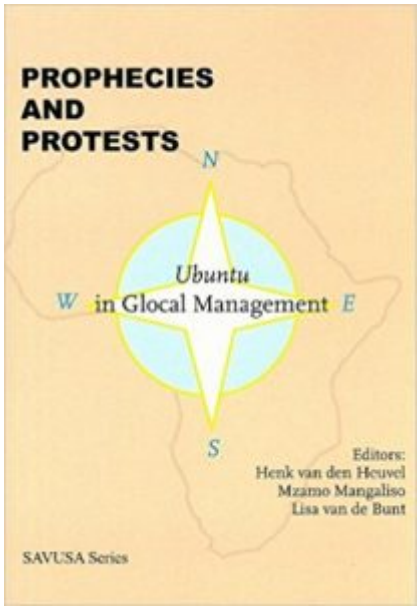
Prophecies And Protests ~ Manufacturing Management Concepts: The Ubuntu Case



We are not born simply for ourselves, for our country and friends are both able to claim a share in us. People are born for the sake of other people in order that they can mutually benefit one another. We ought therefore to follow Nature's lead and place the communes utilitates at the heart of our concerns (Cicero, De Officiis I, VII: 22).

Introduction[i]

During the last decade ubuntu has been introduced as a new management concept in the South African popular management literature (Lascaris and Lipkin 1993; Mbigi and Maree 1995). 'Even South Africa has made a contribution with the rise of something called 'ubuntu management', which tries to blend ideas with Africa traditions as tribal loyality' (Micklethwait and Woodridge 1996: 57). Mangaliso (2001: 23) stresses that with the dismantling of apartheid in the 1990s, South Africa embarked on a course toward the stablishment of a democratic non-racial, non-sexist system of government.

'With democratic processes now firmly in place, the spotlight has shifted to economic revitalization'. To support this revitalization, ubuntu became introduced as a new concept to improve the coordination of personnel in organisations. Mangaliso defines ubuntu as humaneness, 'a pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness that individuals and groups display for one another'. In that sense ubuntu demonstrates family resemblances with Cicero's *communes utilitates.* By using the Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars model of the seven cultures of capitalism, Mangaliso reviews

the competitive advantages of ubuntu.

One of the themes within the model focuses on language and communication. Mangaliso (2001: 26) points to the fact that
… traditional management training places greater emphasis on the efficiency of information transfer. Ideas must be translated quickly and accurately into words, the medium of the exchange must be appropriate, and the receiver must accurately understand the message. In the ubuntu context, however, the social effect on conversation is emphasized, with primacy given to establishing and reinforcing relationships. Unity and understanding among effected group members is valued above efficiency and accuracy of language.

To that end – Mangaliso notices – it is encouraging to see that after 1994 some white South African managers have begun to learn indigenous languages to better understand patterns of interactions and deal with personnel appropriately.

With this mastering of language(s) Mangaliso stresses an intriguing point, which requires further exploration. He creates a contrast between traditional management approaches (like Taylorism and Fordism) and ubuntu. Whereas the former only focus on formal language as a means to transfer information in an efficient way, the latter is based on conversation. This contrast reflects an interesting debate, which actually takes place in the management literature. There is the *modernist* perspective that conceives management knowledge as a predefined, reified object adopted by organisations. At the other hand there is an increasingly popular perspective conceiving management knowledge as *constructed* via processes of diffusion like conversation (Lervik and Lunnan 2004). In this respect it can be noticed that over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the study of language in organisations (Grant et al. 1998; Holman and Thorpe 2003; Moldoveanu 2002). The research being conducted in this area is meant to be potentially useful to managers. In that context the initiative of those white South African managers to learn other languages can be positioned as a way to become better experts while designing an approach which strengthens their capability to calculate rational solutions to problems by improved manipulation. This kind of approach is, however, still *managerialist* in the sense that it embraces the traditional view that managers get things done through the *actions* of others. A lot of management concepts that have been developed over the last fifty years indeed reinforce managerial interests instead of being focused on broader managerial practices.

If, however, the mastering of languages is meant to let managers become good conversationalists who are both responsive listeners and responsive speakers in order to manage interactions instead of actions (Shotter and Cunliffe 2003), we are dealing with a different view on language. The purpose of speaking many languages then, is to achieve a commonly shared objective (Falola 2003). This capability to speak different 'languages' consists of showing how what is proposed by managers can fit everybody's interests. This is what seems to be at stake with ubuntu. Ubuntu does not only enhance communication between management and employees but provides voice as well, i.e. a participatory interaction where openly conflictual social formation can occur, producing voice and inventive ways of living together (Deetz 2003).

This other view on the meaning of language can clarify how an effective implementation of ubuntu in organisations can be supported. Managers who are good conversationalists are able to tell a story, which does not only refer to the facts but can also be liveable for all those involved.

In the remainder of this chapter I would like to present my main argument about the relevance of a popular management concept like ubuntu for promoting more 'Africaness of management' by expanding on the role of language, i.e. communicative action. I first introduce a framework of management concepts to indicate how the transfer of knowledge is being shaped within the field of management and organisation studies. The proliferation of a wide range of management concepts has indicated an increasing sensibility for fashion within the domain of management knowledge. The function of these popular management concepts is to 'help managers engage in a brief standing-back from everyday pressures' (Watson 1994: 216) which will allow them to reflect, and may offer them a new vocabulary to frame their (interaction) differently. Although the framework I introduce is applicable to understand the diffusion of ubuntu, the concept itself invites managers to approach the workforce within their companies in a way that better fits particular African business practices. In order to explain this, the second section will discuss the penetration of some of the key ideas of the language philosopher Wittgenstein in the management and organisational literature. Usually the work of the latter Wittgenstein has been pinpointed as the inspiration for a so-called linguistic turn, which viewed language no longer as a representational device to inform us about the world but as a system of speech acts that through interaction between speakers and listeners provides meaning.

Based on Wittgenstein's view (1953) on language games it will be illustrated how even in instrumental organisations conversations take place and how these can change the role of managers. Finally I will relate the issue of ubuntu as a management concept that propagates a more humanistic view to the linguistic turn that the field of management and organisation begins to embrace in order to support the articulation of what sub-Saharan African countries have to offer to global management (Jackson 2004).

The transfer of management concepts

The description Mangaliso has given of Western managers striving for a proper efficiency of information transfer resembles Peter Drucker's Management by Objectives (MBO). This management concept dates back to the 1950s and became one of the most fashionable concepts of the 20th century. At that time Drucker (1955) worked as a consultant for General Electric (GE) and noticed how its vice-president Harold Smiddy, who was in charge of the Management Consultation Services Division of GE, introduced MBO. Smiddy was convinced that the success of this large scale organisation was determined by persuasion, rather than by command, authority and responsibility of its managers. 'Not customers, not products, not plants, not money, but managers may be the limit on General Electric's growth' (Smiddy 1955: 9). Peter Drucker has become famous for his way of transferring this management concept to the larger business community. He was able to describe, simplify and define MBO in a general way, using a language that was familiar to management. It strengthened the identity of managers as a profession. The concept itself obtained features that made it universally applicable. Due to specific political circumstances after World War II this and similar management concepts like 'productivity' were exported to the Western hemisphere. According to new institutionalists like DiMaggio and Powell (1983) the successful transfer of management concepts to all kinds of instrumental organisations can be explained by the functioning of coercive, imitative and normative mechanisms.

Certainly until the 1960s Europe and Japan were under the spell of the United States and its business approach became diffused by coercive and imitative processes like the Marshall Aid and the military occupation of Japan during the McArthur era (Djelic 1998). The development of Business Schools and their concomitant training programmes for future managers created a normative setting, which made it logical for the newly trained managers to transfer the best

practices of American companies into their own practices. Management concepts which introduced production management, marketing and strategy obtained a design of universal applicability although a process of 'Americanization' was always present (Guillén 1994; Locke 1996; Djelic 1998). Let me illustrate this with one example.

Total Quality Management

Tsutsui (1998) has shown that the famous Japanese Total Quality Movement (TQM) was not the result of some specifically Japanese culturalist essentialism or capacity of imitation and mimicry, but the continuation of Taylorism in a different shape. The Japanese refinement of Scientific Management eventually systematized and disseminated as the Total Quality Control concept of the 1960s, which allowed firms to exploit the technical benefits of Taylorism while avoiding the determined opposition of workers and labor unions. While remaining consistent with Taylorite imperatives, 'the Japanese practice of modern management ultimately traced a distinct trajectory of development' (Tsutsui 1998: 11). Japanese management reformers – especially the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) – never repudiated Scientific Management and its instrumental language of efficiency. They revised it into a local management discourse by enriching it with the rhetoric of participation, decentralization and motivation, and the gospel of small-group activities, as the Human Relations methods had propagated earlier. The workers' full commitment to corporate goals was gained through subtle and consistent programmes of education and training during which conversations about new practices were organised. Some notable management concepts like MBO extended a 'considerable long-term influence on the evaluation of Japanese quality thought' (Tsutsui 1998: 220).

In the 1980s the Japanese TQM approach became a highly *fashionable* concept that was imitated everywhere. Locke (1996) indicates that it threatened to overthrow the American management mystique. But in the end it did not. The popularity of the Japanese management approach somehow amounted to a further expression of management's international Americanization (Locke and Schöne 2004).

The impact of the Japanese management approach, however, could not be denied. It made clear that management concepts could not simply be transferred and adopted as if they had universal applicability. These management concepts had to be translated to make them relevant for local practices. Redefining American

business practice was put on the agenda. The application of management concepts, respecting the local context and the capability of managers to translate any concept into an adapted form and to convince the workers of its relevance, became new topics.

Management fashion

In *Beyond the Hype*, Harvard Business School professors Eccles and Nohria (1992: 19) came to the conclusion that … in a nutshell, managers live in a rhetorical universe where language is constantly used not only to communicate but also to *persuade* and even to *create*. The first step in taking a fresh perspective toward management is to take language, and hence rhetoric, seriously.

With this statement the authors clearly distanced themselves from the modernist view on language as the chief and neutral means by which we inform others about the results of our observations and thoughts. They pointed to the fact that managers get things done through persuasive language. In management literature it became noticed that the popularity of management concepts like Total Quality Management (TQM), Business Process Reengineering (BPR), and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) depended upon the way managers were able to persuade and convince people. These management concepts are, in general, still used as tools to improve business practices, which still comply with a managerialist perspective. However, in the context of communicative action, as will be argued in this chapter, management concepts may reshape business practices in a different way.

Since the proliferation of management concepts in the USA and their increasing transience as fads, research has endeavoured to examine the process of the constitution of management knowledge and its diffusion. In 1990, former McKinsey consultant R. Pascale for example, expressed his surprise about the tremendous popularity of certain management concepts. Reviewing the prevailing management literature he noticed the ebbs and flows of many business fads. Although he found this an alarming development, he had to admit that some of the management concepts that initially obtained faddish characteristics, like TQM, nevertheless stimulated serious consideration and have been adopted as an enduring way of doing business. Grint (1992) noticed in *Fuzzy Management* that for the business community, the issue is not whether management concepts are scientifically substantiated in the sense that their truth can be stated, but whether

they secure business results that are currently accounted legitimate. Even if their scientific value cannot be proven, management concepts are apparently attractive as long as they seem to result in an increase in productivity, efficiency or performance. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) are not so much worried about this phenomenon of fashion. It provides an opportunity for frivolousness and temporality and can challenge the institutionalized order of things. In the same vein Ten Bos (2001: 176, 179) defends the role of fashion in management:
Fashion provides us with a more aesthetic view of organisation and management and what it does not like is 'fanaticism'. As a matter of fact it shares fundamental characteristics with the managerial work: fragmented, impermanent, volatile.

Regardless of this fashionlike appearance the point is to understand how a management concept is constituted. With regard to this the attention over the last years has shifted from diffusion to adoption of management concepts in instrumental organisations. According to Taylor and Van Every (2000: 79) these organizations should no longer be seen as purely physical entities, but primarily 'as territory, a partly physical, partly social life space occupied by a diverse population of workers, managers, and other interest groups, each with their own agendas'. Writing the map of the organisational territory is the principle activity that is taking place. In other words, the principle activity of organisations is repairing, correcting deviations from the map or changing the map.**[ii]** Such a map is as much inscribed in texts as in conversations. The basis of the organisation-as-text is a description in a symbolic language and therefore obtains a material basis. The organisation-as-conversation is shaped through talk-in-interaction.

Main characteristics
Management concepts are usually born as mental creations, 'constituents of thought' (Fodor 1998: 23), about specific processes in organisations. Initially managers facing a problem may discuss their ideas amongst themselves, like at the classical Greek agora. The words they use express new ideas which can support managers to get things done. Where these ideas exactly come from and how they turn into knowledge are complex issues. Nohria and Eccles (1998: 279 and 298), conclude the following:
If asked, most people would tell an interesting story about the variety of sources that have contributed to the ways they act and think as managers. Indeed, management knowledge comes from everywhere: it comes from a manager's own

experience, from books and articles on a variety of topics … and increasingly from consulting firms.

The most remarkable fact, however, is that the popularity of management concepts has much more to do with the quality of the source providing the concept than with its truth.

Managers are interested in ideas which are established by the reputation of a particular country (e.g. Japan), company (e.g. General Electric), manager (e.g. Jack Welch), consulting firm (e.g. McKinsey), educational institution (e.g. Stanford), or professor/ consultant (e.g. Peter Drucker). That is the source of a particular concept.

Considering the previous analysis, four characteristics of management concepts can be identified (Karsten and Van Veen 1998):
A. Management concepts usually have a remarkable label such as TQM, BPR, Core Competency or Knowledge Management (KM). Whenever possible these concepts are reduced into acronyms, to make them convincing and persuasive within the language community of management, and to help create specific networks of professional managers sharing the same discourse.
B. Management concepts describe in general terms specific management issues, which cause an increase of costs or a loss of customers. Managers are then faced with an irresolute but pressing problem that calls for a new meaning and thus are compelled to develop a more probable course of action to improve the situation. Concepts can frame a particular organisational problem and make it recognisable for the managers involved. For example, BPR will be seen as a useful analysis because it allows managers to identify the actual company structure, which has to be redesigned.
C. Management concepts offer a general solution to identified problems. They do not provide constitutive rules, which prescribe relatively specific actions to be taken, but general guidelines that bring about mutual orientations between actors. These guidelines suggest a standard of conduct (protocols) and propel action in a certain direction. They usually evolve from the values and practices of the specific community of actors where the concept initially had been developed. The guidelines are generally issued as a provisional measure until more is known about the practical usefulness of a concept. For example, BPR justified its interventionist guidelines by stating that companies with obsolete structures will become more efficient once these structures have been redesigned and modern

information and communication technology has been introduced. But to persuade managers to follow those guidelines, another characteristic has to come into play: D. The proposed solution will be promoted by referring to success stories about specific well-known firms, which have either developed or already implemented the concept. GE, IBM, Shell and Toyota are usually portrayed as convincing examples of the success of a concept. The examples are the narratives, i.e. the evidence-based stories (Sorge and Witteloostuijn 2004), which articulate the knowledge employed in particular situations and have subsequently created new best practices. The advantage of storytelling is that it facilitates social interaction. At the company level managers can easily share these stories and promote conversations that create beliefs in a common reality which, in turn, becomes a symbol of group solidarity. The different meanings that can be given to the examples can be seen as an invitation to establish a shared translation, which is an act of political persuasion to enrol support for a concept (Tsoukas 1998). The examples themselves illustrate how at the right time (kairos), these instrumental organisations like GE or Shell took the opportunity to introduce a new concept (Miller 1992). Finally, these conversations about company successes will invoke 'a common reality, or myth, which may or may not be true; this is what stories and narratives do' (Hardy 1998: 68).

These four characteristics make a management concept recognisable and clarify how a common social reality about a specific management practice becomes shaped. The fact remains, however, that the knowledge contained in a management concept does not provide constitutive rules according to which a successful implementation can be deduced. Although the above characteristics B and C may suggest that there are rules involved as impersonal, generic or temporal formulae to identify a problem and solve it, these rules are no more than guidelines. Even management concepts that are reshaped into management models with clear graphical designs to illustrate how these concepts should be applied do not provide a detailed prescription for their implementation (Have 2003). These models are only composed of 'structured knowledge' (De Long and Fahey 2000).

Diffusion

After the 'fad and fashion' characteristics about management concepts had been detected and recognised, research has begun to study from a new perspective the diffusion mechanisms developed by DiMaggio and Powell. Especially the role of

diffusion agents, i.e. consultants and gurus, has become the object of analysis. Their rhetorical, linguistic and dramaturgical performance qualities have been stressed (Abrahamson 1996; Huczynski 1993; Clark 1995; Kieser 1997; Grint and Case 1998).

Within the specific institutional contexts that facilitate the transfer of management concepts from one place to another (or from one country to another) a market of management concepts has been established, where these professional diffusion agents play an extremely important role. Although gurus and consultants are both disseminators who try to persuade their clients to follow the concepts they propose, gurus usually present their views through monologues whereas consultants prefer the dialogue. In both cases, however, the purpose is to introduce the new management concept as a novel label to identify an issue that managers may experience as problematic. This amounts to offering a way of making sense of what happens in a specific situation that created the problem. Consultants and managers may then together frame and define the actual situation as well as the preferred one. They tell stories to each other in potentially multiple ways, each way corresponding to a different portrayal of the organisational landscape that caused the particular problem.

Since organisational routines are deeply embedded in organisational cultures and in shared mental models, it is extremely important to initiate discourses among organisational members, in which current structures and practices are questioned or reinterpreted and alternative, more appropriate management philosophies and approaches are offered in a rhetorically convincing way (Kieser 2002: 217).

Consultants may finally influence managers to accept one meaning of the management concept over another. A translation takes place, which will not only lead to new knowledge but to a new management practice as well (Cooren and Fairhurst 2003).

While the level of truth of the management concept can only be stated in terms of plausibility and evidence-based stories, the management concept is usually accepted and implemented due to the communicative skills of the consultant to influence and persuade. These interactions constitute a language game, that takes place between consultant and manager(s) with either the consultant's strategic intent to let the manager accept the relevance of a particular management concept, or a conversation where consultant and manager jointly

agree and engage in the implementation of a particular concept. Language used in this context is quite distinct from the traditional view about language as a neutral mechanism to convey viable information, based upon a proper picture of facts. To better understand this dialogic view on language, it is time to look at the impact of the latter work of the language philosopher Wittgenstein.

The role of language

The work of the language philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein about the meaning and use of language in the 1950s served to refocus the very course of modern philosophy thought in the West away from a theory on knowledge to the study of meaning. Initially the young Wittgenstein shared with representatives of the Vienna Circle the belief that words stand for things and depict them in place of the actual phenomenon. For the logical positivists of the Vienna Circle sentences have meaning in relative isolation from the settings in which they are used. In other words: sentences have meaning if and only if their truth-condition can be established. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) was linguistic in the sense that it focused on therole of propositions: sentences in their projective relation to the world (Hacker 1997). The meaning of the word is found in the object for which the word stands. For example, once the words and sentences used for example to indicate the goal of a firm have been stated clearly and are properly repeated by managers and other employees, a CEO can be convinced that s/he coordinates effectively. This is the conviction Drucker expressed with his MBO. The words and sentences that are used, picture facts and clarify as such the correspondence with the reality of the firm.

The later Wittgenstein repudiated the principles he had laid down in his earlier work. In his *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) he recognised that certain pictures are incomplete and distorted. He came to the conclusion that there is not a simple relationship between the name and its bearer. A word's meaning is related to its practical use. One cannot know the meaning of words without knowing the context within which the word is used. In other words: 'One can know the meaning of a word only if one knows how it is used in practice' (Watson 1997: 364). The way a word is used, and thus its meaning, is contingent on the situation in which it is used. Wittgenstein therefore diverted his attention from the question of truth to that of meaning and concluded that language does not gain its meaning from its reference but from its use in action. Language games became his key focus of attention. Wittgenstein's new vision on language games

with their own set of rules caused a linguistic turn in western philosophy in the sense that language was no longer simply seen as a representational device to inform us about the world.

Instead of focusing on the solitary act of a speaker saying something about the world, the attention shifted to the social act of a speaker saying – through speech acts – something about the world to a listener in order to develop a shared meaning.

Language
was no longer valued as a neutral mechanism through which words and sentences provide true knowledge, but as a system of speech acts, that through interactions between speakers and listeners and their reciprocal interdependencies, provides meaning (Moldoveanu 2002).

Speech acts
Philosophers like Austin (1975, originally 1962) and Searle (1969) who explored Wittgenstein's view on language games looked at sentences not as artifacts that carry meaning 'on their own shoulders but as issuances by speakers for the benefit of their hearers' (Fotion 2003: 34). Austin claimed that besides the description of reality, language is used to perform speech acts. Sentences, i.e. utterances, only carry meaning when the role of the speakers and the hearers, and the rest of the context, i.e. a shared background, are taken into account. Together these sentences constitute a miniature civil society, a special kind of structured whole, embracing both the one who initiates it and the one to whom it is directed.

Austin and Searle developed a speech act theory to look for the rules according to which language itself is being applied to provide meaning. Austin came to the conclusion that all utterances are performative in nature, be they of an asserting, insisting, promising, commanding, warning or flattering kind. Performative utterances are a kind of action, which brings about some result. The speech acts themselves cannot be evaluated as either true or false. It is Searle's achievement to give substance to Austin's idea of a general theory of speech acts by introducing five different categories (assertives, commissives, directives, expressives and declaratives) to classify the illocutionary forces of utterances. If for example a medical doctor issues an order to a nurse by a directive, obedience is required. The claim of the speech act fits particular constitutive rules. Searle

introduced a distinction between regulative and constitutive rules within a language game. Constitutive rules define forms of conduct. The rules of chess for example create the possibility for players to engage in playing chess. They act in accordance with the given rules. How they perform in the game itself depends on their mastering of regulative rules. Searle's central hypothesis is that speech acts are performed by uttering expressions in accordance with central constitutive rules. When a speaker engages in promising something (a commissive speech act) he thereby subjects himself in a rather specific way to the corresponding system of constitutive rules. While acting in accordance with constitutive rules, certain special rights, duties, obligations and various other prescriptions are imposed on our fellow human beings and ourselves and on the reality around us. Four important rules are that the speaker commits himself to what s/he says, has evidence of what s/he says, provides new information and believes what s/he says.

With these four rules at hand Searle is convinced that the speaker will speak the truth about a fact or state of affairs. Searle's focus is therefore still to use the speech act theory to clarify how truth comes about. But a significant drawback of Searle's theory is that it does not adequately consider what makes a speech act successful. This problem has to do with the fact that Searle does not take into consideration the role of several different validity claims that are at stake (Smith 2003). Within the context of using a management concept which defines a specific situation in a company, the role of different validity claims is very relevant. To justify the validity of a management concept storytelling seems to be an appropriate practice. Storytelling in the form of biographies, fiction or historical novels is, however, composed of a wording that may not be completely true but nevertheless persuasive, plausible and convincing. Searle has put fiction aside as a parasitic form of speech acts because he only focuses on the validity claim of truth. Fotion (2003) does not agree with this distinction and is convinced that speech activities like storytelling do not fully jeopardize these rules but that they have to be seen in a different context.

Communicative action

The *linguistic turn* has readdressed the attention to language and has admitted that rhetorics and persuasion are key features to understand how the meaning of what is being said is shaped. Initially the interest focused on the intention of the speaker. It was paying attention to the way a speaker was talking at people rather than with people.

The work of a number of dialogic theorists (Habermas 1984; Bourdieu 1998; Taylor 1995) has turned the attention to the role of language within the interaction between speaker and listener. Dialogic theorists stress the importance of language in the construction and reconstruction of social reality. It also recognises that heterogeneous discourses are the norm. So long as we engage in communicative action, we are embedded in a dialogic interaction that continuously shapes and reshapes speakers as well as listeners. The work of the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas is extremely relevant to clarify the role of communicative action. Later on in this chapter it will help us to understand the role ubuntu can play in organisations. Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984-1987) provides a broad framework, which includes as much the speech acts of Searle as the speech activities Fotion discerned, which do not fully comply with the four rules about speaking the truth. Instead of referring to one world with regard to facts and states of affairs as Searle does, Habermas introduced four different validity claims. A speaker who is oriented towards mutual understanding, will raise several different validity claims and will presuppose that the listener will accept these validity claims. Successful communication implies that the listener must both comprehend and accept a speech act. Next to the claim of comprehensibility there are three important claims at stake:
– A claim which refers to the *outer states of affairs* which a listener may explore as truly or falsely existing;
– A claim which invokes *contextual norms* that legitimize the action which is being undertaken, i.e. norms to which listeners may consent as appropriate to the situation at hand or may challenge;
– A claim expressing the *inner state of self,* emotions and dispositions such as seriousness, anger, impatience or frustration which a listener may trust as authentic or challenge (Forester 1992).

These three validity claims relate to three worlds Habermas has discerned: the objective, the social and the subjective. To all three worlds every speaker and listener has a specific attitude:
– When a speaker adopts an objectivating attitude he relates to the objective world of facts and existing states of affairs.
– When a speaker adopts a norm-conformative attitude he relates to the social world of normatively regulated interactives.
– When he adopts an expressive attitude, he relates to the subjective world of

inner experience (Cooke 1994).

Figure 2.1: Habermas' framework for a pragmatic speech act theory.

Worlds	Attitudes	Validity claim	Structural component	Categories of speech acts
Objective	Objectivity	Propositional truth	Propositional	Constative (asserting)
Social	Norm-conformative	Normative rightfulness	Illocutionary	Regulative (promising/ requesting)
Subjective	Expressive	Subjective truthfulness	Expressive	Expressive (avowing)

Figure 2.1: Habermas' framework for a pragmatic speech act theory.

Any speech act – including speech activity – is successful if an actor relationship is established that is based on mutual understanding, i.e. the four validity claims are being respected. Habermas' point is that the illocutionary force of speech acts is constituted by the mutual recognition of the four validity claims. According to Habermas Searle has not analysed the reasons and motives that would make the listener accept the speech act (Habermas 1989).

These validity claims (comprehensibility, truth, rightfulness and truthfulness) can help us understand how a consultant and a manager or managers amongst themselves in a team reach consensus through dialogue/conversation about the applicability of a management concept by respecting all the validity claims. A conversation is a kind of communicative action, which is usually defined as a range of actions towards agreement or mutual understanding (*Verständigung*). The goal of communicative action is to coordinate the speech acts of the participants. Habermas' focus is on the *pragmatic* aspect of language, i.e. how language is used in particular contexts to achieve practical goals. The consultant and the manager do this more in particular at the level of the social and the subjective world. While a consultant talks about a management concept in an 'experience-distant way', the manager on the other hand talks about the same management concept in a 'experience-near' way. Managers prefer to deal with concepts in a perceptual way and look for applicability (Cf. Geertz 1979).

Their communicative actions do not directly change the objective world of facts and states of affairs. But once an agreement is reached a manager will subsequently behave in line with the meaning he has given to the management

concept and instruct his subordinates to do the same. Only then the objective world of facts can be changed. By definition this procedure also holds true in case a manager starts a conversation with his subordinates to solve a problem. Once they have reached an agreement the subordinates are the ones who do and intervene in the physical world to change things. In this sense Habermas defends a clear distinction between interaction and work.

Strategic action

To achieve the practical goal of implementing a management concept, however, social actions can be divided in *strategic* and *communicative* ones. If a manager makes his subordinates accept a management concept without mutual understanding, but for example 'seduces' or misleads them to implement the concept, then force – a power relation – is the means of coordinating the social action. In strategic action the manager strives at his own private goal without restraint. What matters for the manager is how he can use the employees to realize his own private goal by 'selling the concept'. This practice is called a distorted or *hampered conversation*. It is usually shaped in the form of a monologue and leads to manufactured consent. The management concepts used in such an atmosphere are designed, used and applied as monologic tools and underpinned by a technical-instrumental rationality. Habermas rejects this as a naïve premise as if merely talking to one another will lead to a better world. In the situation of communicative action the manager as well as the subordinates comprehend and accept the relevance or the validity claims through which the importance of a management concept is being presented. They will then jointly implement the management concept.

The communicative action includes, so to say, the speech act and the material act. In communicative action the actors are performing actions, which lead to material acts in the objective as much as in the social world (engagements) while not breaking the mutual consensus and legitimately created social relationship between them. Habermas' distinction between strategic and communicative action points to the fact that a speech act can both be used for reaching mutual understanding and with a strategic intent.

The communicative action, however, consists of:
– A level of mutual understanding, based on a shared background which is obtained by means of an open conversation through regulative speech acts;
– An operational level (the material part) – based on the consensus reached by

constative speech acts which lead to instrumental i.e. material actions.**[iii]**

The communication model Habermas has developed is of interest because it makes us realise that, for the validity of a management concept, it is not enough to only focus on its propositional truth. Management concepts are full of storytelling and their impact cannot solely be judged on their claim of truth. They have an impact on how we perceive and experience reality because – as the model shows – it is also crucial to have knowledge about the social and subjective world when we want to analyse human communication and social interaction, a knowledge that also has to be understood in terms of normative rightfulness and truthfulness. Communicative action is thus a multi-layered approach which sets the scene for engagement to apply and implement a management concept. It recognises a difference between subscribing to the objective world (a description of facts and states of affairs as they are), the social world which characterizes interactions as they should be and a subjective world, a view about how people experience the world they live in.

Conversation

As I have argued so far, studies of conversations need a linguistic analysis, which is rooted in the philosophy of language, but this is not sufficient. Speech act theory in general is very much focused on monogolism and portrays the agent as an autonomous information processing organism. The focus is on analysis of sentences as autonomous units. However, Habermas' pragmatic theory of communicative action has extended the framework into dialogism which takes actions and interactions, e.g. the discursive practices, in their context as basic units. According to Linell (1998: 11) Searle still 'pictures the speaker as an entirely rational agent', and stresses 'the rationality, efficiency and logos of the single idealized communicator'. That approach stands for a monogolism, 'which sustains the authority and domination of the speaker at the cost of his partners, the listeners'. Whereas strategic actions suppress negotiations of meaning, vagueness, ambiguity, polyvocality, domination and fragmentation of participation, Habermas defends a normative approach to dialogue, stressing mutuality, openness, consensus and agreement. To understand the intertwinement between discourse and context, content and expression, speaker and partner, cognition and communication, conversational analysis is needed. Such an analysis is rooted in an empirically oriented sociology of language that started with ethnomethodology (Cf. Silverman 1998; Samra-Fredericks 2000).

Conversational analysis focuses on where and how, in everyday life in instrumental organisations, i.e. the context, people routinely group the sense of each other's talk-based performances. The purpose is to understand the socio-historically determined institutional context within which specific statements occur. This context provides actors with a shared understanding of a situation. In terms of Wittgenstein, the actors identify the situation they are in as the common language game. Knowing in which game they are, determines what is appropriate behaviour. Habermas defines this context in a broader sense as the life world, which contains all the implicit backgroundknowledge about personal identity, culture and society. These life world phenomena cannot be excluded from instrumental organisations. Those organisations that are operating in a multicultural context will have to cope with different communal backgrounds and that makes them differ in interpretations of facts/states of affairs, conventions, norms, procedures, routine actions as well as improvisations.

Although conversations and dialogues are fuzzy constructs, they are language-based interactions, which permit shared meaning to emerge (Grant 1998: 6). The way a shared meaning occurs, however, depends upon the way this medium is used in an instrumental organisation. Conversations can aim for agreement and promote dialogue for mutual understanding, without excluding for that matter that heterogeneous discourses are the norm.

A dominant view in the Anglo-American literature suggests that Western instrumental organisations predominantly implement management concepts through techniques and tools such as cultural re-engineering, quality management, autonomous work teams, just-in-time production systems and employee-involvement programmes to disguise tensions and conflicts. The purpose of these techniques and tools is to establish a specific corporate ideology, a belief in the effectiveness of a concept (Cf. Reed 1998: 201). Usually the regulative and expressive speech acts used are of a strategic kind and commit the hearer to carry out the action represented by the propositional speech acts.

The normative rightfulness of the speech acts as delivered by the manager are not being questioned. Only stories from management's perception are being told to ensure that meanings and motives for action are circumscribed and regularized according to his perspective. In that sense talking at people rather than with people prevails.

However, as has been stated earlier, the recent literature on discourse and dialogues in relation to management practices indicates that conversations, which are based on open communicative action, stress the dialogical perspective. This offers all participants in instrumental organisations to relate with each other by shaping and reshaping a management concept. This entails the recognition of moral interdependence and allows stories from the employees' perspective about specific management practices to be integrated. This kind of conversations as 'talk-ininteractions' (Taylor and Every 2000) looks at an instrumental organisation as a linguistically constituted community in the sense that there always is an explicit enactor i.e. the manager, but that it is the community of standard enactors, who actually implement a management concept. In the absence of such a community the enactment would be undefined and would thus not exist as enactment (ibid.: 270).

Taylor and Every (ibid.) notice that in the dominant Anglo-American management literature the perspective to perceive enactors as a strategic means to reach a goal, is still prevalent. The now popular talk about employees as human resources typifies this approach. People are just another resource to meet the objectives of the instrumental organisation. Within such a context, communication is limited to its strategic version.

Ubuntu and communicative action

Recently, Jackson (2004) has reviewed an upcoming process of Africaness of management and introduced in that context a humanistic view of people to oppose this strategic view. He sees people as having a value in their own right and an end in themselves. Ubuntu encapsulates this approach. Even if it may sound somewhat idealistic – as Jackson says – 'to try to identify a particular African style or even philosophy of management … any description of management systems within Africa should include a consideration of an indigenous African management' (2004: 26-28). And he believes that ubuntu reflects this approach.

While agreeing with Jackson one can see ubuntu as a way to promote and strengthen an attitude of open conversations, as Habermas propagates. In that sense ubuntu can reflect a critical discourse because it wants to include the voice of all participants in any instrumental organisation.

