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Men and management in contemporary Africa

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MEN AND MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICA

Series Introduction

This book is the second in the series edited by Michael Z. Brooke and H. Lee Remmers—the first being *The Multinational Company in Europe*. Each book in this series is designed to be read by students of international business on both degree and post-experience courses. The books are also intended for practising managers with responsibilities on the international side of their businesses.

Each book in this series has been chosen to appeal to both the academic and the business worlds. It is hoped that this will give them their distinctive flavour and value. There is still a shortage of books suitable for courses, indeed some courses on international business have been postponed for this reason. Much existing writing is designed for propaganda rather than for information, and is therefore of limited interest to managers. The books in this series deal in depth with significant issues in the management process—finance, taxation, transfer of knowledge, industrial relations, legal issues and so on. Each book will be designed to stand on its own, but will be complementary to the others in the series. The framework will be rooted in a theory of the subject and original research material will be incorporated. To ensure standardisation of treatment and quality, each author has agreed to active intervention by the series editors and by other advisers called in for individual subjects. Thus it is hoped to maintain the link between theory and practice in books that will be both readable and profound.

One of the objectives of the series is to assist in the understanding of management methods in different cultures. *Men and Management in Contemporary Africa* is the first example of this, and is to be closely followed by a book on management in Japan. Indeed Mr Onyemelukwe quotes in the early chapters of this book something of the Japanese experience to illustrate further his point that international management needs a more precise appreciation of cultural differences.

Mr Onyemelukwe is a practising manager and a citizen of Nigeria. He has had the use of University resources and facilities, and describes his methods below in Chapter 4. Hence, as in all works in this series, there is this combination of academic insight and business experience. This comes out strongly in this particular book.

A particularly important feature is the way the author has been able to provide a critique of Western management thought and its adaptation to the African situation. This critique has enabled the author to sketch with some subtlety, the distinctive characteristics that are likely to emerge with a body of African management thought.

An understanding of both the similarities and the differences between the approach to management in different cultures is obviously important to those who have to manage international businesses. In this connection, warnings about being misled by apparent resemblances should be noted. This subject is also of significance to all those who are interested in comparative management. One of the problems is to distinguish between cultural differences that are related closely to a stage of industrialisation and those that are likely to have a more permanent character. If the family control of business seems everywhere to be among the former, the cultural influences on motivation may well be more permanent. These influences include the effects of kinship, social responsibility, the extended family and other inherited attitudes. Such characteristics can be elusive and difficult to state positively, and the author does great service in helping us to identify them.

Among some particularly interesting points raised are: the need for business to be in line with cultural objectives; the 'gross errors of understanding' which afflict Western managers who write about their experiences of Africa; the special problems of Africa middle managers; the failure of incentives which assume a competitive spirit among the workers.

Especially challenging sections in the latter part of the book raise questions about the Western pluralistic view of society. There may be some confusion here over names, but the emphasis on the African communal approach is strongly urged. Then again the author trenchantly argues that existing managers are ill-equipped to cope with local problems. The author is particularly forthright on the training of expatriates. More familiar is the argument against industrialisation by capital intensive means; but here this argument is presented more persuasively than usual.

Two chapters of case studies provide authentic accounts of situations which the more analytical parts of the book can only suggest to us. As series editors we are convinced that this book contains several important insights and makes a considerable contribution to discussion of the subject.

Other books already being prepared for this series include:

Management in Japan

The Transfer of Technical Knowledge

The Trade Union and the Multinational Firm

Finance, Accounting and Tax Planning

Legal Issues for International Companies

March, 1973

M. Z. B.
H. L. R.

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I also wish to record with appreciation the interest shown by Dr and Mrs Rowe of Harvard University and their many useful suggestions. The list of acknowledgements will not be complete without mention of Mr C. J. Rea of Longman, London. The idea to attempt this work was originally his and was sold to me only after many persuasive discussions. It is to my wife that I owe much of the inspiration in finishing this book. She personally organised and supervised the surveys, read, corrected and criticised the scripts in great detail and finally typed the manuscript. Much of this book would not be in its present form without her patient and loving interest.

CLEMENT ONYEMELUKWE

Introduction

Economic development in the developing countries has resulted in the growth of business organisations, of which industry is claiming an increasing share. In the race for higher standards of living the turn of the present century will be a crucial period for Africa. If African countries have been successful in promoting fast growth, then the year A.D. 2000 will find them approaching what economists call the 'take-off' period when their people will be enjoying a standard of living approaching that existing in the advanced countries of today.

