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## Article

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# Culture-specific management and the African management movement – a critical review of the literature

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In recent years a school of thought has emerged in South Africa, which proposes that, along with the new political dispensation, African values and African culture should be incorporated into South African business practice. This so-called African management movement bases its assumptions and recommendations on various contemporary South African writers and also draws heavily on a theoretical model advocated by Lessem. This article argues that thinking in this field has not been empirically derived and contrasts Lessem's model to the more empirically-formulated one of Hofstede.

'n Bestuursfilosofie wat ten gunste is van die opname van inheemse waardes en kultuur in die Suid-Afrikaanse bestuurspraktyk, het onlangs na vore getree. Hierdie sogenaamde Inheemse Bestuursfilosofie se beginsels is gegrond op die aannames en aanbevelings van verskeie hedendaagse Suid-Afrikaanse skrywers asook op 'n teoretiese model van Lessem. In hierdie artikel word geargumenteer dat denke op hierdie gebied nie empiries gegrond is nie en word Lessem se model met Hofstede se stellings, wat empiriese steun het, vergelyk.

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## Introduction

In recent years the concept of 'African management' has been proposed strongly by, amongst others, authors such as Khoza (1993), Mbigi & Maree (1994, 1995), Boon (1996), Impey & Nussbaum (1996), Lessem (1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c), Mbigi (1992, 1993, 1995a, 1996b), and Mtembu (1996). It can be argued that Lessem (1990, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c) has led the band of 'African management proponents'. This article reviews some considerations underlying the focus on cultural issues in management and also some of the difficulties associated with responsible consideration of such cultural issues. It explores aspects of the African management movement and some of the particular limitations to which it is subject. Finally, it evaluates the theoretical model proposed by Lessem (1993, 1996a) which is acquiring popularity as a frame of reference for the African management movement.

## Call for culture-specific management

Authors abroad (e.g. Van Doorn, 1979) and domestic (e.g. Mutwa in Morgan, 1996) have argued that the success or failure of organisations may have as much to do with organisation-external factors as with organisation-internal ones, and that incongruences of culture can be tremendously destructive. Research by Ronen (1977) and Barrett & Bass (1983) supports the view that management thinking and practice is rooted in the culture of the society from which it originates. African management exponents such as Mtembu (1996) view the perceived failure of South African business management to adopt an African style as a serious handicap. Onyemelukwe (1973) is probably the writer who considers the widest range of cultural implications which

make non-African management practices inappropriate to Africa.

It is not a uniquely South African demand that 'people considerations' should assume greater priority in management, as, for instance Chruden & Sherman (1984) have related. Nevertheless, the position taken by African management exponents is the strong one, as the following extract from Khoza shows: he has argued that Africa is

'essentially an under-developed geo-economic, socio-political entity with potential. For that potential to come to reality latent resources, in particular human resources, need to be managed. At core, economic development is a function of how people relate, how they organise themselves into productive forces' (1993: 117).

Hofstede is one of the international authorities who has taken a somewhat weaker position:

'Culture in the form of certain dominant values is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for economic growth. Two other conditions are the existence of the market and a political context that allows development' (1991a: 169).

It is uncontroversial that business practice is predicated by culture, and this can be a source of conflict:

'Culture pervades and radiates meanings into every aspect of the enterprise. Culture patterns the whole field of business relationships' (Trompenaars, 1993: 16).

It has been argued that the economic success of an organisation depends in part on the motivations of its own employees (Brislin, 1980). Since work effort is an expression of motivation, it appears that certain values have a key part to play in management (Hofstede, 1991a), particularly

since there is a probable relationship between job satisfaction and values (Blood, 1969). Alienated employees are bound to be problematic. In general, alienated employees will lower their aspirations to perform because they see their performance as meaningless anyway (Hofstede, 1991a). The attempts of South African organisations to assimilate black employees into white cultures are often blamed for the alienation of those employees (Fuhr, 1992). It is widely argued that, had business attempted to Africanise itself rather than assimilate Africans, the alienation would not have arisen (Brehm, 1994; Mbigi, 1996a; Molebatsi in Plani, 1996). Of course, employees may still become alienated due to personal factors regardless of the values orientation of management (Blood, 1969).

Organisational culture has emerged as a factor in business performance (Hofstede, 1985). While the exact nature of organisational culture is controversial, it is clear that it must be appropriate to its context to be effective, and that an important part of the context is the expectations of employees (Trompenaars, 1993). Of course, it over-states the case to demand that organisational culture should perfectly reflect national culture, since the relationship between national culture and organisational culture is not wholly reliable (Trompenaars, 1993). 'Research results about national cultures and their dimensions prove to be only partly useful for the understanding of organisational cultures' (Hofstede, 1991a: 18). Nevertheless, while they are not the same thing, there are links between organisational culture and national culture. 'Organisational culture is shaped not only by technologies and markets, but by the cultural preferences of leaders and employees' (Trompenaars, 1993:138). The plasticity of human nature is subject to, but also determines, both (Sorge, 1985). It is therefore seen by African management exponents to be particularly unfortunate if organisational culture flies in the face of the more cherished values espoused in a national culture:

'Cultural conflicts between various culture groupings within the organisation and between the organisation and some of those cultural groupings create problems related to the accomplishment of tasks and the development of creativity and innovation' (Brehm, 1994: 122).

### Research into culture

African management commentators, in calling for a culture-specific management style, may prove to have been guilty of invoking questions of culture without a full understanding of the difficulties involved. A culture-specific management style is difficult to specify, not least because the investigation of culture is itself *terra incognita* in some extent, and fraught with difficulties (Ittelson, Proshansky, Rivlin & Winkel, 1974; Geertz, 1975). Authorities such as Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961), Geertz (1975) and Hofstede (1991a) for instance, warn of the obvious need to distinguish between cultures and their institutions, pre-empting direct observation in some degree. For the purposes of this article, Hofstede's (1984b: 21) definition of culture as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from

another', has been used, bearing in mind his own admission that this is far from a complete definition.

The concept itself is complex. Geertz (1975: 11) has warned against trying to reify culture by conceiving of it as a self-contained 'super-organic' reality with 'forces and purposes of its own'. Nor should culture be reduced. Geertz (1975: 11) has warned against claiming 'that it consists in the brute pattern of behavioural events we observe in fact to occur in some identifiable community or other'. An observation by Geertz is particularly relevant to the broad thrust of this article:

'Only short flights of ratiocination tend to be effective in anthropology; longer ones tend to drift off into logical dreams, academic bemusements with formal symmetry. ... What generality it contrived to achieve grows out of the delicacy of its distinctions, not the sweep of its abstractions' (1975: 24).

