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Reframing human resource management in Africa: a cross-cultural perspective

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Abstract Current approaches to understanding the management of people in Africa are often framed within a pejorative 'developing/developed' world paradigm that not only paints a negative view of management in Africa, but also assumes the need to develop towards the 'developed' world approach. Cross-cultural analysis that focuses first on historical and current cultural interaction across continents suggests a difference between an instrumental view of people as a resource to serve the ends of the organization and a humanistic view which sees people as having a value in themselves. This offers a more useful paradigm for progressing both research and practice in this area. Both a conceptual model and a typology of management systems are offered as a way forward. Research should also focus on cross-cultural difference and interactions at cross-national and inter-ethnic levels. This will facilitate a cross-cultural approach to management development and team building through developing synergies in organizations in Africa

Keywords Management in Africa; locus of human value; humanism; instrumentalism; cross-cultural management.

Introduction: a pejorative view of management in Africa

The current literature on management in 'developing' countries generally (e.g. Jaeger and Kanungo, 1990) and management in Africa specifically (e.g. Blunt and Jones, 1992) presents a picture which sees management in these countries as fatalistic, resistant to change, reactive, short-termist, authoritarian, risk reducing, context dependent and basing decisions on relationship criteria, rather than universalistic criteria. Apart from the pejorative nature of this description and contrast with 'developed' countries, there is the danger that the objective of development is to make the 'developing' world more like the 'developed' world, and that this should be reflected in the direction of organizational change and the way people are managed.

It is unfortunate that this perspective paints a rather negative picture of management in Africa, and one within the 'developing/developed' world paradigm that is not just pejorative but actually hampers constructive research into the nature of management of people and change in Africa. Yet it is likely that the perceived 'African' approach reflects a colonial legacy rather than an indigenous approach to organizing. Indeed, the dynamics of management of organizations in Africa arise fundamentally from the interaction of African countries with foreign powers and corporations (often as an experience unique to a particular country, but also having aspects in common with other

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African countries), as well as through exposure to foreign management education. In addition, managers in Africa increasingly have to manage cross-border dynamics as regional co-operation increases (Mulat, 1998), and have had to manage the internal dynamics of inter-ethnic cross-cultural difference and diversity since the 'scramble for Africa' ensured national boundaries that conformed to the claims of European powers rather than existing African ethnic divisions.

If anything, 'African management' is cross-cultural management. The objective of research should be in understanding the complex cross-cultural dynamics in African countries, and their variation in each African country, in each region and among Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone countries. The aim of management developers and human resource specialists (the term 'human resource' is challenged later in this article as reflecting a view which, although not necessarily alien to Africa, may be contrary to the way people see themselves there) should be to ensure the more effective management of these dynamics, by first understanding them and then addressing the need to develop effective cross-cultural managers and management teams.

This article therefore attempts to reframe our understanding of the management of people, organizations and change in sub-Saharan African countries, by employing a paradigm which reflects the different perceptions of the value of human beings in organizations (Jackson, 1999), and by exploring a model of cross-cultural dynamics in Africa which incorporates at least some of the complex elements which may be important to our understanding (see Figure 1).

The African context

The context of Africa (despite considerable historical, economic, political and social variation across countries which should not be down-played) can best be understood as an historical dynamic that has created a number of paradoxes in Africa. The paradoxes can only be really understood by first considering the inter-continent level of cultural analysis (Africa–Western). The main paradox is between the nature of organizations and the need to develop human capacity. Many African economies are going through a stage of transition from large and often overly staffed public corporations to enterprises which are more publicly accountable and private enterprises which have to compete globally and be profitable (Ibru, 1997; Barratt Brown, 1995) (this aspect is shown as 'Economic Reform' in Figure 1). At the same time there is an overriding need to develop people (Kifle, 1998; Bazemore and Thai, 1995; Kamoche, 1997), and to do this predominantly within work organizations (cf. Anyanwu, 1998). Yet organizations that can take this development role are divesting of people.

A legacy of under-skilling largely through a concentration on export-led primary production and low development of consumer economies (Barratt Brown, 1995; Adedeji, 1999) now hampers human capacity building particularly in the service sector. Also, the current need to develop relevance, flexibility, responsiveness and accountability in the public sector is hampered by a legacy of administration that was tacked onto African societies with a standardization of functions and low transferability of skills (Carlsson, 1998; Picard and Garrity, 1995) ('Legacy' in Figure 1). More recently an imposition of economic structural adjustment programmes, which have reduced government spending, removed subsidies, deregulated goods, money and labour markets, and decontrolled prices to respond to market forces and liberalization of trade (Mbaku, 1998; Wohlgemuth *et al*., 1998) has militated against protecting and developing indigenous organizations through long-term government and private
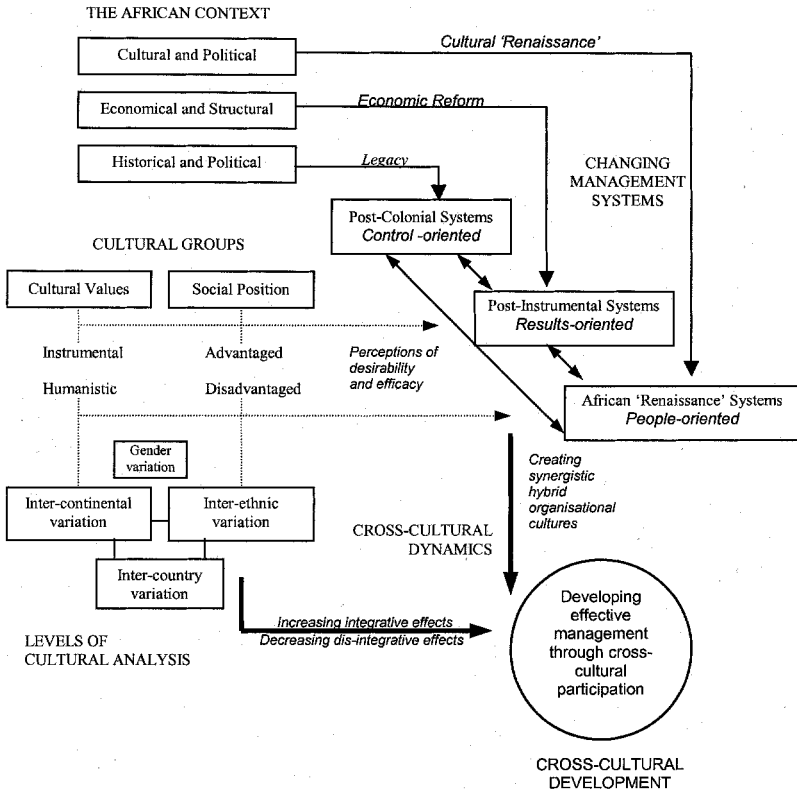
THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

