UNDERSTANDING THE PERSPECTIVES OF INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT PHILOSOPHY IN AFRICAN ORGANISATION

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Abstract
The evolution and development of indigenous African management philosophies and practices in Africa have been seriously affected and retarded by Western management concepts. These foreign management systems generally failed to achieve the expected goals in Africa as they discountenanced African cultural values and social milieu. This paper discusses the fundamental management styles of Africa, particularly Nigeria, with a view to developing indigenous African management philosophy and practices, which will be rooted in the indigenous culture, value system and beliefs. This is aimed at providing the practical way for the efficient and effective running of modern organisations in Africa, especially Nigeria with its global competitiveness.

Keywords: Evolution, Perspectives, Indigenous Management Practices, Philosophy, Cultural Values.

Introduction
Formal application of management theories and practices among western scholars can be traced to the classical theories and scientific management theory or Taylorism (Bartol and Martin, 1991; Bateman and Zeithaml, 1993; Wren, 1994; Kreitner, 1995; Griffin, 2005; Payne, 2006; Hartley, 2006; and Yoo et al., 2006). Though, the Western management concepts and writings have dominated the thinking of academics and practitioners in Africa for a long-time as their positions have not shown in greater detail how culture might be taken into account in managerial practice. There is no doubt that “management in Africa is strongly rooted in cultural beliefs and traditions” (Gbadamosi, 2003; Fashoyin, 2005). In this light, the arrival of colonialism in Africa in the 19th century disrupted the people’s cultural beliefs and traditions, and thus “triggered the beginning of what may be called colonized African management” (Eze, 1995; Nzeli, 2006). This portrayed Africans as people without root or contribution as far as managerial practices were concerned. To this end, the dominance of Western management theories and practices, which are apparently considered as drivers of economic development, has seriously affected the evolution of indigenous African management. As such, the uncritical transfer to the developing countries like Nigeria has contributed to organisational inefficiency and poor performance (Ejiofor, 2005).
Objectives of the paper
In the light of the identified statement of problems as enumerated above, the objective of this paper is to discuss the conceptual clarification of indigenous management philosophy in Africa and identify the cultural values influencing management practices and thoughts. In addition, the paper seeks to justify the need to develop African management theories that are culture sensitive and it advocates a road map for developing indigenous management theories and practices.

Methodology
The paper is purely conceptual, as it relies basically on the writings of published articles and texts for secondary data. It applied a qualitative research design using narratives that lean towards the interpretivist approach which presupposes that a researcher being part of the object of study cannot be value-neutral. The use of secondary information sources was primarily to collate historical information recorded by other researchers and authors. An aspect of this paper is to assess the applicability of current literature; it is not intended to provide a detailed re-statement of its content but more of conceptual research of existing works.

Evolution and Conceptualisation of Indigenous African Management Philosophy
The practice of management in Africa can be traced back to thousands of years (Griffin, 2005). As trading activities and families grew into tribes and tribes evolved into nations, more complex forms of leadership and management style were required and did evolve. Division of labour and supervision practices is recorded on the earliest written record, the clay tablets of the Sumerians also evolved. Likewise, the Egyptians organized their people and their slaves to build their cities and pyramids. Construction of one pyramid, around 5000 BC, required the labour of 100,000 people working for approximately 20 years. Planning, organizing, and controlling were essential elements of that and other feats.

The construction of these great pyramids, are a classic example of management and coordination. According to George (1968), the astonishing description of Egyptian management prowess as it relates to the construction of the pyramids with a technology that would be considered primitive compare to modern standards, affords us testimony of the managerial and organizational capabilities of ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptian Pharaohs had long-term planners and advisors, as did their contemporaries in China. China perfected military organization based on line and staff principles and used these same principles in the early Chinese dynasties. The chain of command or path of authority, including the concept of specialization, was a key contribution to management theory.

Thus, management style in Africa is deeply entrenched in their beliefs and traditions (Fashoyin, 2005). The major managerial philosophy then was communalism. Communality is the process of collectively solving a managerial problem by being your brother’s keeper which was practised in trades and agricultural activities. Africa is a multi-cultural nation embedded with diverse business and management principles. Before colonialism, Africans had indigenous managerial principles of communality, father-figure, hard work, clan-loyalty,
team-work and integrity (Inyang, 2008). These principles were entrenched in the social and business conduct of the pre-colonial empires. Agriculture, which was mostly subsistence, was well organized with communal assistance from each farm to another farm. Members of the community were usually rewarded with the harvests and inter-married as show of gratitude (George, 2012).

