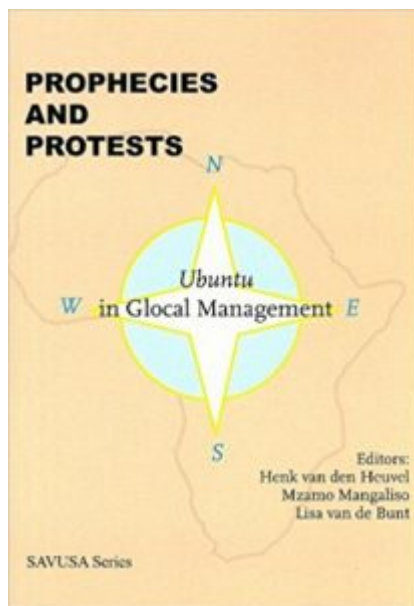


# Prophecies And Protests ~ Ubuntu In Glocal Management ~ Contents



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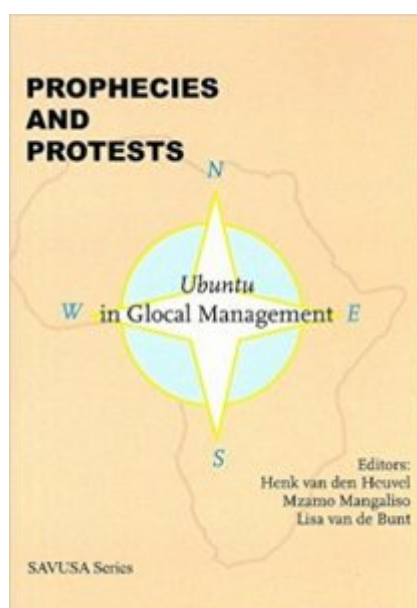
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# Introduction. Prophecies and Protests ~ Signifiers Of Afrocentric Management Discourse



Since the early 1990s, dominant management discourse in South Africa has been contested by a locally emergent perspective that has come to be known as 'African management'. It is doubtless still a rather marginal perspective, but one could argue it is a rather influential one. Over the years, African management has received quite some media attention.[i] Presently, a number of South African firms strongly sympathise with Afrocentric approaches, and actually make efforts to implement their principles. *Eskom Holdings Limited* is a case in point, which is contributing about 50 per cent of the

total energy production in Africa with its approximately 32,000 employees, operating in 30 countries on the African continent. This 'public enterprise' that happens to be 'Africa's largest electricity utility', has been undertaking bold initiatives to institutionalise its 'African Business Leadership' vision, illustrating a contemporary appropriation of 'African management' philosophy. Another example may be First National Bank (FNB).[ii] For several years, Mike Boon of *Vulindlela Network* has been actively involved in an organisational transformation initiative to change FNB's organisational culture. Boon, who is the author of *The African Way: The power of interactive leadership*, is considered a renowned author on 'African management' issues (Boon 1996). Peet van der Walt, chief executive of FNB Delivery - also the man who approached Boon for this grand operation - stated that the initiative has met with overwhelming success (*Sunday Times* 28 April 2002). Eskom and FNB are two of the better-known illustrations,

but several other organisations could be mentioned that are drawn towards to Afrocentric perspectives. Of course, we should not forget about the past experiences of *Cashbuild*, a wholesale company in building materials that was extensively described by Albert Koopman:

*... we took up the challenge to change - really change - our business so that our people would see a different reality. And that would change their perception. [...] We knew that our workforce was alienated from our system (they never understood it in the first place and never reaped the benefits from it either) and that we had to do a mighty good job to bring them into our business as 'co-owners'. How else could they start believing in our business other than by reaping direct benefits from it?* (Koopman; Nasser et al. 1987)

Overall, however, the dominant management and leadership style in South Africa is still mostly described as 'western'. Usually, South African management is not only typified as 'western', but also as 'North European', 'Eurocentric', 'British', and 'Anglo-Saxon', or even as 'American'.<sup>[iii]</sup> These terms are rarely well-defined, or differences clearly explained. There seems to be a consensus however, that British influence was amongst the strongest, and was assumed to have lasting effects. Textbooks and handbooks that are used in universities and business schools in South Africa are primarily written either by American or European authors, or else by local authors who write in a similar 'mainstream' tradition. An Afrocentric perspective could be a response to the felt need for 'a contextualised approach' to management and organisation in South Africa; at least that is how the issue was approached initially.

There is a body of literature on 'African management' (e.g. Boon 1996; Lessem and Nussbaum 1996; Mbigi 2006; 1997) and on management and organisation on the African continent (e.g. Blunt and Jones 1992; Jackson 2004; Kennedy 1988; Wohlgemuth, Carlsson et al. 1998). However, no book has yet brought together advocates of Afrocentric management approaches, practitioners, and academics, to analyse and contemplate on this fascinating and rapidly changing subject in a joint effort. Our focus is on the 'African management' discourse as a South African phenomenon, more precisely as an Africanist vision (or visions) on management and organisation.

### *Fostering dialogue*

In June 2004, a two-day seminar on 'Afrocentric management approaches in South Africa' was held in Amsterdam, organised by the *Faculty of Economics and*

*Business Administration* (FEWEB) and SAVUSA (South Africa – Vrije Universiteit – Strategic Alliances) of the *Vrije Universiteit*, with financial support from the *Dutch Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation* (ICCO). About thirty participants from Africa, North America and Europe met to discuss a number of papers that were presented, by some key initiators of the Afrocentric management debate in South Africa, such as Lovemore Mbigi, Albert Koopman and Ronnie Lessem. The main goal of the seminar was to start up a dialogue between practitioners and scholars to exchange views and ideas on the meaning of ‘African management’ discourse, and to discuss possible implications for business practice. During these two days, the proposal was made to produce a publication as a result of the seminar, with the purpose of engaging a larger audience in this experience and of furthering the dialogue.

This edited volume aims to inspire both readers interested in African studies and readers involved in issues around management and leadership in organisations. The book specifically deals with a subject area where African studies, and studies in the field of management and organisation, meet. Primarily it is a scholarly publication, which will mainly be read by academics. It presumes an affiliation with studies in the domain of management and organisation, and a basic knowledge of recent cultural and economic developments in southern Africa, especially South Africa. Which will mainly be read by academics. It presumes an affiliation with studies in the domain of management and organisation, and a basic knowledge of recent cultural and economic developments in southern Africa, especially South Africa.

The reader will not find case studies or detailed evaluations of applications of ‘African management’ principles in practice in this book. Contrary to this, the book focuses on ideas, on written text instead of on empirical research. It wants to bring together a collection of views on what ‘African management’ is about, what its principal claims are, and how these could be interpreted. Moreover, it aims to foster a dialogue between believers and non-believers, based in (South) Africa and elsewhere. Usually, these two groups hardly ever get together and seldom interact, but live and work in separate arenas. The *believers* in this case are ‘African management’ proponents, who could be considered as *prophets* or *protesters*. The *non-believers* are critical of this phenomenon, sometimes even skeptical, as they try to demonstrate, using rational arguments.

The subject of Afrocentric management approaches seems to render

strong responses, from *any audience* of people involved in management, academia, or otherwise. These responses are usually either extremely positive or very negative. This seems to be the nature of the debate. Moderate opinions are rarely expressed. Whenever believers and non-believers do meet more often than not a clash ensues between proponents and critics, while outright skeptics seem too impatient to consider any interpretative readings of Afrocentric management discourse that seek to go beyond its most obvious features.

Why these strong responses? The question rises whether opposing value systems and worldviews are involved, or if another opinion of what constitutes (local) knowledge and 'truth' could be a major reason for such vibrant debate. Is there a conflict of interests? One wonders whether the issue of 'cultural difference', that appears so overwhelmingly difficult to bridge, lies at the base of this, in particular the binary position of 'African' versus 'non-African'? If this is the main issue, the question is whether these differences are 'for real' or merely presented as such, while in fact signifying something else. If so, what could they be symbols of? Moreover, if cultural difference is principally treated in absolute terms, the question remains how to deal with these (real or imagined) differences in the daily practices of management and organisation.

### *Essentialism*

Notions of 'African culture' and 'traditional values', such as *ubuntu* for instance, are paramount in the construction of 'African management' philosophy. Some observers are especially watchful for a possible manipulative use of such concepts, when they are for example used in a context of management and leadership. To some, reference to these notions may be enough to shy away from the debate. This book is an attempt to turn that tide. As a result, the editors hope to stimulate interdisciplinary assessments that seek to develop critical perspectives, in a considerate way.

The concept of *ubuntu* is subject to a lively academic debate. Critics deem it problematic to simply lift this ancient concept out of its original rural context and ruthlessly transplant it into a completely different, modern urban environment (Jackson 2004: 7; Van Binsbergen 2001). In that way, *ubuntu* becomes completely detached from its original web of social relations. Consequently, contextualized meanings of local ('indigenous') knowledge are disregarded. Some commentators even openly doubt whether there is any real substance to what remains of 'indigenous culture' in South Africa (Bernstein

2002). Furthermore, the complex ways in which notions of ubuntu have been transformed throughout the ages as a result of colonialism, apartheid and globalisation, tend to be overlooked.

Ubuntu philosophy ... constitutes not a straight-forward *emic* rendering of a preexisting African philosophy available since times immemorial in the various languages belonging to the Bantu language family. Instead, ubuntu philosophy will be argued to amount to a remote *etic* reconstruction, in an alien globalised format, of a set of implied ideas that do inform aspects of village and kin relations in at least many contexts in contemporary Southern Africa; the historical depth of these ideas is difficult to gauge, and their format differs greatly from the academic codifications of ubuntu (Van Binsbergen 2001: 57).

The idea of ubuntu has been turned into a modern commodity, wrapped up in a global format, as Van Binsbergen argues. As such, it has acquired a meaning quite different from what it could once have meant in its original context. Nevertheless, this is generally how ubuntu is represented in 'African management' discourse in South Africa: as an illustration of an essentialist perspective on 'African culture', as something unchanged and unchangeable, a homogenising concept that supposedly ties all Africans together.

What are the implications of such a perspective? Does it come with a claim to 'original alterity', a state or quality of 'being other', 'being different'? Does it imply an exceptional moral status? Claims to African tradition could be used to supply 'signs and meanings of African authenticity'. From another point of view, traditional 'authentic African elements' might serve as 'weapons for a radical criticism' by means of strategic essentialism (Mudimbe 1988: 153).

Essentialism is a core issue in this book. Arguably, 'African management' philosophy is highly essentialist by nature. Does this mirror dominant 'western' (ethnocentric) essentialist discourses of 'management' and of 'being African'? In reply, this book invites the exposure of non-essentialist perspectives. Taking into account, of course, that responses to an essentialist discourse could perhaps also be essentialist to some extent.

The idea of cultural determination is another feature of the 'African management' discourse that can be found in this book. In this perspective, culture is not so much seen as the *knowledge* that a person needs to be able to

understand and 'make sense' of a situation, but rather as an independent variable. Cultural determination implies a causal relationship between 'culture' and 'social action'. The chapters by Mbigi and Mangaliso are examples of deterministic thinking; both authors seek to promote ubuntu as a management concept. Perhaps, an essentialist and generalising approach is to some extent unavoidable in any management philosophy. Would a management 'prophecy' not lose much of its captivating power and attractiveness, if it would endlessly elaborate on the endless cultural complexities, tensions and paradoxes in society and managerial contexts? Is 'African management', as any fascinating or fashionable management vision, not particularly appealing to its potential users for its holistic and imaginative character that goes beyond conventional boundaries and horizons? Could we say that it is appropriate or inappropriate to speak of ubuntu and 'African management' philosophy in rather essentialist and deterministic terms? Only through a conversation, we might explore hidden meanings, deficiencies, and reasons why this issue has come about. We might also learn something about the 'strategic essentialism' that the philosopher Mudimbe referred to. The question why ubuntu has become such an appealing idea to many is a fascinating one, while ubuntu is 'out of place', yet seen as 'an African thing' that promises surprising points of view.

*... ubuntu, when appealed to in the modern management of urban and national conflicts, can be effective, but not because it summarises the internalised cultural orientations of the Africans involved in such conflict – very far from it, for these Africans are largely globalised in their world-view and practices, and are no more governed by village rules and allegiances than people in similar urban and national arenas in other continents. Despite having rural and small-scale face-to-face relationships as its referent, ubuntu can be effective, in the first place because it is appreciated as an African thing, but in the second place and especially because, despite its globally-derived format, it introduces non-global, particularistic and intimate elements in the very heart of Southern African globalisation. Ubuntu can work precisely because it is novel, out of place there where it is most appealed to. It allows the conflict regulator to introduce an unexpected perspective to which (for historical, identity and strategic reasons) few parties could afford to say 'no' (Van Binsbergen 2001: 74).*

From a dominant management perspective, it seems quite tempting to criticise 'African management' prophets. This makes one realise that culture should be

treated as a power process, related to ideology and knowledge. Dominant discourses come with claims to 'the truth' and 'normality' that will be defended when contested by an alternative perspective.