Cultural and Political

Economical and Structural

Historical and Political

Cultural 'Renaissance'

Economic Reform

Legacy

CHANGING
MANAGEMENT
SYSTEMS

Post-Colonial Systems
Control -oriented

CULTURAL GROUPS

Cultural Values

Social Position

Instrumental   Advantaged

Humanistic   Disadvantaged

*Perceptions of
desirability
and efficacy*

Post-Instrumental Systems
Results-oriented

African 'Renaissance' Systems
People-oriented

Gender
variation

Inter-continental
variation

Inter-ethnic
variation

Inter-country
variation

CROSS-CULTURAL
DYNAMICS

*Creating
synergistic
hybrid
organisational
cultures*

Increasing integrative effects
Decreasing dis-integrative effects

LEVELS OF
CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Developing
effective
management
through cross-
cultural
participation

CROSS-CULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT

Figure 1 *A model of cross-cultural dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa*

investment in organizations to develop human capacity ('Economic Reform' in Figure 1). The accompanying trend to downsize organizations has also militated against training and developing people in these organizations.

Although, as was said above, there are considerable differences among African countries, the paradox (and conflicts in policies and practices) between historical legacy and future requirements, between the need to downsize organizations through economic reform, to make them 'meaner and leaner' and globally competitive, on the one hand, and the future requirement to skill, re-skill and develop people in work organizations up to managerial levels, on the other hand, may be understood through a conceptualization of an antithesis between the cultural need in Africa to recognize people as having a value in their own right and as part of a social community, which may be in direct contradiction to a predominant Western view in organization, and management theory which sees people as a means to an end within the organization (Jackson, 1999). This perception of the direction and nature of the value that is placed on people in organizations, or locus of human value, shown as 'Humanistic' and 'Instrumental' cultural values in Figure 1, may be central to understanding at least one level of cross-cultural interaction within organizations in Africa. It may also be central to understanding many of the difficulties of managing people in organizations in Africa.

It is to this level of analysis that we must turn to further understand the changing management systems depicted in Figure 1.

Levels of cultural analysis

The inter-continental cultural level is fundament to a number of theories such as the 'disconnect' thesis (Dia, 1996; Carlsson, 1998). At the naïve level of theorizing this may be seen as a difference between 'developing' and 'developed' countries (Jaeger and Kanungo, 1990; Blunt and Jones, 1992). A number of studies have incorporated Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions to explain some of the differences between African and 'Western' countries (Kanungo and Jaeger, 1990; Dia, 1996; Iguisi, 1997). The shortcomings of these approaches will be examined below. Recent cross-cultural studies have incorporated more sophisticated value constructs such as those of Schwartz (1994) (e.g. Munene *et al*., 2000) or have tried to develop value constructs that incorporate 'African' values (Noorderhaven and Tidjani, 2001). An alternative or complementary approach is offered here which develops a theory of 'locus of human value' and helps in an understanding of management and organization systems operating in Africa that draws on inter-continental cultural interactions.

Less developed is work on other levels of cultural analysis that often requires more sophisticated concepts and research tools. Hence, analysis at the regional and cross-national levels, which is becoming more important with the establishing of regional trading agreement (Mulat, 1998) and more inter-country interaction, is at very early stages. Some of the studies mentioned above in connection with inter-continent comparisons are suggesting differences among African countries (particularly Noorderhaven and Tidjani, 2001). However, the lack of sophistication of quantitative measurement instruments, and the lack of qualitative comparisons, has hampered understanding at this level. As a result of a country's unique interaction with a former colonial power, inter-continental interactions are likely to be bound up with inter-country differences and similarities.

Inter-ethnic cultural analysis has remained largely within the domain of social/cultural anthropology, and has been investigated or applied rarely to management and organization theory. This level of analysis is important for understanding potential and actual conflict in the workplace, and in addressing resulting issues of cross-cultural management in African countries. The inter-continental level of analysis is primarily focused upon here, as this has a direct bearing on a discussion of locus of human value, and on the changing management systems depicted in Figure 1.

Inter-continental cultural level

Cross-cultural management theory has been criticized for its lack of theory that connects cultural values to management and work practices, particularly at the behavioural level (Cray and Mallory, 1998). The focus of interest in this paper is at the level of management and organization systems, their cultural derivatives, how they are manifested, particularly in the management of people, and how they operate in Africa. This focus has the most relevance to practising management in understanding the influence of cultural factors, and for management and organizational development practices. Although at the theoretical level these systems can be constructed only as ideal types, they can form the basis for cross-cultural investigation, as well as informing management practices in Africa, which often have to reconcile these various systems. These different 'systems' will interact in different ways in different countries, industrial sectors (including private, parastatal, public and

governmental sectors) and organizations, and give rise to different types and levels of hybridization. This approach is particularly useful in attempting to overcome and integrate some of the complexities of the effects of different cultures on African societies generally and management and organizational practices in particular. These systems are described as 'post-colonial', 'post-instrumental' and 'African Renaissance'. Table 1 also includes a comparison of the three systems with that of a fourth ideal type: an East Asian/Japanese system. Table 2 postulates how these management systems may be manifested in different sets of management attributes.