In the South African tradition, it is the community that shapes the person as

person. The meaning of ubuntu is illustrated through the Xhosa expression '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' meaning the person is a person through other persons, and this expresses a typical African conception of a person. Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical base for the community concept of management (Khoza 1994). Mbigi (1997) has listed the following relevant principles of ubuntu: the spirit of unconditional African collective contribution, solidarity, acceptance, dignity, stewardship, compassion and care, hospitality and legitimacy. Ubuntu intends to reflect an African attitude that is rooted and anchored in people's daily life. The expression of a person as a person through persons is 'common to all African languages and traditional cultures' (Shutte 1993: 46). Ubuntu is a symbol of an African common world and the concept has namesakes in different terms in African countries. Mogobe B. Ramose (1999) made a relevant remark by saying:

African philosophy has long been established in and through ubuntu. That here not only the Bantu speaking ethnic groups, who use the word ubuntu or an equivalent for it, are referred to, but the whole population of Sub-Saharan Africa, is based on the argument that in this area 'there is a family atmosphere, that is, a kind of philosophical affinity and kinship among and between the indigenous people of Africa'.

In West Africa, more in particular in Senegal, the concept of '*teranga*' reflects a similar spirit of collective hospitality between people. Zimbabwe's concept of '*ubukhosi*' also mirrors itself metaphorically in the statement '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*'. There are apparently similarities between these concepts and that of ubuntu, which reflects an African view on community, and is embodied in customs, institutions and traditions (Karsten & Illa 2004).

According to Shutte (1993), ubuntu is not synonymous with either Western individualism or collectivism. Ubuntu expresses an African view of the life world anchored in its own person, culture and society, which is difficult to define in a Western context. According to Sanders (1999), the Zulu phrase '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' has an economy of singular and plural not captured in the banal 'people are people through other people'. The translation of ubuntu can sound like:
A human being is a human being through human beings or the being human of a human being is noticed through his or her being human through human beings … The ontological figure of ubuntu is commonly converted into an example and imperative for human conduct.

Ubuntu is enacted in African day-to-day actions, feelings and thinking. The African community as a social entity, however, is constantly under construction. It is an attempt to shape indigenous social and political institutions, which will be able to develop African nations and African civil societies.

Although ubuntu represents a specific African worldview, Mbigi (1997) is convinced that it nevertheless can be translated into what he calls *The African Dream in Management*. Ubuntu refers to the collective solidarity in Africa, but it can find its concrete expression in modern forms of entrepreneurship, leadership, business organisations and management. The introduction of ubuntu as a management concept will not replace the transfer of knowledge, i.e. management concepts, from the Western world but can support the development of a hybrid management system operating in Africa within which these Western concepts can obtain their proper African translation.

A proper African management system – like the American and Japanese ones – will generate a variety of management styles as distinctive sets of guidelines, written or otherwise, 'which set parameters to add signposts for managerial action in the way employees are treated and particular events are handled' (Purcell 1987: 535).

Ubuntu as a management concept intends to be more than just a popular version of an employee participation programme defined by the interest of management. Ubuntu strives to reach beyond a purely managerialist approach and includes the building of consensus. Looking at the reconstruction Ayitty has made of consensus building in indigenous African political systems, similarities can be found with the approach ubuntu propagates. 'Coercive powers were generally not employed by the chief to achieve unity. Unity of purpose was achieved through the process of consensus building' (Ayittey 1991: 100). Majority of opinion did not count in the council of elders: unanimity was the rule. In face-to-face communities in control of their own destinies these 'wisdom circles' were widespread. In these wisdom circles people rarely engage in responding directly to what is said with argument and debate. 'Rather what is sought is a deepening of understanding and the spontaneous emergence of a solution or decision' (Glock-Grueneich 2003: 36). Even if it is difficult to introduce the traditional form of wisdom circles in modern instrumental organisations, an adapted version can certainly help to shape an ubuntu approach in firms.

Scepticism about a suggested prevalence of ubuntu in African companies, however, cannot be denied. Jackson (2004) indicates that African organisational cultures and management styles with a predominantly strategic orientation are widely present and some of these management styles are often seen as rigid, bureaucratic, directive and task-oriented. Van der Wal & Ramotschoa (2001: 4) notice that ubuntu is sometimes popularised in business books reflecting the tendency to align it with productivity improvement and worker motivation techniques, which reduces its significance 'to flavour of the month status'. They urge to prevent ubuntu from quickly obtaining a faddish character and believe that 'ubuntu embraces a set of social behaviours like sharing, seeking consensus and interdependent helpfulness which, if recognised, valued and willingly incorporated in the culture of organisations, could exert considerable positive outcomes on business results'. Of course, Van der Wal and Ramotschoa's fear can be related to the fashion-like character in which management concepts are ingrained. Even as a fashion – as Ten Bos (2000) has argued – ubuntu can enable managers to become sensitive to their own roles in a turbulent and ever-changing environment. The kind of sensitivity that may come out of ubuntu will depend upon the way managers apply this management concept: either in strategic or communicative action. If they apply it in the former way, then ubuntu will serve as a tool in a monologue; if it is applied in the latter ubuntu can provide a sound basis for constructive conversations about the common interests of a firm. This is the application of ubuntu that Habermas propagates. While ubuntu contains key features to reinforce communicative action and conversation it resists the purely formal language of Taylorism.

Ubuntu as a management concept

The purpose of ubuntu as a societal value is to reshape social relations in society and in instrumental organisations. If for whatever reason managers deny this purpose, they will indeed limit ubuntu as a management concept to a strategic i.e. managerialist use for specific goals they have defined themselves (Rwelamila, Talukhaba and Ngowi 1999). Habermas (1984) describes such an approach as a strategic action where the diagnosis and the solution of a problem within the organisation is not being shared and commonly performed by all participants. It then is a prerogative of management to set the objectives and forces others to accept them.**[iv]** If, however, ubuntu is based on communicative action and managers embracing ubuntu support that form of social interaction then it can lead to an engagement-stimulating democratisation within instrumental

organisations.

Ubuntu can obtain the status of a management concept, when it fits the characteristics given earlier:
– *Ubuntu* has a striking label;
– *Ubuntu* already has raised in general terms a specific management issue. 'Black managers and professionals need to develop a strong sense of collective social stewardship … We need a strong sense of collective, social citizenship' (Mbigi 1997: 38).

The tendency to establish solidarity will build 'a culture of empowerment and team work in the workplace' (Mbigi 1997: 5);
– *Ubuntu's* solution is to improve the efficient and effective operations of instrumental organisations in the South African context.

Literature begins to provide numerous success stories, but none of them seems yet to reach the status of the key success story. There is for example the case of Durban Metrorail, which adopted ubuntu as one of its guiding principles and made the company the Most Progressive Company in Kwazulu-Natal.**[v]** Patricia P. and A. Secheraga (1998) on the other hand consider the South African Airway to be the best example to illustrate how a major non-American corporation uses the various dimensions of ubuntu. Another interesting case for the implementation of ubuntu is CS Holdings.**[vi]** The staff of CS Holdings believes that 'the reputation of a company as perceived by the market is as important as the actual services rendered by the company'. CS Holdings obtained its reputation as a new South African IT company, which forms alliances with firms such as Ubuntu Technologies to provide 'expertise and knowledge exchange as well as some infrastructure, enabling Ubuntu Technologies to tender for business from which they were previously excluded'. The integration of ubuntu guidelines made it possible for CS Holdings to improve its management style and its performance.

Even if a positive impact of ubuntu guidelines can be contested, Chanock (2000) is right that the need to fight for different experiences, as they are reflected in other organisational cultures like Japan, is even greater for vulnerable indigenous communities in a global economy where Western views still dominate. Regardless of the fact that ubuntu can be abused for political reasons, it should be acknowledged that an indigenous South African management system is in its

hybrid phase and that there is a tendency of 'crossvergence' which can support the development of a particular value system as a result of cultural interactions (Jackson 2004: 30). The hegemony of the modernist Western management approach generally has ignored those local cultural values. In the process of changing that modernist perspective, ubuntu may provide a solution to the problems African instrumental organisations face.

Conclusion

There is an increasing interest to promote ubuntu as a management concept. This chapter has tried to describe the main characteristics of management concepts, the way they are created, diffused and implemented. Within management literature the role of fashion cannot be denied and even offers opportunities for management concepts to become popular. It is the author's view that a proper understanding of the promulgation of these concepts is best served by deepening our knowledge about the role language plays. Since the linguistic turn, the philosophy of language has extensively contributed to the advancement of this knowledge. The pragmatic theory of communicative action Habermas has developed clearly describes which claims are at stake to make a management concept meaningful. Next, his analysis stresses the fundamental distinction between strategic and communicative action which can be seen as the distinction between monogolism and dialogues/conversations. Dialogic theorists stress the importance of language in the construction and reconstruction of social reality. As far as we engage in communicative action – even with heterogeneous voices – we are embedded in a dialogic process that at the normative level is committed to restructure the public sphere in a more democratic way. Jackson believes that for the development of an Africaness of management the strengthening of a humanistic view of management is important. This view sees employees as having a value in their own right and as such can distance itself from the strategic view in organisations which only perceives people as a means to an end. Ubuntu encapsulates this humanistic view and for that reason is attracting quite some attention. Ubuntu is being positioned as a new way to strengthen the economic revitalization of Africa. To attain that goal an Africaness of management is quintessential. Mangaliso is of the opinion that to that end the craze for efficiency and accuracy of language has to be countered by an emphasis on conversation. With ubuntu, African managers may better master a relationally responsive understanding than one can find amongst Western managers, while the latter are usually professionally trained as accountable persons and manage employees

more in a strategic way. Mangaliso refers to a distinction between accuracy of language on the one hand and conversation on the other. This chapter argues that it is not language as such which is at stake, but only the version that was developed in logical positivism developed and that found its way in Taylorism and Fordism. Since Wittgenstein has entered the field of management and organisation studies, this view of language is being revised. The pragmatic theory of communicative action provides an interesting basis to relate the issue of language to that of conversations.

Another point is that the possible impact of ubuntu in Africa is often compared with a similar success of Total Quality Management (TQM) in Japan. As Tsutsui (1998) has shown, however, TQM neatly fits into the Taylorist tradition which puts a dominant value on efficiency and the concomitant structuring of organisations and behaviour of managers and other employees. The conclusion from that example is that ubuntu as a management concept for instrumental organisations cannot be developed in the void. African firms and companies too will have to respect efficiency criteria to compete in the global market, but their shape, content and functioning can be adapted to the context shaped by ubuntu.

Quite some defenders of ubuntu as a management concept state that it is part of a development that has its roots in an African Renaissance. This African Renaissance functions like an agora of ideas that will promote a variety of social movements and support the shaping of African civil societies. Some of its ideas stimulate the articulation of an Africaness of management. Hopefully, those ideas will enter the market of management concepts, change the dominant strategic approach towards people in organisations, and offer new perspectives on global management. Mphahlele (2002) has indicated that there are similarities between European and African humanism.

Areas we share with Western Humanists amount to the value and love of life which we cherish; openness of mind; love of self which refuses to be shackled in stiffing, suffocating codes of conduct laid down by some authority who commands obedience; and a conscience that emerges from one's own character as a social being responsible to the community, rather than a conscience that is built on the fear of authority.

These values which are now promulgated in ubuntu reflect interesting similarities with the development of European Renaissance in the fourteenth century. One of

the authors frequently quoted at that time was the Roman Cicero (Skinner 2002). That is why this chapter started with one of his statements. This is not to say that there is one fixed human nature to which these values refer. It only stresses the point that human beings have some common human nature, which is best characterized by the fact that we are conversational beings. Without the latter there would not be the possibility of intercommunication, on which all thought, feelings, imagination and action depend.

NOTES

i. I gratefully acknowledge the comments of Henk van Rinsum (Utrecht University) and the editors of this volume. Of course, the usual disclaimer applies.

ii. Compare Habermas (1989: 141): 'Die kartographische Abbildung eines Gebirges mag mehr oder weniger genau sein – wahr oder falsch sind erst die Interpretationen, die wir auf den Anblick der Karte stützen, ihr sozusagen, entnehmen'.

iii. In Habermas' analysis Searle's assertives are equal to constatives like 'I say that this management concept is applicable'; Searle's regulatives are composed of commissives, declaratives and directives.

iv. During the XI conference of the Eastern Academy of Management which was held in Capetown (South Africa) from 26 to 30 June 2005, Dorothy Ndletyana reported about her research within Deloitte to integrate ubuntu within the company practice and the resistance she encountered amongst the white managers of Deloitte.

v. Durban Metrorail is a South African public transport company. It received an honourable mention during the Black Management Forum (1999) for the most Progressive Company in Kwazulu-Natal.

vi. CS Holdings is a South African IT firm. For more information, please refer to: www.cs.co.za/ reconstructionand_development.htm

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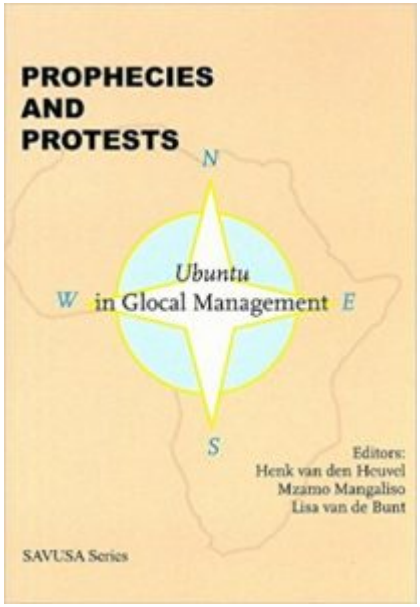
Prophecies And Protests ~ Ubuntu And Communalism In African Philosophy And Art



During my efforts to set up dialogues between Western and African philosophies, I have singled out quite a number of subjects on which such dialogues are useful and necessary. Recently I have stated in an essay that three themes in the African way of thought have become especially important for me:
1.1 The *basic concept of vital force*, differing from the basic concept of being, which is prevalent in Western philosophy;
1.2. The *prevailing role of the community*, differing from the predominantly individualistic thinking in the West;
1.3. The *belief in spirits*, differing from the scientific and rationalistic way of thought, which is prevalent in Western philosophy (Kimmerle 2001: 5).

In these fields of philosophical thought there are contributions from African

philosophers, which differ in a very characteristic way from Western thinking. Therefore in a dialogue on these themes a special enrichment of Western philosophy is possible. In the following text I want to clarify this possibility by concentrating on two notions, which have a specific meaning in the context of African philosophy. To discuss the notions of *ubuntu* and communalism means working out some important aspects of the second theme. The *community spirit* in African theory and practice is philosophically concentrated in notions such as *ubuntu* and communalism. But the concept of *vital force*, which is mentioned in the first theme, will play a certain role, too. We find the stem *–ntu*, which expresses the concept of vital force in many Bantu-languages, also in *ubu–ntu*. For a more detailed explanation of *ubuntu*, I will depend mainly on Mogobe B. Ramose's book, which gives the most comprehensive explanation of the philosophical impact of this notion (Ramose 1999). The concept of communalism is explained in the context of the political philosophy of Leopold S. Senghor and other political leaders of African countries in the struggle for independence (Senghor 1964). A vehement critic of that theory is a Kenyan political scientist, V.G. Simiyu (Simiyu 1987). For a philosophical evaluation of this controversy I will refer to the articles and books of Maurice Tschiamalenga Ntumba, Joseph M. Nyasani, and Kwame Gyekye, dealing with the relation between person and community (Ntumba 1985 and 1988; Nyasani 1989; Gyekye 1989 and 1997).

Finally I will briefly look for *ubuntu* and communalism in African art. I am a lover or African art, but my knowledge of it is not developed on a par with my knowledge of African philosophy. There is no doubt that music and dance are of special relevance in African art. K.C. Anyanwu, in his article 'The idea of art in African thought', has stated convincingly that music is the most important form of art in Africa (Anyanwu 1987: 251-3, 259). The cosmic sound has to be answered by human beings, moving together in the same rhythm. From oral literature I will entertain examples of the predominant role of the community and of the position of the individual. I will also refer to some pieces of woodcarving that express the African community spirit and the reciprocal support given by individuals to each other. This is illustrated by Makondes: towers of human beings, leaning one on the other. A special motive is the relation between men and women and between mothers and children, which we find on some masks and sculptures.

It is my contention that it will not be easy to adhere to *ubuntu* and communalism, which stem from a traditional and mainly rural environment, in a modernised and

mainly urban life-world. The bonds of the community, all based on the extended family, unravel in an urban environment, where people get isolated from each other due to living and working conditions. Nevertheless it is of crucial importance that the moral aspects of *ubuntu* and communalism, and the specific values that are connected with these notions, do not get lost. Their actualisation in philosophy and art can be useful for the endeavour to revitalise them. They can permeate from philosophy and art into other domains of life and be applied in the world of today, also in the domain of management and of organising processes of common work.

My contribution is limited to a short survey of the meaning of *ubuntu* and communalism in philosophy and art, as I do not feel competent to apply it to management or the science of management.

Main philosophical aspects of Ubuntu *and communalism*

If a philosopher trained in the West tries to understand the philosophy incorporated in *ubuntu* thought, s/he will notice that s/he has entered an unfamiliar terrain. The *ubuntu* way of thought differs greatly from what the Western philosopher is accustomed to. However, Tschiamalenga Ntumba's demarcation of African and Western ways of thought along these lines, is too simplistic. He states that African philosophy is a philosophy of 'We' and Western philosophy is a philosophy of 'I' (Ntumba 1985: 83). To reduce *ubuntu* to the saying 'I am because we are', as so frequently happens, is also too schematic. This saying cannot be regarded as a direct African counterpart of Descartes' dictum '*Cogito ergo sum*'. Things are more differentiated. We have to take into account that the 'I', or the person, is becoming increasingly important in African ontology, too. In the West a philosophy of 'We' is not impossible and has emerged as a strong philosophical stream called 'communitarianism', which stresses the meaning of the community. We thus have to look in more detail to the philosophical impact of *ubuntu* and of the African community spirit in order to discover what they can mean in the world of today.

Let me start with Ramose's book *African philosophy through ubuntu*. The discourse of this book is organised around three proverbs, maxims or aphorisms taken from the language of the Northern Sotho. The first aphorism, '*Motho ke motho ka batho*' can be understood as a simplification of *ubuntu*. According to Ramose it expresses the central idea of African *philosophical anthropology*. It means more specifically: 'to be human is to affirm one's humanity by recognising

the humanity of others and, on this basis, establish respectful human relations with them'. In other words, my human-ness is constituted by the human-ness of others, and *vice versa*. And the relations between human beings, other persons and me, are characterised by mutual recognition and respect. The second aphorism, '*Feta kgomo o tshware motho*', says in a condensed formulation: 'if and when one is faced with a decisive choice between [one's own] wealth and the preservation of the life of another human being, then one should opt for the preservation of life'. Hereby a basic principle of *social philosophy* is presupposed: the other ranks higher than I myself, especially when his/her life is in danger. This is due to the fact that life or life force is the highest value, which determines also the relations between human beings. The third maxim is about kingship and expresses a fundamental aspect of *political philosophy*. The formulation of this third maxim, '*Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho*' is very much similar to the first one. It relates kingship like human-ness in general to the humanity of others and demands mutual recognition and respect. In the words of Ramose it means 'that the king owes his status, including all the powers associated with it, to the will of the people under him' (Ramose 1999: 193194, see also 52, 120, 138, 150, and 154).

However, *ubuntu* has aspects that reach further than the contents of these proverbs. It has to be discussed in a comprehensive ontological horizon. It shows how the be-ing of an African person is not only imbedded in the community, but in the universe as a whole. This is primarily expressed in the prefix *ubu*-of the word *ubuntu*. It refers to the universe as be-ing enfolded, containing everything. The stem –*ntu* means the process of life as the unfolding of the universe by concrete manifestations in different forms and modes of being. This process includes the emergence of the speaking and knowing human being. As such this being is called '*umuntu*' or, in the Northern Sotho language, '*motho*', who is able by common endeavours to articulate the experience and knowledge of what *ubu*-is. Thus –*ntu* stands for the epistemological side of be-ing. This is the wider horizon, in which the inter-subjective aspects of *ubuntu* have to be seen. Mutual recognition and respect in the different inter-subjective relations are parts of the process of unfolding of the universe, which encompasses everything, in the speaking and knowing of human beings. This process in itself leads to the forms of inter-subjective relations that have been mentioned above. Ramose underlines the one-ness and the whole-ness of this ongoing process (Ramose 1999: 49-52).

Through this more comprehensive explanation of *ubuntu* in its ontological and epistemological dimension it becomes understandable that *ubuntu* can be regarded as a specific approach to African philosophy in its different disciplines. We have already seen how this is valid for disciplines such as philosophical anthropology, social and political philosophy, and by the same token for ontology and epistemology. Other disciplines, such as metaphysics and philosophy of religion, logic and ethics, philosophy of medicine, philosophy of law and philosophy of economy, including problems of management, are taken into account, as is philosophy of art, although this latter subject is not treated in Ramose's book.

In connection to this new approach to African philosophy, a different use of language is necessary. It has already become clear that *ubu–ntu* is approached 'as a hyphenated word' and that a specific interpretation flows from this way of writing it. The same applies to words such as be-ing, whole-ness or one-ness. The hyphen between the two parts of the words signifies that they have to be understood as processes or in a dynamic sense. So it could be said that *ubuntu* is about human-ness (if the hyphen between human-and – ness is taken in its specific meaning). At any rate it is important not to understand *ubuntu* as an -ism like in the word humanism. Therefore, Ramose criticises the title of the book written by S. and T.M. Samkange: *Hunhuism or Ubuntuism*. According to Ramose these authors, when they speak of 'a Zimbabwe indigenous *political philosophy*', also give a restricted meaning to *ubuntu* (or *hunhu*, which is the word for *ubuntu* in the language of the Shona in Zimbabwe), neglecting the broader dimensions of this notion (Ramose 1999: 51). The suffix -ism indicates 'fragmentative thinking', which gives the general state of affairs with regard to a certain subject-matter. That is not in accordance with *ubuntu* as a whole-ness and a constant flow of be-ing. Ramose aims at a mode of language, in which nouns are also understood as verbs, as they express an ongoing process. He calls this a 'rheomode language', using the Greek word '*rheo*', which means 'to flow', in order to express the specific character of this language. A certain type of logic corresponds with this mode of language. Departing from this, Ramose says: 'The logic of *ubuntu* is distinctly rheomode in character'. He refers in this regard to the book of D. Bohm: *Wholeness and the implicate order*, in which these notions are coined by the 'nature of collective thought' (Bohm 1980 and 2004: 55-69). And he refers to an analogy with famous thinkers of Western philosophical traditions. Firstly, he mentions the thought of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, from coined

the famous saying '*panta rhei*' ('everything flows'). Secondly, he refers to the German idealist Hegel who has worked out a philosophy, in which all things and the human knowledge of them are constantly in a process (Hegel 1977). And thirdly, he points to the American pragmatist Peirce who speaks of a 'universe of change' (Peirce 1958). A specific affinity is stated with the Belgian thinkers Prigogine and Stenger. Their book *Order out of chaos* (1985) expresses the African experience of a 'fundamental instability of be-ing', which leads to the 'ontological and epistemological imperative' to contribute to the forthcoming and stabilising of order as a dynamic equilibrium. To obey this imperative means a persistent search for harmony 'in all spheres of life', especially in the inter-subjective relations (Ramose 1999: 55-60).

The notion of *ubuntu*, *hunhu* or *botha* is particularly in use in Southern Africa. In West and East Africa, we come across the notion of communalism, by which the intersubjective aspects of *ubuntu* are expressed in a similar way, although the more comprehensive philosophical horizon of *ubuntu* is missing here. It is well-known that this notion is used by Leopold S. Senghor, a leader in the struggle for independence and the first President of Senegal, to characterise the specific mode of African socialism. According to Senghor, the traditional African societies show harmonious forms of life without any antagonism of classes, as it is presupposed in the Marxist type of theory. There is an ethics of mutual help and of caring for each other. The absence of private ownership of the land or other means of production leads to inequality among the members of the society. That is the core of what he calls communalism. He points out that a direct way is possible from the communalism of these societies to communism and the classless relations in industrialised socialist societies. This implies that African socialism does not presuppose any dictatorship, as does Marxist theory for the period of transition from class society to communism. It can combine socialist politics with freedom and humane relations between people (Senghor 1964). Theories of this kind can also be connected to other political leaders during the struggle for independence, e.g. Nkrumah from Ghana, Kenyatta from Kenya, Nyerere from Tanzania, Kaunda from Zambia and others (Nkrumah 1970; Kenyatta 1938; Nyerere 1968; Kaunda 1966). The idea of communalism implies a way of decisionmaking which is based on consensus. And the consensus is found through dialogues. In a meeting where political decisions are taken, everybody has to participate and to speak. Julius Nyerere has given a well-known formulation for that: 'We talk until we agree'.

The notion of communalism is criticised by different authors as an idealisation of traditional life in African communities. The most fervent criticism is formulated by V.G. Simiyu, a Kenyan political scientist. He speaks of 'the democratic myth in the African traditional societies'. He makes clear that hate and struggle were not unknown in these societies. Moreover, to presuppose one and the same structure everywhere, proves to be a too simplistic way of speaking about traditional social life in Africa. Simiyu refers to the book of the British cultural anthropologists M. Fortes and E. Evans-Pritchard, which shows that *African political systems* are diverse, ranging from highly authoritarian types of government in the old kingdom of Congo to strictly egalitarian societies with the Gikuyu in Central Kenya (Simiyu 1987; see also Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1970).

What remains true of the communalist ideas is that among the members of the extended families and villages in traditional African societies mutual help was and is a widespread trait of social life. It could be formulated best in a negative way, namely that a member of a family or a village who is in great existential difficulties will not be left alone. Somebody will be there to help or to show a way out of the predicament. And with regard to the different forms of government it can be said that all of them are measured in terms of whether they function for the well-being of the people in the long run. In this sense a democratic intention can be found in them.

Tschiamalenga Ntumba, a philosopher from the Democratic Republic of Congo, has done linguistic research to show that there is a prevailing role of the community in African theory and practice. He gives striking examples from the Lingala-language as to how people use the notion 'we' in many, and, for Western ears, unexpected ways. The answer to the question: 'How is your son developing', can be: 'We are studying at Kinshasa University', and the question: 'How is your wife doing?' can be answeredas follows: 'We have died last month'. As the word for 'we' or 'us' in Lingala is '*biso*', he confronts the '*bisoité*' of African thought, which is expressed in this language, with the '*moité*' of Western thought, as it is expressed in the French language. In a final conclusion he states a 'dialectical primacy of the We over the I-You' in the Lingala language and in African thought as a whole. Here again it seems that Ntumba is guilty of an overstatement when he says that African thought is based exclusively on 'we' or 'us' and Western thought on 'I' and 'me'. At least he is not aware of existing Western philosophies of 'we', and of the emergence of communitarianism as a rather strong current in

Western philosophical debates (Kimmerle 1983; Tietz 2002; Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 2002).

Joseph Nyasani from Kenya builds his theory on Ntumba's basic assumptions. He shows that not only the living members of a family or a village are joined together in a community by a language of 'we' and a feeling of 'we', but also those who have passed away and who are present as spirits. Nyasani quotes from the book of E.A. Ruch from South Africa and K.C Anyanwu from Nigeria on *African philosophy* (Nyasani 1981: 143):

The whole African society, living and living-dead, is a living network of relations almost like that between the various parts of an organism. When one part of the body is sick the whole body is affected. When one member of a family or clan is honoured or successful, the whole group rejoices and shares in the glory, not only psychologically (as one would rejoice when the local soccer team has won a match), but ontologically: each member of the group is really part of the honour.

According to Nyasani, even those who have not yet been born belong to the spiritual whole of the community. The 'we' of the living members of the community are part of a flow of life that is passing through them from the past to the future (Nyasani 1989: 13-25, see also 14-15).

Although Nyasani does not deny the autonomy of the individual person within the society, and especially not 'the responsibility for his own misdeeds' (Nyasani 1989: 14 and 22), Kwame Gyekye from Ghana puts much more emphasis on the role and the importance of the individual person. To a certain extent this can be attributed to their different positions in East and in West Africa. But Gyekye also argues against 'the advocates of the ideology of African socialism' from West and East Africa 'such as Nkrumah, Senghor and Nyerere'. The conception of Gyekye is not so much based on language in general, nor on the demands of a political struggle, but on proverbs and on conversations with sages. He departs from the Akan-proverb: 'All persons are children of God, no one is a child of the earth'. He explains that the 'innermost self' of each and every person, called '*okra*' by the Akan, is something divine, and as such forms the essence of his or her individuality. In other words: each person is unique, because each '*okra*' is unique. Another Akan-proverb says: 'When a person descends from heaven, he/she descends into a human society'. This means that 'the human person is conceived as originally born into a human society, and therefore as a social being

right from the outset' (Gyekye 1989: 47-63, see also 49 and 53).

In his later book on *Tradition and modernity*, Gyekye has criticised a too strong subsumption of the individual person under the community in African thought in general, especially because of the predominant orientation to the past inherent in the endeavour to act in accordance with the spirits of the ancestors. If something is right just because the ancestors have always done it that way, the present is dominated by the past. According to Gyekye, the openness for new events, for tasks of the future is consequently not adequately developed. He regards it as important to act in accordance with the habits of the community and with the opinions and rules of the fathers and forefathers. But he warns that this must and need not lead to a principally backward orientation. Comparing Western communitarianism and its social and ethical dimensions, as it is worked out by Charles Taylor or Will Kymlicka, with a personal attitude towards the tasks of the future, as he would prefer it for Africa, Gyekye defends a 'moderate communitarianism' against any of its more radical forms. And he concludes that he wants to advocate 'a life lived in harmony and cooperation with others, a life of mutual consideration and aid and of interdependence', but at the same time 'a life that provides a viable framework for the fulfilment of the individual's nature and potentials' (Gyekye 1997: 35-76, see 75-76; cf. Taylor 1992; Kymlicka 2002).

In the notions of *ubuntu* and communalism the African community spirit is epitomised. The meaning of these notions shows that there is a high estimation of the community in African thought and practice, higher than that of the individual, but not at the cost of forgetting the individual person. A person is a person in the community and through the others of his or her community. This implies a culture of mutual help, of caring for each other and sharing with each other. This is not only expressed in the African languages; it is also practised by talking to each other, by means of dialogues. Of course, this culture should not be understood in an idealised way. But in spite of struggles between members of a community, envy and hatred, every member can rely on support from somebody of the extended family when in serious trouble or in danger of life.

Ubuntu *and communalism in African art*

K.C. Anyanwu from Nigeria, whom I have already mentioned, writes in his article 'The idea of art in African thought' that the universe as a whole is 'sound'. Like in the unfolding of *ubu*-by *–ntu*, the cosmic sound is taken over and differentiated on earth. The human beings participate in this process of continuing the cosmic

sound on earth and of answering it by making it explicit. The most prominent answer to the music of the universe is dance. Dancing is participating in the vibration of all that is and giving expression to it in a common as well as in a personal manner. That is the realm for a comprehensive esthetical interpretation of the world in African thought. And the esthetical approach is closely related to ethics and to all forms of behaviour. A good action has to be a beautiful action as well, showing some elegance. The concept that connects aesthetics and ethics is that of harmony. Besides music and dancing, oral literature and story telling, wood-carving and other forms of sculpturing are important expressions of a thoroughly esthetical worldview (Anyanwu 1987).

The philosophical impact of oral literature is made obvious most of all by Sophie B. Oluwole, who teaches philosophy in Nigeria. She gives an interpretation of Yoruba aphorisms and short poetical texts. Among others she interprets the following poem:
Cutting alone, cutting alone,
The axe cannot cut alone,
Splitting alone, splitting alone,
The wedge cannot split alone;

Without the Erelu,[1]
Osugbo cult cannot operate.

Oluwole underlines that the English translation of the text cannot transmit the original specificity and the full poetical expression of the text. Again language turns out to be of crucial importance for the understanding of an African world-view. In the structure of the poem we can recognise some formal elements such as frequent repetition and an unexpected climax. However, some ideas become clear: working together is necessary in a community. In questions of public relevance especially the contribution of the women cannot be missed. 'Osugbo' is a secret organisation with the Ijebu, a subgroup of the Yoruba, which has executive government functions. That they need women representatives says something about the understanding of democracy in this group. In the process of decision-making cooperation and participation of all, women included, are necessary. Oluwole summarises the general meaning of the poem, which is not restricted to some kind of technical cooperation, by quoting a proverb: 'The bird does not fly with one wing' (Oluwole 1997: 36-9). This can be regarded as a basic principle of African social philosophy.

In another context, Oluwole quotes two texts from the Ifa-Corpus of oracular poems, which I cannot give here in full length. They deal with problems of the community. The first one expresses 'the hypothesis that the adults and the youth have complementary qualities and responsibilities to each other'. And the second one stresses the individuality of things and of persons, not only men, but also women. In this connection, the text 'explicitly states that the ideal family is monogamous'. It relates extensively how 'any additional wife is an additional problem to the home'. Here Oluwole defends the ideal of monogamy against misinterpretations of the fact that there is 'no law against polygamy' and that polygamy is practised in many African societies. According to her, we must not confuse 'an African social practice with African philosophical ideas', as they are expressed in the Ifa-poems (Oluwole 1999: 89-91 and 94-95).

