Reflections

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C. Sherry Immediato

IN THIS LAST ISSUE OF THE YEAR, WE PRESENT A SELECTION OF articles that offer practical applications and report on work that is pushing the edge of what we recognize as personal and collective learning disciplines.

Our feature story is most apropos to the time of year – I write this while hoping to check many things off my year-end to do list. You may be reading it at about the same time, or perhaps as you are sitting back and reflecting on what the coming year holds in store. In either case, reviewing "Managing Your Time as a Leader," by Marilyn Paul and David Peter Stroh is certainly a good use of your time. Marilyn, author of *It's Hard to Make a Difference When You Can't Find Your Keys: The Seven-Step Path to Becoming Truly Organized*, joins her husband, business partner, and SoL member David in capturing the basic implications of their work for effective leadership. You may have seen a recent *Harvard Business Review* article addressing the symptom of overworked executives, which reported that working long hours and traveling between multiple time zones result in the equivalent of decisions made under the effect of too many martinis. Paul and Stroh are clear that this is a symptom of faulty assumptions that cause us to work more, achieve less, and create a ripple of ineffectiveness in the organizations we manage. They urge us to stop addressing the symptoms and start addressing the causes of working more and achieving less. Two of their key points are recognizing how to increase sustainable productivity, and reducing phantom workload. Their artful use of creative tension to frame their lessons and practical techniques is a great application of organizational learning fundamentals.

This issue also includes three Emerging Knowledge Forum articles from contributors around the world.

By its very label, "systems thinking" can imply that an appreciation of systems is a mental activity. Raimo P. Hämäläinen and Esa Saarinen, of Helsinki University of Technology in Finland propose that our ability to comprehend systems is a complex intelligence involving multiple senses, and sense making that is in itself quite complex. In "Systems Intelligence: A Key Competence in Human Action and Organizational Life" they usefully ask us to consider how it is we are able to function effectively in complex systems, particularly if we understand this competence as intelligent behavior that can be further developed. Some would say that this is the premise of Senge's contribution to the field of organizational learning. Regardless, we would benefit from clear research questions to help develop this intelligence. We look forward to reader comments on this work.

"Context Tension: Cultural Influences on Leadership and Management Practice" points out that the realities of globalization tend to result in Western-based businesses imposing their values and management practices on those in the developing world. The authors – Nadine Mendelek Theimann, University of Oxford; Kurt April, University of Cape Town and Ashridge; and Eddie Blass, University of Hertfordshire and Ashridge – focus on the African context and note that the strength of African culture makes such homogenization both ineffective and impractical. At the same time, the necessity of cross-regional business relationships, as well as a history of colonialism, mean a rejection of Western practices is equally unworkable. The authors propose the possibility of hybrid management systems honoring both traditions rather than trying to co-opt or improve either. They offer a well-researched comparison of regional management

values and practices that the casual reader is likely to find a useful window on the challenges and opportunities of globalization. We hope researchers continue to offer questions and evidence around culture context and its relevance to organizational learning.

For the past ten years, Phil Ramsey, of Massey University in New Zealand, has had the intention of teaching organizational learning by engaging his students in creating their own learning organization. In "Teaching Organizational Learning: Permission to Exhale" he notes that a more traditional mode of transferring knowledge (inhaling) should be complemented with providing the opportunity for "learners to experience the exhilaration of organizational learning" in the educational process (exhaling). We hope that Ramsey's article will create an important new thread of contributions to *Reflections* about organizational learning in the university classroom – including exchanges of syllabi and course materials, teaching techniques, and advice about how to experiment within a traditional university setting.

Finally, this issue's book excerpt from *Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values* takes a comprehensive view about how we can bring more of ourselves to work. The book's author, Fred Kofman, was an early member of the staff of SoL's predecessor, the MIT Center for Organizational Learning. Because Ken Wilber has aspired to a rather thorough definition of what consciousness means to the individual in a collective context, we have chosen to reprint his foreword. It provides a brief and accessible summary of his own work, while offering a good introduction to the whole idea of conscious business – something that we can correctly conclude is currently the exception rather than rule.

As Paul and Stroh began, is it any wonder in all our rushing around that consciousness is the casualty? Fortunately, we can choose otherwise. We hope that this issue provides an opportunity for some quiet moments of awareness of your own gifts – those that you offer and those you receive. We appreciate the opportunity your commitment to collective intelligence and wisdom creates for all of us to engage in inquiry and conversations that matter.

