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Culture-specific management and the African management movement – verifying the premises

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Lessem's proposals which purport to predict the key differences between black¹ managers and white managers in South Africa have been widely adopted by writers within the African management movement. This article investigates the validity of Lessem's relevant proposals. The research found no support for the use of Lessem's model in helping to define African management, but the data were indicative of the prevalence of two forms of organisational culture, reminiscent of Schein's 'operator culture' and Handy's 'club culture', in the organisations researched, and supported the view that organisational culture can have a strong modifying effect on the values of employees, regardless of national or ethnic culture.

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Introduction

It has been argued that in South Africa, management practice is strongly modeled on British and American systems (Binedell, 1993; Khoza, 1993; Koopman, 1993; Lessem, 1993). This so-called 'Eurocentric' approach has resulted in certain authors (Khoza, 1993; Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Boon, 1996; Mtembu, 1996) calling for an 'Afrocentric' management which encompasses the concept and underlying values of *ubuntu*, where the collectivist notion of the interdependence of people, specifically black people, is recognised in the workplace. One of the foremost proponents of this approach is Lessem (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) who has proposed a model to guide thinking in this field.

This article reports the findings of Schonken (1997) in which some of Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) specific statements, within the confines of the South African context, were considered. The research was subject to the limitations of scale and sampling technique (convenience sampling was used), and, of course, to the fact that the findings relating to values always remain subject to interpretation (Zavalloni, 1980). Nevertheless, the findings lend support to Burger's (1995) study in casting doubt upon the validity of Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model.

Lessem's 'Four Worlds' model

Lessem (1996a; 1996c) has presented a model which proposes four 'Worlds' of management (see Table 1)

Lessem has stated:

'Business enterprise in Southern Africa then, has not emerged in a vacuum. In effect it has evolved out of one particular cultural heritage and duly [sic] ignored its others. More specifically, it has drawn strongly on its competitive and personalised (World 1) and weakly on its co-ordinated and managerial (World 2) heritage, while ignoring its co-operative (World 3) and communal (World 4) ones. In fact the country's economic institutions are modeled on the Anglo-Saxon part of its heritage, much more than upon any other' (1996c: 34).

He makes it clear, in short, that he believes that South African managers and supervisors will subscribe, in the main, to a 'World 1' (Western) managerial approach, as he defines it, and that whereas there will be some subscription to 'World 2' (Northern), it will exceed subscription to 'Worlds 3 and 4' (Eastern and Southern) severally.

Probably the most serious shortcoming of Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model is that it lacks empirical substantiation. Burger (1995) has empirically examined the broad proposition that management could be typified along the lines suggested by Lessem (1996a; 1996c). His research does not support either Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model or proposition that managerial styles or types can be associated with the geographical entities represented by his 'Northern', 'Western', 'Eastern' and 'Southern' model.

Table 1 Lessem's four 'Worlds' model

Designation	Philosophy	Business outlook	Managerial orientation	Psychological type
World 1 (Western)	Empiricism	Competition	Experiential	Sensing
World 2 (Northern)	Rationalism	Co-ordination	Professional	Thinking
World 3 (Eastern)	Idealism	Co-operation	Developmental	Intuiting
World 4 (Southern)	Humanism	Co-creation	Convivial	Feeling

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study is to establish the usefulness of Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'Worlds of Work' model as a framework for addressing culture-related issues in the South African workplace.

It was thought necessary also to verify whether black South African managers and supervisors in fact subscribe more heavily to 'World 4' than to 'World 1', 'World 2' and 'World 3' respectively, with comparison both to black South African managers and supervisors subscribing to other worlds, and with comparison to white South African managers and supervisors subscribing to 'World 4'.