Research into cultural differences has advanced at the pace at which new dimensions for differentiation have evolved. Today, many different taxonomies of cultural dimensions are in use, for example that of Trompenaars (1993) and Hofstede (1980, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1991a, 1991b, 1994). It is a pity that the current champions of the African management movement appear to take so little explicit account of the empirically-derived models available.

### Research into values as a key to culture

Cultures may be explained in terms of complex patterns of values, and, because those values lend themselves to empirical study (Zavalloni, 1980), they offer a way to address the otherwise very abstract territory of cultural differences. It should be noted that cultures cannot be explained entirely with reference to values (Zavalloni, 1980) and also that the study of values extends beyond the study of cultures (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Hofstede (1984a) has emphasised that values, and hence cultures, do change over time, but remarks that culture, in the sense of collective mental programming, is

'often difficult to change; if it changes at all, it does so slowly. This is so not only because it exists in the minds of the people but, if it is shared by a number of people, because it has become crystallised in the institutions these people have built together: their family structures, educational structures, religious organizations, associations, forms of government, work organizations, norms, literature, settlement patterns, buildings, and even ... scientific theories' (Hofstede, 1980: 43).

Zurcher, Meadow & Zurcher define a value as

'a selective orientation toward experience, implying deep commitment or repudiation, which influences the ordering of choices between possible alternatives in action' (1965: 539).

Similar definitions abound. Values, then, are not directly equivalent to needs or indeed to attitudes, as authors such as Rokeach (1973) have emphasised, although values do relate causally to these, and other, factors (Sikula & Sikula, 1975). Researchers such as Sikula & Sikula (1975) and Godsell (1983) have investigated differences in values across races to draw conclusions about cultural differences.

while some authors (e.g. Beck & Linscott, 1991) deny such a relationship.

Crucially, values are attributes of individuals as well as of cultures (Hofstede, 1984b), but to a significant extent individual values do appear to be culturally-derived (Zurcher, Meadow & Zurcher, 1965; Hofstede, 1980). It is widely accepted even within the African management movement that individuals' values are not altogether determined by culture. For example, Koopman (1993: 43) implicitly recognises that values may arise from the economic realities of income-group as well as, if not instead of, cultural group:

'... a well-educated first-world person will think predominantly with his left brain – boxes, computers, numbers, logics, aims instead of means, analytic instead of holistic. A lesser-educated person, in turn, focusses on right-brain thinking – creative, survivalist, musical, improvement of process (means) and holistic'.

### Hofstede's contribution

Probably the best-researched values-based model for distinguishing between national cultures at the moment is the one provided by Hofstede (1980, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1991a, 1991b, 1994). He has recorded that his total databank contained more than 116 000 questionnaires collected between 1967 and 1973 from IBM employees internationally (Hofstede, 1980, 1994). The five basic dimensions identified for differentiating between cultures are:

- *power distance*, which 'indicates the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally' (Hofstede, 1980: 45);
- *individualism/collectivism*, which describes 'the relationship between the individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society' (Hofstede, 1984b: 148);
- *uncertainty avoidance*, which indicates 'the extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise' (Hofstede, 1980: 45);
- *masculinity/femininity*, by which 'masculine cultures use the biological existence of two sexes to define very different social roles for men and women. They expect men to be assertive, ambitious and competitive, to strive for material success, and to respect whatever is big, strong and fast. They expect women to serve and to care for the non-material quality of life, for children and for the weak. Feminine cultures, on the other hand, define relatively overlapping social goals for the sexes, in which neither men nor women need to be ambitious or competitive' (Hofstede, 1984a: 390); and
- *long-term orientation* versus *short-term orientation* in *work ethic*, differentiated on the basis that a society with a long-term orientation fosters virtues oriented towards future rewards, for example perseverance and thrift, whereas a short-term orientation is found in societies which foster virtues related to the past and present,

for example tradition, preservation of 'face' and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). This dimension was evolved subsequently to the original four.

It may seem that Hofstede's model is reductionistic, considering only five dimensions. It needs to be taken into account that any culture (itself an aggregation) may assume a place at any point along each dimension, which is actually a continuum. This makes a multitude of permutations and therefore relatively subtle distinctions possible.

### African management movement today

African management commentators generally represent 'Western' or 'colonialist' (generally white South African managers') values, as opposed – and alternative – to African values (e.g. Brehm, 1994). Exponents such as Mtembu (1996) have argued that colonialism has eroded African value systems, while other African management commentators, such as Adonisi (1993), have argued that colonialism has resulted in the exaggeration of particular traditional values. Boon has captured the emotive elements of the African management thesis:

'Is it relevant to pursue our African-ness in our global village? The answer to this is simple – yes! ... We are different people with different cultures. ... More importantly, we have our African humanity and our noble cultures. Woe to the world if we all pursue a singular, grey and boring sameness. Our differences and traditions make us interesting and proud. Every good leader knows of the importance of culture. ... Culture is not an independent thing, it is what we are as people. Our culture guides us in how to behave and it is the expression of our values and beliefs. ... For example, the culture of Japan can be described as one of discipline, efficiency and effectiveness. None of this is imposed. It is now a feature – an accepted group of values – every Japanese citizen pursues. One could easily think Japan is an economic power born of its historic cultural characteristics. In fact, it is a culture that was purposefully directed. ... Culture is, therefore, more important than any other issue. It is the all-embracing force around which everything else revolves' (1996: 15–16).

A consequence of insensitivity to African values in the management of organisations in Africa is illustrated by Onyemelukwe:

'In the field of welfare, present practices in Africa are also below expectation and do not achieve the feeling of belonging which they are expected to evoke simply because it is welfare based on alien philosophies. ... Unfortunately, many welfare schemes in Africa are based on a kind of paternalistic attitude from the owners of the business. They are seen as privileges, a bait to buy workers' loyalty. ... How can one expect commitment from a worker who has to pay for the staff club, when he has no money to meet the needs of his relatives?' (1973: 128–129).

Writers such as Kuylaars (1951) and Hofstede (1994) echo this point, showing that even the most benign of interventions will fail anywhere in the world if they do not take cognisance of the values of the intended beneficiaries. Clearly, the presumption of cultural homogeneity will not stand South African management in good stead (Brehm, 1994).

