Research Article

Lebollo as a Basotho Indigenous Knowledge Framework for Human and Organizational Flourishing

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Abstract

This paper posits that indigenous knowledge systems, especially that of the Basotho, termed lebollo, have the essential ingredients for human and organizational flourishing. This is based on it being pragmatic in orientation, implying real and substantial transformation in the following areas: cognitive, affective, practical, social, consciousness, problem-solving abilities, and relationships [1-5]. Lebollo aims at maximizing personal and group effectiveness, socio-culturally responsible and accountable behaviour, and cooperative and collaborative efforts in all community undertakings. Cultural values, socio-economic and political issues are given priority in inter-personal and communal affairs in a bid to strive towards community and national peace, economic self-sufficiency and political freedom. In other words, this paper holds strongly to the view that lebollo is a unique and original framework of indigenous knowledge, which can effectively and efficiently contribute to individual and collective spiritual, moral, psychological and social emancipation and empowerment.

Keywords: Human Factor; Lebollo; Cooperative and Collaborative Actions; Emancipation; Empowerment

Introduction

The central argument of the Human Factor (HF) literature is that qualities such as responsibility, accountability, trustworthiness, integrity, motivation, commitment, emotional maturity, honesty, love, tolerance, loyalty and personal caring hold the key to all forms of development [6-8]. The main premise of this paper is the idea that through lebollo, initiation school for males, the Basotho indigenous knowledge system essentially highlighted human factor variables which are fundamental prerequisites for individual, collective and organizational flourishing.

Characteristics of Hf In Lebollo include the following elements [10]:

a) Knowledge of one's rights, privileges, duties, and responsibilities as a member in a community

b) Willingness to contribute to societal integration and nation building

c) Extensive personal loyalty and commitment to trust in a common and/or shared historical civilization.

d) Development of well-adjusted and robust citizens.

e) Development of the virtue of hard work, commitment, integrity, trustworthiness, responsibility, dedication, loyalty, and self-respect.

f) Development of worthy citizens guided by decent moral precepts, that is, good citizens who can live, work, contend and cooperate in a civilised way, and who are loyal, patriotic, filial, respectful to elders, law-abiding, and humane, caring of family, parents, neighbours, friends, tolerant of all people, clean, neat, punctual, and well mannered.

For the researcher, lebollo was intended to develop among the Basotho, the necessary and vital motivation to engage in making a lasting contribution consciously and responsibly to their society through the capability of making responsible decisions for a sustainable human existence.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the paper is to find out the extent to which Lebollo as a Basotho indigenous knowledge system could facilitate individual and organizational flourishing through human factor development.

Research questions

The following are the research questions of the paper:

a) To what extent does Lebollo facilitate human and organizational flourishing?

b) To what extent does Lebollo lead to cognitive, affective, practical, and social transformation?

c) To what extent does Lebollo maximize personal and group effectiveness?

d) To what extent does Lebollo facilitate character development?

Methodology

The methodology of this paper is qualitative basic research, while the theoretical framework is critical theoretical analyses.

Basic Research

Basic research, also called pure research or fundamental research, aims to improve understanding or prediction of natural or other phenomena [11,12].

Theoretical Framework

Critical theoretical analyses

Critical Theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Critical theory basically seeks "to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer, 1982). Critical theory involves a normative dimension, either through criticizing society from some general theory of values, norms, or "oughts", or through criticizing it in terms of its own espoused values.

The core concepts of critical theory are as follows:

a) That critical social theory should be directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity (i.e., how it came to be configured at a specific point in time), and

b) That Critical theory should improve understanding of society by integrating all the major social sciences, including geography, economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology.

