

Resisting global universalistic practices: the endurance of culture and particularism in African HRM

Factors
affecting
African HRM

55

Dieu Hack-Polay

Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK

John Opute

Department of Management, London South Bank University, London, UK, and

Mahfuzur Rahman

Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln, Lincoln, UK

Received 18 November 2019

Revised 3 January 2020

Accepted 3 January 2020

Abstract

Purpose – This article empirically assesses the extent to which factors rooted in the cultural and institutional framework in sub-Saharan African organisational contexts challenge and resist the penetration of global practices and how these dynamics impact on human resource management (HRM). This article examines whether universalistic perspectives are significant for African HRM. The article discusses the tensions between the contributions derived from local and historical factors and that of other environmental agents to African HRM practice.

Design/methodology/approach – The study is based on a survey among 100 practising African HRM executives representing significant organisations in sub-Saharan Africa.

Findings – The main findings established that in spite of westernisation and globalising trends in learning and development in Africa, human resource practices are still profoundly embedded in the African cultural fabric. Significant elements of cultures in sub-Saharan Africa pervade organisational processes; such aspects include collectivism and paternalism, which persistently resist change. The article, however, concludes that the resisting parts of sub-Saharan African cultures which are viewed as counterproductive can have positive resonance if constructively deployed.

Originality/value – This article contributes to African HRM literature, a significantly under-researched field. The paper provides an opportunity for African HR managers to be more pragmatic in identifying the contextual issues and aspects of African culture that could be value-adding in a fast-changing managerial field. The findings demonstrate that human resource strategies and policies have specific cultural orientations and reflect the societal predispositions of a particular collectivity; this epitomizes the intertwining of cultural paradigms, political spheres and organisational life in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords Culture, Globalisation, HR practices, Sub-Saharan Africa, Universalistic perspectives

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

It is well documented that African human resource management (HRM) is a generally under-researched practice (Ngongalah *et al.*, 2018; Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Kamoche *et al.*, 2012). This makes the evaluation of African HRM practices very difficult owing to this deficiency of literature and to the sociocultural and political intricacies (Mamman *et al.*, 2018; Iguisi, 2014). Across the African continent, HRM practices differ from one another but keep some general trends that centre on issues that run through the field of HRM (Kamoche *et al.*, 2012).



© Dieu Hack-Polay, John Opute and Mahfuzur Rahman. Published in *Journal of Work-Applied Management*. Published by Emerald Publishing Limited. This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY 4.0) licence. Anyone may reproduce, distribute, translate and create derivative works of this article (for both commercial and non-commercial purposes), subject to full attribution to the original publication and authors. The full terms of this licence may be seen at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode>

Journal of Work-Applied
Management
Vol. 12 No. 1, 2020
pp. 55-68

Emerald Publishing Limited
2205-2062

DOI 10.1108/JWAM-11-2019-0032

The last two decades have witnessed many countries transforming their economies into substantial contributors to the globalising economy. African countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, etc. have not been exempt. Their economies are characterised by several key factors, a central one being the evolution of the industrial relations systems and their institutional arrangements towards more global structures. An important issue which organisational discourses address is that of the efficacy of HR practices, both in terms of the democratisation process and the benefits, and hence competitive advantages wherein companies might gain (Hack-Polay and Siwale, 2018).

The initiation, development or even further adaptation of HR practices in sub-Saharan Africa are immensely affected by the internal and external environment (Kamoche *et al.*, 2012). These initiatives are further challenged by the cultural and historical imperatives that moulded modern African HRM. In addition, the imported cultural norms that are rooted in the Anglo-Saxon and European traditions are shaping, thus affecting the HR practices for the sake of globalisation of economic freedom (Briscoe *et al.*, 2012; Reilly and Williams, 2016; Gamble, 2003). For instance, the shift from dictatorship towards democratic political structures are also influencing the HR practices even at the organisational level. In fact, the democratisation in the economic sphere and human resource processes are closely linked to each other (Vredenburg and Brender, 1993). Universalistic models of HRM have long democratic traditions and well-established legislative provisions. The impact of these models on African economies has not been subject of extensive research (Hack-Polay, 2018; Kamoche *et al.*, 2012; Kamoche, 2011).

The transformation of sub-Saharan Africa in terms of political and economic reforms is dramatic and follows an intricate change. This is contingent upon the capability of its economy to endure and magnify economic growth (Lundvall and Lema, 2015; Hack-Polay and Siwale, 2018; Ayittey, 1992). Although there are many elements that contribute to the transformation of the African organisational realities, human resources play significant role towards this profound change (Mamman *et al.*, 2018; Iguisi, 2014). While there is an increasing amount of research, these works are confronted with the massive problem of dependency on the state, the legacy of the colonial era and the associated inheritance of conflict between federal, state and local government, the persistence of corruption and several decades of military dictatorship (Hack-Polay, 2018; Ayittey, 1992). Considering the rapid transformation based on economic dynamics and globalisations, there are persuasive reasons to study the degree to which African HRM keeps abreast with these dynamics (Veeran, 2012; Onodugo, 2012; Budhwar and Debrah, 2010). Thus, the main research questions of this research focus on the following: to what extent do sub-Saharan African human resource managers face cultural and political dilemmas in their daily practice? To what extent are there attempts to counter particularistic practices deemed opposed to universalistic practices?

