

CAN AFRICAN PRODUCTIVITY BE BOOSTED?

Edgar Ridley's Theory May Have Key To Management

Management consulting Edgard Ridley is a man with a mission art to help developing nations become more efficient and productive. Here he tells *African Profiles* how this can be accomplished.

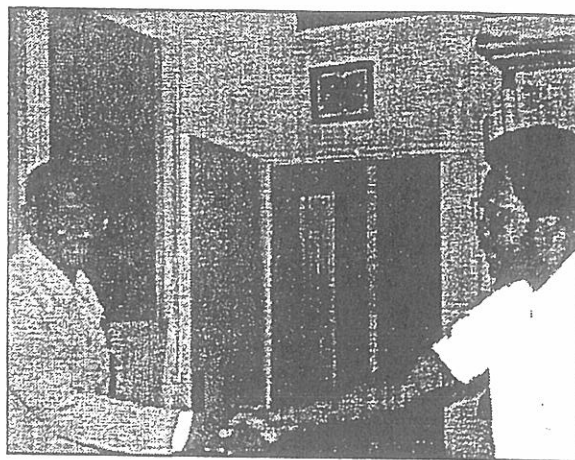
Mr. Ridley, you have a fascinating background in having met with and studied under Cheikh Anta Diop. How was the experience back in Senegal?

Having heard of Dr. Cheikh Anta Diop and his work in the U.S., I knew I would like to study under him at his Radiocarbon Laboratory at the University of Dakar. I went there and was able to meet him and talk about my interest in studying symbolism and mythology. I also discussed my theory with him in terms of productivity. He was most gracious in giving me the opportunity to study and do research at the Radiocarbon Laboratory. The experience was one that I would never forget, in that he covered the whole of Egyptian history in his multidisciplinary work. I presented him with my thesis, "The Neurological Misadventure of Primordial Man," which he accepted. I was most struck by his sincerity and his commitment to solving the problems of Africa in concert with those who have similar interests. He was not concerned with who received credit, but only wanted to unselfishly work for the total liberation of the continent of Africa.

Ridley Associates has made a name with its unique theory of productivity. Why is your theory of symptomatic as opposed to symbolic thought processes the key here?

Historically, scholars have assumed that the symbolic thought process was a natural neurological process. Our research at Ridley & Associates has proven that to be incorrect. This has meant a dramatic change in the way we solve problems and behave, in not only the business world but our personal lives. It must be understood that racism and all of the problems that we face in the world, such as the conflicts in Eastern Europe, Ireland, or Rwanda, have come from a symbolic thought process and its resulting superstitions and mythological thinking. This has produced religious wars all over the world. I cannot emphasize too strongly that in light of current research on symbolism and its effect on the brain, it is imperative that our theory be taken seriously all over the world. The theory of the Symptomatic Thought Process will not only liberate Africa but serve as a qualitative thrust for a better world.

The Symptomatic Thought Process is the key to the problems we face in today's civilization because it eradicates decisions



Edgar with the famed Cheikh Anta Diop

based on mythology and superstitious behavior. That in itself will usher in a qualitatively better world. Thinking symptomatically means thinking non-symbolically, or seeing things without attaching connotations, seeing things as they really are. By doing this, we experience the ultimate, qualitatively, and we eradicate the need to mythologize. Symbolic thinking goes hand in hand with mythological thinking, and that must be eradicated. The only way to eradicate symbolic thinking is to think symptomatically.

Given that the world – not just Africa – has run along symbolic thought patterns for so long, which countries and corporations, in your view, have been successful because they operate on the symptomatic thought patterns.

My concept, the Symptomatic Thought Process, is actually very new. I see applications of my theory in Malaysia and Eritrea; and various other places are trying to adopt it under very difficult circumstances. American corporations have been predominantly using the Reenginee-ring concept, but we are in the process of introducing our Symptomatic Thought Process to several key corporations worldwide.

What is your take on African Americans businesses, along similar lines? Any outstanding success stories?

African-American businesses, to be honest, have been very disappointing, especially in terms of their inability to work together with each other. The vast majority of African-American businesses still depend on whites to save them from collapse, and they

do not have confidence in their own abilities and the abilities of their fellow-African-Americans to be productive and work together to solve our own problems. Recently, with the termination of the affirmative action programs, there have been a few African-American businesses coming together because of the realization that that is the only way to survive. Unfortunately, these are very few.

What do you as a business expert see as promising fields for continental African businesses in the world market? How can they compete?

It is obvious that we live in a complex universe. All areas of technology are up for grabs, and we as Africans must participate and be in the forefront of these exciting fields. I must emphasize, for African businesses to compete, we must focus on effective and appropriate management, and we must have confidence in our own abilities. To compete globally, we must be willing to joint venture with other countries outside the West, particularly in the Pacific Rim areas. Africa, being the richest continent in the world, can be a leader in all areas if they have the will.

Disciplines such as telecommunications and computer technology are arenas in which Africans are already very competitive. One successful African, Noah Samara, who is Chief Executive of Worldspace, is about to launch the most ambitious satellite radio linkup in history. The Ethiopian will target the whole developing world with new technology. Samara is a perfect example of someone who thinks symptomatically: he had faith in his own ability, a strong commitment to Africa; and he persevered.



Edgar Ridley

What can African governments do to foster conducive business climates and attract foreign investments necessary for the economic growth of their countries?

I am happy to say that there are some African governments like Zimbabwe and South Africa who are bringing in Pacific Rim countries like Malaysia for deals and joint ventures. They are eradicating the red tape and other obstacles that tend to discourage some foreign investors. Eritrea is another area that can serve as model for what should be done to induce foreign investors. Eritrea has taken on problems with vigor and a problem-solving attitude.

As we approach the 21st century, what should African corporations or businesses take note of in relation to a rapidly changing global economic order?

African businesses and corporations should realize that the balance of power is changing and that the countries who will bank the world in the future will not come from the West and will not be white. New concepts must be created to steer this changing economy productively. It is essential for Africans to be able to establish non-symbolic relationships with people all over the globe so that we can take a leading role in the global economy.

We notice that you and your wife Linda, the Vice Chairman, are building this together. Your refer to Linda as a "true African princess" in your book. How has this been working - and would you recommend such family partnership?

My wife, Linda, and I formed this firm out of a desire and commitment to Africa and the larger universe. Linda has been a tremendous help to me; indeed, I refer to her as an African queen in my book. Because of our love and trust as well as superior intellectual compatibility, we have been able to work very effectively together. I highly recommend that families support each other in business endeavors-this is something African people should do more of.

Opa Rambo



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