Achieving Unity in Diversity through Cross Cultural Management of Resources

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Management scholars often contemplate why it is increasingly obvious that the expectations of organizations created and managed along western management models have not achieved the desired results when applied across borders. It is a truism that culture affects management hence the need for cross cultural management studies. This paper examines cross cultural aspects of management in different cultures including Africa culture. We have come to accept that there is need to adequately manage cultural diversity of workforce. Management in Africa should incorporate African culture in conjunction with western management best practices and models in order to achieve desirable results.
Introduction

Some scholars often wonder why management effectiveness appears to differ sharply from country to country. The inability of western management theories and fundamentals to achieve the desired objectives in non-western nations in which these theories are attempted to be implemented or applied, call to question the universality of management. It is a truism that management fundamental concepts, theories and principles are fairly universal. The application of these fundamental concepts, theories and principles differ greatly in various cultures; it is the know-how involved in applying the knowledge that is different. The transferability of management know how is subject to validity test.

Evidence abound that the application of these western models in Africa for instance, are devoid of cultural underpinnings. Hicks and Gullet (1978) assert that the general applicability of management fundamental is culture bound as many applications on organization and leadership were inappropriate to local situations, as the native culture and personality play a significant role in enterprise success.

There is equally a clarion call for the infusion of social cultural issues in management practices in order to clearly understand the impact of different cultural values on management and leadership styles in different cultures including Africa. That culture influences management practices mainly through motivation, respect, reward system, promotion and authority is unquestionable.

As a result of the globalization of business operations, with its attendant culturally diverse workforce, there is the urgent need to pay attention to the roles of cross-cultural aspect of management.

Meaning Of Cross Cultural Management

Generally, human race has different cultural background. The way of doing things in one culture may not always be the same in another country. What is good in one culture may be bad in another.

Cross cultural management is the study of the behavior of people in organization located in cultures and nations around the world. It focuses on the description of organizational behavior within countries and cultures, on the comparison of organizational behavior across countries and cultures and most importantly, on the interaction of people from different countries working with the same organization or within the same environment (Wikipedia answers.com/Q). The implication is that often time different meanings, interpretations may be given to similar activities in two different cultures. The diverse nature of the workforce accounts for the variations of interpretation given to employee behaviors depending on its cultural setting.

That the today’s workforce is a multicultural admixture of people from different cultures, ethnicities and lifestyles accounts for the difference in managerial perception of the workforce. This perceptual difference of different employees calls for a critical study of cross cultural aspects of management.

There is the urgent need for today managers to develop a global perspective to management as a parochial view is inappropriate. It is also imperative for a manager that wants global presence to place strong emphases on the external environment. It is a recognized fact that culture differs widely within the same country, not only in countries that are large and diverse but also within geographically small and relatively homogeneous countries. Hardly therefore can firms ignore the global environment, even if the firm has no plan to operate abroad. Increasingly, firms are now known to employ people from different nations with different cultural background.
Cultural differences do affect managerial behavior and practices such as planning, organizing, staffing and controlling. Culture also affects interpersonal relations as seen in negotiation. It is essential that being aware of cultural difference is a prerequisite for personal and organizational success (Donnelly Jr., Gibson, Ivancevich, 1984).

Approaches To Cross Cultural Management Studies

According to Alder (1983), there are six different approaches to cross cultural management studies. All vary in the theoretical and management issues raised. There are assumptions about the universality of management principles, in their ways of dealing with similarity and differences and in their methodology. The first approach comprises of cross cultural studies in America by American scholars. The second approach is ethnocentric in nature, and entails replicating American management models in foreign countries. The third approach is a polycentric study, which attempts describing, explaining and interpreting patterns of management in foreign countries. The fourth approach is comparative studies, which centers on identifying those aspects of organizations that bare similar and those aspects that are different in cultures around the world. The fifth type is concerned with studying organizations, which operate in more than one culture. This is geocentric in nature. This approach is common in international management so as to permit international organizations to have common policies in their operations. Finally, the sixth type is cultural synergistic studies that attempts to emphasize creating universal approach to management in a culturally diverse society.

The predominant approach to cross cultural studies of management is the comparative management approach, which is concerned with the performance of managers in different cultures. This study examines the efficiency and effectiveness of managers in various countries or within the same country (Farmer, 1974).

Farmer and Richman pioneered cross cultural studies using comparative management approach, which emphasizes that external environment factors do affect management practices. Such factors as educational variable, social-cultural and ethical variables, legal and political and economic variables were implicated (Negandi and Estafen, 1976). The inclusion of technological variables resulted in the modified Koontz model of comparative management (Weihrich and Koontz, 1993).