Accordingly, the culture has given birth to various managerial philosophies which include: patrimonial management philosophy; patronage philosophy; indigenous ecological philosophy; balance management philosophy; communal management practice; and acculturation practice. He (2010) also reflects of African management philosophy as: extended family, human relations orientation, co-prosperity or social mutual concern, respect for elders and tradition, consensus, competition and hero-worship. In addition, Ifechukwu (2010) expressed that the Africa management model indicates a managerial style that shows a high concern for people and production, as well as a system where decision-making is participatory.

Despite the acknowledgement of the existence of such high-level management skills and capability in Africa, management as practiced in Africa was regarded as crude and unscientific, which connotes uncivilized management practice. The composite effect of colonialism and the disparagement of scholarship in management results into the relegation of African management system and the continuing subjugation of African management to western management theories and practices (Edoho, 2001).

Previous studies have also shown that the practice of management is heavily influenced by the traditions, values and habits of people as well as their political, economic and social contexts (Edoho, 2001; Fashoyin, 2005). Blanket application of those principles or the “unmodified transfer of those practices which are being utilized in the industrialized countries” (Deihl, 1984) has not in any way helped in the progress of developing indigenous African management theories and practices. There was an erosion of African management thought system through the entrenchment of western management theories and practices which is not desirable for the development of indigenous management theories. Aside from the transfer of western management theories and practices into Africa, there are several challenges impeding the application of management theories and philosophies in Africa. The challenges are obvious consequences of the problems impeding the application of management theories and philosophies in Africa.

The Effect of Western Management Practices and implication on African Management Philosophy

Against the foregoing background of colonial polices and their implication for some of the important aspects of life, it can be argued that the smooth and orderly development of Africa suffered serious impediments during this period. However, the fact of the cultural, racial and religion diversity of the peoples of Africa may have complicated the situation. The diversity made it difficult to describe common or unified local philosophies that could cut across the various ethnic peoples of nations, and which may be applied broadly in African organisations (Duke, 2010). Accordingly, African contact with the western world, which has resulted to
decades of economic exploitation, social oppression and the importation of scientific management, constituted acute problems for management today. Consequently, indigenous African managerial perspectives were either discarded or unappreciated.

Another area where western scientific management scholarship impact on Africans is in the representation and portrayal of African leadership and management in organization studies literature of the west. Nkomo (2006) in an extensive leadership theory and management review identifies the problems of representation and identity, where African leadership and management are portrayed subserviently to that of the west. The use of western benchmarks in the evaluation of African leadership and management led to the conclusion that Africa’s stunted growth or underdevelopment was essentially due to poor leadership and management, and that the application of western leadership and management theories was the needed panacea to the complex social, economic and political problems of the continent.

On the socio-political system, the British operated a system which largely created and enforced an attitude of servitude on the part of the indigenous African population. There was a deliberate segregation policy which was unambiguously expressed in the creation of separate European housing settlement, recreational clubs, medical facilities, etc. This obnoxious practice, with its attendant demoralizing effect on the local populace, characterized virtually all human interaction under the western management. Under this situation, it obviously became difficult for germination of cross-fertilized ideas to occur and spread among a large section of Africans. As such, development or progress of indigenous African management principles and practices naturally suffered in the process (Duke, 2010). Among the several reasons for this dramatic situation is lack of adequate and appropriate indigenous management thought which takes a prominent position. The noticeable lack of success of many African formal organisations created and managed along lines of Western theories and models can be attributable to the fact that the African elite and managers are ignorant of African historical and cultural conditions (Iguisi, 1994).

Furthermore, the African educational system has also come under the heavy influence of colonialism. Across the continent, African business schools and management faculties in the universities and other tertiary institutions have not found it expedient to completely review the colonial business curricular several years after independence. The preponderance of foreign course contents, literature, models, principles, theories, etc. have not in any way helped in the development of indigenous African management theories and management practices.

Ejiofor in his work re-echoed this sentiments. Sadly enough, several years after these sentiments were expressed no significant change has been noticed in the orientation and practice of management in Africa. There is no obvious change in paradigm as much of our management theories; principles and practices are still western-oriented. Our management curricular in schools has not changed. According to Inyang (2007), this has impacted seriously on the state of management research, thereby slowing the pace of management development and management education in Africa, Nigeria in particular. By extension, this point is applicable to the entire continent, which is in need of sound management research and
education that should evolve organically from Africa’s indigenous management thought, reflecting its social milieu and culture. This strange development disrupted the communal life of Africans, and quite grudgingly accepted the new mode of economic activity. Writing about the African industrial man, Ahiauzu (1999) argues the fact “that wage employment in African communities did not evolve from the traditional mode of work organization, but was introduced to the Africans by the colonial administrators, in a manner that was uncomfortable to the early African workers, has created a dysfunctional impression towards wage-employment among average Africans”. The unenthusiastic response of the African worker toward wage employment tends to affect his attitude and work behaviour in the strange industrial organization he finds himself. This has often led to the unjustified stigmatization of the African worker variously as lazy, lacking in motivation (Kiggundu, 1988), and low commitment and loyalty to the organization (Jones, 1986). Ahiauzu (1999) also notes that “African managers very often compare the performance of their workers with that of workers in advanced industrial countries, and very easily condemn the African work as lazy, without giving thought to the fact that African workers have a history, which is quite different from that of the industrial societies”.

