectives centre on the individual as a self-contained being whose humanness is shaped through personal virtues, autonomy, or existential choices, differing from Ubuntu and GLOBE's emphasis on interdependence and shared humanity. It should thus be noted Ubuntu and humanness, as defined by the GLOBE study, are proxies, valuing communal care and kindness, and are contrasted with traditional philosophical views on humanness, which focus more on individual moral development or self-definition.

2.5. Humanness as a distinctly African concept

In the discussion of Ubuntu it was emphasised that Ubuntu could be seen as humane orientation, and that societies, such as Africa, could be contrasted to societies with a lower humane orientation (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004), where performance orientation, for example, may be more practised (Javidan et al., 2004). Such comparisons are widespread, and research fields such as cross-cultural psychology and global leadership are based on these comparisons (Bosson et al., 2021; Lansford, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). An African comparison with the Anglo-Saxon cluster is particularly relevant, given calls for decolonisation (Betts, 2012; Minga, 2021; Molefe, 2022).and critique that the scientific world is preoccupied with westernised, educated, industrialised, wealthy, and democratic societies (WEIRD) constructs, and that constructs and meaning should not be assumed to be universal (Dong & Dumas, 2020; Ludeke & Larsen, 2017; Spector et al., 2015), nor in Africa (Ndofirepi & Steyn, 2023; Steyn, 2023).

By specifying humanness, as used within the GLOBE study, as distinctly African, Mbigi and Maree (2005) and Metz (2020) profess that it may contribute to the understanding of Ubuntu from a typological perspective, where humanness is presented as a dominant way of life in Africa. It could be argued that since Ubuntu is presented as a prominent ideology in Africa, humane orientation should be a dominant practice among its citizens, more so than in any other geographical region. Given the aforementioned information, and considering the data available from the GLOBE study, two hypotheses were set:

1. Worldwide, humane orientation is equally displayed in practice. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practiced more in Africa.

2. All people from Africa have an equal inclination toward the practice of humane orientation. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practised differently among Africans.

These hypotheses will shed light on how African people practise a uniquely humane orientation, presented as a proxy for Ubuntu.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Design

Cross-sectional survey data, collected under the supervision of the Globe Coordinating Team, with R. J. House as principal investigator (House et al., 2004), was analysed. The data was presented by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) in Chapter 18 (Humane orientation in societies, organisations, and leader attributes) of the GLOBE study.

3.2. Data collection

Data collection in the GLOBE study involved a multi-phase process of collecting quantitative survey data, from 17 370 middle managers, across 951 organisations and 61 countries (House et al., 2004). At country level, carefully selected and well- trained country co-investigators collected data.

3.3. Measurement

The GLOBE's Societal and Organisational Culture Questionnaire (SOCQ) was used to measure humane orientation. The SOCQ measures nine aspects of culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation. The focus of this study was humane orientation only, which reflects how societies enact kindness, generosity, and sensitivity toward others (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). SOCQ captures the "as is" (practices) and "should be" (values) aspects of humane orientation, and how these materialise in societies in general, as well as in organisations. Based on the limited data reported by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) on some of the aspects measured, this paper focused on societal practices of humane orientation only, the aspect most comprehensively reported on.

Sample items on humane orientated practices in societies, presented by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004, p. 571), are as follows: "In this society, people are generally [not at all concerned about others / very concerned about others]." "In this society, people are generally [not at all sensitive toward others / very sensitive toward others]." These practices are measured on a 7-point scale, where high scores are indicative of the presence of humane orientated practices in society.

3.4. Reliability and validity

Interrater correlations of .69 and a reliability estimate of .81 (based on the Spearman-Brown Prophecy Formula) for humane orientation (Gupta et al., 2004) reflect acceptable reliability. As far as validity is concerned, Gupta et al. (2004) report satisfactory construct validity for all the GLOBE surveys, with Hanges and Dickson (2004, p. 145) specifying that the scales developed were found to be aggregatable, unidimensional, and that "evidence for construct validity of the cultural scales was provided from several sources".

3.5. Analyses

The analyses conducted to assess the Africanness of humane orientation practices focused on reported mean scores, and in some cases the standard deviation (SD), when it was reported. The mean and SD for the total sample (N=61) are available (see Table 18.4a in Kabasakal and Bodur (2004)). Country-level data is also available (See Table 18.4b in Kabasakal and Bodur (2004)), but only mean scores and no SDs are presented. Some interpretable data is presented in Table 18.4b, where data is presented in the form of different bands, typical of a post facto test following an ANOVA test, where the mean in band A differs significantly from band B, B from C, and so forth. Lastly, data per cultural cluster on the prevalence of humane orientation practises was also available (see Table 18.4c in Kabasakal and Bodur (2004)). Here, mean scores and SDs are available.

Some data, presented in the abovementioned tables, can be interpreted directly to address the research questions. For example, should all African countries be in band A (as per table 18.4b), it should provide convincing evidence that humane orientation is dominant in Africa. In this case, the Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) table would be reproduced and aspects bolded / highlighted to ease interpretation.

The primary analysis done for the study involved calculating Cohen's d-values (d = Mean1-Mean2 / ((SD1 + SD2)/2) (Cohen, 1988) to determine if the means groups differed on a practical level. In cases where SDs were unavailable, the SDs from the relevant larger groups were used. Cohen's d-values around d ≈ 0.2 suggest subtle

but real differences. A medium effect is approximately d ≈ 0.5, indicating a moderate, noticeable difference. A large effect is d ≈ 0.8 or higher, reflecting a substantial and often practically significant difference (Cohen, 1988).

With regard to hypothesis 1 (worldwide, humane orientation is equally displayed in practice. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practised more in Africa), the following analysis was performed:

1. Country-level mean scores, as per Table 18.4b, were inspected to find out if African countries consistently had higher mean scores than most of the other countries. If all African countries are in the high band, band A, it should constitute convincing evidence that humane orientation is dominant in Africa.

2. To elevate the analysis beyond the mere inspection of a table, Cohen's d-test was performed to quantify the extent to which individual African countries differed from the mean of the rest of the world. As country-level SDs are not presented by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004), country-level SDs were replaced with the total group SD. As such, d was calculated with the following equation: d = MeanTotal-MeanCountry / SDTotal. Should African countries score significantly higher than the total mean, it would be indicative of humanness being a dominant philosophy in Africa.

3. In Table 18.4c, Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) provide means and SDs on the prevalence of humane orientation practises data per cultural cluster. Here, data on the Sub-Saharan Africa (S-SA) cluster, representing four of the six African counties, is reflected. Should inspection reveal that the S-SA cluster has the highest score, it could be claimed that humane orientated practices are typical of Africa.

4. To elevate the cultural cluster inspection to a quantitative level, three different Cohen's d-tests were performed. In the first case, the S-SA cluster was contrasted with the world's mean, the total sample. All the necessary data was available to calculate Cohen's-d-values. Also, a comparison between S-SA and the Anglo-Saxon cluster was made, as Africa is often contrasted with the Anglo-Saxon part of the West. Here, all data was available to conduct the analysis. Thirdly, the means of indigenous people of South Africa (Blacks of South Africa, which forms part of S-SA, as labelled by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004)) were compared with those of Whites in South Africa (labelled by Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) as belonging to the Anglo-Saxon cultural cluster). As no SD on country level is provided, the SD of S-SA was used for the Black sample, and the Anglo-Saxon SD for the White sample. Should the difference be practically significant, it would be analysed as indicative of the Africanness of humane orientation, compared to the Anglo-Saxon group.

With regard to hypothesis 2 (All people from Africa have an equal inclination toward the practice of humane orientation. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practised differently among Africans) ,the following analyses were performed:

1. Inspection of the country-level mean scores, as per Table 18.4b, could point out the uniformity of the endorsement of humane orientation. Should the African countries be clustered together, with mean scores not far apart, it would provide evidence that humane orientation is practised similarly across Africa.

2. To elevate the analysis beyond the mere inspection of a table, Cohen's d-test was performed by comparing individual African countries with the mean of the rest of the world. Should the d-values of the African countries be similar, it would indicate that humanness is practised uniformly across Africa.

3. As Ubuntu is often presented as an S-SA construct, it could be expected that S-SA countries have scores similar to those of the S-SA cluster on humane orientation. Here, calculating Cohen's d-values could be productive. Small differences in d-values would be an indication of uniformity.

Considering the analyses presented above, multiple results could be considered when dealing with the hypotheses, contributing to the rigour of this study.

3.6. Ethical considerations

The GLOBE study's results are open to all interested parties, and the authors of this paper cite and reference this document extensively (see House et al., 2004). No data was collected specific to this research, and existing data from the GLOBE study was analysed. At university level, the use of this secondary data was approved by the local ethics committee: 2022_SBL_AC_001_SD.

4. Results

The results are presented below, first focusing on sampling and the psychometric matters, descriptive statistics, and then on the results related to the set hypotheses.

4.1. Sample

In total 17 370 middle managers (1 943 from phase 1 and 15 427 from phase 2), across 951 organisations, and 62 countries (Hanges, 2004).

4.2. Reliability and validity

Reliability data validity information is reported under the heading measurement, and this was satisfactory.

4.3. Descriptive statistics

The mean scores for humane orientated practices are presented in Table 1, staring with the country with the highest mean score (top left) and ending with the country with the lowest mean score (bottom right). The countries are grouped into bands, where each band forms a distinct group.

Table 1
Humane orientation practices mean scores – per country

Band A		Band B		Band C		Band C	
Country	Mean	Country	Mean	Country	Mean	Country	Mean
Zambia	5.23	Indonesia	4.69	U.S.A.	4.17	Italy	3.63
Philippines	5.12	Ecuador	4.65	Taiwan	4.11	Poland	3.61
Ireland	4.96	Albania	4.64	Sweden	4.10	Switzerland	3.60
Malysia	4.87	India	4.57	**Nigeria**	4.10	**South Africa**[2]	3.49
Thailand	4.81	Kuwait	4.52	Israel	4.10	Singapore	3.49
Egypt	4.73	Canada	4.49	Bolivia	4.05	Germany[3]	3.40
		Zimbabwe	4.45	Kazakhstan	3.99	France	3.40
		Denmark	4.44	Argentina	3.99	Hungary	3.35
		Qatar	4.42	Mexico	3.98	Greece	3.34
		Costa Rica	4.39	Finland	3.96	Spain	3.32
		China	4.36	**Namibia**	3.96	Germany[4]	3.18
		South Africa[1]	4.34	Turkey	3.94		
		New Zealand	4.32	Russia	3.94		
		Japan	4.30	Switzerland	3.93		
		Australia	4.28	Portugal	3.91		
		Venezuela	4.25	Hong Kong	3.90		
		Iran	4.23	Guatemala	3.89		
		Morocco	4.19	Netherlands	3.86		
		Georgia	4.18	South Koria	3.81		
				Slovenia	3.79		
				Austria	3.72		
				Colombia	3.72		
				England	3.72		
				El Salvador	3.71		
				Brazil	3.66		

Source: Adapted from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004). Note: Humane orientated practices were measured on a 7-point scale. [1] South Africa (Black sample), [2] South Africa (White sample), [3] Germany (East), [4] Germany (West). African countries are **bolded**, and Sub-Saharan African countries **bolded and underlined**.

Table 1 provides information on hypothesis 1. It can be observed from the table that more African countries are in the top two bands than in the lower two bands. However, not all African countries are in the top band. The wide spread of countries does not provide convincing evidence of the uniqueness of human orientation in Africa.

The argument could be quantified if the mean scores of the individual African countries are compared to the rest of the world. Detail on the humane orientation practices in societies for the total sample is presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Summary statistics for humane orientation practice

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Div.	Min.	Max.
Society practices	61	4.09	.74	3.18	5.23

Source: Adapted from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004).

4.4. Analyses of mean differences

The individual African countries' means can now be compared to that of the global mean, and the results do the d-tests are resented in Table 3. In this case, the total sample SD was used as the SD for the individual countries, as Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) do not report SDs per country. These results are presented in Table 3, with $d = Mean^{Total}\text{-}Mean^{Country} / (SD^{Total}+Std.Div^{Total})/2$.

Table 3
Comparison of mean scores

Country	Mean score	Cohen d	Effect
Zambia	5.23	1.54	Large effect
Egypt	4.73	0.86	Large effect
Zimbabwe	4.45	0.48	Moderate effect
South Africa [1]	4.34	0.33	Subtle effect
Morocco	4.19	0.13	Negatable effect
Nigeria	4.10	0.01	Negatable effect
Namibia	3.96	-0.17	Negatable effect
South Africa [2]	3.49	-0.81	Large effect

Note: $Mean^{Total}$=4.09; SD^{Total}=.74. [1] South Africa (Black sample), [2] South Africa (White sample).

Again referring to hypothesis 1, while some of the listed African countries score high on humane orientation, it is not convincing from the results to suggest that African countries score highest on humane orientation. It is also important to note that Ubuntu is frequently presented as a phenomenon endemic to Southern Africa, and Egypt is geographically far from that region. In fact, Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) place Egypt and Morocco in the Middle Eastern cultural cluster.

Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) also provide data on humane orientated practices per cultural clusters, and these are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Humane orientate practices per cultural clusters

Cultural cluster	Mean	Std. Div	Rank
Anglo: United States, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom, Ireland, South Africa (white sample), New Zealand (N=7)	4.20	.49	4
Latin Europe: France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland (French- and Italian-speaking regions).	3.71	.32	9
Nordic Europe: Denmark, Finland, Sweden (N=3)	4.17	.25	5
Germanic Europe: Austria, Germany (former East and West), Netherlands, Switzerland (German-speaking regions) (N=5)	3.55	.27	10
Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Ecuador, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Bolivia (N=10)	4.03	.32	6
Eastern Europe: Greece, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Albania, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Slovenia (N=8)	3.85	.44	8
S-SA: Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, Nigeria, South Africa (Black sample) (N=5)	4.42	.49	2
Middle East: Egypt, Morocco, Turkey, Kuwait, Qatar (N=5)	4.36	.30	3
Confucian Asia: China, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan (N=6)	3.99	.33	7
Southern Asia: India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand (N=6)	4.71	.30	1

Source: Adapted from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004). Note: N=61; Though counterintuitive, Iran forms part of the Southern Asian cluster (see Gupta and Hanges (2004)).

Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) report statistically significant differences in practice scores across cultural clusters. In terms of this study, the S-SA scores were important, with a mean score of 4.42 and an SD of .49. This is the second-highest score, following Southern Asia. Looking at Table 4, it becomes clear that S-SA has the second-highest mean.

Humane orientation is thus a feature in S-SA societies, but not the highest among all cultural clusters. This provides support for not rejection of the null hypothesis.

Using the data in Table 4, and the overall mean score reported in Table 2, the Cohen's d-value ($d = Mean^{Total}-Mean^{S-SA} / ((SD^{Total}+SD^{S-SA})/2)$ = (4.09-4.42 / (.74+.49)/2) = .53, which indicates a moderate effect (Cohen, 1988). S-SA scored moderately higher than the world mean. The result provides little support for the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Next, the S-SA and Anglo-Saxon cluster were compared. The S-SA cluster mean was 4.42 while that of the Anglo cluster was 4.20. Thus, d = 4.42-4.20 / (.49+.49)/2) = .48, which indicates a moderate effect (Cohen, 1988). Thus, compared to the Anglo-Saxon cluster, S-SA is moderately more humane orientated.

The last calculation pertaining to hypothesis 1 was to calculate Cohen's d-values comparing Blacks in South Africa to Whites in South Africa. Here, $d = Mean^{BlackSoutAfricans}-Mean^{WhiteSouthAfricans} / ((SD^{S-SA} +SD^{Anglo})/2)$, which translates to 4.34-3.49 / (.49+.49)/2) = 1.7, which is considered a large effect. Compared to White South Africans, Blacks are, therefore, significantly more humane orientated.

Next to be addressed is hypothesis 2, suggesting that "All people from Africa have an equal inclination toward the practice of humane orientation". Tables 1 and 3 (above) and 5 (below) are relevant to address this hypothesis.

From Table 1, it can be observed that African countries are captured in Bands A, B, C, and D, thus across all bands. This provides sufficient evidence that humane orientation is not practised uniformly across Africa. The results presented in Table 3 affirm the widespread mean scores on humane orientation. The large differences from the total mean scores provide little evidence that the humane orientation is practised uniformly across Africa.

However, should we assume that Ubuntu is unique to S-SA, there may be no significant difference in humane orientated practices across these countries. The odds of uniformity across S-SA compared to Africa at large (including Egypt and Morocco) are better. Again, Cohen's d-values were calculated using the mean scores from Table 1 for country-level scores, and the SD from the S-SA data presented in Table 4. Thus, $d = Mean^{S-SA}-Mean^{Country} / (SD^{S-SA}+ SD^{S-SA})/2$.

However, Kabasakal and Bodur (2004) provide interesting information on humane orientated practices in different bands. The bands represent distinct groups, with Band A being high, Band B above average, C below average and D representing the group with the lowest scores. The results from Kabasakal and Bodur (2004), which include mean scores for the S-SA countries, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Sub-Saharan Africa scores on practices of humane orientation

Country	Mean score	Cohen d	Effect
Zambia	5.23	1.65	Large effect
Zimbabwe	4.45	0.06	Moderate effect
South Africa (Black sample)	4.34	-0.16	Negatable effect
Nigeria	4.10	-0.65	Moderate effect
Namibia	3.96	-0.93	Large effect

Note: $Mean^{S-SA}$=4.42; SD^{S-SA} =.49. The South African White sample was excluded from the analysis, as it is placed in the Anglo-Saxon cluster by Gupta and Hanges (2004).

Table 5 shows that humane orientation practices are notably higher in Zambia, with a large effect size, whilst Zimbabwe's score shows a moderately large effect. The South African Black score was not significantly different from that of the S-SA mean. The Namibian score was practically significantly lower than the rest of S-SA, while that of the Nigerians was moderately lower. The results provided in Table 5 support the rejection of the null hypothesis.

5. Discussion

The study explored the prevalence of humane orientation on the African continent, assuming that humane orientation, as measured by the GLOBE study, serves as a proxy for Ubuntu. The literature review demonstrated that, when considering the definitions provided by Eliastam (2015), Kamwangamalu (1999), Khomba and Kangaude-Ulaya (2013), and Letseka (2013), the concepts are highly similar. However, humane orientation represents only one aspect of Ubuntu; Ubuntu encompasses much more than mere humane orientation.

The methodology relied on cross-sectional survey data from the GLOBE study, using the SOCQ as the measurement tool for assessing humane orientation. Based on the sample items, humane orientation aligns well with Ubuntu, which is indicative of face validity. Gupta et al. (2004) and Hanges and Dickson (2004) reported satisfactory reliability and extensive evidence of (cross-cultural) validity. Thus, the measurement was considered both valid and reliable. The GLOBE study remains one of the most cited studies on cross-cultural matters. It is highly influential, with more than 15 760 citations (Google Scholar, 2024), reflecting researchers' trust in the instruments used.

Data was collected from 17 370 middle managers across 951 organisations in 61 countries (House et al., 2004). The large sample size enabled meaningful cross-country comparisons. Additionally, six African countries and an S-SA cultural cluster (comprising four countries) were included, allowing for comparisons between Africa and the rest of the world. However, the study excluded 48 African countries, limiting its representativeness for the entire continent.

The data analysis involved examining the reported means, ranking African countries, and analysing the results related to the S-SA cultural cluster. These findings were used to draw conclusions about the prominence of humane orientation in Africa relative to the rest of the world, particularly in comparison to the Anglo-Saxon cluster. Cohen's d-tests complemented this analysis to quantify the observed differences.

Regarding Hypothesis 1 (Worldwide, humane orientation is equally displayed in practice. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practised more in Africa), the null hypothesis should be rejected. However, the alternative hypothesis is also not fully supported. While there is considerable variation in humane orientation globally, Africa is not the leading region in this regard. African countries appear scattered across Table 1, rather than ranking consistently at the top. Moreover, the Cohen's d-values in Table 3 indicate inconsistent differences between Africa and the rest of the world. Notably, Egypt – typically associated with the Middle East – ranked high in humane orientation.

Examining cultural clusters, S-SA ranked second-highest, following Southern Asia (Table 5). While Ubuntu would suggest a strong humane orientation in African countries, the aggregated S-SA scores did not position Africa as the dominant region in this regard. Again, the Cohen's d-test showed a moderate difference between S-SA and the rest of the world. Table 4 further confirms that S-SA has the second-highest mean score for humane orientation. While humane orientation is a defining feature of S-SA societies, it is not the highest among all cultural clusters. These findings support the rejection of the general null hypothesis but do not confirm the alternative hypothesis that Africa is dominant in this area. The Cohen's d-test reinforced this conclusion. However, not being the highest does not denounce the fact that humanness is important in Africa. It forms the second-highest cluster, but is not unique. These findings contradict existing literature that describes Ubuntu as an exclusively African framework for understanding behaviour (Mbigi & Maree, 2005; Metz, 2021; Nkomo, 2011).

When comparing Africa to the Anglo-Saxon cluster (a modified hypothesis 1), humane orientation was more prevalent in Africa. The S-SA cluster ranked higher, and the Cohen's d-value also indicated a significant difference between S-SA and the Anglo-Saxon cluster. Thus, in comparison with WEIRD societies, characteristic of Anglo-Saxon countries, Africa emerges as a stronghold of humane orientation – the proxy for Ubuntu. Compared to the Anglo-Saxon cluster, Africa exhibits a stronger orientation toward humane values.

The second hypothesis addressed the universality of humane orientation across Africa (All people from Africa have an equal inclination toward the practice of humane orientation. Alternative hypothesis: Humane orientation is practiced differently among Africans). The results confirmed that humane orientation practices vary significantly across African countries and even within the S-SA region. Africans are not uniform in their practice of humane orientation, just as the stereotype of Africa's uniformity has long been debunked (Faloyin, 2022; Lansford, 2022; Odimegwu & Adewoyin, 2022). Therefore, while Africans – including this author – acknowledge these differences, academics, politicians, and philosophers should be careful in portraying Africans as sharing a singular exemplary attribute, such as the humane orientation or Ubuntu.

6. Conclusion

The study supports the argument that humane orientation, the proxy to Ubuntu, is prevalent in African cultures, more than in most other regions. While the results highlight humane orientation as central to African identity, they also reveal that these practices are not exclusive to Africa, as even higher scores are found in Southern Asia. Africa's indigenous populations exhibit higher humane orientation scores compared to Western populations, as reported in earlier studies (Gade, 2012; Kamwangamalu, 1999). This research affirms that the notion of humane orientation is geographically or culturally specific and suggests that it manifests differently across various countries and

cultural clusters (Kabasakal & Bodur, 2004). However, despite the geographical link with humane orientation, large diversity was prevalent in Africa, and even in S-SA.

Humane orientation (Ubuntu) is not unique to Africa, nor is it uniformly practised across Africa.

The study has several limitations, including its reliance on secondary GLOBE data and the fact that some data – particularly standard deviations – had to be replaced with aggregated scores, which may have affected the accuracy of the calculations. The scope of the available data was also limited, as only six out of 54 African countries were included. Furthermore, the GLOBE team has acknowledged potential biases in their methodologies (House et al., 2004), which should be acknowledged.

Perhaps the most significant limitation is the use of humane orientation as a proxy for Ubuntu. This article focused on humanness as an indicator of Ubuntu. However, in the GLOBE study several possible proxies, such as institutional collectivism (which measures the degree to which collective distribution of resources and collective action are encouraged and rewarded (Gelfand et al., 2004)), could also be seen as a better / alternative proxy to Ubuntu. Along similar lines, Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023) call for a nuanced understanding of cultural values, noting that Ubuntu can be interpreted as a context-specific expression of collectivism in South Africa. In this light, a similarly nuanced interpretation of African humaneness may also be valuable.

The study may also be criticised for relying on data from 2004. However, given the uniqueness and also the richness of the dataset, and the absence of similar studies since, this data remains a valuable resource. Should cultural values and practices change slowly, which is sometimes true (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), the results could still be relevant today. However, if this assumption proves incorrect, the study may instead be regarded as a historical reflection, providing insights from a unique and comprehensive dataset.

The collection of new data using the GLOBE instruments to provide up-to-date findings is recommended. Present values and behaviours could then be studied, as well as comparisons made to what was prevalent in the past. However, this would be a very expensive endeavour, requiring substantial funding. This article focused on humanness as an indicator of Ubuntu. Further investigations could use multiple indicators of Ubuntu, including institutional collectivism as conceptualised in the GLOBE study, to offer a more complex and nuanced understanding of Ubuntu and its uniquely African nature.

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Article 10: Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo world

Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo world

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Abstract

Background: Ubuntu is traditionally viewed as an emic value system rooted in sub-Saharan Africa and often contrasted with the more individualistic values of the Anglo cultural cluster.

Aim: This study assesses whether Ubuntu values are uniquely associated with sub-Saharan Africa by comparing them to those found in Anglo countries. It contributes to debates on the recognition of indigenous worldviews in post-colonial identity and decolonisation.

Method: Using data from the 2025 World Values Survey, responses from three sub-Saharan and three Anglo cluster countries were analysed. Eighteen survey items were identified as proxies for Ubuntu values.

Results: Of the 18 items, Ubuntu-aligned values were more prevalent in African responses in five cases, less prevalent in eight, and showed no significant difference in five.

Discussion: The findings suggest that while Ubuntu elements are evident among sub-Saharan respondents, Anglo participants more often endorsed values aligned with Ubuntu. This challenges assumptions about Ubuntu as a distinctly African worldview.

Conclusion: The study offers limited empirical support for the idea that Ubuntu values are uniquely characteristic of sub-Saharan cultures. It calls into question the framing of Ubuntu as a dominant indigenous paradigm within African socio-political discourse.

Keywords: Ubuntu, sub-Saharan Africa, Anglo cluster, World Values Survey, emic values, decolonisation, cultural comparison, communalism, individualism, indigenous knowledge systems

Introduction

Ubuntu, an African philosophy emphasising communal relationships and shared humanity, posits that "I am human only because you are human" (Tutu, 2000). This

concept, strongly endorsed in sub-Saharan Africa (Gade, 2012), underscores the interdependence of individuals within a community, highlighting mutual respect and interconnectedness (Metz, 2011). In contrast, those individuals from an Anglo-Saxon cultural background, comprising mostly English-speaking countries, are characterised by individualism. Mainstream culture in these countries prioritises personal goals and individual rights, viewing individuals as autonomous and self-reliant (House et al., 2004), whilst fostering competitiveness and a focus on personal achievement (Ashkanasy et al., 2001).

Recent discussions highlight a renewed appreciation for Ubuntu's principles as uniquely African solutions provided for African challenges (Bhuda & Marumo, 2022; Molefe & Magam, 2019). However, sub-Saharan Africa's colonial history, particularly under British rule, promoted Western ideologies as superior, marginalising indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu, despite these beliefs' deep roots and influence (Nussbaum, 2003).

The question arises whether Ubuntu and its principles remain prevalent and influential in sub-Saharan Africa. If Ubuntu is indeed emic to the region, steps should be taken to leverage its regionally rooted and beneficial principles, as emic systems are more likely to align with and effectively address local circumstances (Mazonde & Carmichael, 2020; Sadler & Fuller, 2020). The emic nature of Ubuntu will be examined in this study by comparing the values of individuals from sub-Saharan Africa with those from Anglo-Saxon backgrounds. Ubuntu will be considered emic if values associated with the concept are more frequently endorsed by individuals from sub-Saharan Africa than by persons from the Anglo-Saxon world.

