

# Management for Sustainable Productivity for Africa

## Human Behavior Expert Edgar Ridley

### On What it Will Take

With the recent financial implosion and the search for answers in the background, now is the time for bold, new thinking. African economies have not been spared from the fallout of the global crisis. Although Africa had a growth rate of 5.9% between 2001-2008, the anticipated growth in Gross Domestic Product for 2009 in Africa will be below 3%. It is universally agreed that Africa will require high rates of growth over the next several decades in order to radically elevate the livelihood of African people.

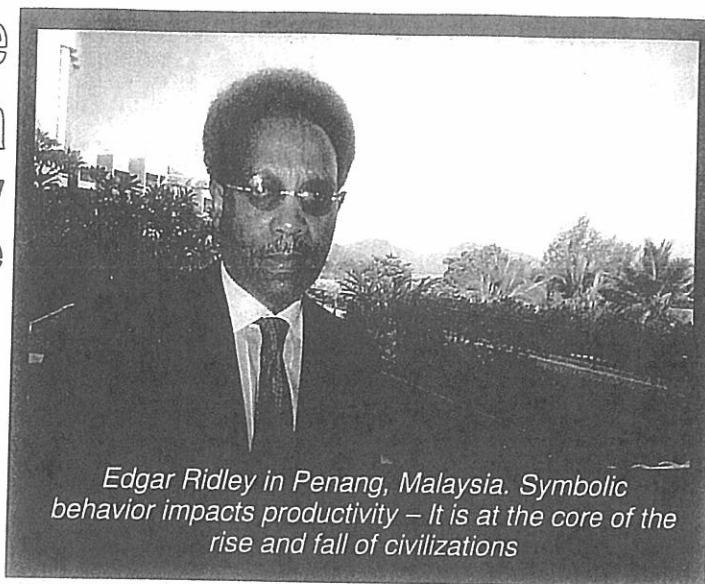
We sat down with noted international consultant and author, Edgar Ridley to discuss his unique management concept and its implications for Africa. As noted by Mr. Ridley, there is no doubt that it was the mindset of Wall Street that drove the behavior patterns that caused the meltdown. Wall Street's illusion that America's economic might was infallible led them on a blind path. Coupled with greed and arrogance towards the rest of the world, this mindset inevitably resulted in the meltdown. Mr. Ridley describes, in the interview and in the brief essay following this interview, that a solution to the global meltdown can only be found through a thoroughgoing analysis of the symptoms leading to the crisis. An improved economic environment must include productivity enhancements. Ridley postulates that problem-solving can only reach the root cause by dealing with the symptoms of a problem, not the symbolic aspects. Symptoms stems from the very roots of

the problem while symbols are but manifestations of the problem.

The Key to Productivity is the Symptomatic Thought Process®

Mr. Ridley's most recent book, *The Golden Apple: Changing the Structure of Civilization* (Africa World Press), has been described as one of the most important books to address the solution to our deeper behavioral problems. Important visionaries have stated that Ridley has, in fact, isolated the key cause in human conflict. If homo sapiens is to survive, civilization must change the behavior pattern in the mindset of individuals. People have to get beyond hate and greed to avert conflict, which can be done by introducing a Symptomatic Thought Process®.

In his most recent book, Ridley offers a series of concrete examples of inadequate decision-making based on symbolic thinking, which leads to unsustainable productivity cycles. As evidenced by his success with his consulting clients, "we must enact a Symptomatic Thought Process® as opposed to a symbolic one," Ridley emphasizes. All that is needed to obtain the Symptomatic Thought Process® is to stop thinking symbolically; since, symptoms are a natural part of the neurological process, symptomatic thinking



*Edgar Ridley in Penang, Malaysia. Symbolic behavior impacts productivity – It is at the core of the rise and fall of civilizations*

automatically responds when we eradicate symbolic thought. Thinking symbolically requires unnatural effort, conversely, symptoms are a natural response to neurological activity. Ridley provides a multidisciplinary primer for those who wish to increase profitability and productivity. He starts by educating the lay community in the arena of symbolic thinking. Thinking symbolically is a neurological process that drives important decisions to be made based on myths. These decisions, often centered around religion and/or race, have determined the outcome of civilization today. For instance, racism has its origins in symbolic thought. "If symbols never left Africa, there would be no racism or religion," said Ridley. Symbolic thought is a neurological misadventure that has led to innumerable accidents of history.