*It requires constant discursal effort continually to reassert the status of a discourse as 'true', objective, neutral or normal and to displace other emergent discourses, labelling them as abnormal, disordering or political* (Wright 1994: 25).

When representatives of dominant management discourses in South Africa actually begin to feel challenged by Afrocentric perspectives and become defensive of their dominant approaches, this could perhaps be an indication that they are starting to reflect on their own management practices, their 'worldview', and maybe even about changing political realities.

### *Prophets and protesters*

Perhaps the title of this book, 'Prophecies and Protests', requires some explanation. 'Prophecies' refers to the Afrocentric management visions that are presented in the book. To some extent, they are characterised by rather sweeping claims, suggesting farreaching consequences. Somewhat provokingly, 'African management' advocates could be seen as prophets. Some may turn out to be true visionaries; others will perhaps be unmasked as 'false prophets' eventually.

Afrocentric management prophets criticise for instance South Africans who they say have lost their sense of cultural identity; 'westerners' would suffer from a similar symptom. The question is whether traditional African notions nowadays still belong to the cultural make-up of a person's self-representation in South Africa. Do people deliberately hide such cultural features in formal organisational contexts, out of fear for being seen as inferior, old-fashioned, or backward? In the 1980s, black managers in South Africa were advised to 'deculturalise'. They were told to 'to "dump" their cultural heritage to succeed in white business' (Reese 1981: 23). Will they now, 20 years later and after the radical change of rule in 1994, have to (re-)negotiate their ('African') cultural identity within their organisations (Luhabe 2002: 167)?

Alternatively, perhaps people choose to constantly adapt to differing situations, and accordingly use their identity strategically, in flexible ways, depending on how to achieve specific goals or obtain access to scarce resources. Likewise, managers - regardless of ethnic or cultural background - may continuously adapt



their behaviour according to the situation and thus conform to traditional cultural values situationally (Human 1996: 177). There are so many questions relating to cultural identity issues in a (South) African context, and the prophets raising these questions, may indeed have a point in asking them.

Secondly, protesters refers to the kind of criticism articulated throughout Afrocentric management discourse that supposedly argues against conventional management practices in South Africa, for instance against over-bureaucratisation, uncongenial relationships or a lack of spirituality. There is a parallel with anti-globalist sentiments directed against individualisation, marginalisation and social exclusion, issues for which identity-based social movements in southern Africa may find some comfort in the ubuntu concept:

*The radical project, under these circumstances, has to be one that finds relevant answers to the question how social movements that are based on challenging the individualising and barbarous logic of the global economic networks can transform them into one that has as its major term the survival and continued evolution of the human species as a biological and social category of free and autonomous beings, bound together by the profoundly humanistic ethos of ubuntu in the universe.*(Alexander 2001: 138-9).

This is not to suggest that the 'African management' community in South Africa would in some way be affiliated with a larger anti-globalisation front, such as the *Anti-Privatisation Forum*, but similar sentiments and desires could be a factor in popularising 'African management' discourse. In fact, it is not being advocated as 'anti-western', 'anti-globalisation', or opposed to capitalist development at all. On the contrary, 'African management' prophets rather seem to flourish within a capitalist economy, as some well-to-do management consultants show us. They nonetheless represent a cultural protest group, in the sense of contesting mainstream opinions in management. Such claims often meet with scepticism, and even with hostility:

*... discourse plays a role in various forms of resistance and counter-power, in protest songs, banners, ethnic media, dissident scholarly work, and so on. However, since minority groups and (other) anti-racists seldom have as much access to the dominant media or other forms of public discourse as the mainstream elites, their discourse is usually effectively marginalized, problematized or ridiculed.* (Van Dijk 1997: 165)

African management advocates' protests seem to opposed a 'western'

hegemonic position, and ('western') claims of universalism in the domain of management and organisation. In South Africa, existing ('Eurocentric') organisational norms, management practices and leadership styles are largely taken for granted; they seem to be untouchable, something which 'African management' discourse seeks to question. The almost self-indulgent conceit with which global management is practised in an African environment is revolting to many 'African management' thinkers, and this causes them to raise fundamental questions. Their *corporate crusade* is not limited to South Africa. Afrocentric management discourse pretends to bring humanity back into the workplace, putting people at the centre of organisations, and to inspire employees and employers to re-create notions of *Africanness*.**[iv]** The latter will be discussed in more detail in the paragraph on identity and belonging.

Challenge and contestation form an indisputable element of 'African management' discourse. Although its advocates do certainly not constitute a grassroots protest group, they could still be conceived in terms of a community or movement. Those who strongly identify with the idea of 'African management' can tacitly become part of this community, suggesting a sense of belonging. Ever since the concept was established in South Africa, people started referring to it as 'ubuntu movement' (Jackson 2004: 250) or 'African management movement' (Thomas and Schonken 1998; Maier 2002).**[v]**

### *Glocalisation*

This book's subject - ubuntu in relation to management - can be seen as an illustration of the cultural dimension of globalisation, of what Roland Robertson called *glocalisation* - a contraction of the words 'globalisation' and 'localisation' - in the sense of new cultural products that are being created:

*... clearly many have seriously underestimated the flow of ideas and practices from the so-called Third World to the seemingly dominant societies and regions of the world.*

(Robertson 1995: 38-9).

Global cultural processes comprise creative local processes and the production of new culture in which 'the local' and notions of 'home' and 'community' are emphasised. What happens at the local level is itself constitutive of globalisation. Thus, globalisation is a two-way process of influencing (Hart 2002: 14). This does not mean, however, that globalisation would actually have caused 'African management' discourse to emerge in South Africa; still, it has come up against a

background of globalisation and as part of larger global cultural processes. Likewise, in other parts of the world, especially in Asia, local management and leadership discourses have come forward, in which notions of traditional values and indigenous knowledge are also given emphasis (e.g. Hayashi 1988; Van Wolferen 1989; Redding 1993; Chung, Lee et al. 1997). The actual circumstances, the specific moment, and the ways in which ideas with regard to Afrocentric management philosophy have been externalised, articulated and disseminated, are specifically related to local South African political and cultural contexts during a time of transition from apartheid to majority rule.

Glocalisation, in the sense of a two-way process of cultural influencing, raises the prospect of 'exporting' ideas around ubuntu and management to places beyond (South) Africa. The global and the local are influencing each other, are intermingling, with the local eventually giving something back to the global. Thus, a form of glocal ubuntu could come into existence, as 'African management' prophets anticipate. The image that innovation always comes from 'the West' is being discursively reversed. 'African management' advocates radiate optimism. If one accepts the idea of Africa as the 'cradle of humankind', meaning that human civilisation started in Africa, this acknowledges Africa's crucial role for humanity and worldwide civilisation.**[vi]** This is in defiance of more dominant views of Africa's 'primitiveness' and dependency.**[vii]** In this reasoning, if humankind indeed emerged from Africa and man was able to develop tools to survive, to multiply and spread over the world, why would it not be possible to develop new perspectives on management and leadership here? In other words, Africa could have 'something special' to offer to the world, especially in the realm of humanity and spirituality, an important message, a solution to certain difficulties that other societies (in 'the west') suffer from. An example is provided by the book *Lekgotla. The art of leadership through dialogue* by Willem de Liefde, a Dutch author who has worked for years as, amongst others, a managing director in Africa and who recognises the spirit of lekgotla, the traditional Batswana meeting point around a fireplace. Initially the book was published in Dutch to inform managers in Europe about the concept of 'African tribal leadership'. A year later, it was translated into English and launched onto the South African market (De Liefde 2003).**[viii]** This is a quite extraordinary illustration of the popularity of the idea of glocal ubuntu.

### *Competitiveness*

Being constitutive of globalisation itself, in a somewhat paradoxical way Afrocentric management discourse seeks to challenge 'the global' to the point that it imagines itself teaching the world about ubuntu. This could be realised by achieving what Ronnie Lessem has called the Southern African Businessphere in his 'Four Worlds of Management' model (Lessem and Nussbaum 1996; Lessem 1994). According to this model, 'southern' and 'eastern' orientations are less prominent in South African corporate cultures and business realities than 'western' and 'northern' orientations were.

*... corporate culture in the north is characterised by rationalism, in the west by entrepreneurship and pragmatism, in the east by holism, and in the south by humanism* (Lessem and Nussbaum 1996: 13).

According to Lessem, embracing all 'four worlds of management' – an integration of 'western', 'northern', 'eastern' and 'southern' perspectives – is something that not only the South African business community should do, but is a message to the whole world, since there are business lessons to learn from South Africa. Mbigi and Mangaliso support this idea, as they will explain, in chapter 1 and 5 respectively.

With South Africa's official re-entry into the global economy after 1994, and the ensuing intensification of its global interactions, companies have been struggling with issues like the increased worldwide competition, corporate identity, diversity management and transformation. Under these circumstances, the South African private sector attempts to become globally competitive above all. 'African management' discourse, including the 'four worlds of management' model, claims to be able to provide the tools to achieve that goal. Strategic business considerations and 'enlightened self-interest' can be motives to become absorbed by an 'African management' approach. This relates to what Mbigi in his transformation workshops ironically categorises under 'survival strategies for whites in South Africa'. Against the background of *black economic empowerment* initiatives and measures of the South African government in the area of affirmative action within the labour market, white managers may fear their own replacement or redundancy in due course for the sake of the upward mobility of black managers. Therefore, they will have to review their strategies and 'adapt culturally' in the context of the 'New South Africa'. Identification with Afrocentric discourse may thus emerge as an option for economic survival. It would certainly be worthwhile to consider the motives of entrepreneurs and managers in South

Africa for drawing on an 'African management' rhetoric that may not always be merely normative or altruistic. To enable the reader to position Afrocentric management discourse within South Africa, a brief description of the context in which it emerged, follows next.

### *A mood of change and a change of mood*

The emergence of the discourse on ubuntu in relation to management has to be considered in the light of the transition and transformation in South Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Van den Heuvel forthcoming). Against a background of political violence, strikes, and widespread feelings of insecurity in the years prior to 1994, (white) entrepreneurs and business people feared a nationalisation of the industry and the unknown consequences of black majority rule in terms of macro-economic policies. Simultaneously however, a sense of optimism and excitement arose among a small but significant group of business leaders, marketing and management 'mavericks'. The positive imagery of a future multicultural democratic South Africa appealed to them and unleashed hitherto unknown energies. In this condition, ubuntu – presented as an 'indigenous African style of participatory management' – offered a source of inspiration, also to white South African entrepreneurs moving away from paternalistic and discriminatory approaches to management:

*As this country rediscovers its pride in itself, we are discovering the magic of the Afrocentric, rather than the Eurocentric, path to the high ground of shared Values* (Lascaris and Lipkin 1993: 45).

Afrocentric values became associated with something mysterious and fabulous. All of a sudden, the 'African culture' that used to be ignored in conventional management literature in South Africa and that was deemed inferior and used in a divide-and-rule strategy in the Bantustan policy under apartheid, acquired a renewed recognition. Peter Vundla, Chief Executive Officer of *Herdbuys* in the 1990s and one of the very few 'early' black managers in South Africa at the time, commented:

*We need to redefine management in this country by appreciating the African-ness of our people* (Lascaris and Lipkin 1993: 46).

A remarkable transition from apartheid to democracy brought about a search for 'a (South) African way' of managing organisations, inspired by 'African culture'. As Nick Binedell, who became director of Wits Business School in Johannesburg

in 1992, put it:

*... what was very clear at the time was ... that the dynamics of South Africa and African culture were not really addressed in organisations.***[ix]**

In the early 1990s, Peter Christie and Nick Binedell were actively involved in facilitating the South African Management Project (SAMP) that ran at Wits Business School. SAMP constituted a vital platform for the expression of views and debates on ubuntu and Afrocentric management. With several publications coming out of that initiative, 'African management' was definitely launched as a 'new' management concept in South Africa. Peter Christie wrote the following in a preface to the book *African management. Philosophies, Concepts and Applications*:

*Management of African organisations has traditionally been largely neglected by the mainstream business literature. (Christie, Lessem et al. 1994: s.n.) From the outset, it was not immediately clear to all that 'African management' was not simply synonymous to 'managing organisations in Africa'. The former was particularly an identity-related perspective, as the adjective 'African' suggests. It entailed a vision of what 'Africanness' would mean in the context of management and organisation in a post-apartheid era, with highly normative ideas, assuming that (black) African people all shared specific cultural characteristics.*

#### *The ubuntu concept*

Further to its normative character, Afrocentric management discourse seems to be characterised by a search for cultural purity and authenticity. This is illustrated by the use of ubuntu, the key concept in this respect. Ubuntu is a term derived from the Nguni language group in southern Africa, expressing a strong sense of community, collective morality and unconditional solidarity. The equivalent in Sotho languages would be botho, and umunhu in Shona.**[x]** It supposedly stands for the essence of being human, shared humanity or humaneness, and for the essence of Africanness. The frequently cited phrases 'A person is a person through others', and 'I am because we are', a reading in English of the African aphorism in Zulu (and Xhosa) *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* and in Sotho *motho ke motho ka motho yo mongwe or motho ke motho ka ka batho*, are used to illustrate the meanings ascribed to ubuntu. Supposedly, it articulates 'a basic respect and compassion for others':

*It is both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It not only describes human being as 'being-with-others' but also prescribes how we should*

*relate to others, i.e. what 'being-with-others' should be all about* (Louw 2002: 5).