Literature review

Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy emphasising communal relationships, interconnectedness, and mutual respect. The term "Ubuntu" is often encapsulated in the phrase, "I am because we are," highlighting the belief that an individual's humanity is inextricably linked to the community (Tshivhase, 2023). Core principles of Ubuntu include compassion, dignity, and shared humanity, which serve as foundational values in many sub-Saharan African societies (Mutanga, 2023). In a comprehensive definition, Steyn and Msweli (2025a) describe Ubuntu as "originating from the Nguni proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' which translates to 'a person is a person through other persons,' embodying an exemplary Southern African way of life or a philosophy, which places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the core of personal development as well as in structuring societal thinking".

As an emic construct, Ubuntu is deeply embedded within the cultural fabric of sub-Saharan Africa. It influences various aspects of life, including social norms, governance, and ethical frameworks. The philosophy underscores the importance of collective well-being over individual gain, fostering a sense of community and social cohesion (Mutanga, 2023). Historically, Ubuntu has played a critical role in conflict resolution and restorative justice practices within African communities (Waghid, 2022).

The Anglo cultural cluster, encompassing countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, is predominantly characterised by individualism.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory identifies individualism versus collectivism as a key differentiator between cultures (Hofstede, 2001). In individualistic societies, personal achievements and autonomy are prioritised, whereas collectivist cultures, like those influenced by Ubuntu, emphasise group harmony and interdependence (Alqarni, 2022). These contrasting orientations manifest in various societal structures, including family dynamics, workplace relationships, and governance systems.

The colonial history of sub-Saharan Africa has significantly impacted indigenous value systems. Colonial powers often imposed Western ideologies, undermining and marginalising local philosophies such as Ubuntu (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). In response, decolonisation efforts have sought to reclaim and revitalise indigenous knowledge systems, advocating for the integration of Ubuntu principles into contemporary African governance and education (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2023). This movement aims to address the lingering effects of colonialism and promote a more authentic representation of African identity and values.

Quantifying culturally embedded constructs like Ubuntu presents methodological challenges. The World Values Survey (WVS) offers a comprehensive dataset that can be utilised to identify proxies for Ubuntu-related values (World Values Survey Association, 2020). However, researchers must exercise caution in selecting appropriate indicators that accurately reflect the multifaceted nature of Ubuntu. Previous studies have employed various survey items to approximate constructs such as communalism and social cohesion, yet the validity of these proxies remains a subject of ongoing debate (Mutanga, 2023). Ensuring cultural sensitivity and contextual relevance is paramount in the empirical examination of Ubuntu values.

Method

Design: Cross-sectional quantitative data from the World Values Survey (WVS)'s seventh wave (Haerpfer et al., 2022) were analysed. Data from the eighth wave are incomplete, as data collection is still ongoing.

Respondents: From the 77 countries included in the 2025 WVS, six countries were identified to be included in the study. Responses originated from Kenya, Nigeria and Zimbabwe, representing sub-Saharan African countries, and from Australia, Great Britain and the United States, representing the Anglo cluster. The selection of countries was based on the availability of data in the World Values Survey (WVS), taking into account that South Africa did not contribute data to the seventh wave (2017–2022) (WVS, 2025). The clustering of countries followed the groupings outlined in the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004).

Measurement: The WVS includes a wide range of variables organised under 14 thematic headings. For this study, only 18 items, identified as potential proxies for Ubuntu or Ubuntu-related values, were selected for analysis.

Table 1 presents the selected questions along with the rationale for their inclusion. The items used in the study include categorical, ordinal, and continuous variables. Items with categorical and ordinal responses are bolded, as different analytical approaches were applied to these data types; accordingly, the results are reported in two separate tables. The final column indicates how each item relates to Ubuntu. This relationship

is established by referencing the definition of Ubuntu as “originating from the Nguni proverb 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,' which translates to 'a person is a person through other persons,' embodying an exemplary Southern African way of life or a philosophy, which places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the core of personal development as well as in structuring societal thinking” (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a).

Table 1

Selected WVS items and their link with Ubuntu

WVS #	Item	Format	Ubuntu is about …
12, 16	Here is a list of qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home. Which, if any, do you consider to be especially important? Please choose up to five! Q12 Tolerance and respect for other people Q16 Not being selfish (unselfishness)	Mentioned (1) / not mentioned (2)	Respect (Q12) and generosity (Q16)
45	I’m going to read out a list of various changes in our way of life that might take place in the near future. Please tell me for each one, if it were to happen, whether you think it would be a good thing, a bad thing, or don't you mind? Greater respect for authority	Good (1), Don’t mind (2), Bad (3)	Respect
34	How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them? When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants	Strongly agree (1) to Strongly disagree (5)	Community
127	From your point of view, what have been the effects of immigration on the development of [this country]? For each of the following statements about the effects of immigration, please, tell me whether you agree or disagree with it: Offers people from poor countries a better living	Agree (2), Hard to say (1), Disagree (0)	Empathy
59	I‘d like to ask you how much you trust people from various groups. Could you tell me for each whether you trust people from this group completely, somewhat, not very much or not at all? Your neighborhood	Trust completely (1) to Do not trust at all (4)	Community and harmony
71	I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? The government	A great deal (1) to None at all (4)	Community
40	How would you feel about the following statements? Do you agree or disagree with them? Work is a duty towards society	Strongly agree (1) to Strongly disagree (5)	Community and generosity
149	Most people consider both freedom and equality to be important, but if you had to choose between	Freedom (1) or Equality (2)	Harmony

WVS #	Item	Format	Ubuntu is about …
	them, which one would you consider more important? Freedom (1) Equality (2)		
156	And what would be the most important? A stable economy (1) Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society (2) Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money (3) The fight against crime (4)	1 / 2 / 3 / 4	Respect, community, generosity, and harmony
179-180	Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card. Q179 Stealing property Q180 Cheating on taxes if you have a chance	Never Justifiable (1) to Always Justifiable (10)	Respect (Q179) and community (Q180)
101	Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary organizations. For each organization, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization? Humanitarian or charitable organization	Active member (2), inactive member (1), not a member (0)	Generosity
213	What about these forms of political action and social activism that people can take? Please, tell me for each of them if you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it. Donating to a group or campaign	Have done (1), Might do (2), Would never do (3)	Generosity
241, 247, 249	Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means “not at all an essential characteristic of democracy” and 10 means it definitely is “an essential characteristic of democracy” Q241 Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor. Q247 The state makes people’s incomes equal. Q249 Women have the same rights as men.	Not an essential characteristic of democracy (1) to An essential characteristic of democracy (10)	Community (Q141 and Q147) and harmony (Q249)
253	Q253. How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country? Do you feel there is (read out and code one answer): A great deal of respect for individual human rights (1), Fairly much respect (2), Not much respect (3), No respect at all (4).	A great deal of respect for individual human rights (1), Fairly much respect (2), Not much respect (3), No respect at all (4)	Respect

Note: Items with categorical and ordinal outputs are bolded

The Ubuntu-related word appear in the text as follows: Community eight times, respect and generosity five times each, harmony 4 times, and empathy once. This does not equate to a perfect representation of Ubuntu, as defined by Steyn and Msweli (2025a), but it is still a reasonable representation.

Reliability and validity: The reliability and validity of the data are not discussed in detail here, as it can be assumed given the Technical Report of World Values Survey Association (2020) and the wide use of the data: The dataset (Haerpfer et al., 2022) was cited in more than 500 articles. The wide use of the WVS database attests to the trust placed in the survey (see Koshy et al., 2023; Steyn, 2023; Van Bavel et al., 2022; Vo et al., 2022). However, this does not suggest that the survey is beyond critique. Several scholarly works have examined its limitations (see Alemán & Woods, 2016; Ndofirepi & Steyn, 2023; Steyn & Ndofirepi, 2022; Zanella, 2024).

Analyses: The data were analysed in two ways: For the continuous data, mean per cluster was calculated and the differences between the means were calculated, using Cohen's d-values (d = Mean1-Mean2 / ((SD1 + SD2)/2) (Cohen, 1988), to determine if the group means differed on a practical level, thus real world significance (Kirk, 1996). The guideline followed for effect sizes was that d smaller than .2 was considered negligible, d between .2 and .5 indicated subtle but real differences, d between .5 and .8 was classified as moderate, and d larger than .8 represented large and practically significant differences (Cohen, 1988). It was decided to select the option that d-values smaller than .2 would be deemed insignificant.

With the categorical data, a different approach was followed. First, the categorical data were converted into percentages. The percentages per cluster were then presented and compared. It was decided that a 10% difference in endorsement would equate to a practical meaningful difference, based on the suggestion of ChatGPT: "A quick, intuitive rule-of-thumb is to translate differences into percentage-points (pp) and use rough benchmarks like these: 3-5 pp - Small but potentially interesting (especially at scale); 8-10 pp - Moderate (likely to change decisions or indicate a real preference); ≥ 15 pp - Large (clearly notable)" (OpenAI, 2023).

The data were then interpreted and a narrative constructed, based on the results of the study, to explore the portrayal of Ubuntu as an African emic value system, in contrast to values typically associated with the Anglo cultural cluster. This narrative broadly addresses the extent to which Ubuntu can be considered uniquely African, and examines the degree to which elements of Ubuntu, which are both complex and multidimensional, are reflected distinctively in the lived values of people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Ethical considerations: The WVS study's results are available to all interested parties and are referenced extensively in this document (Haerpfer et al., 2022). No data were collected specifically for this research. Existing data from the GLOBE study were analysed. At a university level, the use of this secondary data was approved by the local ethics committee: 2022_SBL_AC_001_SD.

Results

Sample size and demographics: Due to the extensive number of items included in the survey, the number of respondents per item varied. However, as shown in Table 2, the sample size for each country never fell below 1,000, with at least 3,000 respondents per regional cluster. The national samples were representative of their respective populations. While detailed reporting on individual countries is beyond the scope and word limit of this paper, it can reasonably be assumed that the results are comparable across countries, given the standardised data collection protocols employed (World Values Survey Association, 2020).

Results pertaining to ordinal and categorical data: Table 2 presents the results of the categorical data. The numbers presented in the table are percentages, and, where indicated, sample size (N). Of particular interest is the last column, where the percentage difference between the mean of the Anglo cluster and the sub-Saharan Africa cluster is presented.

Table 2

Comparative statistics for categorical data from Anglo versus sub-Sahara Africa countries

		Group								
		Anglo				Africa				
WVS #	Responses	Auz	UK	USA	Anglo Mean	Ken	Nig	Zim	Africa Mean	Delta Mean
12	Important	82.7	77.8	69.4	76.7	54.4	61.8	72.7	63.0	13.7
	Not mentioned	17.3	22.2	30.6	23.3	45.6	38.2	27.3	37.0	-13.7
	N	1813	2573	2592	6978	1266	1237	1215	3718	10696
16	Important	41.7	45.4	29.6	38.9	11.1	16.2	21.8	16.3	22.5
	Not mentioned	58.3	54.6	70.4	61.1	88.9	83.8	78.2	83.7	-22.5
	N	1813	2573	2592	6978	1266	1237	1215	3718	10696
45	Good thing	58.2	56.1	55.7	56.7	78.6	90.8	87.0	85.5	-28.8
	Don't mind	30.4	30.0	32.1	30.8	16.2	8.3	8.8	11.1	19.7
	Bad thing	11.4	13.9	12.2	12.5	5.3	0.8	4.2	3.4	9.0
	N	1772	2561	2580	6913	1250	1234	1208	3692	10605
101	Not a member	67.3	72.3	65.7	68.4	60.2	76.9	75.2	70.8	-2.3
	Inactive member	14.4	11.1	15.2	13.6	20.4	13.2	16.6	16.7	-3.2
	Active member	18.3	16.6	19.1	18.0	19.4	10.0	8.2	12.5	5.5
	N	1782	2584	2557	6923	1220	1216	1202	3638	10561
127	Disagree	1.8	3.3	10.5	5.2	30.2	29.2	26.0	28.5	-23.3
	Hard to say	14.7	17.6	37.6	23.3	24.6	21.3	12.9	19.6	3.7
	Agree	83.5	79.2	51.9	71.5	45.2	49.5	61.2	52.0	19.6

		Group								
		Anglo				Africa				
WVS #	Responses	Auz	UK	USA	Anglo Mean	Ken	Nig	Zim	Africa Mean	Delta Mean
	N	1791	2581	2557	6929	1196	1146	1198	3540	10469
149	Freedom	76.7	70.1	76.7	74.5	68.7	71.7	79.7	73.4	1.1
	Equality	23.3	29.9	23.3	25.5	31.3	28.3	20.3	26.6	-1.1
	N	1789	2541	2572	6902	1251	1228	1212	3691	10593
156	A stable economy	17.9	21.8	21.7	20.5	16.6	23.2	20.9	20.3	0.2
	Humane society	25.5	24.6	23.5	24.5	23.3	24.9	18.2	22.1	2.4
	Ideas / money	18.0	21.2	18.8	19.3	26.3	24.4	23.3	24.7	-5.4
	Combat crime	38.6	32.4	36.0	35.7	33.7	27.4	37.6	32.9	2.8
	N	1778	2467	2517	6762	1245	1227	1210	3682	10444
213	Have done	49.3	48.1	45.5	47.6	19.1	16.0	15.6	16.9	30.7
	Might do	29.3	31.8	34.4	31.9	37.8	36.1	34.4	36.1	-4.3
	Would never do	21.4	20.1	20.1	20.5	43.1	48.0	50.0	47.0	-26.5
	N	1796	2582	2563	6941	1199	1203	1199	3601	10542
254	A great deal	28.5	19.0	12.1	19.9	12.5	12.1	8.0	10.9	9.0
	Fairly respect	54.6	58.0	46.0	52.8	43.0	31.0	25.2	33.1	19.8
	Not much respect	14.1	19.7	36.4	23.4	32.2	31.8	36.0	33.3	-9.9
	No respect	2.8	3.3	5.5	3.9	12.2	25.1	30.9	22.7	-18.8
	N	1799	2563	2569	6931	1251	1220	1196	3667	10598

Note: Auz=Australia, UK=Great Britain, Ken=Kenya, Nig=Nigeria, Zim=Zimbabwe; Humane society=Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society, Ideas / money=Progress toward a society in which ideas count more than money, Combat crime-Fight against crime.

Mean differences of less than 10% were regarded as insignificant. The interpretation of these results takes place in the discussion section of the paper.

Results pertaining to continues data: Results presented in Table 3 relate to continues variables (e.g.: Items 179 and 180) and ordinal variables (e.g.: Items 34 and 40) presented as continues variables. The focus is on the last row, where mean differences between Anglo versus sub-Saharan Africa clusters are presented.

Table 3

Comparative statistics for continues data from Anglo versus sub-Saharan Africa countries

		WVS								
		Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item	Item
Country		34	40	59	71	179	180	241	247	249
Auz	Mean	2.84	2.48	2.07	2.82	1.40	1.85	6.21	3.94	8.91

		WVS								
Country		Item 34	Item 40	Item 59	Item 71	Item 179	Item 180	Item 241	Item 247	Item 249
	N	1794	1813	1793	1796	1794	1791	1754	1736	1757
	SD	1.371	0.954	0.568	0.751	1.251	1.667	2.722	2.871	2.235
UK	Mean	3.33	2.56	1.97	3.04	1.48	1.79	6.44	4.61	9.05
	N	2572	2578	2578	2574	2588	2584	2499	2487	2545
	SD	1.258	1.003	0.672	0.788	1.228	1.581	2.479	2.761	1.888
USA	Mean	2.89	2.44	2.24	2.92	1.89	2.11	5.67	4.03	8.45
	N	2589	2581	2584	2579	2568	2572	2547	2536	2554
	SD	0.870	0.971	0.703	0.913	1.771	1.920	2.544	2.725	2.281
Kenya	Mean	2.12	1.95	2.29	2.57	2.92	3.55	4.57	4.70	6.58
	N	1260	1259	1258	1244	1225	1231	1235	1234	1229
	SD	1.182	0.923	0.790	1.019	2.650	2.848	3.090	2.897	3.073
Nigeria	Mean	2.31	1.70	2.30	2.69	1.68	1.79	6.27	5.24	7.00
	N	1233	1235	1235	1233	1235	1234	1201	1209	1222
	SD	0.661	0.820	0.925	0.994	1.648	1.644	3.134	3.122	2.970
Zim	Mean	1.92	1.79	2.24	2.53	1.68	1.86	6.45	6.35	7.66
	N	1212	1214	1211	1208	1214	1215	1200	1201	1196
	SD	1.058	0.807	0.880	1.044	2.067	2.212	3.642	3.539	3.052
Anglo	Mean	3.021	2.491	2.093	2.928	1.592	1.916	6.106	4.195	8.803
cluster	N	6955	6972	6955	6949	6950	6947	6800	6759	6856
	SD	1.167	0.976	0.648	0.817	1.417	1.723	2.582	2.786	2.135
Sub-	Mean	2.117	1.816	2.277	2.597	2.092	2.397	5.763	5.429	7.081
Sahara	N	3705	3708	3704	3685	3674	3680	3636	3644	3647
Africa	SD	0.967	0.850	0.865	1.019	2.122	2.235	3.289	3.186	3.032
	d	+ 0.847	+ 0.739	- 0.244	+ 0.360	- 0.283	- 0.243	+ 0.117	- 0.413	+ 0.667

Note: 34=Jobs scarce: Employers should give priority to nationals rather than immigrants, 40=Work is a duty towards society, 59=Trust: Your neighborhood, 71= Confidence: The Government, 179=Justifiable: Stealing property, 180=Justifiable: Cheating on taxes, 141=Democracy: Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor, 147=Democracy: The state makes people's incomes equal, 149=Democracy: Women have the same rights as men; Auz=Australia, UK=Great Britain, USA=United States and Zim=Zimbabwe; d=Cohen d-value, with d=Anglo Cluster - sub-Saharan African Cluster / (SD Anglo Cluster + SD sub-Saharan Africa Cluster)/2); + reflects that the Anglo cluster had the higher score, - that the Anglo cluster had a lower score.

Cohen d-values smaller than .2 were interpreted as insignificant. The results from this table will be presented in the discussion section of the paper.

Discussion

The premise of this paper was that Ubuntu values, as represented by selected items from the WVS, would reveal that Africans, at least more so than individuals from the Anglo-Saxon world, demonstrate alignment with Ubuntu principles. Table 4 presents the results from Tables 2 and 3 alongside corresponding interpretations. The key question addressed is: Did Africans display more Ubuntu-aligned values than those from the Anglo cluster? The final column shows the results, while the penultimate column provides interpretations of these findings.

Table 4

Discussion of results

WVS #	Item and hypothesis	Interpretation	Difference
12	If “Tolerance and respect for other people” is mentioned, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing respect.	Africa shows less respect	13.7%
16	If “Not being selfish (unselfishness)” is mentioned, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – a sign of generosity.	Africa shows less generosity	22.5%
45	If “Greater respect for authority” is seen as good, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing respect.	Africa shows more respect	28.8%
34	If there is a low score on “When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to people of this country over immigrants”, people show a strong sense of Ubuntu – as a sign of community.	Africa shows more community	0.847
127	If “Offers people from poor countries a better living” is agreed upon, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing empathy.	Africa shows less empathy	23.3%
59	If people completely trust those in “Your neighborhood”, a low score would be a sign of Ubuntu – demonstrating community and harmony.	Africa shows more community and harmony	0.739
71	If people have a great deal of confidence in “The government”, a low score would be a sign of Ubuntu – demonstrating community.	African shows less community	0.244
40	If people strongly agree that “Work is a duty towards society” a low score would be a sign of Ubuntu – demonstrating generosity and community.	Africa shows more generosity and community	0.360
149	If “Equality” is selected above “Freedom”, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing harmony.	No significant difference	1.1%
156	If “Progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society” is selected, it would be a sign of Ubuntu – reflecting respect, community, generosity, and harmony	No significant difference	0.2%
179	If “Stealing property” is never justifiable, a low score would be a sign of Ubuntu – demonstrating respect.	Africa shows less respect	0.283
180	If “Cheating on taxes if you have a chance” is never justifiable, a low score would be a sign of Ubuntu – reflecting community.	Africa shows less community	0.243
101	Being an active member of a “Humanitarian or charitable organization” it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing generosity.	No significant difference	5.5%
213	If you have done “Donating to a group or campaign” it would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing generosity.	Africa shows less generosity	30.7%
241	If you perceive “Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor” as an essential characteristics of democracy, a high score would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing a sense of community.	No significant difference	0.117
247	If you perceive “The state makes people’s incomes equal” as an essential characteristics of democracy, a high score would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing a sense of community.	Africa shows more community	0.413
249	If you perceive “Women have the same rights as men” as an essential characteristics of democracy, a high score would be a sign of Ubuntu – showing a sense of harmony.	African shows less harmony	0.667
253	If people indicate that nowadays there is “A great deal of respect for individual human rights” in their this	No significant difference	9.0%

WVS #	Item and hypothesis	Interpretation	Difference
	country, it could be a sign of active Ubuntu – reflective of the wide range respect for people		

Note: Items with categorical and ordinal outputs are bolded

In Table 4 the outcomes from the hypothesis testing are presented. The table shows whether sub-Saharan Africa scored higher, lower, or showed no significant difference compared to Anglo-Saxon countries on Ubuntu-related questions. An overall summary of the results shows that in five (5) instances, Ubuntu-aligned values were more prevalent in Africa; in eight (8) instances, they were less prevalent; and in five (5) instances, there were no significant differences. Returning to the elements of Ubuntu, empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a), the results of Table 4 are discussed below.

- Empathy: Empathy was measured with one question only. Empathy was less evident among African respondents, who were more unlikely to agree that their country offers better living conditions to people from poorer countries. This lower endorsement indicates that empathy toward outsiders or strangers may be limited, contrasting with Ubuntu's ideal of compassionate inclusivity.
- Respect: Sub-Saharan Africans showed a complex pattern regarding respect. They demonstrated greater respect for authority but reported lower tolerance and respect for other people. They tended to be more open to viewing certain instances of property theft as potentially justifiable. No significant differences were found regarding respect for individual human rights. These findings suggest that respect as a value may manifest uniquely in African contexts, emphasising authority but showing differences in other respects.
- Community: Community-related values varied widely. Africans showed stronger community orientation by prioritising locals over immigrants, trusting their neighbourhood, and supporting income equalisation by the state. Conversely, they showed less confidence in government and expressed a lower level of disapproval toward tax evasion, suggesting a nuanced community ethic that values local and informal networks more than formal institutions.
- Generosity: Generosity indicators were mixed, with Africans showing less unselfishness and participation in donations or charitable organisations. However, they endorsed work as a duty toward society more strongly than their Anglo counterparts, reflecting a communal generosity. The inconsistent pattern suggests that generosity is expressed in specific social obligations rather than widespread voluntary acts.
- Harmony: There were no significant differences between sub-Saharan African and Anglo-Saxon respondents in valuing equality over freedom or progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society. However, Africans showed less endorsement of gender equality, indicating less harmony in that respect. Overall, harmony-related values showed a mixed pattern, with some elements consistent across regions and others less embraced in Africa.

Overall, the findings reflect an uneven endorsement of Ubuntu-related values in sub-Saharan Africa. While some aspects, such as community, generosity, and respect for

authority are strongly represented, the key indicators of empathy, personal respect, and harmony are less frequently endorsed. This mixed pattern suggests that Ubuntu's cultural presence may be uneven or contested, rather than uniformly dominant across the region.

Conclusion

In this study, the endorsement of Ubuntu values by individuals from sub-Saharan Africa was compared to those in an Anglo-Saxon cluster. Eighteen items from the World Values Survey (WVS) were used as proxies for Ubuntu. Data from over 3,000 sub-Saharan Africans and more than 6,000 individuals from Anglo-Saxon countries were analysed, with each cluster represented by three countries. Comparisons were made at the cluster level only.

The results indicate that Ubuntu-aligned values were more prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa in five instances, less prevalent in eight, and showed no significant difference in five other countries. While values such as community, generosity, and respect for authority were commonly reported, other elements such as empathy, personal respect and harmony were less frequently endorsed. Based on these findings, Ubuntu appears to be less prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa than in the Anglo-Saxon world. Using the Anglo-Saxon context as a reference point, this study revealed a mixed and inconsistent pattern of Ubuntu's cultural presence in the region, suggesting that the concept may be contested and far from universally upheld.

Ubuntu's core values, empathy, respect, generosity, community, and harmony (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a), are not all reflected in the attitudes or behaviours of sub-Saharan Africans. Instead of a cohesive ethical system, the data reveals selective adherence, internal contradictions, and in some cases the absence of these ideals. Ubuntu seems to function more as a symbolic or aspirational identity marker than a lived philosophy guiding everyday life. These findings challenge the uncritical acceptance of Ubuntu as Africa's moral compass and underscore the need for a more nuanced and perhaps more critical examination of African value systems as they actually exist.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study lies in the proxies used to represent Ubuntu (see Table 1). Some may question whether the selected variables are truly accurate reflections of Ubuntu principles. It would be reckless to claim that all were ideal proxies; however, most items could be reasonably identified as potential indicators.

Another limitation concerns the WVS itself. While widely used, the instrument is not without flaws, and its validity has been questioned by various scholars. Nonetheless, given practical considerations and the lack of alternative freely available data, the use of the WVS data can be reasonably justified.

Future research

Ubuntu values were measured using items that served as proxies for the construct. Future researchers are encouraged to use instruments specifically developed to measure Ubuntu (see Molose, 2019; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023; Steyn & Msweli, 2025b). Purpose-designed instruments may yield better results in cross-cultural

settings; however, caution should be exercised to ensure that the constructs are replicable across cultures. Tests of measurement invariance are essential to confirm the validity of cross-cultural comparisons (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000).

There may also be a need to identify what exactly African leadership entails, without using Ubuntu as a reference. Some efforts have been made in this direction (see Grobler & Singh, 2018; Lerutla & Steyn, 2022; Lerutla & Steyn, 2024), and researchers are encouraged to find the emic moral compass which is representative of an African value system as it exists in reality.

Declarations

Author contributions: Conceptualisation (R.S. & P.M.); literature review (R.S.); methodology (R.S.); software (N/A.); validation (P.M.); formal analysis (R.S.); investigation (R.S.); data curation (N/A); drafting and preparation (R.S.); review and editing (P.M.); supervision (P.M.); project administration (R.S.); funding acquisition (N/A). All authors have read and approved the published version of the article.

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Data availability statement: This review is based entirely on publicly available data and information sourced from peer-reviewed articles, reports, and other academic publications cited in the manuscript. No new primary data were generated or analysed during this study. Readers may refer to the cited sources for detailed information.

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Article 11: Ubuntu leadership across cultures: A comparative study of its prevalence and outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom

Ubuntu Leadership Across Cultures: A Comparative Study of its Prevalence and Outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

Background: Ubuntu is widely recognised as an African philosophy that shapes the African way of life. In theory, Ubuntu should be most prevalent within Africa, where individuals are expected to resonate strongly with this philosophy. This study examines Ubuntu leadership as an emic phenomenon, distinct from leadership approaches in other cultural contexts, specifically the United Kingdom (UK).