Post-colonial management systems

Description of management in Africa has largely been informed by the developed/developing world dichotomy, as was noted above and is exemplified in the work of Blunt and Jones (1992), one of the most thorough descriptions, and that of Jaeger and Kanungo (1990) on management in 'developing' countries in general. This is particularly so in the distinction made between 'Western' management styles (team-work, empowerment, etc.) and 'African' styles (centralized, bureaucratic, authoritarian, etc.) (Blunt and Jones, 1997).

Organizational systems   However, systems of management identified in the literature as 'African' (Blunt and Jones, 1992, 1997) or as 'developing' (Jaeger and Kanungo, 1990) are mostly representative of a post-colonial heritage, reflecting a theory X style of management (from McGregor) which generally mistrusts human nature with a need to impose controls on workers, allowing little worker initiative and rewarding a narrow set of skills simply by financial means. This system is identified in the literature as being 'tacked on' to African society originally by the colonial power (Carlsson, 1998; Dia, 1996), and being perpetuated after independence, perhaps as a result of vested political and economic interest or purely because this was the way managers in the colonial era were trained (Table 1). Quite often the literature conveys this as a monolithic system of management that is discernible throughout Africa, and even throughout the 'developing' world. There may, in fact, be substantial differences in these 'tacked-on' systems among the hangovers from different forms of colonial administration. There will also be differences between public- and private-sector administration, although commentators such as Blunt and Jones (1992) have noted similarities. In the following, the commonalities are referred to, with differences pointed out where appropriate.

In terms of strategies, there is an emphasis on inputs (particularly in the public sectors, such as in increasing expenditure on health, education and housing after independence) to the exclusion of outputs such as quantity, quality, service and client satisfaction (Blunt and Jones, 1992), or on the supply side rather than the demand side of capacity building (Dia, 1996). Best use is not being made of inputs or the supply to organizations (generated through improvement in education and training) through capacity utilization within organizations. Table 1 therefore indicates a lack of results and objectives orientation, and a possible associated risk aversion. Kiggundu (1989) adds that there is typically a lack of a clear mission statement or sense of direction.

He also characterizes organizational structures, in terms of their *governance and decision making*, as having top management that is overworked, having authoritarian and paternalistic decision styles with centralized control and decision making (Kiggundu, 1989). This is also reflected in Blunt and Jones's (1997) view that leadership is highly centralized, hierarchical and authoritarian. They also add that there

Table 1 *Comparison of different organizational management systems in Africa*

	Post-colonial	Post-instrumental	African Renaissance	East Asian/Japanese
Main principles	• Theory X • Western/post-independence African • Instrumental	• Theory Y • Western/'modern' • Functionalist	• Humanistic • *Ubuntu* • Community collectivism	• Humanistic • Corporate collectivism
Importance	• Continuing legacy through political and economic interests	• Looked to as alternative • Influence from multinationals, management education and consultants	• Some elements may prevail in indigenous organizations • Of growing interest internationally	• Developing importance through East Asian investment • May be seen as alternative
Strategy	• Inputs and process orientation • Lack of results and objectives • Risk aversive	• Results and market oriented • Clear objectives • Calculated risk taking	• Stakeholder orientation	• Market and results orientation • Clear objectives • Low risk taking
Structure	• Hierarchical • Centralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Often decentralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Decentralized and closer to stakeholders	• Hierarchical and conformity
Governance and decision making	• Authoritarian • Non-consultative	• Often consultative • Increasing emphasis on 'empowerment'	• Participative, consensus seeking (*indaba*)	• Consultative but authority from top
Control	• Rule bound • Lack of flexibility • Outside influence or control (family, government) often seen as negative	• Clear rules of action • Flexible • Outside government influence decreasing	• Benign rules of action • Outside influence (government, family) may be seen as more benign	• Consensus and harmony above formal rules • May have a lack of flexibility
Character	• May not act ethically towards stakeholders • Not very efficient • Static • Probably not foreign owned	• More ethically responsible • Aims to be successful • Change is a feature • Probably foreign owned	• Stakeholder interest may be more important than 'ethics' • Success related to development and well being of its people • Indigenous	• Harmony and face may be more important than ethics • Efficiency • May be slow to change

Table 1 *Continued*

	Post-colonial	*Post-instrumental*	*African Renaissance*	*East Asian/Japanese*
Internal policies	• Discriminatory • Employee policies aimed at duties rather than rights	• Non-discriminatory • Access to equal opportunities and clear employee policies on responsibilities and rights	• Stakeholder interests • Access to equal opportunities	• Can be discriminatory (towards women) • Employee relations may be more implicit
Internal climate	• Employee alienation common • Weak trade unions • Inter-ethnic friction • Discourages diversity of opinions • Promotion by ascription	• Emphasis on employee motivation • Weak or co-operative unions • Move towards inter-ethnic harmony • Diverse opinions often encouraged • Promotion based on achievement	• Motivation through participation important • Unions protect rights • Inter-ethnic harmony taken into consideration • Everyone should be able to state their opinions • Promotion based on legitimization of status	• Aims at employee commitment (job satisfaction may be low) • Company trade unions • Inter-ethnic relations may not be an issue • Consensus rather than diversity of opinions stressed • Promotion by seniority
External policies	• Lack of customer/client policies • Lack or results orientation	• Clear policies on customers/clients • Results orientation	• A clear awareness of and articulation of stakeholder interests	• A focus on business and customer networks rather than explicit policies
Management expertise	• Educated management élite with low mangerial expertise	• High, results-oriented managerial expertise is aimed for	• Management expertise based on people orientation	• Management effectiveness based on collective skills
People orientation	• Control orientation	• People and results orientation	• People and stakeholder orientation	• People (in-group) orientation

