

The Applicability of Management Theories in Nigeria: Exploring the Cultural Challenge

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Abstract

Purpose- The purpose of this paper is to examine the applicability of contemporary western management theories within the context of the Nigerian national culture. It explores the evolution of modern management in Nigeria today and why the effective transfer of management practices from Europe and America is a challenge.

Design/Methodology/Approach- This study provides a descriptive exploration of the evolution of contemporary management philosophies, the Nigerian culture, and the challenges the application of western contemporary management within a Nigerian culture has created for modern managers in Nigeria today.

Findings- The Nigerian culture does limit the usefulness of western management practices in the workplace. In reality, these conflicts can be minimized or avoided if the local cultural norms and practices are recognized and considered in the application of contemporary management principles.

Research Limitation & Implication- The effect of culture as a major influence in determining the relevance of western management theories in Nigeria is discussed within the context of Geert Hofstede's five cultural dimensions, leveraging previous empirical studies on the country's cultural conditioning. Though Nigeria was the focus of this research, it must be stated that Nigeria is a multi-cultural country and there is still a need to study in-depth the various cultural practices that prevail across the major tribes to be able to understand the conflicts that occur. The majority of those interviewed during the course of this study were from the Yoruba tribal groups though it can be safe to generalize to the extent that several cultural norms are shared across the major tribes.

Practical Implications- The five cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede provides a framework for understanding the impact of cultural differences for management. However, an understanding of how the local Nigerian culture affects the mindset and way of life of managers and the people they manage is useful in assessing the suitability of western management practices and theories and explore ideas for adaptation. This is particularly useful for multinational corporations.

Originality/Value- This paper builds on scholarly contributions on culture and the extent to which it limits the effectiveness of the practice management theories and philosophies in Nigeria. It goes a step further to examine specific aspects of culture in practice that limits management practices in the workplace. Finally, it provides examples to support the assertion that there is a need to improve the robustness of international management theories that is useful in the African context.

Keywords: Globalization, National Culture, Management Theories, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Although significant progress has been made over several years in the evolution of management theories, the discipline has suffered from a deluge of theories that may be more confusing in practice than directional (Koontz, 1980). Though the earlier work from classical theorists like Taylor, Fayol and Weber contributed significantly to developments in management practice (some still applicable today), it has become clearer that confidence in the universal validity of management theories developed in countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) is questionable. In this regard, Geert Hofstede's (1980, 1991) contribution to the applicability of management philosophies across cultures has lent some form of sanity to the body of knowledge by tackling the differences in relevance across regions as being attributable to cultural differences.

Hofstede (1980) defined culture as the pattern, ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and communicated mainly by symbols, amounting to the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts. As multinationals continue to extend their presence across various geographical regions, the limitations of existing management theories and practices are becoming increasingly obvious. Specifically, the applicability of modern management theories within the context of strongly defined African cultures has become the central focus of recent academic debates. Colonized Africa has proven a rather interesting object of study as it builds on the argument that differences in thinking and social action that exists across cultures are nothing more than mental programs developed in early childhood and reinforced in schools and organizations (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2005).

The African case is complicated by the fact that over time, colonialism altered people's thought processes, experiences and environments in cultures that already had pre-existing forms of management evident in the organization of their ancient kingdoms and empires. Unfortunately, the likely form of management practices that may have evolved independent of colonialism in countries like Nigeria is now open to speculation (Ifechukwu, 2010). Though the practice of management in Nigeria today is largely 'westernized', the pull of strong cultural influences is still evident and has sometimes made practices challenging or ineffective. This has led to a strong call for the development of literature identifying cultural factors that may influence the management framework and practice. As the number of multinationals increase in emerging economies like Nigeria, there is increasing demand for a wider body of literature reflecting the need for the adoption and incorporation of African and indeed Nigerian philosophies into the study of international management.