A major classic in the cross cultural studies that beams a critical search light on the impact of culture as an external variable on management processes was done by Geert Hotstede in 1980 (BeardWell and Holden, 2001). From a study of 66 different countries, Hofstede initially isolated four primary cultural dimensions in 1980 and later added a fifth dimension in 1994. The essence of the study was to appraise the consequences of cultural difference in terms of motivation, leadership and organization (Hofstede, 1980).

**Power distance:** This relates to the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is unequally distributed. Organizations in high power distance culture have more levels of hierarchy, narrow span of control and centralized decision making. In such organizations status and power serve as motivators, and leaders are revered or obeyed as authorities. In a democratic society, the power distance is narrower than in a dictatorship. This implies that people have a higher chance of influencing decisions than in a dictatorship.
**Uncertainty Avoidance:** This relates to the creation of rules and structures to eliminate ambiguity in organization and support beliefs promising certainty and protecting conformity. The implication is that people try in numerous ways to avoid uncertainty in their lives by controlling their environment through predictable ways of working. Organizations in cultures that score high in uncertainty avoidance show more formalization as evident in greater amount of written rules and procedures as well as greater specialization evident in the importance attached to technical competence. In countries that score high that score high in uncertainty avoidance, people tend to show more nervous energy, while in low score cultures, people are easy going. Managers are only motivated by stability and security.

**Individualism and collectivism:** Individualism describes the relationship between the individual and the group to which he or she belong or prefers to live and work. Collectivism is the preference to work or live as a group rather than as an individual.

A country with a high collectivist culture exhibits a high preference for group decision making. Consensus and cooperation is valued more than individual initiative and efforts. Motivation is derived from a sense of belonging; rewards are based on group loyalty and tenure. A collectivist society prefer to respect the group to which it belongs, usually the family, tribe tend to differentiate between the in-group members and out-group members.

The role of leadership in such culture is to facilitate team effort and integration to foster supportive atmosphere and to create the necessary context or group culture. (Beardwell and Holden, 2001)

**Masculinity and Femininity:** This pertains to societies in which social gender roles are clearly distinct. This in other words, refers to the degree to which tough values like assertiveness, performance, success and competition associated with male prevail over tender values of quality of life, maintaining warm personal relationships, service, care for the weak and solidarity are associated with female. Organizations ranked high on masculinity management style is entirely concerned with task accomplishment rather than in nurturing social relationship. In this type of culture, motivation is based on acquisition of money and materialism rather than quality of life. In a more feminine culture, leadership is to ensure bottom line profits in order to satisfy shareholders and to set targets safeguard employees’ well being and concern for social responsibility (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2000).

**Time Orientation:** This is a measure of the extent to which members of a culture adopt a long term versus a short term outlook on work, life and other elements of the society. Some cultures have long term orientation that values dedication, hard work, perseverance, and the importance of self image. Other cultures are more likely to have a short term orientation. This culture put considerably less emphasis on work, perseverance, and similar values. And also, there are cultures that have intermediate time orientations (Griffin, 2002)

**Cross Cultural Management in Some African Cultures**

The culture of a society describes the pattern of behavior which relates to the values and beliefs that are developed over a period of time. The cultural impact of management on organizations is reflected in the basic beliefs and behavior of managers. The most common aspect is how people think and behave (Iguisi, 2004)
Characteristics of Africa culture

In Africa, family relations and social system is the extended family system as opposed to the western nuclear family system. The extended family system is an economic unit that has to care for its members. In Africa, families collectively share a common kinship lineage of both the dead and the living. Mbigi (1997), opines that the family play a fundamental in Africa society by the norms and values it imposes and carries out. The extended family system, constitute an excellent economic unit for production, distribution and consumption.

The African family is seen as a large number of kingship groups which extends from the past over the present to the future. Common blood ties create common obligations which demands that relatives should be supported. Thus individualism is suppressed. From the early age, a person is taught to accept his place within the kinship organization as entirely determined by age.

Using Hofstede (1980, 1991) classification of societal culture, Africa cultures can be analyzed along these cultural dimensions. On the culture dimension of individualism versus collectivism, African cultures are predominantly collectivist. This is as a result of the extended family system where individualism is greatly suppressed. The extended family system as a basis for social relationship is both monetary and kind (Dia, 1996). This is in addition to communal works in family farms, the redistribution of resources and the prestige enhancing functions of the social systems.

Given the pivotal role of the African extended family system, it is apparent that sanctions of kins carry considerable weight and heavy pressure can be exerted by family members for conformity (Takyi-Asiedu, 1993). Achievements within the African traditional cultural setting are usually attributed to group effect rather than individual assertiveness.