Literature review

Perspectives on African HRM

It is accepted that a robust human resource system is a key determinant of organisational and national development (Hack-Polay, 2018; Iguisi, 2014; Reilly and Williams, 2016). Thus, since independence from colonial rule mostly in 1960s, countries in Africa have been striving to generate sufficiently qualified human resources both at the macro level of the state and at the micro level of the organisations (Iguisi, 2014; Hanushek and Woessman, 2007; Zideman, 1997). Vast programmes of human resource development (HRD) through the education systems and training institutions have been put in place to this end (Eynon, 2017; Bloom *et al.*, 2014).

However, HRM in Africa, like in many parts of the developing world, still lacks substantial empirical and theoretical research (Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Budhwar

and Debrah, 2010). HRM still lacks strategic focus, having greater emphasis on the administrative and clerical functions and is more akin to social policies (Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Okpara and Wynn, 2016; Kamoche *et al.*, 2004). Several aspects of the African management literature address the development of human capital but few focus on comparative labour and employment relations, particularly from the perspective of the region's colonial past (Adeleye, 2011). Consequently, the ailments of African organisations are partly due to the malfunctioning of the HRM function and the failures in the effective articulation of labour relations in addition to political mismanagement (Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Kamoche, 2002). Besides the paucity of publications generally in the field, the HRM literature emanating from African scholars themselves is relatively limited. The shortage of input from African scholars is not due to the lack of interest in the field of HRM scholarship but in most instances, the situation can be explained by the funding and the opportunity to be exposed to international audiences (Bendana, 2019; Ngongalah *et al.*, 2018; Dudnik, 2017).

This article, thus, examines developments of African HR practices at work from various perspectives. For example, the practice of "labour democracy" varies from industry to industry, from trade group to trade group and from region to region (Koçer & Hayter *et al.*, 2011). The first enjoys freedom of association and collective bargaining; the second faces restrictions but allows independent trade unions; the third faces further restrictions. The paper reveals that employees do not necessarily seek freedom of association, traditionally pursued by the unions, but long for recognition, which comes from understanding their orientation. They therefore wish their minds and hearts to be won by their employers, which is beyond "filling their pockets" and sometimes beyond the roles of trade unions and collective agreements. In addition, there has been significant literature on employee voice but understanding employer voice provides even a better platform for effective workplace participation (Kaufman, 2014).

Industrial relations in Africa generally centres on a tripartite arrangement of government and its agencies, workers and their organisations and employees and their associations (Opute, 2010). This convulsion impairs human resource planning, which is the patchiest area of HRM in African organisations. It is less often talked about and applied in practice. Few commentators and books will specifically mention this critical area of human resource practice. However, its importance is not arguable. Stewart and Rogers (2012) contend that human resource planning is about forecasting to ensure the right people in the right position at the right time. This suggests that planning is the starting point of the HR activity. It enables the development of a clear view of how HRM policies and procedures are aligned with the organisational strategy. Depending on the business strategy, HR planning ascertains the type of skills and people required, the training and development needs to be met, reward levels that are motivating and retention strategy as well as succession plans.

Human resource planning has predictability and forecasting function, which is essential if organisations, and indeed African nations themselves, are to reduce risks as they venture on new avenues and leap into the unknown. Horwitz *et al.*, (2004) contend that the formulation of critical HRM strategies sits at the heart of both organisational and country strategic imperatives. The lack of human resource planning in sub-Saharan Africa diminishes the strategic dimension HRM in the region. HRM in many such organisations becomes administrative rather than strategic and reactive rather than pursuing proactive actions to anticipate change and reduce the consequences of uncertainty. Consistent scholarship acknowledges that African HRM continues its close association with the traditional personnel function, largely concerned with operational administrative tasks (Kamoche *et al.*, 2004; Budhwar and Debrah, 2010). The persistent question then is as follows: are HRM departments solely to blame for the status quo? The answer within the emerging literature is

that African organisations bear significant responsibilities for the lack of human resource planning (Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Eynon, 2017; Ngongalah *et al.*, 2018). For instance, if there is no explicit business strategy, as may be the case in many African organisations, this renders the need for HR planning superfluous. If no clear strategic goal is established, the HR planning is a worthless endeavour.