However, care must be taken to recognize the potential for another deluge of theories in addressing the impact of cultural variations in management studies, when considering the vastness and uniqueness of various cultures. In Nigeria alone, it may be hard to define a national culture where there are over 250 tribes and 500 languages. Nigeria is the focus of this article for two reasons; First, the range and complexity of the Nigerian culture makes it interesting discussion for a national culture. Second, Nigeria is one of the highest destinations for foreign direct investments and multinationals in Africa mostly because of its population and oil and gas industries. Overall, this article explores the evolution of global management philosophies and theories and the applicability of the various theories within the context of Nigeria.

2. Methodology & Methods

This paper employs a qualitative approach using narratives that lean towards the interpretivist approach which presupposes that a researcher being part of the object of study cannot be value-neutral. Rieder (1985) believes the interpretivist approach seeks to appreciate issues through observation and in-depth interviews, unlike the positivists which assumes the existence of objective reality and facts which is examined through verifiable research methods. Interpretivists try to understand phenomena as described by participants rather than testing through scientific standards of verification (Roth and Mehta, 2002).

This study relied primarily on secondary information sources and to a lesser extent on primary sources gathered by the author through informal face to face interviews and group discussions. The use of secondary information sources was primarily to collate historical information recorded by others. However, it must be noted that a major limitation of this is that the original research was conducted for purposes other than for the current researcher's purpose (Harris, 2001). To its advantage, secondary data does not require access to respondents or subjects (Ember & Levinson, 1991) making it a less expensive mode of research. 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. Such detailed reviews are available in other works (e.g. Adler 1983, 1984; Barratt and Bass 1976; Bhagat and McQuaid 1982; Adler, Doktor and Redding 1986; Boyacigiller and Adler 1991) as are also a number of textbooks which relies upon wider literature (e.g. Adler et al 1986; Terpstra and David 1985; Dowling and Schuler 1990). In addition, a number of collections of papers in book-form have addressed the issue of comparative management and culture (e.g. Evans, Doz and Laurent 1989; Clegg and Redding 1990; Joynt and Warnet 1985; Jaeger and Kanungo 1990; Brewster and Tyson 1991). Majority of work done was based on extensive literature review covering books and about twenty business and social science publications.

3. Conceptual/Theoretical Background

3.1 The Evolution of Management Theories

A highly critical view of the evolution of management theories may describe it as a proliferation of studies, otherwise viewed as 'theoretical diarrhea'. In the United States of America, organizational researchers identified two groups of researchers, those interested in people without organizations and the other interested in organizations without people (Bass and Barrat, 1976). Building on this, most major management theories can be broadly grouped (though simplistic) in either the scientific, classical or neo-classical school of thoughts. Each group can then be broadly assigned to Bass's simplistic definition *organizations without people* (scientific theories) and *people without organizations* (classical and neo-classical) respectively. It is within these broad categories that this article will chart the evolution of management theories. It is interesting to note that though most of these theories have their limitations, they have all continued to co-exist today in one form or the other globally.

Scientific Management Theories: Frederick Taylor (1911) identified various features that are important in the management of the organization with the intent to minimize management by rule of thumb and replace it with timed observations leading to the one best practice. In his view, work at the time was awkward and inefficient and managers were expected to instruct while employees perform duties as allocated within the organization. This encouraged the breaking up of tasks in the organization into sub-tasks and also helped to optimize the performance of tasks. To motivate performance, managers were encouraged to motivate employees through financial rewards and ensure sustenance through systematic and continuous training of workers in the best practice to increase productivity and work performance.

From an economic point of view, Taylorism was an outstanding success and yielded significant improvements in productivity particularly in the industrial era (Wren and Bedeian, 2009). Also alongside Taylor's work in the 1920s was Frank and Lillian Gilbreth's motion study. This study arose from the need to reduce motions from bricklaying at a construction site; The Gilbreths succeeded in reducing the motions from 18 to 4 and then proposed each worker focus on own work, prepare for the next level and train successors (Redding, 1994). Today, some of Taylor's and Gilbreth's postulations are still globally relevant in the area of quality control especially in production based and very large manufacturing organizations around the world. Classical Management Theories: The major proponents of classical management are Fayol's (1949) and Weber's (1922). The respective founders of Administrative & Bureaucracy theory, each school of thought developed sequentially and tended towards addressing limitations in the scientific management theory.