The type of noble virtues associated with ubuntu concern cooperation, reciprocity, hospitality, kindness, mutual trust, respect and equality, but simultaneously it seems to be a rather open-ended construct that may serve as a container for a variety of meanings.

Ubuntu is an ideal concept, often flawed in interpretation in practice. Because the word is being thrown around in popular media, its meaning has become ambiguous and unclear. (Venter 2004: 149)

An Afrocentric cognitive framework and key concepts such as ubuntu may remain rather vague, specifically what they supposedly mean in a modern management context. This is an advantage at the same time, for it creates space to discursively develop such concepts within specific organisational environments.

The origins of ubuntu take us back to rural village life in pre-colonial Africa, where it supposedly was a key value in traditional social organisation. In current Afrocentric discourse the notion of ubuntu is revitalised and re-invented. Amongst its several domains of application, it is also given a central place in conceptualisations of leadership and management in modern contexts, assumingly still resembling 'authentic' African traditions and values. This assumption can be problematised in at least two ways. Firstly, the idea that African values and traditions can be taken as components of a homogeneous entity, with only some minor regional variations, is problematic. This assumption largely ignores the wide diversity of civilisations and differing cultural orientations throughout Africa that have developed in the course of times. Secondly, the notion of something 'authentically African' is also questionable. A plethora of cultural interactions and diffusion that went on for many centuries both within Africa, and with (past ancient) civilisations outside the continent, would be entirely ignored. Such processes have intensified in the era of globalisation. Processes of cultural diffusion in Africa have probably been taking place since the very beginnings of humanity. At best, indigeneity could be considered a temporary condition. 'From prehistoric times down to today', wrote W.E.B. du Bois already in the early twentieth century, 'Africa is ... primarily the land of the mulatto', which is quite a remarkable observation for a man of his time (Du Bois 2002 [1915]: 36).

*Identity and belonging*

The South African philosopher Mogobe Ramose, who has greatly inspired Heinz Kimmerle's thinking about ubuntu, has profoundly studied, and reflected on, this concept. Ramose is convinced that the notion of ubuntu can be of great value to contemporary South African society, in spite of (or perhaps thanks to) its ambiguity and flexibility (Ramosé 1999). Its value concerns for instance its reconciliatory potential, and the idea that it could provide a sense of identity, self-esteem, and belonging. Its popularity should be considered in the context of a society where 'negative images of self' subsist amongst black intellectuals (Mamdani 1999: 127). In this view, the notion of ubuntu becomes an ideological tool, and is instrumental as an identity-marker. Again, this can also be interpreted in a different way, raising critical questions about the prospects of realising a society based on ubuntu principles, such as for example Jan Boessenkool and Henk J. van Rinsum will do in chapter 7 of this volume.

Attributes ascribed to ubuntu are analogous to the rhetoric around *African Renaissance* that is said to have the power to provide the 'seeds of hope' that the continent is so desperately seeking for: the desire for 'a new beginning', for which in a post-cold war context the timing would be exactly right (Okumu 2002: 145-6). It underlines 'an increasingly powerful appeal strongly articulated by intellectuals, for a new future for Africa', opening up exciting possibilities to change the lives of people across the continent (Vale & Maseko 2002: 129-30). Such claims are also linked to the project to 'decolonise the mind', shaking off feelings of humiliation and inferiority. The historical dimension, the recognition of a long history of domination and 'unfree' labour in South Africa, is an essential aspect in the contextualisation of this emergent local approach. Precisely this aspect, the impact of human suffering and experiences of humiliation in the South African workplace of the past – for both employees and employers – often seems to be overlooked in evaluations of 'African management' discourse in contemporary business practice.

It should be acknowledged however, that there also non-essentialist ways to approach identity formation in an African setting, for instance in terms of – negotiable, multiple, complex and dynamic – identification: '... each act, each signification, each decision risks opening new meanings, vistas and possibilities' (Nyamnjoh 2001: 30). Francis Nyamnjoh believes that most people in Africa refuse to think in dichotomies and 'to be fenced in by particular identity markers'. 'Being African is not a birthmark', he says, seeing African identity as a process.



Besides the potential value of the ubuntu concept, its ideological use and its function as identity-marker, some other critical notions will be raised in the following section.

### *Hard questions*

Visions of 'African management', with their optimistic and hence to some extent onesided illustrations, tend to ignore potential negative consequences at the implementation side. For instance, in 'African management' discourse there is generally an emphasis on social obligations towards the community instead of 'individual rights'. This presupposes an unconditional compliance to the social group. How does this relate to the free will of the individual, and how could this work out in organisational practice?

In relation to this, Christoph Marx published a challenging article, in which he compared Africanist versions of ubu and ubuntu with culturalist representations of Afrikaner nationalism. Marx emphasises that with the revitalisation of ubuntu – also embedded in African Renaissance ideology – a 'romanticised and largely ahistorical image of Africa' is invoked. All this is presented in explicitly conservative terms, denying the cultural diversity of Africans (Marx 2002: 65). Consequently, the Africanist culturalist nationalist idea, which also characterises 'African management',

*... centred on the notion of 'Ubuntu', is preparing the ground in which the 'flowers of evil' might once blossom again in South Africa* (Marx 2002: 50).

In extreme phraseology, Marx sends out warnings for 'fascist ideas of "corporation management"' justified by Afrocentric management discourse (Marx 2002: 65). In addition, the discursive use of ubuntu in post-apartheid organisational contexts could lead to the covering-up of conflicts, by displaying subtle mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, and as a consequence of strong appeals to Afrocentric notions of egalitarianism, friendliness and togetherness. Van Binsbergen has also pointed at 'the potential dangers of ubuntu as mystifying real conflict, perpetuating resentment' that,

in his view, was demonstrated for instance in the dealings of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Van Binsbergen 2001: 57). Supporters of critical management studies tend to highlight the 'hidden agendas' behind humanistic management approaches, such as alternative means of control and 'soft domination' in the workplace under the guise of 'communalist interests' (Clegg, Kornberger et al. 2005: 168-9).

There are probably no unambiguous answers to the 'hard questions' and to critical notions. It will have to show in actual practice. Since the implementation of management concepts always depends on particular institutional contexts, prevailing power configurations and interests at stake, it is likely that practical experiences with Afrocentric management principles will inherently be highly differential.

### *Contributions*

After these introductory remarks, I will briefly present the respective chapters in this volume. As announced earlier, the reader will come across a wide spectrum of views. Lovemore Mbigi is a management consultant, motivational speaker and workshop facilitator, who strongly identifies with an Afrocentric worldview. He is proud to be called a *tribesman*, and he has made it his mission in life to disseminate his ideas on 'African management' philosophy. To some extent, Mbigi is also associated with the academic community, but altogether he does not sit too easily into this category. He is habitually referred to as 'Professor', regularly involved in lecturing assignments and also a mentor and supervisor to numerous southern African students. Nevertheless, and he is the first one to point this out, he is not 'a typical professor'. Mbigi claims to have branded the concept of ubuntu in relation to management. His contribution should in the first place not be seen as an academic assessment of the concept, but rather as an attempt to promote 'African management' as a management philosophy. Therefore, it is clearly a managerial text, revealing his personal vision.

In the first chapter Mbigi explains, sometimes somewhat provocatively and prescriptively, what ubuntu means in an Africanist interpretation, and how it could contribute to revitalising organisations in South Africa, and help business leaders and employees to rediscover and harness their *African cultural heritage*. Mbigi has been making his proclamations in an animated prophesying campaign for more than fifteen years now, if not more. He is, as it were, almost a personification of ubuntu in relation to management in southern Africa, as he was already on the scene when it all came about in the early 1990s. What is more, he is still actively committed to keep the discourse alive. His 'statements of belief and aspiration' in the spirit of an Afrocentric management approach should not be confused with 'descriptions of reality', as Van Rinsum and Boesenkool point out in chapter 7.

In chapter 2, Luchien Karsten complements Mbigi's views with a closer look

on management and leadership concepts used in Afrocentric discourse, highlighting the importance of language use in the domain of management and organisation, relating to specific worldviews. Karsten examines the nature of management concepts, management fashion, and knowledge transfer. Thus, he assesses what ubuntu has in common with (other) management concepts. He argues that this concept represents an African worldview that is not captured in conventional American or global management speak that is supposed to be 'universal'. Even though one could classify 'African management' and ubuntu in terms of *management fads*, Karsten believes it has very valuable implications in the context of management in an African setting.

In chapter 3, through an interlocking philosophical excursion, Heinz Kimmerle discusses in further detail the idea of ubuntu and in particular Ramose's interpretations of it. He provides - in a somewhat generalising manner - an overview of a variety of meanings pertaining to (equivalents of) ubuntu and communalism in a wider African spectrum, to grasp a number of different connotations and nuances in the use of these concepts in the domain of African philosophy and art.

Taking this publication as a vantage point for further enriching Afrocentric management thought, David Weir reflects on Arab and Islamic features of management and organisation in chapter 4. He suggests that Arab and Islamic conceptualisations could substantially enrich Afrocentric perspectives, since in practice - as his contribution surprisingly shows - there are some striking similarities between Islamic and Afrocentric perspectives on management. Weir's publication is also a clear illustration of Africa's cultural diversity, also in the domain of management and organisation, thus simultaneously countering homogenising Afrocentric conceptualisations.

In addition, Mzamo Mangaliso and Nomazengele Mangaliso explain their views on the potential value of ubuntu and management in chapter 5. They present and promote this approach, in a professional, academic style. Yet, it clearly shows that they reside with the prophets, also promoting the glocal dimension of the discourse. Mzamo and Nomazengele Mangaliso were born and raised in South Africa, but they have been living and working in the United States for a very long time, integrating their professional experiences from that continent into their own management views. Thus, they try to inspire also a 'non-African' audience with South Africa's management lessons. Their contribution is probably particularly

appealing to practitioners.

Perhaps, the essentialist features of 'African management' discourse that are so often criticised in academia both in Europe and in Africa itself, may turn out to be instrumental in provoking challenging conversations that would otherwise not take place. Such conversations possibly help to identify and break certain taboos in organisational and management discourse – for example with regard to 'ethnicity' or 'traditional religious values', and to show how these notions become manifest – or not – in modern organisational contexts, confronting 'modernity' with 'tradition' inside South Africa.

In chapter 6, Peter Franks develops this argument in his own contemplative way, polarising notions of 'modernity' and 'tradition' to make his point clearer to us. Tapping from many years of personal managerial experience, Franks' contribution represents an interpretative point of view, with amazing insights from organisational realities in a South African rural context.

In chapter 7, Henk van Rinsum and Jan Boessenkool take an outspoken critical stance in the debate, highlighting the political dimension. They point at the metaphoric power of Afrocentricity, arguing that the emphasis on Afrocentric management approaches implies a dichotomy with Eurocentric management, which rather symbolises an urge of Africans to liberate themselves from colonialism and apartheid. Van Rinsum and Boessenkool draw attention to the tensions and paradoxes around this debate. In particular, they wonder whether 'fancy' ubuntu talk by prosperous businesspeople and smart consultants is not merely a strategy to conceal the mounting poverty gap in South Africa.

Finally, co-editors Mzamo Mangaliso and Lisa van de Bunt review all contributions, adding their insightful evaluative comments.

### *A methodology of listening*

Dialogue is not just about talk. It is also about listening. The 'methodology of listening', which Heinz Kimmerle discusses in chapter 4, is also suggested here: listen patiently to what the other person has to say. This requires openness and dedication, but it also takes courage to confront one another with opposing viewpoints. To the extent that identities are involved in this dialogue, these are not just about assumed differences like 'African' versus 'European', or 'Afrocentric' versus 'Eurocentric' points of view. For instance, professional

identities play an important role in this context. Obviously, a management consultant probably has other ways of interpreting social realities and presenting a management vision than a scholar or a business leader will have. A further differentiation exists among academics, largely depending on their specific disciplinary embedding or epistemological viewpoint. Naturally, a philosopher tends to highlight other aspects than a scholar of management studies or an organisational anthropologist. The reader will therefore hit upon highly diverse views on Afrocentric management perspectives. This is exactly what makes the book so unique and absorbing, but of course, it is quite impossible to give a comprehensive and 'definite' perspective. The dialogue moves on.

