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Full Length Research Paper

Appropriate management in an African culture: Implications for education

Chinelo O. Duze

Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. E-mail: chineloduze@yahoo.com. Tel: +2348033380605.

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Following continued search for reasons on the inability of African nations to realize appreciable economic development through education, the researcher investigated the influence of cultural environment on management in industry. Because input/output measures of productivity are not easily measured in education, the industry was used, hoping that the results would safely apply to education since education has appreciable similarities to the profit-oriented industry. The researcher therefore studied employee/management values in two steel production companies in Nigeria. For comparison, a similar study was simultaneously done in a steel company in Italy. Because confidentiality was promised at data collection, the three companies were referred to in this study as P, Q, and R respectively. Italy, besides having the same steel production process like Nigeria, was chosen to eliminate influences on culture by British colonialism. A major aim was whether the results can help explain the disappointing economic development of African countries, with particular focus on Nigeria. Eight research questions guided the investigation. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using percentages. Results revealed almost same performance in X and Y (Nigeria) but comparison with Z (Italy) showed profound differences due to differences in cultural values especially with regard to motivation, satisfaction, and employee-management communication. Conclusion was that Western individualist and participative management models are unsuitable for African nations, and therefore, time for Africans to evolve suitable African management models which encompass African culture for use in Africa. The same can, by implication, apply to practices in education.

Key words: Management culture, Africa, Nigeria, industry, education, development.

INTRODUCTION

Research and statistics show that in almost all projections of economic growth and development, African countries, particularly the Sub-Saharan, score very poorly. Africa figures as the poor relative in the world family of nations and seems to be condemned to remain so for the foreseeable future. African countries nearly always show up at the negative end, and where events become too dramatic, relief actions from wealthier nations often interfere with African chaos. In 1992 the World Development Report classified Nigeria along with other African countries among the world's poorest nations with huge external debts running into billions of US Dollars. This situation has not changed today. Nigeria hosted a summit of the nine countries (E9) with the highest number of illiterates in the world in June 2010 with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) participating in the deliberations for quick remedy. Nigeria currently experiences economic decline in spite of her huge oil earnings. (World Bank, 1992; Kigundu, 1993; Enworom, 1994; Iguisi, 1994; Onuoha, 1999; Duze, 2002; Nwadiani, 2005; UNESCO, 2005). Among several reasons given for this is the lack of adequate local industrial management. The observable failure in many development projects can be attributed to this. Abandoned projects, including those on road construction litter many African cities and villages.

Besides, projects only function so long as they are managed by foreign experts, but tend to flounder as soon as they are transferred to locals. At the same time, African countries do have well-educated manpower so that the necessary skills cannot be said to be lacking per se, though a prevailing negative associate is corruption (Onuoha, 1999; Nwadiani, 2005). What seem to be missing are adequate and stable systems or models of effective and efficient management that is sufficiently accepted and rewarded in today's African societies.

Background to the study

A flash-back to African history could throw background information. The colonial era in most African countries has been one of the shortest in world history. Most African countries have been exposed to Western colonial powers for less than a century before returning to independence in the second half of the twentieth century. What this means is that they were indeed independent before being "held captive" for a while. Thus before colonialism, Africa had a functioning political/economic infrastructure peculiar to their culture. It was the colonialists who termed this "primitive". Neither the institutions nor the political borders imposed by them have respected this infrastructure to date. This is why this term has remained with Africa to date. Thus, unlike in Europe and most of Asia, the attempts on modernization after independence have completely neglected the native cultural traditions and tried to transfer ready-made Western management systems and models to Africa. The result, of course, has been disastrous. In spite of these and the consequent indigenization in Africa, work on developing African models is rare and more focused on the political than on the industrial scene (Onyemelukwe, 1973; Oshagbemi, 1988; Kiggundu, 1993; Iguisi, 1994; Duze, 2002; Nwadiani, 2005).