Aim: The aim of this study is twofold: (1) to determine whether managers in South Africa (SA) score higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, and (2) to assess whether the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and key employee outcomes, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being, are stronger in the South African context.

Setting: The study draws on data collected from employed individuals in South Africa and the UK, contrasting acts and perspectives shaped by different geographical and cultural contexts.

Methods: A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Respondents completed measures of Ubuntu leadership, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being. Following tests of reliability and factorial validity (including measurement invariance), mean scores for Ubuntu leadership were compared across the two cultural groups. In addition, correlation coefficients were calculated and their magnitudes examined to assess the relationships between Ubuntu and outcomes across groups.

Results: The psychometric properties of the instruments were satisfactory. Results indicate that South African managers scored significantly higher on Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, supporting the view that Ubuntu is more salient within the African context. Contrary to expectations, however, the positive associations between Ubuntu leadership and the three employee outcomes were not stronger in the South African sample than in the UK sample.

Conclusion: Ubuntu leadership may hold particular relevance in cultural contexts aligned with its philosophical underpinnings, as reflected in its prevalence in South Africa. Its predictive power is substantial and not confined to South Africa, suggesting that the principles of Ubuntu leadership extend beyond their cultural origins and hold relevance in broader, non-African contexts.

Keywords

Ubuntu leadership, emic perspective, cross-cultural comparison, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, well-being, South Africa, United Kingdom.

BACKGROUND

Cross-cultural studies often focus on comparing groups across geopolitical domains. Numerous examples exist, including the GLOBE project (House et al., 2004; Javidan et al., 2024) and the World Values Survey (Inglehart et al., 2014; Haerpfer et al., 2024), both of which examine value systems across nations. In this study, a similar approach is adopted, comparing cultural constructs across South Africa (SA) and the United Kingdom (UK) (Sagiv & Schwartz, 2022; Schwartz & Cieciuch, 2022).

Why is it important to assess whether Ubuntu is dominant in South Africa? The question arises because its role and relevance remain contested. Some scholars argue that Ubuntu is not genuinely practised or even relevant in contemporary South Africa (Ramose, 2002; Metz, 2011; Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013; West, 2014), while others advocate for its broader institutional implementation (Letseka, 2012; Himonga et al., 2013; Radebe & Phooko, 2017). Still others challenge the very notion that Ubuntu constitutes a unifying value system shared by all Africans (Mangaliso, 2001; Eze, 2010; Gade, 2012; Mboti, 2015). The issue is therefore not only of academic and philosophical interest but also of practical significance, given persistent calls for the revival and application of Ubuntu in social and organizational contexts. It could be asked if Ubuntu is truly distinct as an African philosophy, or if its underlying values are equally endorsed in other countries?

If Ubuntu is indeed abundant in Africa and serves as a particularly potent force for achieving positive organisational outcomes there, African leaders should clearly embrace it. The question remains, however: does it also prove effective as a driver of organisational outcomes elsewhere? Is Ubuntu an emic system that generates outcomes only within Africa, or are its values universally associated with organisational excellence?

It may be necessary to reconsider whether Ubuntu should be regarded as an emic construct and whether it functions as a singularly potent framework capable of generating praiseworthy organisational outcomes when applied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is structured into four key paragraphs: national boundaries as containers of culture; the heterogeneity of the South African workforce; globalisation and the diffusion of values; and the importance and relevance of emic systems.

National boundaries as containers of culture: The assumption that each geopolitical nation-state represents a singular, homogenous culture has been widely criticised (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006; Schwartz, 2014; Fischer & Schwartz, 2011; Brewer & Venaik, 2012; Shenkar, 2001). For instance, not all French citizens share identical value systems, though some nations may show greater cultural coherence than others (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). This becomes even more problematic in large, multi-ethnic states such as Russia and China (Gelfand et al., 2011; Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018). Nonetheless, cross-cultural researchers often proceed with comparing countries, hoping that between-group differences exceed within-group variation (Schwartz, 1999; Hofstede, 2001; Taras et al., 2012). Thus, using national boundaries is abundant in cross-cultural research (with too many to cite), and this will also be the case in the present study.

The heterogeneity of the South African workforce: South African workers and leaders cannot be regarded as culturally homogenous groups. According to Statistics South Africa (Statistics South

Africa, 2025), the fully employed workforce comprises diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. In January 2025, the total working population was estimated at 41.7 million, comprising approximately 34.3 million Black Africans, 3.6 million Coloured people, 1.1 million Indians/Asians, and 2.7 million Whites. Leadership positions, especially in the private sector, remain disproportionately occupied by White South Africans (Department of Employment and Labour, 2025; Matotoka & Odeku, 2021; Myeza & April, 2021). While government and state-owned entities are more reflective of Black leadership, the private sector continues to exhibit racial disparities in management (Department of Employment and Labour, 2025). Also, the Department of Employment and Labour reports that at the top management level, White and Indian males are strongly overrepresented, particularly in the private sector. African and Coloured representation aligns more closely with their Economically Active Population in government spheres, while White females exceed their Economically Active Population in most business types. Foreign nationals are notably present in non-profit organisations, the private sector, and educational institutions. Also, culturally, or at least racially, most South African organisations are heterogeneous, as employment equity legislation explicitly promotes diversity and the equitable representation of designated groups in the workplace (Republic of South Africa, 1998; 2022).

Globalisation and the diffusion of values: While some scholars advocate for emic (culture-specific) approaches to values (Berry et al., 2011), the influence of globalisation cannot be overlooked (Arnett, 2002; Inglehart & Baker, 2000; Rosenmann et al., 2016; Cameron, 2016; Greenfield, 2013). Globalisation facilitates cross-cultural exchange and proximity, making value systems more fluid (Rosenmann et al., 2016; Hong et al., 2000). Thus, globalisation can lead to homogenisation, where national cultures become diluted (Sherefetdinova, 2024), or it may preserve the national culture (Urbaite, 2024). It could also create new types of nationalism (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021), and globalization could also result people embedded in cultures beyond and across national boundaries (Kyove et al., 2021). In general, increased exposure to different cultures can foster tolerance and weaken the stronghold of local (emic) values (Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Greenfield, 2013). In such an environment, it becomes important to assess whether Ubuntu remains a distinct African value, or if it is incorporated into more universal humanistic frameworks (Metz, 2011; Ewuoso & Hall, 2019; Gade, 2012).

The importance and relevance of emic systems: Traditional value systems are sometimes politically instrumentalised, invoked to appeal to voters or to promote national identity (Chabal, 2009; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2022). Philosophers and historians often romanticise the past, portraying it as a period of harmony and moral clarity (Wiredu, 1996; Elgenius & Rydgren, 2022). Psychologically, theories such as Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957; Morvan & O'Connor, 2017) suggest that individuals function best when their behaviours align with their internal value systems (Deci et al., 2017; Vaidis et al., 2024). Embracing Ubuntu in this sense may enhance individual flourishing in the workplace (Nussbaum, 2003; Poovan et al., 2006; Chetty & Price, 2024). People may also flourish in a cultural environment to which they are accustomed, where little effort is required to adjust to foreign norms and practices (Berry, 1997; Ward et al., 2020). For these reasons, it will be assumed that Africans, more than non-Africans, may be more likely to recognise Ubuntu leadership and respond to it in the praiseworthy ways suggested by some scholars (Chetty & Price, 2024; Poovan et al., 2006; Tauetsile, 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This study seeks to investigate whether Ubuntu leadership is more prevalent among South African managers compared to their UK counterparts and whether it has a more substantial impact on work-related outcomes in the South African context.

H_1: South African managers will score significantly higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than managers from the UK.

H_2: The relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being will be significantly stronger among South African managers than among managers from the UK.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology section comprises the following components: research design, participants and sampling, measures, conceptual model, and a data analysis plan.

Research design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the prevalence of Ubuntu leadership across two countries and determine whether the impact of Ubuntu leadership differed along the geopolitically dived groups.

Participants and sampling

Participants were employed adults (18-65 years) residing in South Africa and the UK. No sampling was done. The data emanated from panel data purchased through SurveyMonkey. The criteria were difficult to match across countries, as the requirements provided on the server differ across countries. The specified inclusion criterion was that participants needed to have an income of above R20 000+/pm for South Africa and £50 000+/pa for the UK. For each country, 150 complete responses were purchased. A screening question on employment status was also included. It turned out that 80.7% of the South Africans were fully employed, compared to 84.8% of the UK respondents. A large percentage of the rest were self-employed.

Measures

Four measures were used to gain information on the variables. Ubuntu leadership was assessed using the Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS; Steyn & Msweli, 2024), a 20-item measure developed for this study. The instrument aims to capture four dimensions of Ubuntu leadership: compassion, solidarity, survival, as well as respect and dignity, with five items per dimension. Responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale.

Job satisfaction (JS) was measured using the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (Thompson & Phua, 2012), a four-item scale that captures affective responses to one's job. Participants also rated the items on a 5-point Likert scale. This index has acceptable psychometric characteristics (Thompson & Phua, 2012; Fernández-Muñoz & Topa, 2018).

Normative organisational commitment (OC) was assessed using the Normative Commitment Scale (Jaros, 2007), based on the seminal model by Meyer and Allen (1991). Participants responded to six items reflecting the moral obligation to remain with their organisation, rated on a 5-point Likert scale. This index has acceptable psychometric characteristics (Jaros, 2007; Meyer et al., 2002).

Psychological well-being (WB) was assessed using the World Health Organisation Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5) (World Health Organisation, 2024). This five-item measure asks participants to report their experience of positive mental states over the past two weeks. Items are scored from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all of the time). The index shows construct and predictive validity (Topp et al., 2015; Nylén-Eriksen et al., 2022).

Conceptual model

The conceptual model guiding this study is grounded in the notion that Ubuntu leadership is more deeply embedded in the cultural context of Africans (particularly individuals from South Africa) than in individuals who live and work in Western contexts such as the UK. It is therefore expected that African leaders will demonstrate stronger Ubuntu leadership, and that Ubuntu will influence employee outcomes through value-based mechanisms associated with nationality. Consequently, African employees, in this case from South Africa, are anticipated to respond more positively to Ubuntu leadership than their counterparts in the UK.

H_1: Managers in South Africa will score significantly higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than managers in the UK.

H_2: The relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being will be significantly stronger among employees in South Africa than among employees in the UK.

Data analysis plan

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis, will be reported for all study variables. Group-specific means and standard deviations will also be presented for the two national groups (see Table 1). Reliability of all scales will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The dimensionality of the newly developed Ubuntu Leadership Rating Scale (ULRS) will be examined using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). If the CFA does not yield optimal fit indices for four factors, as hypothesised, exploratory factor analysis (CFA) may be employed. Revisions to the ULRS structure may then follow accordingly. No validity confirmation data will be provided for the dependent variables, as their validity is assumed based on established usage and to maintain conciseness in this article.

To test for common method bias, all variables will be entered into a single exploratory factor analysis, following Harman's single-factor test procedure (Harman, 1976). With 56% of the items measuring Ubuntu, it was expected that this test would fail. As such, exploratory factor analyses will be performed afterwards, with the expectation that the items of the different scales will load on different factors, dependent on the scale from which they originated.

Measurement invariance of the ULRS across national groups will be tested using multigroup structural equation modelling (SEM) in R. This will involve assessing configural, metric, and scalar invariance (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). If scalar invariance is established, an independent ANOVA will be conducted to compare Ubuntu leadership scores between South African and UK participants, reporting on their managers. Eta-squared (η^2) will be interpreted as the percentage variance explained by the differences.

Bivariate relationships between Ubuntu leadership and the three outcome variables – job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being – will be assessed using Pearson

correlation coefficients, computed separately for each national group. These will be presented in a correlation matrix. Statistically significant differences, as determined by the Z-test, will be taken to indicate practical differences between correlation coefficients.

Ethical matters

This study was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership under approval number 3781. No ethical concerns were reported or encountered.

RESULTS

Results are presented under the headings of demographics, reliability, validity (including tests for measurement invariance and common method bias), descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics. The latter will include comparisons of means, reporting of correlation sizes, and comparisons of correlation coefficients between South Africa and the UK.

Demographics

Gender: In South Africa, 40% of respondents were male and 60% female (N = 150), whereas in the UK, 54.3% were male and 45.7% female (N = 151), indicating that the UK sample had relatively more males and fewer females than the South African sample.

Race: In South Africa, the majority of respondents identified as African/Black (62%), followed by White/Caucasian (24.7%), Coloured/mixed heritage (10.7%), Asian (2%), and Other (0.7%) (N = 150). In contrast, in the UK most respondents identified as White/Caucasian (78.1%), with smaller proportions identifying as African/Black (14.6%), Asian (4.6%), Coloured/mixed heritage (1.3%), and Other (1.3%) (N = 151). The racial composition of the two groups was thus markedly different, reflecting the broader population structures of the two countries.

Employment status: In South Africa, most respondents were employed full-time (80.7%), followed by smaller proportions who were part-time employed (8.7%), self-employed (6.7%), unemployed (3.3%), and retired (0.7%) (N = 150). Similarly, in the UK, the majority were also employed full-time (84.8%), followed by those employed part-time (7.9%), self-employed (4.6%), unemployed (1.3%), and retired (1.3%) (N = 151). While the overall employment patterns were broadly comparable, South Africa had slightly more self-employed and unemployed respondents, whereas the UK sample had a higher proportion of full-time employed staff.

Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for all variables and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Reliably coefficients

Group	Scale	Alpha	Number of items
SA	ULRS	0.973	20
UK	ULRS	0.984	20
SA	JS	0.904	4
UK	JS	0.915	4
SA	OC	0.905	6
UK	OC	0.941	6
SA	WB	0.908	5
UK	WB	0.917	5

Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated excellent internal consistency for all scales across both groups. The ULRS demonstrated particularly high reliability (SA α = 0.973; UK α = 0.984), while the JS, OC, and WB scales also showed strong reliability, with alpha values ranging from 0.904 to 0.941. Overall, these results suggest that the measures were consistently interpreted by respondents in both South Africa and the UK, supporting the reliability of the data for subsequent analyses.

Validity

The validity of the ULRS is central to this study, as it was specifically developed for the study. The validity of the JS, OC and WB was tested, but is not reported on here, as all these instruments have a satisfactory track record, and as the scope of the paper does not allow for that.

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated that the ULRS 20 items loaded on a single factor, with eigenvalues of 13.340 (66.7% of variance) for South Africa and 15.320 (76.6% of variance) for the UK, accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance. The scree plot also clearly supported a single-factor solution. A single-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the 20-item ULRS was estimated in lavaan with DWLS for ordinal indicators and robust SEs. Consistent with the EFA, all standardised loadings were strong (.81–.93), evidencing good convergent relations (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023). Global fit based on robust indices was acceptable to good: CFI = .953 and TLI = .946 (≥ .95 often "good," ≥ .90 acceptable), SRMR = .029 (≤ .08 good), and RMSEA = .080, 90% CI [.070, .089], which sits at the conventional boundary for "reasonable error of approximation" (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). The scaled χ^2 was significant ($p < .001$), which is typical with larger df/N and not decisive on its own (Brown, 2015). Following guidance for ordinal CFA, the robust fit indices allowed for within-domain residual correlations, which account for minor wording overlap among items (Li, 2016; Rhemtulla et al., 2012). Overall, the model supports a unidimensional Ubuntu leadership construct with acceptable-to-good fit for publication.

Measurement invariance (MI) was tested for a two-group ordinal CFA (WLSMV, θ-estimator) one-factor ULRS model, across South Africa and the UK, using the categorical MI sequence (configural → thresholds → thresholds+loadings). Decisions followed Chen's (2007) Δ-index rules, $|\Delta CFI| \leq .01$ and $\Delta RMSEA \leq .015$, with SRMR change ≤ .030 for thresholds of ≤ .010 for loadings, were used and complemented by scaled Satorra–Bentler χ^2 difference tests appropriate for WLSMV nesting (Millsap & Yun-Tein, 2010; Satorra & Bentler, 2010; Wu & Estabrook, 2016). The Δ-indices supported both steps (threshold vs configural: ΔCFI = +0.075, ΔRMSEA = −0.086; Loadings vs Thresholds: ΔCFI = 0.000, ΔRMSEA = −0.005), whereas the scaled difference tests indicated minor threshold non-invariance at the thresholds step ($p < .001$), but no loading non-invariance when loadings were constrained ($p = .758$). This common pattern with Likert-type indicators (equal loadings with small threshold differences) is typically handled by reporting Δ-indices and, if desired, adopting partial threshold invariance for a small set of thresholds (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Under the loadings-invariant solution, the UK latent mean was lower than South Africa by 0.288 SD (SE = 0.141, z = −2.05, $p = .040$, 95% CI [−0.563, −0.013]), indicating a modest but statistically reliable country difference.

Common method bias was tested by entering all variables into a single exploratory factor analysis, following Harman's single-factor test procedure (Harman, 1976), with the expectation that the loading would be less than 50%. This outcome was not expected, given that 20 of the 35 items (57.14%) originated from the unidimensional ULRS. The single factor explained, as shown in Table 2, 56.88% of the variance. To further examine the factor structure, exploratory factor

analyses were conducted to determine the number of distinct constructs in the dataset, applying Kaiser's criterion of retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The results presented in Table 2 demonstrate a clear factor structure, with the dataset comprising distinct constructs that exhibit primary loadings on separate factors.

Table 2: Test for method bias

Group	Factors	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
SA	1	19.910	56.887	56.887
	2	2.272	6.490	63.377
	3	1.566	4.473	67.851
	4	1.186	3.388	71.238
UK	1	23.532	67.236	67.236
	2	2.138	6.107	73.343
	3	1.026	2.931	76.274
SA & UK	1	23.532	67.236	67.236
	2	2.138	6.107	73.343
	3	1.026	2.931	76.274

The rotated factor structure (not presented here) indicated that, in the case of South Africa, the first factor was ULRS, followed by OC, JS, and WB. In the UK group, ULRS also emerged as the primary factor, with OC and JS loading on the second factor and WB on the third, a pattern that was replicated when the two groups were combined. While Harman's (1976) single-factor test (expectedly) failed, the results suggest that variance was not dominated by a single general factor, indicating that common method bias was unlikely to threaten the validity of the findings.

Descriptive statistics

Presented in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for the four instruments used in this study.

Table 3: Mean scores across countries

Group		N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
SA	UL	150	22	120	102.6133	18.50187	-1.797	3.494
	JS	150	4	24	19.8800	4.00154	-1.704	3.772
	OC	150	6	36	29.8667	5.44486	-1.506	3.110
	W	150	6	30	24.4000	4.75155	-1.207	1.938
UK	UL	151	20	120	91.9139	24.35021	-1.112	0.615
	JS	151	4	24	18.3377	4.33572	-0.974	0.981
	OC	151	6	36	27.3907	6.90794	-1.097	1.171
	W	151	5	30	23.2318	5.56231	-1.067	0.968

Note: SA N=150; UK N=151, SA Standard Error for Skewness=.198; SA Standard Error for kurtosis=.394; UK Standard Error for Skewness=.197; UK Standard Error for kurtosis=.392.

The distributions of all variables in both samples were negatively skewed, indicating that most respondents reported relatively high scores. Skewness was more pronounced in the South African sample (e.g., ULRS = –1.797, JS = –1.704) than in the UK sample (e.g., ULRS = –1.112, JS = –0.974), suggesting a stronger clustering of higher scores in South Africa. Kurtosis values indicate that several South African variables (ULRS, JS, OC) were leptokurtic (kurtosis > 3), reflecting sharper peaks and heavier tails than a normal distribution. In contrast, the UK variables were mostly platykurtic or near-normal, showing flatter distributions with lighter tails. This tendency

toward generally higher, positively skewed scores is consistent with well-established response styles (Krosnick, 1999), particularly acquiescence bias, where respondents disproportionately endorse the positive or agreeable end of rating scales, which can systematically elevate scores across questionnaires. Overall, these patterns suggest that South African respondents tended to rate items more positively and consistently, whereas the UK responses were slightly more dispersed. This can be observed in the higher standard deviations reported for the UK in Table 3.

Inferential statistics

Given the reliability and structural validity of the data, as well as evidence of MI between the South African and UK samples, cross-cultural comparisons were warranted. Accordingly, comparisons were conducted on mean scores for ULRS, as well as on the correlations between ULRS and JS, OC, and WB. Table 4 presents the results of an ANOVA test where the difference between the South African (M = 102.61, SD = 18.50) and UK (M = 91.91, SD = 24.35) scores on ULRS, as reported in Table 3, was statistically significant.

Table 4: Mean differences between South Africa and the UK on ULRS (ANOVA)

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	8614.353	1	8614.353	18.405	<.001
Within groups	139945.454	299	468.045	-	-
Total	148559.807	300	-	-	-

Note: Eta-squared (η^2) = .058, Epsilon-squared (ε^2) = .055, Omega-squared fixed-effect (ω^2) = .055

The ANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference in ULRS scores between the South African and UK samples, $F(1, 299) = 18.41$, $p < .001$. South African respondents reported higher mean scores than their UK counterparts (see Table 3), suggesting a stronger tendency toward ULRS in the South African sample. The effect size was moderate ($\eta^2 = .058$; $\varepsilon^2 = .055$; $\omega^2 = .055$), indicating that approximately 5–6% of the variance in ULRS scores could be attributed to country differences. These results highlight meaningful cross-cultural differences in ULRS, with South African participants scoring systematically higher than participants from the UK. This is underscored by the scalar invariance evidence presented above.

Table 5: Correlation between ULRS and dependent variables and their differences

Group	Scale	r	Sig.	N	Lower C.I.	Upper C.I.	Fisher Z	Z-test	Sig.
SA	JS	.681	<.001	150	.584	.758	0.832	-	-
UK	JS	.757	<.001	151	.680	.818	0.990	-1.36	.174
SA	OC	.748	<.001	150	.668	.811	0.969	-	-
UK	OC	.805	<.001	151	.740	.855	1.113	-1.24	.215
SA	WB	.687	<.001	150	.592	.763	0.843	-	-
UK	WB	.762	<.001	151	.685	.821	1.001	-1.36	.174

Note: Fisher Z's were calculated manually; p-values are two-tailed; in the last column, the statistical significance of the differences between the correlations is presented.

The first observation from the results in Table 5 is that the correlations between ULRS and the three variables (JS, OC, and WB) were all high, with the lowest being the ULRS–JS correlation for the South African group ($r = .681$, $p < .001$). According to Cohen (1988), correlations of around .10 are considered small, around .30 are medium, and around .50 or higher are perceived as large, indicating that all observed correlations in this study can be regarded as strong.

The second set of results presented in Table 5 concerns the size of the differences between the correlations in the South African and UK samples. Contrary to expectations, the South African correlations were slightly lower than those in the UK across all three variables (JS, OC, WB), although none of these differences reached statistical significance. This suggests that the relationships among the constructs are comparable across the two countries, despite the initial hypothesis that ULRS would be more strongly related to JS, OC, and WB in South Africa, given Ubuntu's emic nature.

DISCUSSION

The demographic profiles of the two samples broadly reflect the population structures of South Africa and the UK. The South African respondents were more likely to be female and predominantly African/Black, whereas the UK respondents were more evenly distributed by gender and were predominantly White/Caucasian. Employment patterns were broadly similar across the two countries, with full-time employment being the most common status, although slightly higher proportions of self-employed and unemployed participants were observed in South Africa. These differences and similarities suggest that the samples are reasonably representative of their respective contexts, which strengthens the validity of cross-country comparisons.

The reliability analyses indicated excellent internal consistency for all scales across both samples. Cronbach's alpha values were particularly high for the ULRS (SA $\alpha = 0.973$; UK $\alpha = 0.984$) and strong for JS, OC, and WB ($\alpha = 0.904$–0.941), suggesting that respondents interpreted the items consistently in both South Africa and the UK.

Validity evidence for the newly developed ULRS was supported by both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. EFA revealed a clear unidimensional structure, with eigenvalues of 13.340 (66.7% variance) for South Africa and 15.320 (76.6% variance) for the UK, and a scree plot confirming a single-factor solution. CFA using DWLS for ordinal indicators demonstrated strong standardised loadings (.81–.93) and acceptable-to-good global fit indices (CFI = .953; TLI = .946; SRMR = .029; RMSEA = .080), supporting convergent validity (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023; Hu & Bentler, 1999). Minor, theoretically justified residual correlations were included to account for item wording overlap (Li, 2016; Rhemtulla et al., 2012).

MI testing across South Africa and the UK using a two-group ordinal CFA indicated that factor loadings were invariant, while minor threshold differences were observed; a common outcome with Likert-type scales (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Under the loadings-invariant solution, ULRS latent means were modestly but significantly higher in South Africa than in the UK ($\Delta = 0.288$ SD, $p = .040$), supporting meaningful cross-country comparisons, particularly where correlation is concerned, and less so concerning means.

Common method bias was evaluated using Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976), but failed in an expected manner. The subsequent rotated factor structure showed that, in both samples and the combined dataset, ULRS emerged as the primary factor, followed by OC, JS, and WB in varying order. This pattern indicates that variance was not dominated by a single general factor, suggesting that common method bias is unlikely to compromise the validity of the findings.

Overall, the results provide strong evidence that the ULRS is reliable, valid, and suitable for cross-cultural research, and that the JS, OC, and WB measures performed consistently in both samples. This will allow for the testing of the hypotheses.

H_1: Managers in South Africa will score significantly higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than managers in the UK.

Given the descriptive statistics of Table 3, in the cases of South African (M = 102.61, SD = 18.50) and the UK (M = 91.91, SD = 24.35) scores on ULRS, the ANOVA (Table 4) indicated a statistically significant difference in ULRS scores, $F(1, 299) = 18.41$, $p < .001$. South African respondents reported higher mean scores than their UK counterparts (see Table 3), suggesting a stronger tendency toward ULRS in the South African sample. The effect size was moderate ($\eta^2 = .058$; $\varepsilon^2 = .055$; $\omega^2 = .055$), indicating that approximately 5-6% of the variance in ULRS scores could be attributed to country differences. Thus, while statistically significant, the practical implication is that South African managers displayed moderately higher levels of Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts. Importantly, South African leaders were not found to be distinctly Ubuntu-oriented. Many UK managers also displayed these qualities. This finding offers limited support for the emic nature of Ubuntu as a uniquely South African leadership system materialising in workplace practices.

H_2: The relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being will be significantly stronger among employees in South Africa than among employees in the UK.

First to note is that the correlations between ULRS and the three variables (JS, OC, and WB) were all strong (Table 5), with the lowest being the ULRS–JS correlation for the South African group ($r = .681$, $p < .001$) and the highest the ULRS–OC correlation for the UK group ($r = .805$, $p < .001$). Correlations of .50 or higher are generally considered large, supporting the conclusion that Ubuntu leadership is strongly associated with key organisational outcomes. This suggests that Ubuntu leadership has a meaningful impact on employee attitudes and well-being.