We also find the expression of the African community spirit in many works of wood carving and other forms of sculpturing. I will give four examples here (photos by the author):

Four examples – Photos by author

They have been selected to illustrate different aspects of what I have described as the contents of *ubuntu* and communalism. Example 3.1 is a Makonde from an area in the Southeast of Tanzania. (It is owned by the Foundation for Intercultural Philosophy and Art, Zoetermeer.) It shows a tower of people, carved from a piece of wood, which is somewhat bent and thus shows the tension and the suppleness of life in a community. Every person needs the others and they need him/her. So

together they form a whole, in which specificity and individuality are not lacking. Example 3.2 is a wooden mask, carved by Bangboye from Nigeria. It represents a family and it shows in particular 'someone who has lived to see his own great-great-grandchildren' (Willet 1993: 2467). The old man is highly appreciated, and he can enjoy witnessing how his life force is going through generations. The third example (3.3) is again a Makonde, but it shows the specific form of life in community, namely a mother with her children. (This piece is also owned by the Foundation referred to.) The continuous support of the mother for the children gives her an especially high value. This relation is the core of the family and of the society. A proverb of the Chewa in Malawi says: 'Mother is God number two' (Schipper 1991: 38). The father lives at a certain distance from this core community. Finally, example 3.4 is a sculpture from stone, made by Chenjerai Chiripanyanga from Nigeria, called 'Polygamy'. (It is owned by the Gallery 'Chiefs and Spirits' in The Hague.) It gives a different perspective on this social practice in Africa from that of the Ifa-Corpus and its interpretation by Oluwole. It is obviously not seen in a critical, but rather in an affirmative way. It may be that we have to conclude that the relation of men and women in the family is changing in the African communities of today. Old practices and new ideas exist side by side.

These four examples make clear (1) that the individual person is dependent on and embedded in the community; (2) that the flow of life goes through the generations of a family and that this is part of the 'joy of being'; (3) that the core of the community is the family, which has at its centre the role and the position of the mother who represents more clearly than anything else the principle of 'caring is sharing'; and (4) that polygamy can be seen as being in accordance with the African community spirit and the social climate of mutual recognition and respect. These are expressions of African thought and African experience, which can illustrate important aspects of *ubuntu* and communalism as we have pointed them out above.

Conclusion

In an article on 'The ethics of *ubuntu*', Ramose deals with '*ubuntu* through the family'. Here he seconds the view of the artist, which is different from that of Oluwole's interpretation of the Ifa-poem. He makes clear that for *ubuntu* love is not the only 'basis of the family'. It plays an important role between the partners, 'but is not necessarily decisive for the formation of the family'. It is embedded in the broader connection of 'mutual care and sharing'. Therefore, 'marriage here

need not be monogamous'. This is 'one of the practices' which is implicated in '*ubuntu* philosophy'. There is an obvious tension with regard to the practice and the main ideas of marriage and the relation between men and women in Africa and in the Western world.

Another aspect of *ubuntu*, which seems problematic in a modernising environment, is the urge for employed members of the family 'to make it possible for other family members to find employment'. That leads to the 'charge of nepotism', which is also often heard on the political level. Ramose admits that this traditional African custom is in line with *ubuntu* 'from one point of view, but invites criticism from another'. If we look at the political level, whereas the African 'community is constituted by a network of interrelated families', the practice of nepotism 'invites the criticism of ethnocentricity'. A solution might be found, according to Ramose, by taking into consideration that 'the right to subsistence' and the priority of family relations must not be defended 'by way of denying the same right to others' who are independent from family obligations (Ramose 2003: 329). Of course, nepotism does not only occur on the political level, but also in the economic sphere and in modern work relations. The argument of Ramose is valid here in the same way.

This argumentation makes us understand that *ubuntu* cannot be interpreted easily from outside. In the same article Ramose explicitly criticises the book of Augustine Shutte, *Ubuntu: An ethic for a new South Africa*, because this author 'approaches the question of *ubuntu* ethics from the point of view of the stranger to *ubuntu*'. He 'is looking at *ubuntu* and interpreting it from the point of view of a "European" with an influential Christian background' (Ramose 2003: 326-7). The cultural differences between African and European opinions in this field are not so easy to bridge. In this matter, it is necessary to apply the 'methodology of listening', which I have recommended for intercultural philosophical dialogues in general. This methodology also implies that even after long and patient endeavours not everything in a different culture can be fully understood.

The project of intercultural philosophy means in the first place that we have to listen, to listen for a long time, how in the philosophy of a different culture answers to certain

questions and reactions to certain of our arguments are articulated. Listening has to be learned; it requires openness, concentration, discipline and a methodical

technique. Listening is art, just as understanding that comes much later (Kimmerle 1991: 8; cf. 1994: 124-8).

Of course, a critical attitude is not excluded by that. If we want to learn from *ubuntu* and to work with *ubuntu* principles, we have to try to behave in the spirit of these principles in our own cultural environment with its specific conditions. That means that we must not look for a direct application, but where necessary, for a transformation of the practical outcome of a deeper understanding of the leading principles.

By interpreting *ubuntu* and communalism in African philosophy and art, an aspect of the second of the three themes for dialogues between African and Western philosophies mentioned at the beginning of this article, is worked out in more detail. I have given a more specific shape to the general trait of the African community spirit. But we must also keep in mind how this theme is intertwined with the other two: the basic notion of vital force and the belief in spirits. Human persons are part of a universal interplay of forces through the communities in which they live, and they are in close and permanent connection with the spiritual world of those who have passed away and those who are yet to be born.

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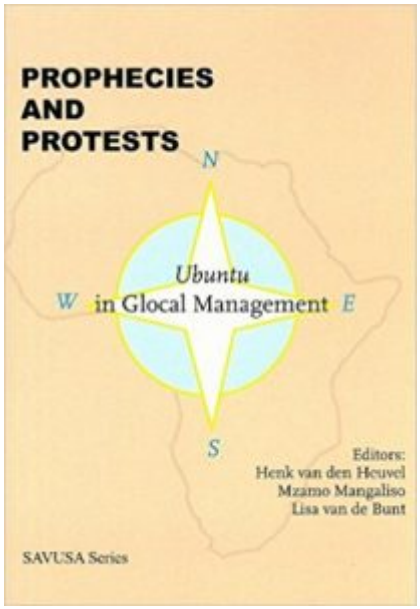
Prophecies And Protests ~ The Scope For Arab And Islamic Influences On An Emerging

‘Afrocentric Management’



Abstract

As there is in the global world of management a diversity of cultures and differing norms of behaviour so there is more than one ‘culture of management’: yet little attention has been paid to the ethical and philosophical bases of other paradigms than those with which we in Western business schools are familiar.

Where other philosophical and ethical systems are encountered, they are apt to be dismissed with the discourse of ‘traditionalism’ or ‘underdevelopment’, or stigmatized as inconsistent with the requirements of business efficiency. Many of these systems of ethics are embodied in cultural traditions that are, in origin, older than those of Western capitalism, yet in contemporary societies these may be evolving and transmuting radically, so it may be incorrect and unhelpful to see these economic systems as deviant cases or as unsuccessful attempts to reproduce Western modalities.

This paper draws on extensive research by the author and colleagues in the contemporary Arab world to identify the values under-pinning management in the Near East, Middle East and North Africa, and to analyze the opportunities for corresponding styles of leadership and management in certain regions of Africa. We suggest that these Islamic values may exert a growing influence on the emerging ‘Afro centric’ models in the Twenty-first century.

It is not claimed that these models of management are especially relevant for African conditions, but they may be and that is for scholars and business-people more familiar with Africa to determine. But it is to argue that they should be more widely understood and studied as a counter-weight to the pervading emphasis on the hegemonic models derived from the historically-specific legacies of the western and colonialist worlds.

In the first section we review the background to management in the region, in the second we review relevant research frameworks and findings, in the third section we focus on the defining elements of Islam as this relates to business, then we examine the impact of modernity and in the final section we discuss some future trends of especial import for emerging paradigms of management in Africa.

The Middle World

A well-known saying among the Bedouin of the Middle East goes as follows: 'It is written: the path to power leads through the palace, the road to riches lies through the market, but the track to wisdom goes through the desert'. In the West and especially in business schools we tend to assume that we have the best maps to all of these three routes, and that they lead to places we already know about. So the paradigms of management on which we base our instruction in these academies are those with which we are already familiar. But we may be wrong in these assumptions for in fact we know very little about the Arab and Islamic worlds and their special ways of managing and their different approaches to money and wealth (Weir 1998). We also know rather little about 'African' styles and patterns of management; though hopefully this book will do something to redress that balance. Nonetheless what counts as 'management' in most of the pedagogic and research literature with which we are in principle familiar is in fact derived from what we know about Western management and business and from what we have learned about our varied attempts to introduce those models into other contexts. Thus we tend to problematise the issues that arise from these ventures at intellectual colonisation and to hold the Western models as 'normal'.

Indeed, perhaps because Africa experienced the impact of European colonialism more directly than the Middle East, scholars in the West tend to know more about Africa than they do about the Middle East. To the Middle East let us heuristically add the largely Muslim lands of North and West Africa and we have defined a region that I will call for the purposes of this exposition the 'Middle World'. This is a region that impacts on Sub-Saharan Africa in many ways.

That is not to imply that there is a simplistic type of cultural development that is exclusively 'Arab' or 'Islamic' or even 'African' but to try and roughly delineate a domain in which these strands of management and cultural thought continuously combine in a complex, dynamic process that will undoubtedly emerge into some pattern that is recognisable sui generis but will nonetheless also contain elements whose history and specific evolution will mark their origins. Therefore we must

not essentialise these strands any more than we should essentialise ‘management’ in the recognisably Anglo-American patternings that frame much of management ducation in the Western world.

The interpenetration of inter- and intra-continental histories vastly predates modern times. Now we have some new beginnings in Africa; and we also have some old legacies. Some but not all implicate Western management philosophies and practice and we need to generously expand our models the better to comprehend the scale of the historical opportunity. Some analyses relating to Africa are based on the discourse of ‘development’; some on the geo-political certainties that guide our political strategies; some on the presumed historical inevitability of the economics of ‘globalisation’. But usually the underlying models of development are drawn from Western models and mirror Western expectations.

The West has its own ideas about Africa and in contemporary debate these often problematise the post-colonial features of African life and society. But the Arab experience of Africa and Africa’s experience of its neighbours to the North and East together comprise a much wider and continuously inter-penetrating history. Colonialism is a minor eruption on the broad skin of African-Arab interaction, and Islam is and has been in many ways even more influential over a longer period in this continent than Christianity. Sometimes this emphasis on the peculiarly Western experience of Africa has led to historically inept theorizing, even to moralizing. Thus, the West, and Britain and the USA in particular, tends to accept a unique collective blame for the evils of slavery, while most scholars agree that slavery was both an Arab and an indigenous phenomenon long before the Western powers entered the scene. Sometimes it is arguable that in some ways Western writers and researchers have almost feared to study the Arab ways of doing business and have implicitly shared in the common perception of the Arab as the ‘dangerous other’ (see for instance, Weir 2005b).

It is not clear that either Africa or the Middle World must follow the paths to economic development prescribed by Western institutions or favoured by Western scholars. Thus the analyses of such scholars as Bernard Lewis may miss the mark. In loudly declaiming the ‘failure’ of the Arab world to modernise at the same rate and in the same way as European and American exemplars of development in such tracts as ‘What went wrong?’, Lewis and his collaborators are eschewing the plausible explanation that these societies may not be on the same tracks to the same destinations (Lewis 2002). Most economies in the world plan to ‘grow’; but

it does not follow that all will do it in the same way. Every major economic culture sustains in its business activity and management practices a recognisable pattern of beliefs and processes that relates in a functional and supportive way to the generic culture in which it is embedded. Management has to lie within its culture rather than to be in opposition to the main trends of thought in the major axes of societal configuration.

In this paper we introduce some of the basic cultural features underpinning the values supporting management in the Middle World. Despite the fact that this world stretches from the Mauretanian coast of West Africa at least until the Straits of Hormuz which mark the limits of continental Arabia, and impacts directly on all the European, Balkan and Turkic countries of the Mediterranean basin, management and business practices in this region remain a relatively understudied phenomenon. (see for example Weir 2000a). Recent American policy pronouncements about 'The Greater Middle East' imply a growing comprehension in Washington about the geo-strategic significance of the region. But our focus should not only be on what is occurring in or adjacent to the Arabian peninsula for it is Africa that constitutes in many respects the largest element of this 'Middle World' and there are more Muslims in Africa than in the Arab heartlands.

But while the impact of this region on the global economy is increasingly significant management practice within it has been relatively little studied until recently. The analysis in this paper is based on research over the past thirty years by the author and collaborators including many of my doctoral students to whom I owe an inestimable debt. These studies have been carried out in the whole region including Saudi Arabia, the other Gulf co-operation Council states, Iraq, the Maghreb countries including Algeria and Libya, as well as in Palestine, Jordan and Yemen (Weir 2000a).

These regions are diverse and generalizations about such diversity are inevitably dangerous. But there is a clear sense in which the countries of the Middle World are in several key respects culturally homogeneous, due to the cultural dominance of a unifying religion, Islam. Over the world as a whole, Islam accounts for approximately 20 per cent of the world's believers and is becoming increasingly prominent in other regions, not least in Europe and the USA. But we do not argue and it would be facile to do so, that what we describe as 'Islam' exists or operates in precisely the same way to influence patterns of general culture or specific management practices in every place where Muslims are to be

found. But there are some unifying features and it does claim to be a universal religion.

Some common features frame the experience of these countries of the Middle World, including as well as the religious framework of Islam, the Bedouin, Touareg and tribal ancestry of many peoples in the region, the experience of foreign rule, repeated and continuing foreign intervention and attempts to control the access to oil and natural resources in the region that have led to rapid economic development in certain parts. But these elements are by no means of equal impact in the historically specific experience of all countries in this region. (Chennoufi and Weir 2000; Weir 2000b). It is not our intention to over-generalise or to claim the universality of any of historical paradigm but to review some features of the economic and business models of the Middle World that may have special relevance for an emerging 'Afrocentric' management.

Some Arab countries are not oil-rich and not all have had the same experience of foreign domination. In particular, there are strong differences between the largely French and Spanish influence on the lands of the Maghreb and the largely British influenced Near and Middle East. Moreover, while the creation and growth of the state of Israel since 1948 is of considerable political and ideological significance for all these states, its economic impact is more relevant to some than to others.

Recent research based on empirical studies has permitted the development of new typological frameworks. The widespread impact of investment in education and training and the strong emphasis on management development permeates the Arab world, particularly, but by no means exclusively, in the oil-rich areas exposed to Western influence. In some states in the Gulf, the spur to research has come through the political requirement of 'nationalization', the replacement of expatriate managers with nationals.

Many countries in the region, particularly around the Arabian Gulf, tend to have highly trained managerial cadres. Lifelong learning is an implicit expectation, not an imposed obligation. The apparently restrictive requirements of Islamic finance and banking have not hindered economic development in countries like Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Leadership control through close supervision and an absence of delegation have not inhibited effective performance. There is currently a strong emphasis in Jordan in particular on the

role of women and on support for entrepreneurial development and assistance for family-owned businesses. Although the Middle world shares many problems and issues with the West and with Europe, as well as with the USA, considerable evidence is building up that Arab management in particular will present a 'fourth paradigm' and is sui generis. The Fourth Paradigm is a characterisation of the management styles and processes in the Arab world that distinguishes it from those practised in the Anglo-American, Japanese and European organisations (see Weir 1998). It is by no means our intention to minimise the differences that certainly exist within this paradigm, nor to imply that these are insignificant, but to paint a broad picture of an overall reality that is in many ways quite distinct from the predominant Western models that form the basis of most business school teaching.

Comparative research frameworks

Some of the research into comparative management styles and inter-cultural comparisons has been stimulated by Hofstede's typology (1991) which provides a widely-understood framework; Hickson and Pugh (1995) have also examined Arab styles and cultures of management. We review these contributions briefly. They are of course generated within the largely Western traditions of comparative management research and have not been built up hermeneutically from within the traditions of scholarship and research that prevail in the region. They are views from outside Plato's cave, not from the shadow-watchers within. The interpretation of the patterns described by Hofstede and others is not necessarily un-contentious. It is not always clear that like is being compared with like or that Hofstede's dimensions are capable of simple cross-cultural translation.

Hofstede is concerned with differences among cultures at national level and the consequences of these national cultural differences for the ways in which organizations are structured and managers behave. His basic typology deals with a number of dimensions: the way in which individuals relate to society and handle problems of social inequality, the relationships between individuals and groups, concepts of masculinity and femininity, and ways of dealing with social and interpersonal uncertainty relating to the control of aggression and the expression of emotions. The countries from which his Arab sample was drawn include Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. He claims that these findings 'demonstrate that the Muslim faith plays a significant role in the people's lives'.

In specific terms the Arab States typically score highly on the power/distance index. Societies of this kind are characterized as those in which skill, wealth, power and status go together and are reinforced by a cultural view that they should go together. Power is based on family, friends, charisma and the ability to use force. Theories of politics which are influential in Arab countries stress the need for power and leadership and the requirements for decisive action in civil as well as in military society. But absolute power, while it undoubtedly exists in some nations in the region, is not universally admired as a value by managers and professionals who recognise that power needs to be exercised with restraint.

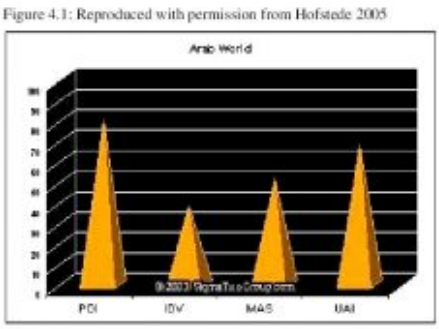


Figure 4.1: Reproduced with permission from Hofstede 2005

In terms of individualism and collectivism, Arab societies, according to Hofstede, rank in the middle of the individualism index. They are moderately masculine, but there are strong sex role distinctions and the role of women is clearly identified as lying within the family domain. In terms of uncertainty avoidance – the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations – the Arab countries again fall between the extreme positions. They are not frightened of other cultures, nor do they wish to become assimilated to them. The Arab countries are classified as moderately oriented towards the avoidance of uncertainty. They undoubtedly also stress the importance of family and kin relations. These dimensions are clearly different from the comparative scores for the world as a whole.

This fundamental characterization points in the minds of many Western commentators to the importance of tradition in Arab culture. Others have argued that the fundamental matrix of Arab social organisation is essentially hierarchical and neo-patriarchal representing in some sense a facsimile of the family and kin

structures which permeate Arab society (see Sharabi 1988). Empirical research largely supports this conclusion. Sulieman, for example, in a study of Iraqi managers, points to the influence of family and kin relations in understanding the Arab manager's use of time and the organization of the working day. Where a close family member appears at the office of even quite a senior manager, it is regarded as improper for the demands of organisational hierarchy to take precedence over the obligations due to family and kin (Sulieman 1984). Hickson and Pugh identify four primary influences over Arabs in general and over management in the Arab world. These derive from the Bedouin and wider tribal inheritance, the religion of Islam, the experience of foreign rule, and the impact of oil and the dependence of Western Europe on the oil-rich Arab states and their distorted economies (Hickson and Pugh 1995).

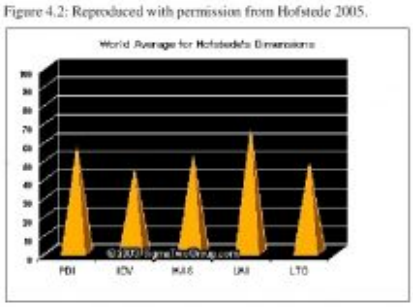


Figure 4.2: Reproduced with permission from Hofstede 2005

These four influences are also mediated by the experience of urbanization, which ranges from the extremes of Cairo, one of the world's oldest continuously occupied cities, to the city states of Dubai and Abu Dhabi which have been created by the sudden increase in prosperity due to the enormous riches of the oil boom.

The Bedouin influence, with its emphasis on the patriarchal family structure, can be seen in the structure of many organisations in the region in which which top-down authority is the norm. In these systems, legitimate authority rests ultimately on the apparently absolute power of the chief person, the Sheikh, who none the less must take account of tribal or organisational opinion in all his decisions.

This structure represents a classical matrix of authority that is still evident in many Arab organisations. But it is modified in particular by the widespread use of

expatriate managers in many of the GFF countries. These managers are often of Western or Indian sub-continental origin. The actual senior line management in a specific organisation may be headed by an expatriate, usually though not invariably by an Indian; but behind and above this formal position stands a power that is ultimately that of the 'Sheikh' whose authority is super-ordinate over the management systems and structures. Sometimes the exact location of this power is opaque, and not clearly related to formal patterns of ownership, but it is there. The structures may in some cases be virtual, but the power relations are real and influential. A 'Sheikh' may not be a permanent status as the possession of relevant authority may be context-dependent.

That is not to say that all business organisations are readily identifiable as 'Sheikhocracies', to use Dadfar's terminology. Nonetheless those who hold power in one context may be assumed to be influential in other contexts also. This 'classical' Bedouin structure is characterized as 'Bedouocracy' or 'Sheikhocracy' by Dadfar (1993), a typology based on an overview of empirical research in Syria, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, and based principally on the Hickson and Pugh approach. The field studies generated 112 variables which were resolved into a number of socio-cultural dimensions. These included: macrocosmic perception, microcosmic perception, familism, practicality, determinism, time horizon, Western lifestyle, Western techniques and technology, and male/female equality. Dadfar relates these value systems to Arab personality types to create a profile intended to characterize the diverse managerial behaviours found in the Arab world.

Dadfar's work is unusual in that it is based on a considerable volume of data and sophisticated data analysis. It demonstrates the inadequacy of many of the simplistic previous accounts of Arab management styles in terms of 'traditionalism', 'conservatism', 'autocracy' and the like. I argue with Dadfar that the discourses of 'traditionalism' and 'conservatism' that are often encountered in Western typifications of the cultures of these regions are misleading; the reality is too complex to be captured by the simple antithesis of 'Western/modern/secular' with 'Arab/traditional/religious'. One of the major empirical studies of management in the region was undertaken by MEIRC, published as The Making Of Gulf Managers (Muna 1989). 140 managers were interviewed in 53 different organisations. The authors identified five main ingredients for success among managers in the Gulf States: a good educational headstart, early exposure to

successful role-models, early responsibilities in the home or around it, the importance of an ethical system which puts a high value on hard work and commitment, and the need to take one's own initiatives in self-development. The study confirms the findings of more impressionistic studies that indicate that Gulf managers prefer a consultative decision-making process.

A striking finding of the MEIRC report and of other studies is the perceived importance of education and training among managers in the Arab world. Organisations in the Gulf countries spend three times as much money and time on their management development every year as do their counterparts in the UK. A larger proportion of managers in the Gulf hold university degrees and indeed postgraduate qualifications in comparison with their counterparts in the USA, UK, France, Germany or Japan. Many organisations had formal career development systems and professional development programmes. These are not recent developments but represent trends that have been visible for some time (Al Hashemi and Najjar 1989).

Managers in the Gulf region are positive towards management training. The MEIRC study concluded that Gulf managers appear to be much better balanced than their Western counterparts in terms of work and family. Personality profiles show managers to be very similar as a population to Western managers, tending to be doers rather than thinkers and planners. Arab managers are adept at working in multinational environments. They revel in the kind of work culture that fosters good interpersonal skills and the techniques of relating well to others. Shared values are important to the managers and they value explicit corporate cultures based in ethical principles. Other studies show a strong emphasis on Western-type management development and training practices as characteristic of the more sophisticated companies in Jordan (Abu-Doleh and Weir 1997).

Managers in Arab countries share a belief in the positive value of change. This is unsurprising because they have experienced more rapid change in their own lifetime than most managers elsewhere in the world. But they are prepared to move up the learning curve at a brisk rate, embracing such contemporary practices as TQM wholeheartedly (Medhat Ali 1998). As managers, they share many behaviours and attitudes with their professional peers in other cultures (Hala Sabri 1995).

These expressions of value do not sit well with the discourse of 'traditionalism'

and ‘conservatism’ applied by Western writers like Lewis or even with the critique of Sharabi and others that the Middle World is characterised by ‘neo-patriarchy’. (Sharabi 1988). Sharabi has argued that there is a burning need for the Arab world to create its own discourse of modernism to cope with the failures to modernise.

Arab managers nonetheless tend to perceive themselves as well-trained, professional, and in a quite explicit sense as ‘modern’. Neither, though, is there any overt cynicism or duplicity in the expressed desires of younger, well-qualified, professional managers to assimilate the practices of efficient management to the cultural matrix of their own societies and up-bringing. Their expressed interest in concepts like ‘democracy’ does not imply, either, that there is equal enthusiasm for the whole apparatus of Western cultural expression that, in the West, is often taken to be co-terminous with ‘democratic values’.

Islam

Among the prime influences on this region and its cultural matrix are the beliefs and practices of Islam, which is the religion of the majority of inhabitants in this region, and the official religion of most of the political entities. But Islam itself is a complex religious system, with many variations on an apparently uniform pattern of basic beliefs and behaviours. In principle though, the similarities are more significant than the internal differences, for Islam is seen as a universal matrix.

The Arab and the Islamic worlds do not map exactly. The Arab world is not entirely (though it is now largely) Muslim and the largest Islamic countries are not Arabic. But the geographical Arabia is the epi-centre of the Muslim faith and the location of its most holy places, including Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem.

In principle Islam represents a pattern of behaviours and beliefs that affect the whole of human life, no segment being exempt. This is a fundamental tenet of the faith that is explored in detail in terms of its implications for economic behaviour in a comprehensive treatment by Abbas Ali (Ali 2005). Thus to a believer, economic and business life are governed by precepts which can be known and ought to be followed. In principle also, although there are people who know more of religion and whose studies and experience make their views of especial importance, Islam does not depend on any intermediary roles like those of priests or monks to intercede between humans and God. The duties of the Faith are laid equally on all believers and are nonnegotiable. Islam is a universalizing religion

though not necessarily a proselytizing one in the same sense as the Christian missionary churches.

Abuznaid provides a concise review of the Islamic values related to managerial practice in the occupied territories of Palestine that in some respects represents a more secular life-style than in the Gulf Co-operation Council states for instance (Abuznaid 1994).

The 'Five Pillars of Islam' are well-known:
– The Testimony of Faith;
– The Duty of Prayer;
– The Requirement to provide Zakat for the needy;
– The Duty of Fasting during the Holy month of Ramadan;
– The Obligation to make the Hajj or pilgrimage to the Holy Places of Mecca.

These practical obligations contain the structural foundations of the ethical basis of all behaviour for a believer including the beliefs and practices of management and business life. While they may be detailed and specified by subsequent interpretations, behaviours which are incompatible with these foundations cannot be 'halal' or acceptable; they are 'haram' or unacceptable. Their strength is in their simplicity and incorrigibility; these fundamental principles are universally adhered to by all believers. Thus they condition the content of belief and practice in all areas of life and the distinction in Western philosophy between the 'secular' and the 'sacred' does not obtain in these societies for in principle there is understood to be a common texture to all social life and there is a basic ethical framework for business and administration which differentiates management in Arab countries from that in the West.

Islam does not separate religious and state authority in the way that appears normal in such countries as France in the more culturally diverse West. Even revisionist scholars like Tariq Ramadan start from this fundamental presupposition (Ramadan 2001). In the extreme case of scholars and activists like bin Laden the more extreme demand is made that these two dimensions of religious and political authority should be united in a new version of the caliphate (bin Laden 2005: 121) but these are highly contentious theories to which possibly only a few Muslim subscribe. One of the great paradoxes of the Islamic world at present is that the heartlands of faith, the holy places of the religion are mainly located in the Arabian peninsula in the Saudi kingdom that is dominated by an

especially dogmatic and severe version of the faith, the Wahabi strain. Another is that the city of Jerusalem, regarded as the third holiest place of Islam is currently occupied by the state of Israel. One of the ironic features of the recent Western invasion of Iraq in pursuit of 'Islamic terrorism' was that Iraq was one of the very few countries in the region that had espoused a secular constitution. It has been an apparently unintentional consequence of Western policy to successfully Islamicise a national resistance movement.

Above all, Islam is a religion of practice and publicly visible behaviours, rather than of private inner belief. It seems to be quite possible for a person who prays five times a day to announce that 'I am not religious' and for this to be understood. The public manifestations of business and management are equally as much governed by the precepts of this belief-system as any other sphere of behaviour. No aspect of public or private life is exempt.

The unity of Islamic involvement is expressed in the concept of the '*Ummah*' which identifies the community of all believers who are in practice joined as they touch the ground during prayer. The *Ummah* is universal and indivisible, representing in a real sense a 'body' in which the individuals who believe inhere. Thus to attack the *Ummah* at any one point implies damaging all of it. This idea clearly posits a different positioning for individuals in relation to other individuals in a collectivity compared to the Western conceptualisation of individuals as ends of moral actions in their own right. Personal value comes from participation in the *Ummah*, rather than from individual essence or original natural rights.

This conceptualisation impacts quite directly on the presuppositions which underly the differing bases of economic science in the West and in the Islamic worlds. Economics is treated in the former as a division of positive science in which the units, the economic actors, are individuals; it is they who have tastes, wants, desires and can express demand and offer supply; it is these specific actions which can be particularized and identified as 'economic'. In the latter, economic actions are governed by the implacable philosophy of Islam which applies to all social behaviour; some actions are permitted and are '*halal*', others are not permitted and are stigmatized as '*haram*'.

The antecedents of some of the theories and philosophies which affect the practice of management in the Arab Middle East therefore are not in practice drawn exclusively, if at all, from the classical Western traditions. Some concepts

which appear to carry the same implications as in Western usage derive from different intellectual contexts. Mubarak has shown how even such a familiar concept as ‘motivation’ can be traced to the corpus of Islamic scholarship and located in the writings of Ghazali and Ibn Khaldun as well as Maslow, Herzberg and Taylor (Mubarak 1998).

So even where words like ‘motivation’, ‘leadership’, ‘incentives’, ‘management’ and so on are used in discourse the context and connotation may be different from Western usage. In Africa also as Mangaliso and others have shown, the discourse of management has to negotiate its way among a range of folk and social belief systems that do not necessarily derive from Western values (Mangaliso 2001).

A growing corpus of researches reports on the impact of Islamic imperatives, some of them formally embodied in law, on the practice of business and management. A specialized subset of these concerns is represented by the studies of Islamic banking and financial institutions. These are characterized by differing accounting and financial concepts from those that form the basis of Western financial and accounting theory; in particular, the avoidance of interest on financial capital. This is rooted in a basic moral concern to avoid usury (see for more detailed explanations Shubber 2000 and Ramadan 2001).

The basic ideas of Islamic finance are simple and non-contentious among Muslims. They can be summed up as follows:

– Any predetermined payment over and above the actual amount of principal is prohibited. Islam allows only one kind of loan and that is *qard-el-hassan* (literally a good loan) whereby the lender does not charge any interest or additional amount over the money lent;

– The lender must share in the profits or losses arising out of the enterprise for which the money was lent. Islam encourages Muslims to invest their money and to become partners in order to share profits and risks in the business instead of becoming creditors. Under *Sharia’h* law, Islamic finance is based on the beliefthat the provider of capital and the user of capital should equally share the risk of business ventures, whether those are industries, farms, service companies or simple trade deals. Translated into banking terms, the depositor, the bank and the borrower should all share the risks and the rewards of financing business

ventures. This is unlike the interest-based commercial banking system, where all the pressure is on the borrower who is expected to pay back his loan, with the agreed interest, regardless of the success or failure of his venture. The principle which thereby emerges is that Islam encourages investments in order that the community may benefit;
– Making money from money is not Islamically acceptable;
– Money is only a medium of exchange and may be a way of defining the value of a thing; it has no value in itself, and therefore should not be allowed to give rise to more money, via fixed interest payments, simply by being put in a bank or lent to someone else. The human effort, initiative, and risk involved in a productive venture are more important than the money used to finance it. Muslims are discouraged from keeping money idle so that hoarding money is regarded as being unacceptable;
Gharar (uncertainty, risk or speculation) is also prohibited;
– Under this prohibition any transaction entered into should be free from uncertainty, risk and speculation. Contracting parties should have perfect knowledge of the counter values intended to be exchanged as a result of their transactions. Also, parties cannot predetermine a guaranteed profit. Therefore, options and futures are considered as un-Islamic and so are forward foreign exchange transactions because rates and earning possibilities are determined by interest differentials;
– Investments should only support practices or products that are not forbidden – or even discouraged – by Islam. Trade in alcohol, for example should not be financed by an Islamic bank and a real-estate loan could not be made for the construction of a casino or a brewery.

A fundamental ethical feature of Islamic finance is thus that of profit and loss sharing. The rate of interest concept which entitles the original owners of financial capital to earn, regardless of the economic success or otherwise of the enterprise in which they are investing, is regarded as improper in Islam.(see Al-Janahi and Weir 2004) There is a general ethical principle that wealth, which can only be created by God, should not be diminished by human agency. This implies that the role of management involves the notion of stewardship of scarce resources, and the role of the financial structures must include maintaining value and minimizing waste of wealth. This in turn impacts on financial and managerial concepts of risk, which leads to a greater involvement of financial institutions in the business affairs of their customers and depositors and thus approximates

more closely to the German or Japanese model of long-term joint involvement in economic affairs rather than the Anglo-Saxon concept of short-termism and optimization of financial returns. It also involves banks and financial institutions in the realities of commercial and industrial enterprise (see Al-Janahi and Weir 2005a).

This is not to say that this system does not involve detailed controls of financial performance. Banks and financial institutions that aim to comply with Islamic law must subscribe to a system of audit controlled by the Sharia Supervisory Board. This, as well as supervising the audit function, also oversees the function of *Zakat* (an essentially voluntary, but none the less expected, donation from the wealthy and prosperous owards the less well-to-do).

The concept of *Zakat* underlies the Islamic concept of social provision. It is not based on collectivist and universalist principles guaranteed by the state, as in some Western and socialist countries, but is underpinned by the Islamic conception of responsibilities owed by individuals to other individuals. There is variability in the extent to which these simple principles guide the actual financial behaviour of managers in these countries. However, there is a widespread understanding that they represent the ultimate touchstone according to which financial transactions should be judged. The enormous financial success of many Arab corporations gives some indication of their utility.