On the basis that there may be significant differences in the management styles of middle managers and supervisors representing different race groups in the South African population of a nature not predicted by Lessem (1993) other than subscription by those middle managers and supervisors to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'Worlds', it was endeavoured to establish subscription by each group to Hofstede's (1980; 1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1991a; 1991b; 1994a; 1997) four original value dimensions. These are: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism and masculinity/femininity. Power distance refers to the extent to which the members of any cultural group are willing to accept an unequal distribution of power, wealth and prestige. Uncertainty avoidance involves the ways in which human societies have learnt to cope with ambiguity. Individualism involves the degree to which individuals in any cultural group are expected to act independently of other members of their society, and masculinity refers to the clear separation of gender roles and a deliberate unconcern for others in any cultural group. Hofstede's (1984b; 1991a; 1997) main value dimensions have been established on the basis of thorough empirical research, and it is suggested that a possible weakness of Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) work is that it does not explicitly take Hofstede's (1984; 1991a; 1997) findings into account.

From the above, the following propositions are posited:

1. South African managers and supervisors subscribe most heavily to 'World 1', with subscription to 'World 2' exceeding subscription to 'World 3' and 'World 4' severally;
2. Black South African managers and supervisors subscribe most heavily to 'World 4';
3. Managers and supervisors in each race group evidence significant differences in the four value dimensions identified by Hofstede (1984b; 1991a; 1997) and/or subscribe differently to the four 'Worlds' identified by Lessem (1996a; 1996c); and
4. Amongst South African managers and supervisors, there is a significant correlation between subscription to a particular World identified by Lessem (1996a; 1996c) and holding particular values identified by Hofstede (1994a; 1991a; 1997).

Methodology

Cross-sectional research involved the use of a questionnaire which was distributed to subjects attending middle managerial and supervisory training conducted by the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa's Central Training

Unit. Data emanating from the questionnaires was supported by focus groups with respondents aimed at discussing the questionnaire findings, and establishing their satisfaction with them. It should be noted that the Central Training Unit does not only train managers and supervisors from within the Anglo-American Corporation, but also acts as a vendor in the public market-place. On the whole, managers and supervisors who are trained at this institution are drawn from larger organisations and groups in the Southern African business arena. It is recognised that the convenience sampling used to obtain the data represents a limitation to the generalisability of the findings of the research. However, it does appear that employees routinely sent for management/supervisory training at the Central Training Unit are drawn fairly representatively from entrants to 'long-servers', across levels of ability, and across race and gender. The population researched was accordingly defined as South African middle and supervisory managers (Paterson grading B upper to E lower) in medium and large organisations. The category of 'medium and large organisations' includes a wide-ranging sample of companies generally with more than 400 employees. While this research population is not the entire population to which Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model applies, it is thought to be representative of that crucial part of it to which his ensuing recommendations for management apply.

The final sample comprised 38 black respondents, 229 white respondents, 12 Indian respondents and ten 'coloured' (mixed race, usually from white, black, Indian and/or Malay) respondents. Twenty four of the respondents were under 26 years of age, 134 respondents were above 25 but under 35 years of age, and 131 respondents were above 35 years of age. The sample comprised 269 men and 20 women, 78 supervisors, 133 middle managers and 78 specialists, the latter category in posts equivalent to supervisors and middle managers.

The research followed the general steps advocated by Schmitt & Klimoski (1991). The questionnaire items were abstracted from a comprehensive literature review, and while these items were not validated, they were constructed in strict accordance with the differentiating dimensions respectively identified by Lessem (1996a; 1996c) and Hofstede (1984; 1991a; 1997). Following the advice of Pareek & Rao (1980), a short, simple questionnaire was constructed. The new instrument was designed with items used in permutation designed to elicit the degree of the respondents' subscription to particular values and 'Worlds' with reference to work-related issues. A copy of the questionnaire is provided by Schonken (1997).

The questionnaire was designed in English, on the assumption that this is the lingua franca of business in South Africa. The questionnaire consisted of three parts, namely:

- demographic questions,
- items relating to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'Four Worlds' model, and
- items relating to Hofstede's (1980; 1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1991a; 1991b; 1994a; 1997) four original dimensions of values.