HRM and culture

In emerging countries, there has been much debate about possible alternative approaches to examining development and participation such as classic accounts of development and participation, contemporary institutional approaches, cultural accounts and dominant models but it is still recognised that allowing for the periodic emergence and diffusions of alternative models cannot be ignored (Hollingsworth, 2006; Wood, 2010). Aycan *et al.* (2006) alluded to the fact that the model of culture fit suggests that organisational culture is shaped by multiple forces external and internal to the organisation which are unrelated to societal culture, albeit paying attention to selection of organisation (and by implication, country) is paramount.

A group of social scientists and management scholars from several cultures working in a co-ordinated long-term effort to examine the interrelationships between societal culture, organisational culture and organisational leadership identified the human-oriented approach as a management orientation based on cultural studies. This initiative, termed The Globe Project, identifies such a leadership style as supportive and involving compassion and generosity towards subordinates (Javidan *et al.* 2006). However, The Globe Project does not provide factor(s) that drive this perspective, other than culture in a wider perspective. Furthermore, the work of some scholars (Besamusca and Tjzens, 2015), in comparing contents of collective bargaining agreements for developing countries, mainly Africa, is quite revealing but it does not elucidate the appropriateness of the contents in the challenging environments of many developing countries; neither does it anticipate any emerging scenarios and the required pragmatism. However, the findings of Hayter *et al.* (2011) allude to good practice with regard to the applications of collective bargaining and the role of stakeholders. Such good practices are ignored in the limited literature on African HRM.

Several investigations (Wood, 2010; Besamusca and Tjzens, 2015; Lamarche, 2015) have underscored the importance of collective bargaining but there is still a shortage of theoretical and empirical research that investigates workforce cultural orientation as concomitant to workforce expectations in the developing world. At the same time, Western employment practices do not represent appropriate theoretical paradigms to ponder the socio-economic context inherent in employment relations in developing countries (Khan and Ackers, 2004; Wood, 2010). This research highlights the challenges of the institutional settings (e.g. lack of pro-labour policies, law providing social protection, expanding collective bargaining converges and lowering the threshold for collective agreements) as important “ingredients” in the sustenance of collective bargaining (Kocer and Hayter, 2011).

HRM and its socio-economic challenges

There is considerable influence of the socio-economic situation on the process of employee engagement. Black (2005) concluded that the fact that countries with individualistic orientation display low collective bargaining is relevant factor in this research, as it stresses that employee engagement is important, above collective bargaining, owing to the fact that it represents a core channel for making individual and “collective indirect demand”.

Most HR processes (from the primary sources) cover a variety of employee benefits. The intention is to demonstrate the commitment of the company in addressing various issues that

are relevant to employment relationship. For example, it is common to indicate items such as utility, education support, housing loan, meal subsidy and vehicle loans (to name a few) in conditions of employment. This strong paternalistic approach to management helps to explain the reason the employee views the employer as an extension of family.

For NECA (Nigeria Employers Consultative Association) survey on remuneration practices across member companies, all eight of the identified best remuneration practices of participating companies relate to non-financial compensation (Opute, 2010). Evidence of this emerging trend is confirmed by the HR practitioners interviewed by Wan *et al.* (2002). In their empirical study of compensation system in Singapore, Wan *et al.* (2002) explain that more companies are offering family- friendly conditions which place less emphasis on the payment of wages and salaries.

From the perspective of key trends of the total reward system in the 21st century, Chen and Hsieh (2006, p. 66) emphasise that the “modern reward system embraces everything that is valued by employees in the employment relationship”. They further stress the need for a holistic and integrated approach to compensation. Therefore, welfare-driven benefits are essential in managing compensation frameworks, a consequence of the socio-economic challenges that is difficult to ignore in any analysis at this level.

Method

The paper is based on data gathered via a survey among HR managers involved with current sub-Saharan HRM practices (Table I). The managers were from various organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The data were collected at HR Expo Africa in Lagos. HR Expo Africa is a broad HRM platform that attracts a wide spectrum of HR practitioners and other professionals from the private, public and third sector areas across African countries to its vibrant and exciting hub of ideas yearly. It shapes the conversation of human capital development and organisational performance with specific focus on new trends and dynamics. The overall objective is to bring to light meaningful ideas and the greatest transformation potentials to encourage sustainable people management and productivity initiatives in the workplace. The conference attracts in excess of 250 delegates (mainly HR practitioners), and facilitators/speakers are invited from across the globe.