Financial management under Islamic law and the dynamic potential of Islamic financial management are contrasted by some writers with the 'sterile mathematical models' of the West (Jabr and Amawi 1993). Other writers point to the concordance of many aspects of the Islamic approach to finance and business, for example the critique of usury, with earlier traditions in Western economic thought. But it is a great mistake to think of these arguments as of merely historical or archaeological significance. Islamic economics is a substantial and growing intellectual force in which most contributions have been made in the last twenty years. This is a current and dynamic area of scholarship and intellectual endeavour. The Islamic Finance Forum meets twice a year to provide opportunities for scholars and industry experts to report on this rapidly-expanding field (see bibliography for web reference).

Likewise it would be a mistake to ignore the critical and fissile aspects of this discourse, in relation to management, organisation structures and human

resource issues as well as finance. The hierarchical and patrimonial nature of authority in Arab organisations does not guarantee efficiency and effectiveness, and it is important not to substitute statements of belief and aspiration with descriptions of reality. There are many studies of the negative impacts of bureaucracy and inefficiency in the Arab and Islamic societies, often rooted in an exaggerated concern for official form over the realities of commercial necessity (see Younis 1993).

Modernity and tradition

The dual pull of tradition and modernity is evident in the characteristic responses of Arab managers to the problems of managing authority and relationships in organisations. Al-Rasheed has compared managerial practices and organisation systems in comparable Western and Arab situations. His study illustrates that the personalized concept of power leads to feelings of uncertainty and loss of autonomy among lower level organisational participants. Conversely, when problems occur, they tend to be ascribed to personal failure rather than to organisational or administrative shortcomings (Al-Rasheed 1994).

Leadership is a complex phenomenon in Arab organisations and is closely tied up with the concepts of shame and reputation. Arab culture, in common with cultures of the Mediterranean regions has been characterized as a 'shame culture' rather than a 'guilt culture'. This governs relations in all areas of social life. For a female to lose her chastity brings shame upon her family, not least on her father and brothers for their failure to protect her honour. For a senior person to fail to provide hospitality for a guest is equally shameful. A good leader is one who arranges matters so as to protect his dependants from shame (Peristiany 1966).

Leadership is a fundamental aspect of life in the Arab world, but its connotations are not necessarily the same as those in the West. The 'leader' is one who is regarded as acceptable by peers or colleagues to guide activities, ensure progress towards some agreed goals and to co-ordinate disparate efforts. There is not necessarily an agreed formula for deciding who will lead; while there are 'royal' families, it is not necessarily the eldest male who inherits the crown; while the descendants of the Prophet are accorded significant respect, they do not have a 'natural right' to leadership. Leaders in one context may not become the leaders in another. A study of Palestinian companies indicates that the most common model is control through close supervision. Thus plant managers go to considerable lengths to demonstrate that they are highly active in supervising the

behaviour of employees who cannot be trusted to act responsibly of their own accord (Nahas *et al*. 1995).

An early study based on empirical research into behaviour and attitudes among Arab managers is The Arab Executive (Muna 1980). The personalization of relationships within Arab life is indicated by the fact that Muna thanks personally all the executives who participated in the study. Muna claims that the typical form of decision-making in Arab organisations is consultative. Delegation is the least widely used technique. Loyalty is prized above all other organisational values, even efficiency. Loyalty can be guaranteed by surrounding the executive with subordinates whom he can trust. Arab managers have a more flexible interpretation of time than Western managers, and often seem able to run several meetings, perhaps on quite unrelated topics, simultaneously. The basic rule of business with Arab managers is to establish the relationship first and only come to the heart of the intended business at a later meeting, once trust has been achieved. This process may and often does take considerable time. Verbal contracts are absolute and an individual's word is his bond. Failure to meet verbally agreed obligations may be visited with dire penalties and will certainly lead to a termination of a business relationship. None the less, the Arab world is essentially a trading world, governed by an implicit and extensive understanding of the requirements of commercial activity.

Al Faleh identifies the importance of status, position and seniority as more important than ability and performance. The central control of organisations corresponds to a low level of delegation. Decision-making is located in the upper reaches of the hierarchy, and authoritarian management styles predominate. Subordinates are deferential and obedient, especially in public in the presence of their hierarchical superiors. The consultation, which is widely practised, is done, however, on a one-to-one, rather than a team or group, basis. Decisions tend to emerge rather than to be located in a formal process of decision-making. Prior affiliation and existing obligation may be more influential than explicit performance objectives (Al Faleh 1987).

The formalities of social, family and political life are usually strictly preserved, even in managerial settings. Thus it is impossible to undertake any kind of meeting in an Arab organisation without the ubiquitous coffee or tea rituals. But the most significant cultural practices are those associated with the '*Diwan*'. This is a room with low seats around the walls found in one guise or other in every

Arab home and most places of business, for it is a place of decision as well as of social intercourse. In the *Diwan*, decisions are the outcome of processes of information exchange, practised listening, questioning and the interpretation and confirmation of informal as well as formal meanings. Decisions of the *Diwan* are enacted by the senior people, but they are owned by all. This ensures commitment based on respect for both position and process. Seniority and effectiveness are significant, but to be powerful, the concurrent consent of those involved has to be sought, and symbolized in the process of the *Diwan* (see for a more detailed explanation Weir 2005c).

There are a growing number of studies which use standardized questionnaire methods and formal rating skills which claim to be culturally invariant, to study job satisfaction and organisational commitment. The results are difficult to interpret. Some studies report that Arab managers differ significantly in their commitment to their organisation compared to Western managers, while others find that expatriates and Arabs share similar work values.

Abbas Ali and his colleagues (1985) have undertaken several studies of the relationship between managerial decision styles and work satisfaction. They reinforce the general finding that Arab managers prefer consultative styles and are unhappy with delegation. They point, however, to the experience of political instability and to the growing fragmentation of traditional kinship structures as the origins of an ongoing conflict between authoritarian and consultative styles and the need for Arab managers to resolve this conflict by developing a pseudo-consultative style in order to create a supportive and cohesive environment among themselves.

They contrast Saudi-Arabian with North American managerial styles in that the Saudi managers use decision styles which are consultative rather than participative. Their value systems are ‘outer-directed’, tribalistic, conformist and socio-centric, compared to the ‘inner-directed’, egocentric, manipulative and existentialist perspectives of the North Americans.

Whereas American organisations are tall, relatively decentralized and characterized by clear relationships, Saudi organisations are flat, authority relationships are vague, but decision-making is centralized. In the USA, staffing and recruitment proceed on principles which are objective, based on comparability of standards, qualifications and experience. In Saudi organisations,

selection is highly subjective, depending on personal contacts, nepotism, regionalism, and family name. Performance evaluation in Saudi is informal, with few systematic controls and established criteria, and the planning function is undeveloped and not highly regarded (Abbas Ali and Al Shakhis 1985).

Al Hashem and Najjar (1989) document the emergence of a managerial class in Bahrain in a series of publications which draw a picture of a well-educated and sophisticated cadre of professional managers, who may not be able to find the fulfilment that their Western counterparts would seek in their work, because of the tight constraints of organisational and administrative structures.

The values of Arab management

In reviewing all of these studies it has to be remembered that just as much as with studies of managers in other contexts we are dealing with a moving target. The Arab world is by no means static and business and industry are dynamic and motile social contexts. Thus to characterise in a summary way the values of management in the Arab Middle East is to risk the accusations of trivialization or of attempting to fix in stone only some selected aspects of what is clearly a fast-changing and dynamic reality. Adel Rasheed in a timely and well-taken critique of earlier attempts to characterise the 'fourth paradigm' has noted that parts of the paradigm are based on extensions and extrapolations of empirically-documented trends and may be subject to review and correction in the light of new empirical research. But this criticism, while true and fair, is an inevitable consequence of the attempt to formulate paradigms and ideal-types, to summarize the features that are established and to join the lines around areas that have not so far been researched.

So, this section by no means intends to portray these values of Arab management as 'traditional', fixed or unchanging. This is a very dynamic arena: many of these values are strongly contested, many of these positions no more permanent than would be claimed of other social representations and other manifestations of social consciousness in other regions.

Nor is it claimed that these values are unique and only to be encountered within this particular set of social groupings in this precise set of geographical locations. On the contrary, many are co-extensive with the field of management itself; modern management is no more or less contemporary in the Middle East than anywhere else, and managers no more or less diverse. Further in the context of

the present discussions, it is not sure that all these elements are of equal interest to students of the 'New Africa'. Some things are closer than others. But, it is pertinent and necessary to sketch in broad outline the description of something that yet with all these reservations and recognitions of inadequacy can be characterised as *sui generis*. We can identify several broad themes.

Firstly, the central significance of being Arab, sharing a common culture and consciousness of cultural difference in their core practice. Arab managers are conscious, sometimes pointedly so, that the generic depictions of the essential lineaments of 'management' and the ethical positions embodied in the Western ways of doing business do not fit their life-spaces at all points. Sometimes they may struggle, even apologise for the lack of fit but they know, deep down, that these clothes do not fit them. This may be equally true for the emerging self-consciousness of African managers.

In the Arab world and in particular within the Mediterranean basin, there is a decided ambiguity about notions of time ranging from '*le p'tit quart d'heure Nicois*' which characterises business meetings in the Cote D'Azur to the '*Boukara, Boukara Insha'allah*' (or in extreme cases to the '*Boukara Fil Mishmish*' of the Northern Sahara). *Boukara* means tomorrow. *Insha'allah* means 'if it is God's will'. The mishmish or wild desert apricot rarely flowers so if a Bedouin claims that something may happen '*Boukara fil mishmish*' you can be sure you have plenty of time in hand. Only one knows what will happen, and what will be will be. These are notions that disturb the Anglo-Saxon but fortify both the Arab and the Mediterranean consciousness. They are not unknown in sub-Saharan Africa.

The primary social institutions of the family and extended kin networks are seen as providing the necessary and sufficient frameworks for business and management activities. This assumption throws into special prominence the importance of networking as the master set of behaviours and skill-sets appropriate to managers. It also highlights the practices of '*Wasta*' which are usually regarded as at least morally ambiguous if not downright corrupting to Western commentators.

Wasta can mean taking the role of a valued intermediary or a trusted middle-man. To say of a businessman that he has 'good *Wasta*' is to praise him for what Western writers call 'network-brightness'. It may also imply that this is the person who acts as a gatekeeper or whose inter-mediation has to be rewarded. But while

Arab managers are often quite critical of these practices, they clearly regard them as endemic to their culture and as unlikely to be affected by any form of 'modernisation'. In the emerging patterns of management in China the persistence of *Guanxi*-based networking has some similar aspects (see Hutchings and Weir 2005).

Business and management are understood to be guided – as is all of social life- by higher laws or statements of value that do not derive from the practise of business itself. In principle as Rahman explains, 'no real and effective boundaries were drawn between the moral and the strictly legal in Islamic law' (Rahman 1966: 116). Thus the *Shari'a* embodies elements of codified juridical statements and exhortations that in other belief systems would be regarded as simply injunctions towards ethically desirable ends.

This is not held to be a consequence of the special subservience of business and management concerns to the dictates of religion or to the improbable views of religious leaders, but to be rooted in a common understanding that the end of business is not business and the goals of management are not defined within the constraints of particular structures of enterprise and public administration. This is in practice an enabling, rather than a constraining set of beliefs, and permits most formats of management activity: it prohibits merely the assumption that economic goals are inevitably predominant or that societies are merely economies writ large.

In Arab business dealings therefore, the 'bottom line' in short-term financial results is rarely, if ever, the bottom line. On the contrary, though business is an honoured profession and the prophet himself was a trader, there is no expectation that business goals ought in general to be those of society at large or that what is good for business is necessarily good for state and family. The over-arching criteria of business success derive from the creation and maintenance of community wealth rather than *vice versa*. These concepts of business as a force for general societal good seem to be quite compatible with social philosophies in many parts of Africa.

Changing trends

As educational standards rise, the emerging managerial cadres of the Middle World gain in confidence from the policies that steadily replace expatriate managers with nationals. This should reduce the pressures which managers

experience in the perceived absence of opportunities for self-actualization at the workplace. But it may also produce a crisis of authority in the organisation.

These pressures are not dissimilar to those found in other cultures experiencing rapid social and economic change, an increasing globalisation of business and the emerging power of multinational enterprise, not least in the petrochemical industries. But the overarching philosophy and belief system of Islam, the essential cohesiveness of the family and tribal structures, and the sheer economic strength of the Arab states should allow the emerging managerial cadres the opportunity to find their own routes to organisational effectiveness.

Among topics on which further research is urgently needed is the question of women in management. Salman (1993) has documented the growing importance of women in the emerging managerial class in the occupied territories of Palestine.

Managers in the Arab world may have been too ready to criticise themselves, their organisational structures and their techniques of management and too reluctant to claim credit for the things that they do well and to enjoy doing them the way they prefer to do them. Arab managers often evidence an unwillingness to trumpet their organizational achievements. There are not many case studies in the business school literature of great Arab entrepreneurs or breakthrough Arab management techniques. More worryingly they may in their lack of confidence lose sight of the fact that, far from lagging behind the rest of the world, it is precisely in the relative strengths of the Arab way of management – in the performance of 'the fourth paradigm' – that an enduring comparative advantage may indeed lie.

The reasons for this optimism lie precisely in the social and organisational structures based on the integrating matrix of ethics and behaviour that we have noted earlier. Let us examine the likely dimensions of the emerging economic patterns of the twenty-first century. It is widely argued that the economy of the world is moving from an industry-based to an information-based format as we enter the 'knowledge society': large economies on the pattern of the former Soviet Union or even of the USA are not necessarily advantaged compared to the flexibilities, adaptiveness and fluidities of smaller economies. These may be based (in the opinion of one respected prophet of globalisation, the Japanese consultant Kenichi Ohmae) on the 'city-region state' rather than the 'imperial' or hegemonic

model (Ohmae 1996).

In the 'knowledge society' there may be changes in enterprise structure from command organisations with their persistent and obstructive hierarchies in favour of smaller, networked organisations that provide a flexible and viable basis for sustained economic growth.

These models of business organisation are close to the familial models which are prevalent in the Arab world rather than on juridical composites linked by shareholder and stakeholder obligations. Family business is increasingly regarded not as a deviant or developmental phase in the evolution of corporate business organisations but as the fundamental source and well-spring of a balanced and dynamic economy. It already forms the basis of much business organisation in the Arab Middle East and is clearly highly relevant in Africa.

The same may be said of the newer technologies of information-based business structures, the 'knowledge economy'. Knowledge economies depend on educated and trained entrepreneurs rather than on conformant management cadres. Centralist State control is not the obvious answer to creating social wealth through business activity, but neither, is the ethic of selfish individualism. Research in the growth poles of the European economy like the central Italian region of Emilia Romagna as well as in the Far East indicates that it is the common bonds of family, kinship, clan and tribe, naturally existing as potential bases for capital, skills and commitment, that provide the most reliable motor for sustained economic growth.

In the Middle World as a whole family is the basic element of society .Thus one writer says:

What could be called a truism in small town America is a fact in Saudi Arabia. Virtually every Saudi citizen is a member of an extended family, including siblings, parents and grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. The extended family is the single most important unit of Saudi society, playing a pivotal role not only in Saudi social life, but economic and political life as well. Even personal self-identity posits a collective self. Each family member shares a collective ancestry, a collective respect for elders, and a collective obligation and responsibility for the welfare of the other family members. It is to the extended family, not to the government, that a person first goes to seek help (Long 2003).

In Africa as a whole and in sub-Saharan Africa more especially it may be that these familial models of economic enterprise are especially relevant. Some scholars indeed have seen the extended family as the key organising principle of African economies. Decision-making follows different rules in the network economy of the Information Society to the imposition down the hierarchy of the strategic judgements of highly-paid executives remote from customers and suppliers on unwilling or ill-informed operatives. It is informed consent that will be required: perhaps it is the model of the family Diwaniah or Majlis, with its balance of consultative and autocratic phases that provides a better guide than the corporate boardroom to the 'loose-tight' properties of effective decision-making in this context.

Much attention has been recently paid to 'de-coupled' or 'loose-coupled' or 'networked' forms of business organisation and here again the advantages offered by the organisational bases of business in the Arab world are worth considering. Relations of trust between partners in loose-coupled structures are central to the outcomes of joint ventures: research in Turkey indicates that trust is indeed the central feature of successful joint ventures (Demirbag, Mirza and Weir 1996; 2003). Trust-based commercial organisations, guaranteed by intermediate social institutions of clan and family may have as much staying-power as those of the market.

Banking and the financial systems also need to adapt to the requirements of new forms of enterprise in identifying what it is they have to offer the global markets. This need not mean greed-based high-risk corporate strategies and financial manipulation; these may indeed have run their course in the West also. But the techniques of corporate recovery, portfolio-balancing and organisational support are not alien to the new generation of bankers in the region. Islamic models of financing for house purchase, assurance, and investment are compatible with sustainable enterprise growth. They may prove attractive models for Africa.

In the realm of culture much expenditure of senior management time and consultants' ingenuity takes place in the West and in Japan to achieve what may come more naturally in economies where the key feature is precisely the existence of a common culture of practice rather than of precise doctrinal assent on minor matters. Central to this business culture are the understandings of good behaviour based on the indefeasibility of trust and the lack of incoherence between behaviour in one context and another that are features of Western

business models and legal restriction. The notions of ‘limited liability’ and ‘risk’ alike operate in a quite different manner in societies of ‘shame’ and those of ‘guilt’.

The discourse of ‘management’ as internalised by many Arabs including the managers who have been trained in the West is inherently perceived by many as suffused with Western values and has yet to find a coherent representation in its own terms. So there are linguistic and philosophical minefields for both Arabs and Westerners to encounter in coming to a more precise and situated understanding of what it is that is characteristic and singular about management in the region, and what may be treated as ‘authentic’ experience.

Conclusion

This chapter has been quite wide-ranging but it has only scraped the surface of a complex reality. It may be helpful to summarize a few directions in headline format. We, in the West, know little about management in the Middle World and we should know more. There may be much to learn from it, perhaps especially for Africa. Management in this region is complex and multi-faceted but it is different in many ways from the Anglo-American or European models and does not conform either to the Eastern or Japanese models. It is a convenient short-hand to regard it therefore as constituting a ‘fourth paradigm’, despite the evident existence of behavioural and cultural diversity.

Islamic precepts and culture form the basic frameworks and elements of management in the region, but it is inadequate to characterise these aspects as constituting a ‘traditional’ or ‘conservative’ style of management. There are many dynamic and evolving aspects and the political and economic context is especially motile. Unless we understand the cultural configurations of Islam, our attempts to understand how managers in this world behave will be doomed to failure. Various elements of the ‘fourth paradigm’ indeed may be especially well adapted to the emergent needs of business in an increasingly global context, especially given the communications technology explosion.

There is no strong evidence of a comprehensive cultural convergence of the fourth paradigm with other paradigms or of the imminent Westernisation of these behaviours and beliefs. *Per contra* the Middle World obstinately continues on its own paths even when offered the seductive embrace of Western capitalism and democracy in one package complete with collateral damage.

Accordingly, the approaches to the management of people and in particular to such Western models as 'human resource management' and 'human resource development' must be very carefully handled when attempting to apply them *holus-bolus* to the practice of management in the Arab Middle East or to the dealings with the enterprises and organisations in this region.

It is perhaps in understanding the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of the styles of management and the practices of business that obtain in this region that much compatibility can be inferred with some of the implications of the 'knowledge society' and of 'best practice' in people management in the West and more generally. The learning from this exercise will not be only one way.

No conceptualisation of new patterns of Afrocentric management can be complete unless we incorporate an understanding of the Islamic-influenced aspects of management in the Middle World. Of all cultures that influence Africa, this remains one of the most profound, intense and deepest rooted. It is not part of the argument of this chapter to deal in detail with how and where these influences will work out. There may well be possibilities for confrontation between these models of economic behaviour and those of the largely Christian-influenced regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria plainly there is a real danger of such confrontations becoming a threat to existing political and economic structures. But just as both Western and Socialist blocs were ultimately disappointed in their attempts to see Africa as a relatively-available free-fire zone for their competing ideological struggle, so Africa will ultimately absorb such confrontations and emerge with a new cultural configuration that is neither absolutely one thing or another but contains elements of both.

A central feature of the growth of the economies of the Middle world in the past few decades has been the explosion of Islamic financial institutions. There is no reason to believe that these types of institutions cannot also flourish in the new Africa, for they appear to have several advantages over Western counterparts for developing economies based largely on family enterprises and supported by communal values.

Muslims need banking services as much as anyone and for many purposes: to finance new business ventures, to buy a house, to buy a car, to facilitate capital

investment, to undertake trading activities, and to offer a safe place for savings. Muslims are not averse to legitimate profit as Islam encourages people to use money in legitimate ventures, not just to keep their funds idle.

A global network of Islamic banks, investment houses and other financial institutions based on the principles of Islamic finance has developed over the last three decades. Islamic banking has moved from a theoretical concept to embrace more than 100 banks operating in 40 countries with multi-billion dollar deposits world-wide. Islamic banking is widely regarded as the fastest growing sector in the Middle Eastern financial services market. From a zero base-line thirty years ago an estimated $US 70 billion worth of funds are now managed according to *Shari'ah*. Deposit assets held by Islamic banks were approximately $US5 billion in 1985 but grew to over $60 billion by 1994 and now stand at over $600 billion.

In specific terms, if present trends continue, Islamic banks will account for 40 per cent to 50 per cent of total savings of the Muslim population worldwide within 8 to 10 years. Islamic bonds are currently estimated at around US$30 billion and are the 'hot issue' in Islamic finance. There are around 270 Islamic banks worldwide with a market capitalisation in excess of US$13 billion. Deposit assets held by Islamic banks were approximately $US5 billion in 1985 but grew to over $60 billion by 1994. Today the assets of Islamic banks worldwide are estimated at more than US$265 billion and financial investments above US$400 billion. Islamic bank deposits are estimated at over US$202 billion worldwide with average growth between 10 and 20 per cent. Islamic equity fund are estimated at more than US$3.3 billion worldwide with growth of more than 25 per cent over seven years. The global Takaful premium is estimated at around US$2 billion. The Middle East market is reported growing at 15 to 20 per cent per year. Between 1994 and 2001, around 120 Islamic funds were launched. This is not a 'traditional' or a 'legacy' market. The emphasis in Islamic Banking on profit-and loss-sharing, on community wealth, and on family business may indeed have special appeal in the new Africa. There are few grounds for believing that the Western systems of finance and business are uniquely promising for developing economies whether in Africa, Asia or Latin America. One abiding characteristic of Islamic economic thinking is that it appears to provide a supportive philosophy enabling believers to deal equally validly with periods of wealth and poverty.

There are probably fewer grounds for believing that Africa must inevitably follow a Western path to economic development in the 21st century than there have

been in the last three hundred years. We are dealing with a growing, evolving, dynamic entity, not a traditional hang-over from an 'undeveloped' past. And in that past, moreover, Islam was a dominant element. Arab traders from Oman were doing business in East Africa long before Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope; Leo the African, Hassan al Wazzan, 'discovered' Timbuctoo before Mungo Park, and he crossed the Sahara following the routes that the Touareg had known for generations.

Accordingly, it is very timely to consider the possibility that the future development of a culturally-appropriate and geo-politically relevant style of management in Africa may be based on Islamic principles, and be closer to those of the Middle World, than to those of Western Europe and North America or even of China. (Though there are interesting similarities between Chinese and Arab models of business networking. See Hutchings and Weir 2005.)

My prediction is that over the next few decades the influence of the emergent styles, including an authentically Islamic as well as secular versions of Arab-influenced management styles, not to exclude the multi-faceted 'Mediterranean styles', some of them owing much to the 'Fourth Paradigm' will become increasingly significant in the world in general and possibly in Africa in particular and the *Diwan* will come to be seen as equally as important as the derivative.

But much more research attention and much more theoretical sophistication is required of management theorists, and undoubtedly a diminished reliance on dated characterizations and inapt cultural categorization based only on Western experience. This paper is, hopefully, a contribution to that understanding.

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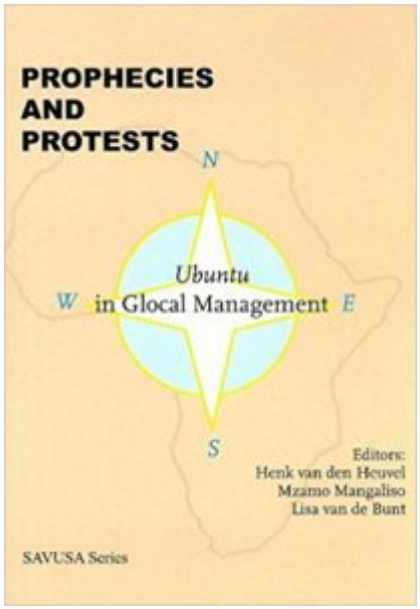
Prophecies And Protests ~ Unleashing The Synergistic Effects Of Ubuntu: Observations From South Africa



Abstract

This paper argues that for the full economic revitalization of South Africa to take place, a critical step is to engage the synergistic effects of *ubuntu* or 'humanness', a philosophy which informs the thinking of a majority of South Africans. *Ubuntu* acknowledges that people are not just rational beings but that they are also social beings who possess emotions such as anxiety, hope, fear, anger, excitement and remorse. The position taken here is that openly recognising these human dimensions and accommodating them in everyday practice can unleash the synergistic effects of *ubuntu*. The paper gives examples of situations in which *ubuntu* manifests itself in the workplace, and provides lessons that can be learned from those situations. Among the advantages that can arise from harnessing the advantages of *ubuntu* are improvements in the corporate goals of employee satisfaction, productivity improvement, workplace harmony and, ultimately, the development of a vibrant economy that will further enhance the global competitiveness of the country.

Introduction

The dismantling of apartheid over a decade ago was a watershed event in the history of South Africa. The world watched as the country charted its course toward the establishment of a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist, system of government. With the democratic processes now firmly in place in the political arena, the spotlight has shifted to the economic revitalization of the country. But, as this paper will argue, sustained economic revitalization will not be possible

until due regard is paid to the voices and aspirations of those who had been locked out of the democratic process for centuries. An important step in that direction is to understand the culture, values, norms and beliefs that predispose individuals to behave in certain ways. It is well known that individual behaviors and decisions are strongly influenced by prior socialization. Prior socialization itself is predicated on philosophical thought systems, which are strongly influenced by culture, norms, beliefs, history, folklore, and mythology; and religion (Hostede 1991; Roer-Strier and Rosenthal 2001; Thompson and Lufthans 1990). These relationships are shown schematically in Fig. 5.1.

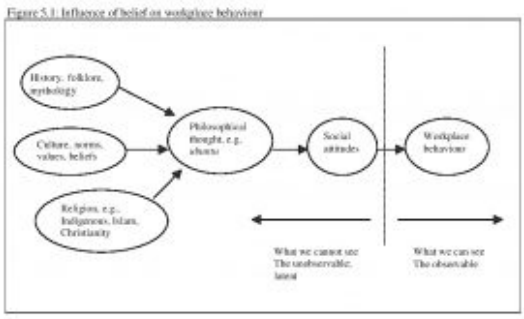


Figure 5.1: Influence of belief on workplace behaviour

The key to understanding the attitudes and behaviors of Africans in the workplace lies in learning about the philosophy of *ubuntu*. As a philosophical thought system, *ubuntu* shapes and informs the beliefs, values, and behaviors of a large majority of Africans in South Africa. Whether it is a critical issue that needs be interpreted or a problem that needs to be solved, *ubuntu* is invariably invoked as a barometer for good versus bad, right versus wrong, just versus unjust. *Ubuntu* can be viewed as an essential frame of reference for understanding African culture in South Africa (Brack, Hill, Edwards, Grootboom and Lassiter 2003; Lufthans, Van Wyk and Walumbwa 2004). In this essay we use Clifford Geertz's (1973) understanding of culture as the web of understandings humans have spun. To Geertz (1973: 89), culture is an historically transmitted 'pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [men] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life'. We believe that culture is something that evolves over time in response to the conditions in which actors find themselves, whether social, economic, political, technological, ecological, and so on. This strongly implies that culture is not an abstraction, but a mutable social

construction. The historical formation of culture thus becomes a source of primordial sentiments which are the 'givens' of a particular group because over time they carry a shared and understood meaning that is of absolute importance. As a component of culture, *ubuntu* evokes existential feelings akin to primordial sentiments (Shils 1957; Stewart 1987; Emminghaus, Kimmel and Stewart 1997). As will be seen in this chapter, these primordial sentiments provide reference points (respect, cooperation, solidarity, empathy, etc.) necessary for creating and maintaining stable identity and peaceful coexistence.**[i]** In this chapter we will give examples of situations in which *ubuntu* manifests itself in the workplace, and provide lessons that can be learned from those experiences. It will conclude by arguing that an understanding of *ubuntu* is the key to accomplishing the goals of employee satisfaction, productivity improvement, and ultimately workplace harmony.

Ubuntu

Over the centuries of their rule in South Africa, the colonial and later apartheid governments have perpetuated the fact that the African population of South Africa is composed of at least eleven ethnic groups, each with its own unique linguistic and characteristics and historic evolution. A superficial assessment of this incredible diversity would seem to preclude the identification of a common character among these 'ethnic' groups. But this would be overly naive, since it belies the underlying distinguishable pan-African character that binds African people, which is a product of its unique geographical, historical, cultural, and political experience (Sithole 1959; Antonio 2001). No other feature can more powerfully capture the essence of this pan-African character than *ubuntu*. The word *ubuntu* (*botho*) is a derivative from *umuntu* (in isiZulu), *umntu* (in isiXhosa) or *motho* (in Sotho), which means a person or a human being. The plural form in both isiZulu and isiXhosa is *abantu* or people. Literally, therefore*, ubuntu* means the state of being a person or human being. But when Africans use the term, it is associated with the kinder, gentler, and nobler qualities of human interaction. So for example, when someone performs an act of kindness, they are said to have *ubuntu*. Having *ubuntu* means being respectful, being generous and giving, preparing the extra plate of food just in case a stranger showed up, going the extra mile in helping those in need without expecting anything back from them. Loosely translated into English, *ubuntu* means humility or humaneness. As noted above, *ubuntu* runs deeper than that. It serves as the foundation for the basic African values that manifest themselves in the ways people think and behave

toward each other and everyone else they encounter. It is lamentable that, until recently, these values have largely been ignored in the management discourse. For a long time the discussion of the concept of *ubuntu* has been limited to other fields in the social sciences such as theology (Sithole 1959; Setiloane 1986). It is only fairly recently that it found its way into the field of management (see See Khoza 1994; Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross and Smith 1994; Makhudu 1993; Mangaliso 2001; Mbigi and Maree 1995; Prinsloo 2000). It is our contention that any effort to bolster economic vitality while, at the same time, creating a healthy work environment will necessarily have to begin with understanding and incorporating the fundamentals of *ubuntu* into management practices. The management practices referred to here include productivity improvement, leadership training, decision-making, and group dynamics. It is our hope that lessons from this paper will contribute toward a greater understanding of *ubuntu*, and thus provide useful knowledge for management practitioners and theorists with an interest in South Africa. The focus of the discussion in the paper will be on the various aspects of *ubuntu* as they relate to relationships to others, language, decision-making, attitude toward time, productivity and efficiency, leadership and age, and belief systems. These were selected since in the view of these authors they bring into stark relief the essential nature of *ubuntu* as described above. They will now be discussed in turn.

Relationship with others

A central part of *ubuntu* is the interdependence of humans in a social context. The driving norms emphasize reciprocity, suppression of self-interest, and the virtue of symbiosis (Mangaliso 1992). Hence it is often said that *umntu ngumntu ngabanye* [a person is a person through others], a statement which conveys the notion that a person only becomes a person through his/her relationship with and recognition by others. This recognition has far-reaching implications in day-to-day interactions among people concerning an individual's status in society. For instance in the isiZulu language, the greeting '*Sawubona*!' translates into 'We see you!' This is a tacit recognition by others of the individual's existence as a human being. The greeting often also includes an honorable designation such as *Nkosi* (honored one, as in king), *Baba* or *Mama* (father/mother, a salutation extended not just to one's actual parents, but to everyone of their age group). This emphasizes the importance of the individual within a wider network of social relationships. Also noteworthy is the usage of the plural voice by the individual, which underscores the preeminence of the collective over the individual. The

response to the question, '*Ninjani*?' or 'How are you?' is, '*Sikhona*!' literally meaning, 'We are here!' This in effect acknowledges the presence of personhood within the collective. As a matter of fact, there is no worse ignominy among Africans than to state that someone *akangomntu* (Setiloane 1986). This means that this person is not human – implying that she/he is an *isilwane* (an animal).

The pre-eminence of the collective can be observed more closely in the extended family as a unit of organisation. Here the emphasis is on the unity of the whole rather than the distinction of the parts. This holistic approach is supported by an ideology that reveres the concentric linkages of individual to family, to extended family, to clan, to village, and ultimately to the entire community. The individual is a member not just of the nuclear family, but also of the extended family or clan. Your mother's sister is equally your mother, and your father's brother is your father. If your mother has two sisters and your father two brothers, then you'd have three mothers and three fathers. This has often presented problems to companies who offer paid leave of absence for the death of immediate family members. At Unilever, a white fellow manager once remarked to me that one of his employees was being deceitful. When I asked why, he told me that the employee was asking for a few days paid leave for the death of his father. There was nothing wrong with that, he said, except just two years ago the same man was given three days of paid leave for the death of his father! How many fathers can a person have? In the western understanding, your uncle is not your father. In company policy he is not a member of the nuclear family and hence is not covered under the bereavement scheme. But in the African world-view he is. World-view is defined as the way reality is socially constructed by a people, or their collective consciousness (Burger and Luckman 1967; see also June 2005).