At this point, administrative style of the British was gradually being insinuated into the governance of the African societies, and it became the main influence on the local way of organising, coordinating, controlling, and directing things-politically, socially and economically. It is in this way that political domination of the African societies, through colonialism, permeated trade, religion and social life of the peoples of Africa, with structural and attitudinal implications for the existing public and private organisations. The stiff conditions of colonialism also had implication for the application, cultivation and development of contemporary management practices. Western management thought, essentially became the tool that was deployed in relegating and decimating the local institutions and management practices while these were supplanted with western-style of management structures that were invariably regarded as superior to the indigenous management philosophy (Kiggundu, 1991; Ejiofor, 2005).

Cultural values influencing Management Practices and Thoughts
Culture has long been considered one of the significant determinants for organizational behaviour and managerial practice (Hofstede, 1980; George, et al., 2012). Today, it is crucial to understand the diversity of culture and how it impacts on the evolution of management theories and practices. There is an abundance of literature on the concept of culture and cross-cultural study of organizational behaviour and managerial practice. As a result, culture is a complex set of norms, values, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that are the features of a particular group (Lytle et al., 1995). In Africa, management has been practised using the cooperative and communal model. This is similar to the concept of communality (Eze, 1995; Inyang, 2008).

To show the influence of culture on theoretical development, Hofstede (2001) suggests that two dimensions of culture are particularly important: (1) importance of religion and (2) traditional wisdom. The first dimension supports the relevance of one’s relationship with a higher power. The second dimension emphasizes the importance of being hospitable, discussing decisions rather than imposing them on others, and that wisdom comes from
experience and time, not education (Hofstede, 2001). These two cultural dimensions clarify the critical role of traditionalism in many aspects of life in Africa. In particular, a deep respect for the elderly is presumably due to oral traditions where age and wisdom are closely related; and relationships between different age groups are markedly gerontocratic and generally paternalistic (George et. al., 2012). Consequently, the elderly, by the virtue of their wisdom, are expected to theorize for the younger ones to follow. The extended family serves as the building block for any organization; and tolerance and forgiveness indicates the importance of interpersonal relations over individual achievements. In African organizations, the importance of clan or ethnic interests over individual needs is manifested in different ways. African managers feel duty bound to satisfy social and even economic needs of their relatives (Dia, 1994). The distribution of scarce resources to clan and ethnic affiliates are natural responsibilities of management (Blunt & Jones, 1997). With this paternalistic orientation, managers bestow favours, and expect and receive obeisance or reverence. This phenomenon offers a unique perspective on in-group collectivism and reflects a response to collective need rather than individual performance (George et. al, 2012). Attempts have been made to identify core values of African managers, especially Nigerians. Mbigi (2002) identifies five core values: (1) respect for the dignity of others, (2) group solidarity, (3) teamwork, (4) service to others, and (5) the spirit of harmony and interdependence. The last dimension has been labelled the spirit of communality, that is, Ubuto (Mangaliso, 2001; Mbigi, 1997).

**African Contributions to Development of Management Thought**

As a result of the fact that Africa had no documentation of her past before the coming of the Europeans, her contribution to development of management thought has not been given even a passing mention in writing on management particularly by Western writers. It is also noted that the fact that African historians and archaeologists had shown that there were ancient kingdoms and empires in Africa is an indisputable proof that Africans gave serious thought to effective management for achieving organisational and state goals (Ifechukwu, 1994).

In this regard, western textbooks that discuss management history acknowledge the great pyramids in Egypt as illustrating early outstanding management activities in Africa. By extension, it is on record that the practice of management can be traced back thousands of years. This is because the Egyptians applied the management functions of planning, organising and controlling when they constructed the pyramids. These great pyramids, which were built in 2900 B.C., are a classical example of management and co-ordination. It is interesting to note that one pyramid required 100,000 men, working for 20 years, covering 13 acres, using 2.3 million blocks, each weighing an average of 2.5 tons. It is also noted that in ancient Ghana, there was the Empire of Ghana. The empire could not have survived without effective organisation and management. In the East and North of Africa, there were great African civilisations. All the above evidence suggests that the recognition of the need for effective management for achievement of organisational goals is a universal phenomenon. In the case of Africa, (with the exception of Egypt) African thoughts about management were never committed to writing. This, perhaps, has led to slow process of studying Africa’s own original conceptions of management (Ifechukwu, 1994).
However, it is clear from the above illustration that management ideas are universal but their level of development differs from one civilization to another. The coming of the Europeans resulted in a permanent dislocation in the march to African civilisation (Ifechukwu, 1994).

