

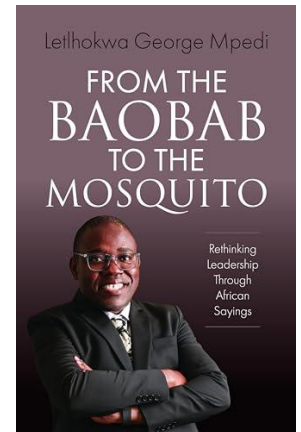


Title From the Baobab to the Mosquito
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Lessons For
 Directors, Prescribed Officers, Executives
 Governance Officers, Company Secretaries
 Ethics Officers, Risk Managers, Compliance Managers
 Audit Professionals
 Strategy and Sustainability Professionals
 Line Managers

Relevance	Overall Rating
10	8
9	
8	
6	
8	
7	



Synopsis

The saying 'if you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito' is a call for the recognition of personal leadership, an acknowledgement that each one of us is a leader somewhere, whether we recognise it or not. The book argues that Africa's leadership crisis, deepened by colonial legacies, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, corruption and stalled growth, calls for leadership models drawn from the African continent's own traditions rather than imported hierarchies. Prof. Mpedi works through proverbs and sayings gathered from different regions and cultures across Africa, using each as a lens onto a leadership principle: collaboration over individual glory, collective decision-making over top-down command, and community-building as a leader's core responsibility rather than a soft add-on to more serious goals. The recurring image in the book is the African proverb, attributed across various African nations, that anyone who doubts a small actor's power has never spent a night in a room with one mosquito: a reminder that scale and legitimacy in leadership do not always run together. Mpedi argues this is not nostalgia for tradition but a practical corrective: leaders who root their authority in inclusive relationships, shared purpose, and equitable outcomes build more durable institutions than those who rely on organisational position alone. A key takeaway for governance practitioners is that an organisation's culture and legitimacy are built the same way a community is – through consistent, small, relational acts of inclusion, not through the formal authority of an organisational structure or the decision-making rights in delegations of authority.

Key Concept: Communal Leadership Drawn from African communal traditions, locating authority in relationships and collective decision-making rather than individual position. Legitimacy is earned through contribution to the group, not conferred by title alone.

Quotes: 'African leadership is in crisis.' 'One might then ask, what is the source of inspiration for leadership?' 'I have come to appreciate that the significance of African sayings and proverbs in practice. They have considerably shaped my leadership style and enabled me to convey my ideas and vision clearly and effectively. I have found inspiration in returning to my roots. Importantly, it is in this process that I realised that there was a distinct gap in our application of this knowledge.' 'It is with practical wisdom that the wise leader applies all wisdom... there is a certain sense, in indigenous wisdom, that humans are stewards in an interconnected world. It is with this sense of stewardship permeating their understanding of their role as leaders that they accord proper respect for others' dignity, give others a voice in decision-making, ensure fair hearing, practice dialogue, engage in consensual decision-making, resolve conflicts and all other practices that fall within their leadership purview.' 'Leadership is not just about individual achievement, but about building strong relationships, fostering a sense of community, and making a positive difference in the lives of others.' 'If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito.'

Practical Tips

- Consider whether your organisation's decision-making truly includes those affected by it, *versus* being announced to them as a fact.
- Communal models treat consultation as central to legitimacy, not a courtesy step to validate a decision that has already been made.
- Consider whether your leadership development and succession planning reward relationship-building and employee contribution as much as individual performance metrics; the two are not the same thing, and only one builds lasting institutions.

Think About

- Avoid assuming imported leadership frameworks translate cleanly into every context. Effective leadership must be culturally rooted to earn genuine legitimacy, not merely procedurally correct.
- Understand that small, consistent actions (how a leader listens, includes, and follows through) accumulate into institutional trust far more than any single strategic decision.
- Consider whether your organisation treats community (including employees, suppliers, service providers, customers, and other stakeholders) as core to leadership success, or as a reputational afterthought once financial targets are met.
- To build a culture in which people perform in for the greater good, laws and policies should all be localised, explained, and reinforced so that they resonate with the people expected to follow them.

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