In contrast to the purely scientific examination of work and organizations conducted by Taylor (1911), Henri Fayol's administrative theory proposed that every organization had six functions: technical; commercial; financial; security; accounting; and managerial. He believed managers had five principal roles: (i) forecast and plan-*as an act of anticipating the future and act accordingly*, (ii) organize-*develop institutional resources both material and human*, (iii) command- *keeping institutions actions and processes running*, (iv) coordinate- *aligning and harmonizing group efforts*, and (v) control- *ensuring all activities above are performed in accordance with appropriate rules and procedures*.

He further identified 14 general principles of management to go along with the management's five principles: division of work; unity of direction; authority and responsibility; discipline; unity of command; subordination of individual interest to general interest; personnel remuneration; centralization; scalar chain of authority; order; equity; stability of tenure of personnel; initiative; and teamwork. Today, most organizations still practice the principles identified by Fayol because it encapsulates personal effort and team dynamics, though there is less practice of the 'unity of command' as most employees now tend to report to more than one supervisor (Wren and Bedeian, 2009).

Bureaucracy Theory: Developed by German socialist, Max Weber. He argued that all organizations are structured bureaucratically and all higher positions supervise and control the lower positions (Weber, 1922). In his theory, there is a clear chain of command within organizations that supports control. In addition, he encouraged the evolution of specialization through division of labour, this way employees only carry out functions they are skilled to perform. Decisions and performance rewards are based on competence and merit and depersonalized relationships are encouraged to ensure objectivity.

The major limitation in the application of the bureaucracy is the lack of flexibility, especially with regards to multi-tasking and teamwork which is important in today's knowledge based era. Though Weber's theory considers the humanity of workers, the effectiveness of the theory at its highest form would result in an impersonal organization without human interaction or subjectivity. Though criticized for the lack of flexibility in their original ideas, the classical theories have clear benefits in practice today, including increased production and effective management of organizational resources (Olum, 2004).

Neo-Classical Management & Human Behaviour Theories: Gradually, management scholars had begun to move away from viewing employees as no more than extension of machines to considering human behavior and social needs of employees. By the early 1920's Elton Mayo disproved Taylor's suggestion that science informs the highest productivity and rejected the idea that individuals were no more than extensions of machines to be controlled. He was able to determine through a series of experiments known as the Hawthorne experiments (1927-1932) that work performance was more dependent on working conditions and attitudes than economic factors (Olum, 2004).

He went further to suggest that increased attention to the human dimension of work impacts productivity. In contrast to the classical theorists that proposed control and reducing individual autonomy; the neo-classicals focused more on gaining a better understanding of human behavior at work, such as motivation, conflict, expectations, and group dynamics to achieve improved productivity.

This new concepts from Mayo gave rise to more modern management theories including the Systems, Contingency, Theory X & Y and Team-Building theory (Redding, 1994; Olum, 2004). The growing need to integrate theories as they evolved to deal with varying conditions was greatly required and some of the more popular human behaviour theories that will be examined later in this study are described briefly below;

- i. The Contingency theory: Proposes that when managers make decisions, they must consider all aspects of the situation and act on those aspects that are critical to the prevailing situation. This theory claims there is no best way to organize a corporation or make decisions. It can be defined simply as the 'it depends' approach, where a lot of variables in the workplace may influence decisions (Pindur, Rogers and Kim, 1995).
- ii. The Teambuilding Theory: Emphasizes quality circles, best practices and continuous improvement. The foundation is built on teamwork and it also prescribes the flattening of management pyramid, building consensus at all levels and reducing levels of hierarchy to increase motivation, creativity and work performance.

Behavioural Scientists in the social sciences with backgrounds in sociology, psychology and anthropology, relied on sophisticated research methods to explain what motivates employees at work. These researchers built the platform for new management theory ideas and a major focus was the adjustment of the employee's complex character within the workplace (Stoner, Freeman and Gilbert, 2004). Overall, theorists like Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg, Rensis Likert, David McClelland and Chris Argyris emphasized informal relationships, communication, uniqueness of individuals and motivation, rather than monetary incentives (Mullins, 2011).