First, we should read and listen carefully to what ardent representatives of Afrocentric management thinking are telling us, and see what terminology and images they call upon to put their message across. Using terms such as Prophecies and Protests, believers and non-believers in this context reveals that apparently there are religious aspects to the debate. Perhaps the time has come to start listening to what Africans actually have to say about African ideas on spirituality and religion, and to take things literally as they are told, instead of immediately forming incomplete or badly informed opinions.

*We must move away from a common Western tendency to define religion almost exclusively in terms of a search for meaning in life* (Ellis and Ter Haar 2004: 3).

This volume is considerate to the potential value that Africa-oriented or Africa-inspired perspectives could add to management and organisational thinking, but without turning a blind eye to critical notes. Admittedly, not all issues that could be raised in an interrogation of 'African management' discourse are covered here. The editors acknowledge that there are several omissions. Readers may experience the lack of assessments of practical 'African management' experiences as a lacuna. For instance, how do people at the receiving end experience ubuntu management? And how do trade unions in South Africa perceive Afrocentric management approaches? Additionally, one may observe that the gender issue has not at all been addressed. Both 'African management' prophets and scholars – considerate and/or critical – have neglected this issue. How is the role of women conceived in 'African management' philosophy? Are specific gender roles defined? If the gender issue would turn out to be entirely ignored, what implications could

this have on the position of women in organisational contexts? Therefore, we would like to invite readers to provide feedback and suggest additional points for debate in relation to Afrocentric management approaches. In any case, in this publication the non-believers have made efforts to focus on the believers' points of view, allowing Africans the possibility to express matters in the terms they feel are appropriate. Vice versa, the prophets encounter other perspectives and opposing views. The outcome of the process is unknown as of yet, but the editors believe in dialogue as a virtue in itself.

## NOTES

- i.** For example newspaper articles, book reviews and magazine features published in: Namibia Economist, 17 October 2003; Business Times, 12 October 2003; Financial Mail, 25 July 2003; Beeld, 23 July 2003; Die Burger, 16 October 2003; People Dynamics, March 2003, November/December 2002, February 1998, January 1993, October 1992; Patriot, 19 August 1999; The Star, 20 April 1997; Beeld, 7 October 1996; Sunday Times, 24 September 1995; Financies & Tegniek, June/July 1995; The Economist, 18 March 1995; The Natal Witness, 27 July 1994; The Daily News, 11 November 1991; Business Day, 31 October 1991.
- ii.** A qualitative case study research on employees' perceptions of 'African Leadership' in FNB was facilitated by Wits Business School in Johannesburg and carried out in 2005-2006 by Elske van der Pol, MA student of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
- iii.** In a range of interviews with South African managers as part of a field research on 'African management' discourse, carried out between June 2003 and June 2004, these terms were mostly used to describe in general organisational culture and management and leadership styles in South Africa (Van den Heuvel forthcoming).
- iv.** For an in-depth discussion of identity formation in an African context, in relation to management and leadership, see Van den Heuvel (forthcoming).
- v.** Thomas and Schonken use this term in a somewhat disdainful manner.
- vi.** A central assumption in Afrocentrism is the image of Africa as the 'cradle of humankind', alluding to Africa's assumed uniqueness and ancient character. Reference is made to scientific - or semi-scientific or pseudo-scientific - accounts that would affirm this claim, such as the book *Out of Africa's Eden*. The peopling of the world (Oppenheimer 2003). Oppenheimer asserts that 'a group living in central Africa 150,000 years ago are the ancestors of everyone living today' and that 'everybody who is not African can be connected by mitochondrial DNA to a

single woman who apparently left Africa with a band of humans 80,000 years ago' (Cape Argus 2003).

**vii.** For a discussion on imagery of Africa and notions of Africa's primitiveness, see for instance Ashforth 1990; Blok 1997; Corbey 1989; Davidson 1994; Fabian 2000; Jahoda 1999; Mudimbe 1988; Rigby 1996; and Wylie 2000.

**viii.** For a review of this book see Van den Heuvel and Wels 2004.

**ix.** Interview with Professor Nick Binedell, Gordon Institute of Business Science, Illovo, 6 August 2003.

**x.** In Shona *munhu* means 'person' and *umunhu* means 'human nature' (Hannan 1984: 390).

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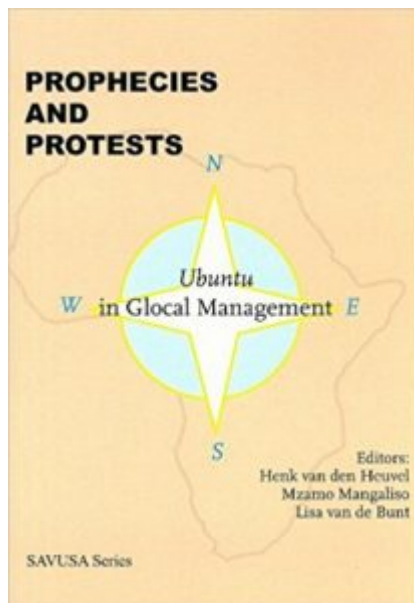
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# **Prophecies And Protests ~ A Vision Of African Management And African Leadership: A Southern African Perspective**



The purpose of this chapter is to explore the philosophical and cultural dimensions of African management and African leadership. The specific intention is to provide a vision of what African management has come to mean in my own life, as a person, raised in the Zezuru tribe (in Zimbabwe), schooled in Zimbabwe and, having built a career in Southern Africa, as a writer and practitioner/consultant who has applied African principles to management. Rather than purporting to be a descriptive study surveying the field of African management, this chapter takes a more

phenomenological approach and is offered as an example of how African management has been applied and promoted during the past 15 years of my career. My hope is that it is seen as an attempt to give readers a deeper understanding of the cultural world which has influenced my life and work, and that readers, both African and non-African, will be inspired to envisage what African management could be. In my own view, African management principles, as I have learned to apply them, have the capacity to mobilise collective business transformations in a unique and effective way. The chapter attempts to illustrate some of the reasons for the effectiveness I have witnessed in the application of African management strategies. Rather than purporting to provide empirical research for these methods, these are descriptions and personal accounts of what they are and why they work.

### *African management*

African management has origins similar to modern management, in that its roots lie in African oral history and indigenous African religion. In 1993, *People Dynamics*, a South African personnel management magazine, published two essays, in which I articulated the African philosophy of ubuntu as a basis of effective human resources.<sup>[i]</sup> In the same year, Ronnie Lessem, Peter Christie and myself co-authored one of the earliest texts on African Management in South Africa (Christie, Lessem and Mbigi 1994). The book included an article on the application and adaptation of indigenous African religious concepts and practices to organisational transformation at Eastern Highlands Tea Estates in Zimbabwe. In fact it was due to my positive experiences as CEO of this company, which inspired me to abandon my career as a business director and devote my life to the

articulation of African and cultural values and philosophy in management.

At Eastern Highlands I had successfully applied a variety of African cultural and religious practices and concepts to the organisational challenge of transformation management. These included: the adaptation of traditional rituals and ceremonies used in African religion; encouraging group singing and dancing to build morale, enhance production processes and engage large groups in collective strategy formulation, and the use of myths and story telling to build leadership and organisational cohesion. With contributions from other writers at the time, such as Reuel Khoza, Peter Christie and Ronnie Lessem, African management as a field of study and practice began to flourish as a discipline in South Africa, from the early 1990s. The African philosophy of ubuntu and its emphasis on interdependence and consensus provided its foundation.

Compared with western management theory and practice, African management is characterised by flatter structures which stress inclusion, interdependence, democracy and broad stakeholder participation. Rather than formal, uniform policies, African managers call for an emphasis on flexibility in relation to policies, which can be easily initiated, changed and transformed through a broad-based collective, mass-scale consensus and participation of many stakeholders. Instead of the tendency towards impersonal relationships in western management theory[**ii**] within an organisational context, African culture calls for highly personalised relationships. In African organisations, harnessing spiritual and social capital is an important management challenge. While there is hierarchy in African organisations, respect for hierarchy is emphasised in ceremonies. What drives organisations, more than official roles within a hierarchy, is the informal power that derives from natural social clusters, and consultation and negotiation depend largely on who owns the issue. Representation of all stakeholders and inclusion of all groups are given emphasis, so that African management is more about allowing multiple leadership roles and greater flexibility. Finally African management tends to prefer a web of interdependence of roles, relationships and competencies and is less concerned with structure and function than western management.

### *Religious ritual and ceremonial foundations of African management*

One of the core assumptions of my work as a practitioner and theorist of African management is the fundamental acknowledgement that, generally speaking, as Africans, we do not have a scientific western consciousness. Our African

consciousness is deeply rooted in religion and spirituality in which symbolism and the expression of behavioural actions are more important than scientific logic. Rituals and ceremonies, symbols and mythology are all relevant and it is important to understand the link between these elements and African cosmology.

In African cosmology reality is deeply rooted in spirituality and spiritual interpretations of events, rather than in scientific interpretation of events. Therefore there is greater openness to what the spirits can do for you, or any communal organisation. In my own experience, such acknowledgement of spirituality is core to understanding African culture and African management. What tends to be in the minds of people I have worked with is how to harness spirituality. Questions that are asked are: how do you understand events spiritually? How do you petition the ancestors? How do you bond with those who have passed on? How and when do you give thanks? In essence, this is how the spiritual realm affects reality.

Mythology is an important part of the foundation of African management. Myths tell us who we are and our possibilities of becoming, as well as where we are. In fact, Joseph Campbell (Campbell and Moyers 1988) was right when he said: 'What myths are for is to bring us into a level of consciousness that is spiritual'.

Indigenous religious rituals and ceremonies of transformation are an equally important aspect because they harness our emotional and psychic spiritual energy. These provoke contemplation and reflection to release us from the stultifying routines and common sense of daily life. They bring about the artful and joyful side of life. Their seductive beauty lies in the ugliness and uniqueness of their ceremonial regalia. It is important that rituals and ceremonies should be accompanied by rhythmic dancing and drumming, as well as singing which brings absorptive, as well as inspirational capacity. The sad reality is that without dance, music and singing, as well as bonding rituals and ceremonies in our life we suffer from high levels of self-alienation. Detailed below are some of the rituals and ceremonies of African Shona tribal religion that have been instructive in the design of transformation processes and practices I have adapted in southern Africa.

It is important to reiterate that the vision articulated in this chapter and the theoretical work offered, represents a view grounded in personal experience as a person born in the Zezuru tribe, which is one of the ethnic groups in the broader

Shona tribe. While there are variations that exist in other Shona ethnic groups, such as the Karanga, and Manyika, the underlying cosmology is shared for the most part. In the interests of simplicity, I will generalise and use the term Shona, while acknowledging that there may be subtle differences among the ethnic groups just mentioned. This section will cover the following rituals, which I have begun to develop into a theoretical body of knowledge and to use as a basis for practical interventions.

- Corpse shadow theory / ritual;
- Crossroads theory / ritual;
- Dandaro renewal ceremony;
- Mukwerera Rainmaking Ceremony.

### *Corpse shadow cleansing ritual*

In Shona tribal religion a dead body is not supposed to have a shadow, and a specific ritual, known as the corpse shadow cleansing ritual, is carried out when there is a shadow.<sup>[iii]</sup> A shadow indicates unfinished business on earth, which prevents the dead person's transformation into the spiritual world beyond. A shadow also indicates that the person failed to have closure on a particular issue, such as bitterness over personal ill-treatment.

In order to deal with this transformation challenge, the family will have to consult a diviner for guidance and clarification. This is usually followed by a cleansing ritual. This enables the deceased person to proceed with the benefit of personal spiritual transformation into the world beyond.

### *Transformation leadership applications*

This ritual, embodying a cleansing process, has been adapted for transformational purposes in the work place, as a way to express and uncover unresolved and unexpressed issues. The first step in transformation is to create inclusive platforms to deal with organisational grievances, fears, ghosts, tragic aspects of their collective history and pathologies. Examples of organisational issues which typically arise are: the tendency to blame and scorn others; negative feelings of helplessness and passivity; secrecy and denial; unexpressed collective historical grievances; unexpressed collective anger and bitterness; unexpressed collective fears and insecurities; collective alienation and isolation and finally avoidance and turf protection. The expression and healing of these negative spirits and feelings will enable the organisational community to free its collective energy and grapple

with positive endeavours such as creating an inspiring image of its future. This has to be done within a flexible strategic agenda.

My experience is that it is very difficult to connect with the spirit of the organisation without the use of mythology, oral history and storytelling. It is not an intellectual journey but an emotional and spiritual journey. The use of collective dancing, music and singing is also imperative.

