RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE EVOLUTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN MANAGEMENT THEORIES AND COLONIALISM: AN EXPLORATION

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ABSTRACT

The evolution and development of indigenous management theories in Africa have been tremendously affected by Colonialism. This actually accounts for the retarded progress of African management theories and principles. Introduction and infusion of western management literatures and practices have successfully silenced the astonishing management prowess of the pre-colonial Africa. The paper argued for the development of indigenous African management philosophy, which will be rooted in the Africa culture and value system that will bring about the panacea to some unique problems experienced by some African organizations in the continent. It was concluded that the Ubuntu management system that categorically discussed the humaneness, communalism and African patriotism has proven to be a source of comfort and the sterling African culture steeped in hardwork, honesty and team spirit is a starting point for the development of indigenous African management philosophies.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important activities of human beings is management. Imagine an army with no commander, a team with no coach, or a nation without a government. This can be likened to the proverbial "sheep without shepherd". The ultimate end of such situations is failure. Therefore, as long as there are economic activities and human endeavors, there must be procedures, people and system to take charge, to plan, organize, staff and control the work. According to Weihrich and Koontz (1983), management is the process of designing and maintaining selected aims. Management is a core area of human responsibility and as a process drives economic development and activities. It is as old as human civilization or history. Most of management theories have military origins, probably because efficiency and effectiveness are essential for success in warfare. The concepts of unity of command, line of command, staff advisors, and division of work can be traced back at least to Alexander the Great, or even earlier, to Lao Tzu. However, the industrial Revolution has created a need for new thinking and the refinement of old thinking in terms of management principles and practices. Management theories can also be said to have roots in antiquity. However, modern theories have evolved in response to increase in the complexity of the work environment resulting from the industrial revolution, the growth in high technology, and the development of global transportation and communication systems. African has existed for several decades and has her own unique ways and her distinct cultures which have for long

been managed (Oghojafor, George and Owoyemi, 2012). However, the traditional African management practice was extensively disrupted in the 19th century with the coming of the Europeans, which marked the advent of colonialism in Africa. The disruption of people's thought and practice processes and cultures occurred through Western "civilization" and a major culprit of the European influence was the "Westernization" of African management thought and practice. The practice of management in African can be traced back to thousands of years ago (Griffin, 2005). As trading activities and families grew into tribes and tribes evolved into nations, more complex forms of leadership and management styles were required and did evolve. Division of labor and supervision practices is recorded on the earliest written record, the clay tablets of the Sumerians. In Sumerian society, as in many others since, the wisest and best leaders were considered and thought to be the priests and other religious leaders. Likewise, the ancient Babylonian cities developed very strict codes, such as the code of Hammurabi. King Nebuchadnezzar used color codes to control production system of the hanging gardens, and there were weekly and annual reports, norms for productivity, and rewards for hard work. The Egyptians organized their people and their slaves to build their cities and pyramids. Planning, organizing and controlling were essential elements of that and other exploits. The construction of these great pyramids, are a classic example of management. According to George (1968), the astonishing description of Egyptian management prowess as it relates to the construction of the pyramids with a technology that would be considered primitive compared to modern standards, affords us testimony of the managerial and organizational capabilities of ancient Egypt. The ancient Egyptian Pharaohs had long-term planners and advisors.It is

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rather unfortunate, despite the acknowledgement of the existence of such high-level management skills and capability in Africa, management as practiced in Africa today does not reflect this legacy. The composite effect of colonialism and the disparagement of scholarship in management results into the relegation of African management system and the continuing subjugation of African management to western management theories and practices (Edoho, 2001). Formal application of management theories and practices among western scholars can be traced to the classical theories of scientific management theory or Taylorism (Payne, Youngcourt, and Watrous 2006; Hartley, 2006, and Yoo, Lemak and Choi, 2006). Though, the western management concepts and writings have dominated the thinking of academics and practitioners in Africa for a long-term (Gbadamosi, 2003), their positions has not shown in greater detail how culture might be taken into account in managerial practice. There is no doubt that "management in Africa is strongly rooted in cultural beliefs and traditions" (Fashoyin, 2005:43). The arrival of colonialism in Africa in the 19th century disrupted the people's cultural beliefs and traditions, and thus "triggered the beginning of what may be called colonized African management" (Eze, 1995). Culture is considered as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, moral, customs, and other capabilities and habits of the individual as a member of the society. Culture therefore relates to the way of life of a set of people and how they adapt and relate to their environment (Oghojafor et.al, 2012). The role of culture as the driving force in the application of management theories in Nigeria can be found in the study of Akporherhe (2002) which posits that culture is the acquired knowledge that people use to make inference, interpret experience and to generate social behaviour. Previous studies have shown that the practice of management is heavily influenced by the traditions, values and habits of people as well as their political, economic and social contexts (Edoho, 2001; Horwitz, 2002; Jackson and Schuler, 2003; and Fashoyin, 2005). Aside from the transfer of western management theories and practices into Africa, there are several challenges impeding the application of management theories and philosophies Africa. The challenges and obvious consequences of the problems impeding the development of African management theories and philosophies are discussed in this paper.

