Chapter 12
Cultures, Leadership Styles and Employee Coping Strategies in African Organizations

Osarumwense Iguisi
University of Benin, Nigeria

ABSTRACT
This research project investigated four managerial leadership styles in Nigerian organizations. The research question that the research tries to address is: to what extent is the leadership styles expressed in modern management theories consistent with the African values? The findings do confirm that the perceived leadership style in the organizations by the managers is autocratic, the preferred style is the paternalistic and the rejected is the autocratic. For about one in five Nigerian managers, the democratic style is the most often rejected. The study challenges the validity of dominant Western universal perspectives in managerial leadership in traditional African organizations. The chapter suggests that elements of traditional values pose serious challenge to African managers’ ability to adopt traditional and modern practices that can improve the effectiveness of leadership in their organizations.

INTRODUCTION
Issues related to culture and management in developing countries is a continuing focus of academic interest (Kanungo and Mendonça, 1996; Hofstede, 2007, Jackson, 2004). However, there remains a paucity of published work on managerial leadership styles in Sub-Saharan Africa. Development of management and leadership in Africa requires knowledge of the effects of culture on management and leadership, and on how the African managers and professional non-managers cope with the cultural ambiguities, complexities and inconsistencies in the practice of managerial leadership styles. In this respect, the place and effect of culture in managerial leadership styles is one of the major concerns of socio-economic development research in Africa.

Whilst the African elites are very knowledgeable about accepted values, models and theories of
Cultures, Leadership Styles and Employee Coping Strategies in African Organizations

The Western societies, knowledge about the cultural and traditional values of their society are rather limited. The African elites may not perceive or understand the obligations imposed upon them by the Western cultures to which they are acculturated, nor the traditional society into which they were born and raised. Hence, their ability to contribute something original to their societal development is limited by this lack of knowledge.

A major theme in management discourse in Africa is the issue of ‘Modernity’ and ‘Tradition’ of managerial leadership practices. The concept of ‘Modernity’ in this regard connotes African managers and professional non-managers to adopt Western management concepts in dealing with local organizational forms and circumstances.

In contrast to this theme in African management, empirical evidence from African and non-African management, organizational and intercultural management scholars (Iguisi and Hofstede 1993; Iguisi 2014; Ahiauzu 1997; Dia 1996; Kamoche 1996; Boon 2005; Hofstede 1980, 2011; Whitley 2000) remind us all that management and the practice of leadership styles are embedded in traditional and socio-cultural values of each society. The concept of ‘Tradition’ in this regard connotes:

- Individual and reference group perspectives on relative valence of values
- Norms and accepted rules of behaviour
- Opinions, attitudes and beliefs of the individual and reference groups
- Social relationship systems
- The residual effects of history

Within each society, these sets of behavioural and cognitive processes interact and shape the socioeconomic development part of a society.

The respondents in this study consisted of employees, of varying educational background. Some are highly educated managers and some are highly educated professional non-managers. They are people who have had their formal education through university level or equivalent. Some of them acquired their education abroad, mostly in European and American universities, while others acquired their education in their home country in Western type universities and institutions.

THE RESEARCH STUDY AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The major objective of the research study is to explore the leadership styles perceived, preferred, and rejected in Africa, exemplified by the Nigerian organizations. In exploring the relationship between culture and managerial leadership styles, the question to be addressed is: to what extent is the leadership styles expressed in Western management theories consistent with the Nigerian (work-related) values? It is speculated here that ‘a possible Nigerian leadership style would probably be an expression of the fragmented African dynamic culturally “modern” and “traditional” values.

This study investigated perceived and preferred leadership styles by African managers and professionals, while specifically focusing on management issues around which their cultural understanding and coping strategies are structured. From the theoretical perspectives, managerial leadership is affected both by modern and traditional values perspectives.

There is support in the literature for the argument that the mediating influence that cultural values exert on the managers’ attitudes towards managerial leadership is very important in understanding the managers and professionals sense of values and the coping strategies they employ to deal with work and non-work situations.