Table 2 *Comparison of different management attributes in Africa*

	Post-colonial	Post-instrumental	African Renaissance	East Asian/Japanese
Management motivators	• Economic security • Control	• Managing uncertainty • Self-enhancement • Autonomy • Independence • Achievement	• Belonging • Development of personal and group	• Belonging • Development in corporate context • Elements of economic security
Management commitment	• To business objectives • To relatives • To organization	• To self • To results • To ethical principles • To work	• To group • To people	• To business objectives (the corporate) • To results • To work • To relatives
Management principles	• External locus of control • Deontology • Theory X • Mistrust of human nature • Status orientation	• Internal locus of control • Teleology • Theory Y • Conditional trust of human nature • Achievement orientation	• Internal and external locus of control • Trust of human nature • Status and achievement orientation	• External locus of control • Theory Y (in-group), theory X (out-group) • Trust of in-group members • Relational and relativity aspects of decision making • Status through seniority
Management practices	• Reliance on hierarchy • Use of rank • Low egalitarianism • Lack of open communication • Lack of open information	• Some participation • Mostly communicating openly • Providing open information when necessary • Confrontational	• Participation • Egalitarianism • Communicating openly • Providing open communication	• Consultative (*ringi*) • Communicating and information giving to gain consensus • Maintaining harmony
Main orientations	• Managing process • Managing power relations	• Managing results (external focus) • Managing people	• Managing people (internal stakeholder focus) • Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)	• Managing people (in-group/out-group relations) • Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)

is an emphasis on control mechanisms, rules and procedures rather than performance (and a high reluctance to judge performance), a bureaucratic resistance to change and a high level of conservatism, together with the importance of kinship networks. These aspects are indicated as *control* factors in Table 1.

The *character* of such organizations may well reflect public-sector, parastatal or recently privatized organizations that are not foreign owned. The public sector and State-owned enterprises in 'developing' countries generally, and sub-Saharan Africa specifically, have been widely criticized as being too large, bureaucratic and change resistant (Blunt and Jones, 1992). There is broad agreement concerning the poor performance of the public sector, which has engendered support for a reduction in its size (Balogun, 1989) and an assertion that it is detrimental to the development of entrepreneurship and competitive production (Kiggundu, 1988). Some of the in-adequacies which Joergensen (1990) draws attention to in relation to State-owned enterprises in East Africa, include lack of clear objectives, over-staffing, lack of job descriptions and job evaluation, lack of incentives and political interference, as well as poor infrastructure and lack of systems. These all point to the inefficiencies indicated in Table 1. Yet there is little empirical evidence to suggest that private-sector organiza-tions are any better equipped to meet the challenges of change and development in Africa (Blunt and Jones, 1992). Montgomery's (1987) study among SADC countries suggests private-sector organizations are no more rational in goal seeking than the public sector. Part of the inefficiency of post-colonial organizational systems may be the levels of corruption and 'unethical' behaviour towards their stakeholders (Table 1). This has been well documented in the literature (e.g. de Sardan, 1999).

Internal policies may be discriminatory as a result of preferences given to in-group or family members. Kanungo and Jaeger (1990) suggest that, because of the associative thinking in developing countries, there is a tendency for behaviour in organizations to be context-dependent, rather than the developed country orientation towards context-independent behaviour orientation where explicit and universal rules apply to a situation rather than the situation and context determining the responses to it. This may lead to decisions based on relationships rather than the application of universal rules, and may therefore be regarded as discriminatory (Table 1). A reflection also of the theory X nature of management and general distrust of human nature, as well as a lack of organizational democracy, may be revealed in employee policies aimed at duties of workers rather than of rights (Table 1).

The *internal climate* of organizations may be revealed in employee alienation (Table 1). Understaffing, poor motivation, risk aversion and unwillingness to take independent action, close supervision of subordinates with little delegation, operations often inefficient and high cost with low productivity, over-staffing, under-utilizations, poor pay and poor morale indicated by high turnover and absenteeism are all features which Kiggundu (1989) recounts. Through the general underdevelopment of the economy and the tenuous status of many jobs, unions are likely to be weak and often subjugated to wider political interests (Fashoyin and Matanmi, 1996). Diversity, including of ethnicity and gender, does seem to be an issue (Merrill-Sands and Holvino, 2000; although this is inadequately treated in the literature, except that pertaining to South Africa). This may also be a reflection of discriminatory policies based on context dependency and promotion by ascription (who you are rather than what you have achieved (see, for example, Trompenaars, 1993)).

As a result of an inputs focus (Blunt and Jones, 1992; Dia, 1996) *external policies* regarding customers and clients are likely not to be overt and to be lacking in results orientation. Kiggundu (1989), having suggested that top managers are likely to be

overworked with a reluctance to delegate work, asserts that they are typically learned, articulate and well travelled. However, at middle management levels there are weak systems and controls, inadequate managerial skills and a lack of industrial knowledge. This is reflected in the general low levels of *managerial expertise* depicted in Table 1.

Management attributes   Attributes of managers operating within this system would be expected to derive from the overall management system operating in an organization. With the control orientation of post-colonial systems and a self-perpetuating inputs orientation, managers who fit in well could be expected to be motivated by control features of their jobs and economic security (Table 2). While little research has been undertaken on *management motivation* in Africa, those few studies do seem to support this supposition (Blunt and Jones (1992), reporting one study in Kenya by Blunt in 1976 and one in Malawi by Jones in 1986).

