

Ke-kere African Management Model: Galvanizing the Management DNA

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Abstract

Several years after conceptualization of management thoughts a great gap and deep silence still engulf the African perspective to management, this could not have been far-fetched but for the fact that earlier conceptualization of management thoughts was westernized. This paper's focus is to corroborate concerns raised by African scholars for the dare need of African perspective to management thoughts and espouse a functional proposition that leverage management thoughts in the African context. The paper evaluates classical management theories which formed the foundation of management thoughts; it further examined the western characteristics of these theories. After reviewing existing African management concepts, the paper developed a new model in African management thoughts known as the Ke-kere African management model, the underlying philosophy of this model is that "organization needs are insatiable" thereby corroborating the lean-management concept. After making effort to see classical management theories applicability in Africa, the paper concludes that although classical management theories have western characteristic but has immensely contributed to management practices in Africa till date; economic industrial democracy popularly known as management by objective, bureaucratic management theory which serve as the operative framework of the Nigerian Civil Service are few instances to mention.

Keywords

Ke-kere_management_model, Classical management theories, African Management.

Introduction

Management conceptualization is trailed to the 17th and 18th centuries from the French offshoot "Mesnagement or menagement". According to Nwosu and Njoku (2010), the verb "manage" as in English is traceable to an Italian word "maneggiare" meaning to handle- especially tool whose also gained its root from a Latin word "Manus" (hand). Though, Alireza, Esmat, and Hakimeh (2015) revealed a deeper position on the management derivative. The scholars claimed, the term management is from Latin word *Manu-agree* interpreted as "leadership by hand", which implies to giving direction. This suggests, the leader set the pace exemplarily by going ahead of followers

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where he intent them to go for the first time. These derivatives actually describe the functional and primary activities engaged in by managers which is accomplishing tasks efficiently with and through other people by crafting and maintaining a work culture where folks working together in team and efficiently achieve set goals (Nwosu and Njoku 2010). It is the same with the assertive position of Drucker (1974) that management entails undertaking everyday jobs with the help of other people and resources. Wejrich and Koontz (1993) described management as a complex process of planning, leading, organizing and controlling people in work team to achieve goals.

Effective management is crucial for every organization survival, as no organization can achieve goals without proper management. Hence, Alireza et al. (2015) conclude that “management is the heart of any organization”. Nwosu and Njoku (2010) asserting the management need of every society said, there is no human endeavor that does not require proper management for its proper functioning. All organizations require good management for effective and efficient functioning. Whenever people work together for the accomplishment of a predetermined goal, there is the need for management saddled with the onus of actualizing organizational goals.

Understanding of how management is important to every society and organization arouse the agitation for the need to conceptualize management in the African context to enable practitioners in this region to understand and effectively manage their businesses and society efficiently. This concern is due to the fact that earlier conceptualization of management thoughts has a westernized characterization that makes its applicability in Africa challenging due to the peculiar socio-cultural and environmental factors. Specifically, there is dare need to explore and develop management models that are explicitly tailored to address the unique socio-economic, political, and cultural challenges faced by African organizations and societies. Moreso, there is lack of integration of traditional African wisdom, values, and management approaches into mainstream management education and practice, which may hinder the growth and development of African businesses. It is against this background that this study seeks to scholarly contributed to the evolving debate on African perspective to management thoughts.

However, the current opinion research paper is organized into thematic issues relating to the subject of discussion having established the background and underpinning what necessitated the study, the western classical management thoughts will be reviewed including the setbacks observed in the classical theories and alongside with the classical theories applicability. The study will further review prevalently outstanding prior African management thoughts followed by providing clarity to the Ke-kere African Management Model and eventual draw a conclusion.

Westernized Characteristics of Classical Management Theories

Classical or traditional management theories marked the conceptualization and pedestal of every other management theory and thought, hence reviewing these characteristics in this paper are expedient. Modern management as it were, is said to have begun with emergence of Fredrick Winslow Taylor’s work on scientific management which efforts were directed at solving the problem of soldiering and to increase productivity through efficient work performance (Taylor, 1911). Taylor was a mechanical engineer working with Midvale and Bethlehem steel companies