There are some who have cautioned about the potential for abuse of individual rights imbedded in the collectivist tendencies of *ubuntu* (Mbigi and Maree 1995; Sono 1994). Tremendous demands are placed on conformity and loyalty to the group through sanctions and punishment. However, in real essence, *ubuntu* allows for a certain amount of individual dissention as long as it does not undermine group harmony. As a complex social tradition, *ubuntu* actually recognises both the importance of the individual and the needs of the group. On the one hand, individual needs are accommodated by providing opportunities for all to participate and contribute in group processes, decisions, and activities. On the other, individuals are expected to contribute to the groups and to support

group decisions. This is not socialism, where the needs of the individual are secondary to the needs of the group. *Ubuntu* enmeshes the needs of the individual in the needs of the group.

The similarities between *ubuntu* and its related social traditions and some of the recent writings on management theory are striking. For example, the 'fusion' metaphor has been used for a style of management described as 'achieving a sense of unity, coming to see others as part of the same whole … seeing similarities rather than differences… common ground and a sense of community based on what people share – vision, norms, and outcomes' (Marcic 1997). Another example is the concept of ecological embeddedness, which emphasizes social relationships and reciprocity (Whiteman and Cooper 2000). These suggestions might sound revolutionary in a western setting that emphasizes individuality, competition and control, but in the context of *ubuntu,* fusion and ecological embeddedness are a social reality and manifest themselves in everyday relationship patterns.

To sum up, we posit that management must familiarize itself with the way people relate to each other in the traditional African way. Whenever practicable these relationships should be taken into account when formulating company policies. Such policies might include recruitment, job placement, promotion, transfer, reward, discipline, and even retirement. In the newly democratized South Africa, companies whose policies are perceived to be responsive to the needs and worldview of their employees will out-perform those that are perceived to be otherwise.

Language and communication

Communication is to the organisation as blood is to the body. But major ontological differences exist in communication between the linguistic world of the African and that of the westerner (Kiggundu, Jorgensen and Hafsi 1983; Mangaliso 1991). In the African milieu, children are socialized from birth to listen to the context and nuances of language in conversation. The importance of language in establishing a sense of community belonging, shared heritage, and common welfare is emphasized. Words are enmeshed in dense fans of association that might be unwittingly activated by mere mention (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989). The pervasive axiom is that to talk and to name is to create experience, to construct reality. The oral tradition – described in later writings as oral literature – has been the most dominant medium for passing on ideas, beliefs customs, and

culture to successive generations. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, it was through the oral tradition that African folk proverbs, ballads, legends, and mythology were sustained and kept alive rather than through detached written form. The transition from oral to written literature in most of Sub-Saharan Africa emerged only as part of the struggle against European hegemony, which led some to describe it as the 'fight-back' literature (Jordan 1995; Stapleton 1991). These intergenerationally transmitted stories have often formed the bedrock of reason, wisdom, and morality (Ahiauzu 1986). A mastery of the art and skill of oratory is often a prerequisite for leadership. This becomes even more so during celebrations when skillful orators will take center stage with their poetry and praise-singing.

Organisation studies researchers have shown that during communication people from individualist cultures tend be content-specific, paying close attention to what is being said; and those from collectivist cultures tend to be context-specific, paying close attention to how something is said (Hostede 1980; Gudykunst 1991; Triandis 2001). The largely individualistic western society places great emphasis on the performative quality of language usage, with primacy given to content and the efficiency of information transfer. Ideas must be translated accurately into words, the medium of the exchange must be appropriate, and the receiver must accurately understand the message. In the predominantly collectivist African society, however, the social effect of conversation is emphasized with primacy given to establishing and reinforcing relationships. Unity and understanding among affected group members is valued above efficiency and accuracy as the following examples demonstrate.

Loaning

The language one uses in conducting business in any given culture is intricately interwoven with the idiom of that culture. Among the amaXhosa of the Eastern Cape, for example, the practice of *ukunqoma* was used extensively in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The word can literally be translated into English to mean 'to loan'. In the African reality, the word does not translate into a similar notion of loaning as is understood in the west. It is a practice whereby an individual loans his/her cow to a neighbour for milk. The borrower can keep the cow for an indeterminate period of time and if, during that time, the cow gives birth to a calf, then the calf belongs to the borrower. However, the lender can, at any moment and without notice, come to repossess his/her cow. Hence the idiom '*Inkomo*

yenqoma yintsengw' ebheka' was coined. It means that you 'milk a loaned cow while constantly looking back over your shoulders' since the owner can reclaim it anytime. As can be imagined, the personal rapport, or the sense of what is being said, is lost in the translation. The surge in interest to learn an African language as indicated by increased enrollments in African language classes in the years following the South Africa's first democratic elections was an encouraging sign (Crowe 1995). While recent reports indicate a lack of institutional support for this surge, it indicated increasing realization that learning to speak an African language is an important means of understanding their culture and patterns of interaction (see Bisetty 2000; Salie 2005). In culture and language there are norms and expectations about how people address each other regardless of rank; how they greet each other; the personal space they maintain; and the expectations they have of each other.

In the work situation where tasks are individually structured with little interaction, western oriented supervisors who are concerned with efficiency usually discourage conversation and other forms of socializing. However, African workers would find this oppressive and unnatural, in fact, inhuman. It is worth noting that the German social scientist Karl Marx was the first to highlight the importance of human interaction in social life and in the workplace when he asserted that humans are social beings who perceive work as a productive affirmation of their human community. It is the emergence of scientific management, as championed by Frederick W. Taylor, which began to distort the human social fabric by breaking up jobs into individual repetitive tasks with little room for creative input by workers (Taylor 1911; Peters & Waterman 1982). The ultimate manifestation of division of labor is captured in the saying that workers do the work, and managers do the thinking. Scientific management (or Taylorism) created tension among employees and produced social distance between them. Though still dominant in classical management thinking, it should also be noted that from the early days, Taylorism was challenged by a succession of western researchers and writers who focused on the human side of organisations. This is highlighted in the works of writers such as Barnard (1938), Follett (1940), and Mayo (1933) in the area of human relations; and Lewin (1951), Maslow (1965), and McGregor (1960) who contributed to the organisational humanism school of thought. But even in these works the ontological benchmarks remain the Weberian (1930) assumptions of bureaucratic rationality, Taylor's scientific management principles of productivity maximization and human relations

assumptions that condition worker satisfaction on productivity increases (Schiele 1990). As Schiele (1990: 147) puts it:
Western organisational theories – with the exception of the neo-Marxist perspective – concentrate on the factors affecting productivity: how fast, how plentiful, and how well something is produced, and … how well and how efficiently people are processed, sustained, or changed.

What makes western management thinking particularly untenable from the Africa-centered**[ii]** perspective is that its assumptions run counter to the core value of *ubuntu*. A dilemma is then created when western management principles are imposed on a workforce whose culture upholds such values such as caring, cooperation, community, and consultation and in whose mind the individual cannot exist outside the collective. This creates a situation of cognitive dissonance which, as many studies have shown, tends to manifests itself in lowered morale and reduced productivity (Aaker 2002; Festinger 1957; Moser 1988; Terkel 1974). What can be learned from this discussion is that in the African work environments attempts to stifle conversation and discourage interaction will be counterproductive and lead to dysfunctional behaviors and ultimately an alienated workforce. Allowing workers to establish relationships, even when not required by the task structure, will improve effectiveness and decrease disruptive and antagonistic behaviors.

Decision-making
We next consider the case of decision-making. Decision-making processes followed in the African context differ markedly from those in the western context. In the western literature, decision-making is defined as the conscious choice of a course of action from available alternatives. The process is typically linear in that one decision sets a precedent for the next. Also, the parameters are reasonably well defined, and, therefore, speed to closure is taken to be meritorious. Vision is usually monocular because unity of vision is idealized. The goal of decision-making is to arrive at the right choice, to select the alternative that best satisfies the decision parameters. From an Africa centered perspective the decision-making process is circular and inclusive, proceeding at a deliberate speed, and often given to deviations in order to delve into other matters however remotely related to the issue at hand (see diagram 2). Vision tends to be polyocular. In other words, those who look at issues from different angles are seen as interesting and as providing valuable insights. Diversity of vision is not only

permitted but also protected and encouraged. Before closure to the issue at hand is arrived at, considerable time is allowed to assure that all voices have been heard and that a consensus has been reached. The goal of decision-making in an African context is to preserve unity and achieve consensus. A decision that is supported is considered superior to the 'right' decision that is resented or resisted by many; unity is more important than utility in decision making.

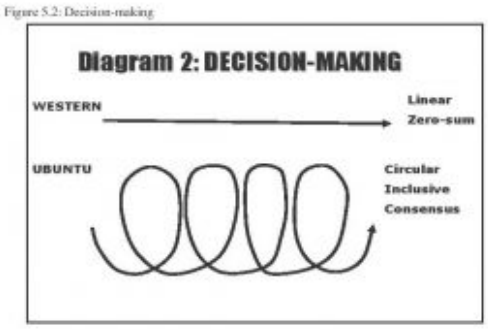


Figure 5.2: Decision-making

Nowhere are these differences better demonstrated than in the way negotiations were conducted between the white South African government and the various black political organisations during the CODESA (Congress for a Democratic South Africa) talks near Johannesburg in 1993. These were the talks that led to the first democratic elections in 1994. Although they outnumbered the white representatives by far, not once did the blacks (led by the African National Congress) put any of the critical decisions to a vote.

All major decisions were made by consensus, often after a lot of behind-the-scenes discussions to bring other parties into agreement. These talks resulted in the formation of a Government of National Unity (GNU), which went on to run the country for the next five years. This is not to suggest that decision-making by majority has no place. It does, and can result in reaching a more optimal, but less supported solution. A solution based on African *ubuntu*-style consensus decision-making might often not be the best solution, but because of the large base of support it enjoys, it is usually more successful at the implementation stage (Mangaliso 2001).

The distinctions between the western and African decision approaches pointed out above suggest that western-style bureaucratic approaches to problem solving will often be ineffective in the African worldview. By limiting involvement and

imposing control over employees, these approaches often lead to ineffective organisational outcomes and dysfunctional behaviors in the workplace. Consensus-based decision-making, although initially costly in terms of time and effort, is more likely to result in improved commitment to organisational goals. As research has shown, the results will be seen in reduction in supervisory requirements, decrease in turnover and absenteeism, increased efficiency and effectiveness (Pellow 1999; Homburg *et al*. 1999; Stasson *et al*. 1991).

Time

Another area of difference between the African and western ways of life is attitude toward time. These differences can present a problem in the manner in which westerners engage in conversation with indigenous Africans.**[iii]** Sociolinguistics has demonstrated that there is a level of discomfort in the different ways that western and African cultures interpret pauses and silences during conversations (Chick 1990).Westerners are inclined to fill the pauses with words; Africans appreciate periodic gaps of silence within a conversation. American managers are believed to have one of the highest talk-to-listen ratios in the world. An African manager is said to have cynically asked his American counterpart whether he ever had a chance to breathe between sentences. A case in point involves a western salesman who had secured an hour-long appointment with a Zulu customer at his home near Stanger in KwaZulu-Natal. When the salesperson arrived punctually, she was upset that her host was not ready. It took a while before the host finally came out to meet her and begin the scheduled discussion.

The salesman found out later that in the Zulu culture when you have an appointment at someone's home, it means s/he has control over what happens in that time period. By agreeing to meet at the home of the client, the salesman was tacitly agreeing that it was up to her host how she would prioritize her time between family activities and business discussion.

Unlike in the western context where time is a strategic commodity to be productively used, in the African context it is treated as a healer. Time is not a commodity to be frugally consumed, a tool to be carefully utilized, or a regulator to be dutifully observed. In Greek this conception of time falls under the label of *kronos*. In the African world-view, time is a reference that locates communities with respect to their collective past and shared future; it assigns significance to patterns of events; and it orders relationships and affairs. Time is not an

independent quantity that can be divided into ever-smaller units; it is a continuum that has meaning only as it is experienced. The *ubuntu* principles reflected in the African conception of time reflect time as a unifying and integrating construct that emphasizes interdependence, shared heritage, regularity, congruity, and fully experiencing the present. In this sense time is epistemologically very close to the Greek concept of *kyros*. However, in *ubuntu* time is not experienced only in the present; it also heals past experiences and allows for reflection. A famous cliché notes that God gave the African time, and the westerner a watch (Fadiman 2000).

Misunderstandings over time are not a new source of friction in cross-cultural interactions. These misunderstandings arise, however, not because of differing importance assigned to time commitments, as demonstrated in the example above, but because of fundamentally different meanings attached to time. This is a difficult gulf to span because it requires adopting a different worldview, or at a minimum, accepting the validity and reasonability of a different worldview. In general, South Africans understand the merits of punctuality, deadlines, and the like. On the other hand where 'western' timing runs into loggerheads with African 'timing', (e.g., in task completions), then that might be an opportune moment to take advantage of the contact time one has invested to solidify relationships and build the rapport that can be used in future business encounters. The western conception of time management will be ineffective at best, and dysfunctional at worst, if it is pitted against the African conception of time.

Productivity and efficiency

According to IMD world rankings, the South African economy has remained steady during its first ten years of democracy, maintaining its position among the top 50 countries in the World Competitiveness Score Board (IMD 2005).**[iv]** While this stability is a sign that the country has turned the corner, if dramatic improvements are the goal, then listening and learning what makes the majority worker tick will be at the heart of the solution. Once again, this is where we still have a long way to go. Only a few years ago, a manager of a Taiwan-based multinational corporation observed that it took 800 African workers in his Dimbaza factory in the Eastern Cape, to make 3,000 pairs of jeans per day. He also stated that the same number of Taiwanese workers could manufacture 20,000 jeans per day (Nickerson 1988). How can this low productivity be explained? Some observers would naïvely assign McGregor's Theory X

characteristics to these black workers (McGregor 1960). 'You have to supervise them all the time. If you are not there, they simply won't work' (Manona 1988). A typical western 'humanistic' response might be that given the regime that was running South Africa back then, black workers were just reacting to the unsatisfactory work conditions where their basic needs were not being met (Maslow 1943). The real dilemma was pointed out in a study that set out to empirically examine this problem of poor productivity (Beaty and Harari 1987). The researchers in that study were astounded to find that their interviewees had completely different priorities than those assumed by westerners. For example, the workers assumed that their firm was responsible for their well-being both on and off company premises, i.e., 24 hours around the clock. The western conception of employer-employee relationships usually begins and ends at the workplace. In fact, the differences were so extreme that the study in its original form had to be abandoned. The conclusion from that experience was that management would learn more by 'active' and 'naïve' listening to their black workers in order to understand their worldview.

In the western literature productivity is defined in organisational terms – obtaining the maximum useful output from a given set of resource inputs. Productivity is assumed to be a critical determinant of organisational viability. Efficiency – the ratio of output value to input cost – embodies the technical aspect of productivity, and maximizing efficiency is the *sine qua non* of western management theory. In the African setting, on the other hand, the emphasis is on social well-being rather than technical rationality. In the African world-view as guided by *ubuntu*, efficiency maximization takes lower priority than societal harmony. Attempts to increase efficiency at the cost of fractured relationships and social disruption can have unintended consequences.

For instance, western managers whose training emphasized what some have called 'denominator management', would see a cutback in the number of employees as a means to increased productivity. In Africa, where work is a social as well as practical activity, it cannot be assumed that the numerator and denominator in the productivity equation are independent variables (Prahalad and Hamel 1994). Employee cutbacks (denominator reduction) would have significant negative impact on output (numerator reduction) likely resulting in reduced, not increased, productivity. Multinationals often resort to between-country unit productivity comparisons to the total exclusion of the national contexts of the

countries being compared. So for example they would state that in one country a production line could be run by two less operators than in a developing country. Logic would suggest that two operators could be removed from the line or laid off. Such a decision might be easy to explain in western contexts but not in Africa. It carries the risk of alienating the entire workforce and resulting in a decrease in productivity as well as other disruption. The highly collectivist orientation of the African culture would favour a system that spreads the burden over everyone during hard times (or rewards during good times) instead of making a few individuals suffer all the pain (or collect the entire reward). In that sense, across the board pay reductions would be much preferred to targeted layoffs. Again another example demonstrates this situation (Beaty and Mangaliso 1999).

The CEO of a South African manufacturing firm visited the nearby township to view the housing conditions of his workers. Appalled by what he saw, he initiated a program in which his firm built immaculate three bedroomed-carpeted houses for his black workers in the township. The firm partially subsidized the mortgage payments and deducted 25 per cent of a worker's salary to contribute to the mortgage. The company also gave the employees the option of selling the house back later and keeping the profit. But the CEO was surprised by the negative reaction of his employees to the scheme. Despite the knowledge he had gained from his first hand experience, he noted the root cause of the breakdown.

We've had some problems. Had we gotten involved and worked with the right leaders in the planning of the scheme from the outset, we would have learned that they preferred the money be used instead to upgrade a greater number of existing dwellings so that more of the company's employees could benefit.

This story demonstrates the dilemma facing managers of western-based firms in developing countries. The performance criteria of the organisation – productivity, efficiency, increased output – may be in direct conflict with the traditional values of the country – solidarity, group well-being, social harmony. The two are not necessarily incompatible and if some consideration is given to protocols and proprieties, change can be introduced with minimum disruption. In fact, as was discussed above regarding decision-making, when properly communicated and deliberated, even difficult change can be implemented effectively. The lesson learned from the foregoing can be summed up in the following way. Western conceptions of organisational productivity and efficiency are inappropriate measures in an African world-view. Attempts to increase efficiency without

consideration of concomitant social impacts will result in reduced organisational productivity. Change must be introduced using consultation and inclusive decision processes if it is to be implemented without disruptive effects. This is ontologically different from the western change management approaches where overall corporate performance is the primary determinant of success (Beaty and Harari 1987; Schiel 1990).

Leadership and age

The context within which leadership choice and style operate is equally important to understand. In Africa, leadership is easier to accept from a more experienced [read: older] individual. This means that a younger person will rarely be comfortable leading a group of people s/he regards as his/her seniors. Equally, it would be awkward for older employees to take instructions from a supervisor whom they perceived to be their junior. This would be particularly difficult in an environment with highly structured tasks where compliance is expected without question and the leader is required to be more directive, a requirement that goes against the grain of African culture, particularly if carried out by a junior (age-wise) member of the community. The following example illustrates the point:

One senior manager at a major industrial firm in South Africa told us that when the company initiated a black advancement program, the first blacks promoted to supervisory positions were young men (20 to 24 years old) who had performed very well. The workers of the group these men were assigned to supervise refused to work for them. When senior managers probed, they found that within the culture of those workers, older men do not work for 'youngsters'. Management then revised their promotion criteria to include age as well as capability (Beaty and Mangaliso 1999).

Sometimes the 'professionalism' displayed by young, western-trained managers is misinterpreted and resented by other employees, as witnessed in the case of an African manager who was summoned before his family elders because he did not treat the workers as brothers but as employees (Ahiauzu 1986). An older person might not necessarily possess all the expertise for the task at hand, but through his/her wisdom, vision, and ability to maintain harmonious working relations, s/he can get others to perform well. There is no question that technology has altered the workplace, giving an advantage to younger people in their twenties and thirties who are more comfortable with technology and more responsive and adaptable to change than those in their fifties and sixties. But older workers bring

a lot of value to the workplace, which is likely to increase as economies expand. As Grossman (2005) notes from his empirical study of discrimination against older workers in the US, marginalizing these employees may prove more costly in the future as employers look for older workers to fill projected workforce gaps. In reality, a manager in the work environment must have the appropriate balance of skills between technical competence and social savvy.

Ironically, this approach to managing is gaining increasing acceptance even in the context of more contemporary western thinking. More successful managers are seen to act as coaches, cheerleaders, nurturers of champions rather than cops, experts, and naysayers (Peters and Waterman 1982). The lesson to be learned here is that in the African thought system, age is regarded as an asset, an ongoing process of maturing and acquiring wisdom. To the extent that management understands this difference in their selection and promotion of people into leadership positions, they stand to be more successful in the implementation of programs such as productivity improvement, employee motivation, worker satisfaction, and workplace harmony. The criteria for selecting employees into leadership position must not be limited only to demonstrated mastery of technical skills. Other criteria embedded in the culture, such as age in this case, must also be taken into account.

Belief systems

Because of migration over the years in search of job opportunities and a better life style, a majority of the African population in SA is urban. Many can still trace their ancestral roots to the rural areas, and others still live in these areas and have temporary dwellings such as hostels and dormitories in the urban areas where they work. Christianity is the dominant religion for over 90 per cent of Africans in SA. But one thing that is noticeable is how those who straddle the urban-rural divide still uphold beliefs in the spiritual world. They use both the western trained physician and the traditional healer or *isangoma* or *inyanga*. Even though over 80 per cent of the black labor force consults the traditional healer, western managers have tended to downplay their centrality, or ridicule their involvement in their employees' health maintenance (Ustinov 1999). Others have wisened to the power of the *isangoma* and used it to full advantage (Beaty 1996). In cases where the management and the workers come from entirely different epistemological and cultural worldviews, the company would preempt a potential fall-out by positively engaging in the worldview of its employees. If a large

proportion of the workforce believes in the power of *mesocosmic* spirits, it makes sense for the company to retain the services of a company *isangoma* along with those of western-trained company doctors. Such an individual would presumably have been oriented in the company's vision and mission to have sufficient appreciation of the symbiotic relationship between community values and the continued viability competitiveness of the company. In time, s/he would most likely also suggest appropriate remedial action that would accommodate both worldviews. After all, companies do hire company lawyers, company public relations officers, and several consultants to solve *ad hoc* problems as they arise. The concurrent belief in the *mesocosmos* and the role of the *sangoma*, makes him/her a key player in the process of mediation and arbitration. The lesson from all these stories is that companies must learn and understand the belief systems of the community in which they operate. They must adapt their systems to fit local belief systems while encouraging the local community to appreciate that company success is tied to the availability of jobs and hence community prosperity.

Unleashing the power of ubuntu <in organisations
A few guidelines are worth noting in order to unleash the power of ubuntu in organisations.

Treat others with dignity and respect. In business engagements with the locals, the objective must not be to tell, but to share. The key is to move away from the parentchild mode of interaction that was fashioned over the apartheid years, and replace it with the parent-parent mode (Berne 1964). The slightest perception of a patronizing disposition might trigger the old primordial sentiments among workers – invariably mostly black – that the former apartheid regime elicited. In fact, during the apartheid years it was considered a tautology in South Africa to speak of black workers since all workers were black (Mothlabi 1987). And that response is to undermine the system that has been responsible for their oppression. On the other hand, if they sense that they are being treated with respect and dignity, the human inclination is to rise up to expectations and deliver the expected results and more.

Be willing to negotiate, not dictate. The new spirit of democracy requires those in management positions to negotiate. Prior to the recognition of workers' unions during the years of apartheid, many employers were reluctant to get into negotiations with employee representatives. They feared that employees would take entrenched positions and not accept any compromises to their positions and

erode their power. The reality that they found after the collapse of apartheid surprised them. They found employees not only willing to find the middle ground, but as an executive of a large corporation near Durban in KwaZulu-Natal naively noted in an interview, 'blacks have taken to negotiation as ducks take to water' (Mangaliso 1988). He did not realize that negotiation was part and parcel of the socialization in which blacks are brought up in the culture of *ubuntu*.

Provide opportunity for achievement, self-fulfillment, and values. *Ubuntu* is about what people value, what people aspire to be. Peter Drucker notes that organizational effectiveness results when two needs are harmonized: the need for the organisation to obtain from the individual the contribution it needs, and the need for the individual to have the organisation serve as his/her tool for the accomplishment of his/her goals and objectives (Drucker 1993). In the context of South Africa, organisations that provide an opportunity for their employees to give expression to their values and beliefs in the course of carrying out their corporate responsibilities are likely to outperform those that do not.

Punctuate achievement with ceremonies. One of the common practices of *ubuntu* is the celebration of major accomplishments and milestones with ceremonies. African society boasts an extremely rich repertoire of ritual, and attending forms of music and singing, dance, and the eloquent verbal expressions of praise singers. Western-style annual year-end socials and celebrations of key anniversaries of service with the company provide a convenient outlet for the need for ceremony. At Unilever, SA ceremonies were held annually to celebrate those who had completed 10, 15, 20, and 25 years of service with the company. These employees were given awards according to the milestones they had reached, and also received a citation in the company's newsletter, *Inspan*. These practices promote the sense of trust, loyalty and family belonging, while at the same time feeding into the primeval needs of *ubuntu*.

Embrace and encourage the employment of kinspeople in your organisation. In western settings, hiring relatives is usually considered to be bad because of the negative stereotypes associated with nepotism. In the African context, kinship ties within the organisation are seen as beneficial. This is so because the most important organizing unit among Africans is the family in its various forms. Family not only includes the nuclear family, but strong bonds exist with members of the extended family, people who graduated from the same high school or university, people whose origins can be traced to the same town or homeland (the

'*homeys*'). The presence of these kinship tiesin the workplace provides a layer of emotional and psychological support to workers.

For promotion into leadership, honour seniority. All things being equal, in choosing someone into a leadership position from among equally qualified employees, the *ubuntu* ethos would tip the scales in favour of the one with more seniority in terms of either chronological age, service to the company, or experience in the position. The corollary to this is that the more junior employee will get his/her turn in some future date. The metaphor '*Zisina zidedelana*' signifies that in a dance each person will get his/her turn in the spotlight.**[v]** This is not uncommon in other, non-Western cultures. For instance, according to former Mitsubishi Executive Takachi Tekeuchi, in Japan the amount of money a person makes between 21 and 50 is much less than they make once they are over 50. This is a practice that rewards seniority and encourages loyalty to the company with the expectation that once employees reach seniority, they will be rewarded handsomely (NBR 1997).

Promote equity in the workplace.
Equity defined as the perception of fairness in the workplace is important in the African way of life. The unfortunate legacy of apartheid in South Africa is that it systematically discriminated against blacks to the point that they are now grossly underrepresented in the key decision-making positions in many organisations. An example of this can be seen in a report that evaluated the impact of the Employment Equity Act of 1998, which required all enterprises employing more than 50 employees to take affirmative action to bring about a represented spread of designated groups in all occupations and organisational levels. This report indicated that although African males constituted 39 per cent of the workforce, they made up just 10 per cent of management. By contrast, white males who constituted 13 per cent of the workforce made up 52 per cent of management (Dept. of Labor 2000; also see Mbabane 2004; Williams 2001). The figures for black females indicated even wider disparities. For the year 2003-2004 another report indicated that of all top management positions white people still accounted for 72.2 per cent, black people accounted for only 23.8 per cent, while a paltry 14.1 per cent of women were represented in top management positions (Africa News 2005). Since then, many analysts have raised concerns about the very slow progress in the implementation of employment equity in South Africa and the poor enforcement of the EE Act (Mbabane 2004). There is, therefore, an urgent

need to identify, attract, recruit , and promote capable blacks into management positions. On the flipside of the coin is the larger question of how the legislature impacts the economy as a whole. While it is difficult to quantify this impact, the responses obtained from South African CEOs in a survey conducted by the World Bank cited the inflexibility of labor regulations and union activities as discouraging employment creation (see Lewis 2001). This indicates the need to balance the need for the enforcement of the EEA legislation with the imperatives of sound macro-economic policies.

Be willing to learn, flexible, and accommodative. South Africa consists of an array of people with diverse cultures and traditions all interwoven into a mosaic of colourful folklore. Up until recently, the accepted *modus operandi* in business has been the western tradition. But other traditions are increasingly becoming commonplace, for example the traditional healers (*izangoma*) referred to earlier. The best thing to do is to be willing to listen and learn from those who are familiar with the culture about the applicability and legitimacy of some of the practices one will encounter. The best strategy is to treat each cultural exigency with caution, care, and understanding. Flexibility and accommodation will go a long way towards creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and an increased sense of identity with the company among employees.

Implications and conclusion

Before discussing the implications of *ubuntu* in SA it is important to point out some disclaimers. The first is a caution against a wholesale justification of all African customs and practices as has been pointed out before. There are several customs and practices based on unsubstantiated superstitions that can be oppressive and sexist, that might stifle individual aspirations and societal progress.**[vi]** Conventional wisdom is that customs will be respected to the extent that they serve a good purpose. Otherwise they should be challenged and changed. In general, however, customs have helped in reinforcing a common belief in humaneness, creation of a sense of dignity and common humanity, empathy for others, and a common bond among members of society. Another caution is against the assumption that culture is static and that there is a one way causal relationship between culture and behaviour. Changing behaviours can also cause changes in culture through feedback and reinforcement over time. Differences between the behaviours of younger and older generations contribute to the ‘generation gap’. In SA differences can be perceived between urban and

rural blacks; and between those who are migrant workers and squatter-camp dwellers on the one hand and those who live in upper middle class neighbourhoods on the other.

What are the business implications of *ubuntu* in the transformation process now taking place in South Africa? To start off, foreign and local white-controlled companies must be willing to work in partnership with indigenous people with the understanding that they will listen to and learn from them. There are several success stories that have come out of such collaborative efforts. One such example is the giant company American Express that formed a joint venture with the black company PulaNala in the travel and tourism industry. As a result of the partnership, American Express has become highly responsive to the shifts in the travel industry. For PulaNala, the relationship will facilitate the transfer of business skills and the accelerated development of personnel into areas of executive responsibility (Mkhuma 1998). Several similar alliances have been formed under the auspices of the Black Economic empowerment programme. It is our hope that the ideas, philosophies, customs and culture that emanate from *ubuntu* will be infused into the corporate policies and procedures of these new alliances. In the face of fierce global competition, *ubuntu* might be the distinguishing feature to tip the scale in favour of companies that espouse it.

We conclude by restating our thesis that, in order to be effective, management principles and practices must receive the embrace of their host cultures. Effective management in South Africa will hinge on the successful harnessing and harmonizing of both indigenous and corporate cultures. Unfortunately, up to now the emphasis has been on suppressing indigenous cultures rather than appreciating their utility. Western culture has been allowed to freely dominate all spheres of corporate life with little or no account taken of indigenous worldviews. With democracy in SA has emerged a new sense of pride and assertiveness among Africans about their indigenous cultures and heritage. It can therefore be expected that they will seek to give expression to those practices they regard as important in their day-to-day corporate life. For management, the challenge is to become familiar with the African cultural practices described in this chapter and, whenever practicable, incorporate then in formulating company policies.

Companies whose policies are perceived to be responsive to the needs and worldview of their employees will out-perform those perceived to be otherwise.

ELEMENT	AFRICAN	WESTERN
Relationship with others	Relationships are reciprocal. Treat other as your brother/sister. Individual predicated upon belonging to collective. "I belong, therefore I am." Extended family important.	Relationships are instrumental, contractual. Center of focus is individual. Collective predicated on individual. "I am, therefore I belong." Nuclear family important.
Language	Oral tradition of transmitting folklore, mythology, culture. Words depend on context. Imprecision, circumlocution, sign of wisdom, cleverness.	Written transmission of folklore. Words have precise meanings. Brevity is the soul of wit.
Decision-making	Decisions arrived by consensus. Dissenters compensated for at some future time. Process is circular. Vision tends to be polycentric. Dispute resolution aims to restore harmony rather than justice.	Usually by majority. Winner takes all. The process is linear. Unity of vision is typical. Monocular. Justice takes precedence over harmony.
Time	Not a finite commodity, it is the healer, allow enough of it for important issues before arriving at a decision.	Time is money, a strategic commodity to be used frugally.
Productivity	Must be optimized. Nonsenior management. Good if it enhances solidarity, social harmony. Shared rewards, benefits, suffering welcomed.	Must be maximized. Downsizing management. Individual rewards, benefits, suffering (layoffs).
Leadership and Age	Age is an ongoing process of maturing and acquiring wisdom. Older people are respected. Gray hair is a sign of wisdom.	Age beyond a certain point becomes a negative. Aging is seen as slowing down. Senior citizens regarded as "dead wood."
Beliefs systems	Belief in extra-creation or spiritual realm occupied by ancestors. Important role of the traditional healer, isangoma. Christianity is now prevalent.	Protestant-catholic Christian belief system dominant. Some circular.

Figure 5.3: A comparison of African and Western systems

For organizational researchers, the challenge is to chart a new research agenda that will incorporate the ideas shared in this paper. Already there are scholars who have begun to conduct such research to help sensitize expatriate business managers about the vagaries and vicissitudes of conducting business in South Africa (Fadiman 2000).

The changes that have taken place in South Africa have brought to the centre ideologies, belief systems and/or cultural practices that in the past were ignored, marginalized, or suppressed. *Ubuntu* is one cultural practice that is endemic in the Southern African way of life that has remained persistent despite apartheid, and is now becoming central, as part of the African renaissance. In his 1999 inaugural address, President Thabo Mbeki signaled the dawn of this renaissance when he noted:

As the sun continues to rise, to banish the darkness of the long years of colonialism and apartheid, what the new light of our land must show is a nation diligently at work to create a better life for itself. … We trust that what we will do will not only better our own condition as a people, but will also make a contribution, however small, to the success of Africa's Renaissance, towards the identification of the century ahead as the African Century (BBC News 1999).

We endorse this vision completely. But if it is to be translated into reality in the corporate world, then this paper calls for a 'renaissance approach' toward managing businesses in South Africa. From this approach will come important

ideas that can help practitioners in the development of culturally inclusive approaches to managing in South Africa, and thus spark the renaissance spirit envisioned by the President. A challenging goal and yet one that is full of promise.

NOTES

i. For an extended discussion on uncovering the deep seated origins of culture see Geertz (1973), and Giddens (1982); and for a deeper explication on primordial sentiments see Shils (1957), and Stewart (1987).

ii. In this paper we will use the term 'Africa-centered' in the Keto (1989) sense in order to posit Africa as a geographic and cultural starting point for the study of people of African descent. It. conveys the same meaning as the term 'Afrocentric' used by other authors (e.g. Asante 1980; Schiele 1990; Williams 1991).

iii. We use the term 'indigenous Africans' to indicate Africans whose ancestral roots are in the continent of Africa.

iv. IMD is the International Institute for Management Development based in Lausanne, Switzerland. It is considered to be among the best business schools in the world in executive MBA training and has been the publisher of the World Competitiveness Yearbook since 1989.

v. Some people believe that in 1994 President Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress did invoke age as a criterion in selecting the country's Deputy President. Aside from his talents and distinguished service in the struggle for South Africa's liberation, the then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki was chosen over Cyril Ramaphosa, a more visible figure during the CODESA transitional talks, due in part to his seniority.

vi. An example among the Batswana is the custom of mogaga which requires a widow to sprinkle leaves each time she leaves her homestead for a 12-month period of mourning. This custom is based on the belief that mourning and respecting the dead this way is vital for the protection of the livestock against infertility. Many, including human rights advocates, have criticized this custom as sexist and archaic: it applies only to widows, and its connection with the protection of the livestock against infertility is tenuous.