Furthermore, with the introduction if industrial labour, a clear change in life style was required in African societies. African workers were treated as individuals under "Western management" and had to differentiate between social life and work contexts. Thus, to place work first and personal relationships second is completely alien to the priorities of the original African life styles. Traditional norms and beliefs have to be negated, and relationships between people have to be re-negotiated to fulfill required Western work behaviour. Indeed, a new culture is introduced through the world of work! (Iguisi, 1994). It is in this light that this research was conducted to get employees and managers air their views about the fits and misfits between the demands of modern technology, Western management ideas, and local culture. Culture in this study rests on the anthropological sense, which underlies cross-cultural research approach. Perhaps, a most appropriate definition of culture in this study will be that given by Hofstede (1991: 5) as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another." In this study, the one category of people are the employees and managers in X and Y (Africa), while the other category is a matched group of employees and managers in R (Western Europe). For both groups, values, in the sense of "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affair over others" (Hofstede, 1991: 8) form a key element of their culture (Iguisi, 1994). However, the extent to which the outcomes of this comparison can be generalized to Nigerian society in general and to the larger African society will be a matter of judgment. The extent it will apply to education revolves round the similarities between education and industry, both operating to achieve the national goals of sustainable economic growth and development.

Theoretical perspectives for the study

Comparative management scholars are still searching for both similarities and differences between cultures. Culture can be perceived as the bridge between the old and the new, the before and the after, the past and the future, the wrong and the right, as well as the "what is" and "what ought to be". These help to understand the role culture plays in different societies. Culture influences management practices mainly through motivation, respect, reward systems, promotion, and authority. It influences organizational design and structure as well as the means that management employs to influence the way managers think, behave and manage. Because management works through people it becomes very vital to note the influence of culture on people's behaviour, more so when one manages in a multicultural environment. Culture defines a shared way of being, doing, and evaluating what is passed from one generation to another.

Thus, the need to understand clearly the impact of different cultural values on management per se is now mounting, and has led to a series of debates and researches from which have emanated two schools of thought. One school of thought, referred to as the "culture-free" or "universalist" believes that organizational management is a science governed by universal principles (Cooper et al., 1994; Eliasson, 2000; Baum and Locke, 2004) while the other school of thought "culture-specific" or "culturalist" argues that these principles are determined by a relative culture (Hofstede, 1980, 1982, 1991, 1993; Shane, 1992; Blunt et al., 1993; Reynolds et al., 1994; Davidsson, 1995; Davidsson and Wiklund, 1997; Aldrich et al., 1998; Henrekson and Davis, 1999; Wennekers et al., 2001; Baughn and Neupert, 2003; Davidsson and Honig, 2003).The culturalist school of thought has raised considerable doubt concerning the transferability of management behaviour from one cultural society to another. It argued that since societies exhibit distinct and persistent cultures, organizations in different social contexts are likely to experience the implications of such variations. Therefore organization members from different cultures will differ in their needs for achievement, security, affiliations, and self-actualization. Also, societies differ in the attitudes and norms of people towards authority. Consequently, subordinates from different societies react differently to superiors and will experience different organizational rules considering rights and duties (Cameron, 1975; Hofstede, 1980, 1982, 1991, 1993; Iguisi, 1994). Inherent in this school of thought as found by Hofstedes's extensive research (1991) in sixty-four different national subsidiaries of the IBM Corporation, is the proven fact that national cultures can be mutually compared along the four dimensions of Power Distance; Individualism; Masculinity; and Uncertainty Avoidance.

Power distance is the degree of inequality between subordinates and superiors that people in a country consider normal, which could range from relatively equal to extremely unequal. Individualism is the degree to which people in a country learn to act as individuals rather than as members of cohesive groups, ranging from collectivist to individualist. Masculinity is the degree to which masculine values like assertiveness, performance, success, and completion prevail over feminine values like the equality of life, maintaining warm personal relationships, service, care for the weak, and solidarity. Masculinity ranges from tender to tough. Uncertainty avoidance is the degree to which people in a country prefer structured over unstructured situations. This ranges from relatively flexible to extremely rigid. This is the school of thought that applies to this study, and all the elements involved were used to address the topic of the study.