It is not the purpose of this article to sing the praises of the African management movement, but to consider some of the problems which beset it. Some of these have already been touched upon. There is a contiguity between the African management movement and the black consciousness movement which may prove problematic, and the African management movement has not yet decided whether it accommodates cultural eclecticism or accommodates only African culture in its proposals. There is a possibly mistaken assumption that there are no significant differences between the values of traditional African cultures and the values of black labourers. Furthermore, the argument for African management tends to be anecdotal rather than empirical, and some of the argumentation is simply inferior. It is not clear that the change in values proposed by African management writers is really possible, or in fact that the values proposed are truly African. Furthermore, the practicability of traditional African values in the modern workplace is at question.

### Is there room for cultural eclecticism in African management?

It is common cause in the African management movement that the values of most South African managers are distinctively those of whites or of 'Western' origination (e.g. Onyemelukwe, 1973; Coldwell & Moerdyk, 1981; Beaty & Harari, 1997; Koopman, 1991, 1993; Fuhr, 1992; Human & Bowmaker-Falconer, 1992; Mbigi, 1992, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996a, 1996b; Lessem, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Motshabi, 1993; Brehm, 1994; Mbigi & Maree, 1994, 1995; Boon, 1996; Christie, 1996; Impey & Nussbaum, 1996; Matsvai & Nussbaum, 1996; Mtembu, 1996; and Sachs, 1996). Adherents of African management are undecided as to whether the acculturation of blacks must be reversed, as argued by Onyemelukwe (1973) and Khoza (1993), or whether traditional African values must simply be affirmed alongside white ('colonialist') ones (Dandala, 1996) to produce Mbigi's (1995a) 'rainbow management style'. Commentators (Mtembu, 1996; Mutwa in Morgan, 1996 and Mbigi, 1996b) have enumerated particular African cultural practices which would be incorporated in African management to actualise the benefits of value-sensitive management. What is clear is that there are current values held strongly by African workers which do not trace their roots to tribal custom, such as the high value put on formal training, although traditional training methods in Africa are by and large not formal (Onyemelukwe, 1973). Clearly, there is *de facto* eclecticism due to an impetus for African management writers to make a case for what they view as being in the best interests of African employees, most of whom are labourers, both from traditional African culture and also from the more modern work-place. Probably, because menial jobs have been effectively re-

served for blacks (Davenport, 1987), it has been labour-related issues such as discipline in respect of which black values have been most enthusiastically articulated. Cultural issues have plainly been caught up in the labour movement. It would be a pity if the African management movement failed to evolve beyond a largely labour perspective on the issue of challenges facing African management.

Furthermore, some African management authors do recognise that even within the context of a locally-evolved culture, it will be possible to draw on desirable elements of overseas thinking (e.g. Mbigi, 1995a; Lessem, 1996b). Research outside the ambit of the African management movement gives some hope for eclectic models. For instance, in their study comparing authority systems in the USA and Nigerian organisations, Scott, Dornbusch & Utande (1979) found differences but also comparable authority structures. England (1973) has found general value patterns characteristic of managers in the various countries which he investigated as well as country-specific differences.

### Anecdotal case for African management

Case studies supporting the implementation of African management are sparse (Khoza, 1993), and there is very little to substantiate a host of abstractions on this subject. In many cases, one is indeed tempted to argue that the cardinal agenda of African management is ideological rather than managerial. Exponents who incorporate ecological issues (e.g. Matsvai & Nussbaum, 1996) and music (Impey & Nussbaum, 1996) do little to allay this concern. Some links made between management practice and traditional activities seem somewhat attenuated. For instance Matsvai & Nussbaum (1996) tell of a tribal entrepreneur who was allegedly guided by a nocturnal vision, and Mbigi (1993) compares the traditional *mukwerera* festivals to celebrations of achievement of production targets. It is difficult to take these analogies too seriously. Mbigi (1995b) for instance likens the traditional African matchmaker role to team management in businesses. The metaphor may appeal, but the differences between the processes and institutions seem greatly to outweigh any similarities. Mbigi (1996a) goes so far as to extend the market potential for African cultural artifacts to the Rustenburg 'Lost City' project, clearly mistaking the degree of authenticity which will appeal to tourists who visit this gambling, golf and hotel establishment.

### Syllogism, teleology and over-statement in the African management position

It will not suffice to ascribe all bad management practices to 'Western' or 'colonialist' culture simply because the bad manager in question is white, as exponents such as Christie (1996) appear prone to do. Teleological thinking also needs to be overcome. Given that African culture does not really have a written tradition, there is a danger that far too many emphatic statements are being made which may overstate the benign and worker-centred nature of traditional African management.

Often, much is made by African management thinkers of the relatively slight managerial implications of some areas of obvious culture difference. Nor should commonalities,

of the sort identified by Godsell (1983) and Brehm (1994), be disregarded. The call by such commentators as Mbigi & Maree (1995: 5) to 'bring together the ancient wisdom of Africa and the modern scientific heritage of the West' might in part be satisfied with restoration of a norm of common courtesy to employees (Godsell, 1983; Mtembu, 1996). Perhaps the demand for a more participative management style (Brehm, 1994) is simply a demand for the simple courtesy of hearing what people have to say. It would be disappointing if all the pursuit of points of cultural differences came to nothing more than this – courtesy is also valued in the 'West', although its conventions differ.

### Pragmatic values or African values?

Hampden-Turner has suggested that unions typically appeal to a collective ethic, while management favours individualistic values:

'Both values have tactical uses for their respective factions and in some cases these roles will even be reversed, with management preferring to create co-operative environments and manual workers preferring individualistic standards of performance. Classically, co-operation by idealising solidarity enables workers to put collective pressure on management. Individualism defends the existing distribution of resources with the claim that managers have earned their higher rewards, and it can be used to keep workers divided' (1990: 35).

This raises the question as to whether the values espoused by the African management thinkers are all really based on African tradition. It seems significant that African management writers have passed over without comment values of a circumstantial nature which may bespeak motives not readily idealised, such as the value for financial security which Godsell (1983) found to enjoy precedence among blacks as well as whites, and that African management writers have never asked for the return of a traditional African labour code, although, according to Mutwa (in Morgan, 1996), such a thing did exist. Participative management, on the other hand, is represented as an intrinsic object of African values (Brehm, 1994; Boon, 1996; Mbigi, 1996b), although Godsell (1983) found that black participants felt strongly that they should be involved in high-level decision-making, not so much because that was what they personally wanted to do as because they felt it unfair that blacks should always be required to implement decisions taken by whites. If Onyemelukwe (1973) is to be believed, participative decision-making is not as deeply rooted in African tradition as some commentators claim. This is not to deny that South African managers are indeed seen as relatively unparticipative, as for instance Brehm (1994) has shown. Hofstede (1984a) even speculates that 'colonialist' managerial styles may arise from their acquiescence with African society's high power distance values. In any event, African culture could hardly defend a claim of monopoly over participative management, as authors such as Tannenbaum (1980) and Chruden & Sherman (1984) show.