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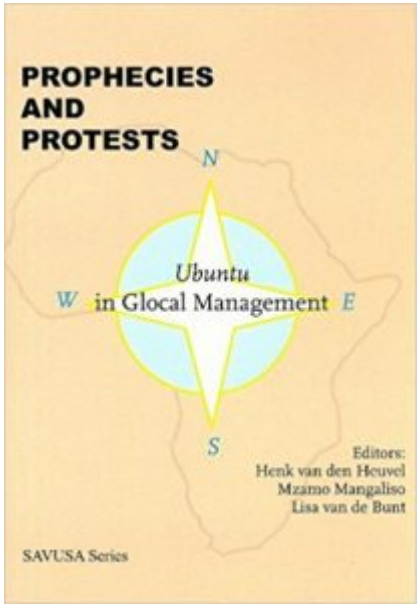
Prophecies And Protests ~ Managing In A Rural Context: Notes From The Frontier



In fact, my philosophy does not allow of the fiction which has been so cleverly devised by the professors of philosophy and has become indispensable to them, namely the fiction of a reason that knows, perceives, and apprehends immediately and absolutely. (Arthur Schopenhauer, The world as will and representation, 1844 (1966: xxvi)).

Introduction

These notes from the frontier challenge management approaches at all levels, from the management of international relations to the management of an enterprise. Building on a growing literature which questions the so-called Eurocentric approach, this essay challenges the adequacy of political correctness in this furious debate, which has come to so dominate the globalisation thrust of the developed world. These notes from the frontier are presented from the particular frontier in which the author lives and works. To some extent it is a personal observation, but one grounded in research, scholarship and participant observation. The notes bring together a number of observations both of the particular frontier of the author as well as those in the USA, Canada, Europe, Asia, Mexico and elsewhere in Africa. It is a work in progress that attempts to reflect upon the dynamics that underlie the emerging crisis of cultural understanding and misunderstanding in order to find ways to ameliorate the inevitable conflicts if something does not change.

These notes attempt to draw a broad picture of a myriad of complex dynamics as well as ground these thoughts in the nitty-gritty of management in a rural context. It is clearly incomplete as such broad tapestries always are. It is broad, not for the sake of being grand, but because the view of the world from the tribal frontier is very different, and questions some of the widely held beliefs that may seem true from the centres of modernity or other particularities. That globalisation is the mobilization of elites worldwide is not in doubt; however, it faces a danger of losing touch with the feelings and thoughts of those on the ground. It is a dangerous game to play that is, perhaps, begetting a growing

reaction to Eurocentrism in general. These notes talk to the issues involved with resolving this basic conflict of the 21st Century, perhaps, contributing to the search for the right questions. This chapter, therefore, roams from the global to the local, intertwining a number of threads, but from a perspective based in a frontier of globalisation.

The notes present the view from a particular context, the particular frontier between globalisation and tribalism in the northernmost province of South Africa, Limpopo Province. It reports the observations of a participant observer, an urban born white South African who has had the fortune to work and live on this frontier for the past 15 years, as well as travelling widely over that time. It also draws on research conducted on specific issues underlying management in this rural context, such as the issues of identity and migrancy as they impact both this rural particularity and other frontiers, including migrants to the so-called developed countries and their particularities worldwide.

This chapter is presented as a contribution to furthering the broader conversations concerning management on the frontiers of globalisation. The frontier is where globalisation and particularities interface, whether in a First or Third World context. More narrowly this contribution forms part of a conversation towards the development of a management style appropriate to the rural Southern African context, in which particularity the author is immersed. The notes contribute to the debate around Afrocentric management. It is somewhat of a heuristic montage attempting to bridge the gap between local and global perspectives and especially the perspective of the particularities vis-à-vis the forces of globalisation. In a sense these are notes from the frontier between modernity and tribality, in this particular case.**[i]** It is not a clash of civilizations as Huntington (1993) would have us believe; rather it is a clash of histories and trajectories, a clash of values on a myriad of fronts. One must be careful not to trivialize this complex dynamic between cultures and values to a good guy – bad guy scenario. Difference is a matter for respect and not for the cheap politics of maligning the other. The crux of the matter is that you cannot expect others', cultures, societies and particularities, to accept the dominating culture in its entirety. Management at all levels needs to urgently acknowledge the 'other', the particularities' right to self-determination.

Coming to terms with particularity

In the 21st century, we are all confronting different complexes of a multitude of

processes variously called individuation, socialisation, urbanisation, globalisation, nomadisation or whatever. However, we are all 'modernising' in our own way, variably influenced by others, but with clearly different starting points, histories, trajectories, cultures, values, perspectives and contexts. These constitute a people's particularity.

The Boers

South Africa provides a unique window on these processes. South Africa's rainbow of particularities is unique, partly because of South Africa's rich and diverse cultural mix, but also, because of the Apartheid Regime's maintenance, manipulation and 'preservation' of traditional societies, or tribalism. It must be recognised that for all its ills, Apartheid resulted from two impulses. First, to keep power in white hands, safe from the so-called 'Swart Gevaar' ('Black Danger'): second, and perhaps more significantly, because it is so often ignored, and because it is so post-modern, its concern with cultural autonomy and integrity; a concern for self-determination. This impulse arose from the successive Boer experiences under British imperialism. History works in cunning ways. Apartheid, for all its negativity, swam against the liberal stream. At the same moment that Apartheid died, liberalism has come to be condemned for its cultural imperialism, or as Highwater (1981) puts it, a 'self-serving fallacy'. Perhaps, it is significant that with the decline of Apartheid the liberal phantasm declines also? As Chabal (1997) states:

We. Them. 'We can't impose our values on them'. The great racist lie at the centre of Western liberalism. The great sophisticated lie which in the century ahead will kill, maim, starve, rob and beat to death tens of millions more Africans than the primitive little lies of Afrikaners ever did.

The Boers' suspicion of British Imperialism was based in the threat to their integrity made by successive British administrators' attempts to anglicise them. This experience left an indelible mark on the psyche of the Afrikaners. They were sensitive to the implications of cultural imperialism as they too lived on the frontier. On many other frontiers the settlers solved this problem by a holocaust of extermination, tempered with restricting native peoples to reservations. This is well exemplified by the following dialogue between the Boer Cilliers (Siljay) and the Barolong Chiefs from Sol Plaatje's 1930 epic, 'Mhudi' (1957).

'But,' asked Chief Moroka, 'could you not worship God on the South of the Orange River?'

'We could,' replied Siljay, 'but oppression is not conducive to piety. We are after freedom. The English laws of the Cape are not fair to us'.
'We Barolong have always heard that since David and Solomon, no king has ruled so justly as King George of England'.
'It may be so,' replied the Boer leader, 'but there are always two points of view. The point of view of the ruler is not always the view point of the ruled. We Boers are tired of foreign Kings and rulers. We only want one ruler and that is God, our creator. No man or woman can rule another'.
'Yours must be a very strange people,' said several chiefs simultaneously (1957: 82-83).

The Boer, Siljay, aptly expresses a complex question of the right of people to their own values and world views in the face of a dominating power. It is a question that is so contemporary in this globalising world. Yet he was speaking more than 150 years ago.

Tribal frontier
The new South Africa's policy, in an attempt to be the most 'progressive', has embraced an ideology of modernism, and acted somewhat blindly to the advantages of harmonising with the traditional sectors as they too develop. Lately this has been acknowledged and processes have been set in place to acknowledge the role that traditional structures can play. However, the mistrust of tradition and custom by the ideologues still lingers and hinders the full participation of such sectors or a serious attempt to come to terms with the issues involved.

Concomitantly there has been somewhat of a denial of the multiple perceptual universes that all people live in, and which are particularly complex in South Africa. People are trying to live by both modernity and tribality while denying the one when in the other, and too often compromising the one for the other. To some extent, people 'accept' the requirements of modernity, while secretly paying homage to 'tribality' and adhering to its customs and practices whenever summoned to do so.

The Limpopo Province of South Africa is particularly interesting as a case study since it is one of the most culturally complex Provinces in South Africa. Limpopo has three dominant ethnic/tribal groupings dominating vast swathes of the province, each with their own internal divisions; the Venda, Northern Sotho and the Shangaans. In addition there are the Ndebele who are less populous yet the

most widely distributed throughout the Province, Indian South Africans, Zimbabweans, Motswanas, Mozambicans, a smattering of white South Africans and recent migrants from all over Africa and the world.

In 1996 a list of issues of concern in public management was presented to the Provincial Government's Human Resources Committee. One of the issues highlighted was 'the conflict between the demands of custom and tradition and the demands of modern work'. No one on the committee denied the veracity and importance of the issue, but it was taken off the list of issues to be presented to the Provincial Cabinet, because it was seen as embarrassing. Yet the very same person, who censored the list, had adamantly confirmed that even for someone as 'modern' as himself, such summonses were 'non-negotiable'.

The embarrassment of the emerging middle class at their multiple allegiances and their conflictual dominant frame of reference all too often means that there is a lack of action and dialogue toward finding an appropriate way to deal with this dilemma. This further contributes to the confusion of the issues involved and processes affected. In a context in which people desperately want to show that they can function in a bureaucratic society of mediated consumption (after Lefebvre's 1976 notion of a Bureaucratic Society of controlled consumption), people do not want to acknowledge that they are tribal at heart. If denial or rejection continues we will all face the uncertain yet inevitable consequences. The possibility of conflict between globalisation and a vast number of particularities could unfold. Shane (2006: 4) notes that terrorism, rather than being global has a 'provincial soul'. War on too many fronts is always dangerous. Inayatullah (2000: 816) argues for this recognition as follows:
What I argue for is a layered self, which does not discount ego, family, nation, religion, race or ideology but progressively moves through these various aspects of identity, until humanity is embraced, and then finally a neo-humanist self, wherein nature and the spiritual are included. Identity thus has depth but is not shaped by the dogmas of the past.

But this has to happen in a way determined by the people of the particularity. She continues to warn of the serious consequences that could arise from this frustration of a people's right to self-determination:
If we do not go this way then the long-term result will be depression. … By the year 2020, non-communicable diseases such as depression and heart disease are expected to account for seven out of every ten deaths in the developing regions,

compared with less than half today. Death becomes the future since hope is lost.

The real danger is that we will continue creating conflict between particularities and modernity, fuelling the dangerous dynamic in world affairs signalled by 9/11 and the increasingly uncertain global environment. Yes it may be reactionary, but it has to be recognised as an honest reaction to a globalisation which is primarily concerned with seducing the elites of the particularities. The world is in danger of warring about cultural diversity on a number of different fronts for the foreseeable future. A modus operandi needs to be found that can harmonise this diversity and pacify and allay potentially destructive forces. Traditional society promises to hinder development, unless some way is found to harness the energy released by 'tribality' and its values. In turn these particularities can temper and enrich the process of globalisation, harnessing it for the cultural integrity of the particularity, keeping faith to the basic values and spirit of that particularity, while adapting to the changed historical circumstances. The debacle in Iraq serves as a warning to those who would tamper with seemingly weaker traditional forces.

This is both a challenge and an opportunity. Can a dialogue on culture and management be incubated? The Afrocentrism debate seems to be one part of such a conversation, which could only release creative energies and perhaps do more to reduce terrorism than anything else.

Instead of seeing 'tribality', particular traditional societies, indigenous knowledge, values etc. as reactionary or, at least, simply resistant to change, they should be approached with respect, sensitivity and circumspection. There is an urgent need to confront this issue and nurture conversations in all the particularities towards taking ownership of development in the face of a rampant globalisation. In other words, particularities need to guide and decide on the direction of their particular development trajectory, i.e., self-determination. A first step is to bring the issues into the open. At all the frontiers, conversations need to find ways to harmonise the diversity, not just manage or attempt to merely co-opt it.

Confronting tribality

Stated in the starkest possible way, and with some obvious caveats, my concern is with the inescapable fact that the West seems today no nearer to understanding Africa than it was a hundred years ago, on the dawn of the colonial enterprise (Chabal 1997).

A voyage of discovery

I am an African, of Ashkenazi Jewish cultural origins whose grandparents came from near Vilnius in present-day Lithuania, arriving in the Cape Colony in the 1890s, with whatever cultural roots and/or 'hybridisations' that lie unknown back in the mists of time. I grew up in the privileged upper middle class of modern Johannesburg of the 1950s and 1960s. Johannesburg was the frontier of the world mining industry, a typical mining town. It grew very rapidly into a cosmopolitan city with all the accoutrements of modernity. Johannesburg under the rise of formal Apartheid, and despite it, was a very vibrant place. Sophiatown and Alexandra were centres of this vibrant emerging urban community, and its Great White Way on Commissioner Street boasted theatres to match anything around Times Square in New York City or London. Art Deco and later Bauhaus left still visible marks on the city's landscape.

Johannesburg, and other South African cities, are characterised by a mix of many cultures even if dominated by the modernizing urban culture. European and American fashion and music mixed with the indigenous strains through Mbaklanga, Kwela, township Jazz and now kwaito. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the streets were alive with music. Kwela bands roamed Johannesburg performing guerrilla style in the streets with people throwing coins in their caps on the pavement in appreciation. A tea box bass, two or three penny whistlers and a guitarist, would break and run when the police arrived as they routinely did.
Safely walking these streets as a child was an exciting adventure, despite the clouds of Apartheid hanging over it. The Apartheid regime wiped out Sophiatown and tried to empty Alexandra unsuccessfully.
The rural hinterland was ever present in the dress, languages and style of the people. But the rural context was somewhat mysterious to a young white boy growing up. Like another world, that intruded into my everyday life in almost every way, but remained afar. I would travel through rural South Africa and Rhodesia (as Zimbabwe was called in those days), seeing the traditional grass and mud huts, mingling with the people, immersed in differences and similarities I did not understand but felt and perceived.

I spent 12 years studying and working in the United States and Canada, and in all that time I never felt truly at home; 'home' was always calling. It was only years later that I realized that I, too, had been a migrant per se. I returned to South Africa in 1982 believing change was more possible. It had become apparent to me

that the only solution for the Nationalist Government, the African liberation movements and the Captains of Industry, was some sort of negotiated resolution. However, I was greeted in South Africa not by vibrant analysis of the possibilities for South Africa but rather by a growing hegemony of thought, soon to be spearheaded by the campaign to make the country ungovernable and the widespread school boycotts. Instead of vibrant analysis one was met with calls for solidarity, and intellectuality was reduced to mobilizing slogans.

It was very different to the lively climate of disciplined theoretical and policy debate that had so characterised the period of Biko and others that had been so influential in the 1960s South Africa I had left. In the South Africa of the 1980s one was even castigated as a reactionary for suggesting that negotiations were even a possibility, let alone inevitable. It seemed that people were so caught up with actions and events, and in the rush to identify with the ANC and UDF, that they could no longer discern trends. Discussion and dialogue had become narrow and confined to the politically correct, on the left at least. Freethinking was no longer encouraged.

Reflecting on this now one is awed by the fact that a little over twenty years later the rule of 'political correctness' is incarcerating debate and conversation on a world-wide basis. Perhaps South Africa, one of the models of 'regime change', was a pivot around which the whole world was changing from a cold war dialogue between Communism and Capitalism to the 'War on Terror'.

Around 1984, in an informal seminar at a prestigious South African university, a paper was presented concerning research conducted with migrant labourers in Johannesburg. The author had found that to the migrants 'home' was not Johannesburg where these migrants spent the overwhelming majority of their time and where they earned a living, but rather, 'home' was the village from which they originated and where their ancestors were buried, that is, their traditional frame of reference. A discussion broke out between two distinguished professors who were present as to 'Why "these people" relate to the "homelands"?' It was pointed out by someone that it was not the Apartheid homeland the migrants were referring to but their spiritual 'home'. People get their ontological security from their spiritual relatedness to their ancestors, through traditions, customs and communing with the spirits as a community. One of the professors inquired, rather condescendingly, 'but why do these people need spirit?' Someone replied, 'If you don't know I can't tell you!' This awakened me to

the fact that many modernists, although highly educated, had difficulty accepting the world view of the other.

I worked for 10 years at the National Institute for Personnel Research (NIPR) which was incorporated into the Human Sciences Research Council in 1986. During this period I had the opportunity to conduct Human Relations Climate Investigations in Public, Private and Civil Sector organisations during a period of rapid social change. My work was not limited to organisational investigations but was also directed at broad policy issues in a variety of sectors and disciplines.

In 1992 I was headhunted to the University of the North in Limpopo Province and have worked there ever since, through its merger with the Medical University of Southern Africa to become the University of Limpopo. Only when I moved to Limpopo was I confronted directly by tribality. It took quite a while before I began to come to grips with the social dynamics. They were so different to what my anti-Apartheid ideas and urban prejudices had led me to expect. The left wing urban ideology of the time had no place for tribalism and ethnicity. These were judged merely as products of Apartheid. The reality I found forced a very difficult and painful reappraisal of these 'truths'. As Dean, Executive Dean and then Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Campus Principal at the University of Limpopo's Turfloop Campus (previously University of the North) I have through participant observation and focused research been able to explore the implications of the rural context on management processes.

The Apartheid Legacy

At the inauguration of Mr. Mandela as the Chancellor of the University of the North in 1993, a Venda chief sent the '*Tshikona*', (the Venda Men's Dance), performed when the community celebrates rights of passage rituals, to perform in honour of the occasion. It was a great honour for President Mandela. The dance involved at least a hundred male dancers of all ages, moving as one snake to wondrous music from their simple pipe flutes to the beat and rhythm of the *Dumbula*, the massive Venda sacred drum. It was a marvel to behold for it so completely integrated anarchy with order. While the dance was continuing on the field in front of the stands, a student leader attempted to take the microphone so as to call the dancers to end. Mr. Mandela was moved to intervene and had to tell the student leader to desist. To the student leaders this was something to be tolerated and its meaning and beauty were somehow lost on them, though not on the vast majority of students, visitors and dignitaries gathered there who watched

in awe, clearly moved by the spirit of the dance. There is a strong tradition among African intellectuals of distancing themselves from their traditional roots, at least in their writing.

In the 1960s and 1970s young Black Consciousness intellectuals consistently spoke against their traditional cultures and traditions. This political imperative was clearly expressed, for example, in the early work of Prof. Njabulo Ndebele, now the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town. He wrote in the early 1970s:
… the blacks must set about destroying the old and static customs and traditions that have over the past decades made Africa the world's human zoo and museum of human evolution. When customs no longer cater for the proper development of adequate human expression, they should be removed. Almost all the so-called tribal customs must be destroyed, because they cannot even do so little as to help the black man get food (1973: 81).

The problem with cultures is the unassailable fact that you cannot understand them fully, as an outsider. It was widely held that local ethnicity and culture were creations of the Apartheid state and that when Apartheid went so would any talk of these 'survivals'. This reflects the a-historical view which has so dominated academic debate in South Africa, a perspective that believes that people want to leave their traditional roots behind for 'development' or modernity.
However, sentiments have changed since Ndebele made this reflection of a particular moment in the history of the struggle. Mafeje (1996: 20) identified the negative effect of such thinking among African intellectuals and others as:
… to devalue traditional institutions in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World and to give the impression that 'modernisation' was necessarily a reproduction of European institutions in Third World countries. The latter assumption has proved unwarranted …

Things have now changed as Wole Akande (2002) concurs:
In the fifties and sixties, the peoples of the newly independent African countries were told Western values would inspire modernization and lead oppressed people to demand the human rights enjoyed by people in the Western World. Today Africans find it ironic that the values broadcasted from the West represent oppression of the poor and the decay of civilization. Consequently, Western values are fast becoming discredited and devalued in the eyes of many Africans.

As I (1984: 1) previously wrote:
The racial dimension has been so overemphasised that it makes any discussion of cultural differences, within this context, appear as a justification for the policies of Apartheid. Without negating the basic similarities between all human beings there is still a need to come to terms with the various aspirational paradigms of our varied peoples.

However, at the time, this was deemed 'politically incorrect'. Dialogue in South Africa has been dominated, distorted, dissuaded and outlawed by the repressive Apartheid state's rigid censorship, bannings, pass laws, forced removals, detentions, and violence. On the other hand, in progressive circles, 'political correctness' in the service of 'solidarity in struggle', sometimes distorted and dissuaded dialogue as well. In the words of Howe (1993: 4) 'Apartheid has given ethnicity a bad name'. In April of 1993 scholars from all disciplines and all corners of the world gathered in Grahamstown for a conference called 'Ethnicity, identity and nationalism in South Africa: Comparative perspectives'. McAllister, one of the convenors, noted:
Just a few years ago it would have been impossible to hold a conference of this kind in South Africa, or even to address the kinds of questions and issues which it raised. Not only was there a boycott which prevented intellectuals from other countries from visiting our shores, but within South Africa itself the feeling was that ethnicity was purely a creation of the Apartheid state.

Furthermore, as he clarifies, '*To discuss ethnicity was somehow to legitimate its existence, and thus to legitimate the Apartheid state. There are still South Africans who feel this way, but the tide has turned*' (1993: 7).
Hopeful words, but unfortunately the issue of culture, Afrocentric management included, is still something that is difficult to discuss without raising emotions and memories of the vicious social engineering of ethnicity under Apartheid.

The view from the tribal frontier
The view from the tribal frontier is very different to the view from the heart of modernity, be it Johannesburg or any other capital anywhere in the world where modernity is dominant. In Limpopo and other parts of the rural Southern African subcontinent, 'tribality' is the dominant. Even the Afrikaners see themselves as a tribe. At this frontier of tribality, the modern is only emerging, somewhat dominating only in urban or peri-urban nodes against a complex tribal backdrop. This is very different to viewing the tribal against the overwhelming backdrop of

New York, London, Moscow, Beijing, Amsterdam or even Johannesburg, Durban or Cape Town.

This difference of perspective is common to all situations in which what Baudrillard (1995) calls 'particularities', are in contact with the modernising impulse called globalisation, or what has been called the new imperialism (Escobar 2001). There is also a frontier in the midst of the centres of modernity with the hoards of immigrants who arrived during the latter half of the last century and who are still arriving. That is a frontier too, but somewhat blurred by the political correctness of notions of melting pots and hybridisation which have so dominated the imagination until recently. It was presumed, and hardly questioned, that the immigrants were being transformed into citizens, almost totally absorbing the dominant culture as their own. The jury is still out on this question. It was certainly given a jolt by the fact that the London suicide bombers were British born in most cases. Perhaps, many of the new immigrants to the first world are only role-playing the ways and means of their new host country, while maintaining their own historico-cultural-spiritual roots and identity.

One of the key concepts in traditional society is the 'ancestors'. In the West one can ask the question, 'Do you believe in the spirit of the ancestors as a guiding force in everyday life?' as a somewhat abstract question, assuming that one may or may not believe. In other words it assumes that there is a choice for an 'individual'. To someone immersed in traditional society from birth, the ancestors are a given that people accept unstintingly. The question of whether or not one believes in the ancestors is nonsensical in this context. There is no question. This is, perhaps, what makes it embarrassing to admit. What will the Western other think of me? It is safer to deny it.

The ancestors are so intertwined with so many aspects of the persons being, at a totally assumptive level, it may not even be possible to, in fact, reject, as it may be in the West, the primary difference being that all people become ancestors when they die. In a sense, immortality lies ahead of everyone. Judeo-Christians do not become gods. Chief Seattle, beginning his 1854 Oration put this difference of perspective and values very elegantly:
Your dead cease to love you and the land of their nativity as soon as they pass the portals of the tomb and wander away beyond the stars. They are soon forgotten and never return. Our dead never forget this beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent

mountains, sequestered vales and verdant lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender fond affection over the lonely hearted living, and often return from the happy hunting ground to visit, guide, console, and comfort them.

He concludes: 'Let him be just and deal kindly with my people, for the dead are not powerless. Dead, did I say? There is no death, only a change of worlds' (Oration of 1854: verse 1). Tribal people are not merely exotic remnants of a dead age, 'noble savages' as it were, but real human beings living now. As Inayatullah militates:
As American Indians have told New Age appropriators, if you desire to use our symbols, our names, our dances, our mysticism, then you must as well participate in our pain, in our defeats, in our anguish. You must also see us in our humanity, good and evil, and not as noble savages. It is the arbitrary exclusion of certain dimensions of history and self that become problematic (1999: 816).

Immortality is hard to give up. People relinquish the histories passed down to them only very reluctantly. Identity is rooted in history and culture, and is not simply an outcome of the environment. In a world where the particular is dominant, it is foolish to deny it and even more foolish to ignore it. One cannot assume that all people really want to embrace modernity uncritically. The resistance coming from particularities cannot be disregarded as mere resistance to change, for it draws from the wisdom that has been handed down through the ages. People recognise their particular culture, tradition and history as their birthright.

It is worth noting the seminal founding work of political anthropology, Pierre Clastres' *'La société contre l'état'* (1974) published in English as 'Society against the State' (1989). He points to the, albeit unconscious, ethnocentric judgments made of primitive societies, '… their existence continues to suffer the painful experience of a lack – the lack of a state – which, try as they may, they will never make up' (189). He contends that this ethnocentrism has an '… other face, the complementary conviction that history is a one-way progression, that every society is condemned to pass through the stages which lead from savagery to civilization' (190). He concludes his argument as follows: 'It might be said, with at least as much truthfulness, that the history of peoples without history is the history of their struggle against the state' (218).

The attempt at hegemony by the state unites but, at the same time, also destroys

the dialects, cultures and languages that do not gain dominance. This homogenisation is resisted by particularities to various degrees. How many dialects and languages has the world lost already? Perhaps we will never know. Griggs and Hocknell (2005) estimate that what they call the 'Fourth World' consists of between 6,000 and 9,000 particularities and accounts for more than a third of the total population of the world. The implication of all of this for the case of management in Africa and other regions with vibrant particularities with a strong allegiance to traditional societies is that they 'conspire' against developments if they perceive them to threaten the core spirit of their traditions, customs, land and autonomy. People accept change which they perceive as beneficial. One must never presume ignorance and any lack of intelligence among people from particularities, or tribals, because of their lack of formal education. Rural people are very clever and can very quickly identify the weak points of any system and abuse, exploit, corrupt or deflect it. The ignorance and blindness of the so-called 'educated' may even be much greater. Andre Gide who took a trip down the Congo in 1925 wrote in 1927:

But people are always talking of the Negro's stupidity. As for his own want of comprehension, how should the white man be conscious of it? I do not want to make the black more intelligent than he is, but his stupidity, if it exists, is only natural, like in animal's, whereas the white man's, as regards the black, has something monstrous about it, by very reason of his superiority (124).

Gide's observation unfortunately still captures the way the Globalisers still look at the particularities. The world is still suffering from these self serving misperceptions and misconceptions.

Identity and migration

There is a growing awareness of the difference between the migration of Europeans and even Eastern Europeans and Jews to the United States of America prior to Second World War. These immigrants sought after the American Dream and, while in fact maintaining an identity from the home country, quickly integrated into the culture of their adopted home. However, the newer waves of immigrants are perhaps different both in their origins outside of the common European culture of previous waves of immigrants, but also in their strong ties to the culture of their particularity. A recent article in Pravda highlights a particularly radical perspective on these recent immigrant waves to the United States and Europe. Mikheev (2006) puts it succinctly: 'The world which the West

has been ruthlessly transforming for years, has started to transform the West in return'. He continues to explain:
Many respectable politicians acknowledge nowadays that massive immigration may destroy the Western civilization in the end. Immigrants continue to conquer the world promoting their own needs and values. … As a rule, immigrants preserve their national identity, which gives them a reason to defend their rights and needs. … Immigration has become a serious problem for the USA too. Non-white Americans have become much more socially and politically active than they used to be in the past. There are US experts who think that immigrants and their growing families will eventually create one of the most serious problems for the USA's internal security in the 21st century. This view was recently echoed by the Republican Senator for Tennessee in the United States, Lamar Alexander, who said: 'A lot of the uneasiness and emotion over this immigration debate is from Americans who are afraid we are going to change the character of our country' (Reynolds 2006).

While the Democratic Senator from California, Dianne Feinstein, commenting on the legislation making English the official language of the USA, put it slightly differently:
I think it's very important that people who want to spend the rest of their lives in this country become identified with American ideals … It's important people learn to speak the language, learn to respect the democracy, want to abide by the rule of law and that this country shouldn't be little ghettos. Learning English is symbolic of buying into that ideal (Reynolds 2006).

This recognition of the fact that migrants may not take on the culture of the host country as their own through assimilation or integration is dawning all across the developed world. Commenting on the Danish experience, Toksvig (2006: 23) writes:
What seems to have surprised Denmark is that many of the people arriving in need of relief wanted to bring their own culture. They did not want to be Danish in the way the Danes did. Even today it is estimated that, instead of assimilating, 95 per cent of thirdgeneration Turkish-Danish males import their spouses from Turkey.

The colonial powers did not consider their settlers taking on the cultures of the countries they occupied; after all, they had invaded. So why should immigrants assimilate? Or rather, why should their adherence to their home culture surprise

the Europeans and Americans as it seems to? Some migrants may try and divide their worlds, holding traditional society as some kind of static entity which they like to visit in order to show the people, from the village, how successful they have become. But most have no choice but, to some degree at least, to accede to custom and tradition's demands as they intrude into their everyday life. Demands such as being summoned to the village for funerals, weddings and other community rituals are generally not negotiable. Other demands, such as those for support of extended family members or the requirement to fund ostentatious funerals and weddings may drive the person to any lengths to satisfy these demands and requirements, so as not to lose face.

This is not to say that traditional societies, as such, are unchanging. They are changing with time and context like everything else. The question is whether the particularity is going to be able to protect values and customs dear to their hearts, and play the role they should in guiding the conversation towards a future modus operandi maintaining the integrity of their history and values. Perhaps this will lead to a range of 'hybrids' for this southern tip of Africa. Maybe something else will emerge through a blossoming of diversity and mutual respect. Or is something to be imposed?

It is, of course, always difficult to understand what is happening in other parts of the world, as it is to understand why it is that 'others' do not behave as we would expect them to do. Nevertheless, our deficiencies in making sense of what is taking place in Africa seem to me to go far beyond the usual problems which we may justifiably have about understanding other peoples and continents. What is puzzling to me is not just that our failure to comprehend Africa is extraordinarily acute but that, in this age of supposed rationality, we seem content to accept failure on such a scale when it comes to the African continent – as though the curse of the Dark Continent should forever obscure our vision and impair our ability to understand (Chabal 1997).

On the other hand those living in the First World view traditional society from a dominating perspective, considering traditional cultures as simply remnants of a distant past, as survivals. This arrogance of domination, presumed superiority, risks trivializing these cultures as quaint and interesting, and not really taking them seriously. Some even attempt to adopt a co-optive paternalism. That is, 'simulating' an accommodation through the adoption of the symbols and trappings of the particular cultures. This unfortunately leads to the

marginalisation and denial of the more profound questions being asked by the leaders of particularities worldwide. This only serves to drive them to more covert levels. Espey (2002), while categorically emphasizing that he does not promote this, notes:

… There is no doubt that poverty in the south and the clash between the dominant Western civilisation and other subservient civilisations is fertile breeding ground for global terrorism. This is a security issue for the north and is already being acknowledged by leaders in the north (in Macfarlane 2002).

Much of the third world, in contact with modernity, either at home or abroad, has, perhaps, been operating at this covert level over the past century, living in their multiple worlds and keeping their true identity within their community. Unlike Third Worlders (i.e., those from particularities) or is it Fourth Worlders, First Worlders, the moderns and post-moderns as they like to term themselves, have a notion of an integrated unified identity striving for self-actualisation, which to a Third Worlder looks a lot like self-indulgence. This hyper-individualism is hard for most Third Worlders to understand. Etzioni comments on a 1993 meeting of Asian leaders in Bangkok:

The purpose of the meeting was to formulate an Asian stance on human rights which would be represented at the upcoming World Conference on Human Rights. According to one report, 'What surprised many observers … was the bold opposition to universal human rights … made on the grounds that human rights as such do not accord with "Asian values"'. Asian intellectuals justify this opposition on the grounds that Western notions of human rights are founded on the idea of personal autonomy, which Asian culture does not hold as a fundamental virtue, if it embraces autonomy as a virtue at all (1997: 179).

Third Worlders on the other hand are used to living in many very different cultures and are comfortable in each of them, or at least can appear to be. What is masquerade and what is real only the actor may know, but possibly only viscerally, in many cases. Migrants learn quickly to move seamlessly between their worlds without any inner contradiction.

Cornejo Polar (2000) counters notions of hybridity with the notion of cultural heterogeneity. Grandis and Bernd (2000) summarise Polar's view as follows:

Rejecting the belief that migration results in a synthesis of the urban with the rural, and the present with the past in the identity of the immigrant, he asserts that migration leads to the formation of dual, or multiple identities. Although

these often appear to oppose one another, they are able to coexist without tension in the migrant, and allow the articulation of multiple and apparently contradictory perspectives in the discourse of the migrant (2000: xx).

This concurs with research conducted among migrants in Limpopo Province (Franks 1994) which found that the migrant's world is one in which it makes sense for him/her to live and work in Johannesburg, while ensuring the survival of 'home'. Above all, 'home' remains the migrant's primary source of identity while s/he can move easily between these worlds.