A theory that links this study with education is the production theory which portrays a technical relationship between the inputs and outputs of a production line. An examination of the production function finds similarities between industry and education. Blaug (1970) stated that a production function defines a boundary in the input-output space, specifying the maximum physical output that can be obtained from every possible combination of inputs, given the existing level of technical knowledge. This means that the input/output graph of a given process produces a normal growth curve whether in education or industry. However, two major points are important here because they deal with the efficiency of the system. The first is that the quality of output is a direct function of quality of inputs. The second is that there is a maximum output that can be obtained from every possible combination of inputs. This implies that it is possible to have points of diminishing returns as well as points of negative returns. This is why the efficiency of the system must be well managed because no organization can afford to have uncontrolled wastages, if goals and objectives must be accomplished.

Education, though not profit-oriented in technical terms, can be regarded as a unique industry since education, like other industries, exists to achieve stated goals and objectives. In the course of performing its functions, education, like other industries, makes use of resources which include human, physical and financial resources. The inputs and outputs in education as well as the processes of teaching and learning change with time as is the case with other productive enterprises. Though it is difficult to define inputs and outputs in education in any real measurable terms as it is done in profit-oriented ventures, educators and economists have evolved certain measures that are effectively applicable. The input measures include issues like cost-related measures; economic variables such as percentage of the gross domestic product invested in education sector; quality-related inputs; society-related inputs like average family size and average size of household; home-related inputs like family income; teacher-related inputs such as sex, age, qualification and experience; student-related inputs like performance in examinations; and school-related inputs such as school total enrolment, average class size, student-teacher ratio, peers' influence. The output measures include enrolment-related output measures like transition rates from one level to another; tests and examinations results-related output measures like grade point average; employment related output measures such as number of persons employed by skill, participation rate in the labour force; and earnings-related output measures like differential earnings of the educated and foregone earnings.

From the foregoing, education is a production process which uses scarce human, physical, and financial resources in the production of educated persons. Since these resources have alternative uses, the economic concept of the production theory in industry can also be applied to education's management (Smith, 1937; Oguntoye, 1983; Duze, 2005). Because the major inputs in education and industry are human beings, what pertains to these human beings could positively or negatively affect the entire production process of the system. Citizens of different nations have their peculiar ways of doing things which would usually succeed in their own environments and may fail when carried into other environments.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate appropriate management in an African culture bringing out its implications for education. A major objective is whether the results of this study can help to explain the disappointing economic development of African countries given the huge investments in education, with special focus on Nigeria. Education is expected to boost economic growth and development. Therefore, theresults from an industrial setting which is also expected to maximize productivity for economic growth and development could have implications for education. Educational planners and administrators transform the

Table 1. Demographic data from the three steel companies studied: P and Q (Nigeria), R (Italy).

Sample size	P	Q	R
	268 (%)	252 (%)	288 (%)
Managers	30	28	25
Professionals	42	50	27
Non-professionals	28	22	48
Total	100	100	100
Higher Education (>15years)			
Managers	78	80	59
Professionals	77	65	81
Non-professionals	31	49	40
Age (>40 years)			
Managers	63	58	75
Professionals	30	26	63
Non-professionals	44	40	68
Seniority (>10years)			
Managers	51	55	81
Professionals	28	26	60
Non-professionals	47	51	88
Nuclear family size (>4)			
Managers	72	59	10
Professionals	46	55	6
Non-professionals	68	70	25
Number of dependents (>4)			
Managers	80	77	22
Professionals	74	61	13
Non-professionals	89	83	25

nation's educational policies and programmes into actualization. This study would be especially significant in providing guidelines and strategies for better functioning of this category of educators, and to policy makers as well, to get education contribute tangibly to development through appropriate management in a multi-cultural environment even at the micro level.

Research questions

To guide the study, eight research questions were raised. One question verified the four dimensions along which national cultures can be mutually compared. These are power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance. Five questions verified influences of culture on management practices through motivation, respect, reward, promotions, and authority respectively. One question sought the type of bosses workers would like to work under, while another sought the overall extent of workers' job satisfaction, motivation, and dedication.