If, on the other hand, these countries fail to achieve this fast growth in the next thirty to forty years, what meagre development they do achieve will be swallowed up by the population explosion. The result will be abject poverty, followed by a gap between them and the present advanced countries which can never conceivably be bridged.

One of the most important requirements for this development is the effective management of available resources. For capital can achieve little unless there is proper and efficient utilisation and the support of the other factors of production. For this reason, a great responsibility rests on the present generation of Africans over these next few decades.

In order to achieve this central objective of efficient utilisation of resources, management methods in Africa have to be studied in great detail. Much has already been done to introduce modern management concepts; and in some countries the central role of managers has been recognised and is being given increasing importance. However, modern management concepts have been built up largely in and with the background of the Western society.

If, however, the type of forward upsurge in development we have in mind is to be achieved, then we must be prepared to undertake a wholesale reassessment of the assumptions of these modern management concepts as they are being practised in Africa. We should not be afraid to question those assumptions which have been for long in use in the more advanced Western countries simply because we think that the West's achievements justify the means they used. We must seek to adapt those concepts that we think are applicable to African conditions. Secondly we should, after the reassessment, evolve new concepts in areas where existing practices are found wanting.

The challenge of the next forty years or so in Africa in the field of management development will seem to lie increasingly in an attempt to build up a body of knowledge to fit the socio-cultural environments in Africa.

An author, writing in a technical journal, called for 'human engineering'. He was of the opinion that human management is in the same position as

engineering was centuries ago when the knowledge available was empirical and fragmentary. Engineering at that time, like management studies today, was difficult to classify and not easy to learn. It was also his opinion that the most important factor in the swift advance of engineering to its present exalted status was the mutually stimulating association between engineering and science. As scientific principles were established, they became the basis of an expanding technology. This collaboration had two important results. First, it enabled the engineer to understand the nature of his problems, and second, it provided him with the facts on which he could reach his decisions by scientifically reasoned processes. This development increasingly made the whole of engineering amenable to formal teaching. He concluded: 'We must determine whether it is possible to establish a science of human behaviour, and if so, whether its principles can be adapted so as to develop a technology of human management.'

If success is to be achieved in such a challenging task, then an open-minded, inquisitive and economical approach is a basic requirement. Theorists must not approach the subject with preconceived ideas, and practising managers must adopt a more research-minded approach to their everyday problems. Reading current management journals and articles in Africa today, one is impressed by the lack of depth of the writings. Where information should follow from research conducted locally, current writing seems to think that any platitudes and short-hand prescriptions that have no culturally proved validity will do. Others think that what is required is to present an appearance of modernity based on liberalistic ideas, on the assumed premise that man is the same all over the world and that no matter where he is liberal democracy and individualism must increasingly provide the basis of action in all human endeavours. This practice is particularly noticeable today in Africa, where attempts to epitomise such things as modern trade unionism, collective bargaining, delegation of authority and consultation are becoming increasingly a feature of all management writings because to do otherwise will mark one out as reactionary or colonialist. All this is not helpful.

A closer association is required between the study of management and the development in the human sciences in Africa if the former is to meet the twentieth-century demands being made on it. The alternative to this cooperation is that the study of management in Africa will be left behind and will increasingly lack significance and relevance. More advance has been made in the social sciences in Africa, as well as in psychiatry, and still a lot remains to be done. The study of management in Africa must develop a more intimate collaboration with these sciences, if it is to acquire relevance to African conditions and to provide useful guidance to all those concerned with development in Africa. It will also assist us to sift from existing international knowledge about management what has general application and what is locally oriented.

This book, an attempt at this kind of study, is the result of a field survey of

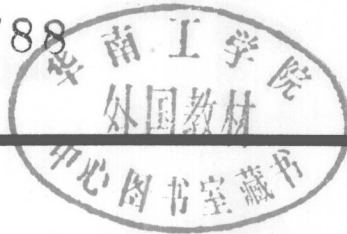
attitudes in business organisations conducted in Nigeria from July to September 1965,¹ details of which are given in chapter 4. In all, over 850 workers and managers were interviewed.

In talking of 'Africa' in this book, we have in mind the portion of Africa south of the Sahara which has come to be known as black Africa. All the people in this area have much in common in their culture and social structure. In our discussions, we have tended to talk of Western culture and African culture as if they were each a well-defined entity. This is not entirely true. There are noticeable differences among the various European nationalities. Yet the people of European origin share many things in their outlook and way of life. It is this ill-defined assortment of similarities that we have ventured to call Western culture.