The questionnaires were distributed to the participants by the conference organisers and formed part of the feedback documentation of four purposely selected sessions which totalled 100 participants. We purposely selected those sessions for ease of access to participants because one of the authors was a speaker or master class facilitator at each of the four selected sessions. At the end of those selected sessions, the participants were invited to complete the anonymous questionnaires which were gathered by the conference organisers and submitted. One hundred questionnaires were returned but the researchers excluded those with less than five years’ experience so as to see a pattern of managers’

Particulars	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean		Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic
					Statistic	Std. Error		
Age group	64	3.00	2.00	5.00	2.9063	0.11073	0.88585	0.785
Trade union	64	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.8750	0.04167	0.33333	0.111
Length of employment	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.8438	0.13769	1.10150	1.213

Table I.
Demographic features

engagement with cultural and political influence in the workplace. This process enabled the research team to retain 64 completed questionnaires that met the length of service criterion.

SPSS was used to analyse the data (Table II). We used Cronbach's alpha to test for reliability, and the result 0.957 is greater than the standard 0.70. We used principal component analysis for communalities, and all values were from 0.714 to 0.910. A one-way ANOVA was also completed. The significant values were under 0.05; thus, the mean values had statistically significant differences. To establish model fit, the research used R-squared (mean value 0.884), RMSE (mean value 0.289), MAPE (mean value 2.484), MaxAPE (mean value 43.391), MAE (Mean value 0.086) and MaxAE (mean value 1.436). We used mainly descriptive statistics so as to present the data in a concise and simple way that is intelligible and useful to practitioners. A further article will deploy more complex statistics for a deeper analysis of the results.

Results

The descriptive statistics (Table III) of the findings show that collectivism is a key determinant of any participation structure. Though collective bargaining is the most common means of participation in developing economies, there are new scenarios that are surfacing. An important conclusion of the paper is that the cultural characteristics of collectivism and paternalism show prominence in the workplace.

Individualism, in contrast, is hardly shown in the behaviour of employees. Our research has revealed that employees strive to maintain cohesion with their work groups. The recent changes operated in the Trade Unions Act 2005 that annulled the automatic check-off system is an interesting illustration. No records exist for individuals who have ceased to be financial members of trade unions in the workplace though they consider themselves non-members. Even when employees were required to contract out during the era of automatic check-off system, there was also no record of employees contracting out of trade union membership.

Enduring particularistic practices in African HRM

The findings point to a particular perception of the organisation among the HR managers. The majority of the participants viewed the company as an extension of the family thus supporting Hofstede's (1980) findings that located African societies within collectivistic cultures.

The thought that organisations represent an extension of the family is further reinforced by the views of the participating HRM managers. Most participants revealed that they often feel considerable pressure from their locals and relatives to employ people

Fit statistic	Mean	SE	Percentile						
			5	10	25	50	75	90	95
R-squared	0.884	0.047	0.806	0.814	0.851	0.881	0.921	0.951	0.953
RMSE	0.289	0.042	0.215	0.223	0.259	0.282	0.333	0.333	0.333
MAPE	2.484	0.481	2.057	2.064	2.202	2.319	2.698	3.423	3.886
MaxAPE	43.391	7.384	31.746	32.589	34.435	46.825	50.000	50.000	50.000
MAE	0.086	0.013	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.078	0.092	0.112	0.119
MaxAE	1.436	0.484	0.937	0.946	1.000	1.226	2.000	2.000	2.000
Cronbach's alpha					0.957				

Table II.
Model summary

Particulars	N Statistic	Range Statistic	Minimum Statistic	Maximum Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. error	Std. Deviation Statistic	Variance Statistic
Organisation as an extension of the family	64	3.00	2.00	5.00	3.8750	0.11024	0.88192	0.778
Pressure from the community	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0625	0.10882	0.87060	0.758
Political influence in recruitment and selection	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0625	0.11329	0.90633	0.821
Comfort about responding positively	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.7344	0.11625	0.92996	0.865
The points raised in questions 9 and 10 above can influence individual and organisational performance	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0938	0.10847	0.86774	0.753
HR managers "under pressure" (resulting from questions 9 and 10 above) can develop strategies to resist or deal with such pressures	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.0000	0.09449	0.75593	0.571
There could be "negative consequences" for resisting pressures from relatives or politicians in relation to questions 9 and 10 above	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.7813	0.12090	0.96722	0.936
Culture plays a significant role in the work place in Nigeria	64	4.00	1.00	5.00	4.3438	0.10015	0.80116	0.642

Table III.
Descriptive statistics

who are close to them, e.g. kinship and those from the same tribal group. There appears to be strength in this normative social pressure, with 80 percent of participants reporting this issue.

In addition to the normative social pressures, the African HR managers experience intense political pressure to do “favours” to people in political office. These pressures can often be coercions and threats to the positions of the HRM managers. The percentage of participants who strongly agree that they have experienced this practice is very significant which denotes significant interference of political life with organisational realities.