3.2 The Management Theory Jungle

This wide variety management theories is not exhaustive and has resulted in what scholars refer to as 'the management theory jungle' (Redding, 1994; Koontz, 1980). Yet, it is agreed that managers can work better using the organized knowledge about management, knowing that it is this knowledge that constitutes science in management. Though knowledge improves management in practice, it is important to recognize that the variables managers deal with in reality are extremely complex and one of such is cultural differences.

3.3 The Cultural Dilemma

Since the 1990s, the global competitive landscape has become increasingly populated by Multinational Enterprises (MNE) originating in semi-developed and developing countries. These "new" MNEs come from (a) upper-middle income economies such as Spain, Portugal, South Korea, and Taiwan; (b) emerging economies such as Brazil, Chile, Mexico, China, India, and Turkey; (c) developing countries such as Egypt, Indonesia, and Thailand; and (d) oil-rich countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Nigeria, and Venezuela (Mauro and Esteban, 2009).

The increase in these “new” MNEs and the frequency with which organizations do business far from home, has given rise to new experiences that disproves the presumption that a definable set of management skills has worldwide validity. This has continued to command widespread implicit disagreement among managers if not among scholars (Boyacigiller & Adler, 1991; Hofstede, 1994).

Hofstede (1980) was the first to perform an experiment to introduce the concept of cultural conditioning. He defined culture as the collective mental programming of people in an environment, encompassing a number of people conditioned by education and life experiences. Another scholar also defines culture as what people have, think and do as members of the society (Ferraro, 1994).

Hofstede (1980) presents culture at the national rather than individual level because nations were the basis for his analysis of work cultures. But, like any clear-cut category, “the nation” has limitations. He recognized that “organizations, occupations and professions, age groups, the sexes, religious groups, ethnic groups, etc.” manifest culture differently but treated the nation as the main unit of culture (Hofstede, 1991). Though many disagree that the nation by itself can be treated as the main unit of culture, to say that nation has no significance is too extreme. The latter position discounts the shared historical experiences common to most nations, the host of governmental and social institutions usually shared within a nation, and considerable organizational research that documents attitude and value differences among countries (Adler et al, 1989).

In a study of about 40 independent nations, Hofstede (1980) empirically examined the main criteria or dimensions by which national cultures differed and he identified four main cultural dimensions; (i) Power-Distance (ii) Uncertainty Avoidance (iii) Individualism-Collectivism (iv) Masculinity-Femininity. He also considered the effect of these dimensions on the common managerial practices of motivation, leadership and organization. Subsequently, a fifth dimension Short and Long termism was included in his later studies.

In the earlier studies, South Africa was the only African country included in the sample of 40 countries globally. With the strongest cultural disparities with the UK and USA being in Africa and Asia, this under-representation of African states presented a huge gap in academic literature. This gap was partially addressed in Hofstede (1983) work on cultural relativity of organizational practices and theories where Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone were assessed as one unit of West African states to determine their position within the cultural dimensions. In addition, Peterson & Smith (1995) extended Hofstede’s study to examine the applicability of five cultural dimensions on work related stress factors like role conflict and role ambiguity and they included Nigeria and Uganda in their study. Both studies found Nigeria to be a high power distance, collectivist, low uncertainty avoidance and high masculinity society.

3.4 Pre-existing Management forms in Nigeria

With over 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is just simply a cultural maze. However, this diversity has not diluted the strength and potency of its culture. Beyond the inherent complexities of cultures, the separation of culture and society is said to be a major misfortune of post-colonial Nigeria (Ikwuemesi, 2012). Therefore, it is important to place in context the historical forms of management in pre-colonial Nigerian states and the forms that have emerged from the post colonial unified Nigeria.

Traditionally, Nigeria (which did not exist before 1914) had its own distinct culture and resulting governance and management styles. Very loosely, Nigeria’s national culture (regardless of ethnic group) stressed the following values; extended family of relationships, co-prosperity, respect for tradition, competition, paternalism, hero worship, consensus, age grade system. Today, the practice or application of these core values is shared among the major Nigeria tribal groups of Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa groups (Ifechukwu, 2010). In addition, a key socio-cultural factor which has recently been identified as a major influence on management practices in Nigeria is religion (Oghojafor, George, Owoyemi; 2012).