Human factor as a prerequisite for authentic development

The following preoccupation is generally untrue if considered from the HF perspective: 'Is it true that the higher a person's educational attainment, the more likely he or she is to believe in democratic values and also support democratic practices?' [13]. In other words, what is more fundamental in HF development is not the level but the kind of education given to our youth and people. It is therefore only authentic HF enhancing education that can produce persons who believe in, and support democratic values and practices [14,15]. Heraclitus was quoted as saying, 'much knowledge does not teach wisdom' [16]. The latter emphasises the idea that philosophers of ancient times were particularly concerned with character building because they knew that without individual transformation, no society could achieve the best of democratic arrangements. Adjibolosoo observes that, it is the cultivation of productive attitudes and positive HF in people rather than a perfect constitutional blueprint that has the power to mobilise internal and external resources for economic development in sub-Saharan African countries. In other words, whether institutions and institutional structures succeed or fail in performing their duties is dependent on the will and character of the people, the existing social ethos and the principles. The HF becomes logically the kingpin of every human endeavour, in the sense that no human programme achieves its best results without it [17-20].

The required human qualities involved in HF development usually serve as cement to glue people together, thereby putting in place the necessary requisites and relevant conditions for human progress and individual and organizational flourishing. HF development serves as a fundamental and vital pillar for authentic individual and collective transformation and empowerment [21] which the researcher unequivocally thinks forms the bedrock of lebollo, or the indigenous knowledge system of the Basotho.In the light of linking education to character formation and human and organisational flourishing, it should be noted that pre-colonial indigenous Basotho education evolved around "the initiation schools that acted as informal institutions where learning actually took place. Boys and girls separately learned cultural values and philosophy, personal and family responsibility and duties to one's clan and people" [22]. The traditional informal education system intended to produce a person characterised by social responsibility and committed to serving one's society and meeting family requirements [23]. Lebollo is thus a systematic traditional model for developing and sustaining human factor character traits and values among Basotho youth, in order to positively direct the latter's energies and resources towards human and organisational flourishing. lebollo can be conceived of as an attempt to educate, train and prepare Basotho's citizens for viable individual and collective flourishing through human factor development.

Lebollo as a Holistic Developmental Model for Human and Organizational Flourishing

According to Matšela prior to the nineteenth century and even early twentieth century, lebollo (initiation rites) were a prerequisite rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood among the Basotho. Until the nineteenth century and to some extent in some regions of Lesotho, until the early twentieth century, acceptance into adult communities required one to have gone through lebollo. There had to be evidence of change for all the initiated, in respect of cognitive, affective, practical as well as social-consciousness problem-solving abilities and relationships [24]. Furthermore, the process did not permit failures, but emphasised personal and group effectiveness, socio-culturally responsible and accountable behaviour, as well as cooperative and collaborative efforts in all community undertakings. Cultural values and socio-economic and political issues (often in integrated problem situations) were generally given priority in inter-personal and communal affairs, the general goal being always striving towards community and national peace, economic self-sufficiency and political freedom [25]. The indigenous Basotho initiation rite of lebollo therefore had a pragmatic orientation,

because it envisaged individual and collective transformations [25]. By extension and deduction, the 'Indigenous Basotho Education System' prioritised the human factor element as primordial in the development process [26-29]. If lebollo is considered as a triple layered process of indigenous education and initiation, it could be subdivided into 'inputs, processes and outcomes' as follows:

a) Inputs would be related to the Basotho general vision of peace (khotso), love and social justice through purity of heart, peaceful coexistence, social justice, local grounding and universal ethos, unity in diversity, and character transformation.

b) Processes entail social education, positive ethics, higher order cognitive and behavioural skills.

c) Outcomes.

Individual dimension – autotelic personality

a) Exceptional courage

b) Enlightenment

c) Magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation

d) Calculated humility

e) Integrity and self-discipline

f) High ethical standards

g) Character transformation

Collective dimension – ubuntu

a) Communal spirit of unity and restoration

b) Peace, ubuntu and service

c) Collective empowerment

d) Self-reliance

Organizational dimension

a) Organizational commitment

b) Organizational engagement

c) Perceived organizational support

d) Organizational justice

In analysing the inputs, processes and outcomes of Basotho lebollo, we shall use King Moshoeshoe 1 as a supreme moral exemplar of the human factor ethos involved in, experienced and expressed at the individual, collective and potentially organizational dimensions.