The results show that the managers attested to being uncomfortable with political interference and normative social pressure. This compares to limited number of managers who feel comfortable and accept these practices. Most of the participants are neutral on the issue. The small proportion of managers who are uncomfortable with these practices may attest to the cultural embeddedness of African organisations and managers. This lack of vigorous rejection of favouritism contrasts sharply with the managers’ awareness of the negative consequences of potentially employing people who lack qualifications and skills and who may not fit into the organisations. [Table III](#) shows that the overwhelming majority of HR managers are aware that such employees can have lower performance and drive down the overall performance in organisations.

Political and normative social pressure: managers’ resistance

There is however, a growing movement towards resisting external political and social pressures in order to maintain the autonomy of the organisation. [Table III](#) shows that a significant majority of the managers believed that strategies could be developed to curbe the weight of these potentially damaging particularistic practices. It is not clear what these strategies might be but it is clear that there is some willingness on the part of the African managers. However, the efforts and strategies geared at dealing with nepotism, favouritism and political interference may be limited in scope due to fear of political punishment and cultural constraints ([Table III](#)).

This study applied analysis of variance (ANOVA) to compare differences of means by categorising between groups and within groups ([Table IV](#)). The results indicate positive F values for the factors with 0.00 significance level. Mean square of between groups is higher than the mean square of within groups for all elements.

Discussion and conclusion

Discussion

One of the key findings of the research suggests that collectivism is inherent in organisational processes and African HRM practices. The research validates the culture-boundedness of HRM practices [Wan et al. \(2002\)](#). This indicates that there is little separation between organisation and the communities in which they are established ([Iguisi, 2014](#); [Mamman et al., 2018](#)). The corroboration of this can be seen through the opinions of the African HRM managers who accept that the organisation is an extension of the family. With globalisation and the dissemination and spread of so-called universalistic practices, one would assume that most African HRM managers would espouse the view that perceives a strict separation of organisations and society. The plausibility of this argument is heightened owing to the fact that more and more managers are undertaking their management education in the West and are, therefore, exposed to global practices ([Madimutsa and Pretorius, 2017](#); [Budhwar and Debrah, 2010](#)). The HRM managers showed support for the intertwining of work and family. This indicates the temerity of African cultures and the way in which they “refuse” to give way to “global” “universalistic”

Particulars		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Organisation as an extension of the family	Between groups	24.143	1	24.143	60.218	0.000
	Within groups	24.857	62	0.401		
	Total	49.000	63			
Pressure from the community	Between groups	30.036	1	30.036	105.125	0.000
	Within groups	17.714	62	0.286		
	Total	47.750	63			
Political influence in recruitment and selection	Between groups	30.036	1	30.036	85.760	0.000
	Within groups	21.714	62	0.350		
	Total	51.750	63			
Comfort about responding positively	Between groups	20.145	1	20.145	36.372	0.000
	Within groups	34.339	62	0.554		
	Total	54.484	63			
The points raised in questions 9 and 10 above can influence individual and organisational performance	Between groups	27.009	1	27.009	81.971	0.000
	Within groups	20.429	62	0.329		
	Total	47.438	63			
HR managers “under pressure” (resulting from questions 9 and 10 above) can develop strategies to resist or deal with such pressures	Between groups	20.571	1	20.571	82.667	0.000
	Within groups	15.429	62	0.249		
	Total	36.000	63			
There could be “negative consequences” for resisting pressures from relatives or politicians in relation to questions 9 and 10 above	Between groups	37.723	1	37.723	110.248	0.000
	Within groups	21.214	62	0.342		
	Total	58.938	63			
Culture plays a significant role in the work place in Nigeria	Between groups	19.723	1	19.723	59.034	0.000
	Within groups	20.714	62	0.334		
	Total	40.438	63			

Table IV.
One way ANOVA

perspectives. This leads us to pose the question of the integration of culture with HRM (Madimutsa and Pretorius, 2017; Chen and Hsieh, 2006). Researchers, such as Mamman *et al.*, 2018; Briscoe *et al.*, 2012; Iguisi, 2014; Wan *et al.* (2002), contend that HRM practices differ from one socio-economic and cultural sphere to another. Thus, we see the need to work with culture and not to mount an assault against it. Decades of attempts to westernise African HRM practices (Kiiza and Basheka, 2018; Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Kamoche, 2011) have shown limited suggestion that there has been metamorphosis of African HRM practices and greater convergence with Western approaches or so-called universalistic practices. Such a near status quo signifies that it is possible for culture and modernity to coexist and work in synchrony to engender dynamic capabilities within organisation and, by extension, within the state.