The employment relations system in practice in Nigeria before the advent of the British colonialists was the Paternalistic employment relations system where family heads had the role of employers and employees were members of the immediate family (Yesufu, 1982). Most work was carried out on a cooperative basis and people of the same age group tended to work for themselves in turns while remuneration was transacted mainly through barter and reciprocate good gestures when required (Iwuji, 1968). The employer (family head) was at his discretion all-in-all and he determined reward systems, recruitment selections, promotions etc not necessarily based on merit or seniority (George, Owoyemi, & Onakala, 2012).

This system was later replaced by the British voluntarist employment relations system (waged employment) in the 18th century. For Nigerians, this new form of wage employment was regarded as degrading; especially working for another man other than a biological relative because this form of work was viewed as only done by slaves (Iwuji, 1968). The British voluntarists employment relations practice required workers to report to work at certain times, start and close work at prescribed times and also lunch for a given and limited time; for locals this was the lowest form of slavery, especially as non-compliance was penalized by loss of wages (Yesufu, 1982). Over time, the British voluntarist employment relations replaced the existing Paternalistic employment relations practice; but this transfer of practices was done without due considerations for the differences in culture between Britain and Nigeria and was done mainly for economic, commercial and logistic considerations (George et.al, 2012).

Another post-colonial practice that influenced the natural development of the local management culture was the practice of employment according to state of origin rather than merit and the argument for this approach was to foster unity between the North and South (Federal Character). The impact, especially in the Civil Service and every critical arm of government was the Northerners who were less educationally and professionally qualified than the Southerners were trained quickly to take up expatriate roles and become the boss of the more qualified Southerners (George et.al, 2012).

4. Discussions

4.1 Nigeria’s Cultural dimension in focus

Traditional Nigeria could be described as highly structured, hierarchical with wide spans of control, organized communal work forms, nurturing leadership though male-dominated and long term oriented-resource management across generations while the family head’s role guaranteed security for all members of the family by ensuring the provision of food, housing and security for all family members (Iwuji, 1968). Unfortunately, a resulting impact of the colonial influences includes the widening of the power distance, evolving into a less nurturing and more masculine wage driven culture reflected in Peterson and Smith’s (1995) study.

Taking into consideration the five cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede(1980), traditional (pre and post colonial) Nigeria can be categorized as follows in the table below:

Table 1: Hofstede’s cultural dimensions adapted to reflect pre and post colonial Nigeria

Hofstede’s Dimensions	Descriptions	West: UK/USA	Nigeria: Traditional (Pre-Colonial)	Nigeria: Colonial (Post-Independence)
Power-Distance	<i>The extent to which society accepts power and authority are distributed unequally</i>	Low	High	High
Masculinity	<i>extent to which the dominant values in society are ‘masculine’- the acquisition of money and machismo over nurture</i>	Low	Low	High
Collectivism	<i>extent to which the society demonstrates collectivism characterized by tight social frameworks in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups</i>	Low	High	High
Uncertainty-Avoidance	<i>extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to put in structures to avoid these situations</i>	Low	High	High
Short-termism	<i>degree to which a culture programs its members to accept delayed gratification of their material, social, and emotional needs</i>	High	Low	High*

Source: adapted from Hofstede (1980). * Authors assessment

The consequence of the variations in the cultural dimensions between the West and Nigeria for management practices is significant and the resulting challenges are described within the context of Hofstede's cultural dimensions.

The Power-Distance Dimension: In Nigeria, the power distance is significantly high as most institutions favor a highly hierarchical structure. It is widely known that subordinates or lower classes of society are expected to aspire to ranked privileges. Culturally, the power distance is further heightened by factors like age and social class. On Wednesday March 13, 2013, there was a TV interview of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Lagos Commandant, Shem Obafaye who was being asked to provide details of the organization's authentic website address for the viewers benefit (there were supposedly fake websites in operation). Surprisingly, he kept insisting that he was not at liberty to provide the information without the approval of 'my oga at the top' (Kareem, 2013). Interpreted; his boss.