With best wishes for deep contentment in the New Year,

C. Sherry Immediato
Managing Director, SoL

Context Tension:
Cultural Influences on Leadership and Management Practice

Nadine Mendelek Theimann, Kurt April, and Eddie Blass

Nadine Mendelek Theimann

Kurt April

Eddie Blass

The canon of knowledge in the fields of management and leadership has been developed from Western capitalist principles, with leading thinkers in the field being mainly of American or European descent. These ideas have then been "exported" beyond Western boundaries as trade has expanded globally, and practices such as international outsourcing have become more widespread. Although some areas of Asia, particularly India, may be willing to adapt to some of these Western practices, other areas of Asia, and Africa as a whole, are not so willing. We offer a contextual understanding and comparison of leadership and management practices in Western and African contexts to provide some explanation as to why such practice needs to be modified if it is to be successful outside the Western context in which it was conceived.

Understanding the African Context

The West has supplied leadership and management ideas, political systems, and economic infrastructures to Africa from colonial times to the present. Most Western theories used in organizations in Africa have not achieved their desired outcomes,

however, because many Africans find they have to sacrifice their authenticity in order to fully embrace such Western ideals. This highlights the need to understand the African context and, in particular, the perspective of the African worker.

African theories are seldom captured in literature, and specifically not in organizational literature – rather, the "African Way" has been to pass down the wisdom of the ages through the oral tradition. This no longer appears sufficient, as many Africans, particularly educated and skilled Africans, have been drawn to urban lifestyles, separating them from the traditional forms of oral transfer and placing them in direct contact with the Western organizational norms and cultures that dominate many of their employing organizations.

From Convergence and Divergence to "Crossvergence" Perspectives

Increased international business activity and emphasis on globalization have rekindled interest in the convergence/divergence debate among organizations. The *convergence* thesis maintains that economic ideology drives cultural values, such that exposure to Western ways of engaging in business will result in the adoption of Western values (Ralston et al., 1993). This suggests that a society's value systems respond to technological advances, rather than to indigenous cultural forces. As a result, industrialized nations will develop common values in the realm of economic activity and work-related behavior. Culture,

therefore, is treated merely as something accidental that could have been different.

The *divergence* perspective, on the other hand, recognizes national and cultural differences. Its proponents maintain that culture is deeply rooted and drives the values of any society beyond economic ideology. The divergence perspective is consistent with the dominant view of some cross-cultural theorists (e.g., Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Adler, 2002) who emphasize that all management practices are in large part culturally determined, although there is little consensus on the significance of particular cultural variables.

Hence a third perspective has developed: *crossvergence,* based on acculturation theory within the field of anthropology. Ward et al. (1999) and Ralston et al. (1993) proposed that when two cultures meet, a blending of values may result. The crossvergence perspective therefore recognizes the importance of economic ideology and national culture, as well as the importance of the synergetic interaction between the two. Moreover, it is consistent with a more balanced perspective of global integration and local responsiveness. Country-specific characteristics, such as culture, socioeconomics, political-legal climate, and technological factors, however, influence the meaning, interpretation, and implementation of the foreign practices in these organizations. Understanding these characteristics is necessary before crossvergence can be achieved. The influences of other cultures tend to lead to the development of a new hybrid value system, rather than a convergence of value systems.

A common sense of identity within the emerging hybrid culture may be manifested as agreement on what the current situation in the organization is, in terms of organizational and management attributes; what the ideal situation is, in terms of management style and such organizational factors as hierarchy, decision-making process, and control; and how the ideal contrasts with the way these aspects are likely to change. Logically, organizations are likely to evolve in a positive way if the various stakeholders concur on these fundamental matters.

Creating a Hybrid from Different Roots

The root difference between Western and African cultural perspectives stems from the principles on which they learn and develop throughout their lives. The Western world adopts a primarily scholastic approach based on facts, logic, and the nature of reality, whereas the African approach is based in humanism.

In Western Europe, humanism originated in the study of classical culture and was part of the Renaissance that took place in the 14th and 15th centuries. It got its name from one of the era's most important goals: the promotion of a new educational curriculum. This curriculum consisted of *studia humanitatis,* or the humanities, a group of academic subjects concerning the human condition. Humanities subjects included grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and ethics. These disciplines were all studied, whenever possible, in the original classical texts and with a qualitative approach. The humanities curriculum conflicted with more traditional education that was based on scholasticism. Scholastic education concentrated on more "factual" subjects, such as logic, natural philosophy (science), and metaphysics, or the nature of reality. Scholars often clashed sharply over these two systems of education. A lot was at stake in these academic controversies, which were, and still are, related to the question "What is education for?"

African humanism is embodied in ritual, story, cultural practices, symbolism, and myth, and takes the human being as the starting point, emphasizing the dignity and worth of the individual. A basic premise of humanism is that human beings possess within themselves the capacity for *truth* and *goodness*.