On the dimension of masculinity versus femininity, Africa society is traditionally more feminine in nature. There is greater emphasis on the maintenance of warm personal relationship, caring for the weak and in the development of cooperative spirit, contrary to a masculine society where assertiveness, competitive spirit are encouraged. The feminine disposition of Africa society creates a closed circuit between humans and their environment oriented towards harmony. There is a strong emphasis on settling disputes and restoration of harmonious personal relationships (Kiggundu, 1993).

A typical African worker sees work as an instrument of activity rather than as a central life interest, since it serves as a means of securing his needs (Blunt, 1983; Fashoyin, 1993). Another peculiar cultural form of Africa society is the indigenous system of saving and credit where credit is given at festive periods, which serves as a unifying activity for the local people.

Management in Ghana

Modern day Ghana, a West Africa country is a product of British colonial rule. Ghana comprises of about 100 linguistic and cultural groups whose major ethnic groups are Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbane, Guan and Ga-Adangbe. These ethnic groups share a common cultural heritage, history, language and origin. The major languages are Twi, Fanth, Ga, Hausa, Dagbane, Ewe, and Nzema with English Language as the official language.

Ghana is predominantly 60% Christians, 15% Muslims and 25% Traditional Africa religion. Essentially, no part of Ghana is ethnically homogeneous as there are migrations for jobs in urban centers.
The management style prevalent in a culturally diverse society like Ghana can be appraised in line with the common characteristics of Africa society and Hofstede’s (1980, 1991) classification of societal cultures. Organizational power in Ghana is based on clear system of hierarchy. Autocratic leadership style is common place as a result of organization hierarchy and respect for age in Africa. In this regard authority is rarely questioned. Decision making is highly centralized as absolute objectives rests with God. Managers are paternalistic in nature as they show adequate concern for the welfare of the subordinates and harmony is thus maintained.

The organization structure is high, emphasizing hierarchical order of doing things. To the employees, job security is considered very important. Organizations recruit employees from mixed sources; from schools, from other organizations, and staff punching is common. Employee loyalty is neither to the organization nor to the profession. Free wheeling is the norm rather than the exception.

The typical organization structure tends to retain the major characteristics of rigid bureaucratic structures, and rule bound hierarchies. On staff development, organizations are reluctant to invest highly on staff training as there are the possibilities of staff switching after such training. The term of employee employment is often intermediate as a result job switching and early retirement. On the issue of employee motivation, the hygiene factors of recognition and appreciation in addition to monetary incentive are employed. In strict sense, the application of theory X and Y is not suitable, rather Theory T. this advocates that tradition is a source of wisdom, hence people will dislike change and will do everything to avoid it if possible. Proponents of Theory T believe that change is a natural function and resisting authority leads to negative consequence (Adekola and Sergic, 2007). As an extension of the African extended family system, relationship oriented leadership is practiced commonly.

Management in South Africa

A mixture of African and non African have long lived together in South Africa. South Africa is made up of a population of well over 42 million people, comprising of about 75% Blacks, 12% Whites, 9% colored and 3% Indian. South Africa is a culturally diverse nation. This diversity goes further as the Blacks are subdivided into nine major ethnic nationalities. The languages are Zulu in majority and Xhosa. The constitution recognizes eleven official languages with English as the language of business. More than 80% of the population is Christian (Richmond and Gestrin, 1998). Coming on the heels of South Africa’s long exposure to western education and management influence, there are different styles of management practiced in South Africa.

The Eurocentric Management Style: This is predominantly traditional western management style. This style of management concentrates on the primacy of individualism and self-centered concepts of self-fulfillments, self-development and advancement. This approach to management unfortunately dominates the business landscape (Khoza, 1994). With the recognition of English as the language of business, Horwitze, Bowmaker-Falconer and Searl (1996), asserted that the attention of management is for the people to serve the bottom line objectives of the organization and in as much as job descriptions, evaluation and disciplinary codes are indications of western management styles.
Afrocentric style of management: This style of management centers around the usage of African cultural parameters in influencing appropriate management of organizations. This style is concerned with African home based concepts about people and their predispositions to work and productivity. The implication is that of Africa’s exclusivist ubuntu-base value system. Ubuntu, according to Koopman (1991), is the belief that man is very much a part of the society fabric and that each individual sees the need to find a suitable place in a societal structure. This concept has significant implications for corporate life. The people feel a sense of belonging, management is approachable, atmosphere informal with free flow of information. The philosophy of Ubuntu in South Africa is a reflection of an orientation to life that is opposed to individualism, insensitive to competitiveness but comfortable with collectivism.

The Inspirational Management Style: This style of management is a conscious fusion of the traditional African management practices, value and philosophies with western management techniques. Lessam (1996), acknowledged the infusion of the different cultural worlds in South Africa, which entails trust and respect for values, building common values and learning. Mbigi (1994), described this mixture as inspirational management. This is a management process which entails releasing the African’s hunter spirit, releasing the communal spirit, developing a village spirit and releasing a productive spirit.