If Ubuntu were purely emic to South Africa, one would expect it to exert a more substantial influence on employee attitudes in South Africa than in a context where it is not culturally embedded, such as the UK. However, the opposite pattern was observed: the correlations between ULRS and employee attitudes were somewhat larger in the UK than in South Africa (Table 5). Although this finding runs counter to our hypothesis, it is important to emphasise that the observed differences were not statistically significant. Consequently, the hypothesis that Ubuntu leadership would show stronger associations with employee outcomes in South Africa must be rejected.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while Ubuntu leadership is present and positively related to employee outcomes, Ubuntu is endorsed more by South African managers, however, its effects, noticeably impactful, are not limited to the South African landscape. Ubuntu exerts a strong influence across both groups. The fact that the observed associations were not stronger in South Africa than in the UK, implies that Ubuntu may not operate as a distinctively emic system shaping South African employee experiences in a significant way. Rather, Ubuntu leadership, as measured here, may represent a more generalisable set of relational leadership principles that transcend cultural boundaries.

Managerial implications

The results of this study have several implications for managerial practice. First, the strong reliability and validity of the ULRS across both South African and UK samples suggest that Ubuntu leadership principles can be meaningfully assessed in diverse cultural contexts. This has

implications for management selection as well as for evaluating the impact of Ubuntu-related interventions.

Second, the finding that Ubuntu leadership was stronger in South Africa indicates that, aligned with Ubuntu's roots in African philosophy (Ramose, 2002; Mbigi, 1997), it may be important in managerial practices in contemporary South African organisations. For managers, this highlights the need not to shy away from embracing Ubuntu leadership in South African workplaces. Instead, leaders should consciously cultivate Ubuntu principles if they wish to strengthen relational and prosocial aspects of leadership in their organisations.

Third, the robust associations between Ubuntu leadership and employee attitudes (JS, OC, WB) across both contexts suggest that adopting Ubuntu-oriented leadership behaviours can have meaningful organisational benefits, including enhanced satisfaction, commitment, and well-being. Managers in South Africa or the UK may therefore view Ubuntu leadership not only as a culturally significant practice but also as a pragmatic approach to improving employee outcomes.

Finally, the cross-cultural comparability of the ULRS indicates that multinational organisations can apply this measure to benchmark relational leadership practices across branches. This opens opportunities for leadership development programmes that draw on Ubuntu values while remaining relevant in non-African contexts.

Limitations and future research

Sampling bias and representativeness: The use of non-random, panel-based convenience sampling (via SurveyMonkey) inevitably limits the generalisability of the findings, particularly given differences in occupational structures and income distributions between South Africa and the UK. However, concerns about the quality of pro-panel data should not be overstated. Research demonstrates that well-designed online panels can yield results comparable in validity to traditional survey methods (Callegaro et al., 2014), and that regular respondents do not necessarily undermine data quality (Matthijsse et al., 2015). When rigorous screening and quality controls are applied, SurveyMonkey's pro-panel data can therefore be considered a robust and credible source for research. Future research could address this limitation by employing probability-based sampling methods or by stratifying samples across industries and occupational levels to improve representativeness.

Lack of cultural differentiation across samples: Although the study compares geopolitical groups, it does not account for within-group cultural heterogeneity. South Africa's population includes individuals from a wide array of cultural, racial, and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, the UK sample may consist of immigrants or people from former colonies familiar with Ubuntu-like values, potentially blurring group differences. Future research should therefore incorporate cultural identifiers within samples, such as ethnicity, language group, or generational status, to disentangle within-group variation from between-country comparisons. However, as experienced in this research, this will require large samples to create subgroups that are large enough to compare statistically.

Measurement limitations of the ULRS: The Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS) was developed for this study. Although the ULRS lacks extensive psychometric research, this instrument showed high levels of reliability (Table 1), convergent validity (Table 5), and good indicators of structural factorial validity and MI across the South African and UK groups. Cross-cultural invariance is not a risk to construct validity. Future research should conduct further

psychometric validation of the ULRS and applications across a broader range of cultural settings. Anyone interested in using the ULRS is welcome to do so without seeking permission from the authors, provided that this paper is properly referenced in their work.

Outcome measures developed in Western contexts: The job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being scales were designed initially within Western settings and centre to a large extent on individual rather than collective outcomes. Their suitability for capturing important outcomes in African contexts, particularly when examined alongside a culturally embedded leadership style such as Ubuntu, should therefore be treated with caution, as noted by some reviewers. Future research could adapt or develop outcome measures rooted in African epistemologies, such as communal solidarity (Mangaliso, 2001) and humaneness/Ubuntu values (Nkomo, 2011; Poovan et al., 2006). Nevertheless, operationalising these constructs and linking them to workplace outcomes remains a complex but necessary undertaking.

Unmeasured confounds: The presented model is very simple and does not account for other contextual or organisational variables (e.g., industry, organisation size, public vs. private sector) that could influence both the expression of Ubuntu leadership and the employee outcomes assessed. The decision to keep the survey as concise as possible was deliberate, given cost considerations and the need to maximize completion rates. Future research should expand the model by including contextual moderators and organisational characteristics, using larger sample sizes that permit multi-level analysis, and more variables to increase the complexity of the work.

CONCLUSION

Aligned with expectations, Ubuntu leadership manifested more strongly in South Africa than in the UK, reflecting its philosophical roots in African contexts. Nevertheless, the humane values it represents, as measured by the ULRS, are not absent in the UK, where mean scores were only moderately lower. Ubuntu can justifiably be called African, but the values underpinning it extend beyond the continent.

The predictive power of Ubuntu is substantial, influencing individuals across geographical boundaries. The assumption that Ubuntu operates solely as an emic construct tied to Black cultural expression, where only Africans would be influenced by its presence, is not supported. Instead, Ubuntu functions as an effective leadership model in both South Africa and the UK, underscoring its relevance as a broadly applicable framework for fostering positive organisational outcomes.

Declarations

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Chapter 11: Ubuntu across race in South African

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	**C**	**C2**	**12**	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

This chapter addresses Objective C2 (To specify the African nature of Ubuntu by contrasting the relevance and impact of Ubuntu on those of an African cultural background to those of a Western cultural background), contrasting the relevance and impact of Ubuntu between African and Western cultural contexts.

This objective was partially achieved through an article with the following title:

Steyn, R. & Msweli, P. (2027b). Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct: Expression and outcomes among Black and White South Africans. Paper available from the first author – paper presently under review.

The article is currently under review and is included in the reference list with the designation 2027a as a placeholder pending publication.

This is referred to as Article 12.

Article 12: Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct: Expression and outcomes among Black and White South Africans

Ubuntu Leadership as an Emic Construct: Expression and Outcomes Among Black and White South Africans

ABSTRACT

Background: Ubuntu, an African humanist philosophy, emphasises interdependence, compassion, and collective dignity. As a leadership construct, it is believed to resonate more with individuals culturally aligned with its principles. This study investigates Ubuntu leadership as an emic (culture-specific) construct and examines differences in its expression and outcomes across racial and cultural lines.

Aim: The study aims to: (1) determine whether Black managers score higher on Ubuntu leadership than White managers, and (2) assess whether the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being, are stronger among Black employees.

Setting: The study was conducted in South Africa, using data from employed individuals of Black and White racial backgrounds.

Methods: A cross-sectional, quantitative design was employed. Participants completed measures of Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes. ANOVA was used to assess mean differences in Ubuntu leadership scores across groups. The strength of relationships between Ubuntu leadership and outcomes, expressed as correlations, was compared using the Z-test.

Results: Employees reported that Black and White South African managers exhibited similar levels of Ubuntu leadership. The relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes were practically strong and similar for Black and White South Africans.

Conclusion: Although often viewed as an emic construct tied to Black cultural expression, the findings indicate that Ubuntu leadership is practised across racial groups and has a positive impact on employees, irrespective of their race. The results also highlight Ubuntu's relevance as an effective framework for fostering positive outcomes in the workplace.

Keywords

Ubuntu leadership, emic perspective, race, job satisfaction, organisational commitment, well-being.

INTRODUCTION

There is growing recognition of the need to ground leadership theories in the cultural contexts from which they emerge (House et al., 2004; Tsui, 2004). Dominant Western models often overlook indigenous worldviews and relational dynamics present in non-Western societies. One such worldview is Ubuntu, a Southern African philosophy centred on compassion, solidarity, survival, respect, and dignity (Steyn & Msweli, 2024). As a leadership approach, Ubuntu emphasises relational integrity, mutual respect, and communal welfare over individual gain (Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi, 2005).

Ubuntu leadership has been advanced as a culturally resonant alternative to conventional leadership paradigms, particularly within African organisational contexts (Khoza, 2006; Lutz, 2009). However, the empirical validation of emic, culture-specific constructs remains limited (Berry, 1998; Berry et al., 2011; Shaffer & Riordan, 2003). Although theoretical and conceptual work on Ubuntu leadership is extensive, relatively little is known about how it is expressed across different cultural or racial groups within the same national context (Nkomo, 2011; Walumbwa et al., 2011). In South Africa, with its complex history of racial division and cultural diversity, Ubuntu is often associated with Black African identity (Nkomo, 2011). Yet, it is not uniformly internalised or practised by all South Africans. Louw (2015) cautions that while Ubuntu is prominently featured in South African leadership discourse (Thomas & Inkson, 2009), it may not resonate equally across the population, and its communal emphasis can, at times, constrain individual agency.

This study contributes to the growing discourse on indigenous leadership by empirically investigating Ubuntu leadership as an emic phenomenon (Bolden & Kirk, 2009; Jackson, 2004). Specifically, it examines whether expressions of Ubuntu leadership differ between Black and White South African managers and whether these differences translate into divergent outcomes in employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being. By exploring these dynamics, the study seeks to shed light on the cultural embeddedness of Ubuntu leadership and its varying effectiveness in a racially and culturally heterogeneous society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To situate this study within the broader academic discourse, the following literature review addresses three key areas: (1) the conceptualisation of Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct rooted in African philosophy, (2) postcolonial critiques of universal leadership models that marginalise indigenous perspectives, and (3) the contextual dynamics of leadership within the unique sociocultural landscape of South Africa. The review will be followed by a presentation of the identified research problem and the study's hypotheses.

Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct

Ubuntu, an African philosophy grounded in humanism and communal ethics, underpins many social and organisational practices on the continent. The term, often translated as *"a person is a person through other persons,"* encapsulates values such

as compassion, interconnectedness, and mutual dignity (Mbiti, 1969; Ramose, 1999, 2002; Tutu, 1999). When applied to leadership, Ubuntu implies an approach that emphasises empathy, collective well-being, and moral responsibility (Nkomo, 2011; Mangaliso, 2001). This form of leadership deviates from many Western leadership models that prioritise individual performance, transactional exchange, or charismatic authority (Bass & Bass, 2008). The notion of *Ubuntu leadership* has gained traction not only as a culturally appropriate framework for African organisations but also as a decolonial alternative to imported theories that often neglect local realities (Kadam & Frempong, 2025; Kane & Archibald, 2023).

Understanding Ubuntu leadership through the lens of cross-cultural psychology requires distinguishing between *emic* and *etic* approaches. The *etic* perspective seeks universal constructs applicable across contexts, whereas the *emic* approach focuses on culture-specific phenomena that may not be readily generalisable (Berry, 1998, 2002; Van de Vijver, 2015). Ubuntu leadership is best conceptualised as an emic construct, arising from African ontologies and resonating with cultural norms found primarily within African societies (Lutz, 2009; Mangaliso et al., 2022). For example, concepts such as *botho* in Botswana and *utu* in East Africa reflect similar indigenous epistemologies of care and reciprocity (Broodryk, 2006). Due to its cultural embeddedness, Ubuntu leadership may be more prevalent or better received in social groups that share a cultural affinity with these values. Comparative studies within culturally diverse national contexts, such as South Africa, could provide a unique opportunity to test this assumption empirically.

Postcolonial critiques of universal leadership models

Postcolonial organisational theory challenges the dominance of Western paradigms in leadership and management science (Ndofirepi & Steyn, 2023). Scholars in this field argue that global knowledge production often reflects Western epistemic privilege, marginalising indigenous theories and perpetuating colonial legacies (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008; Nkomo, 2011). Within the post-apartheid South African context, this critique is particularly salient, as organisational practices continue to reflect historical inequalities in both representation and ideology (Booysen, 2007). Ubuntu leadership has been proposed as an act of epistemic resistance, a reclaiming of African values within formal institutions (Myeza & April, 2021; Verhoef, 2021). By elevating relational ethics and communal responsibility, Ubuntu offers an alternative logic to hierarchical or individualist models of leadership, thereby challenging the implicit norms embedded in many (Western) mainstream theories (Mabele et al., 2022; Zoogah, 2009).

Importantly, postcolonial theory cautions against essentialising cultural identity. Individuals within the same geographic region, or even within the same racial group, do not uniformly internalise indigenous norms (Thomas & Inkson, 2009). The GLOBE study, though based on somewhat dated data, reflects this reality in South Africa, where Black and White populations endorse different values (House et al., 2004). The country's complex historical and racial dynamics, rooted in apartheid, continue to shape how Ubuntu leadership is expressed, recognised, and evaluated. Although

Ubuntu is widely regarded as an African worldview, its adoption and effectiveness in multicultural workplaces may vary across racial lines, influenced by leaders' and followers' socio-cultural positioning and lived experiences (Mangaliso, 2001; Eze, 2010; Gade, 2012; Mboti, 2015).

Contextualising leadership in South Africa

Leadership does not occur in a vacuum; it is socially constructed and contextually bound (Dickson et al., 2023; Mbigi, 2005). The process of leadership contextualisation emphasises the importance of adapting leadership models to the cultural, historical, and institutional dynamics of specific settings (House et al., 2004; Tsui, 2004). Leadership effectiveness depends not only on a leader's traits or behaviours but also on the extent to which these are interpreted as legitimate and meaningful by followers within a particular cultural framework (Dickson et al., 2003). Ubuntu leadership, in this view, is not merely a set of practices but a culturally situated discourse through which leadership is enacted and received.

Empirical studies have shown that contextually grounded leadership models are more predictive of key organisational outcomes (Jackson et al., 2008; Tayali, 2025; Chetty & Price, 2024). However, limited research (House et al., 2004; Nelwamondo, 2024) has examined whether the impact of culturally specific leadership constructs like Ubuntu varies across subpopulations within the same country or organisation (Oksamytna & von Billerbeck, 2024). In the South African context, where both Black and White individuals work under the same legal and institutional frameworks but may differ in cultural upbringing and worldview, such an investigation is particularly pertinent.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite the growing theoretical support for Ubuntu leadership as an emic and culturally resonant model, there remains a scarcity of empirical research comparing its expression and effectiveness across racially distinct groups within South Africa. Specifically, from recent scholarly debate (Chukwuere, 2020; Mwipikeni, 2018; Sebola, 2019; Zondi & Makhoba, 2018), it remains unclear whether Black South Africans, whose cultural heritage is more closely aligned with Ubuntu philosophy, perceive and evaluate the key elements of Ubuntu differently compared to White South Africans. Such a race-based comparison may be warranted, as the widely respected GLOBE study differentiated between Black and White South Africans when comparing values in their 2004 study (House et al., 2004). This gap in the literature limits our understanding of Ubuntu leadership's situational relevance and potential as a unifying or divisive leadership model in diverse organisational environments. Addressing this gap can offer important insights into both leadership theory and the practical management of multicultural teams in postcolonial contexts.

H_1: Black South African managers will score significantly higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than White South African managers.

H_2: The relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being will be significantly stronger among Black South Africans than among White South Africans.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology section consists of the following components: research design, participants and sampling, measures, conceptual model, and a data analysis plan.

Research design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the prevalence of Ubuntu leadership among Black South Africans, relative to White South Africans, and to assess whether its impact differed across racial lines.

Participants and sampling

Participants were employed adults (18-65 years) residing in South Africa. No sampling was done. The data emanated from panel data bought through SurveyMonkey. The inclusion criteria entailed that participants needed to have an income of above R20 000+/pm, working on the assumption that such participants should be employed.

Measures

Four instruments were employed to gather data on the study variables. The items of these instruments can be seen in Table 2.

Ubuntu leadership

Ubuntu leadership was evaluated using the Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS; Steyn & Msweli, 2024), a 20-item tool specifically developed for this research. The scale was designed to assess four aspects of Ubuntu leadership: compassion, solidarity, survival, as well as respect and dignity, with five items per subscale. Participants provided responses on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicate stronger perceptions of Ubuntu-oriented leadership behaviours. The results of this study show that the instrument possesses high reliability. Despite designing the instrument as a multidimensional instrument, the measurement model demonstrated that it is, in fact, unidimensional. These results are also presented below. It is common for analyses to reveal that scales initially theorised as unidimensional have simpler structures than expected, as seen in the case of other measures of Ubuntu (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Sigger et al., 2010).

Job satisfaction

Job satisfaction (JS) was assessed using the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction (Thompson & Phua, 2012), a four-item instrument capturing affective responses to one's work. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). This scale previously demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties (Fernández-Muñoz & Topa, 2018; Thompson & Phua, 2012).

Normative organisational commitment

Normative organisational commitment (OC) was measured via the Normative Commitment Scale (Jaros, 2007), which builds on the foundational model by Meyer and Allen (1991). Participants answered six items reflecting a moral obligation to remain with their organisation, using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores denoted more substantial normative commitment. The instrument exhibits acceptable psychometric reliability (Jaros, 2007; Meyer et al., 2002).

Psychological well-being

Well-being (WB) was captured using the World Health Organisation Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5; World Health Organisation, 2024). This five-item instrument requests respondents to indicate their experiences of positive mental states over the preceding two weeks. Items are rated from 0 (at no time) to 5 (all of the time), with summed scores multiplied by 4 to produce a total score ranging from 0 to 100. Scores below 50 suggest diminished well-being and may indicate a risk for depression (Topp et al., 2015). The use of this World Health Organisation Index adds credibility to the measure.

Conceptual model

The conceptual model guiding this study is grounded in the notion of Ubuntu leadership as a culturally embedded leadership style among indigenous people (Blacks), with Black leaders displaying more Ubuntu leadership attributes and Ubuntu influencing employee outcomes through relational and value-based mechanisms (assumed to be based on race). The model hypothesises that:

H_1: Black South African managers will score significantly higher on measures of Ubuntu leadership than White South African managers ((Group difference in Ubuntu leadership expression);

H_2: Ubuntu leadership will positively predict employee job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being, with these relationships being stronger among Black South Africans than among White South Africans. (Ubuntu leadership's prediction is biased on the employee's race). Figure 1 is relevant to H_2.

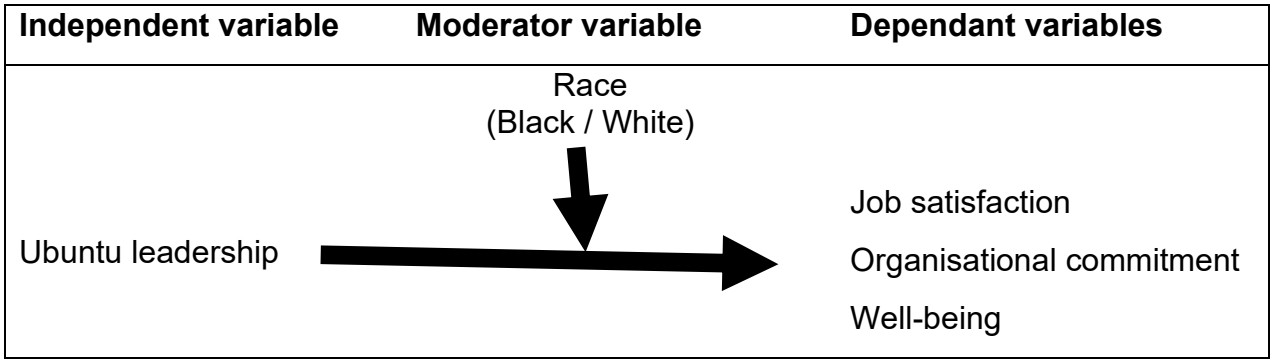

Figure 1: Race as moderator for the leadership-outcome relationship

Data analysis plan

Before conducting inferential statistics, the quality of the data was first assessed. Reliability analyses were conducted using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable, for all scales.

The dimensionality of the new Ubuntu Leadership Rating Scale (ULRS) was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). After several efforts to fit the five-factor model, it was concluded that the ULRS is unidimensional. The unidimensional model of ULRS has a good fit, as presented in the results section under validity. Important for this study, comparing Black and White respondents necessitated testing for measurement invariance across race. These results are also presented under the validity heading. Furthermore, under the validity heading, common method bias results will be presented. As more than 50% of the items in the test battery are items from ULRS, a loading of 50% or more, of the variance on the first factor could well have been expected, particularly as ULRS had a the good fit in the unidimensional model. To demonstrate that the instruments used in the study measure different concepts, exploratory factor analyses were performed.

Should the reliability and validity information be acceptable, descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, skewness, and kurtosis, for all variables (ULRS, JS, OC, WB), will be presented for the full group. Descriptive statistics pertaining to ULRS will be presented per race, as only ULRS relates to the hypotheses (H_1).

Under the heading of inferential statistics, analyses of variance (ANOVA) tests will be performed to compare the mean scores of Ubuntu leadership between Black and White participants. Also, under the heading of inferential statistics, Pearson correlation coefficients between Ubuntu leadership and the three outcome variables (JS, OC, WB) will be computed separately for each racial group. A Z-test will be performed to ascertain whether the correlations differ.

Finally, hierarchical multiple regression analyses will be conducted for each outcome variable (JS, OC, WB), broadly following the procedure outlined by Dawson (2014). In Step 1, only demographic variables will be entered as predictors. In Step 2, Ubuntu leadership will be added. In Step 3, the racial group, as a binary variable, will be included. In Step 4, the interaction term (ULRS × Race) will be entered to test for moderation effects. A significant interaction term will provide evidence of moderation.

Ethical matters

This study was approved by the Ethics Research Committee of the University of South Africa Graduate School of Business Leadership under approval number 3781. No ethical concerns were reported or encountered.

RESULTS

Demographic statistics

The respondents were predominantly aged 30-44 years (56.0%), followed by 18-29 years (26.7%), 45-60 years (16.0%), and a small proportion aged 60 years or older

(1.3%). Precisely 40% of respondents were male, and 60% female (N = 150). The majority of participants identified as African/Black (62.0%), followed by White/Caucasian (24.7%), Coloured/mixed heritage (10.7%), and smaller proportions identifying as Asian (2.0%) or Other (0.7%). Among the leaders, African/Black (45.3%) and White/Caucasian (44.7%) groups were nearly equally represented, while smaller proportions of leaders were identified as Coloured/mixed heritage (7.3%) or Asian (2.7%). Most employees were managed by leaders of the same race, with Black employees led by Black leaders (52.7%) and White employees led by White leaders (22.7%), while 24.0% experienced a racial difference between employee and leader.

Reliability

All four scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.973 for ULRS (20 items), 0.904 for JS (4 items), 0.905 for OC (6 items), and 0.908 for well-being (5 items). Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicated excellent internal consistency for all scales across both samples. The ULRS demonstrated particularly high reliability (α = 0.973), while the JS, OC, and WB scales also showed strong reliability.

Validity

The validity of the ULRS is central to this study, as it was specifically developed for this purpose. The validity of the JS, OC, and W instruments was tested and found satisfactory, but is not reported here to limit the length of the paper. Furthermore, all these instruments have previously demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties.

ULRS model fit: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) indicated that the ULRS 20 items loaded on a single factor, with eigenvalues of 13.340 (66.7% of variance) accounting for a substantial proportion of the variance. The scree plot also clearly supported a single-factor solution. A single-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the 20-item ULRS was estimated in lavaan with DWLS for ordinal indicators and robust SEs. Consistent with the EFA, all standardised loadings were strong (.81–.93), evidencing good convergent relations (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023). Global fit based on robust indices was acceptable to good: CFI = .953 and TLI = .946 (≥ .95 often "good," ≥ .90 acceptable), SRMR = .029 (≤ .08 good), and RMSEA = .080, 90% CI [.070, .089], which sits at the conventional boundary for "reasonable error of approximation" (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2023). The scaled χ^2 was significant ($p < .001$), which is typical with larger df/N and not decisive on its own (Brown, 2015). Following guidance for ordinal CFA, the authors emphasised robust fit indices and allowed a very small number of theory-justified within-domain residual correlations to account for minor wording overlap among items (Li, 2016; Rhemtulla et al., 2012). Overall, the model supports a unidimensional Ubuntu leadership construct with acceptable-to-good fit for publication.

Measurement invariance of the ULRS across Black and White groups: A two-group ordinal CFA (WLSMV estimator) compared Black and White leaders. The configural model fit was excellent ($\chi^2(334) = 284.223$, $\chi^2/df = 0.85$), yielding RMSEA = <.001

(90% CI = 0.000–0.000) and CFI/TLI ≈ 1.00 because $\chi^2 < df$ (RMSEA is lower-bounded at zero and incremental indices cap at 1.00 (Brown, 2015; Kline, 2023)). Constraining thresholds and then loadings produced no change in fit (ΔCFI = 0.00; ΔRMSEA = 0.00 at each step), satisfying Chen's (2007) Δ-criteria and supporting strong invariance (Millsap & Yun-Tein, 2010; Wu & Estabrook, 2016). With measurement equivalence established, the latent mean difference (White vs Black) was small and non-significant (ΔM = 0.101 SD, SE = 0.108, z = 0.933, p = .351, 95% CI [−0.111, 0.312]), indicating no evidence of a racial difference in the underlying Ubuntu leadership factor in this sample.