We are currently in a perverse situation in which the West is traversing a path toward a more humanistic approach, particularly in business and government, while Africa is being criticized for not being scholastic enough, be it in business, government, or society. Modern Africa still stresses the importance of human needs, both on an individual basis and, more importantly, on a collective basis. African

During the colonial period in Africa, people and employees were treated in a trans-actional or instrumental manner. They were seen as cogs in the machinery of business, a means to an end, to be exploited solely for the betterment of business (exemplified in the term: "human resources"). A new "post-instrumental" form of communal humanism (different from the individualism and transactional approaches so dominant during colonial times) has the potential to build an inclusive competitive advantage.

humanism requires interconnected individuals to contribute to the welfare of the society in which they reside. This is Africa's gift to the world: social leadership within a context of humanistic citizenship. This approach may not be the most expedient or efficient, but it promises a more sustainable society.

This is unlikely to be a purely African phenomenon. There is evidence, from India (Jackson, 2002), for example, that hybrid human resource development systems are being designed to manage Western (instrumental) and Indian (humanistic) orientations in organizations. Their applicability in other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, needs to be investigated. The Japanese (holistic) management approach has also provided systems of management in East Asia that appear to be successful in collectivist societies, and they, too, may have some parallels with African societies. The influence of Asian management collectivist philosophy has to be taken into consideration, since Asian businsess have made significant investments (particularly in South Africa) in recent years. Ahiauzu (1986, p. 54) points out that "though he may work in industry, the African lives in a wider society; and it is from this society outside the workplace that the elements that constitute the framework within which the African indigenous thought-system operates derive." This "thought system" includes features like a high degree of harmony between humans and the world around them, the use of symbolism to make sense of the world, a spiritual connection to something larger than the individual, the use of an oral tradition for passing on collective wisdom, and a strong emphasis on family and the immediate community. The importance of family is visible in the network of interrelationships, extended family and mutual obligations, similar to the paternalism found in Thai organizations (Kamoche, 2000). This results in a sense of communalism and traditionalism (Nzelibe, 1986; Onyemelukwe, 1973), which is not unlike the Confucian influence on Asian cultures (Horwitz, Kamoche & Chew, 2002).

What do such hybrid models look like in practice? How do they differ from the Western management models? Jackson (2004) identified three dominant types of management organizations in Africa: (1) post-colonial, (2) post-instrumental, and (3) African renaissance. By analyzing each of these three systems, we will illustrate how they can lead to potential and actual conflicts in the workplace. The analysis will address issues of cross-cultural management in African countries, while demonstrating how a combination of features from the three models could give rise to hybrid management models.

Post-Colonial Leadership and Management Systems

Leadership/management in Africa is typically represented in the literature as fatalistic, resistant to change, reactive, short-term-oriented, authoritarian, risk-reducing, and context-dependent, with decision making based on external criteria. Kiggundu (1989), for example, describes organizations as typically having these characteristics: understaffing of competent people; poor motivation; risk aversion; workers unwilling to take independent action; close supervision of subordinates with little delegation; inefficient operations; overstaffing of nonqualified personnel; underutilization of capacity; poor pay; and low morale, indicated by high turnover and absen-

teeism. Top leaders and managers are likely to be overworked, while reluctant to delegate work, and are generally learned, articulate, and well traveled. However, at the middle-management level is inadequate managerial expertise and skills, combined with a lack of industrial knowledge. Blunt & Jones (1992, 1997) also represent such a system.

Jackson (2004) argues that this representation of African management in the literature is mostly representative of a post-colonial heritage, reflecting a Theory X style of management, in McGregor's (1960) terminology, which generally mistrusts human nature and asserts a need to impose controls on workers, allowing little worker initiative and individually rewarding a narrow set of skills simply by financial means. This system was imposed on African society originally by the colonial powers, and has been perpetuated since Africa gained political independence (but often not economic independence), perhaps as a result of vested political and economic interests, or perhaps purely because this was the way managers in the colonial era were trained. This kind of system typically lacks clear, community/stakeholder-endorsed mission statements or any sense of shared direction. Poor business results follow, and leadership is viewed as detached, highly centralized, hierarchical, and authoritarian. Table 1 illustrates how this Western ideal of leadership is viewed by the authors as operating in its "ideal" state, in East Asia, and in Africa.