Statement of the problem

Blanket application of management principles in use in industrialized countries has not in any way helped the progress of developing indigenous African management theories and practices. There was an erosion of African management thought system through the entrenchment of western management theories and practices which is not desirable for the development of indigenous management theories. The evidence of management in Africa before colonialism and the need to develop African management theories that are culture sensitive and more relevant to the local needs are lacking. Therefore, advocating a road map for developing indigenous management theories and practices in Africa is needed.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is conceptual. It is an exploration into secondary data sourced from relevant existing literature on the subject from journal articles, internet sources and textbooks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Basic concepts in Management principle, Theories and Practice

The identification of extant knowledge of management in Africa unequivocally presents sound basis and conditions for the nurturing of management principles, similar to those developed in the United States of America and Europe. These basic concepts in management are:

Firstly, principles in management are considered as fundamental truths existing at a given time, and which explain the relationships that exist between two or more sets of variables. Principles are intended to guide thoughts and actions. They are developed from experience acquired through interaction with the environment in the normal course of working, and carrying out responsibilities in organizational setting. There are several of these principles of management in western management literature, beginning with Fayol's (1949) fourteen principles. According to Osuala (2002) the value of management principles is in helping managers make more accurate decision, since principles are developed from experience and can be re-applied. Secondly management theories in its simplest conceptualization, is a systematic grouping of related principles. Management theory therefore serves as a means of classifying pertinent management knowledge. According to Nwachukwu (1992), management theory is a synthesis of the concepts, ideas and principles of management. Management theory is scientific in nature relying on observation of events and analysis of facts to generate hypotheses. Management theory increases managerial efficiency by providing the guidelines to help the managers solve problems in the organization. It also helps in crystallizing the nature of management, in terms of analyzing management job and the training of managers. Third concept is management practice. Management theory provides the basis for management practice, and the practice in turn helps to reinforce the development of management theory. Management practice therefore, involves the translation of existing management knowledge and theories into action that will result into organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

African contributions to development of management thought

As a result of the fact that Africa had no documentation of her past before the coming of the Europeans, her contribution to development of management thought has not been given even a passing mention in writing in management particularly by Western writers. However, it is also noted that the fact that African historians and archeologists had shown that there were ancient kingdoms and empires in African is an indisputable proof that Africans gave serious thought to effective management for achieving organizational and state goals (Ifechukwu, 1994). According to George (1968), it is noteworthy that a few of the western textbooks that discuss management history acknowledge the great pyramids in Egypt as illustrating early outstanding management activities in Africa and the world in general. This is because the Egyptians applied the management functions of planning, organizing and controlling when they constructed the pyramids. It is noteworthy that one pyramid required 100,000 men, working for 20 years, covering 13 acres, using 2.3 million blocks, each weighing an average of 2.5 tons. In ancient Ghana, was the

Empire of Ghana which could not have survived without effective organization and management. In the East and North of Africa also, there were great African civilizations. All the above evidence suggests that the recognition of the need for effective management for achievement of organizational goals is a universal phenomenon, even in Africa. In the case of Africa, (with the exception of Egypt) African thoughts about management were never committed to writing. This, perhaps, has led to slow process of studying Africa's own original conceptions of management (Ifechukwu, 1994). It is clear from the above illustration that management ideas are universal but their level of development differs from one civilization to another. Who knows what would have happened in Africa if colonisation had not dislocated the progress of African civilization and by extention Africa had the opportunity to develop her own peculiar ways of management and management theory?.