There are admittedly African management writers who do recognise that some of the values which are described as

characteristically African may rather be pragmatic responses to the reality of poverty and oppression (e.g. Mbigi, 1995a), but this does not result in any obvious adjustment of the values promoted by the African management movement as a whole.

### Are traditional African values practical?

It is by no means clear that it is in the interests of black South Africans in the modern work-place to return to tribal values, since in fact traditional practices may not necessarily translate well into the contingencies and imperatives of organisational management in all cases (Chadford, 1995). For instance, in an attempt to reconcile traditional African child-rearing practices with the concept of the learning organisation, Mtembu (1996) describes a learning process which is, to say the least, rather crude by comparison with the demands of the learning organisation enunciated by such authorities as Garvin (1993).

### African management or black managers?

The African management movement has concerned itself mainly with the introduction of an ethic and practices which are characteristically African. Exponents are now beginning to question whether that is as effective an approach as the introduction of black managers into the organisational milieu would be. Sachs has put it rather well:

'I have no doubt that the main thing is not to even try to get the director of Anglo-American to toyi-toyi or to wear Afro-type shirts. It is to ensure that the boards of the big companies and all levels of management, particularly people who take the hard decisions of business life, and not just the top levels, are drawn from all sectors of society' (1996: 153–154).

Clearly, a debate is in the offing which is still far from resolution.

### Lessem's 'four worlds of work' model

Lately, exponents of the African management movement have taken increasingly to quoting a model of cultural types proposed by Lessem (1990, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c). The model suggests that, particularly from a business point of view, humanity may be quartered into four 'worlds of work', each of which is represented in South Africa as follows:

#### World one: Western empiricism

'The SUBJECT of South African *pragmatism* has been the *individual entrepreneur*, recently beginning to evolve in orientation from *self-help* to *self-development*. Its OBJECT has been the *independent enterprise*, partially evolving in its structure, in the '90's, from a free enterprise into a learning company' (Lessem, 1996c: 43).

Lessem believes that Western empiricism has its roots in Britain and is the predominant philosophy in businesses in North America and Britain. He also believes that it is the prevalent philosophy in South African management practice, entirely disregarding Godsell's (1983) finding that the

values of white South African males defy ready categorisation.

### World two: Northern rationalism

This philosophy is epitomised in a South African context as follows:

'Sunter's "high road", for South Africa, in effect is to be travelled by rationally-based enterprising man. If the natural, *entrepreneurial drive of ordinary people* can be encouraged and channelled into *constructive activities*, the future metropolitan markets of South Africa could be amongst the most exciting in the world. ... While most strongly rooted in France, there are manifestations of such rationalism in such diverse European regions as in Scotland and Prussia, in Northern Italy and in Scandinavia, and on the North-eastern seaboard of the United States. In many ways it is the most quintessentially European, or Northern, as opposed to Western (American), Eastern or Southern, of all four philosophies' (Lessem, 1993: 25-26).

According to Lessem (1993: 23), 'rational management has never taken root in South Africa and the Dutch and Huguenot influences have never been renewed'.

### World three: Eastern idealism

Lessem expands on the underlying philosophical tradition of 'Eastern idealism' as follows:

'Bacon in England, Descartes in France, Hegel in Germany – there lies a formidable European trinity. For Hegel, the idealist, then, *every condition of thought or of things – every idea and every situation in the world leads irresistibly to its opposite, unites with it to form a more higher and more complex whole*. History is made only in those periods in which the contradictions of reality are being resolved by growth, as the *hesitations and awkwardness of youth pass into the ease and order of maturity*' (1993: 29).

Nowhere is there a reference to a Japanese philosopher, or even to any Japanese managerial writer, but, nevertheless, Lessem extends his construct as follows:

'Holism has emerged out of a long-standing Germanic, and also to some extent Dutch, philosophical traditions. Reflected also in the "Eastern" Japanese way, it has given rise to what may be termed a *developmental manager*. While its positive manifestation is holistic, its negative expression is totalitarianism. Philosophically embodied, in South Africa, in Smuts' *holism and evolution*, it is managerially reflected in Ralph Stacey's *managing chaos*' (1996: 38).

### World four: Southern humanism

'... *humanism* is strongly rooted in "Southern" and African soils, also having distinct branches in Greece, in Italy, in Spain and in Ireland. It has given rise to what may be called the *convivial manager*. While its positive manifestation is in its communal nature, its negative expression is in the form of nep-

otism and corruption. Philosophically embodied in the work of Laurens van der Post ... it is managerially reflected in *Koopman's ... transcultural management*. ... The human group lies at the heart of a humanistic approach to business, encapsulated at the primal end of its socio-economic development by the family business. ... In fact, the backbone of the Italian economy, as is the case in Spain, is formed by thousands of small and family-sized family and co-operative businesses. Retail trade, agriculture and construction industries are dominated by co-operatives, themselves grouped into consortia, centred upon particular regions or districts characterised by municipalism, welfarism and communalism' (Lessem, 1996a: 43).

Lessem's proposals are couched in style and reasoning which are open to criticism. They err in schematicising and disregarding research, giving rise to unjustifiable uniformitarianism, disregard a growing case for commonality in management practices, under-estimate intra-organisational cultural factors, and idealise particular 'worlds of work'. The criticisms are expanded upon in the following paragraphs. All exacerbate the difficulties with which the African management movement, as it is today, finds itself struggling.

### Problems of reasoning

Lessem's model is over-extended, and, in particular, does not benefit by being applied to a notion of organisational life-cycles, by which a 'world' is apportioned to each of four phases in the organisational life-cycle:

'African management, as a dynamic whole, ... represents an interplay between the four psychological or cultural types, albeit with different shades of emphasis. In the final analysis ... all four philosophical factors are required for integrated managerial learning and organisation development. Moreover, as and when space is transformed into time, *experientially-based enterprise* turns into *professionally-based organisation*; thereafter, and in turn, the *developmentally-oriented industrial association* ultimately develops into the *convivially-networked* [sic] economy and society' (Lessem, 1993: 38).

Can he seriously be telling us that South African companies will switch from being driven wholly by 'Western' values to being driven wholly by 'Northern' values to being driven wholly by 'Eastern' values to being driven wholly by 'Southern' values in the course of the organisation's life-span?