In the African context, "leadership" and "management" are socially constructed concepts that contrast with the individual Western construct of "the leader/manager," as explained by Hogg's (2001) "social identity theory of leadership." According to Hogg (p. 184), "group identification, as self-categorization, constructs an intra-group prototypicality gradient that invests the most prototypical member with the appearance of having influence; the appearance arises because members cognitively and behaviorally conform to the prototype" (i.e., the person who behaves the most to "type" is deemed to be the leader of that type). Because most multinational managers and highly skilled Africans take their intra-group norms from the previously colonial West, it is they who are ascribed the apparent influence as leaders. African employees then seek to emulate them in culture and behavior, often suppressing or denying their authentic selves (at a cost). Hence the belief in modern, urban Africa that the "work person" is separate from the "home person" – a belief that undermines the roots of African humanistic society.

Hogg further argues that the group becomes divided by status into leader/managers and followers. In time, a charismatic leadership/managerial personality

Element	Current Western Leadership "Ideal"	Leadership in East Asia	Leadership in Africa
Table 1. Comparison of Elements of the Western "Ideal" Leadership with East Asian and African Paradigms			
Influences on leadership practices	• Paramount concern for organizational performance • Drive for efficiency and competitiveness • Urgency induced by short-term economic model • Dependent on followers for operational effectiveness • Individualistic • Emphasis on capital markets	• Maintenance of harmony fundamental • Attention to social networks and particularly familial networks • Consensus valued • Respect for seniority, age, experience • Expectation that managerial authority will be exercised with concern for country and community	• Highly centralized power structures • High degrees of tension as management seeks clarity and control against employee comfort in uncertainty and ambiguity • Emphasis on control mechanisms rather than organizational performance • Bureaucratic resistance to change • Acute resource scarcity • Individual concern for basic security • Stakeholder focus • Importance of extended family and kin networks
Managing authority	• Relative equality of authority and status between manager and subordinates • Delegation/ decentralization • Teamwork • "Empowerment"	• Leadership from the top • Respect for seniority • Goals set by top management • Acceptance of wide power and status differentials between managers and subordinates	• Authoritarian/ paternalistic leadership patterns • Centralization • Bureaucratic controls • Preoccupation with rules and procedures • Reluctance to judge individual performance
Managing uncertainty	• High degree of conservatism and stability-seeking behavior • Uncertainty accepted as normal • Continuous change viewed as natural • Sense of urgency	• Deep-rooted, shared theologies and philosophies provide relative certainty and security • Long-term view of evolving change • Hierarchy and conformity stressed • Collectivist mutual duties	• High degree of tolerance of ambiguity • Change-resistant organizational hierarchies, reinforced by preoccupation with rules • Social networks crucial to provide individual security
Managing relationships	• Trust superficial and offered up-front. Deep trust seldom offered. • Tolerance of others • Openness valued • Open confrontation of differences • Open debate and conflict valued Deep private conversation and dialogue avoided • Support of followers essential • Drive to secure commitment and high morale	• Emphasis on maintenance of harmony and personal dignity • Deep trust earned over time. No offering of superficial trust • Persons valued over issues • Avoidance of confrontation and conflict • Open debate and conflict avoided. Deep private conversation and dialogue valued • Maintenance of social networks important	• Openness to others • Deep trust earned over time. No offering of superficial trust • Emphasis on harmony with others, nature, and the spirit world • Confrontation and differences privately dealt with • Open debate and conflict avoided. Deep private conversation and dialogue valued • Extended social networks importance for sustainability

is attributed to the leader/manager group, which further empowers them and sharpens the status differential. Hence the leader/manager develops a view of the "followers" (employees) as a dependent group hanging on their commands and knowledge. This results in leaders' seeking to limit organizational risk, which in practice means the implementation of controls. Hence, in Africa, the emphasis is on control mechanisms, rules, and procedures, rather than performance. Indeed, there is a high reluctance to judge individual performance.

Table 2 illustrates how this post-colonial perspective on African management differs from the post-instrumental, African renaissance, and East Asian perspectives. A spiral of copying Western behavior in a culture that values leadership differently leads to a strong control element, as can be seen in the table.

The character of such overly controlled organizations is also reflected in the local public sector, or recently privatized local organizations that are not foreign-owned. This stems from the fact that much of the public sector is led by the ex–war heroes/political prisoners/exiles, etc., who led the political revolutions for democracies in their home states. Unfortunately, most of these people did not receive any formal education in managing organizations. When they have acquired such education, they have rarely had sufficient time to practice their skills and competencies. As a result, many are "learning-by-doing" (Gorelick et al., 2004). In addition, the public sector often finds it difficult to lure the most talented local employees away from the multinationals and the private sector.

Managers who fit in well in a post-colonial system are expected to be motivated by power and economic security. Decisions are typically focused on the past and present, rather than the future. Management practices follow an authoritarian leadership style with reliance on hierarchy and a lack of openness in communication and information giving. Within post-colonial systems, management is oriented toward internal processes and power relations.