It is clear that companies' and HRM departments' efforts must coalesce to bring about meaningful and positive integration between culture and the direction of the organisation to make use of creative aspects that can enhance the organisations more organically and be more competitive (Briscoe *et al.*, 2012). For instance, social pressures on HR managers to recruit local people may not be asymmetric with strategic HRM whose direction is constructed by rationalities that are, in themselves, dynamic. In an African economic context dominated by unemployment and high levels of wealth disparities, local recruitment can soothe inequalities (Hack-Polay, 2018) and bring improvements in the vitality of the locality. From a strategic HRM perspective, there is a plausible cost-saving dimension to be considered. In fact, employing people from the local area could cost the organisation less and enable the company to deploy its surplus of profit for further investment, e.g. expansion, addressing social responsibilities, etc. This demonstrates that there are elements of culture that fit strategic HRM perspectives that are able to revitalise organisations for competitive advantage (Kiiza and Basheka, 2018).

Despite the potential positive view of some cultural patterns, a different dimension of particularism in HRM practices in sub-Saharan Africa, political interference, is not favoured by HRM managers. That is the aspect concerning political interference. Political pressure is about asking HR managers to hire unqualified or underqualified people. The politically recommended employees are often a politician's family members or mistresses; such recommendations do not necessarily come from the locality. There is therefore no argument to suggest that the recommended employees would add to the vitality of the area. Thus, there is no business case for such practices. Politically recommended employees could be less useful because in some cases they can attempt to take control and be the eyes and ears of the recommenders. This then seeds fear and suspicion in the organisation and inhibits innovation and creativity (Hack-Polay, 2018; Abdul-Kahar and Sulaiman, 2017; Kamoche, 2002; Onodugo, 2012; Ayittey, 1992). This is largely why the majority of the African HR managers in their survey rejected political interference and showed willingness to develop strategies to combat the practice. However, their fear about vigorous action in the fight against political interference attests to the potency of this practice and its resilience. Political interference diminishes the power of the trade unions, which are often the organisms that are capable of putting up meaningful resistance to the presence of political powers in daily organisational life, as Kamoche (2002) found.

Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that despite globalisation, several critical aspects of African HRM remain close to and intertwined with culture and tradition. Recruitment and selection and approaches to collective bargaining are particularistic as they depart from the so-called universalistic or global practices. Sub-Saharan African human resource managers are faced with dilemma in their attempt to navigate simultaneously global and local perspectives. In spite of the charge that African organisations have high levels of corruption and favouritism, human resource managers have a positive view of some cultural practices that are vilified by the outside world. The HR managers believe that there could be some congruence between some of the local practices, for instance the hiring of relatives or locals, and contemporary human resource strategies. Some practices support the fulfilment of the organisations' social responsibilities; at the same time, they can enhance competitive advantage. The findings of the study provide support for the argument that if HRM practices are close to traditional values, they can form part of the African organisations' dynamic capabilities, provided HRM weeds out the toxic particularistic practices and strives to integrate value-adding, community-enhancing and capacity-building practices from outside.

Limitation of the research and future perspectives

The study has some limitations that impact the generalisability of the findings. The sample size could be widened to provide more perspectives. A key limitation of the present research is linked to the fact that the data was collected in single country; in fact, though some of the participants were from different nationalities, the majority of the HR managers surveyed were Nigerians. A systematic sampling strategy covering several sub-Saharan African countries could increase the validity and generalisability of the research. For instance, potential differences between Eastern, Western, Central and Southern Africa could be explained by socio-economic, cultural and political determinants that further studies could help unveil. Future research could also consider the differences between Anglophone and Francophone countries due to the different colonial experiences which can have significance for how current African HRM practices are articulated generally. In addition, the researchers believe that there are some good practices in African HRM that are often obfuscated by fierce negative criticisms; further studies could focus on identifying those good practices and demonstrate their value as well as ways to disseminate them.