observed how workers were deliberately working below their capacity that is, 1/3 of what their strength can carry, and he proposed the scientific management after several years of study. In his proposition he said if scientific management is adopted in place of the rule-of-thumb method, it would determine a fair pay for a fair day job where productivity will increase, and workers earn more money. The principle of scientific management ideology is to scientifically identify “one best way of doing each task”. Hence, he proposed; 1) scientific management for the replacement of rule-of-thumb. 2) Methodical selection, workers up-scaling for assignment of responsibility they are best suited. 3) Intimate and friendly cooperation between management and workers to perform job tasks according to specific scientific principle. 4) Division of work equitably between management and worker, that is, initiating motivation and incentive wage plan. These efforts of Taylor paid-off leading to increased productivity and higher pay (Nwosu & Njoku 2010). Additively, Alireza et al (2015) stated that Taylor’s efforts changed the management praxis greatly, as workers interests were looked after by management. With the aid of his science of shoveling experimentation, shovelers efficiency rose from 16 to 59 tons per day, culminating to yard workers from 500 to 140. He ushered in revolution in art and metal work. Mahmood and Basharat (2012) claims Taylor’s effort was significantly valued by factory owners as those principles are still in praxis around the globe. As we observe, mostly workers are paid according to their productivity. However, other scientific management theorists and scholars built on Taylor’s work to improve productivity and efficiency in the workplace. The likes of Henry L Gantt studied Taylor’s incentive plan and contributed the “Task and Bonus Plan”- where workers are promised 50% bonus if they meet daily task, and supervisors to get percentage bonus on each worker that meets up daily targets with addition to another bonus if all workers meet daily targets. In this way supervisors are motivated to train their workers to be efficient in the job. “Gantt Chart” was also his contribution to provide a pictorial bar chart to publicly monitor the daily performance of workers (Petersen, 1986; Smith, 2000).

Frank and Lillian Gilbreth built on Taylor’s innovative time and motion study by splitting tasks into diminutive sub-components and finding best alternative to perform each component and by reorganizing each job components more scientifically (Gilbreth & Gilbreth, 1917). This study contributes to work performance optimization and increase efficiency and productivity by eliminating wasteful body-hand motion amongst bricks workers.

Muhs (1982) reviewed Harrington Emerson’s advocacy of applying scientific management in administrative process to cut down cost and Morris Cooke’s proposition of scientific management adoption in educational system- public, non-profit organization was all classical management theoretical attempts to articulate and conceptualize management thoughts as well as improve management efficiency.

Criticisms of Classical Management Theories

Mahmood and Basharat (2012) claimed that scientific management theory domiciled in United State of America (USA) to enhance productivity in a prevailing industrial revolution due to labour force shortage, consequently the only way to boost productivity was through raising the efficiency of workers.

Ignoring human face and requiring workers to perform continuously at high level (like machine) and the sharing of profit from that was the main setback recognized on this theory. The employees kicked against it for fear of layoffs due to redundancy when tasks as smartly accomplished.

Nwosu and Njoku (2010) noted that workers opposed the principle of substituting the individual judgment and discretion for scientific methods and techniques, while Taylor objected to workers exercising their own discretion or judgment because of lacked standard and system. This view was incompatible with workers' interest. It makes them feel that they are being treated like cogs in the wheels of well lubricated machines and not as human. The worker's aversion was that the system rewards successful workers and punish un-successful ones, without finding out the reason for their poor performance.

African Contextualization of Management Thoughts

Africa is the second largest and populous continent in the world with an estimated population size of 1,471,883,519 as on October 31, 2023, representing 17.89% of the total world population based on the latest United Nations estimates (Worldometer, 2023). Despite this colossal population, there has been insignificant scholarly contribution to conceptualization of management thoughts. This has made management praxis seemly difficult in African workspace and society. This is evidence in the structural and institutional decadence, political instability, economic crunch, poverty, business failures and incessant crises foist in African continent. Recent call for papers of notable journals have indicated interesting in African contextualization of management thoughts thereby requiring scholars in this region to make useful efforts to advance this course. A responsive gesture to addressing this lacuna announces the "Ubuntu African Management Concept" and more of its likes.

Ubuntu was translated from the Xhosa expression "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" translated, person through other persons. This reflects the emblematic African concept of a person (Luchien & Honorine 2005). Ubuntu provides a strong philosophical base for the community concept of management (Khoza, 1994). Ubuntu- a community concept of management was initiated to improve the management of personnel in organizations which has proven to be a major challenge and area of interest in the field of management. Ubuntu upheld humane, insidious spirit of caring and communism, peaceful coexistence and hospitality, respect, and responsiveness, displayed amongst individuals and groups (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars 1993).

Luchien and Honorine (2005) said Ubuntu management concept is projected to be widely admired version of an employee participation programme frontier by management interest. Ubuntu promotes employee's interaction and knowledge sharing. Therefore, Ubuntu is said to fit the socialization model of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) during which tacit knowledge is highly upheld. Ubutu African management concept, "people become people through others" typifies and advances the principle of esprit-de-corps, the need for synergy and promoting prosocial behaviours in the workplace are very topical issues in human relation and organization behavior thesis.

Ke-Kere Model of African Management Conceptualization

Ke-kere African Management Model conceptualization is traced to a popular dialect of the Nembe – Ijaw tribe of the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria. Ke-kere is an underlying philosophy of the “Nembean” that reflects the African’s perception of the concept of management. With prior understanding of the economic concept that “human wants are insatiable” and as such the unending struggle for satisfaction. Holding to this fact resources sort for or gathered are to be maximally utilized to meet pressing needs. The Ke-kere model proposes that ‘organization needs are insatiable’ just like the human wants, this explains the reason for organizations continuous search of better investment opportunities, reliable and less cost effective material sources, unending hunt for capable human resource, incessant board of directors meeting for appraisal of strategy formulation and implementation. The Ke-kere African management model explains that since organization needs are insatiable, it requires strengthening of its internal locus to make maximum or efficient use of any resources it has to meet set goals, hence, Ke-kere model corroborate lean-management concept.