METHODS

The research is a survey aimed at comparing management and employee perceptions, attitudes, and values in the three steel companies studied referred to in this study as P, Q, and R for research purposes since confidentiality was promised at data collection. P and Q are in Nigeria while R is in Italy, studied also for the purpose of comparison. A structured questionnaire (in English) containing sixty items was developed by the researcher for data collection. The instrument was based on the value survey model (VSM) developed by Hofstede (1982) for cross-national comparison of work-related values, with modifications from Iguisi's (1994) similar study of cement companies in Nigeria and the Netherlands. It was found adequate in measuring what it intended to measure by a jury of experts in business management and educational administration. This satisfied the face and content validity of the instrument. The instrument was subjected to the Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient statistic to ascertain its reliability using the test-retest method. The computed r value of +0.88 was accepted as satisfactory.

The researcher administered and retrieved the questionnaire forms in Nigeria with the help of research assistants, but mobilized the researcher's siblings in Italy to help do the same and interpret where necessary. Considering the estimated staff strength (the target population) in each company, a total of 1000 copies were distributed, 400 copies each to P and Q, and 300 to R. The well completed copies retrieved from P was 268 (67%), Q 252 (63%), and R 288 (96%). These comprised the study sample of a total of 808 steel workers. The lower return rate in Nigeria may perhaps be a first indication of culture being a discriminating factor. It may be that the generality of Nigerians were yet to imbibe the "research culture". Response options, apart from the demographic data, and the rankings were based on the five-point-likert-type scale. The data collected were analyzed in percentages. To correct the imbalance in the composition of the samples among managers (M), professionals (P), and non-professionals (N), a weighted average of (M+P+N)/3 was always used for company- and country-wide comparisons.

RESULTS

Besides the demographic data, analyses of responses were done according to how they related to the eight questions raised, and the results presented in Tables 1 to 9. Table 1 shows the relevant demographic data from the three steel companies, P, Q, and R. Table 2 shows the dimensions of national cultures in Nigeria and Italy. Here, the scores of the four cultural dimensions were computed for Nigeria and Italy and set against those of Hofstede (1991) and Iguisi (1994) and compared. Tables 3 to 9 show the various responses to the relevant questions that guided the thrust of thisresearch. These are responses to important areas in one's life that motivate (Table 3), sources of respect (Table 4), reasons for reward (Table 5), reasons for promotion (Table 6), desired criteria for authority (Table 7), types of managers as bosses (Table 8), and extent of job satisfaction, motivation and dedication (Table 9).

Table 2. Dimensions of national cultures compared with two other studies.

National cultures	Nigeria (Africa) P+Q (%)	Italy (Western) R (%)	Difference (P+Q)-R (%)
1. Power distance (present study)	94	61	+33
(Iguisi, 1994)	100	65	+35
(Hofstede, 1991)	77	38	+39
2. Individualism (present study)	44	66	-22
(Iguisi, 1994)	46	63	-17
(Hofstede, 1991)	20	80	-60
3. Masculinity (present study)	40	21	+19
(Iguisi, 1994)	39	22	+17
(Hofstede, 1991)	46	14	+32
4. Uncertainty Avoidance (present study)	35	63	-28
(Iguisi, 1994)	38	69	-31
(Hofstede, 1991)	54	53	+1

Source: Fieldwork, Hofstede (1991), and Iguisi (1994).

Table 3. Motivation: Ranking of important areas in life.

Area	Nigeria	Italy
Family	1	1
Work	4	3
Leisure	5	2
Wealth	6	4
Community	2	5
Religion	3	6

Table 4. Sources of respect: Ranking.

Factor	Nigeria	Italy
Position	1	5
Experience	2	4
Accomplishment	4	2
Seniority	3	7
Education	5	3
Age	6	6
Others	7	1

Table 5. Reasons for reward: Ranking.

Factor	Nigeria	Italy
Experience	2	2
Accomplishment	1	3
Seniority	4	4
Education	3	1
Age	6	6
Others	5	5

Table 6. Reasons for promotion: Ranking.