The direction of *management commitment* can also be derived from the above discussion. An indication of a commitment to 'business' objectives involves the pursuit of end results at the expense of means, although not reflecting an achievement orientation (Montgomery (1987) noted a regard for internal aspects of the organization rather than policy issues, development goals or public welfare, remarking on an aloofness of managers in the public sector). This may reflect an ethical disregard for wider stakeholders and a pursuit of corporate objectives as they dovetail with the manager's own objectives (Kiggundu (1989) underlines the political nature of this agenda). For example, de Sardan (1999) argues that corruption is embedded in the logics of such practices as negotiation and gift giving, and is both conspicuous and generalized within the administration of organizations in Africa. There is also evidence, from the discussion above, of family influence in organizations, and the commitment of managers may well be directed to these family connections (Table 2).

Management principles may be related to an external locus of control in 'developing' countries, where events are considered as not within the individual's control, where creative potential is regarded as being limited and people are generally fixed in their ways and not malleable or changeable (Kanungo and Jaeger, 1990). This may well reflect also a mistrust of human nature and a belief in the undisciplined nature of African workers in industrial life (Abudu, 1986). Decisions are focused in the past and present rather than the future (Kanungo and Jaeger, 1990; Montgomery, 1987) and therefore may be deontological in nature rather than teleological. Action is focused on the short term, and success orientation may be moralistic rather than pragmatic as a result. This may reflect a lack of achievement orientation and a status orientation as a management principle. A passive-reactive orientation (Kanungo and Jaeger, 1990) is assumed. Again, this may give rise to a theory X conception of management (Table 2).

The way these principles are manifested in *management practices* is widely accepted in the existing literature, as evident in authoritarian management styles with reliance on the hierarchy, use of rank, low egalitarianism and a lack of openness in communication and information giving (Montgomery, 1987; Blunt and Jones, 1992, 1997). This may lead to conclusions that the *main management orientations* within post-colonial management systems are towards managing internal processes and managing power relations (Table 2).

An historical legacy   The perceptions created by this conceptualization of 'African management' within a developed/developing world paradigm (fatalistic, resistant to change, reactive, short-termist, authoritarian, risk reducing, context dependent, associative and basing decisions on relationship criteria, rather than universalistic criteria) may

not be useful when directly contrasted with management in the 'developed' world, however much this may reflect the realities of many organizations operating in Africa (although bearing in mind differences derived from different colonial legacies and differences among public and private sectors). Implied within this conceptualization is the idea that the developing world should be 'developed' to become more like the developed world. However, its positioning in Figure 1 is as an historical legacy from the colonial involvement of the 'developed' world in Africa.

The developing/developed conceptualization often fails to recognize other (sometimes embryonic) management systems operating in Africa. It is also not sufficiently underpinned by cultural theory. The developing/developed world paradigm reflects a paucity of cultural analysis, and in management theory reflects the traditions of the convergence thesis (from Kerr *et al*., 1960). Where this view of management in 'developing' countries is explained by cross-cultural theory, reference is often made to Hofstede's (1980) value dimensions. Hence, Kanungo and Jaeger (1990) depict the organizational situation in developing countries as relatively high in uncertainty avoidance (low tolerance for risk and ambiguity), low in individualism, high in power distance (reflected in a lack of consultative or participatory management) and low in masculinity (a lack of competitiveness and achievement orientation and low centrality of work). Hofstede's (1980) own data are not very helpful on African culture as he had small sample sizes from West and East African countries that he combined into two regional samples and a whites-only sample from South Africa. The popular South African management literature supports a view that African cultures have a collectivist propensity (Koopman, 1991). The academic work of Blunt and Jones (1992) indicates from the available literature that African societies are low on individualism. More recent studies that include African countries suggest lower levels of values associated with individualism (Munene *et al*., 2000), and higher levels for those associated with collectivism (Smith *et al*., 1996; Noorderhaven and Tidjani, 2001). Yet these say little about the nature of African collectivism, and provide little explanation of the 'disconnect' thesis.

Locus of human value   At this level of inter-continental cross-cultural interaction, in historical perspective, the concept of locus of human value in distinguishing an antithesis between an *instrumental* view of people in organizations that perceive people as a means to an end and a *humanistic* view of people which sees people as having a value in their own right, and being an end in themselves, may be more usefully explored (Jackson, 1999). The Western concept of 'human resources' typifies the former approach in its view of people as another resource to meet the ends of the organization. It is likely that this concept would predominate in post-colonial African organizations to a certain extent (Table 1). Blunt and Jones's (1992) assertion that post-colonial organization is input rather than output dependent may lead to the conclusion that such organization is not functionally oriented in the sense of objective seeking. Yet it is difficult to conceptualize such an organization as humanistic. Organizations in Japan and other East Asian countries (and depicted in comparison in Tables 1 and 2) may have been more successful in harnessing the latter approach in order to obtain employee commitment to the organization (Allinson, 1993), but organizations in Africa have largely not done this. Hence African workers themselves see work organizations primarily as instrumental towards providing a contribution to their own livelihood (Blunt and Jones, 1992) and that of their communal group.

The *instrumental/humanistic* construct may avoid some of the pitfalls of applying a developing/developed dichotomy (as in Jaeger and Kanungo, 1990) or of applying a

simplistic 'individualism/collectivism' model (Hofstede, 1991) to cultural analysis in explaining differences between indigenous and imported views of human relations. It may also explain the levels of inappropriateness of what is termed post-instrumental management systems.

Post-instrumental management systems

A belief, within the developing/developed world paradigm, reflecting the convergence theory of Kerr *et al*. (1960) and the contingency theory of Hickson and Pugh (1995) (and see also Cray and Mallory (1998) for an overview), is that the developing world, through industrialization, should become more like the developed world. This is reflected in the trend for 'Western' approaches to management to be imported into African countries through multinational companies, and 'Western' approaches to be sought out by managers who are increasingly being educated within Western or Western-style management courses and being trained in Western traditions. This may affect not only organizations in the private sector, but also those in the public and parastatal sectors and those recently privatized enterprises that are in the process of refocusing as a result of downsizing and other major organizational change. This may reflect also a disparaging of 'African' (i.e. post-colonial) ways of organizing and managing. This disparagement is reflected in much of the literature reviewed above.