As ridiculous as it seemed, this was a strong reflection of the enormity of the power-distance dimension in Nigeria and an unfortunate demonstration of how it fosters ineffectiveness. High power-distance is just as prevalent in the public sector as it is in large private institutions. Examples are private organizations that separate the junior and senior staff canteens so the junior staff would have something to aspire to.

Uncertainty-Avoidance Dimension: This dimension covers the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to put in structures to avoid these situations. Hofstede (1980) suggests that societies with strong uncertainty avoidance are characterized by higher levels of anxiety and aggressiveness that creates a strong urge for people to work hard. By default, high power distance structures tend to also be characterized by strong uncertainty avoidance and workers may get anxious and stressed if their bosses allowed any ambiguity in roles or responsibilities.

Informal discussions with managers showed that a typical middle-aged Nigerian worker would tend to feel more comfortable in their specialized routines, with clear rules and ways of doing things and any sudden variation in responsibility is interpreted as being setup for a fall. In addition, there was a tendency for this type of worker to prefer a singular chain of command where there is little ambiguity on his/her line of report as opposed to the newer team-based management structures with multiple reporting lines. Studies show that managers in high-power-distance countries as Uganda, Nigeria, Hong Kong-Macao, Korea, and Brazil report more use of rules and procedures than managers in low-power-distance countries as Finland and the Netherlands (Peterson and Smith, 1995)

Individualism-Collectivism Dimension: This dimension expresses the extent to which the society demonstrates collectivism characterized by tight social frameworks in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups. In-groups consist of relatives, clans who are expected to look after them and in exchange they owe absolute loyalty to the group. This is in direct contrast to individualism where a loosely knit framework exists to take care of themselves and their immediate families only.

The collective dimension is more evident in Nigeria where there has historically been a culture of communalism. In Nigeria, the value system is traditionally driven by the impact of the society on the individual, it is the society that sets goals for the individual and provides the structure to make these goals realizable. Thus most of the individuals life aspirations are nurtured by the society through the system of praise and blame, sanctions and rewards of some sorts (Iremeka, 2012). It is this form of society that accounts for the large volumes of professional doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants produced because individuals were educated by pooled family funds and they were mostly instructed on which professional path would be useful to the society.

Subsequently, the individual is expected to return to the society to give back by doing the same for the next generation. This process also exists in the workplace. It is usually the individual's responsibility to provide work for members of their community as they rise up the corporate ladder. Feelings for others, solidarity, selflessness and hospitality are some key hallmarks of the traditional Nigerian family (Iremeka, 2012).

Unfortunately, this tendency towards practicing human-relations approach to management through the extended family recruitment system can also result in 'nepotism' in the workplace.

However, this paternalistic system which can also be viewed positively, evolved from the colonial days where the traditional leaders acted as recruitment agents for the British and sent their family members to join waged employment (George, Kuye, Onakala, 2012)

Masculinity-Feminism Dimension: This dimension expresses the extent to which the dominant values in society are ‘‘masculine’’- the acquisition of money and machismo over nurture; care for others, quality of life and people (Hofstede, 1980). In most African cultures including Nigeria, the norm has been for the men to go to work while the women stay and care for the home. Even in the advent of modernization, the role of working women and the primary home-makers has not changed significantly. Full-time working mothers are still expected to perform the role of the primary homemaker while the men are still the primary providers for the home and community.

Short-termism-Long-termism Dimension: Hofstede (2001) later added the fifth cultural dimension, Long-term versus short-term orientation. This denotes the degree to which a culture programs its members to accept delayed gratification of their material, social, and emotional needs (George, 2012). A key cultural value shared across the various ethnic groups in Nigeria was hardwork. Traditionally, people worked hard to achieve honor and the very famous saying ‘a good name is more important than riches’ was a constantly repeated to every child up to adulthood. The average Nigerian’s fulfillment and evidence of prosperity was how many people he/she assisted and this traditional value in Nigeria made it a long-term oriented culture. The long-term nature of resource management (e.g. land) across generations also reinforced this culture. However, with waged employment and increased systemic corruption there is a growing culture of short-term gratification alien to the Nigerian traditional culture.