The cleansing process works in the following way. Organisations hold a three to five-day transformation ceremony around core strategic themes and key issues. These are called burning platforms, since they provide a context for people to give voice to burning issues. The agenda should be flexible and open to allow the expression of negative feelings, which opens the way to clear thinking. It is advisable to start with key role-players, some who are pro-change and some who are against change. It is important to lead the discussion in such a way that they articulate their change positions and agendas. Then, the facilitator makes the case for change and designs an inclusive process to manage the articulated change issues. Finally, it is important to formulate an inclusive process to craft a shared future vision, as well as a pathway to a shared desired future.

One client, the South African Post office, chose to use the burning platform process, at a point in time when they were experiencing a loss of R500 million a year. Racism was so rampant that the organisation was losing skilled managers, both white and black. There had been so many internal conflicts during one year (1998) that the human resources department had had to institute 4,200 different mediations. According to the human resources manager, most of these cases were racially motivated. In addition, people alleged that there was fraud in the organisation of R1 million rand. When we came to discuss the value drivers of the company, they said fraud around registered letters was a key one and had to do with the presence of syndicates. During the first days it was very difficult for whites coming to the workshops to share rooms with blacks, but after a number of workshops that was no longer an issue. As a result of the burning platforms and the building of group trust and group cohesion the Post office was eventually able to identify and then bust some of the syndicates that were involved. They couldn't function properly as an organisation, until the burning platform processes were completed. They went on to make R750 Million a year. After a twoyear period, there was a great improvement in race relations. They eventually went onto commercialise some of their business units.

### *Cross-roads ritual*

In a traditional context, this ritual is intended to help an individual and a group to deal with cross-roads issues in their life in order to leap into the unknown future. The purpose of the ritual is to help individuals and groups find a way to turn their backs on the unwanted present and past. The ritual is done at night in birth clothes at a four-way stop or cross-roads with the help of a diviner. The diviner will help the individual and relevant family group to articulate the issues that are faced, standing at the cross-roads.

The participants of the ritual face the four sides of the earth and utter incantations or mantras around their specific cross-roads challenges. They travel back home without looking back. They then eat red millet porridge mixed with cleansing herbs from the same bowl with clenched fists to signify their new fighting spirit. Every member in the extended family has to participate. This is known to harness the creativity of the group.

### *Transformation management applications*

Anchoring strategic themes and burning issues should be the basis of designing learning materials for transformation workshops. The design of transformation workshops should be rooted in the cross-roads issues facing the organisation and the workshop participants, so as to facilitate emotional and spiritual connection. The facilitator must first deal with the negative issues from the past to enable the organisation and participants to harness the creative energy needed for forward movement. It is important for the facilitator to avoid becoming a hostage of the tragic element of someone's history. Human beings have the capacity to overcome their limitations and reinvent their life and future. Heroes have demonstrated this capacity throughout history by turning disadvantages into advantages. In working with groups, do not blame the past; overcome its limitations and constraints. This is the essence of creativity. We cannot change our past. The past is our heritage. Our duty as such is not to condemn history; our duty is to change history. The goal is to create a sense of a shared destiny and a shared vision, as well as a shared performance agenda and shared bonding rituals to create shared meaning.

It helps the process to use a credible external facilitator, but leadership at every level of the organisation and community should own the change through high visibility at change ceremonies and rituals. Rituals and ceremonial leadership cannot be delegated, as the primary task of leadership is to create meaning and manage focused attention. The facilitator must foster an inspiring victory



paradigm to overcome a victimhood paradigm that often leads to paralysis and inaction. He or she can use non-verbal communication. For example, it is possible to fight resistance to change with clenched fists. It is also important to create a collective fighting spirit of optimism. As leaders we cannot give what we do not have. We have to first create hope within ourselves to inspire us to peak performance.

### *Dandaro renewal ceremony*

The ceremony is used for both renewal and remedial purposes. It is facilitated by an external diviner, and participation by a community of relatives and outsiders is essential. The Dandaro renewal ceremony focuses on the specific challenge faced by a particular extended family. It is a night-long affair, during which collective contemplation and reflection are mandatory. Although it is facilitated by a particular spirit of divination, all the spirits present are allowed to commune as soul mates and descend from the world beyond and assist in giving guidance to the family on the cross-roads challenges under consideration. This particular ceremony is always accompanied by collective singing and dancing, as well as drumming, and punctuated by the ululation of women to welcome spirits.

The singing of the ceremonial songs is always accompanied by spiritual wailing (kukaiva) to call the spirits for guidance, and punctuated by a special form of meaningless humming (mahonyera). In between the singing participants give their didactic message in conversational style.

### *Transformation management applications*

At Eastern Highlands Tea Estates I re-enacted the Dandaro renewal ceremony as an inclusive education forum for organisational renewal to allow collective strategic reflection and dialogue involving everyone in the organisation. This was inspired by childhood religious experiences at the feet of the spirit cult of Dembetembe, the Rain Queen of the Vattera Clan of the Shona tribe. She had adopted me and appointed me as her personal assistant and prince at the age of three.

Organisational education should not just be an intellectual affair, but also a ceremonial and collective bonding affair, permitting joyful dancing, singing and drumming, so as to allow for feasting and the harnessing of the collective creative and spiritual genius of the organisation. It is difficult to develop and mobilize the emotional, social, creative, and spiritual intelligence of the organisation, which

will dilute the impact of the transformation interventions of the organisation.

### *Mukwerera rainmaking ceremony*

The Shona tribe of Zimbabwe has three major ceremonies. Ruvhuno is a ceremony that celebrates the ripening of crops. Rukoto is a ceremony which celebrates the harvesting of crops. The African American community has reinstituted this in the Diaspora in the form of Kwanza Celebrations.

The Mukwerera rainmaking ceremony (Lessem and Nussbaum 1996) is the most important strategic ceremony or forum that takes place before the rainy season, to allow collective strategic planning by the community. It is led by the Rain Queen or Rain King. It is an all-day affair which includes community education, mobilization and social bonding. Every family participates in its preparations and subsequently in the celebrations. Several bulls are slaughtered and eaten together with other food during the celebrations. For this ceremonial occasion, other lower level spirits are not allowed to participate, as the highest spirit, the Rainmaker Spirit, who is a representative of God on earth, is in charge. In the spiritual hierarchy this is very important and it is strictly enforced. Ceremonial collective singing, dancing and drumming is imperative, as well as collective bonding punctuated by ululation to express joy and gratitude to God and the spirits in the world beyond. During the celebrations the strategic challenges facing the community are hotly debated.

### *Transformation management applications*

At Eastern Highlands Tea Estates I re-enacted the Mukwerera ceremony to democratize organisational strategy formulation, mobilization and effectuation. I called it the Production Festival and in Nampak I called it the World-class day, to capture the organisation's aspiration to attain world-class manufacturing status.

This strategic ceremony allowed both organisations to undertake effective strategic mobilization, renewal, reflection and implementation, as well as strategic education, so that employees could effectively become both strategic thinkers and doers. The organisations also succeeded in becoming time-based and team-based organisations, which accelerated value creation, as well as in becoming learning organisations, which in turn accelerated knowledge creation, sharing and application. The ceremony also inspired organisational creativity and innovation as illustrated in the diagram detailed below:

Figure 1.1: Organisational creativity and innovation



Figure 1.1: Organisational creativity and innovation

African indigenous knowledge creation and its relevance for management African indigenous knowledge systems and strategies for collective learning still have to be adapted and made universal so that they may become more relevant for management in other contexts. Their potential role in education, learning, knowledge creation and transformation has yet to be fully understood and articulated in the west.

African culture offers a very important element in transforming organisations and communities, because it requires the co-creation and integrated alignment of worldviews through shifting paradigms. Indigenous knowledge, ceremonies and learning processes provide inherent wisdom in this area.

African learning systems, however, focus on implicit rather than explicit knowledge and knowledge is uncoded rather than codified. The greater part of human knowledge is uncoded implicit knowledge that is difficult to access, transfer and learn. Uncoded implicit knowledge can only be accessed and learned through experience. Implicit knowledge, according to the Japanese thinker Ijiro Nonaka (Nonaka and Takuchi 1995), can only be transferred through practical experience based on relationships and trust between the learner and the mentor. This is where African indigenous knowledge creation has an excellent contribution to make. Most business knowledge is not codified and is also implicit. African collective and traditional educational methods have the potential to add value to business education, since they are so instructive in transferring uncoded implicit knowledge and in facilitating the rapid and collective learning of whole communities. African processes as highlighted in the rituals mentioned above, as well as collective learning systems to be discussed in these paragraphs shed light on practical experiences which are highly relevant in enhancing the collective learning. Collective learning requires both the social

capital of trust and the intellectual capital acquired through reflective action. It is therefore important to draw inspiration from indigenous collective learning rituals and practices, such as African tribal initiation ceremonies, in our search for collective learning practices required to democratize knowledge and skills in modern organisations. The practices of the African collective learning systems are summarised in the following paragraphs.

The underlying philosophy stresses learning by doing, that is, reflective action learning. Learning is viewed and experienced as a collective effort; not just an individual effort, thereby embracing the fundamental philosophy of ubuntu. Another core component of collective learning in the African context is the principle 'teach one and learn one'. In African culture, the best way to learn is to teach others so in this particular sense, the sharing of knowledge and skills is vital. Understood in a slightly different way, there is a strong belief that in order to get everything we must share everything. This is echoed by Professor Reg Revans (Revans 1983), who explains it more accurately, arguing that the people learn more from comrades in adversity than from experts on high.

In the context of African culture and knowledge creation, the social process of learning is as important as a learning curriculum or content in terms of programme design. We need to pay particular attention to social processes in terms of the bonding and learning rituals and ceremonies. In addition, collective learning requires us to celebrate and canonize our interdependence, which is the cornerstone of the ubuntu value system. In addition, there are several principles related to collective learning and knowledge creation. These include: the spirit of learning principle; the principle of personal destiny and the principle of learning through life skills.

The core notion of the spirit of learning principle captures the belief that the organisational spirit or climate establishes the unique horizons and perceptions of learning. The principle of personal destiny (*dzinza* in Shona) embodies the idea that learning is accelerated by a high sense of personal purpose, history and destiny as well as career pathing. Finally, the principle of learning through developing life skills means that learning is accelerated by being focused on survival challenges. In this sense, adaptive learning is vital. Again, this resonates with the writings of Reg Revans who states that collectives and groups that adapt to change effectively have a steep learning curve and that their rate of learning exceeds the rate of change facing them. These principles of collective learning

derived from the traditional African wisdom and initiation rituals and ceremonies should guide multi-skilling and transformation efforts in our organisations.

### *New methods for managing transformation*

The creation of a new system is a complex task, because of the fact that one is dealing with unknown elements. Although the known system has been discredited, the new system is unknown. This type of change is fundamental - it recognises the change of the whole system and not just a few elements in it. Political scientists call it transformation. Futurists call it a paradigm shift - a fundamental shift of our worldview is required. This is the type of change organisations are facing in the global economy today. It requires the development of new mass facilitation and mass mobilization methods. The current fascination in Human Resources Management with performance consulting does not deal with this kind of transformation. African peasant revolutions have developed advanced methods of managing transformation; mind shifting and changing of worldviews of a large number of communities. The only western social theorist and social activist who deals with this type of change management in the area of social action, is Saul Alinsky. He detailed this in his seminal work entitled 'Rules of radicals' (Alinsky 1972).

Having both participated in and witnessed the revolutionary struggles in both Zimbabwe and South Africa, I began to adapt the mobilization methods of nationalist and guerrilla movements, to the rapid massive transformation of business and state organisations. My experience is based on transforming a large packaging manufacturing organisation which employed 26,000 employees in South Africa. The entire project took three years to complete. This involved the transformation of racist organisational cultures into non-racial, non-sexist and high-performance cultures, as well as enabling the disadvantaged groups to reclaim public accountability, so as to rise to the challenge of nation building.

The second case where this model was applied was a large railway company that employed 66,000 employees. This transformation model was also implemented with remarkable positive results, by a large postal service and freight company employing over 25,000 people in South Africa.

### *Key elements of the transformation model*

Underlying the practical applications of the transformation model is a number of key elements. The model focuses on the creation of a new reality or system and

also has the potential to enable the co-creation of new paradigms, worldviews and mindsets. The model also focuses on the co-creation of a new memory of the future, shared values and a new shared agenda. Typically, mass mobilization of all employees occurs through mass workshops of 150-500 employees per session, around a new organisational strategic agenda and national vision. This is accompanied by the training and development of a large number of in-house transformation facilitators to run workshops. The training and development of a large number of transformation champions with line experience and responsibilities enhances the capacity of the organisation to implement transformation on a day-to-day basis in their work area. In addition, in the training strategy, efforts are made to ensure the inclusion of a large number of key role-players such as union shop stewards as transformation champions in their respective constituencies and structures. Although the external consultant facilitates 10-30 per cent of the workshops, the primary focus is on building a critical mass for transformation and in-house capacity to facilitate and manage change.