The dominant style of management in South Africa as a reflection of cultural diversity is the traits of domination of Eurocentric approach to management where autocratic tendencies, hierarchical orientation and authoritarian disciplinary measures are emphasized. The dominance of this style of management is conceived as the direct consequence of apartheid socialization of people along the identification of races and the lack of trust towards the cultural alien (Hortwiz, Bowmaker-Falconer and Searll, 1996)

Managing the consequences of cultural diversity

Cultural diversity relates to the co-existence of people from different background. Multiculturism is concerned with the influence of this culturally diverse workforce co-existing and flourishing within the organization. The nature of this diversity could be in ethnicity, race, gender, physical ability and sexual orientation and age (Stonner, Freeman and Gilbert Jr, 1993).

Due to the challenges posed by cultural diversity in workplace, management must pay strict attention to the needs of a diverse workforce. Cox and Blake (1991), highlighted six arguments as consequences of diversity. The cost argument relates to the cost of managing cultural issues. The resource allocation argument is concerned with the reputation of managing diversity. The market argument is concerned with the distribution of goods and services in a culturally diverse environment. The creativity argument is concerned with the improvement of the level of innovativeness. The problem solving argument takes advantage of the heterogeneity of the workforce in decision making and problem solving resulting in better decisions. Finally, system flexibility argument posts that the operating environment becomes less determinate, less standardized and therefore more fluid.

Gentle (1994), believes that managing workforce diversity should incorporate both the dominant race with the visible and invisible ethnic cultures in the society that
contribute to the diversity. This is necessary for any company that seeks competitive advantage in the global economy. Griffin (2002), however, recognizes two approaches to managing workplace multiculturalism.

**Employee Efforts:**

Every employee is enjoined to strive to cultivate the attitude of understanding, empathy, and tolerance and demonstrate the willingness to communicate. Understanding is required from each manager of the meaning and nature of diversity. Managers are to come to terms with treating everyone as the same and people’s needs are to be treated fairly and equitably.

Empathy is demanded from managers in handling diversity and multiculturalism in workplace. Managers are to learn the different feelings of new employees and members from different background. Tolerance is demanded from individuals when dealing with others. They should be willing and able to tolerate any fundamental difference between themselves and others. Employees should be willing to communicate openly on issues relating to diversity and multiculturalism in workplace, such that exchanges are friendly, low key and none threatening.

**Organizational Efforts**

The starting point is that policies be in places that show how people or employees are affected directly or indirectly by workplace diversity. Mission statements should articulate a clear and direct commitment to differences among people (Rynes and Rosen, 1994).

Another organizational effort is organizational practices. This connotes the following practices and procedures that are based on flexibility rather than rigidity. Such practices as flexible working hours can be used to accommodate diversity. The composition of teams and committees should be a reflection of the extent of diverse workforce.

Equally important is training in diversity. Such training should be aimed at bringing out the similarities between the employees rather than the differences. Finally, there should be a fundamental belief among management that diversity and multiculturalism are valued before it can be effectively managed. Deliberate policy should be in place that clearly underscores management commitment to support diversity and multiculturalism.

**Conclusion**

Foremost management theories and principles of the west are laddered with the socio-cultural norms of the society in which the scholars were born and raised. Attempts to replicate these principles in Africa for instance failed due to the African cultural setting. This call to question the universality or transferability of management principles. As revealed in literature, Africa’s cultural setting affects management in the following areas;

**Decision making:**

On the issue of decision making, autocratic style of management is preferred due to hierarchical need of the African family and the great distance between the leaders and followers in terms of authority. In African society, decisions are made by
managers whose contribution to decision making is based on age and wisdom. Unlike
the participatory leadership style of the west as advocated by most literature
(Ahiauzu, 1985)/

**Welfare:**
Traditionally, Africa’s extended family system ensures that communal interest
provides for the unfortunate and the handicapped amongst its people. Reward system
that promotes individualism is resisted, and a system that rewards the group is most
preferred.

**Managerial leadership:**
The traditional concept of Africa leadership is paternalistic. This is enshrined
in the extended family system. It is expected to produce a higher managerial
effectiveness and workers productivity. This paternalistic disposition of leaders
confers on the management the right to give orders and exact obedience and sanctions
imposed.

**Training:**
In traditional Africa communities, training involves long apprenticeship. The
trainee is trained not only on the job, but his personal character is developed at the
same time. Part of the training objective is that the trainee should be useful to himself
and as well as meet the corporate goals of the community.

It is our submission that management is management, and best practices can
be transferred anywhere in the world. There should be no rush to copy American or
Japanese management practices everywhere, rather, the transferability of best
practices should take cognizance of cultural diversity of the workforce in their
national context.

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