Factor	Nigeria	Italy
Experience	2	4
Accomplishment	3	3
Seniority	4	6
Education	1	1
Age	6	5
Others	5	2

Table 7. Desired Criteria for authority: Ranking.

Factor	Nigeria	Italy
Experience	1	3
Seniority	2	4
Education	3	1
Accomplishment	4	5
Age	6	6
Others	5	2

DISCUSSION

A key question to people's motivation pattern is on how important certain areas in one's life are to the person. It is known that people's way of life influences what motivates them in life. Nigeria shares its family structures with other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa where the extended family is an economic unit that has to care for itself. Here, families are collectives sharing a common kingship lineage and living and collaborating in a village, for common security

Table 8. Types of managers: Prefer, actual, reject.

Types of managers	Nigeria			Italy		
	Prefer (%)	Actual (%)	Reject (%)	Prefer (%)	Actual (%)	Reject (%)
Managers(M)						
Autocratic	8	32	62	0	11	73
Paternalistic	42	38	2	21	35	0
Consultative	33	17	19	61	40	0
Democratic	17	12	17	18	14	27
None of above	0	1	0	0	0	0
Non-managers (P+N)						
Autocratic	10	27	58	5	27	72
Paternalistic	30	22	9	17	31	1
Consultative	19	24	21	60	23	4
Democratic	41	24	12	18	15	22
None of above	0	3	0	0	4	0

Table 9. Extent of job satisfaction (Sa), motivation (Mo), and/or dedication (De).

Country	Nigeria		Italy
Steel companies	**P** (%)	**Q** (%)	**R** (%)
Managers (M)			
Sa+Mo+De	19	21	67
Mo+De	25	22	31
Sa+De	11	12	2
Sa	10	7	0
None of the above	35	38	0
Non-managers (P+N)			
Sa+Mo+De	24	25	56
Mo+De	26	30	33
Sa+De	23	20	3
Sa	1	3	1
None of the above	26	22	7

in the face of human and natural threats to life. Village compounds and squares provide the safe context for a life-long learning of crafts, survival techniques, and social behaviours. Kingship groups extend from the past over the present to the future, linking up generations of family members. This keeps the family context constant and also signifies the African circular perception of time. This strong family loyalty also supports ethnic and religious loyalty to the extent that African societies are "We" societies, and "we" opposes "them". In-groups suppose and oppose out-groups (Iguisi, 1994). An idiom in Nigeria says that "Togetherness is Strength". What "makes them tick" would most likely be what relates to and enhances family life. This is probably why community and religion were ranked high (second and third) by the Nigerian workers as against fifth and sixth by the Italian workers shown by result in Table 3. Therefore, on the culture dimension of individualism versus collectivism, African societies are strongly collectivistic as opposed to Western countries that are purely individualistic. This is also indicated by the result in Table 2. Comparison between the results of this study and those of Iguisi (1994) and Hofstede (1991), shown in Table 2 confirms that African societies are also characterized by a high tolerance of social inequality, masculinity, and have low uncertainty avoidance. Therefore cross-national transfers of management models into a different cultural context would be detrimental to national economic development.

On the factors that influence respondents' respect for people in the organization, the result shown in Table 4 demonstrates the classical sociological distinction (Parsons and Shils, 1951: 7) between an "ascription" society (judging others by who they are) and an “achievement” society (judging others by what they have done). This relates to the culture dimension of Power Distance and also explains the rankings by African and European steel workers. While the factors of position, experience, seniority, accomplishment, education, and age were important to Nigerians, none of these appealed to the Italians so much that “others” which was ranked seventh (last) by Nigerians was picked as first, followed by accomplishment and education, by the Italians. This may imply that Africans tend to respect people by “who they are” while the Western countries respect people by “what they have done”.

The result in Table 5 shows the responses on the importance of certain factors used in rewarding employees in the organization. The ranking indicated accomplishment, experience, and education in the order given as most important for Nigerian workers while education, experience, and accomplishment in that order are most important for the Italians. Seniority, others, and lastly, age, were ranked in both countries in the same order. This implies that reward systems may not be influenced much by culture differences. This is also evidenced in the responses for promotion shown in Table 6. However, the responses for authority in Table 7 tend to be influenced by culture were Nigerians preferred experience and seniority while Italians preferred education and others.