This over-simplification of what is a complicated question is useful because of the magnitude of our assignment.

The book is written for students of management and all those interested in African problems of development and foreign investors, present and prospective, in Africa.

1. The Nigerian civil war occurred between 1967 and 1970.



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Industrialisation

The science of management owes its origin to the growth of industrialisation. It is industrialisation which made possible for the first time the assemblage of human and material resources in such concentration that the need for a more organised knowledge of how to manage these resources to produce certain desired results came to be felt. Thus, to a large extent principles and concepts of management seem to move and change with the character and course of industrialisation. What were regarded as adequate management techniques in the days of the single owner, mechanised businesses do not now meet the management requirements of the giant corporations with their highly automated operations.

Just as management techniques in Europe and America derive from the state of industrialisation, so should it be in Africa. The state of industrialisation in Africa has many peculiarities—lack of trained manpower and shortage of skills, political and social changes taking place under conditions of stress, relative scarcity of capital, racial and tribal tensions in business. All these and more call for detailed study so that suitable management techniques can be found.

A lot of work has been done in analysing the industrialisation process in the West and the entrepreneurial and managerial attitudes that made it possible. There has always been the assumption that all these are universal in their application. However, the process of industrialisation in its social, cultural and political context in Africa has many distinctive features. As we review assumptions and attitudes that characterise industrialisation in the West we will point out areas where these assumptions and attitudes do not meet basic African needs and conditions.

The social process of industrialisation has in general been analysed by students at three levels. The first is at the level of the total society. The second is at the level of organisation, and the third at the level of the individual. Study at the first level has resulted in the building up of a body of information attempting to define what is often referred to as industrial culture. In doing this researchers have attempted to contrast the culture and attitudes of people in an industrialised society with those of pre-industrial (sometimes called primitive) or traditional societies. At the level of the organisation, researchers

have portrayed the modern factory or business concern located in a developing society as an innovating influence. The values and attitudes called for in modern business are supposed to be in contrast with the social and cultural norms of the people in an industrialising society. The theorist at the individual level seeks to analyse the mental stress an individual is said to possess; a certain degree of commitment which qualifies him for or disqualifies him from fitting into industrial life.

A major characteristic ascribed to industrial culture is the nuclear family structure. It is argued that the nuclear family structure in the industrialised societies stands in sharp contrast with the composite, joint or extended family as is common in Africa. It is stated that the nuclear family is the basis of an industrial community and that whereas it promotes industrialism, the extended family system dilutes the incentive to work, to save and to invest. The authority structure in the traditional family is said to affect adversely one of the major ingredients of free enterprise—initiative.

A utilitarian class system is also said to characterise industrial culture. The industrialised societies of the West are said to be based on an 'economic' order rather than a 'status' order. According to Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison and Myers, 'The culture of industrialization challenges the old hierarchy and replaces it with a new ordering of the classes; professionals, managers, administrators and industrial workers. . . .'¹ Traditional class structuring based on ascribed rather than earned status is said to impede individualism.

Another characteristic of the so-called industrial culture is its religious and ethical values. Hard work, thrift and saving, for example, have been supported by religion. Much of the industrial achievement of the West has been attributed to the Protestant revolution in ethics which emphasised just what the rising middle class of Europe needed in their new quest for material comfort and self-development. In contrast, traditional religions emphasised the attainment of other-worldly goals, reinforced by a belief in duty to fulfil obligations not usually directed to economic gains or pursuits. It is also said that the cyclic theory of time in pre-industrial societies is directly opposed to the needs of industrialisation which centre on time and progress; rather, the status quo is maintained and change is abhorred, an attitude which impedes the acceptance of scientific and technological advance.

Another important characteristic of industrial culture is the emphasis on written rules and laws regulating people's activities. These legal provisions respect private property rights. In the traditional societies, on the other hand, custom and social values are more important than written laws. Individual rights to property are subordinated to family or group.

Traditional societies emphasise loyalty to the small group based on family, tribe, language or geographical region. Industrial cultures on the other hand emphasise a permanent, central nation-state and loyalties based on much larger groups.

* The notes to these references are as a complete list at the end of the book (pp. 180 ff.).