**Proposed African Management Model**

The injection of the western management theories and principles has resulted in a clash with the African management thought. According to George (1968), the development of traditional and workable management principles were marred by the importation of Western philosophies and management concept which has resulted to years of economic exploitation and social oppression leading to acute problems for African management. On the basis of the review of African core values and the foregoing of African culture management model, the following framework for understanding the key African values that are required in developing an indigenous management practice/philosophy are presented. These values are:

![African Management Model](image)

**Perspectives of the Model**

A need for security in the face of hardship provides a commitment to helping one another. However, it is likely that this value is not based on simple exchange, but as a result of a network of social obligation based predominantly on kingship. More recently, the concept of Ubuntu has been prominent in the South African management literature, a value that is built on the assumption that people are only people through other people. Incorporating Ubuntu principles in management hold the promise of superior approaches to managing organisations. Organisations infused with humaneness, a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness will enjoy more sustainable competitive advantage. Accordingly, Ubuntu implies a management approach emphasizing teamwork, attention to relationships, mutual respect and empathy between leader and followers, and participative decision-making (Mbigi, 2005; Mangaliso, 2001). Mbigi (1997), for example, suggest that collective trust is a large part of this value that should be developed in organisations before participation and empowerment initiatives can succeed. These aspects are reflected in a wider community stakeholder orientation which also includes elements of
family, and a character that involves the development and wellbeing of its people, with a general people orientation, and a sense of belongingness, trust and openness.

**Common Social Principles**
According to Mutabazi (2002), these principles are concept of life as a universal current which suggests leaders recognize their position in the never ending cycle while helping others to identify that their lives are greater than individuals and groups; human connection to nature as one of the primary tasks of leaders is to establish harmony with their community and environment; vertically organized moral order and human relations is generally not characterised by the development of technical skills but the gradual adoption of a philosophy of universal fellowship.

**Deference to rank**
Dia’s (1996) assertion that this refers to power distance particularly within the organisational context between employer and employee is probably rather simplistic. Although, traditional rulers were such by their title to the senior linage, they had to earn the respect of their followers, and rule by consensus. Political decision-making should be through obtaining consensus, and through a system of checks and balances against autocratic rule (Mbigi, 1997). At the same time, taking one’s proper place in the social scale is an important aspect of the virtue of humility, and refers not only to deference to rank and seniority, but also to the senior person showing humility towards the younger person.

**Sanctity of Commitment**
Commitment and mutual obligations stem from group pressures to meet one’s promises, and to conform to societal expectations. In Africa, reciprocity serves as a societal principle that guides resources allocation. It defines the perceived rights and obligations of parties engaged in a relationship (Kuada, 2007). According to Kuada (2007), African kingship relationships appear to endorse a form of reciprocity that comes close to alter centrism. This simply means that those who are in need have the right to demand assistance from those they perceive to have the means to assist.

**Reward for Compromise and Consensus**
This involves the maintenance of harmony within the social context, but also qualifies a deference to rank 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, councillors to assist him, to be guided by consensus. As a result of this collective responsibility, everyone has 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.

**Communal Management Practice**
Communalit is the basic management philosophy that governs existence and social relations in Nigeria (Fashoyin, 2005). It reflects a family atmosphere, philosophical affinity and kinship among and between indigenous people of Africa. While some views of collectivism are associated with ‘here and now’ relationships, communalit is anchored in Africa history and
includes present and future obligations to the social entity. Social life has traditionally revolved around communal ceremonies: weddings, infants’ naming ceremonies and public performances associated with cultural and religious holidays.

**Balance management**

Balance management is a managerial approach of ensuring equity among all stakeholders in an institution by managers. In an effort to ensure equality and justice among all ethnic groups in the country, the balance philosophy should be. This concept implies creating a national capital where none of the country’s ethnic groups would be dominant. This management thought is also the basis for the much criticized Federal Character principle which most times has sacrificed merit on the altar of catchment areas. Under this arrangement, a well-qualified applicant to public institution from the Southern part of the country could be rejected for an unqualified candidate from the Northern region due to the need to ensure equal representation of all regions.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

This paper has addressed an omission in the literature and has thus added to knowledge by formulating propositions which are based on the review of the African core values which include extended family, human relations orientation among other values. Also, this paper has emphasized the need to adapt these techniques to suit the local environments but more importantly, there is an urgent need to create theories and the techniques that are founded on the ideals of our culture and business environment. The above approach is a critical attempt aimed at giving indigenous African management, particularly Nigeria self-confidence to reflect national and indigenous interest, rather than the management principles and practices of the Western interests.

**REFERENCES**