The result in Table 8 shows workers’ choice of the kind of managers and non-managers. (The non-managers comprise the professionals and non-professionals) they would like to work under. They were asked to indicate the preferred type and the actual type to which a boss (leader) most closely corresponds, as well as the boss under which they would prefer not to work (reject). The pattern of response shows remarkable leaning on societal values of Africans and Europeans.

The responses of workers from the concluding question on extent of job satisfaction, motivation and dedication were analyzed and result presented in Table 9. The result is quite revealing indicating some remarkable differences between the Nigerian steel plants and the Italian plant, which also reflect the different cultural values. In-groups are quite separate from out-groups in a collectivist society, and this also holds for managers (leaders), which leads to favouritism instead of performance. As also observed in Iguisi’s (1994) survey, individualistic attitude in African cultures has not developed or progressed to a level where kingship and tribal background have stopped playing a role in how subordinates are handled at work. Private life and work are still closely linked and have not become separate spheres like in industrialized countries. This implies that managers and non-manager alike will at times let private interests prevail over organization’s interests. This lowers work performance and undermines obligations to the company. However, there was no economic performance data made available to the researcher to compare the companies on. This calls for further research.

The general observation from the results presented in this study is that most African industrial organizations function at a low level of efficiency, given the level of motivation of workers. In this survey, one third of the workers considered themselves satisfied and dedicated, but not motivated. This scenario is detrimental to goal accomplishment in any organization (Schumpeter, 1934; Drucker, 1971; Gomez-Mejia and Balkan, 1989; Geletkanyez, 1997; Locke, 2000; Duze, 2002; Hayton et al., 2002). This is a combination hardly recognized in the comparable Italian company. This problem exists in industry as much as in education in Nigeria.

In view of these differences, Western individualistic and American style participative management models, generally perceived as “imported models” or “transferred models” (Onyemelukwe, 1973; Oshagbemi, 1988; Hofstede, 1993; Geletkanyez, 1997; Duze, 2002; Hayton, et al., 2002; Nwadiani, 2005), are unsuitable for Nigeria in particular and Africa in general, be it in industry or in education, given the wide cultural differences. The dilemma is that Africa does not really have any alternative role models conceived in the African cultural context for the African manager that must uphold his culture while he aspires to deliver the goals and objectives of the organization effectively and efficiently on African soil. The recent history of East Asia shows that small and medium sized local businesses, not run according to the “Western textbooks”, can very well carry an economy from depression to boom (Iguisi, 1994).

Conclusion

This study surveyed the cultural differences of employee and management values and behaviours in one Italian and two Nigerian steel companies. The Italian company was studied for the purpose of comparison. The results were interpreted within the cultural context of the countries. The findings reveal that the national cultures of Nigeria and Italy, as measured by workers’ values and desires, are different. Nigeria is more collectivist than Italy which is more individualistic. Power distance is much higher in Nigeria, like elsewhere in Africa, and this is unlikely to change, because one consequence of power distance is that it is difficult to check the abuse of power. African leaders are notorious for abuse of power. Furthermore, the larger power distance means that respect and authority are based on position, experience, and seniority not age per se. Thus, the ideal manager for the African is a benevolent paternalist. We therefore conclude that these findings have implications at both company level and the macro level that is structural development issues, including education, and consequently, have significant policy implications. The understanding of the workings of the industry will, to a certain extent, simplify the understanding of the education sector. Both systems are influenced by the cultural environment prevailing over space and time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusions, we recommend that the time is now for African nations to develop African management models that will not only reflect African cultures in the industry but also in education. Africans must wake up to the realities of the time and take a lesson from the East Asian countries that have appreciably evolved and adopted their own models of management especially in entrepreneurial activities that yield substantial benefits to their economic growth. It is the Africans themselves that must initiate African models of management to power their economy, education being important, for sustainable national development. In doing so, they could partner with their industrialized friends.

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