The Influence of Culture on Management Practices and Thoughts

Culture has long been considered one of the significant determinants for organizational behaviour and managerial practice (Hofstede, 1980; Peng 2001; George, et al., 2012; Triandis, 1995). Today, it is crucial to understand the diversity of culture and how it impacts on the evolution of management theories and practices. There is an abundance of literature on the concept of culture and cross-cultural study of organizational behaviour and managerial practice. Culture is a complex set of norms, values, assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs that are the features of a particular group (Lytle et al., 1995). Culture is a group's strategy for survival and it constitutes the successful attempt to adapt to the external environment. In Africa management has been practiced using the cooperative and communal model. This is similar to the concept of community (Eze, 1995; Inyang, 2008). The Communality is a major feature of the African culture.A deep respect for the elderly is presumably due to oral traditions where age and wisdom are closely related; and relationships between different age groups are markedly gerontocratic and generally paternalistic (Linquist and Adolph, 1996; George et. al., 2012). Consequently, the elderly, by the virtue of their wisdom, are expected to theorize for the younger ones to follow. The extended family serves as the building block for any organization; and tolerance and forgiveness indicates the importance of interpersonal relations over individual achievements. To show the influence of culture on theoretical development, Hofstede (2001) suggests that two dimensions of culture are particularly important: (1) importance of religion and (2) traditional wisdom. The first dimension supports the relevance of one's relationship with a higher power. The second dimension emphasizes the importance of being hospitable, discussing decisions rather than imposing them on others, and that wisdom comes from experience and time, not education (Hofstede, 2001). These two cultural dimensions clarify the critical role of traditionalism in many aspects of life in Nigeria Africa including management. In African organizations, the importance of clan or ethnic interests over individual needs is manifested in different ways. African managers feel duty bound to satisfy social and even economic needs of their relatives (Dia, 1996). The distribution of scarce resources to clan and ethnic affiliates are considered natural responsibilities of management (Blunt and Jones, 1997). With this paternalistic orientation, managers bestow favours, and expect and receive obeisance or reverence. This phenomenon

offers a unique perspective on group collectivism and reflects a response to collective need rather than individual performance (George *et al.,* 2012). Attempt has been made to identify core values of African managers, especially Nigerians. Mbigi (2002) identifies five core values: (1) respect for the dignity of others, (2) group solidarity, (3) teamwork, (4) service to others, and (5) the spirit of harmony and interdependence. The last dimension has been labeled the spirit of communality, that is, Ubuntu by Mangaliso (2001).

The Nexus between culture and Management practices in Africa

Culture is one of the major determinants of how people think and behave (Kessapidou and Varsakellis, 2002). It is learned through education, socialization and experience and passed from one generation to another. Oghojafor et al., (2012) stated that culture is something that is enduring and it consist of figurative elements, including beliefs, ritual practices, as well as informal cultural practices such as language and chores. One of the most notable features of the culture of sub –Saharan Africa is their non-individualistic character. Lutz (2009) noted that the communal character of African cultures does not mean that the good of the individual person is subordinated to that of the group, as is the case with Marxist collectivism. As opposed to Western management thought which advocates euro-centrism, individualism and modernity, 'Africa' management thought is said to emphasize traditionalism, communalism, and cooperative teamwork (Nzeribe, 1986). In the pre-colonial Nigerian society for instance, the political philosophy and leadership style is communal in scope and it incorporates everyone into leadership and decision –making process. Given the general features of pre-colonial Nigerian economy, one can conclude that the economy was largely built on 'collectivism', an articulated mechanism, cooperation and voluntary activity to meet the needs of the society(Tamuno, 1980). The European colonialisms were obsessed with the ethnic and cultural differences among African populace and this necessitated the need to adopt cultural differences as the centerpiece of colonial administrative framework, even though, this policy had tragic effects for post-colonial Africa, inspiring ethnic hatred, civil war, fierce political competition, and even genocide (Mamdani, 1996).