There are a number of additional requirements which serve to build the effectiveness of this transformation model. Every employee must participate in the transformation workshops and the workshops must be cross-functional, multi-racial, multi-level and large, to create high impact and give a sense of high connectivity. The content and process must be the same for every level and every group and must focus on burning issues facing the organisation. High velocity in implementing the transformation programme is key. The whole process must be completed within a maximum of one year, to avoid losing momentum. If the time is lengthened, the transformation process and programme can be deterred through the resignation of key role-players and the emergence of derailing events. Time is of essence. The politics of speed in managing transformation are important. Finally, managing the politics of transformation with key groups and role-players is a vital part of implementing the model successfully.

### *Programme content*

This model was also implemented with amazing success in a development corporation employing more than three thousand employees, and also in a medical service organisation employing more than one thousand employees. The transformation model focuses on developing and publishing high performance systems. At the heart of this transformation model is the need to achieve creative

high performance and competitive alignment. The model has three key elements: capacity building, work transformation, and social and political transformation. Alignment of these three elements to translate into high performance is an essential ingredient for success. The model is detailed in the diagramme below:

Figure 1.2: The transformation model



Figure 1.2: The transformation model

The work transformation issues include fundamental change elements such as: the development and implementation of best practices through reliable and comprehensive benchmarking systems; the implementation of a process improvement and innovation system; and the design and development of teams. In addition, development of innovative products, practices and systems is enhanced by redefining the competitive rules. In addition, attention is given to the development and implementation of high performance management systems. This includes the management of work, product development and technology.

The social and political transformation issues include the following fundamental change elements: the development of participative governance systems in order to create a fair organisation and society; democratization of information, knowledge and skills so that every employee is both a strategic thinker and doer; the negotiation of a shared strategic performance agenda and finally the development of shared worldviews and a collective sense of shared destiny. Celebration of cultural diversity is an important aspect of the transformation model and this occurs by both valuing differences and identifying similarities.

There is also a deliberate investment in the capacity building of every employee, to develop their strategic capacity to understand work transformation issues, as well as social and political issues. In addition to this, there is a deliberate emphasis on developing global citizenship and a global perspective. The creation

of critical awareness regarding the competitive nature of the global economy is vital; creating awareness in every employee with regard to economic aspects such as: how the global economy works, including the zero sum of its competition; how the national economy works, including the challenges of nation building, as well as the development of a national competitive agenda. The intention is to help ordinary employees to reclaim public accountability and to become development cadres so that they fully understand how their company works and how the industry functions.

The purpose is to create the capacity in employees to understand the survival and competitive challenges at five levels: global, national, industry, company, and personal. The intention of these learning strategies is to shift employee mindsets around governance and public accountability through participative co-creation of new paradigms.

Detailed below is an example of the course content for a three to five day workshop for South African companies:

- The challenge of economic liberation;
- Managing our heritage and the past;
- Management of diversity and affirmative action;
- Management of trust and diversity celebration;
- The challenge of managing organisational and personal transformation;
- SA transitional and transformation challenges;
- Strategic market and performance agenda;
- Building a corporate vision community.

#### *Managing the heritage of the past, present and the future*

I have applied transformation management in the South African Post Office (SAPO) to deal with strategic diversity and transformation issues as well as performance issues.

Both were necessary for the Post Office to become economically viable. These collective learning forums were named after selected strategic and transformation themes. They were called Strategic Diversity and Transformation programmes (SDT). The collective learning forums involved 26,000 employees hotly debating the strategic postures and transformation challenges facing the organisation. Each forum was residential and lasted three days.



The focus of the organisational learning process was on breaking even and attaining economic viability two years ahead of the schedule. The process was implemented with my help and an army of trained in-house transformation champions and facilitators, 95 in number. Through collective learning processes the issues were resolved. The same organisation was also interested in managing the difficult aspects of the past. The purpose of this module was to create extreme discomfort with the past in white participants so that they could let go and begin to search for an attractive memory of the future. A few well-selected historical facts would be woven into a tragic historical epic in a very humorous way, to produce disgust with the past and the resolution to create a new future among the participants.

The presenter would take many selected historical facts and weave them into tragic stories and this module was normally presented at the end of day one of the workshop. It used to leave the white participants in a complete state of painful disgust of their past and black participants very angry about their past. Therefore, discomfort was created in both groups and they would go to sleep in a tormented state, ready to travel into the future the next day.

#### *Survival strategies for minority and majority groups in South Africa*

The next morning the presenter would help the white SAPO participants to craft a survival strategy to thrive and prosper in a hostile political environment without political power. The presenter would draw examples from minority groups who prospered and succeeded in hostile environments without political power, such as the Jews. The elements of the survival strategies of minority groups must develop into a partnership with the majority and the development of a new patriotic agenda that includes the majority group. From the perspective of the majority group, they have to rise to the challenge of nation building. The majority group needs to shift from a victim-hood mentality to a victor-hood mentality. The majority cannot be both victims and victors. There is a need to make the shift, moving to a decisive resolve and focus on governing the country efficiently and fairly. This requires hard work. This gives the majority group a new positive agenda and vision.

The second day would end with a bonding ceremony around a big outdoor fire. People would share food and drinks. This is punctuated by collective singing and dancing to create the social capital required to chart and travel the difficult and trying road of organisational transformation.

### *Spirits of African management*

Management is not a science but more like an art where knowledge is eclectic with a bias towards religious mythology and oral history, as well as philosophy. Mythology, as mentioned previously, is important in a strategic transformation process. Myths serve four functions: A mystical, cosmological, sociological and pedagogical function. The mystical function deals with the mystery of our existence and that of the universe. We always address the transcendent mystery through the actual conditions in the world. The cosmological function shows the shape of the universe, which is the essence of science and highlights how human beings understand the universe. The sociological function supports and validates a certain social order. This accounts for the variation of myth from place to place. The pedagogical function of myth shows us how to live human life under any circumstances. Biblical parables serve as good examples in this regard. For example, Lazarus, the talented ten, and the prodigal son, the latter being about forgiveness and reconciliation particularly in family matters.

In African culture, myths are stories about our collective historical experience, shared destiny and heritage as well as about shared personal destiny (*dzinza*). These myths have been built around the stories and are integrated with well selected historical facts. The writer uses this technique extensively on the training modules for a variety of topics. They have also been captured live on video for the purpose of training facilitators, change agents and development practitioners.

This technique, which I now call *mythography*, is a very powerful instructional tool for creating new learning paradigms and for building a sense of hope and shared destiny. Mythography is also very effective in managing the spiritual, emotional and social resources of the organisation. It is one of only two techniques that have the potential to manage spiritual resources and raise spiritual awareness. Jesus of Nazareth used a similar instructional methodology, particularly the extensive use of fables and myths called parables. Essentially, Mythography = History + Mythology.

Organisations need role models who are *mythical* heroes to personify and affirm their purpose, meaning and values, particularly in times of rapid change. Mythic heroes give people something to strive for in order to attain both organisational and personal transformation. Mythic heroes also help people to address the contradictions of human life and the mysteries of human existence. This is what

the story of Job accomplished in Jewish and Christian cultures. It poses the question: 'Why do bad things happen to good people?' Joseph Campbell aptly comments in this regard, saying: 'When a person becomes a model for other people's lives, he has moved into the sphere of being mythologized'.

A good example of this is the role Mandela played during the Southern African struggle as a mythic hero. Although he was in prison, he inspired thousands of political activists and freedom fighters. The late Herbert Chitepo played a similar role in the Zimbabwean struggle, although he had been assassinated. This is the role Edward Mondlane, the founder of Frelimo, played in the struggle for the liberation of Mozambique, although he had been assassinated very early in the struggle by hired hands of imperialists. Amilcar Cabral played a similar role in the struggle for liberation in Guinea Bissau, although he, too, had been assassinated by imperialists during the early part of that struggle. Mbuya Nehada, the female revolutionary leader of the first Chimurenga ('revolution') in Zimbabwe, played a similar heroic role in that country's liberation war.

Facilitators and development practitioners can create mythic heroes in communities and organisations to inspire development as well as transformation efforts. This can be done in the following manner detailed below. Firstly, select an individual who is prochange and has done amazing things regarding transformation. Then create a heroic story around this particular individual. It is important to increase his / her visibility in the community or organisation; in this way it becomes possible to reposition the heroic individual in the community or organisation. This intervention not only helps to brand the hero/heroine but helps to create space and a forum for him/her. It also encourages and inspires him/her to achieve in the chosen field. The new result is a mythic hero who personifies the new vision in the values of the organisation. Finally, it is crucial to constantly tell the story, which then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy for the chosen individual. Ultimately, the individual has to find an aspect of myth that relates to his/her own life. Organisations need role models, mythical heroes to personify and affirm their purpose, meaning and values.

In the writer's own transformation projects with the Agricultural Rural Development Corporation (ARDC), Spoornet, Nampak, Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA) and the South African Post Office (SAPO) he endeavoured to mentor and create mythic heroes who would then inspire the transformation efforts.

### *Religious, philosophical foundations of African management*

In addition to understanding the role of myth in transformation, the following sections seek to elaborate on the spiritual and philosophical elements of African culture, which underpin African management.

#### *African spiritual perspective*

The African spiritual life is pervasive and deeply rooted in every area of life. There is no separation of religion from any other areas of life and religion is fully integrated with life in a remarkable rhythm. For this reason, social capital – which embodies an organisation's emotional and spiritual resources – is a distinctive competitive factor akin to intellectual capital. Social capital affects the impact of any strategic intervention and the ultimate effectiveness of policies, procedures and processes. But modern management thinking practices and literature are generally weak in managing emotional and spiritual resources, which also help determine the value of an organisation, although there are some authors who are beginning to focus on this area.**[iv]**

Science is not instructive on how to manage social capital in organisations. Social capital is a different form of energy and level of consciousness and requires a different knowledge base. Understanding about the role of spirits, articulated in traditional African religions can contribute to social capital management and its transformation. I have developed, for example, the hierarchy of African spirits, which is transtribal, as a model for managing cultural, emotional, and spiritual resources in an organisation.

In African spirit religion, the spirit represents our ultimate real self, our inner self and total being, and our total consciousness. The spirit is who we really are. In terms of management, the spirit is the ultimate energy and consciousness of an organisation. The spirit carries an organisation's values and essence. The African spirit model serves as a metaphor to capture an organisation's prevailing climate, culture, energy and consciousness. This model can be used as a tool for auditing the dominant spirits and cultural values of an organisation in a live, collective and a participative manner.

The model can also be used as a framework for managing and transforming an organisation's social capital – its emotional and spiritual resources. It can, potentially, be more effective than sophisticated cultural surveys and psychological techniques, which some employees might not understand because

they lack basic literacy skills. The presence of illiteracy is a factor that can skew the result of traditional western surveys.

The model has been used as a diagnostic tool to transform and create social capital in large business and state organisations in South Africa, such as the South African Post Office, Spoornet – SA National Railway, and the Agricultural Rural Development Corporation.

### *The spirits of management*

There are many ways to extract the myths and to discern the spirits of an organisation. You can ask participants to share their most memorable experiences, or ask them to share stories of the most remarkable characters in the organisation. If the stories are negative, it means that the myths and spirits of the organisation are negative. The following descriptions of spirits in the hierarchy may be useful to some readers to help diagnose positive and negative spiritual dimensions within organisations. They are described in the Shona language, but I have found that they have broader relevance.

### *The destructive spirit*

The Witch Spirit Mutakati is the lowest spirit in the hierarchy of African spirits. This is an evil spirit that wants to spoil everything in life and on Earth. In terms of the corporate collective spirit, it is characterized by destructive cynicism, negative thinking, and passive and active sabotage. This spirit devours an organisation's energy. It is a dominant spirit in sluggish businesses and government bureaucracies.

### *The powerless spirit*

The Avenging Spirit Ngozi is usually good but has been treated unjustly. As a result, it harbours anger, bitterness, and revenge. It is the dominant spirit among marginalized and powerless groups in society and organisations. This is the predominant spirit in dispossessed groups and the underclass of any society and organisation. Unless such groups can overcome their bitterness and anger, they will not be able to negotiate a new reality and new vision for themselves or their organisations. They can also become a danger to themselves and society as a whole.