References

- Abdul-Kahar, A. and Sulaiman, E.S.B. (2017), "The history and practice of human resource management (HRM) in Ghana s policies perspective towards improving public sector administration for good governance", *Journal of Political Sciences and Public Affairs*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 2-9. doi: [10.4172/2332-0761.1000275](https://doi.org/10.4172/2332-0761.1000275).
- Adeleye, I. (2011), "Theorising human resource management in Africa: beyond cultural relativism", *African Journal of Business Management*, Vol. 5 No. 6, 2028-2039.
- Aycan, Z., Kanugo, R., Mendonca, M.M., Yu, K., Deller, J., Stahl, G. and Kurshid, A. (2006), "Impact of cultural on human resource practices: a ten country study", *Applied Psychology; An International Review*, Vol. 49 No. 1 pp. 192-221.
- Ayittey, G.B.N. (1992), *Africa Betrayed*, St. Martin's Press, New York.
- Bendana, C. (2019), "African research projects are failing because funding agencies can't match donor money", available at: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/04/african-research-projects-are-failing-because-funding-agencies-can-t-match-donor-money> (accessed 27 December 2019).
- Besamusca, J. and Tijdens, K. (2015), "Comparing collective bargaining agreements for developing countries", *International Journal of Manpower*, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 86-102.
- Black, B. (2005), "Comparative industrial relations theory: the role of national culture", *The International Journal Human Resource Management*, Vol. 16 No. 7, pp. 1137-1158.
- Bloom, D.E., Canning, D., Chan, K.J. and Luca, D.L. (2014), "Higher education and economic growth in Africa", *International Journal of African Higher Education*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 22-57.
- Briscoe, D., Schuler, R. and Tarique, I. (2012), *International Human Resource Management: Policies and Practices for Multinational Enterprises*, Routledge & Taylor Francis, London.
- Budhwar, P.S. and Debrah, Y.A. (2010), "Human resource management in developing countries", In Wilkinson, A., Bacon, N., Redman, T. and Snell, S. (Eds) *The Sage Handbook of Human Resource Management*, Sage, London. doi: [10.4135/9780857021496](https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857021496).
- Chen, H. and Hsieh, Y. (2006), "Key trends of the total reward system in the 21st century", *Compensation and Benefits Review*, November/December, pp. 64-70.
- Dudnik, N. (2017), "Stop bemoaning Africa's lack of scientists - start funding them", available at: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/africa-s-scientists-are-not-absent-they-just-need-the-right-kind-of-investment-b93066ad-8320-4f69-be60-e58da659d59b/> (accessed 27 December 2019).
- Eynon, D.E. (2017) *Women, Economic Development, and Higher Education: Tools in the Reconstruction and Transformation of Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. doi: [10.1007/978-3-319-53144-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53144-1).

- Gamble J. (2003), "Transferring human resource practices from the United Kingdom to China: the limits and potential for convergence", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 14 No. 3 pp. 369-387. doi: [10.1080/0958519022000031807](https://doi.org/10.1080/0958519022000031807).
- Hack-Polay, D. (2018), "Compassionate investment- remittances in poverty alleviation in Francophone Africa: the case of the Ivory Coast", in Hack-Polay, D. and Siwale, J. (Eds), *African Diaspora Direct Investment: Establishing the Sociocultural Rationale*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, UK.
- Hack-Polay, D. and Siwale, J. (2018), *African Diaspora Direct Investment: Establishing the Sociocultural Rationale*, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hanushek, E. and Woessman, L. (2007), *The Role of School Improvement in Economic Development*, available at: http://papers.nber.org/papers/w12832.pdf?new_window=1 (accessed 27 December 2019).
- Hayter, S., Fashoyin, T. and Kochan, T.A. (2011), "Review essay: collective bargaining for the 21st century", *Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 225-247.
- Hofstede, G. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences In Work-Related Values*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA.
- Hollingsworth, J.R. (2006), "Advancing our understanding of capitalism with Niels Bohr's thinking about complementarity", in Wood, G. and James, P. (Eds), *Institutions and WorkingLife*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Horwitz, F., Nkomo, S. and Rajah, M. (2004), "HRM in South Africa", in Kamoche, K., Debrah, Y., Horwitz, K. and Muuka, G. (Eds), *Managing Human Resources in Africa*, Routledge, London, pp. 1-18.
- Iguisi, O. (2014), "African values for the practice of human resource management", *Beykent University Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 56-77.
- Javidan, M., Dorfman, P.W., de Laque, S. and House, R.J. (2006), "In the eye of the beholder: cross cultural lessons in leadership from project globe", *Academy of Management Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 67-91.
- Kamoche, K. (2002), "Human resource management in Africa: introduction", *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 13 No. 7, pp. 993-997.
- Kamoche, K. (2011), "Contemporary developments in the management of human resources in Africa", *Journal of World Business (formerly Columbia JWB)*, Vol. 46 No. 1, pp. 1-4.
- Kamoche, K.N., Debrah, Y.A., Horwitz, F. and Muuka, G.N. (2004), *Managing Human Resources in Africa*, Routledge, London.
- Kamoche, K., Chizema, A., Mellahi, K. and Newenham-Kahindi, A. (2012), "New directions in the management of human resources in Africa", *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 23 No. 14, pp. 2823-2834.
- Kaufman, B.E. (2014), "Explaining breadth and depth of employee voice across firms: a voice factor demand model", *Journal of Labour Resources*, Vol. 35, pp. 296-319.
- Khan, A. and Ackers, P. (2004), "Neo-Pluralism as a theoretical framework for understanding HRM in Sub-Saharan Africa", *International Journal of Human Resources Management*, Vol. 15 No. 7 pp. 1330-1353.
- Kiiza, M. and Basheka, B. (2018), "Indigenous human resource management practices in Africa: empirical lessons from four sub-regions", *Indigenous Management Practices in Africa*, Advanced Series in Management, Vol. 20, pp. 97-118. doi: [10.1108/S1877-63612018000020006](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1877-63612018000020006).
- Kocer, R.G. and Hayter, S. (2011), *Comparative Study of Labour Relations in African Countries*, AIAS Working Paper WP 116, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam.
- Lamarche, C. (2015), "Collective bargaining in developing countries", *IZA World of Labour*, 2015, p. 183.
- Lundvall, B.A. and Lema, R. (2015), "Growth and structural change in Africa: development strategies for the learning economy", *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development*, 2014, Vol. 6 No. 5, pp. 455-466. doi: [10.1080/20421338.2014.979660](https://doi.org/10.1080/20421338.2014.979660).