Both the Ke-kere management model and lean management shares common frontiers, they both emphasize the importance of eliminating waste and optimizing process. The Ke-kere model, rooted in African cultural values, promotes efficient resource utilization and harmony within the organization. Similarly, lean management principles, originally developed by Toyota, prioritize the reduction of non-value-adding activities and fostering a culture of continuous improvement (Dekier, 2012).

It is understandable that as new model that has not come to limelight it may face challenge especially gaining acceptance amongst management practitioners, which is normal in change management process, but publishing this notable contribution in the context of African management in internationally indexed journals is a strategic effort the research engenders in to galvanize the management DNA. Especially where upholding the Ke-kere Model underlying principles would foster the African cultural value of inclusivity and diversity; recognizing the strength that comes from different perspectives and backgrounds. Moreso, African management often considers the interconnectedness of various aspects of life and business. This holistic approach can be applied to management by considering not only financial metrics but also the social, environmental, and cultural impacts of business decisions. This can lead to more responsible and sustainable practices.

This model awakes organization to the reality that it does not have absolute control of all resources it needs to be self-reliant and control the external forces that interacts with the organization therefore, the need to build a redoubtable organization structure and internal elements that would shield itself from the weight of the external environment.

Applicability of Classical Management Theories in Africa

There is no contention on the actuality that classical and management theories are westernized which asserts its characteristic contextualization, but can one posit that these theories have no bearing in the African management practice and organizations? This rhetoric question announces

us to the scholarly positions on the applicability of classical management theories in African context.

Adegbeye (2013) argued that earlier efforts from classical theorists like Taylor, Fayol and Weber contributed appreciably to advance management practice till date, though, buoyancy in the universal validity of these management theories developed in United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA) is questionable because of the environmental peculiarities as well as the cultural variance. He asserted that the African situation is more worrisome considering the disoriented thought process of many caused by colonization, not downplaying the noble experiences and cultures that pre-existed with their own management model evident in the organization of their ancient empires. Regrettably, prevailing management practices independent of colonialism in Nigeria is now open to speculations (Ifechukwu, 2010). Though the management practice in Nigeria is largely 'westernized' this is still evident and has sometimes made practices challenging or ineffective.

The application of management theories and practices has been an area of keen interest to scholars especially in developing countries (Oghojafor, George, & Owoyemi, 2012). Researchers have perceived this issue from divergent, universality, convergence, and situational perspectives (Hassan, 2013). The divergence perspective holds that, mostly comparative management literature shows western management theories to stop at the cultural boundary of each nation. Culture is undeniably the main source of management differences between developed and developing countries (Hoskisson, Eden, Ming, & Wright, 2000). Contrary to the position of cross-cultural researchers that there is no universality of management theories, those with universal standpoint argued that culture does not limit the applicability of management theories and posits that there are comparable management practices within organizations all around the world (Hassan, 2013). Those who embrace convergence perspective consider the degree of industrialization as the main determinant for applicability of management theories (Hofstede, 1993). Hassan noted that the setbacks western management theories face in its applicability in Africa is attributed to technical and economic difficulties in these countries rather than cultural constraints. However, classical management theories have proven to be applicable to a great extent in African; it has aided management practices immensely. George, Kuye, and Onakala, (2012) noted that economic/industrial democracy (Management by Objective) management principle where workers participate in decision making as operational in Africa-Nigerian organizations today was developed in the UK based cultural practices before transferred to Nigeria. The various employee motivational theories which have western characteristics are still practiced in Nigerian organization to enhance employee commitment and productivity despite the contextual differences. The Bureaucratic management theory despite its westernized context forms the module-operandi of the African-Nigerian Civil service system. The four management functions of – planning, organizing, directing, and controlling as espoused by Fayol with addition of his fourteen (14) management principles forms the universality of management practices in organizations till date. Therefore, it suffices to say that despite irregularities in-terms of cultural and environmental diversities characterizing the classical management theories, African organizations and management practices has become more efficient after their contributions.

Conclusion

Lack of documentation of Africans contribution to development and conceptualization of management thoughts has made it seem like Africa is a new breeding ground for management thoughts and it has arisen researchers concern lately of the need to contextualize management thoughts in Africa for a better understanding and efficiency in practices. This paper is out to contribute to the agitation of growing interest in contextualizing management thoughts in Africa with the understanding that prior conceptualization of management thoughts has western characteristics. The paper took a holistic view of the classical management theory as the foundation for management thoughts; it further examined the western characteristics of these theories and its setbacks. After reviewing existing African management concept, the paper developed a new model or concept of African management known as the “Ke-kere African management model” which proposes that organization needs are insatiable therefore organization should build its internal locus to make an efficient and maximal use of any resources at its disposal to achieve set goals. The paper eventually concludes with attempt to see the applicability of these western characterized management theories.

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