From all these contrasts between the industrial and traditional cultures it is often concluded that, to enter the era of industrialisation, the traditional culture must be bent or, better yet, destroyed. The basic assumption is that individualism is the basis for achieving industrialisation. The concepts of the nuclear family and the open society, as well as the religious and ethical values of an industrialised society, are simply describing different facets of an individualistic society. No one who knows Africa will agree that the extended family necessarily saps the will to work, to save and to invest. In fact, in some instances the extended family, as we will see in the next chapters, has been an incentive to seek work and to progress. In an attempt to contradict this Kerr and his group claimed that even though close relatives may subscribe to initial capital for investment and they may provide a means for members to adjust to industrial life: 'these advantages are at best temporary; the entrepreneur must eventually tap a wider and less personal capital market; the individual worker eventually becomes a member of an urban nuclear family'.² That a worker is physically separated from his extended family does not make him any less a member of that family. Goode has stated that 'the common hypothesis that the conjugal form of family emerges when a culture is invaded by industrialisation is an undeveloped observation'.³ Much literature on management in Africa still shows, however, a belief that the ideal is to separate the worker in his urban setting from his village environment and ties.

While it may be true that industrialisation calls for an emphasis on personal ability rather than acquired status, there are still wide variations between industrialised societies in their social structures. While in some societies as in Japan the classes take on attitudes deriving from pre-industrial beliefs, in others like the United States the relationship between the classes is fluid. In yet others like the Soviet Union the relations are regulated. To argue, therefore, that industrial culture is synonymous with an 'open society' is questionable.

The claim that particular religions emphasise hard work and thus help to promote industrialisation implies that traditional religions scorn diligence. This approach fails to realise that traditional religions do not directly concern themselves with whether or not people work hard. Quite often the requirements of religious obligations are more readily fulfilled by those who through hard work are materially well off. Further, traditional values, though perhaps not traditional religions, do stress the importance of work. African folk stories abound with the moral of hard work and diligence. Lazy people in traditional societies are scorned and chastised, though not ostracised. Yet productivity in traditional societies is low and there is always the temptation to equate this with laziness on the basis of many assumed characteristics of traditional institutions.

Those who would solve Africa's industrialisation problem would wish to concentrate attention on what they call the 'cultural inadequacies' and the 'cultural limitations' of the African communities. They would assert that the

inevitable consequence of industrialisation is social tension and stress. For example, Kerr and his group stated that 'the drastic changes in human beings and their relationships required to achieve a settled industrial work force have been made only with significant reactions from the workers-in-process. While the work force has in the end been malleable, the metamorphosis has ordinarily involved considerable stress, tension and even violence'.⁴ Management concepts based on the necessity of stress naturally have far-reaching effects.

When people argue, as Kerr and his colleagues did, that the industrialisation process is socially painful and that individuals in an industrialising society must experience stress and tension they almost seem to be arguing that the mismanagement, or lack of management, of the early industrialisation process in the West with its social abuses was unavoidable. They seem to be telling managers in Africa to believe that much of the social disorganisation and worker disenchantment in Africa today is a logical outcome of industrial development.

We reject the idea that the modern business organisation is a uniquely innovating institution in the sense that it is immutable and that everything about it has been specified and designed in the industrialised countries and simply has to be transplanted into the industrialising societies. Such an outlook has encouraged rigid management attitudes in solving problems in Africa. The process in practice should be an infinite series of adjustment on both sides. Commentators have at times expressed surprise that instead of the modernisation of traditional Indian industry, what occurred was a process of 'Hindustrialization'.⁵ It would have been more practicable if managers, and all students of the subject, did in fact accept this without any regrets as the only basis of action.

Those who would classify workers according to their level of commitment to industrial culture have always had a hard task. Authors have been vying with each other trying to establish which of the following factors, or combination thereof, better establishes commitment—liking for the job, absenteeism, frequency of visits to home village, whether the worker has his wife with him or in the village, workers' preference for town or village, preference for paid employment, or what. The bias already introduced in the selection of these criteria makes it not surprising that most attempts at determining commitment give conflicting results. Some of the criteria have nothing to do with the actual process of industrialisation like visits to village, but represent mere value judgements. Others, such as absenteeism, cannot be ascribed simply to commitment or non-commitment. These attempts at specifying commitment have failed increasingly because people wish to isolate simplified prescriptions rather than to examine the total culture of each industrialising society and to study the place of industry within it.