Common method bias: Common method bias was assessed using Harman's single-factor test (Harman, 1976), in which all variables were forced into a single factor. The ideal is that this factor would account for less than 50% of the variance. However, the single factor explained 56.88% of the variance. This outcome was not unexpected, given that 20 of the 35 items (57.14%) originated from the ULRS. To further examine the factor structure, exploratory factor analyses were conducted to determine the number of distinct constructs in the dataset, applying Kaiser's criterion of retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Variance in dataset

Factors	Eigen value	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	19.910	56.887	56.887
2	2.272	6.490	63.377
3	1.566	4.473	67.851
4	1.186	3.388	71.238

The component matrix results from a Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation (with Kaiser Normalisation), where four components were retained based on eigenvalues greater than 1, and factor loadings below .50 were suppressed to aid interpretation, indicating clearly that the first factor was ULRS, followed by JS, OC and WB. This is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Items of measurement variables and their loadings on components

Component	1	2	3	4
Items of ULRS, WB, OC and JS	ULRS	JS	WB	OC
1 My leader actively listens and responds empathetically to the concerns of team members.	.692			
2 My leader goes out of their way to support others during difficult times, demonstrating genuine care.	.655			
3 My leader encourages a supportive and understanding environment where everyone feels valued.	.788			
4 My leader recognises and addresses the personal and professional needs of team members.	.597			
5 My leader promotes a culture of kindness, where helping others is prioritised.	.707			

Component	1	2	3	4
Items of ULRS, WB, OC and JS	ULRS	JS	WB	OC
6 My leader fosters a sense of unity and teamwork, emphasising collective goals over individual achievements.	.718			
7 My leader advocates for inclusive decision-making, ensuring all voices are heard and considered.	.706			
8 My leader leads by example in collaborating across different departments or groups to achieve common objectives.	.602			
9 My leader strengthens bonds within the team by celebrating collective successes and learning from shared challenges.	.613	.505		
10 My leader encourages the sharing of resources and knowledge to enhance team cohesion and effectiveness.	.678			
11 My leader emphasises the importance of mutual support and cooperation for the team's and organisation's sustainability.	.760			
12 My leader advocates for strategies that ensure the long-term well-being of all team members, not just short-term gains.	.803			
13 My leader encourages resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges, emphasising the strength of working together.	.660			
14 My leader promotes a culture where team members are prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good of the team and organisation.	.510			
15 My leader ensures that the organisation's practices sustain both the social and environmental ecosystems it operates within.	.656			
16 My leader treats all individuals with equal respect, valuing diverse perspectives and backgrounds.	.778			
17 My leader upholds ethical standards and integrity, setting a positive example for others to follow.	.771			
18 My leader encourages an environment where everyone feels respected and empowered to contribute their best.	.767			
19 My leader addresses any form of disrespect or discrimination swiftly and effectively to maintain a dignified workplace.	.753			
20 My leader promotes transparency and fairness in all dealings, ensuring that every team member feels valued and respected.	.791			
1 WB: I feel cheerful and in good spirits.			.735	
1 WB: I feel calm and relaxed.			.779	
3 WB: I feel active and vigorous.			.761	
4 WB: I wake up feeling fresh and rested.			.814	
5 WB: My daily life is filled with things that interest me.			.632	
1 OC: I feel that I owe this organisation quite a bit because of what it has done for me.				.718
2 OC: My organisation deserves my loyalty because of its treatment towards me.		.544		
3 OC: I feel I would be letting my co-workers down if I wasn't a member of this organisation.				.684
4 OC: I am loyal to this organisation because my values are essentially its values.		.524		.543
5 OC: This organisation has a mission that I believe in and am committed to.				.594
6 OC: I feel it is "morally correct" to dedicate myself to this organisation.				.647
1 JS: I find real enjoyment in my job.		.728		
2 JS: I like my job better than the average person.		.725		
3 JS: Most days I am enthusiastic about my job.		.700		
4 JS: I feel fairly well satisfied with my job.		.771		

For the first 20 ULRS items, all primary loadings were on Component 1, with only one item displaying a secondary cross-loading. The four JS items demonstrated a simple structure, loading cleanly on Component 2 with no cross-loadings. Similarly, all five WB items loaded distinctly on Component 3, with no evidence of cross-loadings, supporting factor interpretability. For the six OC items, four exhibited clean loadings without cross-loadings. In one case, an item showed a cross-loading but retained its primary loading on OC, while in another case, the item's primary loading was on JS. Although this deviation from simple structure is not ideal, such cross-loading is not entirely unexpected, given the conceptual overlap between organisational commitment and job satisfaction reported in the psychometric literature.

Descriptive statistics

Presented in Table 3 are the descriptive statistics for ULRS, JS, OC and WB

Table 3: Descriptive statistics

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
ULRS	150	22	120	102.613	18.501	-1.797	3.494
JS	150	4	24	19.880	4.001	-1.704	3.772
OC	150	6	36	29.866	5.444	-1.506	3.110
WB	150	6	30	24.400	4.751	-1.207	1.938

Note: Standard error for skewness is .198 and for kurtosis .394.

The distributions of all variables were negatively skewed, indicating that most respondents reported relatively high scores. Kurtosis values indicate that several variables (ULRS, JS, OC) were leptokurtic, reflecting sharper peaks and heavier tails than a normal distribution, with WB more platykurtic or near-normal, showing flatter distributions with lighter tails. Overall, these patterns suggest that the respondents tended to rate items more positively and consistently. This tendency toward generally higher, positively skewed scores is consistent with well-established response styles (Krosnick, 1999), particularly acquiescence bias, where respondents disproportionately endorse the positive or agreeable end of rating scales.

Important to this study is the difference between the mean scores of Black and White employees on ULRS. These scores are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: ULRS mean scores across race

Race	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI
Black	83	101.938	17.753	1.948	98.063	105.816
White	67	103.447	19.491	2.381	98.693	108.202
Total	150	102.613	18.501	1.510	99.628	105.598

Note: Range 22-120

The mean ULRS scores of Black managers were numerically lower than those of White managers, which was contrary to the hypothesis. To test whether these numerical differences were significant, ANOVAs were performed. The results are presented in the following section.

Inferential statistics

Given the reliability and structural validity of the data, as well as evidence of MI between the Black and White groups, cross-cultural comparisons were warranted. Accordingly, comparisons were conducted on mean scores for ULRS, as well as on the correlations between ULRS and JS, OC, and W.

Mean score differences: Hypothesis 1

Table 5 presents the results of an ANOVA testing whether the difference between the Black (M = 101.93, SD = 17.75) and White (M = 103.44, SD = 19.49) scores on ULRS, as reported in Table 4, was statistically significant.

Table 5: Mean differences between Black and White on ULRS (ANOVA)

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	84.307	1	84.307	0.245	0.621
Within Groups	50921.266	148	344.063	-	-
Total	51005.573	149	-	-	-

Note: Eta-squared (η^2) = .002, Epsilon-squared (ε^2) = –.005, Omega-squared fixed-effect (ω^2) = –.005, and Omega-squared random-effect (ω^2) = –.005

Table 4 shows that White managers obtained numerically higher scores on the ULRS compared to their Black counterparts. However, the ANOVA (Table 5) indicated no statistically significant difference in ULRS scores between the Black and White samples, $F(1, 148) = 0.245$, $p = .621$. The effect sizes were negligible ($\eta^2 = .002$; $\varepsilon^2 = –.005$; ω^2 fixed-effect = –.005; ω^2 random-effect = –.005), indicating that racial group membership explained virtually none of the variance (less than .5%) in ULRS scores. These findings suggest that perceptions of Ubuntu leadership were broadly consistent across Black and White managers, with minimal evidence of systematic group-based differences.

Relational differences: Hypothesis 2

This section addresses two issues. First, the correlations between ULRS and the dependent variables are examined. Second, the relationships between ULRS and the dependent variables are analysed with respondent race included as a moderating variable in a regression model.

Table 6: Pearson correlations, confidence Intervals, Fisher Z, and Z-Tests for JS, OC, and WB by group

Group	Statistic	JS	OC	WB
Black	Pearson correlation	.714	.752	.692
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	112	112	112
	Lower 95% CI	0.528	0.575	0.526
	Upper 95% CI	0.827	0.847	0.801
White	Pearson correlation	.592	.742	.668
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001

	N	38	38	38
	Lower 95% CI	0.344	0.433	0.387
	Upper 95% CI	0.767	0.941	0.855
Black	Fisher Z	0.895	0.978	0.852
White	Fisher Z	0.681	0.955	0.807
Total	Z-test	1.10	0.12	0.23
	Sig.	.270	.910	.820

Note: Fisher Z's were calculated manually; p-values are two-tailed; in the last row, the statistical significance of the differences between the correlations is presented.

The first observation from the results in Table 6 is that the correlations between ULRS and the three variables (JS, OC, and WB) were all high, with the lowest being the UL–JS correlation for the White group (r = . 592, p < .001) and the highest the UL–OC correlation for the Black group (r = . 752, p < .001). According to Cohen (1988), correlations of around .10 are considered small, around .30 are medium, and around .50 or higher are seen as large, indicating that all observed correlations in this study can be considered strong. Ubuntu leadership thus had a practically significant impact on JS, OC and WB.

The second set of results presented in Table 6, pertain to hypothesis two, and concerns the differences between the correlations in the Black and White groups. As expected, the Blacks respondents' correlations were slightly higher than those of the Whites across all three variables (JS, OC, W), although none of these differences reached statistical significance. The p-values did not even get close to the p < .05 threshold. This suggests that the relationships among the constructs are not different and comparable across the two groups, despite the initial hypothesis that ULRS would be more strongly related to JS, OC, and WB in the Black group, given the emic nature of Ubuntu.

The moderation effect of race on the ULRS and the dependent variables (JS, OC, and WB), as graphically presented in Figure 1 (the conceptual model), was also tested, considering the interaction between ULRS and race, using stepwise regression. Table 7 presents the results of this test for JS.

Table 7: Model summaries and fit (ANOVA) test of predictors of JS

Model	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	Std. Error	F	Df	Sig.
1	.149	.022	.009	3.98371	1.669	2,147	.192
2	.692	.478	.468	2.91958	44.633	3,146	<.001
3	.694	.481	.467	2.92166	33.625	4,145	<.001
4	.695	.483	.465	2.92744	26.879	5,144	<.001

Note: Predictors in Model 1: (Constant), Employee race, Employee gender; Predictors in model 2: (Constant), Employee race, Employee gender, ULRS; Predictors in Model 3: (Constant), Employee race, Employee gender, ULRS, B/WEmployee; Predictors: (Constant), Employee race, Employee gender, ULRS, B/WEmployee, ULRSxB/WEmployee

From Table 7, it can be observed that race and gender do not significantly predict JS (Model 1). Adding ULRS to the model significantly increases the predictive validity of the model, predicting 46.8% (see adjusted R^2) of the variance in JS (Model 2). Adding

further complexity to the model by including a binary race variable, Black/White Employee (B/WEmployee), did not add to the predictive power of the model (see adjusted R^2 in Model 3). The same applied when adding the interaction variable ULRSxB/WEmployee (see adjusted R2 in Model 4).

In moderation testing, the criterion is that the interaction term in Model 4 should be significant ($p < .05$), and attenuate the effects of the constituent variables, rendering them non-significant under complete moderation. Presented below are the coefficients for the models predicting JS.

Table 8: Beta coefficients and their significance in models predicting JS

Model		Beta	Std. Error	Std. Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	20.853	1.169	-	17.845	<.001
	Employee gender	-0.125	0.665	-0.015	-0.188	.851
	Employee race	-0.328	0.182	-0.147	-1.802	.074
2	(Constant)	6.323	1.545	-	4.092	<.001
	Employee gender	-0.798	0.491	-0.098	-1.625	.106
	Employee race	-0.151	0.134	-0.068	-1.126	.262
	ULRS	0.148	0.013	0.684	11.300	<.001
3	(Constant)	6.931	1.691	-	4.100	<.001
	Employee gender	-0.732	0.497	-0.090	-1.472	.143
	Employee race	0.052	0.265	0.023	0.195	.846
	ULRS	0.148	0.013	0.686	11.309	<.001
	B/WEmployee	-0.973	1.094	-0.106	-0.890	.375
4	(Constant)	4.486	4.105	-	1.093	.276
	Employee gender	-0.772	0.502	-0.095	-1.538	.126
	Employee race	0.059	0.266	0.027	0.223	.824
	ULRS	0.173	0.040	0.800	4.317	<.001
	B/WEmployee	0.977	3.177	0.107	0.307	.759
	ULRSxB/WEmployee	-0.019	0.030	-0.239	-0.654	.514

From Table 8, it can be observed that ULRS was the only significant predictor of JS, while all additional variables related to moderation were insignificant. The crucial interaction term, presented in the last row of Table 8, was also not significant. Thus, race did not moderate the relationship between ULRS and JS.

The same analyses were conducted with OC and WB as dependent variables, as well as with the leader's race as a moderating variable. These results are not presented for the sake of brevity. However, in none of these cases did the interaction term statistics approach significance, suggesting the absence of moderation. Thus, across multiple dependent variables and race-related moderators, no evidence of moderation by race was found in this sample of South Africans.

DISCUSSION

Ubuntu leadership, rooted in African humanism and communal ethics, has been conceptualised as an emic construct that reflects indigenous cultural norms and values

such as compassion, reciprocity, and relational responsibility (Mbiti, 1969; Ramose, 1999; Tutu, 1999; Lutz, 2009; Mangaliso et al., 2022). Postcolonial scholarship further positions Ubuntu as a form of epistemic resistance to Western leadership paradigms, while also cautioning that cultural identity is heterogeneous and shaped by South Africa's complex racial history (Banerjee & Prasad, 2008; Nkomo, 2011; House et al., 2004; Gade, 2012). Since leadership is socially constructed and contextually bound, with its effectiveness dependent on cultural interpretation (Dickson et al., 2003; House et al., 2004), it was hypothesised that Black South African leaders would display more Ubuntu leadership and that Black respondents would resonate more strongly with Ubuntu leadership than their White counterparts.

Before turning to the hypothesis testing, rigorous attention was given to the reliability and validity of the instruments employed in this study. The ULRS demonstrated strong internal consistency and, despite being theorised as multidimensional, showed a unidimensional factor structure with satisfactory fit. JS, OC and WB displayed acceptable psychometric properties, also when grouped together. Furthermore, tests of measurement invariance confirmed that the ULRS functioned equivalently across Black and White respondents, ensuring that group comparisons were valid. This provided a sound foundation for testing the hypotheses regarding racial differences in Ubuntu leadership and its outcomes.

From the results, several insights emerge regarding Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct. First, with respect to H_1, the study did not find significant differences in Ubuntu leadership scores between Black and White managers. This stands in contrast to theoretical expectations (Nkomo, 2011; Lutz, 2009) and the assumption, drawn from the emic perspective, that Ubuntu is primarily embedded in Black African cultural heritage. Instead, the finding suggests that Ubuntu leadership practices may be more widely shared across racial groups in South Africa than previously assumed. This echoes Louw's (2015) caution that Ubuntu, while rooted in African identity, is not uniformly internalised even among Black South Africans.

Second, regarding H_2, Ubuntu leadership was strongly and positively associated with JS, OC and WB. These results align with prior philosophical and theoretical claims that contextually, Ubuntu leadership is impactful. It is a powerful predictor of JS, OC and WB, for all South African respondents, irrespective of race. Complementary to this statement, and contrary to the hypothesis, the strength of these relationships did not differ significantly between Black and White respondents. While correlations were slightly higher for Black employees (Table 6), the absence of statistically significant moderation effects suggests that Ubuntu leadership is not exclusively emic in its outcomes (Table 8). Emic leadership models are not more predictive of employee outcomes, contrary to what is implied by some scholars (Jackson et al., 2008; Mangaliso, 2001). Ubuntu may extend beyond its emic roots and operate etically.

Taken together, these results complicate the strict dichotomy between emic and etic perspectives (Berry, 1998; Berry et al., 2011). It calls into question postcolonial critiques that warn against essentialising cultural identity (Nkomo, 2011; Banerjee &

Linstead, 2001), or, for that matter, national identity. At the same time, it entails questioning the extent to which contemporary indigenous perspectives are central and whether their reclamation is warranted (Chukwuere, 2020; Mwipikeni, 2018; Sebola, 2019; Zondi & Makhoba, 2018). Although Ubuntu leadership is deeply rooted in African philosophy, the results suggest that it also possesses cross-group applicability and relevance. As such, Ubuntu leadership represents a case where an indigenous philosophy can affirm local heritage while simultaneously contributing meaningfully to multicultural organisational contexts.

Practical implications

The findings suggest that Ubuntu leadership is and can be applied effectively across racially diverse groups in South Africa, reinforcing its relevance as a leadership approach for multicultural organisations. Leaders, irrespective of their race, who embody Ubuntu principles, are likely to foster high levels of JS, OC, and WB among employees. For organisations, this underscores the value of leadership development initiatives that incorporate Ubuntu-based training and reflection, as these not only resonate with and acknowledge local cultural heritage but also generate substantial positive impacts for the organisation. By positioning Ubuntu leadership as both culturally grounded and universally beneficial, organisations can engage employees and contribute to a more humane workplace culture.

Limitations and future research

The results of this study are constrained by the cross-sectional design, the sample type and sample size, reliance on self-report measures, potential social desirability effects, and the risk of common method bias – limitations that are commonly observed in similar research. Future research should employ more complex models, incorporating variables such as the racial match between employee and leader, examining organisations separately, and potentially including a complementary qualitative component to explore how various aspects of Ubuntu leadership interact with the outcomes they produce. Anyone interested in using the ULRS is welcome to do so without seeking permission from the authors, provided that this paper is properly referenced in their work.

CONCLUSION

From the results mentioned above, this study demonstrates that Ubuntu leadership is a powerful predictor of employee well-being, job satisfaction, and organisational commitment, but that these effects are not moderated by race. Contrary to the assumption that Ubuntu leadership functions solely as an emic construct limited to Black cultural expression, the findings suggest that it is also embraced across racial groups, functioning as an effective leadership model in South Africa's multicultural organisations. These results negate the emic nature of Ubuntu leadership while it underscores the importance of Ubuntu as a broadly relevant framework for fostering positive organisational outcomes.

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Chapter 12: Integrating perspectives on the African nature of Ubuntu

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	**C**	**C1+C2**	**-**	**Synthesis of C**
13	A+B+C	Conclusions	-	Synthesis of A, B & C

Introduction

This chapter integrates the work on Objectives C1 and C2, offering a synthesis of perspectives on the African nature of Ubuntu (Aim C). A standalone publication was deemed unlikely to be publishable, as full methodological details and extensive results would have made the work unwieldy. Instead, Chapter 12 focuses on the findings of Articles 8 to 12, enabling a compelling conclusion without repeating the largely similar literature reviews and methodological details. While much of what follows revisits earlier material, placing these results in proximity enables a synthesis that would not have been possible had they remained dispersed.

Article 8: Leadership styles in Africa: Quantifying the uniqueness of the humane orientation

In Article 8, the hypothesis that humane-oriented leadership (HOL) could be regarded as the most effective leadership style in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was tested. The assumption was that HOL would resonate more strongly in Africa, given the prominence of Ubuntu and African humanness as guiding philosophies. To assess this claim, the effectiveness ratings of HOL in the SSA cluster were compared with those

in the Anglo cluster, a comparison particularly relevant in light of current decolonialisation debates. Data from the GLOBE study was used.

The results showed that SSA managers rated HOL higher than their Anglo counterparts, with a statistically significant but moderate difference (Cohen's d = .36), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Notably, however, the Southern Asian cluster reported the highest endorsement of HOL, underscoring that the construct is not uniquely African.

GLOBE further assessed five other leadership styles: Charismatic/Value-based, Team-oriented, Participative, Autonomous, and Self-protective. Within both the SSA and Anglo clusters, HOL ranked fourth in effectiveness, with Charismatic/Value-based and Team-oriented leadership rated most highly.

Table 2: Leadership scores for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo cluster

Cluster	Dimensions					
	Charismatic/ Value-based	Team-oriented	Participative	HOL	Autonomous	Self-protective
SSA	5.79	5.70	5.31	5.16	3.63	3.55
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6
Anglo	6.05	5.74	5.73	5.08	3.82	3.08
Rank	1	2	3	4	5	6

Source: Adapted from Dorfman et al. (2004 p. 680).

Taken together, these findings suggest that while HOL, as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership, receives somewhat stronger endorsement in SSA than in the Anglo cluster, it is not uniquely African. The near-identical ranking patterns across clusters indicate that Ubuntu leadership resonates beyond Africa, although it is not the dominant leadership style within the continent. This raises important questions, not only about the claim to cultural exclusivity and the possible enduring influence of colonial legacies, but also about the existence of leadership practices that may be universally relevant.

Article 9: Ubuntu as an emic belief system: A quantitative analysis of humane-oriented practices

In Article 9, data from the GLOBE study was again utilised, this time focusing not on leadership effectiveness but on organisational values. The GLOBE Societal and Organisational Culture Questionnaire (SOCQ) was employed to measure humane orientation alongside nine other cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, and performance orientation.

As in the case of Article 8, the central assumption was that humane orientation would be relatively high in Africa, and potentially endorsed as an emic African value. Mean scores on humane orientation were compared across regions, countries, and within South Africa. The findings showed that many African countries scored above the global mean, suggesting a distinctly African link to humane orientation, again treated as a proxy for Ubuntu. Among the ten GLOBE regional clusters, Sub-Saharan Africa ranked second highest, just below Southern Asia. A comparison between the SSA and Anglo clusters was done, as in Article 8, with HOL effectiveness. It revealed similar results, in other words, a moderate difference (Cohen's d = .47), now on the cultural dimension.

Importantly, considering the universality of Ubuntu in Africa, significant differences emerged within Africa itself, indicating that humane orientation is not uniformly endorsed across the continent. This aligns with earlier conclusions (see Articles 6 and 7). Also, within South Africa, Black respondents viewed their society's practices as far more humane-oriented than White respondents did, and this produced a large difference (Cohen's d = 1.7). This finding will stand in contrast to what is reported in Article 12, with data collected in 2025.

Overall, the results of Article 9 confirm a strong association between humane orientation and Africa, particularly in contrast to the Anglo cluster. However, humane orientation is not unique to Africa; it appears prominently elsewhere, and within Africa, its endorsement varies considerably. Thus, Article 9 provides empirical evidence that the humane orientation value, central to Ubuntu, is expressed in Africa, but that its expression is diverse within Africa.

Article 10: Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo world

In this article, secondary data was again employed, as in Articles 8 and 9, but this time drawing on the 2025 World Values Survey (WVS). Nineteen WVS items were identified as proxies for Ubuntu values. A comparison was made between Sub-Saharan African and Anglo countries. The results showed that Ubuntu-aligned values were more prevalent in African responses in five cases, less prevalent in eight, and showed no significant difference in five. These findings suggest that, while elements of Ubuntu are evident among Sub-Saharan respondents, Anglo participants more often endorsed values aligned with Ubuntu. This outcome stands in contrast to Articles 8 and 9, where Africans demonstrated moderately higher affiliations with Ubuntu-related leadership (Article 8) and values (Article 9). Taken together, the results challenge the assumption that Ubuntu is a distinctly African worldview. Article 10 thus provides only limited empirical support for the claim that Ubuntu values are uniquely characteristic of Sub-Saharan cultures and, particularly when considered alongside Article 8, raises questions about the framing of Ubuntu as a dominant indigenous paradigm within African socio-political discourse.

Article 11: Ubuntu leadership across cultures: A comparative study of its prevalence and outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom

Article 11 makes use of primary data collected specifically for this study. As in the previous articles, the prominence of Ubuntu in Africa was examined in contrast to another context – this time, comparing South Africa with the United Kingdom (UK). The assumption was that South African managers would display higher levels of Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, and that they would respond more strongly to an Ubuntu leadership “prompt.” Data was collected from 150 participants in South Africa and 151 in the UK.

Results revealed that South African managers scored significantly higher on Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, providing strong evidence of the existence of Ubuntu leadership in South Africa. This finding contrasts with the more moderate evidence presented in Articles 8 and 9, and the counter-theoretical results reported in Article 10. Article 11 – and, as will be seen, Article 12 – add an important dimension to the debate introduced in Article 6 concerning the positive outcomes of Ubuntu

leadership. The results in this regard, presented in Article 11, were firstly that Ubuntu leadership was found to have a practically significant impact on positive organisational outcomes (job satisfaction, normative organisational commitment, and psychological wellbeing). Secondly, and contrary to expectations, the strength of these relationships was not greater in the South African context than in the UK context. In other words, the assumption that Africans would be more strongly primed by an emic leadership style did not hold.

The findings of Article 11 affirm the Africanness of Ubuntu by showing that South African managers displayed significantly higher levels of Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts. At the same time, the absence of more substantial outcome effects in the South African context suggests that while Ubuntu is rooted in African traditions, its relevance extends beyond Africa, challenging claims that it is an exclusively African paradigm.

Article 12: Ubuntu leadership as an emic construct: Expression and outcomes among Black and White South Africans

The data collected for Article 11 was further analysed to produce Article 12. Of the 301 responses reported in Article 11, the 150 from South Africa were used. The same hypotheses were essentially tested, but this time not through cross-country comparisons; instead, the focus was on differences between White and Black South Africans in their association with Ubuntu. The assumption was that White South Africans, many of Anglo or broader Western European descent, would be less inclined to display Ubuntu-like leadership and would respond less strongly to Ubuntu prompts than Black South Africans, who are largely of African descent.

The results of Article 12, however, contradicted these expectations. Employees reported that both Black and White South African managers exhibited similar levels of Ubuntu leadership. This finding contrasts with the earlier GLOBE study, conducted many years ago, which had shown higher levels of humane orientation among Black South African managers. The present study found that South African managers, regardless of race, demonstrated comparable levels of Ubuntu leadership.

Similar to the findings reported in Article 11, the hypothesis that the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes would differ across the two groups was not supported. Instead, the results showed that these relationships were

consistently strong and practically significant, with no meaningful differences between racial groups.

Although Ubuntu is often regarded as an emic construct tied to Black cultural expression, the findings indicate that Ubuntu leadership in South Africa is expressed across racial groups and yields positive outcomes for employees irrespective of race. Article 12, therefore, underscores Ubuntu's relevance as an effective leadership framework for fostering positive workplace outcomes in South Africa more broadly, without a race-based focus.

Conclusion

Articles 8 to 12 provide a nuanced answer to the question of Ubuntu's "Africanness." As explained in the literature (Articles 1 to 5), Ubuntu leadership is rooted in African moral philosophy, and this research shows somewhat elevated endorsement in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the effects are not confined to Africa. The weight of evidence supports an "African-origin, globally relevant" position rather than a claim of exclusivity.

In Articles 8 and 9, the results show a consistent, moderate Sub-Saharan advantage: the Sub-Saharan cluster outranked the Anglo cluster, while Southern Asia consistently exceeded Sub-Saharan levels. These patterns suggest that while Ubuntu-aligned leadership and values resonate in Africa, they are not limited to Africa. Article 10 introduces constructive tension: Anglo populations sometimes endorsed "Ubuntu-like" values more than Sub-Saharan respondents. This divergence may relate to the level of analysis (workplace leadership in GLOBE versus broad societal values in WVS) and operationalisation (purpose-built leadership and culture constructs in GLOBE versus post-hoc proxy items in WVS).

The primary data (Articles 11 and 12) adds granularity and timeliness. Article 11 shows South African managers scoring higher on Ubuntu leadership than UK managers, corroborating the "African-origin" claim at the level of perceived workplace leadership. At the same time, the effects of Ubuntu leadership on outcomes (job satisfaction, organisational commitment, well-being) were practically strong in both countries, challenging the idea that Ubuntu's benefits are context-bound. Article 12 deepens this picture within South Africa: Black and White managers were reported to display similar levels of Ubuntu leadership, and the positive outcome relationships were equally strong across racial groups. This finding sits in productive tension with older GLOBE

evidence suggesting higher humane orientation among Black South African managers; it plausibly reflects temporal change and cross-group convergence in organisational norms in South Africa.

Conceptually, Ubuntu is best framed as an African philosophical resource whose leadership expression has cross-cultural efficacy. Practically, organisations in South Africa (and beyond) can invest in Ubuntu-informed leadership development without presuming it “belongs” only to certain groups; the benefits appear generalisable across race and national context. Normatively, claims that Ubuntu must be either uniquely African or universally generic are too stark; the evidence supports a middle position: African in origin and symbolism, and globally resonant in practice and outcomes.

Chapter 13: Conclusions: Synthesis, limitations and future research

Orientation chart

Chapter	Aim	Objective	Article(s)	Description
1	-	Orientation	-	
2	A	A1	1, 2	
3	A	A2	3	
4	A	A3	4	
5	A	A1+A2+A3	5	Synthesis of A
6	B	B1	6	
7	B	B2	7	
8	B	B3	11, 12	
9	B	B+B2+B3	-	Synthesis of B
10	C	C1	8, 9, 10, 11	
11	C	C2	12	
12	C	C1+C2	-	Synthesis of C
13	**A+B+C**	**Conclusions**	-	**Synthesis of A, B & C**

INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as the concluding chapter of the thesis. It starts by revisiting the problem statement, aim, and objectives. Although the individual papers address the stated objectives, the compilation does not, in itself, constitute a coherent or integrated narrative of the overall work. Some objectives are not fully covered by individual papers, while overlaps exist across others. Accordingly, this chapter seeks to integrate all findings and results into a coherent grand conclusion. Staying true to the principles of critical realism, all findings are incorporated into a comprehensive narrative. The conceptual model presented in Chapter 1 is then revisited, followed by reflections on the limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies. No dedications or acknowledgements are included here, as these are already presented in the preliminary sections.