Ridley goes further to instruct that symptoms are a natural part of the physical makeup of human beings; therefore, they are a natural neurological process and event of the human brain. Although traditionally thought to have begun with the study of medicine, symptoms began as cultural indicators.

Ridley notes that an assumption long held by academicians and

top scholars in medical anthropology is that all progress has come out of symbolic thought. However, Ridley has proven, through painstaking research and implementation with his consulting clients, that symbols can never be a natural part of the neurological processes of the human brain.

### Behavior Change is a Must for African Productivity

As Ridley emphasizes, human behavior is the engine that runs productivity. Ridley maintains that although traditional academia concedes that symbolism originated in Africa, it is important to recognize that a qualitative behavior change is essential so that African businesses can experience effective productivity for their individual countries. Ridley provides multiple examples: from the Belgian success at instigating the Rwandan conflict; to the continued distrust among Africans in having confidence in other Africans to solve African problems.

Ridley has been designated as an Expert consultant with the Asia Productivity Organization (APO). The APO is a regional intergovernmental organization based in Tokyo, Japan whose mission is to contribute to the socioeconomic development of Asia and the Pacific through enhancing productivity and changing the mindset for productivity. Although it enforces its ideals primarily in the Pacific Rim, more recently the APO has been collaborating with productivity organizations throughout sub-Saharan Af-

rica. Ridley's brief is to partner with the Malaysian Productivity Corporation (an APO member organization), implementing training and conducting workshops on his productivity methods.

### Leadership Models

When asked about leadership models that exemplify the Symptomatic Thought Process®, Ridley points to the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, as an exemplar of dynamic and successful leadership in the developing world. Ridley notes that Dr. Mahathir exhibited

IMF line suffered economic collapse, Malaysia rode out the storm and has been relatively stable ever since.

Dr. Mahathir's successor did not carry on the mission of Dr Mahathir as originally intended, and that successor was recently replaced. It is too early to tell what the new leadership will do, although Prime Minister Najib Razak's attempts to change the tone of public discourse is a step in the right direction. His mission to unite the multiple racial groups in Malaysia is commendable. He has established a public forum for all citizens to participate in called

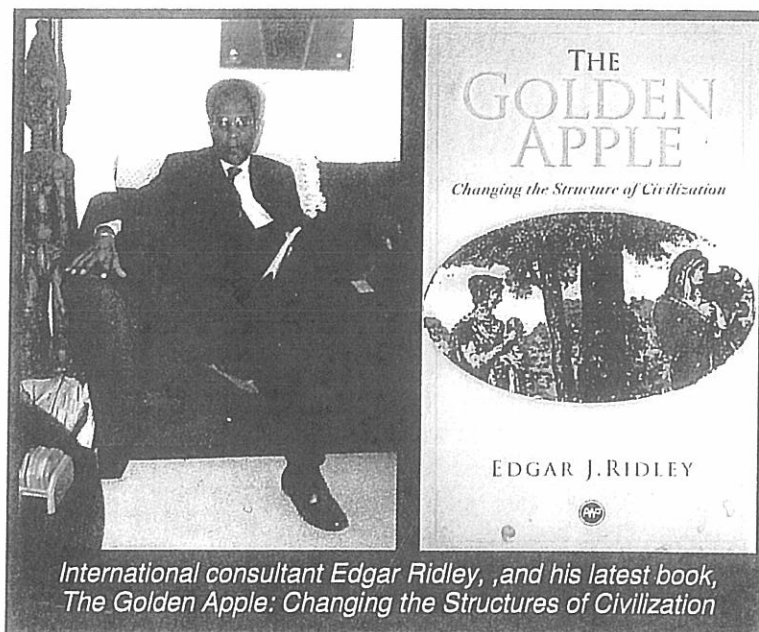
1Malaysia.com that is unique for a head of state.

In continuing his discussion surrounding leadership models on the world stage, Ridley points to Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Senegalese leader and former secretary general of UNESCO. Under Secretary M'Bow's courageous leadership, UNESCO redefined pedagogy to correct the distorted historical perspective perpetuated by

the West. Ridley notes that M'Bow's leadership was the Symptomatic Thought Process® in motion, as he challenged Western structures of imperialism that would not have benefitted African people.