We do not believe that there is anything like an industrial culture, at least not in the sense that there is a body of norms and attitudes which people must

acquire to industrialise adequately. At best what constitutes the industrial culture of one society may not constitute an industrial culture in another. Managers would do well to take account of this in determining policies and strategies.

In what was a standard work, Kerr and his group explained the uniformity of industrialisation in another way. They attempted to establish that industrialisation was one road which has many paths leading to it, and argued that the pattern of industrialisation in each area is determined by the nature of what they called the industrialising élites, the group in the society that initiated the industrialisation process. They listed what they called five ideal types of industrialising élites: the dynastic élite, the middle class, the revolutionary intellectuals, the colonial administrators, and the nationalistic leaders; each of which has the common quality for 'ordering the surrounding society in a consistent and compatible fashion'.

Interesting as their work was as an historical reconstruction, Kerr and his group would have made a more useful contribution if they had inquired further whether there were factors that produced each kind of élite in each situation or whether, as they seemed to imply, it was just an accident. They should also have asked how it was that each élite group managed to order the surrounding society in a consistent and compatible fashion. For, in fact, if we make an exception of the colonial administrator as a special case, the other four kinds of industrialising élites were not as unique as Kerr would wish to make them out. These 'élites' did no more than maximise the potentialities within the existing socio-cultural environment and channel them into a massive programme of industrialisation. The revolutionary intellectuals of Russia, contrary to the impression given by Kerr, did no more than impose on the Russians after the revolution a way of life which was basically no different from what they knew before.⁶ To describe every complex pattern of industrialisation in the world as led by one of five industrialising élites is an over-simplification. It is the refusal of many authors and researchers in the field of management to give a significant place to social and cultural factors that limits the usefulness of their work. The social upheaval which might result from industrialisation in Africa will come to a large extent from the attempts of dominant groups to import and impose strategies and attitudes on people whose socio-cultural characteristics are not in line. The secret of Kerr's industrialising élites was their ability to fashion industrial strategies which were in line with the characteristics of the people they were dealing with.

What then should constitute the working hypothesis for our investigations of how the social processes of industrialisation can best be controlled and directed and from which management attitudes it should derive? The answer seems to be in acceptance of differences in cultures that make for dissimilar adaptations of industrialisation. It is in the explanation of these differences that the clue to the study will be found.

The explanation lies in what Linton has called 'basic personality'.⁷ His concept rests upon the following: (a) that an individual's early experiences exert a lasting effect upon his personality, especially upon the development of the projective systems; (b) that similar experiences will produce similar personality configuration in the individuals who are subjected to them; (c) that the techniques which members of any society employ in the care and rearing of children are culturally patterned and will tend to be similar although not identical for various families within each society; (d) that culturally patterned techniques for care and rearing of children differ from one society to another.⁸

If these assumptions are correct, as the evidence abundantly suggests, then it follows: (a) that members of any given society will have many elements of early experience in common; (b) that as a result they will have similar developments of personality, forming a fairly well-integrated configuration called 'the basic personality type' of the society; (c) that since early experiences of individuals differ from one society to another the personality norms for various societies also differ; (d) that within each society there are variations of personality around this norm.

From the above principles, we can arrive at a number of generalisations for the purposes of our discussions. The first is that, even when a person is faced with configurations that are new to him, certain component elements of these configurations are familiar because they are based on similar experiences to his. On the basis of such similarities, he will often unconsciously tend to transfer various items of behaviour from his established patterns of response to the emergent pattern associated with the new situation.⁹

Second, the process of integrating newly developed habits into a person's pre-existing personality configuration and his increasingly automatic response to such new situations go hand in hand. Habits which are consistent with his pre-existing personality configuration or value-attitudes produce the least emotional upset. They are more easily 'automated' and incorporated.

Third, value-attitudes of a person are deeply rooted in his childhood and operate almost automatically below the level of consciousness. Thus the value-attitude systems of an adult in so far as they are still relevant to his present environment are difficult to extinguish. Even when they have been inhibited, they often reassert themselves when the inhibiting influence is removed, or when the new responses cannot adequately cope with the situation. While the inhibition is present the result is a sort of 'marginal man' not fully participating in his environment.

Fourth, even when one society borrows patterns of behaviour from another, these are reworked and modified until they agree with the basic personality of the borrowers. The end result is often not the same as the original pattern, because in as much as every society has its own way of life, it never presents a clean slate on which new experience can be written.

The individual in a changing society as he matures constantly has to