13.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Chapter 1, following some discussion, a single-sentence problem statement, with the emphasis on the statement, was formulated. It was stated that “the lack of conceptual clarity, limited empirical evidence of impact, and insufficient examination of

its uniquely African character leave Ubuntu's role and relevance in addressing African challenges largely unsubstantiated".

Throughout this thesis, an attempt was made to address the problem by providing a largely quantitative examination of what the Ubuntu concept entails, how it operates, what outcomes it produces, and the extent to which it constitutes a distinctly African construct capable of addressing African problems.

13.2 AIM(S) AND ACHIEVED OBJECTIVES

The general aim of the project was to conceptualise Ubuntu comprehensively, report on its impact, and specify the extent of its African nature[11]. It is clear from the thesis that the work was structured around three sub-aims: conceptualising Ubuntu, assessing its impact, and examining its African nature. All objectives were achieved.

13.2.1 Objective A1: To define Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership through an extensive literature review – See Article 1 and 2.

13.2.2 Objective A2: To conceptualise Ubuntu leadership by focusing on characteristics assessed in measures of Ubuntu leadership – See Article 3.

13.2.3 Objective A3: To adapt or develop a questionnaire that will assess the level of Ubuntu leadership practised by a leader – See Article 4.

13.2.4 Aim A: Conceptualising Ubuntu – See Article 5.

13.2.5 Objective B1: To describe the organisational effects of Ubuntu leadership through a systematic review of empirical research results – See Article 6.

13.2.6 Objective B2: To assess the prevalence of Ubuntu behaviour among leaders – See Article 7.

13.2. 7 Objective B3: To test the relationship between Ubuntu leadership and desirable organisational outcomes – See Chapter 8.

13.2.8 Aim B: The impact of Ubuntu – See Chapter 9.

[11] … towards providing a weighted opinion on the utility of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership in contemporary South Africa.

13.2.9 Objective C1: To specify the African nature of Ubuntu by comparing Ubuntu-aligned values across countries – See Article 8, 9, 10 and 11.

13.2.10 Objective C2: To specify the African nature of Ubuntu by contrasting the relevance and impact of Ubuntu on those with an African cultural background with those of a Western cultural background – See Article 12.

13.2.11 Aim C: The African nature of Ubuntu – See Chapter 12.

The successful completion of the study's objectives resulted in the achievement of its aims. The objectives provided the operational steps through which the broader aims of the research were addressed. All that remained was to integrate the findings associated with the different aims into a coherent whole. All what was left was to integrate the different aims, and this is presented below.

13.3 INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS INTO A COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE

This section integrates the findings from the preceding studies into a coherent explanatory narrative, consistent with a critical realist approach to the overarching research problem. Individual syntheses related to the three themes have already been presented: Chapter 5 addressed the conceptualisation of Ubuntu, Chapter 9 examined its effects, and Chapter 12 explored the Africanness of Ubuntu.

A bold attempt was made to present the findings in a single paragraph. It read as follows:

> Ubuntu, as a concept, is relatively uniformly defined and often idealised as an ethos to rejuvenate Africa. [A working definition was developed in this research by identifying and synthesising common themes across existing conceptualisations.] While its elements are generally agreed upon, from a psychometric perspective, it is defined in a less complex manner than theoretically portrayed. [This was also reflected in the measurement scale developed for the study.] Evidence from this study supports the view that Ubuntu leadership has a positive effect on employees' job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being, strengthening the limited and often tentative evidence previously available. Ubuntu, however, is not consistently embraced across Africa and appears to be primarily a Southern African ethos. The humane orientation that underpins Ubuntu is not restricted to Africa, as

similar values are recognised in other contexts. Africans may endorse Ubuntu more strongly than those in Anglo settings, but this does not make the concept exclusively African. [Most comparisons in this research were made between African groups, or between South Africa and Anglo countries, specifically the United Kingdom.] Across contexts, Ubuntu leadership consistently yields positive outcomes. Nevertheless, while Ubuntu may represent a powerful leadership style, several other approaches also prove effective, including those found in Africa. [The present study indicates that Ubuntu ranks fourth as a potent leadership style in Africa.] It is best characterised as "African in origin, globally relevant, and demonstrably potent."

While it does not encompass every detail of the research, it captures the essence of the findings and provides a sufficient basis for revisiting the conceptual model introduced in Chapter 1.

13.4 CONCEPTUAL MODEL

The conceptual model presented in Chapter 1 illustrates the relationships between the main constructs and provides a visual representation of the study's focus. The conceptual framework guiding the study, developed in light of the research, was presented in Chapter 1 as follows.

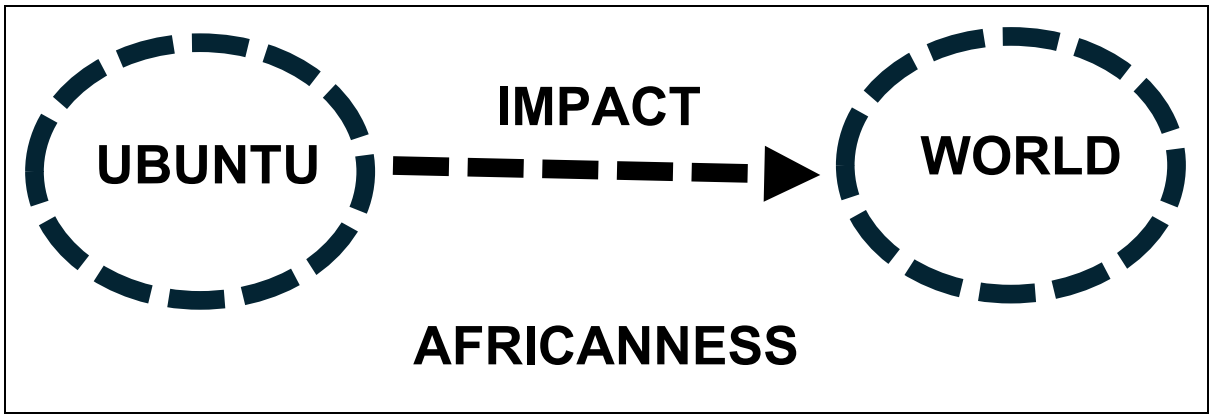

Figure 1: Conceptual model following the investigation (From Chapter 1, then called Figure 3)

The conceptual model developed through this investigation, and informed by the theoretical framework of critical realism, should provide a clearer picture than the blurred representation in Figure 1 (Chapter 1), yet not the absolute certainty suggested by Figure 2 (Chapter 1). What is presented here lies somewhere between those two depictions.

Following this research, a clearer picture of the concept has emerged, along with a comprehensive definition outlining its central aspects (the first circle has become clearer). The findings also demonstrate that Ubuntu exerts a substantial impact (the arrow is now much clearer), specifically on certain organisational outcomes (the second circle has become clearer). It was shown that Ubuntu influences job satisfaction, normative organisational commitment, and psychological well-being. Lastly, regarding the Africa/non-Africa dimension presented at the bottom of the figure, the normative claims that Ubuntu should be either uniquely African or universally generic are overly stark. The evidence supports a middle position – African in origin and symbolism, yet globally resonant in practice and outcomes.

13.5 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The conceptualisation and operationalisation of Ubuntu were undertaken as essential precursors to theory building, providing the groundwork for a coherent theory of Ubuntu leadership. In line with established theory-building logic, conceptualisation ensures definitional clarity and articulates the theoretical domain, while operationalisation enables the empirical testing and refinement of the theory. Although no fully developed theory is presented here, the route for theory building and subsequent testing is clearly established by the study.

This study is grounded in critical realism. True to this ontological lens, Ubuntu is regarded as existing independently of human perception: Ubuntu is there, it influences the environment, and it continues to exist even when not directly observable. It is further recognised that knowledge of Ubuntu and its impact is mediated by several factors, with geography and race playing important roles in this research. At an epistemological level, care was taken to employ appropriate and, in particular, multiple methodological designs to approximate the truth. The emphasis is on approaching, rather than fully attaining, truth. Theoretically, this research does not introduce a new framework but contributes by consolidating, clarifying, and adding depth to the scholarly understanding of Ubuntu.

13.6 METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

It can be stated with confidence that this thesis adopts a mixed-methods methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the research questions thoroughly. The first part consisted primarily of qualitative research, involving the

exploration, interpretation, and synthesis of articles and the ideas, concepts, and theories they presented. The second part was predominantly quantitative, drawing on published research results (e.g., GLOBE), secondary data (e.g., World Values Survey), and data collected specifically for this study. The methods of analysis were also diverse. The first set of articles required conceptual evaluation, where the author relied on scholarly reasoning to reach conclusions. In the second set of articles, the data was more amenable to statistical analysis, producing numerical results that could be assessed against clear-cut-off scores to determine outcomes. This latter part of the research required not only the thematic integration of articles, as was done in Chapters 5, 9, and 12, but also their consideration as a whole, which forms the focus of this chapter. This synthesis was challenging, given the three different themes addressed in the research and the substantial body of work, consisting of twelve articles in total. Building on Chapter 1 (Orientation) and the summative chapters (Chapters 5, 9, and 12), which synthesised the findings related to the three themes, a grand narrative was constructed in a single, extended paragraph through scholarly judgement. Rather than presenting a complex, multi-page integration, the decision was made to provide an executive summary focused on the general aim of the study and the overarching research problem, rather than on methodological detail.

13.7 CONTRIBUTION: IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The study makes several contributions.

The importance of this study lies first in its success at clarifying the conceptual foundations of Ubuntu. Often celebrated but inconsistently defined, Ubuntu has historically been invoked as an aspirational ethos rather than treated as a robust construct. This research demonstrates that Ubuntu can be clearly delineated, empirically measured, and meaningfully applied. In doing so, it establishes the first building block of a coherent body of knowledge – conceptualisation – allowing scholars, educators, and policymakers to present Ubuntu as a viable and legitimate framework in philosophy, education, and leadership studies. This step moves Ubuntu from rhetoric to recognition as a definable and researchable leadership concept; African in origin yet globally relevant.

A second area of importance lies in the practical application of Ubuntu in organisational and human resource systems. Evidence from this study showed that Ubuntu

leadership is strongly and consistently related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and psychological well-being across racial groups in South Africa and in a cross-national context with the United Kingdom. This supports the deliberate incorporation of Ubuntu into HR processes, including leadership selection, coaching, development, and performance evaluation. For organisations, the study demonstrates that Ubuntu is not only a cultural philosophy but also a practical leadership style that can yield measurable benefits in employee outcomes and workplace cohesion.

A third contribution is the development of the Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS). This instrument was created and validated as part of the study, showing strong reliability, acceptable validity, and brevity in administration. It offers a practical tool for integrating Ubuntu into HR systems, both as a baseline measure and as a means of assessing progress in leadership development programmes. Importantly, the ULRS is freely available for use, provided that the work is properly referenced, thereby extending the reach and practical impact of the study.

Finally, the study is significant due to the debates it generated at the conceptual, methodological, and practical levels. Its mixed-methods design ensured rigour and integration across diverse sources of data. At the same time, the challenges it encountered in peer review and conference forums underscored the novelty and relevance of the work. By stimulating discourse, refining measurement, and linking conceptual clarity to practical application, the research both consolidates Ubuntu as a recognised construct and positions it as a valuable addition to global leadership models.

In sum, the study is important because it achieves three outcomes of lasting value: it provides a consolidated conceptualisation of Ubuntu as a leadership construct, it demonstrates its usefulness for HR systems and organisational practice, and it introduces the ULRS as a reliable, freely available tool to operationalise Ubuntu in real-world settings. Together, these contributions ensure that Ubuntu can be advanced with confidence as African in origin, globally resonant in practice, and meaningful for both scholarship and management.

13.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The use of geographical designations to locate Ubuntu is conceptually problematic. References shift between South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Africa as a whole,

creating inconsistency. Although the intention was to cite sources accurately, discrepancies arose partly from the way references were combined – for instance, one source describing Ubuntu as an African philosophy and another framing it as a Sub-Saharan leadership style. This conflation highlights the risk of blurring distinct geographical and conceptual boundaries. It must also be acknowledged that Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and South Africa are not culturally homogeneous entities, and invoking them as such risks reinforcing cultural essentialism (see Article 12). Nevertheless, these terms were employed pragmatically in the study to remain aligned with existing literature and comparative datasets, despite recognising their inherent limitations.

Some reviewers regarded the emphasis on the uniqueness of Ubuntu in Africa as a potential limitation of the study, suggesting that greater attention should be directed to its salience. This critique is valid, since most scholars would recognise that Ubuntu's humane orientation resonates with principles also found in Confucianism, humanism, and other communitarian ethical systems. Nonetheless, claims of uniqueness are frequently advanced in the literature (Molefe & Magam, 2019; Tutu, 2000; Gade, 2012), often asserting that Ubuntu is particularly suited to addressing African challenges. Therefore, the issue of salience was not disregarded in this study. Several articles (Articles 8, 9, 10, and 11) explicitly report on the salience of Ubuntu. Empirically, the findings indicated that Ubuntu is neither unique nor particularly salient in the African contexts, contrary to some scholarly assertions (Metz, 2011; Mukuni & Tlou, 2021). Consequently, even if the study's title were reframed to emphasise salience rather than uniqueness, a revision that would be difficult at this stage given the incorporation of "uniqueness" across multiple articles, the overall conclusion would remain unchanged: Ubuntu was found to be neither unique nor particularly salient.

The study deliberately and unapologetically adopted a predominantly quantitative focus and approach. It is intended to provide empirical evidence to the Ubuntu studies field, which is often regarded as conceptually rich yet lacking in empirical depth, a contribution it successfully achieves. At the same time, it is acknowledged that even within a positivist orientation, interpretation by the researcher inevitably shapes the analysis. This acknowledgement, however, does not serve to defend the outcomes but rather to situate them within a broader epistemological frame. Grounded in critical realism, the study also recognises that contributions from qualitatively oriented

scholars, as well as from philosophical and political perspectives, could further enrich and deepen the discourse.

Another limitation of the study lies in its use of proxies. As acknowledged in Article 8, humane-oriented leadership (HOL) was employed as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership, and in Article 9, humane values were paired with Ubuntu values. The reliance on proxies is by no means ideal and must be recognised as a limitation. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the overall value of the research. The very presence of such constructs within quantitative research frameworks legitimises their use. Thus, while the use of proxies is not optimal, it remains both defensible and methodologically permissible.

A further challenge in this research was integrating the various outcomes into a coherent narrative. Although the studies were initially planned to align seamlessly, the research process itself, together with the demands of reviewers and publishers, resulted in article titles and even content becoming somewhat fragmented. The thesis ultimately comprised twelve such articles, representing three broad themes. Synthesising articles within these themes proved difficult, as the methodologies employed differed and, at times, the findings were not complementary. Beyond this, there remained the task of weaving the themes into a comprehensive, overarching narrative. This integration process was demanding and required far more interpretive work than originally planned. The role of researcher reflexivity, particularly in the final phases where the interpretation and integration of findings were shaped by the researcher's perspective, must be acknowledged as a limitation of the study. Nonetheless, interpretive work remains consistent with the critical realist orientation that the research adopted.

Many more limitations are present in the research, but the ones noted above are the overarching concerns. Most articles include dedicated sections addressing their specific limitations. These are not repeated here to avoid unnecessary repetition.

13.9 FUTURE RESEARCH

It is not necessary to state that future research could address the limitations of the present study or move beyond the delineations already made, as these have been recorded and can be deducted from those statements. However, several other avenues remain worthy of exploration.

While this thesis consolidated Ubuntu into a workable definition and measurable construct, further refinement of its conceptual boundaries may still be required. Future research should continue to explore whether Ubuntu is best defined as a leadership style, a cultural ethos, or both, and test alternative operationalisations to capture dimensions not yet integrated.

Future studies should systematically compare Ubuntu leadership with other established leadership styles, such as transformational, authentic, ethical, and particularly servant leadership. Such comparisons would clarify whether Ubuntu offers unique explanatory power. In line with this research, these comparisons should consider not only effectiveness but also cultural resonance, thereby assessing the cultural effectiveness of other leadership styles as well.

Staying with the cross-cultural theme, and although this study demonstrated Ubuntu's effects in both South Africa and the UK, further cross-cultural research is needed. Examining Ubuntu leadership in diverse contexts, such as in Southern Asia, which is closely aligned with humane orientation, could help assess whether Ubuntu has global resonance.

As alluded to in the limitations, future studies could also replicate these findings using larger, more representative, and stratified samples that cut across industries, occupational levels, and demographic groups. This would enable more robust subgroup analyses and support stronger conclusions about the stability of Ubuntu's effects across populations.

Also mentioned earlier, research should extend beyond the traditional individual-level outcomes of job satisfaction and organisational commitment, which tend to dominate Western studies. The impact of Ubuntu should also be considered in terms of collective-level outcomes, including organisational ethical climate, social cohesion, and community trust, which may align with African priorities.

This research focused mainly on simple models, often limited to two variables or basic mediation. Future work should apply more complex designs, such as moderated mediation, multilevel approaches, or structural models, to better capture the realities of organisational life and its dynamics. For this reason, many more variables would need to be included, which would lengthen the surveys and make the research more challenging to execute.

Future research should also harness the growing potential of artificial intelligence (AI) to advance Ubuntu scholarship. AI-assisted methods can substantially enhance systematic literature reviews, qualitative coding, conceptual synthesis, scale development, thereby accelerating the development and refinement of theory. At the same time, AI should be regarded as a research support tool rather than a substitute for scholarly judgement. Researchers remain responsible for ensuring the accuracy, originality, transparency, and ethical integrity of their work. The uncritical use of AI, particularly where it generates interpretations, citations, or text without rigorous verification and appropriate disclosure, risks undermining scientific credibility and constitutes an unethical research practice.

Finally, future research should engage Ubuntu leadership in broader debates on decolonisation, indigenous knowledge systems, and global leadership theory. Such interdisciplinary work would reinforce Ubuntu's significance as both a practical managerial construct and a philosophical contribution to leadership discourse.

It is thus clear that, although the ambition was to paint a clear picture of Ubuntu, as envisioned in Figure 2 of Chapter 1, this aim was not fully achieved. However, while individual contributions may be modest, collectively they advance progress towards a more meaningful whole. As Nelson Mandela affirmed, 'It always seems impossible until it's done.' Consequently, it is our task to assume this responsibility to turn Ubuntu into a living ideal.

13.10 CONCLUSION

At the outset, this research identified a central problem: "the lack of conceptual clarity, limited empirical evidence of impact, and insufficient examination of its uniquely African character leave Ubuntu's role and relevance in addressing African challenges largely unsubstantiated." After twelve articles and nearly 300 pages of investigation, greater clarity has now been achieved. Ubuntu has been more precisely defined, its effects on key organisational outcomes established, and its African origins affirmed. At the same time, evidence shows that Ubuntu resonates beyond Africa, consistently demonstrating relevance across contexts. The most accurate characterisation emerging from this body of work is that Ubuntu is African in origin, globally relevant, and demonstrably potent.

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Annexures

Annexure 1: The Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS)

Respondents were asked to rate these items on a scale (e.g., 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), to assess the extent to which leaders embody these values. It is present as a multidimensional scale. However, its unidimensional nature was revealed in Article 11 of this thesis. Anyone interested to use this scale is welcome to do so, with the condition that they quote Article 11 [[Still unpublished]] as the source. Also, if “My leader” is replaced with “I”, this could be called the “Ubuntu Employee Reflection Scale (UERS)”.

Ubuntu Leadership Reflection Scale (ULRS)

Components and items
1. Compassion
1.1: My leader actively listens and responds empathetically to the concerns of team members.
1.2: My leader goes out of his/her way to support others during difficult times, demonstrating genuine care.
1.3: My leader encourages a supportive and understanding environment where everyone feels valued.
1.4: My leader recognises and addresses the personal and professional needs of team members.
1.5: My leader promotes a culture of kindness, where helping others is prioritized.
2. Solidarity
2.1: My leader fosters a sense of unity and teamwork, emphasising collective goals over individual achievements.
2.2: My leader advocates for inclusive decision-making, ensuring all voices are heard and considered.
2.3: My leader leads by example in collaborating across different departments or groups to achieve common objectives.
2.4: My leader strengthens bonds within the team by celebrating collective successes and learning from shared challenges.
2.5: My leader encourages the sharing of resources and knowledge to enhance team cohesion and effectiveness.
3. Survival

3.1: My leader emphasises the importance of mutual support and cooperation for the team's and organisation's sustainability.

3.2: My leader advocates for strategies that ensure the long-term well-being of all team members, not just short-term gains.

3.3: My leader encourages resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges, emphasising the strength of working together.

3.4: My leader promotes a culture where team members are prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good of the team and organisation.

3.5: My leader ensures that the organisation's practices sustain both the social and environmental ecosystems it operates within.

4. Respect and Dignity

4.1: My leader treats all individuals with equal respect, valuing diverse perspectives and backgrounds.

4.2: My leader upholds ethical standards and integrity, setting a positive example for others to follow.

4.3: My leader encourages an environment where everyone feels respected and empowered to contribute their best.

4.4: My leader addresses any form of disrespect or discrimination swiftly and effectively to maintain a dignified workplace.

4.5: My leader promotes transparency and fairness in all dealings, ensuring that every team member feels valued and respected.

Source: OpenAI’s ChatGPT, personal communication, February 20, 2024.

Annexure 2: Similarity report

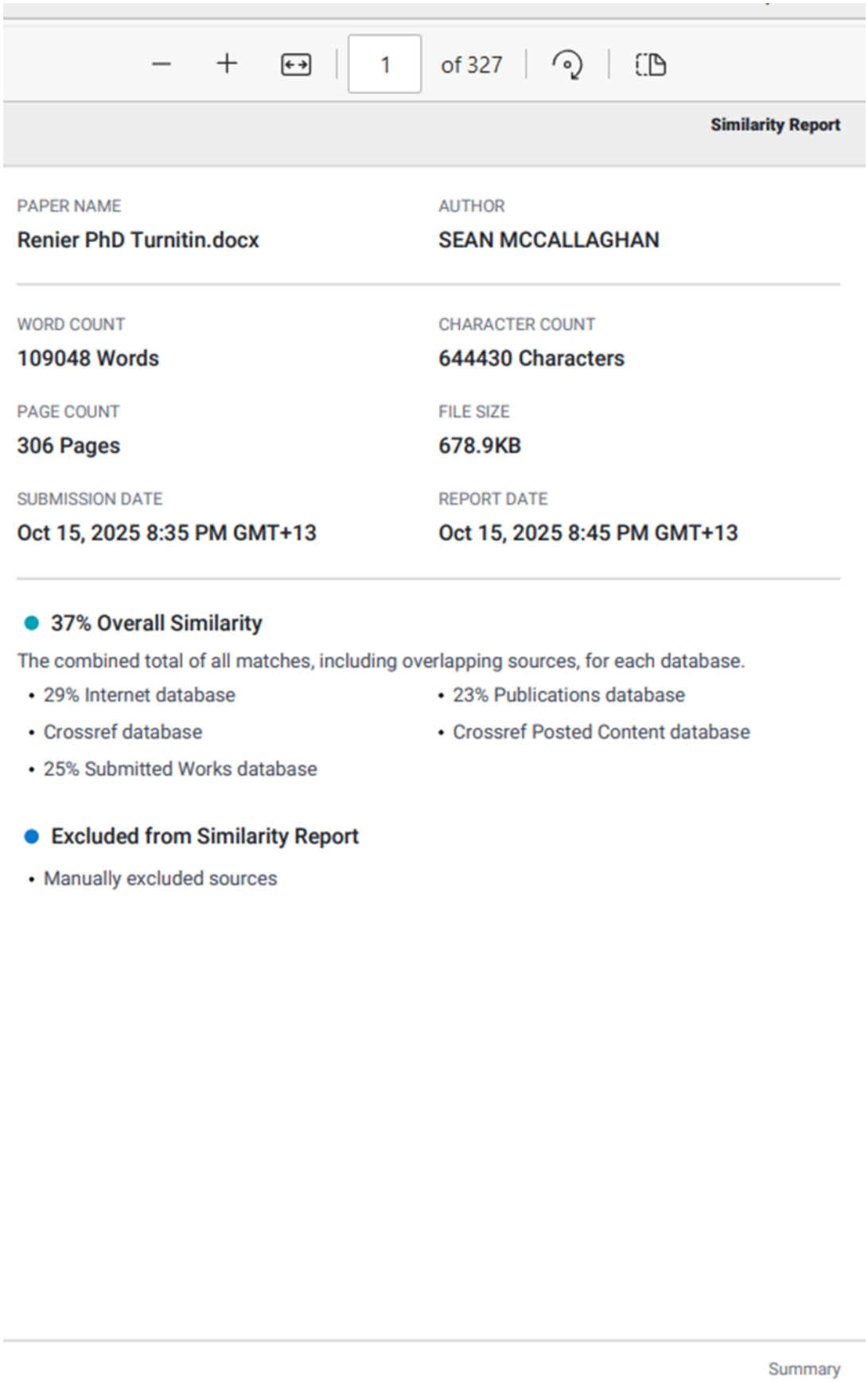
Enclosed are Page 1 and Page 308 of the Turnitin report for the thesis, as well as a screenshot of Page 1 (“Screenshot”) in which small overlaps and the reference list have been excluded.

On Page 1, the overall similarity is reported at 37%. When minor overlaps and references are removed, this figure decreases to 14%, as reflected in the Screenshot. One source stands out, namely International Business Conference (11%). This is attributable to Articles 2, 4, and 5, which were legitimately published in the proceedings of the International Business Conference in 2023, 2024, and 2025.

On Page 308, the overall similarity remains at 37%, as expected. The most prominent sources are International Business Conference (16%) and pubs.ufs.ac.za (3%). The latter is explained by the fact that the publisher of the Interdisciplinary Journal of Sociality Studies hosts its work at pubs.ufs.ac.za. Article 2 of the thesis was published in that journal in 2025. Additionally, the University of South Africa appears as a source with a 1% similarity, which can be reasonably understood given that the original proposal for this thesis was submitted at this institution.

No other sources exceed a similarity of 1%. It is therefore clear from this Turnitin report that the overlaps are attributable to legitimate prior publications and administrative submissions, and do not provide grounds for any claim of plagiarism.