- Madimutsa, C. and Pretorius, L.G. (2017), "Revisiting trade unions' response to new public management: a case from Zambia", *Public Personnel Management*, Vol. 46 No. 3 pp. 288-307. doi: [10.1177/0091026017713230](https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026017713230).
- Mamman, A., Kamoche, K., Zakaria, H.B. and Agbedi, M. (2018), "Developing human capital in Africa: carving a role for human resource professionals and practitioners?", *Human Resource Development International*, Vol. 21 No. 5, pp. 444-462.
- Ngongalah, L., Emerson, W., Rawlings, N.N. and Muleme, J. (2018), "Research challenges in Africa – an exploratory study on the experiences and opinions of African researchers", available at: <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/biorxiv/early/2018/10/17/446328.full.pdf> (accessed 27 December 2019). doi: [10.1101/446328](https://doi.org/10.1101/446328).
- Onodugo, V.A. (2012), "Impact of globalization on human resources management in Africa: evidence from Nigeria", *European Journal of Business and Management*, Vol. 4 No. 18, pp. 121-135.
- Opute, J.E. (2010), *Compensation Strategies and Competitive Advantages in the Globalised Economy: Nigerian Based Study*, PhD Thesis, January 2010, London South Bank University, London, UK.
- Reilly, P. and Williams, T. (2016), *Global HR Challenges Facing the Function*, Routledge, London.
- Stewart, J. and Rogers, P. (2012), *Developing People and Organisations*, CIPD, London.
- Veeran, P. (2012), *The Impact of Globalisation on Human Resources Management Policies and Procedures in the South African Public Service – a Study of Selected National Government Departments*. Doctoral thesis, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.
- Vredenburgh, D. and Brender, Y. (1993), "The relevance of democracy to organizational management", *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 99-114.
- Wood, G. (2010), "Employee participation in developing and emerging countries", in Wilkinson, A., Gollan, P.J., Marchington, M. and Lewin, D. (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Participation in Organizations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ziderman, A. (1997), "National programmes in technical and vocational education: economic and education relationships", *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, Vol. 49 No. 3, pp. 351-366.

Further reading

- Chiu, R.K., Luk, V.W. and Tang, T.L. (2002), "Retaining and motivating employees: compensation references in Hong Kong and China", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 402-431.
- Fanon, F. (1963), *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Weidenfeld, New York.
- Gyimah-Brempong, K. (2011), "Education and economic development in Africa", *African Development Review*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 219-236, doi: [10.1111/j.1467-8268.2011.00282.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8268.2011.00282.x).
- Kaufman, B.E. (2004), *The Global Evolution of Industrial Relations: Events Ideas and the IIRA*, 1st ed., ILO, Geneva.
- Mzee, P.K. (2012), "The context of globalization and human resource need and strategy for developing countries - the case of african countries", in Cuadra-Montiel, H. (Ed.) *Globalization Education and Management Agendas: IntechOpen*. doi: [10.5772/3256](https://doi.org/10.5772/3256).
- Nkomo, S.M. (2011), "A postcolonial and anti-colonial reading of 'African' leadership and management in organization studies: tensions, contradictions and possibilities", *Organization*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 365-386. doi: [10.1177/1350508411398731](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508411398731).
- Pidomson, G. and Nwagbara, U. (2013), "Trade unions and leadership in Nigeria's new democracy: issues and prospects", *Economic Insight – Trends and Challenges*, Vol. II No. LXV, pp. 33-40.
- Ojo, O.J. (1980), "Nigeria and the formation of Ecowas", *International Organization*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 571-604.
- Okpara, J.O. and Wynn, P. (2016), "Human resource management practices in a transition economy - challenges and prospects", *Management Research News* Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 57-76.

- Wan, D., Ong, C.H. and Kok, V. (2002), "Strategic human resource management and organizational performance in Singapore", *Compensation and Benefits Review*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 33-42, available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886368702034004006>.
- Wan, H.L. (2006), "Japanese remuneration systems in Malaysia: a case study analysis", *Compensation and Benefits Review*, November/December, pp. 31-41.
- Xhafa, E. (2014), "Trade unions and economic inequality: perspectives, policies and strategies", *International Journal of Labour Research*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 35-55.

Corresponding author

Dieu Hack-Polay can be contacted at: dhackpolay@lincoln.ac.uk