Inputs

Overarching vision and mission of peace (khotso), love and social justice

Inputs relating to lebollo comprise the Basotho general vision of peaceful coexistence (khotso), love and social justice through purity of heart, social justice, local grounding and universal ethos, unity in diversity and character transformation.

Khotso or peace

In the past, among the transpersonal Basotho cultural values which served as a social cementing force, peace (khotso) was, and is still a cornerstone virtue [30]. The notion of khotso involves harmony within an individual and with members of a community and within communities, and the Basotho firmly believe that the absence of peace will totally compromise the expression and experience of all other virtues. Moshoeshoe's ambition to excel as a chief was encapsulated by Mohlomi of the Koena as a mission of "love and justice through humanization of, and equality with others" and "Go, rule by love, and look upon thy people as men and brothers". Fred Ellenberger [30] restates the same vision and mission as follows: "One day thou wilt rule men: learn, then, to know them; and when thou judgest, let thy judgements be just". Moshoeshoe not only used these words as his guiding philosophy, but always endeavoured to meet up to their exigencies [31]. For the researcher, love and social justice through peace demand an imperative breakdown of the ego, or a movement from ego-centredness to social-centredness. This feat of character building is confirmed by Matšela who contends that lebollo aimed to equip youngsters with competencies that are necessary for adulthood. These included bohloeki (purity), which is advocacy for cleanliness both in its literal form as it relates to hygienic living, and in its metaphorical form as it relates to mind and soul, or inner self.

Local grounding and universal ethos

The principles of Basotho indigenous education through lebollo laid emphasis on grounding the knowledge of young people in community values, while indirectly exposing the young people to the wider world and to different cultures through the fundamental tenets of the former, in order to develop a cosmopolitan mindset [32]. By educating the young people for ubuntu/botho through Basotho indigenous education, lebollo has the potential of contributing towards the ideal of creating citizens who are inclined to treat others with fairness, dignity and justice at all times.

Unity in diversity and character transformation

Actualising a vision of khotso (peace) can only imply a high sense of unity in diversity, which is exemplified in King Moshoeshoe's concern for building and maintaining a cohesive and United Kingdom through making cultural plurality a binding value for the Basotho [33].

Character transformation

For the researcher, the kingpin of lebollo is individual character transformation, which will later become the principal behavioural driver based on an awareness of unity in diversity. On this note, we could say that lebollo includes fundamental rites of passage for "creating a person out of the untamed and unmoulded body of a child" [34-36].

Processes

Botho/Ubuntu cultural ethos

This paper posits that without the necessary Botho/Ubuntu character traits acquired by Basotho youth through lebollo, the vision and mission of peace, love, social justice, purity, local grounding and universal ethos, unity in diversity and character transformation, would not be unattainable. Character from culture is what supports, and drives into manifestation, the vision of peace and justice, in the sense that culture determines peoples' beliefs, communication patterns, values, and decision-making mechanisms. Basotho 'indigenous education' acquired through lebollo was the medium for creating citizens with the kind of personhood that was deemed necessary for 'good' human conduct among Basotho communities, since education is the process of transmitting the culture of a society from one generation [37]. The processes of lebollo entail social education, positive ethics, and higher order cognitive and behavioural skills.

Social education

During lebollo, as in many other African societies, Basotho youth were taught about the structure of their social environment, their place in that structure, and how they were expected to behave towards everyone within it. In other words, the "African youth's ethnic group and community were held by rules and regulations, values and social sanctions, approval, rewards and punishments, etc., into which he was inducted".