Much of Lessem's argumentation is *non sequitur*, as the following excerpt illustrates:

'South Africa's full cultural heritage is bestowed not only with the modern fruits of American and European science and technology – strongly connected with its empirical and rational orientations – but also with its arts, artifacts, stories and mythical beliefs, traditionally represented in "the humanities". Whereas in Europe such a humanistic tradition is particularly strong within Southern climes, particularly in Italy, in Southern Africa it is the black more



than the white who is stepped [sic] in this communal, convivial way of being. Only in this humanistic way, therefore, will Southern African business and management truly come into its own' (Lessem, 1993: 31).

It is not clear how the conclusion follows from the preceding remarks. Another recurring weakness of reasoning is also illustrated: a number of the premises are controversial and unsubstantiated, in particular the notion that African values are best expressed in what should clearly be seen as tribal culture, given the extensive de-tribalisation which has subsequently occurred (Schlemmer & Hirschfeld, 1994).

### Fallacy of schematicism

Geertz (1975: 17) has warned that there is little profit in 'extricating a concept (in this case, culture) from the defects of psychologism only to plunge it immediately into those of schematicism'. Lessem's model is nothing if not an instance of schematicism, and his sweeping generalisations have not so far stood up very well to the test of empirical research such as that of Burger (1995).

A particularly unfortunate feature of Lessem's model in the South African context is that, in considering Eastern values, it typifies these with reference only to Japan, and ignores entirely the important Indian, Malay and Chinese elements in the South African business world. No effort is made to demonstrate that their values are represented by Japanese values, or to accommodate their existence if the values of South African Indians, Malays and Chinese, as one intuitively supposes, are not informed by modern Japanese business values any more than any other group in South Africa. The following excerpts from Mbigi (1995a: 42) clearly indicate the kind of difficulty which arises from an attempt to apply Lessem's model in this connection:

'There is a strong Eastern dimension to our African culture as a result of the spread of religion, commerce and slave trade which we need to acknowledge and celebrate' (Mbigi, 1995a: 42).

Certainly, it is not clear that he can be alluding to the Japanese as the source of this Eastern influence, the Japanese having no significant part in South African religion, commerce and slave trade, but subsequently he declares that

'our Asian heritage will provide us with process management tools such as the measurement of efficiency, quality, waste, down-time and speed response. We also need to go back to our Asian cultural heritage and learn about managing the value-adding process. The Asian and Japanese genius have been in process innovation, not product invention. They have developed practices that result in the high performance of their organisations. ... An understanding of process management can only be deeply understood by going back to our Asian cultural roots. We need to re-claim these roots and begin revisiting our cultural linkages with Asia. It is from our Asian cousins that we may learn a lot about establishing beauty in the work-place, and about better work methods through practices such as SPC (statistical process control), JIT (just in time inven-

tory), TQM (total quality management), TPM (total productive maintenance), OPT (optimum production techniques), etc. ... We need to harness our Afro-Asian heritage' (Mbigi, 1995a: 45).

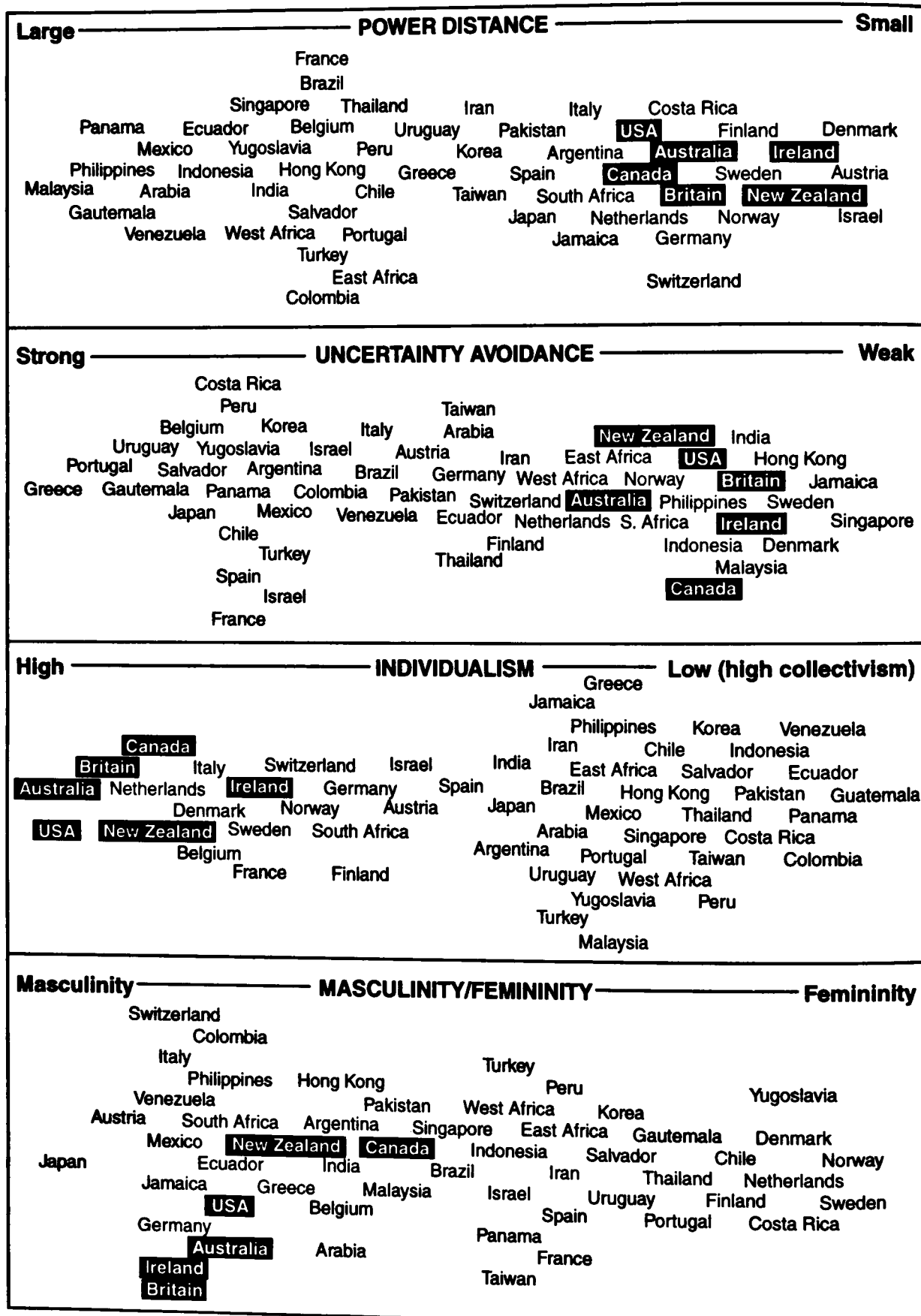
It is not clear that South African Indians, Chinese and Malays feel any particular ownership of SPC, JIT, TQM, TPM, OPT, *et cetera* and any implication that they are culturally transmitted, would require some impressive justification.