Figure 1.3: The Spirits



Figure 1.3: The Spirits

### *The innovative spirit*

The Wandering Spirit Shave is the spirit of an outsider who comes to the family or clan as a White Knight on a specific area or issue. This is an unusual individual who has a particular obsession and unique creative ability. It is the spirit of innovation. This is a weak spirit in many modern organisations in which innovators are not accepted or rewarded but, at best, just tolerated. The key strategic lesson is that innovative ideas may have to come from outside the organisation or from outsiders to the accepted corporate system. That suggests a strong case for employment practices that can attract mavericks, who usually have incomplete or unusual résumés. Organisations may also have to make use of reputable consultants to generate creative ideas. The insiders may be too close to their systems to envision potential realities. It is difficult to challenge a corporate culture from within, as it is career-limiting. The second strategic lesson is that innovation may have to be managed outside of the formal structure, giving rise to the need to create parallel structures for innovation.

### *The family spirit*

The Clan Spirit Mudzimu Wemhuri is a family spirit that is interested in the survival of its group. This spirit enhances group solidarity through specified rituals, activities, ceremonies and symbols. It is important for building team-based, world-class organisations. It also serves to emphasize the importance of rituals, ceremonies and symbols in designing organisational teams.

Figure 1.4: Cultural values associated with Spirits

CULTURAL VALUES	SPIRIT
Morality and dignity	Rainmaker Spirit GOBWA
Performance and enterprise	Hunter Spirit SHAVI RUDZIMBA
Authority: Know the truth	Divination Spirit SANGOMA
Power and conflict	War Spirit MAJUKWA
Survival of one's self and one's group	Clan/Family Spirit MUDZIMU WEMHURI
Particular obsession, ability and creativity	Wandering Spirit SHAVE
Bitterness, anger, revenge	Avenging Spirit NGOZI
Cynicism, negativity, destruction	Witch Spirit MUTAKATI

Figure 1.4: Cultural values associated with Spirits

### *The personal spirit*

The War Spirit Majukwa is a spirit of personal power, conflict and gamesmanship. It helps us understand power cultures and how to create power and influence in organisations. The rise of spider-web structures in modern organisations makes it imperative for individuals to develop power skills for personal influence in order to accomplish objectives.

### *The spirit of truth*

The Spirit of Divination Sangoma knows the whole truth, which is his truth, and is not open to other views. Experts and specialists in organisations typically personify this spirit, as do most traditionalists. The spirit reduces the rate of learning in an organisation and its ability to adapt to change. Therefore we should populate action learning teams with non-experts and mavericks.

### *The restless spirit*

The Hunter Spirit Shavi Rudzimba is a restless spirit and is the spirit of entrepreneurship. It has an eye for opportunity and deal-making. This spirit has a marked quest for pragmatic, creative solutions to survival and competitive challenges. The rituals and ceremonies surrounding this spirit help us develop practices to manage entrepreneurship in organisations.

### *The relationship spirit*

The Rainmaker Spirit Gobwa is concerned about our relationship with the organisation and other people, as well as with our ecological, social, political, economic, and spiritual environments. This spirit takes care of our whole universe and is concerned with truth, morality, balance, and human dignity. This spirit helps clarify the stewardship role of the CEO and the need to take accountability for the whole organisation, as well as being its conscience. The primary role of a CEO is to look after the spirit of the organisation and its total social capital.

### *Strategic lessons from the Spirit Hierarchy model*

In any given situation, there will be two or more dominant spirits that determine the social capital of an organisation. The dominant spirits determine the organisation's outcomes, consciousness, culture and energy levels.

The African Spirit Hierarchy model can be used to audit the dominant culture and values, as well as the organisational climate in a collective, participative manner through dialogues and bonding rituals that allow group psychological departure and rebirth. The ceremonies and symbols that are integrated into the process provide access to the collective unconsciousness of the organisation. The whole process is enhanced by one or more elements of storytelling, singing, dancing and mythography.

It is important to dispel negative spirits for a positive organisational climate to flourish and make renewal efforts sustainable and high-impact. Organisations cannot let go of a negative past and embark on the critical path of corporate renewal as long as there are deadening, routine activities and processes. There is a need to design rituals and ceremonies of departure and rebirth. As a general rule, competent and charismatic outside consultants must facilitate those. Organisations cannot embark on a cultural renaissance without dealing with past grievances.

Organisations have to know where they are coming from to find out where they can go. They have to know who they are before they can know what they can become. Strategic visioning and values exercises have failed because of their lack of a 'spiritual dimension', for want of a better term. Such exercises have ended up with empty slogans that are neither practiced nor taken seriously. Organisational transformation is not just an intellectual journey; it is also an emotional and spiritual journey. In order to access the emotional and spiritual resources of an organisation, appropriate bonding symbols, myths, ceremonies, and rituals are needed.

### *Cultural and philosophical foundations: A comparative analysis*

Cultural philosophy is vital in leadership because it enables managers to understand philosophy and contextual realities. This is what ubuntu; the philosophy of African management can contribute to the management discipline. Ubuntu means 'I am because we are; I can only be a person through others'. It is only in the encounter of others in our relationships that we discover who we are.



This requires trust in others and a canonization of the values of interdependence, respect, consensus, solidarity and human dignity, as a basis of management practices. Management excellence requires us to celebrate the richness and diversity of global cultures.

We are all products of our culture. We can only see what our cultural paradigms allow us to see. Therefore, all managers and employees only see what their cultural paradigms in their organisations allow them to see. The clay material of management is subjectivity. Management is emotional, social, spiritual, political and rational.

Therefore, any approach to the study of management should reflect this complexity and diversity. The current Cartesian scientific paradigm may be necessary but not sufficient in understanding management - it only addresses the rational element of management. Ultimately, the challenge of management is to move from being a science of manipulation, to also being a science of understanding. The discipline of management is culturally biased because it is about the issues of how we organise people and how we manage the work they do. Hence, the management discipline should encompass the great theory of being.

It is important to explore the role of cultural paradigms in organisational leadership. We are all products of our cultures. Charles Hampden-Turner and Alfons Trompenaars (1993) argue in their book 'The seven cultures of capitalism' that we can only see what our cultural paradigms allow us to see. Therefore, all leaders and employees can only see what their cultural lenses allow them to see in organisations. This has serious implications for leadership theories and practices. The national host culture determines how the challenge of leadership in organisations is approached. Thomas H. Kuhn (1996), in his book 'The structure of scientific revolutions', defines a paradigm as follows:

*... accepted examples of actual scientific practice, examples which include law, theory, application, and instrumentation together - [that] provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research. Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice.*

His observation of creative thought leaders in the scientific fields was that people

who understood the prevailing scientific paradigm in their field and had the courage to think and explore the frontiers beyond it. Organisational leaders should not only be able to understand the culture of the host country in which their organisation is operating, but must also have the personal courage to think outside it. At the risk of over-simplifying and over generalizing, the influence of the four cultures of the four corners of the globe will be examined. It is important to note that every culture has its competencies, strengths and weaknesses. The essence of leadership excellence is the ability to leverage the host African culture and then harness complimentary competencies of the distinct global cultures of the four corners of the globe.

### *Overview of the global cultural diversity for leadership excellence*

Let us start by examining the cultural worldview of the European North and its strategic implications for leadership, theory and practice. The cultural worldview of the North is 'I am because I think I am'. There is an emphasis on rational and scientific thinking. European leaders have harnessed this competency in planning, as well as scientific and technical innovation. In fact, the stunning achievements of European leadership and civilization have been due to scientific and technological innovations, as well as rational planning techniques. Between 1500 and 1700 there was a dramatic shift in the way people pictured the world and in the whole way of thinking in Europe. The new scientific mentality and the new perception of the cosmos gave our European civilization the features that are characteristic of the modern era. They became the basis of the paradigm that has dominated European culture for the past three hundred years, according to Capra (Capra 1982). René Descartes is usually regarded as the founder of the modern scientific paradigm. The belief in the certainty of scientific knowledge lies at the very basis of the Cartesian philosophy and of the worldview derived from it. The Cartesian belief in scientific truth is reflected in the scientism that has become typical of the Western culture. Thus, Descartes arrived at his most celebrated statement *Cogito, ergo sum* - 'I think therefore I exist'. The European cultural paradigm can assist leaders to plan and create a memory of the future.

### *Eastern Asian cultural paradigm*

The eastern Asian cultural paradigm is characterized by an emphasis on continuous improvement to attain perfection. In fact, most Asian religions emphasize a pilgrimage into inner perfection. From these religions techniques of personal development and perfection have developed, such as yoga from

Hinduism and meditation form Buddhism. The Eastern worldview can be summarized as 'I am because I improve'. According to the Japanese leadership expert Masaaki Imai (Imai 1986):

*If you learn only one word of Japanese make it Kaizen. Kaizen strategy is the single most important concept in Japanese management - the key to Japanese competitive success. Kaizen means improvement. Kaizen means ongoing improvement involving everyone: top management, managers and workers.*

It means much more than that. It means a philosophy that encourages every person in an industry - every day - to make suggestions for improving everything; themselves, their job, their workplace, their factory layout, their telephone answering habits, their products and their services. The giant Japanese electronic company Matsushita receives some 6.5 million ideas from its employees every year. The cultural business strategy of kaizen inspired the successful Japanese economic revolution because this cultural competency allowed the Japanese to manage mature manufacturing technologies through innovation and team structures such as quality circles. This gave birth to a worldwide revolution in quality through the participatory leadership best practices of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Total Productive Maintenance (TPM).

#### *Western cultural worldview*

America is a young successful dominant civilization which exemplifies a western cultural worldview. Since it is an adolescent civilization, it believes in what Robert Reich (Reich 1991) has called the myth of the individual hero. The Western worldview puts emphasis on the individual lone hero who, through his individual nobility, independence, courage and conviction, saves organisations and communities from their fate. This cultural worldview can be stated as: 'I am because I, the individual hero, dream and do'. More specifically, this cultural paradigm translates into: 'Concentrate on your self-interest and you will automatically serve your customer and society better, which in turn will let you serve your self-interest'. The classic representative theorist of the Western paradigm is Adam Smith, whose main thesis is that collective social goals are a by-product of self-interest. Therefore, if each individual pursues their own selfish personal interest, an invisible will automatically serve the common interests of the larger society. Adam Smith published a book entitled 'The wealth of nations', which became a manifesto of American enterprise. Adam Smith summarized the heart and soul of the Western American cultural paradigm as follows:

[This individual] ... *intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it ...* (Smith 1937: 423).

Another feature of this paradigm is the guts to dream and the personal courage to put them into action. This cultural paradigm has a visionary enterprising trait which has inspired American economic development and created the largest and most competitive economy in human history. It takes substantial courage and a capacity to dream big to think of inhabiting other planets in the manner Americans have done and demonstrated.

#### *African cultural paradigm of the South*

The African worldview is characterized by a deliberate emphasis on people and their dignity – the emphasis on the collective brotherhood of mankind called ubuntu, which is the African perspective of collective personhood derived from muntu or munhu. Ubuntu literally translated means ‘I am because we are; I can only be a person through others’. There is deliberate emphasis on solidarity and interdependence which is a key characteristic of African communities of affinity. The Archbishop Desmond Tutu puts it more clearly:

*Africans have a thing called UBUNTU; it is about the essence of being human, it is part of the gift that Africa is going to give to the world. It embraces hospitality, caring about others, being willing to go that extra mile for the sake of another. We believe that a person is a person through other persons; that my humanity is caught up and bound up in yours. When I dehumanize you, I inexorably dehumanize myself. The solitary human being is a contradiction in terms, and therefore you seek to work for the common good because your humanity comes into its own in community, in belonging.*

The key values of African leadership include five key dimensions. Firstly, respect for the dignity of others. Secondly, there is a focus on group solidarity: an injury to one is an injury to all. Thirdly, teamwork is deeply valued, meaning that none of us is greater than all of us. Fourthly, service to others in the spirit of harmony

is a driving value. Finally, there is a profound value accorded to interdependence: Each one of us needs all of us. Charles Handy, the British guru on management echoes the same sentiments on collective personhood when he writes:

*We have to find a personal security in our relationship too. We are not meant to stand alone. We need a sense of connection. We have to feel that it matters to other people that we are there. Because if it makes no difference whether you are there or not then you really begin to feel like a meaningless person. If you have no connection to anybody, you have no responsibility and therefore no purpose (in Gibson 1997).*

African cultures stand Adam Smith's premise on its head. In terms of the African cultural paradigm, the needs of the group or community are considered first, and then the invisible hand will automatically take care of the desires of the individual. Serve your society and stakeholders to the best of your ability and you will automatically achieve your own personal goals, which will allow you to align them with the needs of your relevant stakeholders, including customers. It therefore follows that the African leadership paradigm has a bias towards servant leadership. The practices of the African paradigm of leadership are best articulated by Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf 1996). These best practices are:

*Listening:* The servant leader seeks to identify and clarify the will of the group. They seek to listen respectfully to what is being said. Listening also encompasses: getting in touch with one's inner voice; seeking to understand what one's body, spirit and mind are communicating. Finally, listening with regular periods of reflection is essential to the growth of the servant leader.