Positive ethics

Mapesela argues that Basotho indigenous education inculcated good ethics, morals and values such as humaneness (Botho/Ubuntu), neighbourliness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. It is his view that Basotho indigenous education "...can still be used to encourage people to become better members of society, as well as to help curb certain social problems like the lack of neighbourliness, heartlessness, theft, killing and rape, uncaring and unpatriotic attitudes, and lack of good ethics".

Higher order cognitive and behavioural skills

Lebollo sought to instil higher order cognitive skills such as thuto-kelello (cognitive engagement) or the ability to think strategically, and at the highest level through a pragmatic problem-based education, makhabane (virtues), which included industry or hard work, leruo (wealth), makunutu a sechaba (national secrets or classified information), bonatla (warriorship), and boqapi le bokheleke (creativity and eloquence) [38].

Outcomes

Nala or prosperity through individual, collective and organizational flourishing

The outcomes of lebollo can be classified under individual, collective and organizational rubrics, in this case exemplified by the personality of King Moshoeshoe 1, who as earlier depicted is the exemplar of the highest virtues resulting from lebollo of Basotho indigenous education. The individual dimension of lebollo could be summarised as the emergence of an autotelic personality characterised by exceptional courage, magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation, calculated humility, integrity, self-discipline, and high ethical standards.

Individual Dimension

Emergence of an autotelic personality

According to positive psychology, an 'autotelic personality' tends to do things for their own sake rather than chasing some distant external goal. This type of personality is distinguished by certain meta-skills such as high interest in life, persistence, as well as low self-centeredness. The latter aptly reflect for the researcher character traits of youth initiated into the lebollo system of Basotho indigenous education which emphasised social-consciousness and relationships [39].

Exceptional courage

First among the qualities of self-control is courage because courage is needed to manage all sorts of pressures, both internal and external. In all, King Moshoeshoe 1 as exemplar of self-control demonstrated exceptional courage in battle and decision-making [1,4,9].

The values of magnanimity, forgiveness and reconciliation

As earlier said, the principles of Basotho indigenous education through lebollo has the potential of contributing towards the ideal of creating citizens who are inclined to treat all others with fairness, dignity and justice at all time. On the basis of the preceding statement, there is no doubt why King Moshoeshoe 1 demonstrated gestures of forgiveness, reconciliation, magnanimity and even-handed justice, even to those who had wronged him [9].

The value of calculated humility

The quality of humility is one of the key elements of lebollo style education, which aimed at transforming the person from ego-centeredness to social-centredness, as confirmed. King Moshoeshoe 1 used calculated humility with aggressors who could return again, superiors who could possibly become future aggressors, and foes who had suffered defeat from his warriors.

Integrity and self-discipline

The difficulties traversed during lebollo were meant to forge unwavering self-discipline and integrity in the Basotho youth, future rulers of the nation. These twin traits are highlighted in King Moshoeshoe 1 who not only abstained from strong beer, wild hemp and even tobacco, but pardoned cannibals, and demonstrated indulgence and tolerance of human foibles [4-8].

High ethical standards

Courage, magnanimity, forgiveness, reconciliation, calculated humility, integrity and self-discipline are inconceivable without an overarching ethos of high ethical standards, which in the case of this paper were integral aspects of the lebollo educational system. Lebollo was intended to create role models for future generations,

and we can definitely say that King Moshoeshoe 1 lived up to this high expectation by demanding a high level of ethical conduct from everyone, while also conducting himself in a manner that set a clear model for others to emulate.

Collective Dimension

The collective dimension of the outcomes of lebollo is characterised by a communal spirit of unity and restoration; peace, Botho/Ubuntu and service; collective empowerment and self-reliance.