### Disregard for research

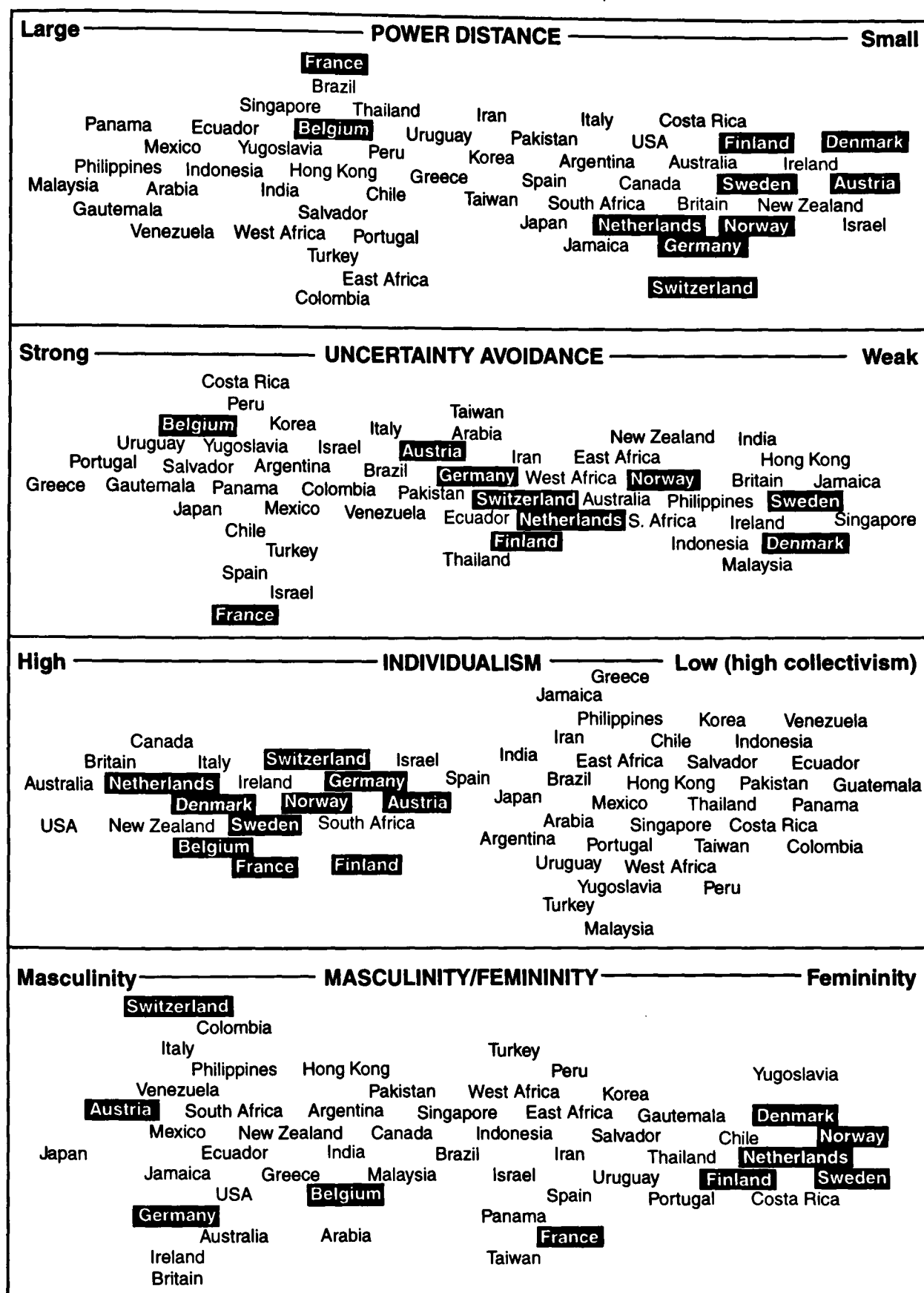
Nowhere do Lessem's (1990, 1993, 1996a, 1996b, 1996c) texts demonstrate that his 'four worlds of work' model has been based on, or verified by, systematic research. Nor is his model even reliably consistent with the authors whom he quotes. Hampden-Turner's (1990) typification of British managers, for example, seems to have more in common with Lessem's 'World two' than with his 'World one', the latter being the 'world' which he associates with British management. Nor does Lessem's model test particularly well when compared with Hofstede's. While Hofstede (1980, 1984a, 1984b, 1985, 1991a, 1991b, 1994, 1997) found that the countries associated with Lessem's 'World one' generally have values to a greater or lesser extent expressing small power distance, weak uncertainty avoidance, high individualism and masculinity, they are interspersed with other countries which Lessem would have included in his 'worlds' two, three and four variously (Table 1). Hofstede found that countries which Lessem would characterise as 'World two' generally value high individualism, albeit alongside countries from his other 'worlds', but these countries have values spread right across the scale in respect of power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity (Table 2). It is difficult to know what to make of Lessem's 'World three': whether to consider only Japan, or whether to include all oriental countries north of the equator. When all oriental countries north of the equator are considered, Hofstede's research finds a general trend towards large power distance and low individualism or high collectivism, although interspersed again with countries from the other 'worlds', whereas with respect to uncertainty avoidance and masculinity or femininity, the countries are spread right across the scale (Table 3). If 'World four' is to be construed as widely as Lessem suggests, then in fact there is no pattern corresponding to Hofstede's values at all, other than perhaps a generalisation to the effect that none of the 'world-four' countries show a predominance of values for very small power distance, which hardly bears out a case for strong participativeness as a core 'Southern' value (Table 4). Certainly, Lessem's 'World four' cannot be distinguished as an entity on the basis of Hofstede's research.

It is disquieting to consider that the African management movement is adopting a cultural model which has no empirical research base of its own and which appears to be so inconsistent with the model which does have probably the most credible research base. In the light of this fact alone, it would be cavalier on the part of exponents of African management not to give careful thought to the challenge of an empirical research base.