Individuals' perception about the control they have over what happens to them is vital to their understanding of how they live and what their meaning in the world is (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Astin, 1996), and can affect how new experiences change the individual's behavior. This perception is referred to as "*locus* of *control*" and stems from their expectations about what will happen following a particular behavior (Rotter, Seeman, & Liverant, 1962). Western culture promotes an internal locus-of-control orientation; people are expected to perceive themselves as the active determiners of their fates and accept full responsibility for their outcomes. Over the years in Western society, the locus of control has become "good guys/bad guys," with internality being substituted for "desirable, intelligent, and bright" and externality for "failure, dull, and inadequate" (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 182). The research and practice in the area has been biased by the popular assumption that internal locus of control is a positive asset and externality is a deficit (Evans, Shapiro, & Lewis, 1993). An internal locus of control became the "moral vision" of Western cultural ideology (Christopher, 1996), whereas African culture generally features an external locus of control.

A useful alternative conceptualization of *locus* of *control, in our attempt to find a crossvergence way forward,* is provided by Wong & Sproule (1984). In their study, they noted the importance of distinguishing "realism" from "idealism," suggesting that people's reality tended to account for their external scores, and their ideals tended to account for their internal scores. Building on this, it is possible to view *locus* of *control* as involving a two-dimensional view, such that dual control (or shared responsibility) can be described in terms of both internal and external *control*. Individuals who understand *control* to be from both internal and external sources could be considered to be "bilocals," individuals who strike a healthy balance between beliefs in internal and external *control*. Wong & Sproule (1984) hypothesized that bilocals cope more effectively because they observe an optimal mix between personal responsibility (internal *control*) and reliance on appropriate outside resources (external *control).*

Indeed, Gurin et al. (1978, p. 292) argued that

Table 2. Comparison of Different Organizational Management Systems in Africa			
	Post-Colonial	**Post-Instrumental**	**African Renaissance**	**East Asian/Japanese**
Main principles	• Theory X • Western/post-independence African • Instrumental	• Theory Y • Western/"modern" • Functionalist	• Humanistic • Ubuntu • Community collectivism	• Humanistic • Corporate collectivism
Importance	• Continuing legacy through political and economic interests	• Looked to as alternative • Influence from multinationals, management education, and consultants	• Some elements may prevail in indigenous organizations • Of growing interest internationally	• Developing importance through East Asian investment • May be seen as alternative
Strategy	• Input- and process-oriented • Lack of results and objectives • Risk aversion	• Results- and market-oriented • Clear objectives • Calculated risk taking	• Stakeholder oriented	• Market- and results-oriented • Clear objectives • Low risk-taking
Structure	• Hierarchy • Centralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Often decentralized	• Flatter hierarchy • Decentralized and closer to stakeholders	• Hierarchy and conformity
Governance and decision making	• Authoritarian • Non-consultative	• Often consultative • Increasing emphasis on empowerment	• Participative, consensus seeking (*indaba*)	• Consultative but authority from top
Control	• Rule-bound • Lack of flexibility • Outside influence or control (family, government) often seen as negative	• Clear rules of action • Flexible • Outside government influence decreasing	• Benign rules of action • Outside influence (family, government) may be seen as more benign	• Consensus and harmony above formal rules • May lack flexibility
Character	• May not act ethically toward stakeholders • Not very efficient • Static • Probably not foreign owned	• More ethically responsible • Aims to be successful • Change is a feature • Probably foreign-owned	• Stakeholder interest may be more important than "ethics" • Success related to development and well-being of people • Indigenous	• Harmony and "face" may be more important than ethics • Efficiency • May be slow to change
Internal policies	• Discriminatory • Employee policies aimed at duties rather than rights	• Nondiscriminatory • Access to equal opportunities and clear employee policies on responsibilities and rights	• Stakeholder interests • Access to equal opportunities	• Can be discriminatory (toward women) • Employee relations may be more implicit
Internal climate	• Employee alienation common • Weak trade unions • Inter-ethnic friction • Discourages diversity of opinions • Promotion by ascription	• Emphasis on employee motivation • Weak or cooperative unions • Move toward inter-ethnic harmony • Diverse opinions often encouraged • Promotion based on achievement	• Motivation through participation important • Unions protect rights • Inter-ethnic harmony taken into consideration • Everyone should be able to state opinions • Promotion based on legitimization of status	• Aims at employee commitment (job satisfaction may be low) • Company trade unions • Inter-ethnic relations may not be an issue • Consensus rather than diversity of opinions stressed • Promotion by seniority
External policies	• Lack of customer/client policies • Lack of result orientation	• Clear policies on customers/clients • Result orientation	• A clear awareness of and articulation of stakeholder interests	• A focus on business and customer networks rather than explicit policies
Management expertise	• Educated management elite with low managerial expertise	• High, result-oriented managerial expertise sought	• Management expertise based on people orientation	• Management effectiveness based on collective skills
People orientation	• Control orientation	• People and result orientation	• People and stakeholder orientation	• People (in-group) orientation

