

Change Management and Cultural Synergy: *Is There an African Management Model?*

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Summary:

The picture of Africa presented in the West is a continent in turbulent transition. Based on literature reviews, field study and interviews with managers, Nadine explored the relevance and potential for cultural conflicts in the intersection between Western and African management approaches. The key question at hand was: "Will management concepts and practices imported from the industrialised West meet Africa's needs?" Nadine's conclusion: "It's not that simple." Rather, there is more we can do to develop a more informed and nuanced view of management styles appropriate to Africa.

Recommendations:

Nadine notes that despite emphasis on "good governance" within the development community, little work has been undertaken on the study of African management, and a goal of defining "good management" in Africa is compounded by uncertainty, government interference, socio-cultural factors, inappropriate practices, and adversarial labour relations. She recommends:

Need for cultural sensitivity: There is no single formula for management development in different cultures. A clearer ascertainment of what constitutes "success in Africa" is possible if we become more informed on the African thought system and organisational realities.

Limits of Western management: Some observers suggest that training for African managers is often intended to divorce them from societies they serve. But Western-style planning cannot guarantee anticipated outcomes. As one example, the West may teach delegation, information-sharing, and participative management, but Africans may continue to push decision making upward.

Appeal for 'cross-vergence' and hybrids: There is an alternative. In line with the work of informed theorists, when two cultures meet a blending can result. Cross-vergence and hybrids combine global and local perspectives in a balanced way.

Historical challenge: In addition to social variations by country, there are three major types of management systems embedded in African history: 1) "post-colonial", implying control, hierarchy and rank; 2) "post-instrumental", implying importation of Western approaches through multinational companies and courses; and 3) "African Renaissance," reflecting a call for return to African values, including sharing; commitment; compromise and consensus; openness; and good relations. The influence of these three systems cannot be underestimated.

Future directions: In increasingly global markets, where national and corporate cultures encounter one another, we have only begun to consider the right mix in Africa. With such an open landscape, organisations can benefit from a willingness to ask questions, try, and learn – making good use of cultural audits and adaptive intercultural training to enrich, evolve and harness better management strategies.