The decision to use a questionnaire in which respondents express their own values was difficult. Hofstede (1977) has

pointed out that it cannot be taken for granted that self-rating will work well as an indicator of values. Careful thought was given to following an approach used by Burger (1995), which was to ask the subordinates of the actual research subjects to verify behaviours in their managers which would express enactment of particular values. It was, however, decided not to follow this approach on the grounds that it would add a gratuitous level of indirectness to the research. Careful thought was also given to the possibility of using an entirely qualitative approach before discarding it on the basis that there has already been an imbalance of qualitative research in this field and that what is needed at this stage is more quantitative verification of the constructs under consideration. In any case, most errors which could emerge from self-rating occur also in qualitative investigation, and, as Pareek & Rao (1980) have demonstrated, any number of other research errors are also more probable in a qualitative investigation. It was finally concluded that self-rating would be the least of the available evils, and that it could be moderated as far as possible by positing questions, not directly about values, but of a type requiring respondents to make clear value judgments. The questionnaire was accordingly designed to investigate value-driven management practices occurring in business.

Hofstede (1991a) has noted the difficulty in values research of distinguishing between the desired and the desirable. Hofstede has remarked, that values

'direct our feelings of good and evil. They are opinions on how things *should* be. Indirectly, they also affect our perceptions of how things are, and they affect our behaviour' (1985: 347).

It is by no means clear in what extent values research should focus on the desired or the desirable respectively, and it is suggested that most people would agree that value systems are at least as much about what is desirable as they are about what is actually desired.

None of the respondents found understanding the concepts and language contained in the instrument to be a problem, an issue which was borne in mind, following Os-good (1977). Confidentiality was not seen as an imperative on the part of respondents, but nevertheless the context secured sufficient confidentiality.

The questionnaire was administered to the sample as follows: trainees attending appropriate management/supervisory training courses (whose numbers range from 8–15 per course) were asked to complete the questionnaire. During this time, the researcher remained present, and was available to answer any questions relating to the meaning of particular items. There was a limited number of such questions. Thereafter, trainees transferred their scores to a summary-sheet and calculated their ecological totals. The researcher then discussed, in focus groups, the implications of the various 'Worlds' and value dimensions, assisted by a handout containing Lessem's (1996c: 5–6) summaries of his 'Four Worlds' of management. This gave the respondents an opportunity to verify that their ecological scores did in fact correspond with their own intuitions about their values. Respondents were afforded the opportunity of challenging particular items comprising the various categories of ecological scores. The process served to provide qualita-

tive validation of the items as they stood, and to assist in the interpretation of the findings. There were no occasions on which respondents disagreed with their ecological scores, except one case, in which a female manager declared that she had been surprised to find that she had strongly 'masculine' values. The rest of the group at the time endorsed the view that she was competitive, and evinced masculine values.

After collection of the questionnaire and the summary-sheets, preliminary data-cleaning (following Schmitt & Klimoski, 1991) and recalculation took place. Discrepancies between data-capture and respondents' summary sheets were investigated and corrected piecemeal. There were a limited number of such problems, and where rectification was not immediately and obviously possible, the questionnaire was discarded from the data.

Most people are likely to prove relatively equivocal in their value systems (Rokeach, 1973). As a result, the constant-sum (or forced-distribution) scale technique was selected as the one most appropriate to accommodating degrees of subscription. By using a forced-distribution scale, it was possible to elicit preferences between paired values. This is the only way to capture effectively the relative importance which a subject describes to a particular practice. A criticism to which Burger's (1995) research is subject is that, by using Likert scales, he enables a 'halo effect' which implies that particular managers enact a wide range of values, disregarding the fact that it is prioritisation between competing values which identifies a particular value system, rather than the occurrence of particular generic behaviours. The technique used in this research was intended to obviate any similar 'halo effect'.