scores of greater externality on measures of locus of control among minority (oppressed) groups were incorrectly interpreted in several reports as demonstrating that "cultural values and beliefs in external forces needed to be altered, when in fact [subjects'] sense of low personal control reflected a correct perception of a harsh environment over which they had little control." Hence the importance of emphasizing both internal and external aspects of control, instead of only the benefits of internal (ascribed to Western leaders/managers) or the distresses associated with external (ascribed mainly to African employees). This is a sensible alternative to prevailing discussions of locus of control, and fits within a crossvergence perspective. In multicultural environments, bilocals are expected to be better adjusted than controllers (those with internal control beliefs) and controllees (those with external control beliefs) in many ways (Wong & Sproule, 1984).

Others (e.g., Hannerz, 1969; Valentine, 1971; LaFromboise et al., 1993) have referred to the impact of cultural acquisition and the creative tension between maintaining a balance between internal and external control as "biculturalism." The concepts of bilocals and biculturalism are key to making sense of the collective behavior and social life, as well as the individual and work life, of the African community. Members of the community draw upon both a distinctive repertoire of standardized African group behavior and, simultaneously, patterns derived from the mainstream cultural system of Western derivation. For most Africans, socialization in both of the systems begins at an early age, at home and in school and through the mass media, and continues throughout life – and therefore the two are of equal importance.

Post-Instrumental Management Systems

When Western human resource practices are implemented in cultures that have a different regard for people in organizations, these incompatibilities can result in a lack of motivation in the workplace, lead-

ing to low productivity and labor strife. Followers may prefer a leader who is kindly, considerate, and understanding to one who is overly dynamic and productive, and possibly too demanding. There is no assumption here (as there is with the post-colonial management systems) that the followers are lazy, need controlling, and have an external focus. Here the assumption is that the objective of development is to make the "developing" world more like the "developed" one through industrialization, and that this goal should be reflected in the direction of organizational change and the way people are managed. "Most organizations have been primarily shaped by the narrow range of perspectives and experiences of Western European, white, heterosexual, physically able-bodied males" (Weber, 1993, p. 93). This is reflected in a trend wherein Western approaches to management are imported into African countries either through multinational companies; Western-governed institutions like the WTO, IMF, and World Bank; or African managers who are increasingly being educated with Western-style leadership and management curricula (in Africa and abroad). This view is quite different from that of African culture, and the contrast between the two views of training and development are illustrated in Table 3.

An opportunity exists within the post-instrumental management system for a crossvergence hybrid model to emerge. Africans can extract useful Western knowledge while discarding dysfunctional practices, and combine the result with context-appropriate native insights and knowledge, thereby creating a unique hybrid. This also affords the West, and its institutions, the opportunity to enrich its own perspectives and reconstitute its organizations along the hybrid model, providing they are prepared "… to be shaped by more diverse cultures and perspectives, [then] there is every reason to expect that organizations will change" (Weber, 1993, p. 93).

Valuing diversity in African workplaces seems to be compatible with stressing common goals and standards, provided the attention to diversity is not allowed to undermine the emphasis on community and what the community stands for. Since African

employees are engaged in common effort rather than individual effort, organizational processes and human resource practices and policies should seek to guide behavior standards that address the collective effort (shared goals, shared rewards, shared performance standards, shared operating norms, and so forth). Yet Africa is far from one large, harmonious community. There are frictions and tensions between sub-communities as exist between different ethnic groups all around the world. The challenge becomes finding the right balance between the humanistic collective orientation of the community and the different ethnicities and communities within the nation-state

or even within the African Union. "If we do not recover and identify with the particularities of our community, then we shall lose what it is we have to contribute to the common culture. We shall have nothing to bring, nothing to give. But if each of us dwells too much, or even exclusively, upon his or her ethnic particularity, then we are in danger of fragmenting and even destroying the common life" (Alasdair MacIntyre, quoted in Quay, 1991).