### From Cheikh Anta Diop to Barack Obama

A major influence on Edgar Ridley's early development came from his contact with the Senegalese physicist and historian, Cheikh



International consultant Edgar Ridley, and his latest book, *The Golden Apple: Changing the Structures of Civilization*

great courage when other leaders would not, in stoutly rejecting overtures from the IMF and World Bank in the 1990's. Ridley first worked in Malaysia in 1992 around the time when Asia was mired in deep economic crisis. He describes how Dr. Mahathir led the emerging 'Asian Tiger' out of a serious economic quagmire by holding onto Malaysian currency regulatory mechanisms that the IMF insisted should be loosened for the sake of 'free trade'. As those nations that followed the

Anta Diop; Ridley states: "Diop was one of the greatest scholars who ever set foot on this earth. He indeed rewrote the history of the world. His multi-disciplinary approach in analyzing the African origins of civilization made him a legend." Ridley feels privileged yet humbled to have been a former student of the great pan-African scientist.

Ridley acknowledges that his field of study goes against the grain. When asked how he landed in this space, Ridley states, "I was disturbed that Africa's people are among the poorest in the world, notwithstanding the fact that the continent possesses most of the world's natural resources".

Africa's rich endowment yet to be put to work in a major way. This became the basis of Ridley's inspiration to study the dynamics of civilization in Africa under an African scholar. Professor Diop's influence is best demonstrated in an earlier book of Ridley's titled *An African Answer: The Key to Global Productivity* (Africa World Press). About what inspired those early efforts, Ridley says: "I knew that the methods being used to liberate Africa from its economic misery were not working. Something new had to take place to break the circle." Ridley followed that work with an exploration into symbolic thinking and a prescription for a new dynamic, in a book titled *Symbolism Revisited: Notes on the Symptomatic Thought Process* (Africa World Press).

The coming of the first African American president of the United States, and one with a direct African lineage, is seen by the whole world as a major milestone of historic dimensions. Notwithstanding the right-wing white males, most people seem to wish him well – yet the stumbling blocks are bound to be there. I

asked Ridley what President Obama's supporters should be wary of. The advocate of the Symptomatic Thought Process® stated that President Barack Obama has started out "doing a great job." Ridley notes that he "is the first president in the history of the United States that the rest of the world has shown such dependence on." However, Ridley was cautious: "We are waiting patiently to see what his policy toward Africa will be," he says. But he sees Obama's path as being strewn with 'dangers' even if the opportunities for an "extraordinarily legendary" presidency exists. Ridley states, "Whether fairly or unfairly, President Obama will be judged according to how his presidency impacts the world as a whole as opposed to the past and unlike other US presidents."

### **An African Productivity Forum in New York**

Returning to Africa's prospects, Ridley emphasizes that Africa's its future would depend on a qualitative behavior change. In fact, Africa can claim this century! "The continent has unmatched resources, and the time is now", says Ridley. Ridley assures us that we are seeing examples of present-day African business leadership that trends towards the Symptomatic Thought Process®. An example is the First Rand Group, a Johannesburg bank, which recently won a banking license in India for advisory and project finance work. Their strategy is to dominate trade flow between India and sub-Saharan Africa. Ridley cites this as a perfect paradigm of Africans having faith in their own abilities, eschewing handouts from the West, to pursue a vision of cross-continental cooperation for the benefit of Africa. Asia continues

to provide foreign direct investment onto the African continent, and the linkages between sub-Saharan Africa and Asia are proving to be a rub for the traditional global lending establishments. I posed the question to Mr. Ridley of whether western intervention would be expected, when Africa seeks greener pastures elsewhere – he agreed that that is always a possibility. Ridley stated, "We saw at the recent G20 meeting that African cannot rely on the West for assistance - we need to change our mindset to free us up to find new solutions – solutions created and implemented by Africans for Africa."

So what's next for the advocate of a behavior change for economic transformation? How can African countries engineer a system of sustainable productivity for the long haul? "We are planning an International Forum on the Ramifications of African Productivity," he informs African Profiles. "By focusing multiple voices around the topic of enhanced productivity on the African continent, we hope to highlight the possibilities for increased cooperation and partnerships." The Forum is slated for September 22, 2009 in New York City.

Ever on the move, Ridley's message is bound to be increasingly heard where those thinking of the future of regional economies are listening. "I will be traveling to Malaysia and Germany in the near future; I hope to go to Africa next for consultations on mindset change. By doing that we hope to increase productivity that will enhance Africa's economic condition." He is considering a trip to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for an African Union-related conference. He also plans to return to West Africa, including Senegal, in due course.