A forced distribution of this nature yields an ordinal measurement scale, and as such is suitable for only relatively simple statistical analysis. Parametric data, which permit more sophisticated statistical analysis, require a degree of certainty that the scale yields interval properties which simply cannot be assured in respect of statements about value preferences, even when these refer to fairly concrete behaviour. Correspondence analysis may be used to raise the order of this data (Bendixen & Sandler, 1995) but this was not deemed necessary to test the propositions in question. Construct validation was not the purpose of this research.

As a statistical procedure, correlations serve both to control for and generalise across particular differences. As the data were of a non-parametric nature, a Spearman correlation matrix was used. It is recognised that such a simple statistical procedure does not exhaust the research potential of the data. Irvin & Carroll (1980) have advised researchers to employ factor analysis for the purpose of construct validation. However, the purpose of this research was not to propose a construct or even to test it. In any case, a questionnaire such as the one used in this research, with relatively few items per ecological category, and whose items have been pre-selected in accordance with specific constructs, using a relatively limited sample, does not lend itself to really effective multivariate analysis. Moreover, there are elements of subjectivity in factor analysis which, at the end of the day, will not make for a much more

decisive argument than the Spearman correlations used in this instance, especially in the context of a small sample and short instrument.

Results

The frequency counts indicated on Table 2 were calculated on the basis of simple preference between matched values (individualism or collectivism, low power distance/high power distance, masculinity/femininity and strong uncertainty avoidance/weak uncertainty avoidance) and from the 'Four Worlds' (that is to which 'World' any individual subscribed most).

Proposition 1 which states that subscription in the sample group of South African managers and supervisors to 'World 1' would exceed subscription to 'World 2', and subscription to 'World 2' would in turn exceed subscription to 'Worlds 3 and 4' severally was not supported by the research, since the research findings were that 50% of white middle managers and supervisors (as opposed to 42% of black middle managers and supervisors) subscribed mainly to 'World 4'. Altogether 48% of white middle managers and supervisors in the sample were found to subscribe mainly to 'World 3', as opposed to 58% of black supervisors and managers, and 8% of white middle managers and supervisors were found to subscribe mainly to 'World 2', while only 5% subscribed most highly to 'World 1'.

Lessem's (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) writings unequivocally give the impression that one should expect black middle managers and supervisors to subscribe mainly and strongly to 'World 4', (proposition 2), and certainly in greater proportion than white managers and supervisors. In fact, for both black and white supervisors and middle managers, the pattern found in this research was that the majority subscribed mainly to 'World 3', closely followed by subscription to 'World 4', and with 'Worlds' 1 and 2 receiving little to no subscription. The fact that there is any greater subscription to 'Worlds' 1 and 2 by white managers and supervisors is probably an expression of data-bias. Proposition 2 is, therefore, not supported.

Where a meaningful difference did materialise between the black and white samples was in respect of Hofstede's (1984a; 1991a; 1997) masculinity/femininity value. Here,

the black sample tended rather more strongly to masculinity than did the white sample. That is counter-intuitive (compare Brehm, 1994). This inclination could be explained as a result of black managers and supervisors having to demonstrate a higher level of competitiveness to attain these positions at the time the research was undertaken, an interpretation which was confirmed in the discussions held with respondents after they had analysed their answers. Interestingly, the very few female respondents demonstrated an even stronger leaning towards masculinity, and explained it in the same way. Unfortunately, the sample of women was too small as to render invalid even the most tentative generalisation from this finding. The Indian sample produced a pattern similar to the white sample, but the 'coloured' sample – small as it was – produced an even more pronounced leaning towards masculinity than the black sample had, presumably for the same reasons. The black and 'coloured' samples demonstrated a slightly stronger trend to weak uncertainty avoidance than the white sample. It is possible that the relatively stronger weak uncertainty avoidance values held by black and 'coloured' middle managers and supervisors is a concomitant of having to work with, and in great measure accommodate to, white managers. Perhaps a process of 'natural selection' ensured that black and 'coloured' employees with these values were promoted to their current positions. Proposition 3 is, therefore, partially substantiated.