There is also a need in Africa for skills development that will allow individuals to contribute their best to the collective cause, rather than skills development for individual gain. In the West, the focus is

Table 3. Contrast between Western and African View of Training	
Western	**African**
• Individual responsibility for self-actualization	• Group-determined self-actualization
• Learning viewed as an individual problem-solving process toward positivistic reality, involving puzzlement, perturbation, even discomfort for the learner. Knowledge is to be hoarded as a source of power, and the tension of "not knowing" is skillfully managed at an individual level	• Learning is viewed as a group-responsibility process toward constructivist reality, involving risk avoidance for the group but acquisition of additional information on an individual level. Collectivist nature of social relationships, which enables compromised group goals
• Individual agency in social relationships, which enables maximized organizational goals	• Self-confidence in individual's relationship with his/her stakeholder group, thereby ensuring positive individual affirmation
• Self-confidence in individual's relationship with his/her employing organization, thereby ensuring positive individual affirmation	• Heightened awareness of hierarchical levels within and outside organizations, and deference to tribal/familial authority
• Heightened awareness of hierarchical levels within organizations mainly, as well as deference to organizational authority	• Education is seen as a way to enhance individual status, rather than for personal growth
• Education is seen as a way to enhance both individual status and personal growth	• A view of the professional as better able to make interdependent judgments
• A view of the professional as an individual of independent judgment	• The value of prescribed knowledge from an early age, with self-discovered knowledge emerging with maturity – and knowledge is to be used for the group's advancement
• The value of self-discovered knowledge as opposed to prescribed knowledge from an early age – and knowledge is to be used for one's own advancement	• The power of the teacher is ascribed to him/her by virtue of his/her position. View of the teacher-learner relationship as one in which the learner stays dependent and cannot easily achieve equality with the teacher
• The power of the teacher rests in his/her expert knowledge, information, and skills. An emerging view of the teacher-learner relationship as involving interdependence and growing equality as learner approximates teacher's knowledge	• Development as involving group risk and individual change for learners, but reward is potential group prosperity
• Development as involving individual risk and change for learners, but reward is potential individual prosperity	• Training viewed as a threat rather than an opportunity if it involves an admission of group ignorance and group shortcomings
• Training viewed as an opportunity even if it involves, within a trusting training context, the admission of individual ignorance and shortcomings	• Increasing degree of openness, as trust is developed over a long period of time (among everyone, and as an explicit goal)
• Increasing degree of openness, as trust is assumed up-front in relationships (mainly among peers)	
Source: Authors, and adapted from Jones (1989), Jackson (2002)	

on getting teamwork/communal behavior even though individuals are individually competent. Africans need to be empowered with individual skills and competencies, in order to work for the benefit of all. However, the paradoxical nature of Africa's dilemma is that although there is a humanistic, communal focus, no wide-scale agreement exists as to what the common good or venture should be. So separate groups muddle along, each working toward its own goals and values, without either harming or contributing to the success of neighbor communities. This runs counter to the Western market philosophies of survival of the fittest, mean and lean organizational paradigms, or pulling together for the common good of the organization. It is expected, almost taken for granted, that African organizations will not pull together because of ethnic or family-based rifts. Hence what may appear to a Western observer of African organizations to be "irrational" merely reflects a set of values that differ from those of the West.

The African Renaissance System

Taking a divergent stance and rejecting Western ideals more or less completely, some African authors have called for a return to African values and indigenous knowledge systems (Stremlau, 1999; Ajulu, 2001; Mbeki et al., 2004). This movement for an African renaissance follows the precepts of *Ubuntu*. Literally translated, *Ubuntu* means "I am who I am through others." Mbigi (1997) has more specifically set about defining and elaborating the management philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which is based on the sense of community.

Key values can be summarized as follows:

- **Sharing:** A need for security in the face of hardship has prompted a commitment to helping one another. This value is not based on simple exchange, but is a result of a network of social obligations, based predominantly on kinship.
- **Deference to rank:** Although traditional rulers gained their titles by senior lineage, they had to

Table 4: Comparison of Different Management Attributes in Africa				
	Post-Colonial	**Post-Instrumental**	**African Renaissance**	**East Asian/Japanese**
Management motivators	• Economic security • Control	• Managing uncertainty • Self-enhancement • Autonomy • Independence • Achievement	• Belonging • Development of personal and group	• Belonging • Development in corporate context • Elements of economic security
Management commitment	• To business objectives • To relatives • To organization	• To self • To results • To ethical principles • To work	• To group • To people	• To business objectives • To results • To work • To relatives
Management principle	• External locus of control • Deontology • Theory X • Mistrust of human nature • Status orientation	• Internal locus of control • Teleology • Theory Y • Conditional trust of human nature • Achievement orientation	• Internal and external locus of control • Trust of human nature • Status and achievement orientation	• External locus of control • Theory Y (in-group), Theory X (out-group) • Trust of in-group members • Relational aspects of decision making • Status through seniority
Management practices	• Reliance on hierarchy • Low egalitarianism • Lack of open communication • Lack of open information	• Some participation • Mostly communicating openly • Providing open information when necessary • Confrontational	• Participation • Egalitarianism • Communicating openly • Providing open communication	• Consultative • Communicating and information sharing to gain consensus • Maintaining harmony
Main orientations	• Managing process • Managing power relations	• Managing results (external focus) • Managing people	• Managing people (internal stakeholder focus) • Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)	• Managing people (in-group/out-group relations) • Managing results (defined by stakeholder interests)

