

## Features

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Africa is learning what it means to produce quality. Business leaders recognize that quality is essential if they are to compete on the world economic stage. They are putting into place quality management principles and policies that will help them produce world class products.

# INSIDE OUT MANAGEMENT - AFRICA AT A CROSS-ROADS (PART 1)

By PHILIP R. WALKER, PhD

When the British were forced out of Africa they did not take everything with them. They left more than most people realize. Books have been written about the legacy, good and bad, of British rule around the world. But one area that receives far too little discussion is the legacy of bureaucracy. According to Robert Dibia (2003) the British bureaucracy made a lasting impression on administrators in Africa. These include, but are not limited to 1) elaborate lines of authority based on roles and responsibilities, 2) a structure that stressed slow processes through thorough, risk and mistake avoidance that valued secrets with limited divulgence of information (knowledge is power?), 3) top to bottom organization where power, prestige and influence was gained as one climbed the hierarchy of organization. His book is worth reading to gain a background on the current realities of civil service. In many places where the British ruled it was not unusual to have a very bloated civil service committed to maintaining the status quo. When the British reluctantly pulled out, country by country, they left behind organization and structure designed to serve an elite and maintain control over the populace. It has taken countries years to move from governments inflated with civil servants to governments designed to serve the expansion of business. Most developing countries are still struggling to make the transition.

## Bureaucracy's Role

One of the principles in Organizational Leadership is that all organization moves from the simple to growing complexity. For social institutions this is a process of moving from entrepreneurship to bureaucracy. This is the natural progression of all complex systems. Bureaucracy is defined as the structure and regulations designed to control people and activity in organizations, including government. It is characterized by establishing rules that must be followed, the division of responsibility and the establishment of clear lines of authority epitomized by the organizational chart. It is interesting to note the origin of the word Bureaucracy. Bureau was used in Western Europe to refer to a writing desk and became synonymous with office. The suffix, 'ocracy, is Greek and means "rule." So at its root bureaucracy is "rule by desk or office."

## KEY THOUGHT

**The golden age of Africa will not happen through developing traditional leaders or workers. Africa must experiment and seek new ways of leading, directing and empowering workers.**

Both the German Baron von Grimm (1764) and his French counterpart de Gournay bemoaned the degree to which governments were invading business with their laws, rules, and regulations. At one point Marie Vincent de Gournay declared "We have an illness in France which bids fair to play havoc with us; this illness is called bureaumania." But it was Grimm who said it best, "The real spirit of the laws in France is that bureaucracy of which the late Monsieur de Gournay used to complain so greatly; here the offices, clerks, secretaries, inspectors and intendants are not appointed to benefit the public interest, indeed the public interest appears to have been established so that offices might exist."

## Africa at the Cross Roads

Japan was known in the 1950s and early 60s as the country that copied everything and invented nothing. But something happened. In the process of building a strong industrial complex, corporate leaders invested in research and development as never before. Following the lead of Deming, Juran, Crosby, and other management gurus Japan moved from a country that produced cheap toys to the automotive and electronic leader of the world. They found ways to push innovation and continuous improvement to the shop floors where workers were able to add real value through their knowledge and inventiveness. They became obsessed with taking out variation from each and every process (kaizen). This relentless pursuit of process perfection has permitted their little island country to become an economic power house.

Africa is learning what it means to produce quality. Business leaders recognize that quality is essential if they are to compete on the world economic stage. They are putting into place quality management principles and policies that will help them produce world class products. But to the degree that they accept current management policies and practices will be to the degree that they forfeit their potential to become global economic leaders. In order for Africa to translate its great resources into wealth, influence and economic dominance it must become a leader in innovative organizational design. The current models of management are destined to create the ideal leader for leading yesterday's organization.

The golden age of Africa will not happen through developing traditional leaders or workers. Africa must experiment and seek new ways of leading, directing and empowering workers. If the current breed of African entrepreneur allows his businesses to be run by traditional MBO's and their ilk, he will move Africa from the road of prosperity to the one of mediocrity.

## The Road Less Traveled

The natural drift of organizations is towards increased bureaucracy and greater complexity. One of the main reasons for this is the need for ensuring quality of process and to ensure control over workers.

Everyone knows that workers respond to the big carrot (more money) and the big stick (firing) if you do not measure up. In fact, you must manage people if you are going to get the best return out of their labor. That is why we have developed management systems. Traditionally management is all about planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. The industrial revolution made management a necessity. Historically people worked on small farms and were motivated to produce crops that would provide them with the sustenance to live. As the need for labor in factories increased and the farmland became ever more scarce, people moved to urban areas in order to find jobs that paid cash that allowed them to purchase food and housing. But these workers were often ignorant of the bigger picture and had little motivation or encouragement to work hard. As a result the mid level manager was invented. The job entailed understanding what was needed and then making sure everyone worked hard enough to meet the deadlines set up by the management hierarchy. Management had the brains and the shop floor worker had the brawn. Thus was born scientific management as developed by Max Webber and Frederick Winslow Taylor. But it was McGregor and his Theory X and theory Y that showed how this model was not accurate and was actually doing great harm

Now we are moving at increased speed with emphasis on communications, knowledge and innovation. The world is doing more and more with less and less brawn. The value of human capital is no longer primarily in its ability to move pig iron from one heap to another. The old ideas of the carrot and stick approach to management just are not working in today's world. The real value-add is in finding solutions to problems at the shop floor rather than simply on some designer's table. For the past fifty years it has been about empowerment. Kaizen and the quality movement has worked hard to push decision making to the lowest level of competency. Africa is behind the curve on this as it still is locked into the pre McGregor days, viewing labor as simply the means of following the plan. But there is a road less traveled that can leap frog African businesses into the forefront.



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