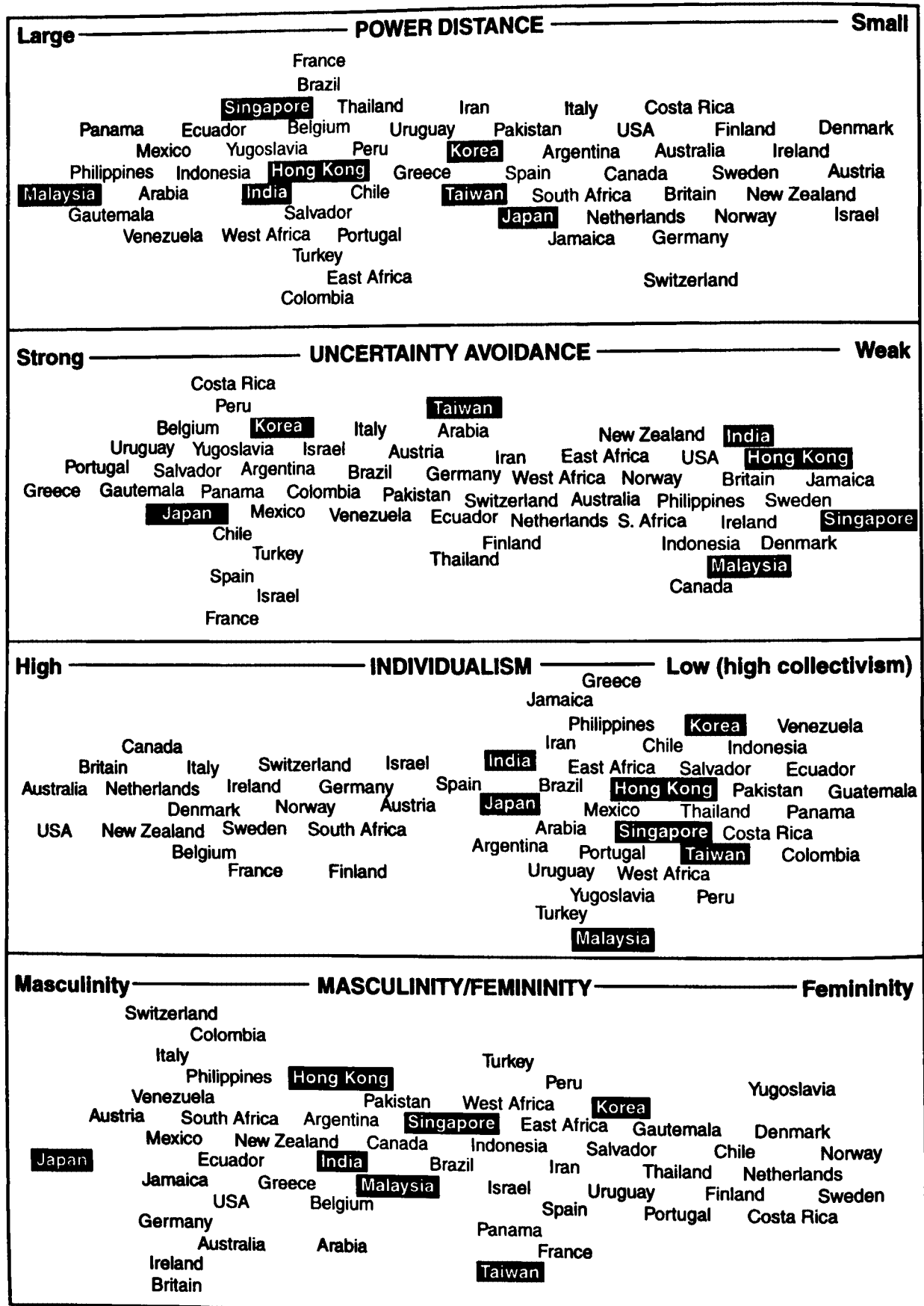


**Table 1.** Superimposition of Lessem's 'World one' on Hofstede's 'values map of the world'.

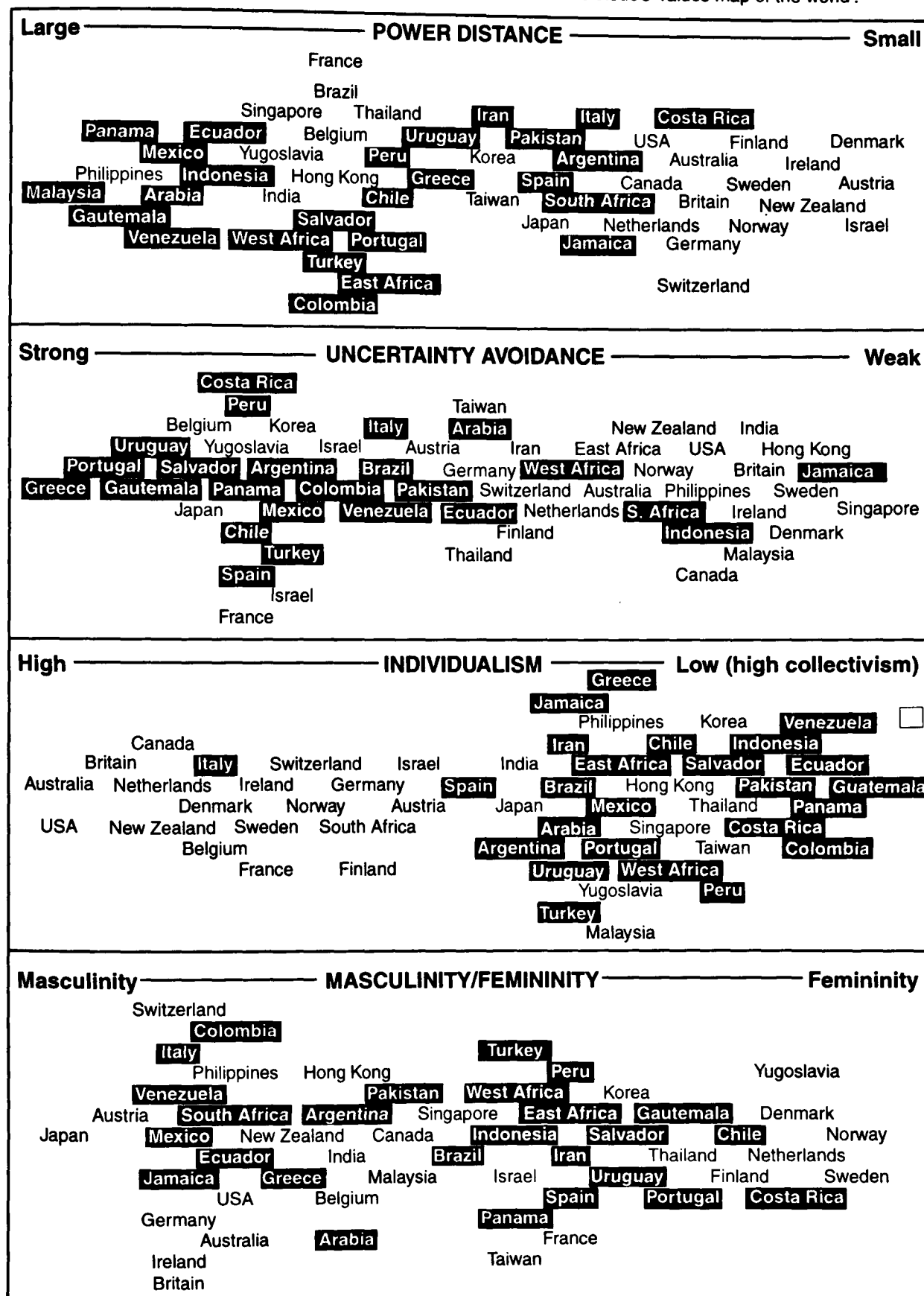
The countries in black blocks are included in "World One". It should be noted that these "value maps of the world" are not of Hofstede's designing but are simply crude representations of the rankings found in Hofstede's research.