To someone who does not know of the subtle varieties of world views that are possible, isolated in their narrow confines (albeit hypermodern or post-modern), it is difficult to understand the sensibilities of the other as anything but frivolous. They are clearly foreign. Middle class urbanites of our global cities cannot even move among the denizens of their own cities without culture shock, let alone understand the sensibilities of a sangoma**.[ii]** in South Africa. This inability to understand the legitimacy of the other, no matter how strange and foreign they may appear is the root danger of the present crisis in world affairs. It is not that traditional cultures are unchanging. As Garcia Canclini (1995: 155) proposes:
… What can no longer be said is that the tendency of modernization is simply to promote the disappearance of traditional cultures. The problem, then cannot be reduced to one of conserving and rescuing supposedly unchanged traditions. It is a question of asking ourselves how they are being transformed and how they interact with the forces of modernity.

Viewing issues of management from this perspective does not accept the superiority of modernity in its assumptions but rather resents its seemingly inevitable domination. As we see, the resistance to this domination in Iraq, and throughout the Middle East, has resorted to open terrorism and guerrilla warfare. Perhaps, this will force a realization that the voices of the particularities demand recognition and respect, and demand that their concerns are addressed. Their capitulation cannot be forced without their annihilation. Luyckx (1999: 979) reports the plea of one of the non-Western participants at the Brussels Seminar in 1998, as follows:
There is already a dialogue and cross-fertilization going on between Asian cultures and Western culture. The same thing is true for the historic role of Islam. But we are urging the West to change, and go into a real dialogue. There is no shortage of noisy words in the field of management (Mintzberg 1999).

Reality is far too complex for these buzzwords to be more than very partial analyses, no matter how holistic they claim to be. Here one must remember the caution of Schopenhauer against the professors and their '… fiction of a reason that knows, perceives, and apprehends immediately and absolutely' (1966:xxvi).

In the investigation of social situations, that is, in trying to grapple with understanding the complex dynamics of situations, contexts and people, there is great danger in the application of predetermined understandings. The error of such applications is systematic. This systematic error may, down the line, create more problems than the initial intervention was intended to solve.

Humankind will always (continuously and forever) have to find appropriate ways to manage in the ever-changing situations and contexts and with the people whose interests and concerns are diverse and also always changing. All the models and buzzwords have something to teach us, but in the particular moment in a particular situation, with particular people, the appropriate thing to do cannot be predetermined. It is always a matter of fit, in terms of time and space, yet there is seldom an abstract fit; it always involves judgement. However, this is not to belittle the importance of models and 'loud words' in enriching management and leadership vision and understanding. There is always a need for praxis and knowing one's context and people.

The danger of 'error' in all theories and models is that it is systematic. Error systematically fetishises one aspect of a complex and dynamic situation, ignoring others. Following Schopenhauer (1844) and Baudrillard's (1983) notion of the 'precession of the model', Giri (1998) draws upon the Upanishads:
Let us begin with the Upanishadic insights where it is believed that reality is beyond our categorical formulation and comprehension. Whatever categories and concepts we use to make sense of reality, they are not adequate to provide us with a total picture. The Upanishadic insights refer to the simultaneous need for concept formation as well as the abandonment of concepts. … It is only when one fully and thoroughly disengages oneself from superimposition, that one opens oneself to an experience of reality.

A strategy may be appropriate in the abstract but may not be appropriate in the particular moment in a particular situation in the particular context with those particular people.

For example, after the changes in South Africa, the application of participation as a panacea, as a visible sign of the new democracy, had a particularly detrimental effect on the running of the very institutions that the country needed in order to build itself for example. In Higher Education, where I have been an active participant, it certainly contributed to the ungovernability which characterized the sector, especially the historically Disadvantaged Institutions, for many years. Leadership was cowed before an orgy of participation, and corruption of all sorts followed. This is still continuing. Participation, when introduced into a very volatile and politicised situation ends up allowing the domination of any organised minority. Participation, too, has to be managed. The challenge is to find the appropriate way to manage in particular situations with particular mixes of people and values, in full awareness of the nuances of the particular moment in time. We need to learn how best to manage in our particularity.

Culture and Management

A Saudi Arabian public manager's resort to disciplinary measures to control his subordinates' performance and behaviour is severely restricted by the civil service code and the strong traditional inhibition on causing someone to lose his face or means of livelihood. Consequently, he is obliged to try informal methods of persuasion and social pressures before turning to punitive steps. In assuming the role of the paternalistic leader, the manager is expected to look after the financial, social and professional welfare of his subordinates who will return this in the form of personal loyalty, obedience and acceptable standards of behaviour and performance (Atiyyah 1999: 9).

The Saudi public servant, as with his South African counterpart, is forced into roles that a global manager would consider an abuse of his/her freedom. How would these same global managers respond to the KwaZulu Provincial Minister of Education's refusal to be in her office for three weeks because her office was bewitched? As her husband told the media, 'There is a common belief that she is being bewitched by her predecessor'. The predecessor responded: 'I don't know anything about muti. I am a Christian. I don't want evil to affect anyone'. The culture of the context infiltrates every organisation or institution to some degree. For instance, the old school tie, Broederbond, Lodges, etc., can all influence organisational functioning. This is no better or worse, only different, in its extent and domination. On the tribal frontier traditional culture dominates in fact.

Ouchi (1981: 40) noted the crucial point when he wrote that '… an organization

cannot convert new employees into a firm specific culture deviant from the surrounding society – so instead it adopts an organisational culture with central values identical to those of the surrounding society'. Sinha (1992: 5) reported on this situation in the Indian sub-continent, which harbours so many ancient particularities:

Other scholars (e.g., Ganesh 1982; J.B.P. Sinha 1990) confirmed that Indian work organisations remain embedded in the socio-cultural milieu. Modern technology is often compromised with social compulsions to the extent that in some cases automatic machines and plans are rendered manual (either by neglect or inept handling) for creating more job points. Work forms remain Western in description, but work relationships are permeated with cultural ethos. The organisational chart as given by the supplier is kept neatly in the drawer, but hierarchy is culturally shaped. The organisation may have high tech but the identity remains social (Parikh 1979). Ganesh (1982: 5) observed that '… organisations in this country [India] have fuzzy boundaries. Essentially organisations have come to represent settings in which societal forces interact. Thus, our organisations have provided settings for interaction of familiar forces, interest groups, caste conflicts, regional and linguistic groups, class conflicts, and political and religious forces …'. He further pointed out: 'In some cases, the sociocultural factors adversely affect organisational vitality and productivity. However, in some other cases, they are effectively utilized to maintain high productivity (J.B.P. Sinha 1990; J.B.P. Sinha and D. Sinha 1990).

More recently Kao, Sinha and Sek-Hong (1995), published an important work, *Effective organisations and social values*, which was succinctly reviewed by Professor Gandhi of the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, expanding on Ouchi's basic premise as follows:

People's behaviour in different social settings, whether at home or at work is largely determined by their values, attitudes and beliefs. To a large extent the culture one belongs to determines these. In organisations people belonging to the same culture have similar social values and therefore display similar patterns of behaviour. Managers who recognise these social values and design appropriate work systems tend to create more effective and successful organisations.

Instead of functioning as the global manager would expect, decisions in the organisation are overridden by interests outside the organisation. A chance meeting at a funeral can undo all the plans made by an organisation in its

planning. Decisions can be made by the collective behind the scenes.

Sinha provides the key to sustainable development, through harmonising the cultural nuances of the social context with the needs of the organisation. Rather than attempting to co-opt, suppress or merely wish them away, the customs and traditions of the cultural particularity have to be negotiated if sustainable development is to be arrived As Mazrui (1974: 17) has pointed out, the failures of African Governments perhaps follow from a dependent stratification system, in which the selection of leaders and the conferring of privilege are 'based on values and skills drawn from a dominant foreign source'. They have been those most Westernised, and not those with the vision and capability to develop their historical context. In a sense what Mazrui is alluding to is the fact that African development has followed a Western rather than an African template, a template foreign to the third world context and therefore an imposition. Afrocentrism arises as a counter to the Eurocentrism that has dominated the world for so long. Afrocentrism arises from the interaction between the domination of the socalled global over the local, or what Baudrillard (1995) calls particularities. These notes from the frontier understand Afrocentrism as viewing the world from and within Africa.

Much of the management-in-Africa literature seems to focus on how one should motivate and manage people, relying heavily on notions of participation which is where first world management happens also to be, the learning institution etc. However, until we face the deeper issues of values and identity, honestly and openly, we are not going to find an appropriate modus operandi for management in Africa or any other particularity.

Even champions of globalization increasingly fret that it may damage or destroy the diversity that makes the human race so fascinating, leaving nothing but homogenized, least-common-denominator forms of creativity. In the wake of September 11, there is a new urgency to these concerns. The fury of the terrorists – and of the alarming number of people around the world who viewed the attacks as a deserved comeuppance for an arrogant, out-of-control superpower – is sparked in part by a sense that America is imposing its lifestyle on countries that don't want it. And one needn't condone mass murder to believe that a new world order that leaves every place on the globe looking like a California strip mall will make us all poorer (Weber 2002).

The view from the particularities is pretty unanimous. Sohail Inayatullah (2000: 12) suggests:
As the intelligentsia for hyper capitalism search for new legitimating factors, the challenge for the anti-systemic movements, in this possible window of opportunity, will be to create visions and practices of a more multicultural society with an alternative economics that is spiritually grounded.

Wole Akande (2002) echoes a similar sentiment:
But what is there to fill up the vacuum of decaying Western values? The expression 'African values', now typically propagated by Zimbabwean dictator Mugabe, is generally discredited as being the government propaganda of dictators. There is indeed a general confusion about which set of values might take the place of the once universal Western value set. However, the search for new or old values is ongoing. A search for historic, cultural roots can be observed in all non-Western societies. Predictably, any revivalist movement is bound to meet resistance especially since 'Asian', 'African' and 'Muslim' values have also been questioned as a result of their use of the most repressive parts of their cultural roots. Even so, the peoples of Africa nowadays act more self-confident on behalf of their roots than only a decade ago. Local cultural expressions, beginning with the arts, lead on a path towards cultural autonomy, which again should influence the value set.

On the other hand, all the talk of multiculturalism in the West risks becoming merely an exercise in containing particularities within modern and western constraints, all the time maligning the particularities. Just as the West uses extreme events to malign entire thousands-of-years-old cultures, this 'hegemony of the new' can have terrible consequences.

Many writers have contributed to an important dialogue towards ubuntu and African-based Management. Notable among them are Koopman (1991), Mbigi and Maree (1995), Boon (1996), Lessem (1996) and Mbigi (1997) among others (cf. as Mbigi (1997) describes in his book entitled 'Ubuntu: The African Dream in Management'). While one appreciates their pioneering work one has to agree with Manning (2001: 3):
The first question, then, is how to bring in new thinking and at the same time preserve valuable experience. Secondly, how can the performance of new teams be enhanced? Answers to both questions are closer to hand than most managers think. They lie not in ill-defined notions of 'African management' or drawn-out

diversity training, but in much more pragmatic 'strategic conversation'.

One of the greatest problems with all the amelioratives (and Afrocentric management can be viewed as such, not that that is all it is) is that they have seldom been evaluated by neutral research. This does not have to be quantitative research, or what Mbigi denounces as 'empirical research'. But, if others cannot confirm the claims, we are in the realms of 'puff'. This goes for the legion of buzzwords that have each had their fifteen minutes of fame. One is reminded of Mintzberg's question: 'Are we so numbed by the hype of management that we accept such overstatement as normal?' (Mintzberg 1999)

Thinking that ubuntu or some African or Afrocentric management can capture the essence of Africa is as absurd as thinking one could typify the West through its humanistic philosophies. These typifications are always limited to a few if not a single dimension of the issue. When used in that way these useful exercises become reduced to nothing more than buzzwords adding to the noise. It risks becoming the worst form of reification or rather commodification, more to do with commerce and business than with any real understanding of the complex dynamics faced at the frontiers. The question is whether it furthers our understanding and ability to find a way forward. However, despite these dangers, all buzzwords do have something to contribute to the conversation.

Issues of managing on a tribal frontier

Living and working on the tribal frontier in South Africa I can only attempt to draw on my research and management experience within this rural context to try and elucidate the issues that beg for understanding in terms of the issue of culture and management for a particularity in the face of rampant globalisation. The following anecdotes illustrate the general flavour of the issues unique to the tribal frontier:

A Director of a School appointed a woman lecturer as the supervisor of a student's dissertation work. He was approached by a number of people to change the appointment because the student was a Venda male, and a 'Venda male' could not be supervised by a female. This is common to all the tribes in the Limpopo and beyond although it is slowly changing. Adherence to such views depends on the degree of urbanisation more than anything else. Perhaps, the lower the degree of formal education, the higher the so called chauvinism, at least publicly and by word, however,the deed may contradict this.

Rightly or wrongly the Director decided to accede to the request in this case. However, it illustrates the dilemma of offending local values or those of modernity in the attempt to find an accommodation which allows processes to continue. What if a white requested not to be supervised by a black. This we could not accede to as custom is not at issue, or is it?

Recently the Ministry of Education reported that its highly publicised programme to incentivise excellence in teaching had run into problems. The programme for bonuses was based on peer review scores given by colleagues. The minister of Education said the programme had run into problems because 'they all just give each other 100 per cent' (Hogarth 2006: 38). To which a local satirist, Hogarth, responded: 'Gosh. What did she expect?' (ibid.).

A Human Relations Climate Investigation conducted in the Limpopo Provincial Public Service (Franks, Glass, Craffert and de Jager 1996) indicated the following major issues:
– Lack of mobilisation of skills and expertise towards a common vision;
– Classism. A feeling among some public servants that they are 'professionals' and therefore superior to those they are supposed to serve;
– Confusion of political and administrative purposes;
– Historical and contemporaneous favouritisms (from *baasskap* to *broerskap* to sexism to comradeship);
– Inadequate performance evaluation systems;
– Inadequate supervision and management;
– Inadequate training and development;
– Covering-up, excusing, or simply just not recognising, incompetence;
– Conflict between the perceived demands of tradition and custom versus the demands of modern administration.

The core issue underlying all other issues and exacerbating the situation is what the authors termed 'the conflict between the demands of custom and tradition and the demands of modern management'. The inadequacy of this conception is acknowledged, despite its descriptive accuracy and heuristic potential. It is important to understand that this conception represents a complex dynamic of interacting forces some of which have been sketched above.

To give an example: A public servant sits at a desk with a pile of work to do. S/he receives a phone call. It is someone from his/her village summonsing him or her

‘home’ for a funeral, marriage or other such responsibility. Culturally, and in terms of custom, this is ‘non-negotiable’, and takes precedence over any other responsibilities. Invariably the public servant puts his or her pen down, locks the office and goes ‘home’ for anything up to two weeks. The work must wait.

This is not something that can easily be changed. However, what can be done is to pro-actively put procedures in place for such an eventuality, whereby the public servant contacts someone else to take over the workload while s/he is away. S/he should brief the respective people as to what is to be done and what is urgent. In this way it would be ensured that work would at least continue and important things get done.

Unfortunately, at present we resist even acknowledging the issue. As a Chief Director said to me, ‘it is embarrassing!’ It is only embarrassing because we are trying to deny cultural differences, partly because Apartheid made such a fetish of them, and secondly because we are presently so concerned to prove we are modern.…

It is urgent that difference needs to be recognised and celebrated. It is certainly not something to be embarrassed about. Let us put appropriate procedures in place to handle these legitimate responsibilities. The conflict between the demands of custom and tradition and the demands of modern enterprise, overtly or covertly affects all work processes at each and every level of enterprise. For instance this conflict or dilemma:
– Affects all processes of selection, and placement of staff can be influenced by agendas extraneous to the goals of the organisation. Pressures to hire the home boy or girl is just the tip of this iceberg of nepotism;
– Work and modern enterprise are secondary to ‘home’ and all it stands for. That is, the spiritual frame of reference influenced by the ancestors, in the legends of the mass of the workforce;
– Interrupts work flows: funeral interruptions; absences without replacement, and/or delegation. In some cases access to the absentee’s office may not be possible and if faxes arrive there they will wait till the absentee returns. This has the effect of clogging work processes. Even high level executives have to attend numerous funerals on Saturdays disturbing their focus and limiting their work;
– Strengthens informal networks: encourages the formation of tribal, clan, political, or whatever based informal networks which compete with the formal

decision-making processes. Because of this, partial interests tend to be served above those of the organisation as a whole. Generally it creates disruptive networks that exacerbate organisational politics hindering organizational functioning;
– Complicates discipline, and makes it impossible to implement performance management. Managers cannot act procedurally against a home boy or girl who is not performing without having to face his family and clan at the funeral every Saturday. It is not like in the city where, if a manager fires someone or disciplines them, the manager probably never sees the person again. In the rural context it is much more personal. Strategies and procedures need to be put in place that can help people face these very real and emotional processes, decisions and dilemmas;
– Encourages favouritism of all sorts: nepotism, clanism, tribalism and caraderie flourish. Hire the home boy or girl;
– Compromises security and confidentiality: the impossibility of implementing security protocols as they will be overridden for a 'home-boy or girl', or even a comrade.

Perhaps most important is the notion of 'face' affecting all processes. For instance it is never made apparent that an appointee is an affirmative action appointment because of the damage it would do to that person's 'face' as such. Therefore no development processes are put into place to assist the appointee. Nor can such an appointee ask for assistance or mentoring lest they be seen as an affirmative appointee and lose face. These factors can end up subverting well-meaning processes such as affirmative action by reducing it to nepotism, ethnicism or tribalism, or just plain camaraderie among members of the ruling party. The strategy of favouritism has its downside, which only emerges in full strength once the third or fourth generation of affirmative appointments have settled in. What emerges is a struggle for positions and organisational politics rules supreme with merit being pushed aside. There is no reward for those who do their job, as they will not be noticed in the cocktail lounges in their expensive clothes or in their extravagant automobile nor in their mansion.

In addition the Public Service in South Africa is riddled with a confusion of political and administrative purposes. This can best be illustrated by looking at the hierarchy of trust found among the respondents in the Northern Province survey. The respondents were asked: 'How well do you think the following

people/organisations/departments can be trusted to look after your interests at work?' The respondents could indicate 'good', 'fair', 'bad' or that they did not know. Generally the higher the education the less they trust any of the role-players. The current position clearly illuminates the morale situation in the Public Service.

It is not surprising to find that 50 per cent of respondents in the Labour category trust the union and that trust in the unions declines for clerical workers and Administration Officers and is lowest with the Middle Managers. Surprisingly, for the Senior Management the trust in the union (48 per cent) is almost as high as for the labourers. This indicates that Middle Management can often be overruled by their Senior Managers. They find themselves in the middle of a political alliance which cuts across the administrative procedures. The confusion of roles evident in the hierarchy of trust in the Limpopo Province Public Service explicates a parallel process to that of cultural identity and solidarity.

The further from the centres or nodes of modernity the greater the influence of tradition and custom, the more tribality dominates. However, the influence at the centre should not to be underestimated, as much of it is covert, and denied. But it is clearly a matter of degree.

Many of these influences are covert. Exacerbating the situation is the denial around such issues. This denial stems from the elites buying into the global paradigm as well as embarrassment and playing of roles to accommodate the demands of modernity. Sometimes the application of so-called African Management can collude with the disruption of organisational functioning rather than helping.

This is not going to change unless we recognise and acknowledge the competing value systems and do something to harmonise them. At present we are merely allowing them to find their own way, damaging organisational and institutional growth.

The central problem is the confrontation between merit and organisational politics that really arises from outside the organisation itself. Merit builds respect while a politically riddled organisation builds contempt. And this is something that all the spin doctors cannot gloss over. If these processes are left unchecked it eventually leads to situation of a war of all against all for position. The following

caricature illuminates the situation that arises from the abuse of Affirmative Action: 'If I have a job that I cannot do, and you have a better position, with better pay and perks, that you cannot do, then why can't I not do your job?'

We desperately need to come to terms with the fact that as soon as we allow interests external to the goals of the organisation to influence decisions within the organisation we encourage the fudging of roles and interests. External interests can influence all levels of functioning, from CEOs to streetsweepers. All decisions at all these levels can be influenced allowing policies to be hijacked for interests other than those of the organisation as a whole. The organisation can be hijacked by any of a multiplicity of interests whether they be political (i.e., camaraderie), tribal, ethnic, clan, family, broerskap or whatever kind of favouritism. It merely depends on who the home boys or girls are. Favouritism opens the possibility for self-interested motives to corrupt processes, masked in the rhetoric of the ruling policy environment. For example:
– Appointment of unqualified homey is sometimes masked as affirmative action;
– Taking kickbacks or giving oneself contracts is even rationalized as empowerment;
– Hard decisions are not taken and incompetence is excused for a myriad of reasons.

In rural areas, especially, we have to find a way to work with the traditional structures, if we are to make organisations work. It is necessary to deal with the social and psychological impacts of rapid urbanisation on people. If we do not talk about the conflicts in people's minds, caught between the demands of custom and tradition and the demands of modern enterprise conflict may be exacerbated. Denial fosters the conflict between tradition and modernity undermining morality and subverting all enterprise. There is a dire need to assist people to change in a way that is consistent with their values and more importantly allow and encourage so-called tradition to develop the wealth it contains for the benefit of society. As Mafeje (1996: 20) comments, noting the growing number of voices raising the issue of '… the relationship between culture and development in Africa':
The underlying presupposition is that Africans have not fared well so far precisely because they have abandoned their own cultures and languages in favour of alien culture and language. While the correlation might not be as simple as such presuppositions imply, there is an obvious need for re-evaluating African

experience so as to discover what went wrong, and how best it could be corrected, relying on homegrown remedies.

While the assimilation of alien culture and language has been led by the elites, its absorption further down has been far weaker. It is urgent that African intellectuals incubate a dialogue between tradition and modernity, as is happening in India and other third world countries that are successfully resolving this complex of difficult issues and find ways to come to terms with modernity. All particularities need to find a modernization that begins to harmonise with their indigenous knowledge and value systems.

These notes talk at the micro level to the need for an African management that can synergise management principles with the demands of custom and tradition as well as for custom and tradition to harness the management of human capital towards African solutions to Africa's problems.

Towards the future

There is a rising awareness of the need to deal with the cultural question. The frenzied attempt to deny cultural relativity is waning. A Brussels Seminar at the European Commission (1998) proposed a 'double hypothesis':

– 'That we are in transition to a transmodern way of thinking that combines intuition and spirituality with rational brainwork;

– That 21st century conflicts will likely be not between religions or cultures but within them, between premodern, modern, and transmodern worldviews'.

Luyckx continues: 'Non-Western thinkers find this framework useful: it opens a door to criticism of the worst aspects of modernity without being 'anti-Western' (1998:974).

Inayatullah (2000: 7) comments that 'like death, the West has become ubiquitous. But will hegemony continue and are there any signals of possible transformation from within and without?' Inayatullah proposed the following four alternatives for the West: A dramatic ageing population leading to a future where immigrants are required for survival, however, once in the holy land of Disney, multiculturalism may make porous the West itself;

– Genocide against the Other, resisting internal transformative processes;

– The Artificial Society, wherein diversity and the Other are pushed back since high productivity can be achieved through the new information and genetic

technologies, that is, through reductionist science and linear economic progress; While the latter technocratic scenario is most likely, there are possibilities that a more multicultural, Gaian, communicative, globalist future may emerge.

While, perhaps, a little idealistic, Inayatullah captures the possible futures before us. Perhaps we will negotiate future hybrids. But socially engineered simulations will simply not wash. Perhaps, hybrids with integrity? But this will be a rocky path and the warning made by Jan Christian Smuts more than a century ago, during another outbreak of a particularity resisting colonialism, the Boer War, reflects this:
History will show convincingly that the pleas of humanity, civilization, and equal rights, upon which the British Government bases its actions, are nothing else but the recrudescence of that spirit of annexation and plunder which has at all times characterized its dealings with our people (Smuts 1900: 3).

Can the global heed the warnings, or will it arrogantly attempt to impose its will, annihilating all particularities? Baudrillard, echoing Inayatullah's second alternative, warns somewhat prophetically:
Our wars thus have less to do with the confrontation of warriors than with the domestication of the refractory forces on the planet, those uncontrollable elements as the police would say, to which belong not only Islam in its entirety but wild ethnic groups, minority languages etc. All that is singular and irreducible must be reduced and absorbed. In this sense, the Iran-Iraq war was a successful first phase: Iraq served to liquidate the most radical form of the anti-Western challenge, even though it neverdefeated it (1995: 86).

Dialogue needs to escape the 'good guy – bad guy' level of political discussion so predominant in world affairs today. This is accurately reflected in the exposition of the goings on at Abu Graib Prison in Iraq as well as other interviews with US troops in Iraq. The American troops vilify and hate the people they are fighting. Also, the congressman who, after viewing pictures from the prison showing Iraqi women having to display their breasts, noted that he had not seen any violence. That is violence to the Iraqi women.

Politics is not about good guys and bad guys, or 'good and evil' as President Bush would have us believe. Politics is about conflicts of interests, whether they be spiritual, cultural, social, political and/or economic. Unless particularities are taken seriously, acknowledging conflicts of interest for what they are and

respecting their histories and aspirations, little progress can be made in management or in world affairs. More problematically, if we are to stop the terrible talk of good and evil as unleashed by the dangerous dialogue world leaders are flirting with in their 'War on Terrorism' from spiralling out of control, the world will have to act swiftly or the chance for dialoguewill dissolve in mistrust, loathing and the maligning of the 'other'. As Wole Akande (2002) has noted:
Politically, the 20th century was a battle between left and right. In the 21st century the contest will pit localists against those struggling to manage globalisation. The former will seek control over the local economy; the latter will continue to see globalisation as inevitable as gravity. Their role will be to attempt to make it a better balance for all of us.

At the local level, what is required is a willingness to know our contexts, the values, customs and traditions, and a willingness to respond honestly in finding ways to effectively manage in multicultural contexts. We need to firstly acknowledge ourselves in all our complexity. All urbanizing populations experience this confusion. What is needed is a willingness to know our contexts, the values, customs and traditions, and an honest response in finding ways to synergise multiculturality in vastly different contexts.

No simple solutions will solve the problems raised by globalisation's penetration and domination of particularities. This is a political issue, no matter whether at the level of managing an organisation or international relations. The same principles apply. Unfortunately political issues cannot be reduced to technical solutions; they have to be negotiated or someone sabotages the implementation of the solution. They clearly cannot be imposed. As the author has previously written (1984: 1): 'Without negating the basic similarities between all human beings there is still a need to come to terms with the various aspirational paradigms of our varied peoples'.

European modernization required the urbanisation of people under the myth of a full-employment economy. Now we know this was never achieved and, further, that the information society has destroyed jobs and allowed them to go offshore, and that the possibility of full employment recedes, even more drastically.

We therefore need to develop traditional society as a social net (cf. Russian survival on potatoes grown in the countryside) and recognise the benefits of rural

connectedness (not having to pay rates and taxes on tribal land makes retirement very affordable and therefore the need for less disposable income in retirement). Perhaps we could set the economy going if we decreed that only pine boxes can be used for funerals, rather than the very expensive coffins presently demanded. People invest in the dead. They can pay for expensive funerals but not for their children's schooling. It is a clear indication of priorities. It is clear that South Africa's consumption patterns will make development difficult.

If one is sensitive to the nuances of imperialism in a global world, its pros and cons, one is forced to look on the efforts to modernize the South African population with some trepidation. One can be afraid for two reasons, opposite yet complementary. The two reasons for trepidation are:
– That it will beget a resistance (especially now the Middle East resistance is fanning the fires), preventing a process of harmonization from even beginning;
– That these efforts will damage irreparably the psyche of the particularities in South Africans, and other countries, by overpowering the ancient frameworks, and extinguishing their flames.

Unless some way is found to ameliorate the confusions people have, one risks polarization such as we are now witnessing between Muslims and the so called modern world (some even reduce it to the Christian world).

A people which holds its custom and tradition so dear as Africans do, needs to share their confusions if they are to find ways to harmonise their tribality with modernity and inventing an acceptable modernity. Sindane (1998: 18) argues for the survival of the traditional leadership as an institution. 'The sooner it is utilised effectively, the better for all concerned, particularly rural communities'.

At the moment there is a growing effort in this regard although many people are pretending to be part of one framework while not, in fact, being free of the other to do so. Some of us are living a pretence, but a pretence with dire consequences. A pretence that will engender psychological conflicts as well as those between elites and the traditional societies they wish to will away. And this is true for any particularity. A number of authors and practitioners have pioneered models and dreams of African Management and/or Management in Africa. These pioneers of an Afrocentric vision are enormously important. However, some of them verge on the utopian. The use of the concept ubuntu, notwithstanding its rich history and authenticity, has sometimes been presented as a blanket solution to all the

problems faced by South African organisations. Ubuntu is an admirable concept, just as is humanism in western philosophy. However, when it attempts to posture a superiority for Africans, it ends up being as delusional as that of the superiority of the West. In any case ubuntu is always limited by 'mona' (envy and jealousy).

Despite such weaknesses, including the fact that a clearly African Management is still to emerge, these efforts need to be complemented, supported and assisted by a generalised conversation to handle the nuances of the cultural dimension in management on the frontiers of modernity and tribality.

When the Afro-pessimists raise the spectre of corruption, they are in part misunderstanding the pressures and dynamics faced by African leaders and people. It is not so much that people are corrupt but that they are caught between competing demands, values, temptations and desires. People need help dealing with this confusion of roles and values; primarily they need to help each other find a way forward. Without such dialogues and conversations on these issues people are left to their own devices. They therefore fall back on their tribality for comfort. Tribality and modernity have to converse or conflict will abound. The issue must be dealt with in the open.

There is already a rich and diverse literature on culture and management from many and varied particularities. The basis is in place to engender an honest understanding of the issues involved at the management level. It is possible to incubate a dialogue towards appropriate policies as well as the processes and strategies for implementation. The following are some of the things that need to be facilitated at the local level:
– Acknowledge the issues involved, the integrity of all views, values and conflicts of interest and resist maligning the 'other';
– Support managers in handling the complex situations they face;
– Find ways to support the people trying desperately to come to terms with contradictory demands on them, through some form of group work, perhaps;
– Move beyond denial in our everyday lives. Shake off the 'shame'- the real legacy of colonialism and Apartheid;
– Incisive research and dialogue concerning the issues involved;
– Break away from the politically correct and face the murky reality;
– Strategic conversations at the coal face;
– Reject entitlement and face our responsibilities. Strengthen the social fabric;
– Embrace meritocracy as the only way to cut through the webs of favouritism and

become productive. Any exceptions made will open a loophole for favouritism of all sorts.

Recently, a debate has arisen in the South African Sunday papers which seriously criticises affirmative action as it has been practiced in South Africa. The debate was opened by Prof. Malegapuru Makgoba, Vice- Chancellor of the University of Natal. He has been supported by Prof Sipho Seepe (2005) who concurred with the last point above when he wrote:
Surely we cannot continue to maintain policies that assume that black people are mentally inferior and incapable of competing on their own merit! In addressing the historical imbalances, we should continue to be guided by principles in which advancement is based on merit and a single standard of excellence (Sunday Times, Letters Section, 6 February).

Others accused Makgoba of selling out to whites. Nevertheless this is, perhaps, a sign that South Africa is losing its innocence. Hopefully, critical and intellectual conversations are becoming more and more possible at a local as well as a global level. The 'No' vote in France and the Netherlands concerning the EU Constitution, which Baudrillard describes as the 'No to the unquestionable Yes' (2005: 24), is perhaps a sign of the unravelling of the hegemony of political correctness (Arrighi 2005). The people who source their identities in particularities cannot relinquish their birthrights as long as they survive, whether at home or in some far-off First World country. How we choose to handle the interface of cultures at the frontiers of globalisation, whether in the heart of the modern or in some particularity, can halt the negative spiral. Conversations need to take place across all frontiers. Zhao (1999: 918) asks a relevant question as follows:
The West and the East have two different kinds of historical experiences, reflecting two differing philosophies: one of confrontation and the other of reconciliation. Now, adding the fresh experiences of two world wars and a third cold war in the passing century, is it not the time for us to ask ourselves, in the face of cultural divergences, which kind of philosophy would be better for us to follow?

The fact is that there is a resistance to talking of matters of culture by all sides. As long as some are blinkered by their fundamentalism, whether Christian, Muslim or whatever, while many are blinkered by the politically correct negation of cultural relativism, and the religious belief that the issues surrounding Human

Rights have all been honourably resolved, the misunderstanding will continue to subvert the best laid social engineering plans of the policy makers whether they have modern, tribal or migrant origins.

In South Africa this resistance is very clear. Because Apartheid took the idea of cultural difference to the extent of attempting their so-called separate development policies, creating homelands for the various ethnic groupings, this made any discussion of cultural difference extremely limited, limited especially by the understandable wish to negate anything that could have justified such a 'crime against humanity'. However, one has to recognise that even though the mode of implementation of a policy can become abhorrent to world opinion, there could still be a grain of truth in it. It gets us back to logic and the limits of the bifurcating Aristotelian logic which is used as a dominating dialogue to capture people's minds on the side of good as against evil. The forced choice is of course manipulated by the horror stories one can tell about another culture, while one's own crime statistics on abuse of women and children tell another story of horror. No society has found a way to eliminate such abuse. None can stand on a tower of moral superiority, the so-called high ground. Until we acknowledge our equality, truly, we will not be able to sort out these very deep and important questions of cultural difference and harmony. The arrogance to think that the First World has solved these problems is a very dangerous standpoint, fuelling the arrogance of political correctness, and furthermore one which makes the holder of such beliefs weaker and poorer, in their ignorance of the powerful explosive forces simmering in their societies.