The correlations found in this research, relating to proposition 4, even where they are relatively strong, are weak in absolute terms. Correlations in excess of 0.5 or -0.5 were unusual. On the other hand, many of the correlations proved to be significant. However, the threshold for significance, 0.3, should not be over-estimated. Rho^2 , the coefficient of determination, shows at 0.3 that only 9% of the first variable co-varies exactly with the second variable. In other words, 91% of the variance remains unexplained. This is understood as a sharp reminder that national or ethnic values, even if they are the subject of strongly-expressed loyalties to individuals, are not so predominant as to define individual and circumstantial values in an overwhelming degree.

Table 2 Respondent value orientations

Value orientation	Black	White	Indian	'Coloured'
Tend to subscribe to individualism more than to collectivism	58%	65%	50%	40%
Tend to subscribe more to collectivism than to individualism	42%	35%	50%	60%
Tend to value lower power distance	68%	72%	58%	80%
Tend to value higher power distance	32%	28%	42%	20%
Tend to value masculinity over femininity	63%	52%	50%	80%
Tend to value femininity over masculinity	37%	48%	50%	20%
Tend to stronger uncertainty avoidance	0%	20%	50%	0%
Tend to weaker uncertainty avoidance	100%	80%	50%	100%
Subscribe mostly to 'World 1'	0%	5%	0%	0%
Subscribe mostly to 'World 2'	0%	8%	0%	0%
Subscribe mostly to 'World 3'	58%	48%	50%	50%
Subscribe mostly to 'World 4'	42%	50%	50%	50%

A relatively strong correlation (0.315) was found between tendency to individualism and subscription to 'World 1'. This is much as Lessem (1990; 1993; 1996a, 1996b; 1996c) predicts, and so is the relatively strong negative correlation (-0.366) between tendency to individualism and subscription to 'World 3'. What was surprising was the relatively weak correlation between tendency to collectivism and subscription to 'World 4' (0.199). The score of 0.199 falls below the threshold for statistical significance. That it was lower yet in respect of black respondents (-0.052) may convey nothing of importance, but it certainly offers no support for any significant association between subscription to 'World 4' and tendency to collectivistic values. Low correlations were found between collectivism and 'Worlds' 3 and 4 in respect of the black sample, which may be explained speculatively by positing a sort of natural selection process, by which non-rural blacks are preferred for supervisory and middle managerial posts. Perhaps such people come to reject collectivism. This opens the way to suggest that the black sample in this research is not representative of the 'black manager' envisaged in African management writing (e.g. Morgan, 1996; Plani, 1996). However, it is held that some sort of reality check is required in that case. It remains to be proven that the new generation of black managers will have substantially different values from the incumbent black managers and supervisors.

It makes intuitive sense that strong masculinity values would correlate with subscription to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'World 1', and in some extent the research found such a correlation (0.259), although it is far from being a strong one. The correlation between a tendency to weak masculinity and subscription to 'World 3' was very weak (0.032), but there was a stronger correlation between a tendency to weak masculinity and subscription to 'World 4' (0.455). The correlation between tendency to femininity and subscription to 'World 3' is low (0.032), falling well short of the threshold for significance, as a result of which it is concluded that no support has been found for Lessem's (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) proposal that this value system is actuated by a benign concern for harmony. This sheds no light, of course, on values in Japan itself, upon which Lessem (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) entirely bases his concepts which underlie his World 3, since Japanese were not included in the research population. Since the value of collectivism is most strongly correlated with subscription to 'World 3', it appears that collectivist notions in the work-place are not much informed by a 'convivial' 'World 4' ethic, as Lessem (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) supposes.

Weak masculinity on the other hand was found to correlate relatively strongly with subscription to 'World 4' (0.455). However, that part of the sample made up by black respondents showed a much weaker correlation (0.030). Perhaps what is represented by this is the fact that black employees who have obtained advancement in South Africa to middle managerial and supervisory posts may have had to be more competitive than their white counterparts. It is suggested, therefore, that the low correlation achieved with respect to black managers and supervisors may

express circumstantial values. This was borne out in the discussions with participants after they had completed their questionnaires.