4.2 Examples of the limitation of Management Theories in the Nigerian workplace

Weber’s Bureaucratic Theory: Large power distance countries like Nigeria (and most African nations) also tend to have high uncertainty avoidance. The constant need for strong leadership to provide direction is a form of avoiding uncertainty and can be achieved quite naturally in a large power distance structure. This is quite strong in Nigeria where Weber’s bureaucratic hierarchies and controls are still very prevalent.

Furthermore, in a strongly collective society like Nigeria, the large power-distance is also seen as a means of creating stability that will endure because each person is expected to be their brother’s keeper and as they become empowered they are expected to empower others. Working men are also expected to educate not just their immediate children but also other family members. In most workplaces, relatives or clan members are found within the same organizations and the hierarchical relationships are usually maintained within the workplace. However, the close relationships do not support the impersonal objectivity required to attain high levels of efficiency within such structures.

In addition, the underlying conflict between traditional assured job security and the colonial wage system that does not guarantee long term job security still exists. Unfortunately, the effect of this conflict is the development within the workplace of mini fiefdoms where workers automatically align themselves with whoever can guarantee rewards and security. In such situations, performance is usually undermined and nepotism encouraged. **The Contingency Theory:** This claims that there is no best way to organize a corporation to make decisions. It is argued that optimal course is dependent on the internal or external environment. In applying the contingency approach within organizations, Nigerian managers are known to prefer ‘tried and tested’ methods which is an indirect spin-off from the paternalistic ‘leader knows best’ attitude towards subordinates. Culturally, experience is measured by age and not skills and the subsequent hero worship of older workers tends towards seeking old work remedies. This lack of flexibility usually hinders effective management where a particular problem may require a different solution.

Team Building Theories: These theories encourages management styles that reduce hierarchy leading to flatter structures, empowering subordinates through being part of decision making and increasing responsibilities and teamwork as key forms of increasing motivation and resulting work performance. Unfortunately, the traditional response of most Nigerian workers, make them automatically resistant to such propositions.

For example, in an effort to encourage a flatter management structure, open communication, teamwork and creativity, some multinational organizations introduced the policy of first name exchange basis for all employees at all levels. Unfortunately, this practice in direct conflict with the traditional Nigerian value of respect for elders and tends to resort in a situation referred to as ‘name avoidance’ where subordinates avoid calling superiors anything at all. David Morand, Professor of business management at Penn State, USA, revealed that, ‘‘When workers were unsure of the norm for addressing superiors, they were likely to avoid calling superiors anything at all.

The higher the rank, the less likely people were to address a boss by name! This ‘conversational black hole’ where nothing is said creates unnecessary tensions in the workplace’. (Morand, 2005: 326) Moreso, in most Nigerian cultures and especially the Yorubas, a two year age differential forbids the younger to refer to the older by his/her first name. In an interview with a Nigerian manager in a multinational organization practicing this policy, the executive described an incident where his niece, Ola (not her real name) was employed as an entry level assistant in the organization. Ola was uncertain what to call her uncle as the workplace policy was ‘first name basis policy’. Distressed and confused, Ola spoke informally to colleagues who then advised her to call her uncle by her first name, because it was after all the organizational culture (culturally, even her mom didn’t call the Manager by his first name). Unable to cope, she went home to inform her parents of her intent to resign her position. Fortunately, the matter was settled within the family. It was decided (with the uncle’s permission) to refer to him by his initials at work.

It is interesting to note that, Nigerian personnel managers employ people from their clans or even family members (Ubeku, 1984), this reinforces the high communality and paternalistic environment in Nigeria. The probability that relatives or kinsmen would find themselves in the same organization and experience the issues described above is very high. In Western nations like USA and UK, reciprocal forms of address were intended to reduce the perception of power distance between subordinates and superiors, leading to greater job satisfaction for subordinates and greater openness of communication with superiors (Morand, 1996). Unfortunately, we found that first name address was in direct opposition to the prevailing local culture in Nigeria, particularly among the age-grade conscious Yorubas.