It is perhaps unnecessary to go into the detail that is summarized in Tables 1 and 2, where 'post-instrumental' systems are contrasted with post-colonial systems, other than to outline the principles involved. It is unlikely that such a system, based on 'modern' management theory, is blatantly instrumental, but it will likely lack the humanism of what is here described as the African Renaissance.

A distinction has been made in the Anglo-American strategic human resource management literature between a 'hard' organizational perspective, reflecting utilitarian instrumentalism which sees people in the organization as a mere resource to achieve the ends of the organization, and a 'soft' developmental human relations approach, which sees people more as valued assets capable of development, worthy of trust and providing inputs through participation and informed choice (Beer and Spector, 1985; Tyson and Fell, 1986; Hendry and Pettigrew, 1990; Storey, 1992; Vaughan, 1994). Tayeb (2000) quite rightly states that the concept of human resource management is itself a product of a particular Anglo-American culture. It is likely that the 'hard' and 'soft' approaches taken within Western organizations are both a reflection of an inherent cultural concept that perceives human beings in organizations as a means to an end (Blunt and Jones (1997) use the term 'functionalism'). If this is the case, then it is likely that, when Western companies, or managers educated in the Western tradition, try to implement 'Western' human resource practices in cultures which have a different concept of people, and a different regard for people in organizations, then incompatibilities will be manifested through lack of motivation and alienation leading to low productivity and labour strife.

The extent to which such manifestations are the case in foreign-owned and Western management-oriented companies in Africa has been little researched. This remains at the moment a hypothesis ripe for testing.

African Renaissance management systems

It may be somewhat idealistic to try to identify a particular African style or even philosophy of management (e.g. Human, 1996), but it is worth pointing to aspects that it may include, so that in empirical studies those aspects may be discerned where they

do exist (Tables 1 and 2). Most of the impetus for a return to African values and indigenous knowledge systems has been from South Africa, through the suggestion for a movement towards an African Renaissance (e.g. Makgoba, 1999). In 1991 Koopman published his book about Cashbuild, a company built up on the basis of 'transcultural' principles, which attempted to 'match the values of a community with an appropriate form of management and organization' (1991: 89). This involved reconciling what he called 'individualism' and 'communalism'. Mbigi (1997; Mbigi and Maree, 1995) has more specifically set about defining and elaborating the management philosophy of *ubuntu*, which is based on this sense of community. Again, this approach is here regarded as an 'ideal type', which may be discerned as a conscious approach to management in some African organizations, and probably one that is a not as developed (historically) as post-colonial or post-instrumental systems.

   A useful framework for discussing what an African Renaissance management system might look like is provided by the work of Binet (1970) on African economic psychology. Dia (1996) provides an account of this work. This can be supplemented and supported by popular African management texts (Boon, 1996; Mbigi and Maree, 1995; Mbigi, 1997), as well as specific anthropological work, such as that of Gelfand (1973), which is used here to illustrate specific aspects by reference to Shona values in Zimbabwe. Key values can be summarized as follows.

Sharing   A need for security in the face of hardship has provided a commitment to helping one another. However, it is likely that this value is not based on simple exchange, but is a result of a network of social obligations based predominantly on kinship. More recently, the concept of *ubuntu* has been prominent in the South African popular management literature, a value that is built on the assumption that people are only people through other people. Mbigi (1997), for example, suggests that collective trust is a large part of this value and should be developed in organizations before participation and empowerment initiatives can succeed. Certainly Gelfand (1973) suggests that trust (*ruvimbo*) is seen as an important virtue in Shona culture. Openness, sharing and welcome together form important components of *ubuntu* (Boon, 1996). These aspects are reflected in Table 1 in a wider community stakeholder orientation which also includes elements of family and other outside involvement, and a character that involves the development and well-being of its people, with a general people orientation (Table 1) and a sense of belongingness, trust and openness (Table 2).

Deference to rank   Dia's (1996) assertion that this refers to power distance, particularly within the organizational context between employer and employee, is probably rather simplistic. Although traditional rulers were such by their title to the senior lineage, they had to earn the respect of their followers and rule by consensus. Political decision making was through obtaining consensus and through a system of checks and balances against autocratic rule. People were free to express opinions and dissension (Mbigi, 1997). At the same time, taking one's proper place in the social scale (*kuzvipeta* in Shona) is an important aspect of the virtue of humility (*kuzvidukupisa*), and refers not only to deference to rank and seniority, but also to the senior person showing humility towards the younger person, and to the educated person not looking down on those less educated (Gelfand, 1997). This is reflected in Table 1 in a control that involves benign rules of action and promotion based on the legitimization of status (reflecting management principles based on both a status and achievement orientation in Table 2),

Sanctity of commitment   Commitment and mutual obligations stem from group pressures to meet one's promises and to conform to social expectations. This is reflected in Table 1 in the obligations to stakeholders, for example in the external policies, as well as the commitment to the group in Table 2.

Regard for compromise and consensus   This certainly involves the maintenance of harmony within the social context, but also qualifies deference to rank discussed above. Boon (1996), for example, summarizes the main characteristics of traditional African leadership by saying that the chief personifies the unity of the tribe and must live the values of his community in an exemplary way; not being an autocrat, the chief must rely on representatives of the people, counsellors, to assist him (chiefs were and are male), to be guided by consensus. Failure to do so would result in his people ignoring his decisions and law. The people are strongly represented, with a duty to attend court hearings, and all have a responsibility to each other collectively to ensure the laws are upheld. As a result of this collective responsibility, everyone has a right to question in open court. The concept of openness is an important value and implies that no one should receive retribution for anything said correctly in an open forum. If this is a latter-day idealization of consensual authority, it was certainly a perception of early anthropologists working in Southern Africa (see, for example, Gluckman, 1956). In Table 1 this is reflected in structures that have flatter and more accessible hierarchies, consensus-seeking decision making, an internal climate of participation and openness, and protection of rights. Management practice also reflects a participative, egalitarian and open approach (Table 2).