Communal spirit – unity in diversity in action

Letsema-cooperative community farming took place among the Basotho whereby "four or more families would come together and agree on a duty roster that would allow them to cultivate each of their fields on agreed days to make them ready for the planting season" [4]. Letsema transcended cooperative community effort because it was the outcome of a philosophy of ''many hands do light work" [4]. In other words, letsema was the practical aspect of the ideals of communal spirit, feelings of belonging, interdependence that is "a life of cohesion, or positive integration with others". King Moshoeshoe 1 ruled by a system of alliances and tribute beyond his borders and by consensus building within, which enabled him to build loyalty and allegiance through the pitso (public gatherings) where events (and/or issues) of national importance were discussed [24]. In his management of public affairs, he furthered the tribal methods learnt from his youth in which "[h]e allowed his followers to appeal to the chief's court (Lekhotla) against his own decision". In this way, he was able to prove that diversity can be a binding attribute, in an environment in which it could otherwise be expected to be divisive. Through his diplomacy and fairness, King Moshoeshoe 1 was able to attract, assimilate and integrate disparate and often desperate peoples into a people with a common language and allegiance.

The values of peace, Botho/Ubuntu and service

King Moshoeshoe 1 valued peace and he called peace his sister. His strive for peace led him to make peace offerings of cattle to the armies of his foes, who had suffered defeat from his warriors. Just as strong as his value for peace, was also his desire for consensus and willingness to serve his people – arising out of ubuntu. He was noted for being a more generous chief than any of his contemporaries and served his people in this manner more than any other chief of his time [12]. He embodied the noble qualities of a chief who loved and served his people based on the understanding that his power depended on the goodwill or grace of the people, thereby fulfilling the Sesotho proverb – morena ke morena ka sechaba i.e., a chief is a chief by (the grace of) his people.

Collective empowerment – public interest before self-interest

Hart and Hart (1992: 91) state that "the justification for use of power by public (leadership) is the advancement of the public interest". Through the mafisa system, King Moshoeshoe 1 was able to incorporate many people in forming a new nation by accepting

mafisa cattle [40]. Commenting further, Thompson states, "As the owner of vast wealth in sheep and cattle, he was able to bind people to him by judicious gifts, by lending them livestock on mafisa, and by establishing cattle-posts under reliable followers." Indeed thousands of impoverished commoners and chiefs during the upheaval of the Lifagane, literally 'the crushing', leading to much forced migration and chaos during and following the growth of the Zulu kingdom, benefited handsomely from the mafisa system [2]. King Moshoeshoe's selflessness is well recorded in the testimony of his son Sekhonyana: "[He] gained the esteem of the [Basotho] … by succouring the distressed and protected them and not keeping recaptured cattle of other clans of the [Basotho] for himself, as he could have done according to custom, but returning them to their owners" [8]. Through these means, of course, their 'owners' (who no longer owned them, in fact, merely held them under the Mafisa system) were drawn into his chiefdom [40].

Self-reliance

With respect to leruo (wealth) [33] observe that the Sesotho proverb: "mphemphe e ea lapisa, motho o khonoa ke sa hae" (begging begets poverty; an individual is better served by the sweat of his or her brow) was used to fuel the spirit of self-reliance and to discourage economic inertia.

Organizational dimension

The researcher strongly posits and hypothesizes that the lebollo ''inputs and processes values'' of peaceful coexistence (khotso), love, social justice, purity, local grounding and universal ethos, unity in diversity and character transformation, can effectively enhance organizational commitment, employee engagement, perceived organizational support, and organizational justice within organizational settings, as seen below.

Organizational commitment

Lebollo values would raise organizational commitment, that is, the degree to which employees would identify with a particular organization and its goals, and to wish to maintain membership in the organization [26].

Employee engagement

Lebollo values would enhance employee engagement or an individual's involvement and satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for the work they do [16].

Perceived Organizational Support

The application of lebollo values would increase the degree to which employees believe that their organizations value their contribution and care about their well-being (Robbins et al. 2008: 80).

Organizational Justice

Lebollo values in the workplace would increase organizational justice, that is, the degree to which processes and outcomes at work (procedural and distributive justice) would be regarded as fair by employees [27].

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