The correlation between a tendency to strong uncertainty avoidance and subscription to 'World 2' was not particularly strong (0.208), but comparatively, this is meaningful when it is considered that a tendency to strong uncertainty avoidance showed slight negative correlations with subscription to 'Worlds' 1, 3 and 4 respectively. Strong uncertainty avoidance was substantially more strongly correlated with subscription to 'World 2' values with respect to black respondents (0.521) than with respect to white respondents (0.289). This suggests that 'World 2' has more appeal for black managers and supervisors with strong uncertainty avoidance values than for white managers and supervisors with the same value.

Subscription to 'World 2' correlated relatively strongly, albeit inversely, with a tendency to small power distance (-0.247) with respect to the overall group, much as Lessem (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) leads one to expect. However, Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) writings would have one believe that African culture (which he intends to epitomise in his 'World 4'), is strongly democratic and egalitarian. One would therefore expect a relatively strong correlation between a tendency to lower power distance and subscription to 'World 4'. The research found that there was no significant correlation, although, in fact, the correlation for the overall group was positive (0.187). Nor was there any significant correlation between tendency to small power distance and subscription to 'World 3' (0.154). The black respondents, as a group, produced a relatively strong negative correlation between a tendency to small power distance and subscription to 'World 4' (-0.374). This conflicts rather strongly with claims of 'conviviality' and a democratic spirit of management associated with subscription to 'World 4'. Some of the discussion suggested that in some cases the explanation may lie in a reaction experienced by black employees who enter supervisory and managerial posts against the values of trade unions and labourers.

There is some substantiation for proposition 4, but many of the findings are counter-intuitive and do not support the writings of the African management movement (Brehm, 1994; Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Lessem, 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c).

Discussion

While this research offers no evidence that Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model helps to predict differences between the values of white South African middle managers and supervisors and those of black South African middle managers and supervisors reliably, this is not to say that there are not important cultural differences, and nor is it to say that the cultural differences which Lessem (1996a; 1996c) perceives would not be more readily identifiable outside the context of the work-place. Nor does this research add to the case for abandoning Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) constructs out of hand, as Burger's (1995) research does. Burger (1995) has argued strongly that Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) constructs must be separated from their

geographical concomitants. To that, this research adds evidence that they must be separated from their racial concomitants in the specific context of the South African work-place. That probably renders Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) proposals virtually useless in the context of their original purpose. Moreover, the findings suggest that some aspects of Lessem's (1990; 1993; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c) constructs have to be modified even if they are separated from their racial and geographic concomitants. It appears, for instance, that collectivism as a value is more strongly associated with subscription to 'World 3' than to 'World 4'. On the other hand, the low correlation between femininity and subscription to 'World 3' suggests that collectivism in the latter context should not be seen so much as a benign caring for other people as something related to a demand for conformity and compliance with team requirements.

These findings offer no reason for endorsing any view that Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'Four Worlds' represent all the major value systems expressed in management, and nor, in fact, is there conclusive evidence that Hofstede's (1980; 1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1991a; 1991b; 1994a; 1997) dimensions represent the whole picture either. In the first place, one intuitively suspects that there must be more substantial differences in values between the cultural – or racial – groupings in South Africa than have been indicated using either of these models, and that the crucial dimension has yet to be discovered. For example, Bendixen & Thomas (1997) in a study of 586 middle managers from the major ethnic groups in South Africa, raise a question as to whether Hofstede's (1994b) VSM94 instrument is adequate in distinguishing between individualism and communalism, as opposed to collectivism in the South African management context. Unfortunately, the present research has not been conclusive in helping to define what 'African management' really is, although it certainly has cast doubt on some of the received answers to this question. It is, however, clear that it will not suffice simply to think of *ubuntu* (accepting the validity of that property on the basis of Godsell's 1983 research) as equivalent to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'World 4' or the value of collectivism. The findings of this research suggest that the values of black people will have to be controlled for income group and industrialisation, and there is no reason to suppose that this is not equally true of the values of white South Africans.