Page 1



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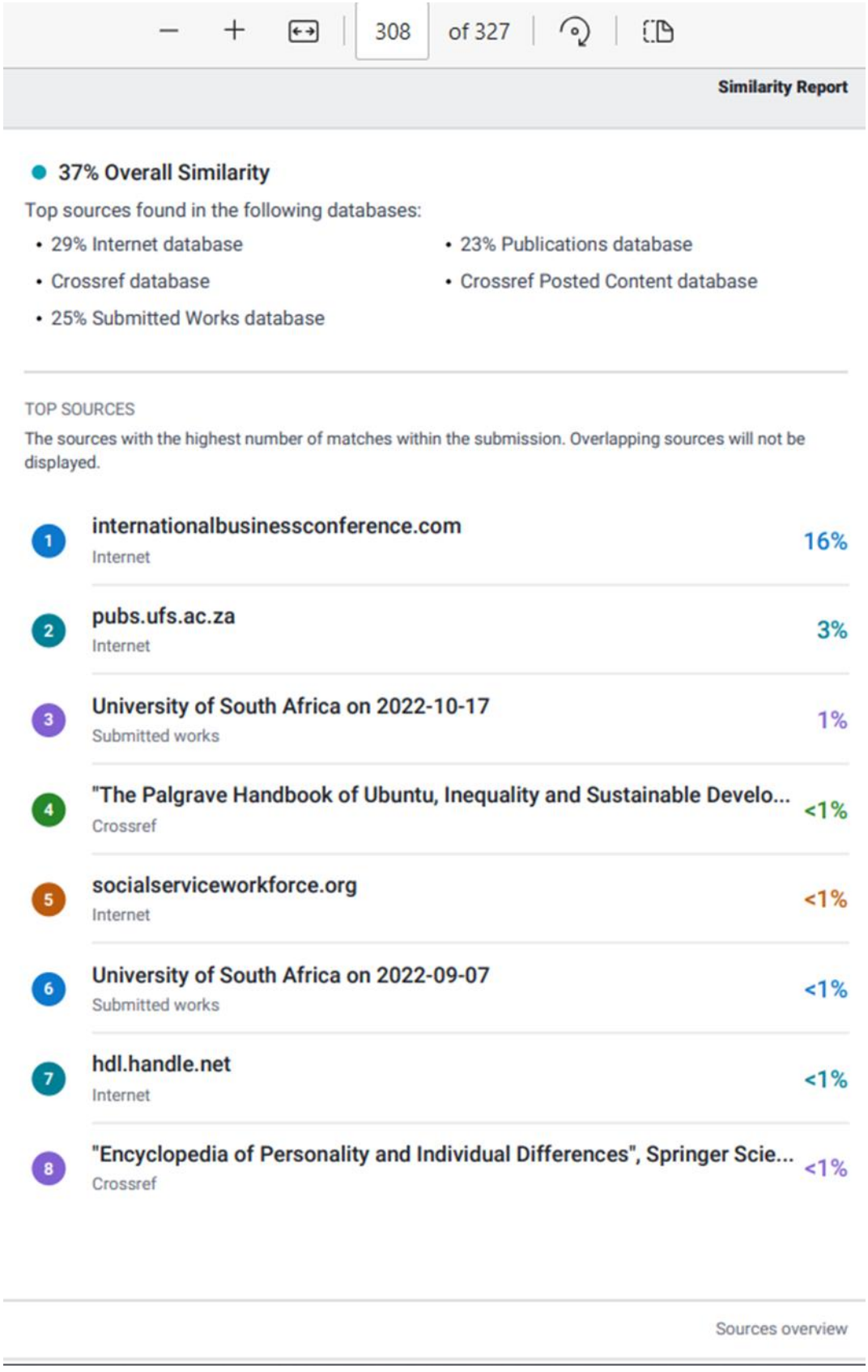
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Sources overview

Annexure 3: Ethical approval certificates

UNISA university of south africa

Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

Ref #: 2024_SBL_AC_011_EX-3781
Name: Prof Renier Steyn
Staff #:90153413

Date: 03/05/2024

Dear: Prof Renier Steyn

Decision: Ethics Approval from May 2024 to April 2027

Researcher: Prof Renier Steyn

SBL

Midrand

Steynr@unisa.ac.za 0792273984

Definitions, conceptualization, and differentiation

Qualification:

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC for the above mentioned research study Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The **negligible risk application** was **reviewed** by Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC on 12 April 2024 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC .
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (April 2027)Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Page 1 of 2

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 2024_SBL_AC_011_EX-3781 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

NBWMlitwa

Prof N Mlitwa
Chair of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC
E-mail: wiltonb@unisa.ac.za

Prof P Msweli
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC
E-mail: mswelp@unisa.ac.za, wiltonb@unisa.ac.za

UNISA university of south africa

Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)
Ref #: 1726
Name: Prof Renier Steyn
Student #:
Staff #:90153413

Date: 01/12/2023

Dear: Prof Renier Steyn

Decision: Ethics Approval from ___ to ____ (specify the time period relevant to the approval)

Researcher: Prof Renier Steyn

SBL

Midrand

Steynr@unisa.ac.za 0792273984

Supervisor:

Co-Supervisor:

Co-Researcher(s): Prof P Msweli

Email address: mswelp@unisa.ac.za

Leadership within the African context

Qualification:

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC for the above mentioned research study Ethics approval is granted for {one year}{two years }{three years }{ five years}.

The **{negligible}{low }{medium }{high}risk application** was **reviewed** by Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC on in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Graduate School of Business Leadership_RERC .
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.

7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (xxx). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 1726 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,

NBWMlitwa

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Annexure 4: In search of Ubuntu: An autoethnographic reflection on meaning, research, and African thought

In search of Ubuntu: An autoethnographic reflection on meaning, research and African leadership

Abstract:

The expression “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,” commonly translated as *“*a person is a person through other persons,” raises questions about the nature of social connections, prompting further inquiry into its precise underlying meaning. This uncertainty may be partly due to the concept’s linguistic and cultural connotations, as reflected in Desmond Tutu’s observation that “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language.” The unsubstantiated and often indiscriminate use of Ubuntu as a catch-all term for everything African can frustrate those interested in clear conceptualisation. This curiosity ultimately motivated me to pursue doctoral studies to develop a deeper understanding of the subject. Three broad aims guided the thesis: understanding Ubuntu’s operational structure, exploring its impact, and interrogating its African nature. These efforts culminated in a twelve-chapter thesis and several related research outputs. Although the thesis followed a positivistic orientation aimed at identifying quantifiable material, this reflective paper adopts an autoethnographic approach, acknowledging subjectivity, lived experience, and memory as legitimate sources of knowledge. This paper presents the journey of the Ubuntu thesis, the awareness and enlightenment I experienced during the process and an attempt to integrate these insights into a concise narrative. In doing so, it offers a multilevel perspective on Ubuntu. Additionally, the paper presents and critically assesses how alternative and combined research strategies used in the thesis may contribute to knowledge building.

Keywords:

Ubuntu; autoethnography; African philosophy; research methodology; knowledge construction; mixed methods

Introduction

Many autoethnographical studies begin with an explanation of the method's scholarly value, especially its ability to connect personal experience with cultural analysis and generate rich, reflective insight (Custer, 2014; Poulos, 2021). Autoethnography differs fundamentally from traditional positivist approaches to science. It acknowledges subjectivity, lived experience, memory, and narrative as legitimate sources of knowledge (Ellis et al., 2011; Wall, 2006). As such, the text intentionally adopts a storytelling style that may, at times, resemble autobiographical or literary writing (Adams et al., 2021; Ellis et al., 2011). In autoethnography, the narrative is not separate from the analysis; the story itself becomes part of the scholarly method (Ellis et al., 2011; Poulos, 2021). This does not suggest that the account is fictional but reflects a different epistemological understanding of how human experience can be explored and interpreted in scholarly research. (Adams et al., 2021; Wall, 2006).

The narrative is presented below under five headings. I begin with a brief introduction of the author, followed by the perceived need for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of Ubuntu. This is followed by a reflection on the thesis’s findings and reflections on how these findings were achieved methodologically. Thereafter, a synthesis is presented, also reflecting on the challenge of conducting such an integration. I conclude with summative reflections on Ubuntu itself, the research process followed, and recommendations for future research.

The author and the origins of the journey

It is common practice to introduce the author in an autoethnographic study to position the researcher within the narrative, acknowledge subjectivity, and provide contextual background to the experiences and interpretations presented (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Below is a reflective account of my own intellectual orientation and positionality.

I self-identify as an ISTJ individual and recognise a tendency to observe patterns, distinctions and differences between individuals and groups. I am inclined toward structured and evaluative forms of reasoning, and I generally assume that differences in behaviour, performance, values and outcomes may be meaningfully examined rather than automatically dismissed as socially constructed or irrelevant.

My worldview is strongly informed by individual-based conceptions of merit, responsibility, and civic participation. I align myself with a cosmopolitan perspective, namely, the view that participation in civil society should be primarily grounded in shared civic norms and obligations rather than solely in ethnic, cultural, or group-based identities. In this regard, I remain cautious about strong forms of cultural relativism that may discourage critical evaluation across contexts or limit the possibility of universal assessment standards.

These orientations are reflected in my academic interests and research practices. Much of my work explores the existence of group differences, their interpretation and their possible consequences within organisational and social settings. At the same time, I recognise the ethical and methodological responsibility associated with such research and the need for reflective interpretation. My perspective, therefore, combines an interest in empirical differentiation with an emphasis on individual variation and contextual complexity. I am also critical of tendencies within contemporary discourse that sometimes discourage open inquiry or place excessive symbolic value on ideological sensitivities at the expense of analytical engagement and evidence-based discussion. In this regard, I occasionally adopt a sceptical stance toward ideologically fashionable claims that lack substantiation, especially where symbolic positioning appears to outweigh critical analysis.

My first ancestor, Douwe Steyn, arrived in Africa in 1672, approximately 354 years ago, and, as such, my family has been rooted in Africa for many generations. Although I am classified as White, I identify equally as African. In this regard, I associate with the declaration reportedly made by Hendrik Biebouw in 1707: “Ik ben een Afrikaander” (“I am an African”), in which he acknowledged leaving behind his European roots and embracing an African way of life. Thus, my identity is firmly rooted in Africa. I regard myself as part of the continent’s cultural and social fabric, rather than as an outsider to Africa’s cultural realities.

The need for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of Ubuntu

There is a vast body of knowledge on Ubuntu, and, from a disciplinary perspective, the associated literature is equally extensive and diverse. Ubuntu has been explored across numerous fields, including philosophy (Metz, 2007; Shutte, 2001), theology (Gathogo, 2022), psychology (Sefotho & Letseka, 2024), social work (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013), leadership (Bolden & Kirk, 2009), political science (Eze, 2010), ethics (Molefe, 2019), sociology (Gade, 2012), education (Letseka, 2012) and management studies (Nkomo, 2011), with each field approaching the concept from distinct ontological, epistemological, and practical perspectives. This multidisciplinary discourse leads to notable conceptual differences regarding Ubuntu. Without conceptual clarity, it becomes difficult to build a coherent and cumulative body of knowledge (De Vos et al., 2011; Mouton, 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2016).

In the case of Ubuntu, consensus on its conceptualisation remains elusive. This conceptual instability can be partly attributed to temporal changes in how Ubuntu has been understood and applied, leading some scholars to argue that Ubuntu, as a way of life, has effectively come to an end and now survives largely as an idealised vision of a past social order

(Matolino & Kwindingwi, 2013). Such critiques portray Ubuntu as a form of nostalgia, reflecting a longing for an imagined past rather than describing contemporary social realities (Müller, 2015). Matolino and Kwindingwi (2013) contend that contemporary invocations of Ubuntu constitute a "narrative of return," or an attempt to recover an idealised African past that is no longer accessible and may never have existed in the form imagined. They argue that Ubuntu is rooted in a restorative project aimed at reclaiming dignity and identity, but that it relies on assumptions about traditional communal life that are incompatible with modern African societies. This critique underscores the need for a contemporary definition of Ubuntu; one that reflects present realities rather than idealised historical reconstructions. Such a definition is particularly important given that other scholars contend that rigorous scholarly engagement with Ubuntu has, in fact, only just begun (Metz, 2014). The contemporary conceptualisation of Ubuntu can be advanced through evaluating its impact, one of the objectives of this study. By examining findings from contemporary empirical research, it becomes possible to determine whether Ubuntu is evident in present-day settings and whether the outcomes attributed to Ubuntu support or challenge assumptions about its continued relevance and presence, thereby grounding the concept in contemporary realities.

Reflections on the findings and the research process

The study, as previously stated, considered three broad themes: conceptualising Ubuntu, specifying its impact, and assessing its African nature. I will discuss each separately, starting with the most fundamental theme, namely conceptualisation. While I will provide brief comments on the findings, the discussion will focus more strongly on how the papers influenced my thinking about Ubuntu and the research project itself.

The following figure presents a graphical overview of the organisation and structure of the thesis, "Ubuntu leadership as a uniquely African concept", which I handed in for examination in December 2025.

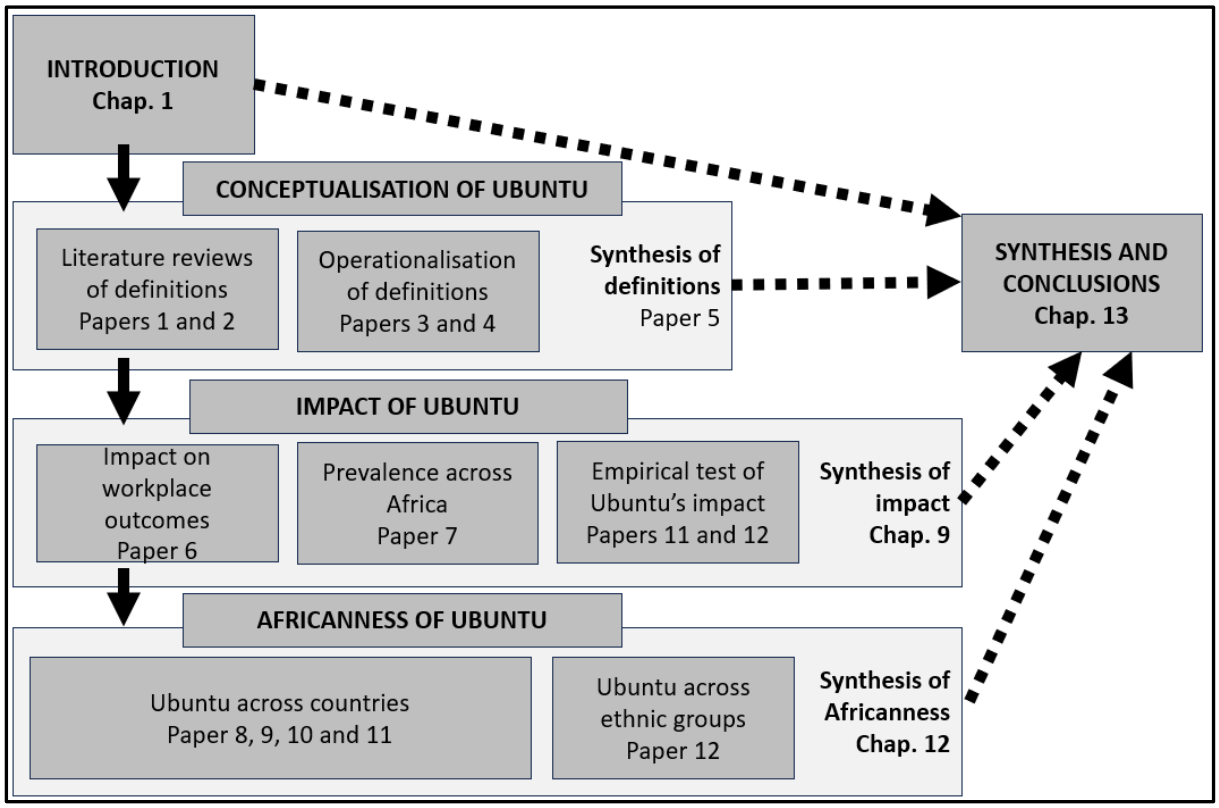

Figure 1: Structural layout of the thesis "Ubuntu leadership as a uniquely African concept"

The aim of the figure is to provide a guide to what follows and to serve as a scaffold for the discussion presented below. This paper is not intended as a duplication of Chapter 13.

Rather, it represents an effort to conclude the endeavour in a more humane, informal and almost conversational manner, instead of presenting it solely as a conventional piece of academic writing. While the following chapter adheres to the requirements of scholarly reporting, the discussion in this paper seeks to reflect more personally on the journey, the lessons learned, and the broader meaning of the research.

Conceptualisation

Answers on conceptualisation were sought through four processes.

Paper 1: The first paper on conceptualisation was most likely the most traditional in format. A traditional search for academic papers containing the term Ubuntu in the title was conducted and, following several rounds of screening, 50 full-text documents published in English were selected for analysis. A comprehensive list of definitions of Ubuntu was then compiled and analysed to identify words or constructs that appeared most frequently across the definitions. The most frequently mentioned words and constructs were regarded as central themes and presented first in the definition developed. Following the focus on the most mentioned words (empathy, respect, community, generosity and harmony) and some of the literature collected in this search, Ubuntu was defined as follows: “Ubuntu, originating from the Nguni proverb umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, which translates to ‘a person is a person through other persons,’ embodies an exemplary Southern African way of life or philosophy that places empathy, respect, community, generosity, and harmony at the core of personal development as well as societal thinking” (Steyn & Msweli, 2026b, p. 10). The aim was to be as inclusive as possible.

Paper 2: This work took place during the early period of artificial intelligence (AI) use in academic work, when its use was frequently frowned upon. However, I proceeded to use data generated by ChatGPT. The basic prompt requested direct verbatim definitions and lists of Ubuntu characteristics from credible academic sources. The information from these lists was then manually integrated, as using AI for such integration was almost unimaginable at that stage.

The outcome was quite appealing, and both a summative definition and a list of characteristics were compiled. Ubuntu was defined as “a Southern African philosophy that values social harmony, community building, and prioritises the well-being of the community over individual self-interest; which emphasises the importance of relationships, empathy, compassion, inclusivity and mutual respect to foster collaboration and build trust among individuals and groups” (Steyn & Msweli, 2023, p. 115). The “main characteristics of Ubuntu are a belief in human interrelatedness (1), particularly within communities (2), where harmony is prioritised (3). Respect (for others, elders and the environment) is also important (4) and may be linked to compassion and empathy (5). Another strong theme is humaneness (6), which relates to treating people with dignity. Lastly, hospitality constitutes a powerful theme (7), relating to welcoming others into one’s community or home” (Steyn & Msweli, 2023, p. 115).

The outcome was appealing, and I moved from the phrase “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” or “a person is a person through other persons”, which permits vague and highly subjective interpretations of Ubuntu, to a more specific definition accompanied by a list of Ubuntu characteristics. However, closer inspection of the references later revealed that many were “hallucinations,” and thus the direct quotations, as well as the references provided, were AI fabrications. This flaw was acknowledged and reported. It may be regarded as an important lesson.

Paper 3: This paper was based on the assumption that Ubuntu, like many other concepts, may have become overly theorised, while in reality representing a simpler construct than often proposed. The paper, therefore, examined whether the complexity reported in previous conceptualisations of Ubuntu would materialise when subjected to the scrutiny of exploratory factor analysis. Specifically, the paper reported on the findings of authors who had

previously proposed measures of Ubuntu (Brubaker, 2013; Molose, 2019; Mutsonziwa, 2020; Sigger et al., 2010; Terblanché-Greeff & Nel, 2023). In two instances, making up 40% of the cases, Ubuntu emerged as a unidimensional construct, thus displaying less complexity and possibly substantial conceptual overlap among the proposed dimensions. Given the theorisation and the majority of studies indicating a multidimensional structure, it was concluded that "despite conceptual overlap among the terms, Ubuntu can be understood as a composite construct encompassing compassion, solidarity, survival, and, lastly, respect and dignity" (Steyn & Msweli, 2025c, p. 9). The test for a bifactor model, when collecting and verifying data, would be the logical conclusion of this paper.

Paper 4: The fourth approach to conceptualisation was even more adventurous and also involved the use of AI. As a starting point, items from five Ubuntu measures developed by Brubaker (2013), Molose (2019), Mutsonziwa (2020), Sigger et al. (2010) and Terblanché-Greeff and Nel (2023), were extracted. Collectively, these five measures comprised 104 items. The underlying assumption was that the items themselves reflected the operationalised meaning of Ubuntu, and that ChatGPT could identify coherent thematic clusters that would reveal the construct's underlying nature and dimensions.

The 104 items were presented to ChatGPT with the instruction to create an instrument measuring five unspecified underlying constructs, each with four items. From the 104 items, ChatGPT extracted items under the following themes: (1) Leadership Compassion and Support; (2) Team Solidarity and Shared Suffering; (3) Respect and Dignity in the Workplace; (4) Community and Interconnectedness; and (5) Empathy and Altruism. The themes were appealing; however, the items selected by ChatGPT under these themes did not appear sufficiently coherent, displaying low face validity. Then, ChatGPT was prompted to develop a 20-item instrument by arranging the 104 items under the four previously identified constructs underpinning Ubuntu: compassion, solidarity, survival, and, lastly, respect and dignity. This matching of themes and items also had low face validity. Given the learning that had taken place, ChatGPT was finally prompted to develop a 20-item instrument by applying the themes without considering the 104 items. The resulting measure consisted of four constructs with five items each, yielding a 20-item instrument with high face validity. This final measure was considered superior and was adopted as the measure of Ubuntu for this study (Steyn & Msweli, 2024). In some respects, this instrument represents an operationalisation of Ubuntu.

Synthesis: Paper 5, a paper on the synthesis, was an attempt to integrate the findings of the four studies discussed above. While it was eventually published (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a), the paper was initially not well received by reviewers. Reviewers were particularly critical of the way triangulation was interpreted and applied in the study. This criticism partially motivated the later decision to adopt an autoethnographic approach instead, as autoethnography appeared to offer greater flexibility in how the narrative was constructed and how the research journey itself could be presented. I selected this approach because I believed it would place greater emphasis on the narrative's authenticity and richness rather than on adherence to conventional methodological expectations, thereby allowing greater freedom in how the story was told.

One of the primary lessons from this conceptualisation exercise was that each process produced different outcomes. Conducting only a single conceptualisation exercise would therefore likely have resulted in a biased interpretation or conclusion. However, having four explanations or approaches to conceptualisation did not necessarily resolve the challenge of arriving at a comprehensive definition. Instead, it complicated the process while simultaneously providing greater depth and richness for interpretation. The resulting definition was lengthy and perhaps even overspecified, but I felt that it was comprehensive, inclusive and delineated the concept clearly.

Incorporating additional contextual readings, in Paper 5 Ubuntu was ultimately defined as "... an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for others, manifesting as empathy and compassion, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for

solidarity, harmony, and community-building, which embraces the principle of collective survival and is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values" (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a, p. 2325).

Even if the definition presented may not be perfect, the development and presentation of several definitions and understandings are preferable to presenting a single definition derived from one strategy. The findings, therefore, suggest that conceptualisation may benefit more from pluralism than from premature closure around a single interpretation. Consequently, future researchers are encouraged to employ multiple strategies when engaging in conceptualisation exercises.

The impact of Ubuntu

Having gained some knowledge of how Ubuntu was conceptualised, an effort was made to examine its impact, specifically within the workplace. The impact of Ubuntu was assessed in two standalone papers and in Chapter 8 of my thesis (See Steyn, 2026b).

Paper 6: In the paper, "The impact of Ubuntu and Ubuntu leadership: A review of quantitative analyses" (Steyn & Msweli, 2027a), the aim was not to conduct a meta-analysis to determine the magnitude of Ubuntu's impact, but rather to identify the types of workplace outcomes it influences. More specifically, the study sought to identify "objective" rather than perceived workplace outcomes. To achieve this, quantitative studies were reviewed, meaning that the identified impact was limited to the constructs measured and not necessarily reflective of the full range of outcomes influenced by Ubuntu. From the 46 usable studies identified, Ubuntu emerged as a distinct African construct with strong predictive power for employee engagement, organisational commitment, and performance. However, this approach was itself limited, as the findings were strongly shaped by methodological choices, particularly the selection of dependent variables, and a qualitative approach for identifying the spectrum of outcomes may have been useful.

Although it did not cover the full spectrum of Ubuntu outcomes, the study identified variables that could later serve as potential outcomes of Ubuntu. The study also exposed significant challenges within Ubuntu research, particularly the diversity of scales used to measure Ubuntu and the widespread use of self-designed, non-standardised instruments, which complicated compatibility and interpretation, undermined comparability, and made it difficult to build a coherent evidence base. This study addressed this gap, providing a theoretically grounded measurement instrument. Additionally, Ubuntu leadership was often presented as equivalent to servant leadership, raising questions about its distinctiveness and its uniquely African roots, a matter addressed in the third part of the broader study.

The literature on Ubuntu research further reveals important methodological weaknesses, as flawed interpretations and limited statistical rigour reduce the reliability of findings. Considering the 46 publications retrieved, the evidence base regarding the effects of Ubuntu remains limited. Quantitative research on Ubuntu leadership remains limited, with only a few studies focusing on the same outcomes. It was concluded that although Ubuntu shows promise as a predictor of positive workplace outcomes, the lack of standardisation and replication continues to restrict its broader application and undermines confidence in its practical utility as a leadership approach.

Paper 7: The paper, "Ubuntu as a unifying ethos in Africa: A critical review of quantitative outputs" (Steyn, 2026a), builds upon the previous work, but focuses on the prevalence of Ubuntu research across Africa, particularly in response to sceptics who question whether it remains widely practised and whether Ubuntu can realistically be presented as a unifying solution across the continent. A total of 36 quantitative studies were reviewed, all published in English.

The findings on the impact of Ubuntu were mixed: some studies confirmed Ubuntu's continued relevance, others questioned its prevalence, and several suggested that its values extend beyond Africa, where Ubuntu leadership has also been applied as an intervention. The evidence indicates that Ubuntu is not uniformly practised across the continent. Most of

the work originated from South Africa and neighbouring countries. In its current form, however, Ubuntu does not resonate equally with all Africans, suggesting that calls for continental unity in its “spirit” may have limited traction beyond Southern Africa. Additionally, considering the published works, Ubuntu appears more prominently in rural areas and is not confined to any single ethnic group. While some propose Ubuntu as a universally shared pan-African philosophy, this research suggests instead that its relevance is regionally and contextually bound.

Chapter 8: This was the first empirical part of the study for which primary data were collected. Here, a large group of employed individuals (N = 301) was assessed for the level of Ubuntu-like leadership to which they were exposed, along with a set of dependent variables. A large sample across national groups (South Africa and the UK) found that Ubuntu was related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being. Ubuntu leadership had an impact across the countries mentioned (See Chapter 8 in Steyn, 2026b). Using data from the subgroup of South Africans (N = 150), Ubuntu correlates significantly with the same variables (job satisfaction, organisational commitment and psychological well-being), for both White and Black South Africans. Thus, Ubuntu had a similar impact across ethnic groups in South Africa (See Chapter 8 in Steyn, 2026b).

No publications specifically addressing the empirical relationship between Ubuntu and these desirable outcomes were identified; however, this topic was incorporated into later papers submitted for publication. (See Steyn and Msweli (2026c) and Steyn and Msweli (2027b). The results underscore the robustness of these relationships. Ubuntu leadership meaningfully impacted job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and psychological well-being.

This represents an important contribution to research on the impact of Ubuntu on desirable outcomes, particularly in a field where findings are, first, still very limited and, second, not always grounded in meticulous methodological approaches. These empirical studies provided much-needed evidence of Ubuntu’s strong and consistent impact on key organisational outcomes across cultural and ethnic groups.