When one reads Prime Minister Blair saying that 'if people want to come here, either fleeing persecution or seeking a better life, they play by our rules and our way of life', it raises serious concern that a leader of Blair's stature can so simplistically view this complex situation. Where is hybridity in that? Thankfully, at the same time he announced the setting up of a Commission that would 'examine multiculturalism and explore measures to integrate better those who deliberately separate themselves from British law and culture' (Donaldson 2005: 13). Blair and other world leaders would do well to examine the situation carefully before embarking on misguided actions. First they will obviously need to adjust their mindsets. It requires that people recognise the legitimate in that which they instinctively consider illegitimate. This is a difficult challenge.

Conclusion

I would hope this paper contributes with the others in facilitating a conversation towards building on our cultural strengths and finding solutions appropriate to our particularities and our world. The problem always remains that one is understood by those who already see the issue; for many of the others it is a case of 'if they don't know, you can't tell them'.

In February 2004 the author was invited to share these ideas at a special seminar on 'Building Capacity for the Future' held by the Minister of Public Service and Administration, in South Africa. Everyone acknowledged the issues as important but politely shied away from discussion. They described them as so-called soft issues. These issues are often dismissed as soft issues. But in fact they are the hard issues, in the sense of being most difficult to resolve. They can only be resolved if we face our realities for what they are, rather than viewing them through Eurocentric lenses. This Eurocentrism rather than imagining a possible future, hopes for traditional structures to just wither away. History shows that they will not for, in fact, this has been the strength of Africa's cultural and linguistic survival in the face of the ravages of colonialism. There is no option but to face these realities and a growing awareness of them. While elites can, perhaps comfortably dream of modernity in the urban centres, it is much more difficult here on the interface between tribality and Modernity. However, it is just as real a quandary in the urban as the rural contexts, just not as visible.

It is not that these processes are not present in the so-called developed world or in the urban centres of modernity in the Third World; they certainly are. However, a certain degree of domestication has been achieved such that members of particularities are only known to those that are part of them, to academics who sometimes study them, and to some of their neighbours. To the vast majority of their fellow citizens they hardly exist, if at all. To many moderns, particularities are merely quaint reminders (survivals) of a 'primitive' time long past.

Members of a particularity know that their particularity exists in all its contemporaneity and that it is not primitive in the least. If forced to make a judgement they would see modernity as more savage than any particularity they may be aware of. They are also aware of the contemporaneous existence of other particularities and respect them for that, knowing they are not mere survivals, but have their own historical missions. In their recognition of 'others' they are strengthened while the moderns are weakened by their ignorance. Particularities are stronger and healthier than they may at first appear to be.

Everyday the urgency for dialogue seems to increase as the world spirals dangerously towards its future. The world has moved from a bipolar world dominated by the dialogue between Capitalism and Communism to what many people think is a unipolar world symbolized by the emergence of the United States as the, so-called, lone super-power. As with all things, the world is rapidly changing to a multipolar world signalled by the growth of the European Union, China and India to name only the largest. As all particularities aspire to self-determination this will increase exponentially. One no longer lives in a centralized universe but it is fast becoming nodal, where each node is a particularity with its own unique core and modernizing trajectory. Nodes have a right to self-determination, which is not to say they are retreating to racial purity and that there should be no mixing, only that it should happen with respect for the origins of partners, factoring this into the relationship. It is rather a recognition of the right of particularities to find their own path and resolve the issues that confront them in a way that satisfies their particular values, customs and will. It is not about superiority but recognising the value of all humanity and the contributions all can make. It respects the recognition that there is always more that we do not understand and that what may appear retrograde presently may become exemplary in the future, and vice versa.

All paradigms have their errors. Let us not wipe out what we do not understand. This sketch is unashamedly based in an acknowledgement of cultural relativism and the necessity of factoring the cultural dimension into all our deliberations.

NOTES

i. This chapter uses the term tribal in its descriptive sense. It is not meant to be derogatory in any way. The problem with political correctness is that it cannot handle such realities in its ideological antagonism towards tribalism and particularity in favour of global domestication and modernisation. Mafeje (1996) differentiates tribe from state as follows: 'Therefore, analytically and historically, the line of demarcation between tribe and state is crossed only when those who rule are no longer governed by kinship principles of recruitment into public office nor for their subsistence and that of their staff and retinue …' (p. 33).

ii. Traditional healer.

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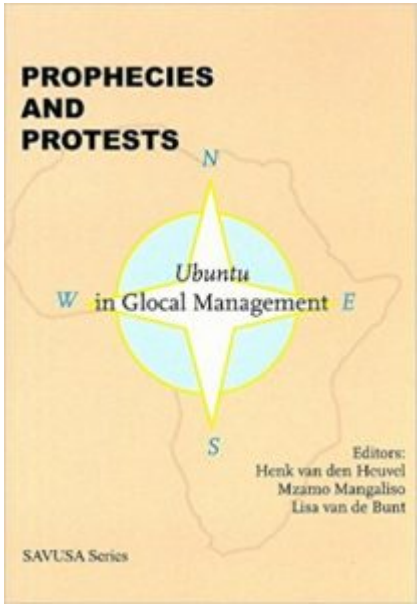
Prophecies And Protests ~ Eurocentric Versus Afrocentric

Approaches: Management Thinking Beyond Dichotomies?



Introduction

In 2003 one of the authors of this article visited a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa where a colleague – a well known South African specialist on *ubuntu* – lectured in the Philosophy department at that time. The author gave a presentation on *Genomics and Africa* in one of the lecture rooms of the School of Molecular and Life Sciences of this university. On the wall outside the lecture hall there was a show case, containing a brochure of the school that stated:

Vision

The school of molecular and life sciences strives to be an internationally recognised afrocentric centre of excellence in biotechnology, arid zone studies, and related disciplines.

The author was struck by the use of the word 'afrocentric'. Surely, molecular biology as such cannot be Afrocentric. Or can it? In *Cell Biology International* 2001, an article written by Barry Fabian was published. The title of his article was *Cellular ubuntu: Umntu Ngumntu Ngabanye Abantu, and other problems for cell biologists in the new millennium*. Fabian looked at the self-organisation of developing cells. He noted that the complexity of cells is not only related to the cell itself but also to the functional whole of cells leading to an ordered operating system. Fabian concluded: 'To this end, cell and developmental biologists must continue to honour and explore the adage that "a cell only becomes a cell through other cells"'. So 'molecular *ubuntu*' in the metaphoric sense of the word is possible after all.

Afrocentricity is a concept that has gained popularity both in Africa and among African-Americans in North America. In this article we will first focus on the problems with regard to the definition of this concept. We will then argue that the

popularity of the – loosely defined – concept is probably related to its metaphoric power, constructing an opposition to Eurocentric, and creating its own authenticity. We will try to demonstrate that this construction of opposition and authenticity, i.e. this construction of identity, can potentially mask other – possibly more relevant – dichotomies, notably the dichotomy between the rich and the poor.

Afrocentric: A definition problem

Trying to answer the question what afrocentric management is about, will undoubtedly induce problems of definition. Generally speaking, we find the term *afrocentric* difficult to handle because a clear and unambiguous definition of the concept seems to lack. Are we, for instance, talking about an African Afrocentrism or perhaps an African-American Afrocentrism, or are they both the same?

Afrocentricity is a concept that has a long history. It has been the subject of many discussions among African-American scholars in the United States for many years already. There is a wealth of literature related to this subject. One of its major advocates is the African-American scholar Molefi K. Asante. The Department of African American Studies of Temple University, where Asante has been working for many years, has been a leading place in spreading this concept. However, the concept of Afrocentricity has met with severe criticism from scholars, including Stephen Howe in his *Afrocentrism: Mythical pasts and imagined homes* (1999).

One of the African American scholars, Jerome H. Schiele, has tried to connect Afrocentricity explicitly with organisational theory. Back in 1990 he wrote an article entitled *Organisational theory from an Afrocentric perspective*.

Even if we agree that African and African-American Afrocentrism are identical, we are still faced with definition problems. What exactly do we mean by ‘Afro’? Does this part of the concept refer to a geographical entity, to a mental creation, or to a cultural trait of a given society? Is it at all possible to speak of ‘Africa’ as a unity?

We encounter the same problem when using the word ‘African’. Trying to define the adjective ‘African’ will take us into politically highly sensitive discussions. Christopher Marx (2002) rightly points at the strategies of inclusion and exclusion when using concepts such as African or *ubuntu*. We argue that the concept Afrocentric necessarily indicates the exclusion of something that is not Afro. Does

it perhaps mean that we want to exclude Eurocentric? Still, other questions can be raised. What exactly do we mean by Eurocentric? What do we refer to, if we use the concept 'Euro'? Does 'Euro' refer to the colonial period, or does it perhaps extend to a neo-colonial domination? It could also refer to a global spread and domination of a neo-liberal market-ideology, originating in the North Atlantic region. In this sense 'Euro' refers to both the (colonial) empire and to 'Empire' as defined by Hardt and Negri.

Centric' apparently wants us to put something in the centre. But in the centre of what exactly? 'Centric' may refer to a tendency of domination; i.e. domination of a periphery. What then would qualify to be the periphery to the 'Afrocentre'? From the perspective of reflective methodology (see Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000), we take a fundamentally critical stance with regard to the concept of Afrocentric, preventing us from essentialising and defining the 'true' and fixed essence of this concept. However, based on the literature it is still possible to detect some integrating notions that seem to claim a central position in the concept of afrocentricity. These concepts are integration, harmony, communality, consensus as opposed to difference, individualism, atomism, fragmentation, etc. This dichotomy seems to run parallel with the old opposition between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* as formulated by Ferdinand Tönnies already in 1887. But using these concepts induces the danger of a strongly essentialist perspective.

Therefore, for us the more interesting and challenging question is related to strategy: why do people emphasize the use of the concept of Afrocentricity? In their contribution to the conference on *Afrocentric Management* in 2004, Karstens en Illa stated that 'the popularity of management concepts has much more to do with the quality of the source providing the concept than with its truth'. They put much emphasis on the importance of management concepts, concepts *that are full of ambiguity*. They call them *mental creations*.[i] For us this is a very important and interesting observation.

Following this line of reasoning, one may argue that afrocentric management is a mental creation. That means that the relevant research question is not so much related to content, to the 'what-is-afrocentric-management-all-about' question. The examples that we gave from the field of molecular biology lead us to suggest that the instrumental use of labels such as 'Afrocentric' or, as it is fashionable in Southern Africa nowadays, *ubuntu*, is mainly due to metaphoric reasons. Let us take the following definition of metaphor: a figure of speech in which a word or

phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them (Merriam-Webster Dictionary). The famous French philosopher Paul Ricoeur wrote extensively about the function of metaphor. He commented that '[..] a discourse which makes use of metaphor has the extraordinary power of redescribing reality' (Ricoeur 1973: 110). '[….] we must then assume that this reality as it is redescribed is itself novel reality'. According to Ricoeur the effect of using metaphors is 'compared to stereoscopic vision. Several layers of meaning are noticed and recognised in the thickness of the text'. Following Ricoeur we need to look for another, almost hidden, meaning behind the use of the word afrocentric. The use of the concept of Afrocentrism may be another way of redescribing reality; of constructing a novel reality.

In this chapter we deal with the concept of Afrocentric management. It was Gareth Morgan, amongst others, who elaborated on the powerful use of metaphors in the way we conceptualise management and organisations. Morgan said: 'Metaphor encourages us to think and act in new ways' (Morgan 1997: 351). One of the metaphors he outlined is that of organisations as cultures; organisations 'as in essence socially constructed realities' (ibid.: 142). In the next paragraph we want to ask ourselves what this 'novel reality' (Ricoeur), or these 'socially constructed realities' (Morgan) might look like.

Power of opposition

Using the oppositional dichotomy of Afrocentric versus Eurocentric makes the 'case' of an afrocentric management look like a powerful one. It seems to give the concept of afrocentric management a prominent position.

This dichotomy consists of two sides of the same coin that reinforce each other. One side is that of *denial*, i.e. denial of the part that we want to exclude (see Marx 2002). The negative meaning of Afrocentrism is not-being-Eurocentric. The other, positive, part of the coin is (*re-)appropriation*. Using Afrocentrism means that Africans apparently want to (re)-appropriate their authentic identity.

In this sense the use of the concept of afrocentric management pertains to a long history of wanting to escape from a Eurocentric hegemony, combined with a long history of searching for an authentic African identity. Not without reason, the subtitle of Howe's critical analysis of Afrocentricity reads as follows: *Mythical pasts and imagined homes*. Seen from this perspective there is continuity between concepts such as Pan-Africanism, *Négritude*, African Personality, *Ujamaa*,

Ubuntu, Afrocentrism, African Renaissance, etc. Du Bois, Senghor, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Tutu and Mbeki meet in this 'Quest for the authentic African'.

In afrocentric management one can discern a strong tendency to search for authenticity. And this search for authenticity is at the same time a denial of a hegemonic colonial and neo-colonial past. There is a rejection of a Eurocentric hegemony and a re-appropriation of alleged authentic, African 'Mythical pasts and imagined homes'. According to Schiele (1990), mainstream organisational theories reflect the conceptual framework of Western social science, being derivates of Western ideology and thought, thereby negating the worldview of African people.

Afrocentricity serves as a tool for redescribing reality, for constructing a novel reality. Referring once more to Ricoeur, one may argue that 'afrocentric' could then well serve as a metaphor for liberation, liberation from a hegemonic Eurocentric science and technology; liberation from a hegemonic rationalist and instrumental organisational theory; liberation from a neo-liberal market ideology with the commercial interests of Global Big Business. In short, liberation from 'Empire', 'this new global form of sovereignty', 'Empire' with its 'lack of boundaries' (Hardt and Negri 2000: xii-xiv). Applying this line of arguing to the field of molecular biology, Afrocentric molecular biology would then mean a biotechnology that addresses the real needs of the people in Africa, irrespective of the commercial value of the scientific endeavour. In the sense of constructing an authentic African past, afrocentric molecular biology has one interesting and particularly strong case: advanced DNA-research techniques conclude irrefutably that human beings originate from 'Out of Africa'; a molecular African authenticity *par excellence*.

In the first part of this chapter we discussed the problematic nature of the definition of 'Afrocentric'. This problematic nature will become more and more salient in a globalising world; certainly in a field that is in the heart of 'Empire' (some may say the heart of 'Darkness'). One of the classics of postcolonial literature is entitled *The empire writes back*, by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. Borrowing their title one could argue that afrocentric management is about *The empire that manages back*. Afrocentric management is a powerful tool, claiming its own, authentic, place in the series of management-ideologies. At the same time, in the next part we will demonstrate that the use of this management-concept may have consequences that run counter to what it wants to accomplish.

The myth of opposition

We argue that putting an emphasis on the *ubuntu* concept potentially mystifies actual developments in southern Africa today. To what extent are present developments based in the opposition between African and western ways of thinking and doing? Taking a Marxist point of view, former Apartheid can be seen to be the highest form of capitalism. And although after 1994 major changes have occurred, the poor masses have hardly been favoured. In many comments we read that some progress has been made in the last ten years, but at the same time high levels of poverty and inequality appear to have persisted (see e.g. various contributions in the *State of the Nation, South Africa 2004-2005*, edited by Daniel, Southall and Lutchman, 2004). Bond states (2004: 2/3): 'South Africa has fitnessed the replacement of racial apartheid for what can be accurately described as class apartheid'. However, another thing that has become apparent after 1994 is 'the aspiration of the emerging black bourgeoisies' (Lazarus 2004: 9).

Ubuntu serves as a concept in management ideologies in the transnational stages of post-apartheid. The situation of post-apartheid is aptly characterized by Van Binsbergen (2002: 1) when he writes about:

Africa's most viable economy; a highly complex, largely urban and industrial society; an overdeveloped state apparatus originally geared to oppression of the majority of its population; caste-like intra societal divisions in terms of wealth, education, information, and concrete social power; the newly-gained constitutional equality of all South African citizens; the rising expectations among Black people who have historically been denied the White minority's privileges of class and colour; the majority's simmering resentment, both about past wrongs and about the slowness of present compensations and rewards; a drive among individual Blacks to gain financial and occupational security as quickly as possible; and the highest rates of violent crime in the world today.

It is in this present world of persisting structural inequalities that we should analyse the values of the *ubuntu* concept. Neglecting this world of different and fragmented meanings and interests in a highly urban and globalised economy by pinpointing at the alleged historical-authentic background of all black Africans will probably rather favour the emerging rich and powerful ones instead of the have-nots.

Focusing too strongly on the *ubuntu* concept and the philosophy of the African Renaissance can result in a process of depoliticisation and thereby mystification of the everyday struggle of people living in a state of poverty. We argue that it is not so much the opposition between African and Western management concepts that is at stake but the opposition between the instrumental, individualistic, profit-seeking, managerial class and a more humanized social democratic form of living and working together. 'The attention is to reclaim conflicts suppressed in everyday life realities, meaning systems, and self-conceptions and the enhancement of local forms of resistance' (Deetz 1996; see also Grey 2005).

Some people speak about a 'caste of managers' that is mainly interested in measuring and controlling, thereby neglecting questions that deal with quality. This global discourse of a managerialism combined with a profit-seeking mentality will influence large sectors of society; a tendency that runs counter to the integrating concepts of *ubuntu* and its propagators.

Since this is a global phenomenon, the Western world and most of (South) Africa are part of the same neo-liberal market relations of 'Empire'. We argue that *ubuntu* concepts stressing African authenticity and Africa's imagined pasts – paradoxically – strengthen these existing relations, probably (and hopefully) against their intentions.

Conservative dimension of 'ubuntu'

In the work of authors including Mbigi, Mangaliso and Franks, the concept of *ubuntu* seems to be strongly related to a classical anthropological concept of culture. It is a concept that stresses shared values, harmony and consensus. It stresses the interest of the community, of the group, of the tribe (Louw 2001). Anthropologists have known for a long time that this use of the culture concept is one-sided, since it overlooks the many contradictions, ambiguities and power relations which are always part of cultures.

For Mbigi and Mangaliso, *ubuntu* as African philosophy *par excellence* serves as a basis for management. However, does the way they conceptualise the philosophy not fit seamlessly into the tradition of bestseller writers like Ouchi (1981), Peters and Waterman (1982) and Deal and Kennedy (1982) when they articulate a form of corporate *Gemeinschaft* (community) that tells a lot about the myths of North American capitalism, not about what really happens in organisations, i.e., that is prescriptive instead of descriptive? (Parker 2000). These authors point at the

importance of shared values, consensus, harmony and even mention the idea of corporate tribes.

Undoubtedly, an African context differs from a Western (or should we say Eurocentric?) one. But since we are all part of a global 'Empire', the differences match striking similarities. Both worlds strongly appeal to the managers' homogenizing credo, 'all noses in the same direction'. In some way, it is ironic to see that Mbigi, Mangaliso and others appeal for the same values as do their Western counterparts whom they criticize so badly.

In his polemical and critical article on *ubuntu*, Christopher Marx (2002: 59) writes:
Ubuntu is the self-description of a society that is in the wake of a transformation from an intimate pre-modern into an anonymised and urbanized industrial society, marked by a division of labour. Ubuntu is an invented tradition, whose task it is to minimize historical chasms and fractures. Ubuntu aims to contrast society and community, Gesellschaft and Gemeinschaft.

According to Marx *ubuntu* suggests a cultural essentialism: the essence is the African village and chiefdom, a pre-modern, idyllic world with a community spirit of belonging and social security. In essence, that is what Africa is, contrary to 'the West', a world of egotism and emotional coldness, by definition. In general *ubuntu* refers to 'tradition', that world of belonging, security, solidarity, togetherness, etc. But does that tell the whole story about African villages and chiefdoms in former times? Idealizing community and communalism as the main signifiers of African identity (Marx 2002: 52) masks the real struggles of people in former days, like undemocratic power relations, poverty, and the like. Nation building positioned in such an image of the past is deeply conservative and naïve: it glorifies an imagined past.

Ubuntu adepts such as culturalists might fail to notice the implications of their political statements in the economic domain. Political statements deal with identities, the economic domain deals with interests. In their view politics 'centers around identities, which are to be expressed and represented, not around interests, which compete for power and resources' (MacDonald 2004: 637). The take-over of power by the ANC administration did not harm the business elite too much so far, as has been indicated in many publications in recent years (Marais 2001; Lodge 2002; Daniel *et al*. 2004).

Racial solidarities do influence elections, in spite of formally 'non-racial' political institutions, and the ANC does trade on racial identity, representation, and politics. But what white liberals, whether culturalists or individualists, do not see is that the material interests of whites – at least of prosperous ones – benefit from emphasis on representing African identities, that Africanizing state leadership serves as the condition – the camouflage – for instating the material interests of prosperous South Africans (who are disproportionately white). Emphasizing racial identities allows the party of Africans to represent poor Africans symbolically, while putting them off economically (MacDonald 2004: 639).

Ubuntu philosophy informs us about many aspects of past and probably even of contemporary village life in Southern Africa. But the danger of stressing these traditional values of *Gemeinschaft* is that this mystifies and obscures ('camouflage') other conflicts in the present globalised South African *Gesellschaft*. The image of Africa is the paradox of deeply felt friendliness and hospitality of people versus the struggle for life and profound inequalities of resources, of power, in the past and today.

Ubuntu and the western management concept

Since the early 1980s many western organisations, more in particular the executives of these organisations, have been identifying new perspectives on management. Although not for the first time in organisational theories, culture and cultural differences became a key factor, not in the last place because of Japanese successes and management experiences. That the interpretation of these experiences is rather one-sided and distorted does not alter the fact that the Japanese success stories were very popular. Western managers find support in concepts such as consensus and harmony that (supposedly) exist in the Japanese business world (Ten Bos 2000). Looking back, it becomes clear that one may question the so-called lifetime employment and the element of collectiveness (Bax 1991). However, the culture concept offered relief to many in the sense of 'shared values' answering the pressing question: how do we achieve a situation in which everyone is pulling in the same direction?

This perspective has continued to dominate discussions until today, at first mainly in the business world, but later, in the 1990s, in the not-for-profit sector as well. Everyone started to look for shared values with which to re-determine and share deadlocked identities. Because of fundamental societal transformations, managers and executives are continuously struggling with change, complexity,

differentiation, and fragmented meanings. Various management courses come up with the instruments and models with which to achieve this, both to identify conflict via a quick scan, and to change this into a more desirable situation. There is a continuous search for shared core values and a common identity as *the* expression. *Ubuntu* refers to (traditional) values. In that sense it is seen to be a concept of culture. It serves as a concept in management ideologies in the same manner as the integration perspective on (organisational) culture did in the West.

Just like the integration view on culture, the concept of *ubuntu* with regard to culture essentialises and thereby mystifies existing (cultural) differences. Any generalization on Western and on African management concepts necessarily misses out on the contradictions and conflicts in everyday life. Confronting these concepts with each other is only possible in a rather theoretical or abstract manner, not based on solid empirical research. Differences within the concepts probably outweigh differences between the concepts. And with respect to similarities, it may well be the other way around. Life in rural areas in the Netherlands is very different from urbanized life. The same holds for South Africa, as Franks shows in his comparison between Johannesburg and the countryside. Moreover,

… we must realize that in many other contexts, outside Southern Africa, the appeal to human-ness or humanity occurs in ways very similar to those proclaimed by ubuntu. The very term 'human rights' suggests so much: it defines not primarily – for such would be superfluous – the ontological entities to whom these rights apply (humans), but especially the extent of their application: universal, applying to all humans (Van Binsbergen 2002: 9).

We argue that, in principle, the discussion should not concentrate on further delineating differences between Western and African management concepts, but on management (concepts) and their pre-suppositions in general. Managerial *ubuntu* adepts fit in the tradition of publications that focus on the practitioners' perspective on (organisational) culture. This perspective has yielded a major quantity of so called 'how to' books from the early 1980s onwards (with first bestsellers of Peters and Waterman and Deal and Kennedy). Parker (2000: 25) places these books in context, and concludes that

… the most relevant element of that context is that which frames the culturalist movement as an attempt to intervene in the identity of the employee just as all organisational control strategies from (at least) Taylor onwards have done.

He rightly warns that this should not be taken too seriously, as the claims made are, to a great extent, normative. These claims are far less about what actually happens in organisations: 'Most of this work is hence an amalgam of mythologizing and mystification couched in marketable quasi-anthropological language' (ibid.). It raises the question of whether the current (renewed) interest in diversity (like the supposed differences between Western and African management), identifications, commitment, loyalty and binding also contains a large degree of normativity, and wishes to provide managers with instruments with which to increase efficiency and productivity, and manageability. Cavanaugh (1997) talks about diversity's rhetorical contribution to the reproduction of organisation. He suggests that diversity may have more to do with 'affirming the given than changing it'.

Are management scholars perhaps more concerned with ideal and thereby intangible situations, or do they seek to express what everyday situations and experiences are? In the latter case it would be advisable not only to study organisational processes and management from an integration point of view, but also from a differentiation perspective and a fragmentation or even conflict perspective (Martin 1992; 2002).

Opposition is between rich and poor

If we claim that the opposition between Western and African management is nonexisting in the sense that it relates to novel realities, or at least is not relevant, we may focus on what concerned scholars (and management consultants) could better attend to. It is the dominance of the instrumental rationality model in the service of the powerful that is at the heart of organisational studies taught in most management and business schools in the USA and in Europe, and indeed even in many other parts of the world nowadays (Grey 2005). Studying organisations is inseparable from political choices. Focusing on cultural differences (*ubuntu*, traditional or otherwise) without explicit political choices is a way to conceal who controls the access to resources.

The increasing gap between rich and poor does not have its primary basis in cultural differences, between a 'Western' way of thinking and doing, and its African counterpart, but in the harshly unequal in access to, and control of resources. No one will deny the fact that structural power relations between the West and Africa are out of balance. But it is probably more important to recognise that in our globalised world the same inequality can be found within nation states,

within institutions and within organisations.

Economists and the international institutions that employ them routinely ignore differences of power; by prioritizing poverty over inequality, relations of power, and responsibilities these entail, are eliminated from the picture (Nederveen Pieterse 2002: 1027).

Global capitalism and the market ideology of 'Empire' have replaced national market capitalism and their local impact is felt at every level transgressing the borders of nations and continents. Discussions about *ubuntu* can only be valued when placed within this view on structural power relations that relates to center and periphery. This implies that we need to look for comparable positions between people in the West and in Africa. Solidarity on the national level is important, but is necessarily seen in the context of relations between global inequality and domestic inequality, since the effects of globalising economies and their ideological legitimacies by (international) management and business schools and their gurus cannot be underestimated. At the heart of *ubuntu* lies solidarity. But what does solidarity mean when on the one hand people are expelled from their homes because they suffer from AIDS or live in deep poverty in slums, and on the other hand their 'brothers' drive around in their Mercedes or BMW and lock themselves every night in their palaces with huge walls and gates around it? Is this way of living simply copied from the West? Is it just an integral part of African culture as it is in the West as well? Therefore, if *ubuntu* adepts want to promote solidarity with poor masses and favour the democratic participation of all, they should point their arrows at the present South African political situation.

South Africa's version of capitalist democracy, as advanced by the ANC under President Thabo Mbeki, uses racial nationalism to undergird democratic government; uses democratic government to ratify capitalism; and completes the circle by using capitalism to materialize the significance of racial nationalism, the predicate for the ANC's strategy of legitimating democratic capitalism and capitalist inequality (MacDonald 2004: 632).

One may argue that the colour of the elites in South Africa is changing; it is 'blackening' bit by bit. And maybe on the other side, the colour of the poor masses is 'whitening' a little bit. But at the same time MacDonald points at the logic of the political economy:
The new African bourgeoisie, because it shares racial identities with the bulk of

the poor and class interests with white economic elites, is in position to mediate the gap between rich and poor and black and white by creating cross-cutting cleavages. Cutting in the African bourgeoisie without providing for the African poor changes the racial character of economic inequality, but it does not narrow it much; it enlists new elites in collusive businesses, but it does not expose them to much new composition; and it rewards racialists political strategies of legitimization and stabilization, but it does not allow the African poor effective institutional recourse. It changes the beneficiaries of and justifications for the political economy, but not its logic (ibid.: 651).

The logic of structural inequality seems to be colour-blind. By focusing on so-called African traditional values like collectiveness, consensus and solidarity as a solid basis for African management, and in opposition to Western management, *ubuntu* culturalists miss the point that causes the ever-growing gap between poor and rich South Africans and withhold the poor masses from developing a higher standard of living. If they do not connect their cultural-philosophical discourse with the existing political-economical inequality, the trap of inequality will be sustained. In this respect, we agree with Christopher Marx when he writes:
All cultural and historical differences within Western societies are ignored, and, instead, 'the West' becomes an adversarial image, the 'other' against which a description of 'Africans' can be contrasted. A conservative critique of culture framed in these terms, and presented under the banner of ubuntu, is unable to use social historical analysis to learn more about the opposition between individualism and community in South Africa (2002: 62).

If African management, and *ubuntu* in particular, is going to make a difference to Western management, it needs to incorporate a broader analysis of structural political and cultural inequalities. This would imply solidarity with the poor and powerless masses in the first place. Such a human factor would add something that (western) management in general lack is in dire need of.

From dichotomy to dialogue?
Tom Lodge writes:
There is nothing wrong with codes of behaviour such as ubuntu. The concept expresses a compassionate social etiquette which, if everybody adhered to it, would make life most agreeable. It might prove quite difficult, though, to reconstruct a political order on the basis of collective solidarity rather than civil liberties. Besides, not all traditional belief systems are egalitarian or benign. What

constitutes tradition is always a contestedissue, but tradition is often invoked to justify oppression and cruelty. Whether the tradition that is invoked existed or not is a rather academic question (Lodge 2002: 235).

Moreover, (South) Africa is changing and rapidly becoming part of a globalised world. *Ubuntu* codes, whatever their intrinsic values, can only be taken serious if they become a weapon in this changing arena with all its complexities. But is this what the *ubuntu* adepts strive for by means of reinforcing the concept? In such a world

… ubuntu may serve as a liberating transformative concept in the hands of those who wish to build the country, but it can also be wielded as a mystifying concept in the hands of those who, after the post-apartheid reshuffle, were able to personally cross over to the privileged side of the huge class divide, without being over-sensitive to the wider social costs of their individual economic and status advancement. This process is widely noticeable in South Africa today. It is what people euphemistically call the Africanisation of that country's economic and public sphere. Those using the concept of ubuntu selectively for their own private gain, seem to be saying to their fellow participants: 'How could you possibly question the way in which this specific situation is being handled by us, whereas it is clear that we appeal to our most cherished common African ancestral heritage, to our ubuntu! … (Van Binsbergen 2002: 16).

It is exactly this warning that is at stake here. Instead of longing for traditional values it would be advisable to analyse what is happening nowadays in South Africa (and elsewhere in Africa). As regular visitors, researchers and readers we see a deeply divided society in many ways on all levels, only partly informed by *ubuntu* values. Using concepts like meaning, power and context will show that society needs to be defined as a (multicultural) arena of multiple identities and interests, and so is every organisation within society. It will explain that consensus is lacking with regard to many issues and strategies because management and work floor for instance may have different interests. It will teach us that sometimes unexpected coalitions are formed between historically strongly divided people. That poor people, like many of their 'brothers' are longing for the same fruits of present developments, if necessary at the cost of their neighbours or even relatives. It will, at the end of the day, show us that the similarities between western societies and African societies are probably stronger than the differences. The same goes for a comparison of 'African' management

with ‘Western’ management, whether inspired by *ubuntu* or not.

Therefore we invite *ubuntu* culturalists to join hands with critical academics, both in the West and in Africa, who have been studying and discussing management and organisational processes for many years now. From an academic perspective it would be more accurate and more correct to concentrate on the analysis of current organisational processes and management concepts, without continually wishing to indicate how they could be different or better. This would prevent us from falling back into the pitfall of functionalism and normativity. It is our academic task to help those who want to increase their capacity to reflexivity, by teaching them, and by learning together to ask the relevant questions in organisational practices, whether they are consultants or managers themselves. Daily practice requires rapid decisions and changes. There is hardly time for reflection, or at least this time is rarely taken.

In the analysis of organisational and management processes, there should be a focus on the process of sense- and meaning-making, as this is the basis for collective actions. The analysis will thus have to concentrate on retrieving the origin of these meanings.

Meanings are formed by a mix of earlier experiences (like traditional values) and present (globalisation-informed) opportunities, and therefore continually (re)produced in interactions between people. At the same time, this sense- or meaning-making is a process of negotiation. Thus, what is necessary is an analysis of these interactions, realizing that it is an arena in which people take part who come from different positions and who have different (and possibly conflicting) interests.

We argue that we find ourselves present in an arena in which cooperation goes hand in hand with conflict, unmasking existing differences and inequalities, unveiling the illusion that organisational practice could be a haven of consensus and harmony in a heartless world of poverty and inequality, as *ubuntu* seems to suggest. We, as academics, argue that we need to be critical, by the nature of our profession. ‘The dialogic outcome requires a constant dedifferentiation and redifferentiation for the sake of demythologizing and enriching natural language and consequently opening to reconsideration the most basic and certain experiences of everyday life’ (Deetz 2000: 136). The basic perspective is that of difference. It is not about resolving differences, but about the extent to which the

struggle can be fought openly, and the extent to which the other is taken seriously, especially when the voice of the other is not heard otherwise. Therefore it is less important whether these differences have a Western or an African background.

We argue that *ubuntu* as a management tool cannot work in a 'traditional' environment of a 'traditional' community. We live in a world that is globalising, differentiated, fragmented, diverse, full of contradictions and paradoxes, etc. *Gemeinschaft*, referring to the authentic communal living, and *Gesellschaft*, referring to the modernist, rationalist society cannot be seen as separate things. We do not live in a world that is characterized by separate, essentialised, cultures that meet, including a Japanese, a North American, an African, but in a world characterized by different 'cultural orientations' (Van Binsbergen) that interact, that contradict, that reinforce, that should listen to each other. And in such a dialogue, *ubuntu* and Afrocentric management need to find their rightful place. Then both can be seen as integral parts of a process that Robertson has called 'Glocalisation'. Only then can *ubuntu* perform its transformative role.

NOTES

i. See also Karsten and Illa 2001.

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