Source: Jackson (2002)

earn the respect of their followers and rule by consensus. People were free to express opinions and dissension. At the same time, taking one's proper place in the social scale is an important aspect of the virtue of humility and legitimization of status.

- **Sanctity of commitment:** Commitment and mutual obligations stem from group pressures to meet one's promises and to conform to social expectations (this appears as obligations to stakeholders noted in Table 2).

- **Regard for compromise and consensus:** The main characteristic of traditional African leadership is that of a chief who personifies the unity of the tribe and who must live the values

of his community in an exemplary way without being an autocrat. The chief must rely on representatives of the people to assist him, in order to be guided by consensus. Failure to do so would result in his people ignoring his decisions and law. The people are strongly represented, with a duty to attend court hearings, and all have a responsibility to one another to ensure the laws are upheld. As a result of this collective responsibility, everyone has the right to question in open court.

- **The concept of openness:** An important value that implies that nobody should receive retribution for anything said correctly in an open forum. In Table 2, this is reflected in structures

that have flatter hierarchies, consensus-seeking decision making, an internal climate of participation and openness, and protection of rights. Management practice also reflects a participative, egalitarian, and open approach.

- **Good social and personal relations:** Commitment to social solidarity. The tensions of management/labor relations that have been a feature in African organizations can be attributed largely to a lack of human dimension and the adversarial attitudes of colonial employment relations.

A comparison of the management attributes associated with each of the three African management systems and the East Asian system are presented in Table 4.

Whereas the post-colonial system seeks to impose Western ideals on African culture, the African renaissance model seeks to reject such ideas and return to a cultural context untouched by industrialization and the expansion of capitalism. This may be appealing to many in Africa, but it is an unrealistic ambition, as the colonial history and influence cannot be erased.

Where Do We Go from Here?

For a management system to operate successfully in the African context, it must take account of the cultural roots and history within which the organization is seeking to operate. We have outlined three approaches that can be taken: a post-colonial approach that seeks to impose Western ideas on Africa; the post-instrumental approach, which seeks to "improve" Africa with Western developments; and the African renaissance approach, which seeks to reject Western ideas. Such normative aims will never succeed if the community that is being "improved" does not welcome the intervention as improvement. Equally, the African renaissance approach that seeks to remove the Western influence and return to African cultural roots will not succeed, because history cannot be erased, and the influence of the multinationals and globalization are not going to recede. This leaves us seeking a middle ground that considers both the different and the overlapping systems stemming from the influence of diverse post-colonial systems and their different operating versions (Portuguese, Belgian, French, Dutch, English, German, Arabic, etc.) on the one hand, and the interaction with post-instrumental systems represented by various multinationals present on the African continent (North American, European, and Asian companies) on the other hand – while first focusing on the African values and thought system in order to understand their impact on the working behavior of African leaders and managers. Such a hybrid, cross-vergence management system not only could be the way forward for management in Africa, but also may be the way forward for the developed world as it struggles to embrace the complexities of diversity that are arising from globalization. Perhaps it is time for the canon of knowledge in management and leadership to shift to Africa.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Nadine Theimann gained extensive international experience as an economist and program manager for the United Nations Development Program. She has lived in many different countries, and completed case studies of intercultural change management in foreign-owned companies in Senegal and the Ivory Coast. She is multicultural and multilingual with fluency in French, English, Norwegian and Arabic, as well as a working knowledge of Portuguese.
ntheimann@assalaconsulting.com

Dr. Kurt April is the author of seven books, 70 academic articles and lectures on Leadership, Diversity and Inclusion at the Graduate School of Business (University of Cape Town, SA). He is an Associate Fellow of Saïd Business School (University of Oxford, UK), Research Fellow of Ashridge (UK) and Visiting Professor of RSM Erasmus University (Netherlands).
kapril@iafrica.com

Dr. Eddie Blass is a senior researcher at the Ashridge Business School (Hertfordshire, UK), having been a Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of Derby, and a Research Fellow at Cranfield University. She has been widely published in the academic press, and her research focuses around two areas: education methods and processes, and the future of work.
eddie.blass@aol.com