In the workplace this practice is either openly confronted or passively resisted. In effect, in an effort to enforce such policies within the local cultures, subordinates are inadvertently subject to workplace tension while mentoring and coaching benefits are lost because managers tactically ignore or refuse to mentor subordinates who are perceived as not conforming to the cultural codes of conduct. In the example above, the Manager admitted to feeling forced to accept what he considered disrespectful behavior from individuals young enough to be his children and though he would not openly challenge the policy, he expected the younger ones to ‘know better’. This position clearly demonstrates the predominance of age as a cultural factor in high power distance societies. The importance of age cannot be over-emphasized as many executives admit to the existence of ‘invisible’ work structures where informal hierarchies based on age differentials override the formal hierarchies based on skills and qualifications in practice.

Beyond Nigeria, the diversity of cultures in Africa also presents remarkable scope for the development of new and more relevant management practices. The South Africa mining workers strike is evidence of the limitation of applying standard western management practices and the Ubuntu management theory has been proposed as an alternative form of managers taking into consideration the local culture in South Africa. Ubuntu management proposes that South African’s respond better to face to face communication in dispute resolution because this culturally signifies a sign of respect and care for workers. This also explained the inability of the mining managers to manage the workers conflict through emissaries and message posting on bulletin boards (Mangaliso, 2001).

An alternate view of a similar phenomenon also shows the diversity of cultures in Africa. In the case of Cadbury Nigeria Plc, the management took advantage of the fact that workers were mostly clan or family members and had a deep sense of loyalty, so a strike action was actually a taboo and it was simply culturally unacceptable. Unfortunately, this abuse of the culture resulted in the workers being unable to exercise their rights (even as whistleblowers) because of the strong paternalistic influence of leaders in local management practices (George, Ogojafar, & Owoyemi, 2012). Regardless of the cultural context, western management clearly has its limits in practice especially in Africa.

5. Limitations of this study and Areas for Further Research

This article has delved into several areas of culture that would require more detailed case studies showing the relationship between culture and the applicability of management theories in the workplace. Though some interviews were conducted in the course of developing this article, they were mostly informal and took the form of narrative discuss. Furthermore, a significant number of those interviewed were from the Yoruba tribal group which is the original tribe in cosmopolitan Lagos. Though differences exist in cultural orientation, the areas considered in this study are largely shared beliefs across the three major tribal groups in Nigeria and can therefore be generalized.

However, it is important to recognize that there is tremendous scope for further study to examine the specific nature of the cultural mindsets of the various tribal groups and how this difference affects workplace dynamics. A study of this nature should go beyond articles, books and informal discussions to the use of surveys in selected organizations to a wider range of respondents. It is important to add that in employing the interpretivist approach the researcher has made every effort to be minimize bias in the course of study.

As the body of literature advocating the adoption of African philosophies of management grows, scholars must be aware of the fact that Africa is a continent and not a country and is therefore multicultural. Furthermore, with the growing challenges faced by the average Nigerian managers, more attention needs to be placed on identifying real-life challenges in the workplace arising from the adoption of western practices and how to resolve them.

Today, the average Nigerian manager must understand how to manage the 21 year old new recruit who has no problem engaging 45 year old managers on a first name basis, questioning instructions or even offering opinions without being asked. The global media (internet and Hollywood) has contributed to the development of a new generation of 'Westernised young Nigerians' who seem to be more aligned with Western than Nigerian cultural practices. The emergence of this new generation with new perspectives may have already introduced a systematic shift in generational cultures in Nigeria and the resultant effects needs to be explored. This shift should be interesting for scholars of African Management, especially in studying cultural convergence as a possibility with more generations becoming westernized.

6. Conclusion

The methodical study of cross-cultural research in management science, helps in understanding which Western management practices are transferable and which are not. A thorough understanding of the dimensions of culture above and how it influences management processes and its effectiveness in any given industry is critical to managers. Bearing in mind that the management process can be described in line with classical theorists as a way in which the manager carries out his functions of planning, organizing, directing, staffing and controlling; the cultural mindset and changes within any given system will influence how all the functions above are perceived and performed. The challenge of the applicability of Western management theories in Nigeria is very real and the introduction of new African philosophies in management is long overdue.

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