Developing indigenous Management theories and philosophy in Africa

The evolution and development of indigenous African management philosophy is very essential for the development of Africa. This is because if the philosophy is rooted in African culture, value system and beliefs, the derived management knowledge would help the African organizations function more effectively and efficiently. In a globalizing world, each country needs a theory of global management with element of local content, but having global relevance and consistent with common human nature. For instance, what is lacking in both stakeholder theories and social contact theories is the concept of the common good, which is the good of the community and also of each of its members. Albeit, every human being and every traditional culture is naturally communal rather than individualistic, so the right place to start the development of the needed African theory of ethnical global management is by drawing from the philosophy of the traditional cultures, in all regions of the world. While in Nigeria, several works, including Eze's (1995) and Inyang's (2008) have made

attempts at identifying the need for the development of such theory, no new and significant theories or tools can be said and considered to have been perfected and widely implemented from these works.

Ubuntu: African Management Philosophy

A few African scholars of note have started the advocacy for indigenous African management philosophy that would serve the need of the African continent. In South Africa for example, there is an emerging philosophical thought system derived from African culture, beliefs, values and behaviours known as Ubuntu, (a Bantu word meaning, broadly, sharing pervasive spirit of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness – that individuals and groups display for one another. The world 'Ubuntu' belongs to the Nguni group of languages. It is best translated in English as "humanness or being human" (Khoza, 2006:6). The Southern African traditional understanding and perception that an individual is truly human as a member of a community has set the revolutionary agenda for evolving an indigenous African management philosophy that will emphasize communalism, and participatory decision-making in organizational life. Ubuntu is the foundation for the basic values that manifest themselves in the ways African people think and behave towards each other and everyone else they encounter" (pp. 24). Ubuntu philosophy according to Poovan, Du Toit and Engelbrech, (2006) allows managers to tap into the familiar African values to build and reinforce team effectiveness by: Pooling resources for survival – maintaining effectiveness depends on shared values and individual contribution which encourage focus on communal (vs differences) with minimized threat to survival through conflicts. Engineering unified situations- the spirit of solidarity, that is, mutual on traditional 'pal abre', central village location for gatherings, activities, mediation, decisions, events and rituals. Ubuntu is therefore considered as an important value of African culture that can form the foundation of African management philosophy that is in tune with the peoples of Africa.

It is argued by its proponents that Ubuntu, adopted as a system of management practice for competitive advantage has universal appeal beyond the shores of the continent (Mbigi, 2005). Mangaliso (2001) pointed out that building in Ubuntu principles in management promises better ways of organizational management. Ubuntu as a management system promotes teamwork; mutual respect and empathy between leaders and followers, and participative decision-making. These are very basic principles of management, with potential for improving organization activities and functioning in Africa. The resultant effect would be organizations permeated by humanness, an all encompassing climate of caring and community, harmony and hospitality, respect and responsiveness which will ensure lasting competitive advantage. The Nigerian counterpart of this is the system of governance in the eastern states. Here communities were administered through geroncracy. A group of elders governed the communities and together as a team made decisions for the communities. Farm lands were often communal properties. Development projects were communinal efforts. Yet outstanding individual achievers were publicly acclaimed and honoured. The western part of the country had a well established kingship system where you have the king at the helm of affairs and a council of chiefs. This can be likened to the board of directors who make the policies that guide the activities of state. Merit, hard work, fair play, honesty and excellence were held in high esteem and adequately recognized. The opposite of these were abhorred and punished. Skills were acquired and handed down the generations leading to the development of family cottage industries. There was dignity in labour. These are all good fundamentals for a great African management theory and practice. Westernization, the offshoot of colonialisation has rubbed Africa of many of these cultural values.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the evolution of management thoughts and practices in Africa and has posited that it has been greatly influenced by colonialism, culture and socio-economic thoughts. It established that management is a phenomenon known to Africans during the pre-colonial era. Africans managed by communality, consensus and unanimity. Communality is the basic management philosophy that governs existence and social relations in Africa. It reflects a family atmosphere, philosophical affinity and kinship among and between indigenous people of Africa. While some western views of collectivism are associated with 'here and now' relationship, communality is anchored in Africa. In conclusion, the evolution of management thoughts in Africa has developed differently from that of Europe and America as a result of the impact of culture. A hybrid model of the African and Western related management philosophy can be extremely valuable due to the convergence of cultural influence. It is therefore recommended for further research to empirically determine the areas of divergence and convergence of the evolution of management thoughts between African countries and the West.

Recommendation

Management scholars, researchers, archeologists and practitioners from different countries of the continent should meet more often in order to research and promote the study of African management history and theory, thereby encouraging African indigenous managers to practice and apply African management theory and thoughts in solving problems of firms in the continent and in managing them as well.

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