Synthesis: In Chapter 9 of the thesis (see Chapter 9 in Steyn, 2026b), a synthesis of Ubuntu’s impact is presented. Papers 6 and 7 provide a critical assessment of Ubuntu's prevalence and impact, while simultaneously exposing important conceptual and methodological challenges in the field. The papers provide evidence that suggests that Ubuntu is associated with desirable outcomes, particularly employee engagement, organisational commitment, performance, and ethical leadership. However, the research base remains fragmented due to inconsistent definitions, the widespread use of self-developed measurement instruments, and varying levels of methodological rigour. Furthermore, the findings challenge simplistic assumptions about Ubuntu as a universally endorsed African philosophy. Ubuntu is strongly associated with Southern Africa and rural communities, its prevalence across the continent is uneven, and many of its underlying values appear to be shared beyond African contexts.

In Chapter 8, where the quantitative data from Papers 11 and 12 were used, the quantitative data collected specifically for the study address several of these limitations by providing more rigorous empirical evidence of Ubuntu leadership's effects. Using validated measures and comparative designs, these studies demonstrate that Ubuntu leadership is consistently associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and psychological well-being. Importantly, these relationships were found to be robust across national boundaries (South Africa and the United Kingdom) and ethnic groups within South Africa (Black and White respondents). While Ubuntu leadership was more prevalent among South African managers, its positive effects were not confined to the African context, suggesting that its practical value extends beyond its cultural origins.

The two sets of results, which may initially appear incompatible, instead point to a more nuanced conclusion. Ubuntu appears to be rooted in Southern African cultural traditions and remains particularly salient within Southern Africa, although it is not uniformly distributed

across the continent. Rather than supporting Ubuntu as an exclusively African phenomenon, the findings suggest that it is better understood as a Southern African construct with principles that resonate more broadly across societies. The impact identified was also not limited to Africans or African contexts, as its beneficial outcomes appear applicable across diverse cultural settings. This shifts the debate from whether Ubuntu is uniquely African and suited only to Africans to understanding how an African-derived philosophy can function as a leadership framework with broader relevance and practical applicability.

This section on the impact of Ubuntu was less than satisfactory in terms of the research process. The focus drifted from identifying the organisational variables influenced by Ubuntu to specifying the contexts in which impact had been reported. A meta-analysis of the impact may have provided greater satisfaction; however, the poor quality and incompatibility of the available research made this impossible. I ultimately concluded that Ubuntu does have an impact, but that a more critical view should be applied, given that the positive effects reported in qualitative studies may be overstated at times.

The African nature of Ubuntu

As can be seen above, the impact section of the research gradually morphed into addressing aspects of the African nature of Ubuntu. However, five additional activities were undertaken to explore this matter more directly. Consistent with the aim of providing a quantitative perspective, both secondary and primary quantitative data were used to examine the notion of the African nature of Ubuntu.

Paper 8: In the paper “Leadership Styles in Africa: Quantifying the Uniqueness of Humane Orientation” (Steyn & Msweli, 2025b), the prevalence of humane orientation in societies, as reported in the GLOBE study, was examined across Africa, Southern Africa, and specifically among the indigenous people of South Africa. The GLOBE study provides mean scores for all participating countries, which were used for comparative analyses across regions, countries and population groups within South Africa. More African countries scored above the global mean on humane orientation than below it. Among the 10 regional clusters identified in the GLOBE study, Sub-Saharan Africa recorded the second-highest humane orientation score. However, significant differences in humane orientation were found across African countries, indicating that it is not uniformly endorsed throughout the continent. Within South Africa, Black South Africans, more than White South Africans, perceived their society's practices as humane-oriented.

The findings confirm a strong association between humane orientation and Africa, particularly when compared with the Anglo cultural cluster. The Anglo cluster was selected for comparison because relevant data were available and because of its historical association with colonisation in South Africa. Nonetheless, humane orientation is not exclusive to Africa and is evident in other parts of the world. Furthermore, Africa itself is characterised by diverse worldviews, reflected in variations in the endorsement of humane orientation. The study provides empirical, quantitative evidence supporting the argument that humane orientation, as a proxy for Ubuntu, forms an integral part of African identity. The study also makes a methodological contribution by repurposing historical data from a prestigious international research project to address questions not explicitly considered in the original investigation, while providing full acknowledgement and credit to the original data owners.

Paper 9: The GLOBE study not only reports on the prevalence of certain values associated with countries, but also on leadership practices and perceptions of their effectiveness within countries. In the paper “Ubuntu as an Emic Belief System: A Quantitative Analysis of Humane-Oriented Practices” (Steyn & Msweli, 2025d), the perceived effectiveness of humane-oriented leadership practice was investigated. It could be argued that, as Ubuntu embodies African notions of humanness, it should be associated with effective leadership, particularly within the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) context.

This study examined whether humane-oriented leadership (HOL), used as a proxy for Ubuntu leadership, reflects African views of effective leadership. Using data from the GLOBE study, HOL scores were compared across regional clusters, with particular attention to SSA and the Anglo cluster. In addition, the relative ranking of HOL among the six GLOBE leadership dimensions was analysed.

The results showed that the mean HOL score for SSA was significantly above the global average, although it was not the highest of all regional clusters. The Anglo cluster's score was only marginally lower than SSA's. Perhaps most interestingly, HOL ranked fourth in perceived leadership effectiveness in both regions. While HOL was strongly associated with SSA, it was not exclusive to the region and displayed an unexpected similarity to leadership preferences within the Anglo cluster. These results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Leadership scores for Sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo cluster

Cluster	Dimensions					
	Charismatic/ value-based	Team-oriented	Participative	**Humane orientation**	Autonomous	Self-protective
SSA	5.79	5.70	5.31	**5.16**	3.63	3.55
Rank	1	2	3	**4**	5	6
Anglo	6.05	5.74	5.73	**5.08**	3.82	3.08
Rank	1	2	3	**4**	5	6

Source: Adapted from Dorfman et al. (2004, p. 680).

The study provides quantitative support for the relevance of HOL, and by implication Ubuntu leadership, within Africa. At the same time, it highlights a surprising alignment between African and Anglo perceptions of effective leadership, a finding that could easily be overlooked in discussions of Ubuntu (See Bhuda and Marumo (2022) and Ramose (1999). These results suggest that some leadership values associated with Ubuntu may be more universal than is commonly assumed. However, the findings also indicate that HOL is not perceived as the most effective leadership approach, even within the Sub-Saharan cluster.

Paper 10: This paper utilised data from the 2025 World Values Survey and resulted in the paper "Is Ubuntu distinctly African? A comparative study of communal values in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Anglo World" (Steyn & Msweli, 2026a). Eighteen survey items were identified as proxies for Ubuntu-related values. Responses from three Sub-Saharan African countries and three countries from the Anglo cluster were analysed. The dataset contained both categorical and ordinal variables, which complicated the analytical process and limited the use of a single statistical approach across all items.

The results suggest that Ubuntu-aligned values were not consistently more prevalent among Sub-Saharan African respondents. Of the 18 items examined, values associated with Ubuntu were significantly more prevalent in African responses in only five cases, less prevalent in eight cases, and showed no significant differences in the remaining five cases. Surprisingly, and contrary to the results in Steyn and Msweli (2025b & 2025d), the Anglo cluster more frequently endorsed values aligned with Ubuntu than did respondents from the Sub-Saharan African countries included in the study.

These findings challenge assumptions that Ubuntu represents a uniquely African worldview or that its underlying values are more strongly endorsed in Sub-Saharan Africa than elsewhere. While some elements commonly associated with Ubuntu were evident among African respondents, more of these values were prominent among their Anglo counterparts. Consequently, the study provides little empirical support for the proposition that Ubuntu values are uniquely characteristic of Sub-Saharan African cultures. Indeed, the findings largely contradict such a claim.

The study, therefore, calls into question the portrayal of Ubuntu as a dominant and distinctive indigenous paradigm within contemporary African socio-political discourse. At the same time, it raises the possibility that many values associated with Ubuntu may be more

universal in nature than is often acknowledged, suggesting the need for greater caution when presenting Ubuntu as an exclusively African belief system.

Paper 11: With the preceding three studies (Papers 8, 9 and 10), proxies for Ubuntu were used for analysis. For Paper 11, primary data were collected. The resulting paper was titled "Ubuntu Leadership Across Cultures: A Comparative Study of Its Prevalence and Outcomes in South Africa and the United Kingdom" (Steyn & Msweli, 2026c). The study examined Ubuntu leadership as an emic phenomenon and explored whether it is distinct to Africa and if it had differential effects based on cultural or geographical contexts. The study had two objectives: (1) to determine whether managers in South Africa (SA) scored higher on a measure of Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, and (2) to assess whether the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and key employee outcomes – job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being – were stronger in the South African context.

The study drew on panel data collected from employed individuals in South Africa and the UK (N = 301), capturing data on perceptions and experiences shaped by different geographical and cultural environments. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed. Respondents completed measures of Ubuntu leadership, job satisfaction, organisational commitment and well-being. Following assessments of reliability, factorial validity, and measurement invariance, mean scores for Ubuntu leadership were compared across the two cultural groups. In addition, correlation coefficients were calculated and compared to examine the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and the outcome variables in each context.

Importantly, the tests of factorial validity indicated a unidimensional construct. This finding was not aligned with the proposed theoretical structure, but it was not entirely unexpected, as previous research discussed under the first goal also resulted in a less complex structure than originally proposed. This lends additional gravitas to the findings in Paper 3 (Steyn & Msweli, 2025c), which suggested that Ubuntu may be over-theorised and that a simpler explanation would be defensible. A bi-factor model appeared to best fit the collected data.

The psychometric properties of the instruments were satisfactory, including the tests of measurement invariance, which allowed cross-group comparisons. The results indicated that South African managers scored significantly higher on Ubuntu leadership than their UK counterparts, supporting the view that Ubuntu leadership is more prevalent or salient within the African context. Contrary to expectations, however, the positive associations between Ubuntu leadership and job satisfaction, organisational commitment and well-being were not stronger in the South African sample than in the UK sample. They were strong in both samples.

These findings suggest that Ubuntu leadership retains particular cultural relevance in contexts aligned with its philosophical foundations, as reflected in its greater prevalence in South Africa. At the same time, its predictive power was substantial in both countries and was not confined to the South African context. The results contribute to the debate on the Africanness of Ubuntu, as outlined above, and suggest that Ubuntu leadership represents a leadership practice with broader, potentially universal, relevance.

Paper 12: In this study, the previous cross-cultural investigation was effectively replicated within the South African context by comparing Black and White South African respondents. The resulting paper was titled "Ubuntu Leadership as an Emic Construct: Expression and Outcomes Among Black and White South Africans" (Steyn & Msweli, 2027b). Mirroring the objectives of the preceding study, the aims were to: (1) determine whether Black managers scored higher on Ubuntu leadership than White managers, and (2) assess whether the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes – job satisfaction, organisational commitment, and well-being – were stronger among Black employees.

The study was conducted in South Africa and drew on data collected from employed individuals identifying as either Black or White South Africans (N = 150). The analysis mirrored those conducted in Paper 11.

The findings indicated that employees perceived Black and White South African managers as exhibiting similar levels of Ubuntu leadership. Furthermore, the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and job satisfaction, organisational commitment and well-being were strong and positive in both groups. No meaningful differences were found in the strength of these relationships between Black and White South African employees.

These findings challenge the notion that Ubuntu leadership is expressed primarily or exclusively through Black cultural identity. Although Ubuntu is often conceptualised as an emic African construct, the results suggest that its principles are practised across racial groups within South Africa. Moreover, the beneficial effects of Ubuntu leadership on employee attitudes and well-being appear to be equally relevant for Black and White employees. The study therefore provides further evidence that Ubuntu leadership has practical value as a workplace leadership framework and that its positive effects transcend racial boundaries within the South African context.

Synthesis: These papers provide a nuanced answer to the question of Ubuntu's "Africanness". As explained in the literature review, Ubuntu leadership is rooted in African moral philosophy, and the evidence generally supports somewhat higher endorsement levels in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, its effects are not confined to Africa.

Papers 8, 9 and 10 reveal a consistent, although moderate, Sub-Saharan advantage. The Sub-Saharan African cluster scored higher than the Anglo cluster on humane orientation and humane-oriented leadership, although Southern Asia consistently exceeded both. These findings suggest that Ubuntu-aligned values and leadership resonate strongly in Africa but are not unique to the continent. Paper 10 introduces constructive tension. Using World Values Survey data, respondents from Anglo countries often endorsed Ubuntu-like values more strongly than their counterparts from Sub-Saharan Africa. This divergence may reflect differences in the level of analysis – workplace leadership in the GLOBE studies versus broader societal values in the World Values Survey – as well as differences in operationalisation, with the former relying on purpose-built constructs and the latter on post hoc proxy measures.

The primary data presented in Papers 11 and 12 add granularity and contemporary relevance. Paper 11 found that South African managers scored significantly higher on Ubuntu leadership than UK managers, supporting the view that Ubuntu leadership remains more salient in its cultural context of origin. At the same time, Ubuntu leadership showed equally strong relationships with job satisfaction, organisational commitment and well-being in both countries, challenging the view that its benefits are context-bound. Paper 12 extended these findings within South Africa. Black and White managers were perceived to display similar levels of Ubuntu leadership, and the relationships between Ubuntu leadership and employee outcomes were equally strong across racial groups. While this differs from earlier GLOBE findings that suggested higher humane orientation among Black South Africans, it may reflect temporal change and increasing convergence in organisational norms and leadership expectations.

Conceptually, Ubuntu is best understood as an African philosophical resource whose expression in leadership possesses cross-cultural relevance and effectiveness. In practice, the findings suggest that organisations can invest in Ubuntu-informed leadership development without assuming that it belongs exclusively to any particular racial, ethnic, or national group. The evidence, therefore, rejects both extremes: Ubuntu is neither uniquely African with no relevance elsewhere nor a generic set of values devoid of cultural roots. Rather, Ubuntu is African in origin and symbolism, yet broadly resonant in its practice and outcomes.

Challenge of synthesis and integration

The title of the thesis, "Ubuntu leadership as a uniquely African concept", is relatively simplistic. The aim, as stipulated, is more complex. It stated that the "study seeks to

establish a foundational definition of Ubuntu leadership, trace its prevalence and expression across African contexts, assess its influence on key organisational outcomes, and determine whether it operates primarily as an emic construct". Presented above are some syntheses organised according to the building blocks of knowledge (De Vos et al., 2011; Mouton, 2001; Podsakoff et al., 2016). Accordingly, conceptualisation was required before the proposed relationships between the concept and its outcomes could be examined. On this basis, a higher level of abstraction became possible at the theoretical level, specifically regarding the African nature of Ubuntu. Building on this foundation, it was only once the concept had been clearly defined and its relationships with other concepts established that its uniqueness within the African context could be meaningfully contemplated.

The writing of this document was instrumental in developing a more coherent synthesis of the research. Six months have passed since I submitted the thesis for examination. Looking back, I believe certain elements of the synthesis could have benefited from further refinement, given the constraints of the submission timeline and my close involvement in the research process at that stage. The intervening period has provided an opportunity for greater reflection and critical distance, allowing for a more integrated and nuanced understanding of the findings and their implications.

I was initially hesitant to explicitly advocate triangulation as a methodological approach, given the reservations expressed when publishing the paper addressing the first aim, namely the conceptualisation of Ubuntu (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a. For this reason, I framed this paper as an autoethnographical study, through which I convey my narrative of engaging with Ubuntu as a research topic. What I present, however, may be regarded as methodological triangulation in the sense proposed by Denzin (1978), namely, the use of different methods to address the same research problem. By integrating diverse methods, in this case literature reviews, secondary data analyses, primary data studies and AI-generated integrations, I capitalise on the strengths of each, offset their respective weaknesses and generate findings that are richer, more comprehensive and potentially more credible than those produced by any single method alone. Within this endeavour, I followed the strategy proposed by Jick (1979), which emphasises convergence, complementarity and the identification of unique findings.

Integration was not an easy task, as the study's aims were not necessarily aligned in a linear fashion. Using three sub-aims to address a single overarching aim proved challenging, particularly because each sub-aim addressed an associated and related, yet in some respects distinct, aspect of the phenomenon under investigation. In addition, the thesis presented a substantive volume of research, spanning more than 320 pages, including approximately 40 tables, most of which summarise findings and results, and incorporated 12 papers, 10 of which had already been published by the time this document was written. Although the papers were generally aligned with the study's objectives, some degree of content drift occurred during the review and publication processes. Reviewers suggested changes to titles, analyses, interpretations and emphases, resulting in shifts in the focus of individual papers. These deviations were accepted because the imperative to publish sometimes took precedence over strict alignment with the original research plan. Consequently, while the planned structure of the outputs was coherent and closely linked to the study objectives, the final set of published papers did not perfectly mirror that structure. The challenge during the integration phase was therefore not only to synthesise findings across multiple studies, but also to reconcile the inevitable divergence that emerged through the publication process.

As the thesis title was "Ubuntu Leadership as a Uniquely African Concept" and its primary aim was to conceptualise Ubuntu leadership as such, I revisited each paper to consider its contribution to a more nuanced and refined conceptualisation of the construct. In doing so, I examined not only how each paper advanced understanding of Ubuntu leadership, but also how, collectively, they contributed to a more comprehensive specification of its nature, characteristics, outcomes and purported African distinctiveness.

In the section on the nature and characteristics of Ubuntu, useful lists of Ubuntu characteristics were developed. Alberts (2019) refers to definition-through-denotation, whereby a concept is defined through the description of its characteristics or constituent elements. The challenge, however, was that these lists consisted of different descriptors drawn from a variety of sources. The strategy adopted was therefore to align synonymous terms and themes to arrive at a more concise and coherent set of characteristics. As reported above, this process ultimately resulted in what I regarded as a robust and comprehensive definition of Ubuntu.

Ubuntu is …

> "… an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for others, manifesting as empathy and compassion, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, and community-building, which embraces the principle of collective survival and is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values" (Steyn & Msweli, 2025a, p. 2325).

The use of the word ethic, referring to a guiding moral principle or value system, may, upon reflection, be an appropriate choice for capturing the concept's deeper meaning. However, it may also be viewed as a limitation, given that this study focused on Ubuntu leadership as a contemporary, enacted form of leadership. While Ubuntu may be understood as an ethic at a philosophical level, the primary concern of this research was its manifestation in leadership practice.

The conceptualisation presented here aligns well with Jick (1979)'s notion of convergence and complementarity in triangulation. However, it aligns less well with the incorporation of unique or divergent findings into the final conceptualisation. In the sections that follow, an attempt is made to accommodate such specificity through explicit reference to the leadership and managerial implications of Ubuntu, as well as its prevalence across different contexts.

The next question was how the outcomes presented under the second aim, namely the impact of Ubuntu, influenced the conceptualisation of Ubuntu itself. The evidence suggests that Ubuntu is associated with a range of desirable outcomes, particularly employee engagement, organisational commitment, performance and ethical leadership. This conclusion emerged from both the literature reviews conducted and the primary data collected and analysed in this study. The link between Ubuntu and positive outcomes is therefore reasonably clear, although it is equally plausible that Ubuntu may be associated with additional desirable outcomes that have not yet been adequately researched.

Using the assumption that Ubuntu would be most frequently researched in contexts where it is prevalent, the findings suggest that its prevalence is indeed greater in Africa, particularly in Southern Africa. However, Ubuntu is not uniformly endorsed across the continent. The evidence further suggests that it tends to be practised more strongly in rural communities and in relational settings where interpersonal connectedness and communal values are emphasised.

Given the additional information on the impact of Ubuntu, the concept can be described as …

> "... an ethic rooted in the recognition of dignity and respect for others, manifesting as empathy, compassion and generosity, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, and community-building, which embraces the principle of collective survival, contributing to positive workplace outcomes, and is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values, finding its fullest expression in this region and in small-scale, relational settings rather than in large, impersonal systems".

This conceptualisation adds what Jick (1979) refers to as unique findings and additional specification. More than an ethic, the outcomes of Ubuntu leadership in the present-day context are presented, and the geographical reach is emphasised. This is also more aligned with what Alberts (2019) refers to as "definitions-through-synthesis" and was thus the

ultimate aim, in which a definition describes the integration of a significant body of knowledge.

In the last section, focusing on the Africanness of Ubuntu, several additional insights emerged. One of the most important was that Ubuntu leadership appears to be more prominent in Africa, particularly in Southern Africa, although it is not exclusive to this region. Specifically, the findings further indicate that Ubuntu leadership is more prevalent in South Africa than in the United Kingdom. Historical secondary data indicate that Ubuntu-related values and leadership tendencies are more strongly endorsed among Black than White South Africans. However, the primary and recent data presented a different picture, showing that Ubuntu leadership is perceived to be practised at similar levels by Black and White South African managers.

The findings affirm that while Ubuntu leadership retains a strong standing in Southern Africa, its expression as a driver of desirable outcomes extends beyond racial, national and regional boundaries. An important additional finding is that although Ubuntu leadership is associated with positive workplace outcomes, it is not perceived as the most effective leadership style. In the GLOBE data, humane-oriented leadership was ranked fourth in perceived effectiveness, suggesting that while Ubuntu-related leadership behaviours are valued and have positive outcomes, they are not necessarily regarded as the most desirable leadership approach, even within the contexts where they are most strongly endorsed, particularly in Southern Africa.

Adding this information to the Ubuntu definition proved difficult, as the definition gradually began to morph into a paragraph. While the findings regarding the prevalence, geographical distribution and perceived effectiveness of Ubuntu leadership added important nuance, incorporating all of these elements risked overburdening the definition. I then presented the following description of Ubuntu leadership:

> "... a leadership approach, prevalent in Southern Africa but not exclusive to it, which is grounded in Sub-Saharan African values, rooted in the recognition of human dignity and respect for others, manifested through empathy, compassion, and generosity, and recognising the interconnectedness of people through a striving for solidarity, harmony, community-building, and collective survival. It contributes to positive workplace outcomes across groups, finds its fullest expression in small-scale relational settings rather than in large impersonal systems, is not generally regarded as the most effective leadership style, and is sometimes presented as a nostalgic project aimed at recovering a world that may once have existed."

This is no longer a definition, but rather an example of definitional creep. Such an extremely broad definition should be avoided (Alberts, 2019). It is therefore not presented as a formal definition of Ubuntu leadership, but rather as a comprehensive response to the research question of how Ubuntu leadership may be conceptualised in a uniquely African fashion. In this sense, it serves as a synthesis of the findings generated across the various studies, integrating its nature, characteristics, outcomes, prevalence and perceived Africanness, rather than attempting to define its essential meaning alone. Jick (1979)’s emphasises convergence, complementarity, and the identification of unique findings were incorporated in this statement.

Thus, synthesis in this case was created not by selecting a single preferred interpretation of Ubuntu, but by progressively integrating findings generated through different methods, data sources and levels of analysis. The process moved from identifying the nature and characteristics of Ubuntu, to examining its outcomes, and finally to considering its African distinctiveness. Each stage added a further layer of understanding, while simultaneously complicating the task of maintaining conceptual parsimony. The final synthesis, therefore, does not claim to provide a definitive or immutable account of Ubuntu leadership. Rather, it represents an informed attempt to integrate a diverse body of evidence into a coherent understanding of the concept. In doing so, it demonstrates that Ubuntu leadership is best understood not through a single definition or perspective, but through the convergence of

multiple forms of evidence, each contributing unique insights into its nature, expression, impact and cultural significance.

Concluding reflections on Ubuntu and future research directions

My journey in attempting to understand Ubuntu as a uniquely African concept was arduous and, at times, lonely. I focused on capturing the essence of the construct, and I trust that I have succeeded, at least to some extent. This preoccupation is essential to drive such an extensive project. I appreciate the description presented by one of my examiners that the thesis demonstrated both academic rigour and methodological creativity. I hope that the path I travelled will not only advance research on Ubuntu but also serve as an example of how methodological innovation and the synthesis of a large body of knowledge can contribute to scholarly understanding.

Synthesis remains a difficult endeavour, and we should all acknowledge the extent to which subjectivity influences this process. I trust that my emphasis on quantitative evidence, clear reporting and the explicit declaration of my personal stance contributed to the quality and transparency of the final product.

I was particularly encouraged by one examiner's comment that "this thesis is very important and will be used as a guide for many future PhD students." The examiner did not specify the context of this statement, but I hope it referred to the thesis's structure, its methodological variety and the academic content presented. Whether the journey changed me as a person is less certain. I do not believe it fundamentally altered who I am. However, it has made me considerably more comfortable with the topic and has enabled me to provide a definition of Ubuntu that extends beyond the often-cited phrase umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, or "a person is a person through other persons." While I recognise the cultural and philosophical significance of this expression, I believe that it may present only a partial interpretation of a multifaceted concept.

The findings of this thesis also point towards several opportunities for future research. Firstly, further conceptual and empirical work is still required, particularly in exploring how Ubuntu is understood and practised in contemporary contexts characterised by urbanisation, globalisation, migration and technological change. Rather than viewing Ubuntu solely as a nostalgic renaissance project directed towards an idealised past, future researchers should pay greater attention to its contemporary prevalence and compare it with other leadership styles and value systems. Such work may help clarify the extent to which Ubuntu remains a lived reality rather than an aspirational ideal.

Furthermore, this research demonstrated that Ubuntu leadership, although associated with a range of positive workplace outcomes, is not necessarily perceived as the most effective leadership style. Future research should therefore distinguish more clearly between leadership styles that are preferred, admired, or regarded as morally desirable and those perceived to be most effective at achieving organisational objectives in contemporary societies. Such distinctions may provide important insights into the practical role of Ubuntu leadership and help explain the apparent tension between its positive outcomes and its relatively modest ranking in perceived leadership effectiveness.

As is commonly recommended, future studies should move beyond cross-sectional designs and investigate the long-term effects of Ubuntu leadership through longitudinal, experimental and intervention-based research. Such approaches would provide stronger evidence of Ubuntu's causal impact on employee and organisational outcomes. However, these designs are often beyond the scope of smaller projects, such as a single doctoral study, due to their substantial administrative, logistical, financial and time demands. Researchers should therefore carefully weigh the potential methodological benefits against the resources required to undertake such studies.

A particularly important recommendation is that future researchers consider using the theoretically grounded Ubuntu measure developed during this thesis. The field is currently characterised by a proliferation of self-developed, non-standardised instruments, limiting comparability across studies and restricting the cumulative development of knowledge. The use of a common, psychometrically validated measure would facilitate replication, enable meaningful comparisons across contexts, support future meta-analyses and contribute to the establishment of a more coherent evidence base regarding the nature, prevalence, antecedents and outcomes of Ubuntu leadership.

Finally, future conceptualisation studies should consider employing multiple methods and sources of evidence. The findings of this thesis suggest that conceptual clarity is more likely to emerge through methodological pluralism than through reliance on a single conceptualisation strategy. As such, triangulation should not be viewed merely as a means of validation, but also as a means of discovery, allowing researchers to capture the richness and complexity of concepts that resist simple definition.

Is this the final page of my journey? I believe that there could be two possible answers. For now, I concur with Paul Valéry, who observed that "a work is never truly finished, only abandoned." I am prepared for this eventuality. I jumped through many hoops to finish this project and spent countless hours on it. It is time to put the project to rest. Having reached this point, the work should now stand on its own merits. I do so in the spirit of a sentiment often attributed to writers such as Salman Rushdie, although I have been unable to locate the exact quotation: "There comes a point at which further revision no longer improves a text, but merely alters it."

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