Good social and personal relations   This stems from many of the aspects discussed above, particularly the commitment to social solidarity. Dia (1996) observes that the tensions of management–labour relations that have been a feature in African organizations can be attributed largely to a lack of a human dimension and the adversarial attitudes of colonial employment relations. In Table 1 this is reflected in an internal climate of inter-ethnic harmony (although group solidarity may also act against this, as will be discussed below), and other aspects of people orientation generally, and a humanistic orientation.

This presents a different picture to that of Blunt and Jones, although this is partially recognized by them (1997), and other commentators on organizational management in African countries. Both this view and an idealized view of what African management could have been (without colonial interference) are probably too simplistic, as has been stated above. With the increase in interest in African approaches to management, as indicated in the South African popular management press mentioned above and the general call for a renaissance of African thinking, values, education and political transformation (Makgoba, 1999), any description of management systems within Africa should include a consideration of an 'indigenous' African management. Alongside this, a looking towards alternative management paradigms for inspiration and adaptation in Africa seems logical. Japanese management (although beyond the scope of this article to review) has provided systems of management in East Asia that appear to be successful in collectivistic societies (e.g. Chen, 1995) that may have some parallels with African societies. Aspects of this as a fourth system have been included in Tables 1 and 2 for comparison purposes.

Research is necessary at the inter-continental level because of the extensive interaction not only between sub-Saharan Africa as a 'cultural entity' and European and other former colonial powers and present-day multinational companies, but also

because of the unique interaction of each African country with organizations and institutions that are foreign to the African continent. This may give rise to differences between countries like Senegal and Gambia (formerly French and British respectively) that share the same language and tribal groups (Sow and Abdulaziz, 1999), on the basis of their interaction with colonial and former colonial countries as well as any differences in indigenous cultures. This aspect, as well as others such as ethnicity, may explain some of the cultural differences among African countries, and should form the basis of future research.

Implications for future research

Changing management systems

The discussion above and the typologies of Tables 1 and 2 and Figure 1 have presented three systems of management as 'ideal types' that are purported to be operating in African countries. It is unlikely that these are operating in a pure form. The 'hybridization' of management systems is an important consideration in Africa. Concepts of cross-vergence have been operationalized and researched in other regions such as Hong Kong (Priem *et al*., 2000). These studies indicate that, rather than a tendency to convergence (the coming together of value systems) in regions and countries that have had high levels of influence from other cultures, there is rather a tendency to cross-vergence (developing of hybrid value systems as a result of cultural interactions). The nature of change and continued influences from different cultural sources in African countries may indicate the development of hybrid systems of various forms. Some of these may be highly adaptive and effective in managing cross-cultural dynamics and not least the different requirement of instrumental and humanistic perspectives. Some may be maladaptive. There is evidence from India (Rao, 1996) that hybrid 'human resource development' systems are being designed to manage the different Western (instrumental) and Indian (humanistic) orientations in organizations. Their applicability in other regions such as sub-Saharan Africa needs to be investigated, as well as good practice being developed in Africa (Cashbuild in South Africa may be an example; see Koopman (1991)).

A further aspect should also be considered with regard to locus of human value. A study by Jackson (in press) over seven countries around the world suggests that a humanistic orientation is associated with collectivism. Hofstede (1991) makes the case that poorer societies (and perhaps disadvantaged sections of societies) are more collectivistic because of the need for mutual self help. If this is the case, then people in African countries who are socially disadvantaged may be more prone to have a humanistic view of human worth, and those in a socially advantaged position may have a less humanistic locus (Figure 1). This may also be reflected in organizations by managers having a less humanistic locus than employees. This has important implications for employee–manager relations in practice. This can be investigated only through empirical research that compares the perceptions of employees and managers.

Other levels of cultural analysis

Inter-ethnic and cross-national levels of cross-cultural analysis have been only superficially dealt with in this article, and this is a reflection of the literature in general. Yet an understanding of inter-ethnic interaction is crucial to effective management in

organizations in Africa, particular in managing conflict and developing synergistic work teams.

In a country such as Nigeria, whose main three languages or tribal groupings (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) are fairly well documented even in the management literature (e.g. Adigun, 1995), it may be appropriate and feasible to undertake studies that consider cross-cultural differences within the country. In other countries with large 'settler' populations, differences between white and black groups may be an appropriate avenue for research (conflict resolution in, for example, South Africa is not only a legitimate application for research findings, historical inter-ethnic conflict may also affect the way data are collected; for example, see Hofmeyer *et al*. (1994)). This may be particularly the case as white managers may be closer to the instrumental approach of Western companies and black African managers closer to a humanistic approach.

The (mainly Western) approaches to studying cultural differences (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994; Smith *et al*., 1996) provide only 'thin' description, which has severe limits in describing differences between African countries, let alone within African countries (see Thomas and Bendixen (2000) who have used Hofstede's approach to study South African cultural differences).

'Thick' description is more usefully employed to develop hypotheses. For example, this level of description of different ethnic groups in Nigeria enabled Adigun (1995) to develop specific hypotheses regarding differences among these three groups within the workplace.

If managers in Africa are going to be successful in forging regional co-operation, an understanding of cross-border differences (and similarities) must be developed. It is unlikely that studies based on Hofstede's methodology will generate discernible differences. A number of more general global studies have incorporated African countries (Chinese Cultural Connection (1987) included Zimbabwe and Nigeria; Smith *et al*.'s (1996) re-analysis of Trompenaars' (1993) data includes Ethiopia, Nigeria and Burkina Faso). Even more recent studies which focus on Africa, such as that of Munene *et al*. (2000), tend to emphasize differences between African countries, on the one hand, and Western countries, on the other. Instruments that are more sensitive to African cultural differences should be employed. Noorderhaven and Tidjani's (2001) study that used a Delphic method to derive questionnaire items more representative of African values from African scholars and managers represents a breakthrough.