**Table 2.** Superimposition of Lessem's 'World two' on Hofstede's 'values map of the world'.

The countries in black blocks are included in "World two".

**Table 3.** Superimposition an expanded interpretation of Lessem's 'World three' on Hofstede's 'values map of the world'.

The countries in black blocks are included in an Oriental "World three".

**Table 4.** Superimposition of Lessem's 'southern climes' 'world four' on Hofstede's 'values map of the world'.

## Uniformitarianism

Geertz has made the point that generalisations about man as man will not be discovered through a

'Baconian search for cultural universals, a kind of public opinion-polling of the world's people in search of a consensus gentium that does not in fact exist ...' (1975: 40).

Lessem's model tends to regional uniformitarianism, for all that he occasionally tries to defend himself against the accusation by recognising that 'different African peoples have fundamentally different philosophical traditions' (Lessem, 1993: 38). It is just as well that he makes no claim that all black South Africans are one people, since it is unlikely that such a claim could be culturally or anthropologically sustainable. From uniformitarianism it is but a short step to stereotyping or caricaturisation (Trompenaars, 1993). Lessem's proclivity to caricaturisation may be inferred from the following text:

'The Englishman is preoccupied, mainly, with taking appropriate action. With this end in view he organises, disciplines and controls himself. In fact, for Madriaga's Englishman, self-control is an essential requirement. Self-control is easily transplanted from the individual to the group. Such group control manifests itself in two ways. The first is in the strongly internalised tendency towards social discipline. The second is in the sense of social service that is deeply ingrained within the English psyche. ... The individual lives in an atmosphere which is therefore imbued with moral and social responsibilities, divided into zones of different obligations. He is closely watched by his own social self and acquires self-consciousness, through the combination of freedom constrained by responsibility. Finally, through the inter-linking of his innate insularity with his moral stance, the English man of action is prone to a sense of self-righteousness' (Lessem, 1990: 140).

## Commonality in managerial practices

Lessem's schematicism has caused him to disregard – without being explicit about it – a world-wide case for convergence in managerial practices on the basis of optimal performance supported by research such as that of Neganndhi (1979), who found that differences in organisations' effectiveness could be explained largely by differences in their management practices and cultures. International emulation and borrowing of practices is also on the increase and is strongly recommended by such commentators as Wickens (1987). When Lessem (1990: 57) does propose the development of a 'mutualistic, global village' through 'world-wide travel and more sophisticated communications media', he does so without in any way considering universal factors of enhanced performance.

## Under-estimation of Intra-organisational cultural factors

Lessem entirely ignores cultural and other factors which may be more important to management than national cul-

ture. For example, he has a rather one-dimensional notion of the factors of production in Africa:

'While it is obvious for all to see that, for example, the Japanese and the British come from very different cultures, which in turn affect their management and business behaviours, it may not be so clearly apparent that different African peoples have fundamentally different philosophical traditions. These, in turn, radically pre-condition the art of the possible, in management as in life as a whole. They are the *generic factors of African production*' (Lessem 1993: 38).

There is no consideration of any other factors.

## Idealisation of particular 'worlds of work'

Lessem quite transparently idealises his 'Eastern' and 'Southern' worlds of work, as the following text illustrates:

'Whereas Americans, then, are individually enterprising, the Japanese are collectively adaptable. Whereas the West shows personal values within a corporate melting-pot, the East harmonises group values within an inter-dependent "Japan Inc"' (Lessem, 1990: 165).

The idealisation is in over-stating the harmonious adaptiveness. In reality, as such authors as De Bettignies (1973) have shown, the value of harmoniousness in Japan is not necessarily an unequivocal or even a benign one. In epitomising his 'communally-based convivial manager', Lessem (1993: 36) has remarked:

'Whereas the individualist ... is oriented towards multi-rationalism [sic], the communally-oriented person is *non-racialist*. While in the first case separate individuals get together to form a team, in the second *an individual emerges out of a group*. Whereas *profit*, for the individualist, is a reward for personal initiative, for the communal person it is a *vote of confidence given by his society for services rendered to it*. As a result, the more the individualist has the more powerful he is; conversely, *the more the communal person is prepared to give and share the more respected he becomes*. Ultimately, whereas the one is self-reliant and independent, the other, according to Koopman, is *co-operative and inter-dependent*. Whereas the individualist fears that all he has may be taken away, and is therefore driven by fear to acquire more and more, the communal group's *greatest hope is for the upliftment of all*'.

Implicit though they are, the moral judgements are quite obvious, and the idealisation of the 'worlds of work' in which collectivist values are preferred over individualism is quite obvious.

Perhaps the idealisation is a result of reliance on second-hand accounts. Lessem for instance epitomises his proposed 'Eastern idealism' in terms of the interpretation of 'Western' visitors to Japan, and does not refer to the writings of Japanese commentators. With exceptions, the same can be said of his views on African management. Again, one is left puzzled as to why Lessem has not tried to verify his model empirically.

## Conclusion

The African management movement still has some way to go before it has provided a clear vision of the African manager. In concentrating on issues of culture, it has entered a difficult field. However legitimate its concern for culture-specific management may be, it is in any case only a part of the whole picture. What is more, if the case for culture-specific management is to rely on flawed premises, whose appeal is emotive rather than rational, then one fears that the African manager is going to have to emerge by fits and starts and despite, rather than thanks to, the prophets who predict his coming.

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