*Empathy:* The servant leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognised for their special and unique spirit. The most successful servant leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic leaders.

*Persuasion:* Persuasion is the clearest distinction between the conventional authoritarian leadership style and that of servant leadership. The servant leader is effective at building consensus within groups. The emphasis on persuasion rather than consensus is the heart and soul of African leadership because it is embedded in the ancient African philosophy of ubuntu. According to Nelson Mandela:

*Then our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings ... Then the country was ours in name and right ... All men were free and equal, this was the foundation of government. The council of elders was so completely democratic that all members of the tribe could participate in its deliberations. Chief and subject, warrior and medicine man, all took part and endeavoured to influence decisions* (Mandela, speech from the dock, at his 1962 trial).

According to George Ayittey (1999), African societies have, for centuries, enjoyed a tradition of participatory democracy. The organisational structure of indigenous African systems was generally based on kinship and ancestry. Survival of the tribe was the primary objective. Each ethnic group had its own system of government. These were unwritten constitutions like the constitution of Britain. Customs and traditions established the governance procedures. All African political governance systems in both chiefdoms and kingdoms started at village level comprised of extended families and lineages. Each village had its head chosen according to established rules with checks and balances. The chief was assisted by a small group of confidential advisors drawn from close friends and relatives called the inner council. If he disagreed with them, he would take the issue to the council of elders, a much wider and more formal structure consisting of hereditary headmen of lineages or wards. Their main function was not only to advise the chief but also to prevent the abuse of power by voicing its dissatisfaction and by criticizing the chief. The chief would inform the council of the subject matter to be dealt with. The matter would be debated until a decision was reached by consensus. The chief would remain silent and listen as the councillors debated the issues. He would weigh all viewpoints to avoid imposing his view on the council. The chief did not impose his rule – he only led and assessed the collective opinions of the council.

The people were the ultimate judge on disputed issues. If the council failed to reach consensus, the issue would be taken to the assembly for debate by the people. Every person was free to speak and ask questions. Deliberations continued until consensus was reached. Minority positions were heard and taken into account. In a majority rule process minority positions are ignored. The hallmark of African leadership traditions and practices is consensus democracy in order to accommodate minority positions to ensure the greatest possible level of justice and avoid sabotage during the implementation process. Compromise, persuasion, discussion and accommodation, listening and freedom of speech are

the key elements of the African leadership paradigm. Consensus is difficult to reach on many issues. African political, social and economic leadership tradition is noted for the length of time required to reach consensus and it may take weeks to attain unity of purpose.

Consensus, by its very nature, is the antithesis of autocracy. The problem with the Western cultural leadership paradigm with its emphasis on individualism is that it scorns its own origins in the supportive community. The dauntless entrepreneur is a self-made man. According to Trompenaars et al. (1993): 'This may be a good political argument for keeping the money you have accumulated, but it is a very dubious claim in reality, and one that sells short the many who sustained you'. The view of the African paradigm is that the nurturant community is the cradle of the individual. Therefore it follows that many changes could be made to transform organisations by shaping them as enterprising communities that could increase rather than decrease the individuality of each member. To focus on individuals only is to miss out on all the social and collective arrangements which can be altered to enhance the contribution of the individuals. In African cultures team rewards take precedence over individual rewards; the team is likely to support and reward with their friendship and respect the higher performers and the innovative individuals within the group. If the bonus is paid to individual high performers or individuals identified as more creative, the group is more likely to gang up on those whom they think are most favoured by management, sabotage their performance and socially punish them for their creativity. Star individual performers will benefit substantially from team rewards as opposed to individual rewards.

### *Healing*

Many people have broken spirits and have suffered emotional hurts. Servant leaders should recognise that they have an opportunity to 'help make whole' those with whom they interact. According to Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf 1996):

The servant as a leader – there is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between the servant leader and the led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share.

Perhaps former President Nelson Mandela can be described as an epitome of African leadership virtues, particularly in terms of healing, compromise and

diversity tolerance, as well as his focus on creating racial harmony and consensus democracy. Nelson Mandela says:

*I am prepared to stand for the truth, even if you all stand against me ... I am writing my own personal testament; because now that I am nearer to the end, I want to sleep for eternity with a broad smile on my face knowing that, especially the youth, can stretch out across the colour line, shake hands and seek peaceful solutions to the problems of the Country.*

He went on to comment on the destiny of whites in South Africa:

*Young Afrikaners had a specific and central contribution to make to the development of the South African nation and had too much potential to allow themselves to be marginalized.*

Mandela also said that he had always fought against the domination of the majority by the minority, as well as the domination of the minority by the majority. This is the essence of African consensus democracy which seeks to accommodate minority groups.

Servant leaders seek to nurture their abilities to 'dream great dreams'. The ability to look at a problem from a conceptualising perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. Servant leaders are called upon to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach. In other words, in terms of the African leadership paradigm, one of the key functions of leadership is the ability to manage meaning by creating the memory of an attractive future. Leadership has to have the ability to create a shared agenda and vision that is capable of transforming the status quo, as well as the rare ability of enrolling people into the vision and galvanizing support for it. The leaders have to be able to energize people to overcome major obstacles towards achieving the vision of transformation by managing attention to achieve focused excellence. They have the ability to capture their vision in captivating language. Mandela can serve to illustrate this dimension of African leadership practice:

*We have triumphed in the effort to implant hope in the breasts of millions of our people. We enter into the covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both Black and White, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their inalienable right to human dignity; a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.*



## Self-discipline

Yet another key element is that African leadership practices cherish a warrior tradition. African chiefs and kings were expected to lead their people in terms of war. Management of self-discipline is very important; doing very ordinary things in an extraordinary manner, as well as walking the talk, thus putting their sincerity on constant display in order to create trust. Management of social capital by creating trust is a key element of African servant leadership

Figure 1.5: Seven levels of consciousness. Source: Barrett 1998.

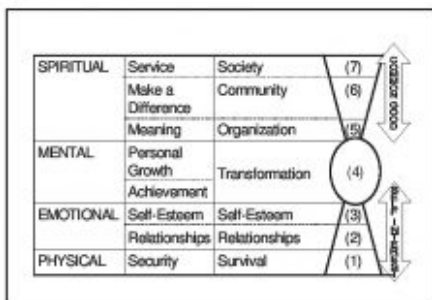


Figure 1.5: Seven levels of consciousness. Source: Barrett 1998.

## Consciousness

In terms of the African leadership paradigm, leaders have to be sharply awake. They have an inner serenity. They have a high degree of personal consciousness. High consciousness can only be attained through a personal spiritual journey, by reaching into the depths of our spiritual inner resources to transcend our self-interest and attain a high level of personal transformation to be able to focus on the common good in service of society and the enterprising organisational ability. This also enables leaders to overcome the limitations of their historical circumstances inspired by a sense of personal destiny, which enables them to infuse spiritual energy into the organisation. For this to happen, leaders have to have a sense of connection with both the past and the future. They need a sense of legacy inspired by being rooted in their culture and traditions. In the African worldview, leaders are the custodians of culture and a particular civilization. They have to have a highly developed sense of personal destiny (dzinza) by knowing who they are, to become what they know they can become, by knowing their personal and family history, as well as tribal and national history to serve as a compass and a reference point in order to find their paths in a changing world.

## Conclusion

The genius of European (North) leadership tradition lies in planning and technical innovation. The genius of the American (West) leadership tradition lies in entrepreneurship and a bias for action. The genius of Asian (East) leadership tradition lies in process innovation to attain quality and perfection. The genius of African (South) leadership tradition lies in ubuntu – interdependence of humanity by emphasizing human dignity and respect through consensus democracy and people mobilization, solidarity and care. Therefore, Richard Pascale (Pascale 1990) was right in saying:

Leadership reality is not absolute; rather, it is socially and culturally determined. Across all cultures, in all cultures and in all societies, human beings are coming together to perform certain collective acts, encounter common problems which have to do with establishing direction, co-ordination and motivation. Culture affects the way in which they can be resolved. Social learning also establishes horizons of perception.

## NOTES

- i.** These essays were awarded a prize by the Institute of Personnel Management (IPM) for their originality.
- ii.** Some of the writers who have articulated classical management theory in Europe and America are Peter Drucker (2005) and Kurt Lewin (1973).
- iii.** In my own experience, the corpse shadow ritual is commonly found in all Nguni groups in South Africa.
- iv.** Some examples: Patricia Aberdine (Megatrends 2010) writes eloquently on the emergence and importance of spirituality and spiritual capital in organisations; Verna Allee (2003) is very articulate about the role of relationships and social capital in the evolution of intellectual capital.

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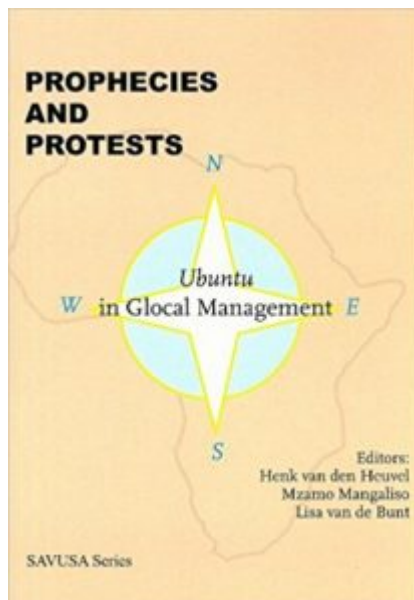
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# **Prophecies And Protests ~ Manufacturing Management Concepts: The Ubuntu Case**



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 loyalty' (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 establishment 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 the role 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 monologism 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 monologism, '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 stifling, 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](http://www.cs.co.za/reconstructionand_development.htm)

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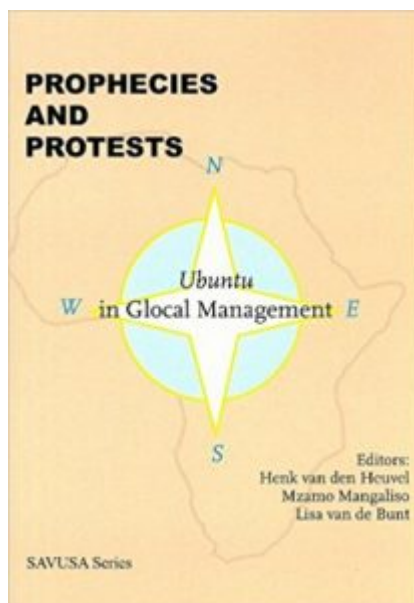
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# Prophecies And Protests ~ Ubuntu And Communalism In African Philosophy And Art



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 of 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: 193-194, 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 oneness 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 answered as 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,<sup>1</sup>  
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 worldview. 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):

Figure 1.1: Makonde



Figure 1.2: Mask with ancestor



Figure 1.3: Makonde



Figure 1.4: Polygamy



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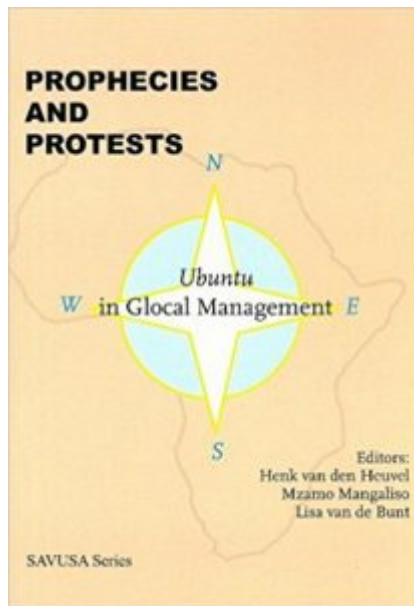
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# **Prophecies And Protests ~ The Scope For Arab And Islamic Influences On An Emerging**



# ‘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 education 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

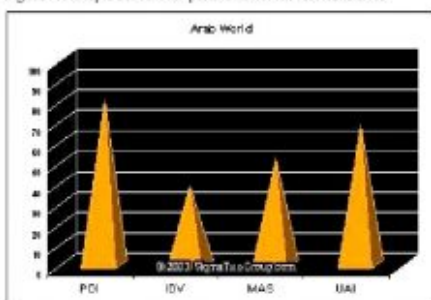


Figure 4.1: Reproduced with permission from Hofstede 2005

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.

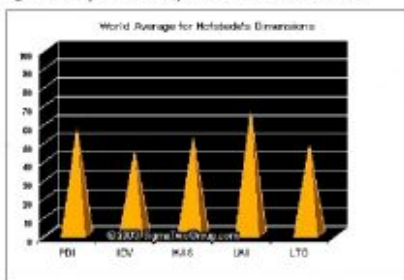


Figure 4.2: Reproduced with permission from Hofstede 2005

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 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 belief that 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 towards 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 *Diwaniyah* 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 funds 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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