Although quantitative methods may be a first approach to developing an understanding of cross-country differences, these should also be complemented by qualitative, thick description.

As another level of analysis, gender differences should not be overlooked. This, again, is an aspect that has not been represented in research on management in Africa (but see Woodford-Berger, 1998; Merrill-Sands and Holvino, 2000).

Cross-cultural dynamics

Any investigation of management and organization in Africa must consider the different and overlapping management systems described above and tentatively labelled post-colonial, post-instrumental, African Renaissance and others such as Japanese alternatives. It must consider how these systems vary, for example through the differing influences of various post-colonial systems (e.g. Portuguese, French, Belgian, British and their different operating varieties) and multinationals (e.g. American, Australian, Swedish and other Anglo-Saxon and European variants). It must also consider how these systems differ and combine in cross-cultural interaction at the various levels

discussed above: inter-continental (predominantly African-Western, implying a need also to investigate outside Africa in Western companies), cross-national (e.g. Zimbabwean-Zambian within region or South African-Nigerian across regions when such comparisons are appropriate and useful) and inter-ethnic (e.g. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba in Nigeria).

However, research on management in Africa that includes only these variables would remain at the descriptive and comparative levels. Investigation that is concerned with the effectiveness of organizations and management in Africa should include at least two other aspects: the dynamics of cross-cultural interaction (i.e. how can multi-cultural working, which is implicit in management in Africa, be effective or ineffective?); and change (i.e. how do organizational stakeholders' perceptions, values, decisions and actions affect change at micro- and macro-levels?). Jackson and Kotze's (in press) study of a major multi-cultural South African organization, the South African National Defence Force, employed integration–disintegration theory adapted from the literature on multi-cultural teams. Multi-culturality may be a disintegrative influence where members of cultural groups are tending to make in-group, out-group decisions (Tsui *et al*., 1992), but also strengths may be drawn from cultural diversity in increasing creativity and better decision making (Jackson, 1992; Lau and Murnighan, 1998). It is likely that multi-culturality in African organizations is leading in the main to the former position, particularly as collectivist societies are more prone to make in-group, out-group decisions (Hui, 1990), leading to conflicts within the workplace or in inter-organizational relations. Elron *et al*. (1999), in their study of cultural diversity in multinational peacekeeping forces, note that recent work on multi-cultural teams suggests that highly heterogeneous teams develop a strong hybrid culture compared with those which are less heterogeneous (Early and Mosakowski, 1998; Hambrick *et al*., 1998). An inability to revert to previous identities and norms explains this. This necessitates the need to develop a new common culture when co-ordination and communication are required among a number of different participants. A common sense of identity within the emerging culture, which enhances internal communication, co-ordination and cohesiveness (Elron *et al*., 1999), may be discernible through investigating such inferred variables as agreement on the perceptions of organizational and management attributes, in terms of what the current situation in the organization is, the ideal situation (what is desirable in terms of management styles and organizational factors, such as level of hierarchy, decision-making process and control) and how this contrasts with the way these aspects are likely to change. Logically, organizations are likely to change in a positive way if the perceptions of the various stakeholders concur about the present nature of the organization and its management and the desirable character of change.

Figure 1 attempts to draw together these elements, and identifies the nature of the relationships between variables; about which hypotheses may be formulated and operationalized in future research design.

Developing effective management in Africa

This article has attempted to point towards more fruitful lines of research by reframing human resource management in Africa. This last section refers to the final aspect of the model of cross-cultural dynamics in Figure 1, and is somewhat tentative. It represents, perhaps, the ultimate goal of management research: to inform the effective practice and development of management. First, however, the basic research has got to be undertaken. It is hoped that this paper may help in pointing the way.

For managers in Africa, trying to make sense of the complexities inherent as a result of historical circumstance and different levels of cultural interaction, the developing/developed world paradigm has not been useful. The attempt by international agencies to influence effective governance in Africa by structural and economic measures that reflect a largely instrumental view at the macro-level (see Jackson, 1999) has failed to address the real issues of developing people, hitherto referred to as a 'resource'. By recognizing the interplay of the dynamics of locus of human value, at the inter-continental level of cross-cultural analysis, it may be possible to develop hybrid approaches, as seems to be happening in India (Rao, 1996), to the effective management of people, at the micro-level. It may be important to focus on the development of hybrid systems of people management, and, through research, to see what has been successful and what has not been successful in terms of the adaptation and synthesizing of the different 'management systems' discussed in this article.

At the regional co-operation level, involving cross-border working, the 'European' model of managing cross-culturally by developing synergies in cross-border teams, rather than the 'American' model of managing diversity by homogenization (e.g. Jackson, 1993; Thurley and Wirdenius, 1989) may be more appropriately considered. Above all, the 'Western' view and practice of HRM (accepting that there are differences among Western countries) does not represent a cross-cultural perspective. Blindly trying to implement an HRM system in organizations in Africa may not be appropriate. Although this article does not profess to say what is appropriate, it does suggest that a cross-cultural approach to managing people based on creating multi-cultural synergies may be a way forward. Many other considerations are involved in developing inter-ethnic cross-cultural synergies within organizations apart from decreasing disintegrating effects and increasing integrative effects, as depicted in Figure 1. These include addressing issues of patronage in some African countries and continuing issues of discrimination in other countries.

Much can be achieved by employing a cross-cultural paradigm which focuses on understanding these issues and then addressing them by developing managers in Africa on a cross-cultural basis, learning through good practice and building on the deeply felt humanistic perspectives of African people. It should be remembered that organizations and managers have been managing these dynamics in Africa for many years. Lessons can be drawn from good practice not only for management in Africa, but also to contribute to global managing throughout the world.

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