However, the data gleaned in this research cannot properly be used to propose a comprehensive alternative model. The items in the questionnaire were designed with very specific constructs in mind. To use this set of construct-specific data for the purpose of proposing a comprehensive set of constructs would be fallacious. A questionnaire which would reveal radically different constructs (Lebart, Morineau & Warwick, 1982) would need a far more representative range of items.

Organisational culture

The findings of this research strongly support the view that, if the research instrument asks questions about the work-place, then it will elicit work-related values. Work-related values, it appears, strongly reflect organisational cultures. The strong subscription found in this research to 'Worlds' 3

and 4 can be best understood with reference to organisational culture, rather than ethnic or national culture. While this research did not reveal considerable differences between the values of black middle managers and supervisors and their white counterparts on the basis of questions relating to Hofstede's (1980; 1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1991a; 1991b; 1994a 1997) and Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) models, it did reveal fairly unequivocally:

- that within any particular racial group, there was a wide divergence of values, bespeaking a strong influence of individual values and/or sub-cultures;
- that a considerable proportion of South African middle managers and supervisors, regardless of race, subscribe to a loose value system approximating to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'World 3'; and
- that an almost as substantial proportion of South African middle managers and supervisors, regardless of race, subscribe to a distinct, but not entirely different, loose value system roughly equivalent to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'World 4'.

Since the subscription to these value systems appears to be regardless of race as noted in Table 2, it is proposed that what is being evinced here is acculturation into two kinds of organisational culture. Employees adapt to and are socialised into organisational culture. Authors such as Robbins (1993) have long recognised the reality of this process. The closest equivalent of 'World 3' in terms of organisational culture is Schein's (1996) 'operator culture'. It is unsurprising that middle managers and supervisors would develop the values most closely associated with 'operator culture'. This, after all, is what Schein himself found to be the pattern:

'The culture of operators is the most difficult to describe as it evolves locally in organizations and within operational units. ... The operator culture is based on human interaction, and most line units learn that high levels of communication, trust, and team-work are essential to getting the work done effectively. Operators also learn that no matter how clearly the rules are specified as to what is supposed to be done under different operational conditions, the world is to some degree unpredictable and one must be prepared to use one's own innovative skills. If the operations are complex, as in a nuclear plant, operators learn that they are highly inter-dependent and must work together as a team, especially when dealing with unanticipated events. Rules and hierarchy often get in the way of unpredicted conditions. Operators become highly sensitive to the degree to which the production process is a system of inter-dependent functions, all of which must work together to be efficient and effective' (1996: 13).

A review of the items in the present research, designed to test subscription to Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) 'World 3' makes it clear how close this is to Schein's (1996) 'operator culture':

- 'The best way to learn how to manage is by discovering the organisation's goals and values and making these your own;'

- 'Companies succeed best when managers and supervisors succeed in getting collaboration and co-operation in task performance among all employees;'
- 'The best managers are those who spend lots of time coaching, mentoring and developing their subordinates;'
- 'I focus on how things could be improved, dislike doing the same thing repeatedly, and get good results following inspirations and hunches.'

Positive responses to the items above would be consistent for a manager or supervisor in an operator culture, who relies on human interactions, high levels of communication, trust and team-work, and whose results depend on the performance of other team members and who finds rules and hierarchy creating difficulties in dealing with unpredicted conditions. The emphasis on interdependence spoken of by Schein (1996) is apparent.

The organisational culture which most closely approximates to the version of 'World 4' which finally emerged from the research was Handy's (1978) club culture, albeit with some modification. The club culture is typified by a spider's web (Handy 1978). The organisation which has this culture would probably have divisions of work based on functions or products. Binding these divisions would be lines of power and influence, reducing in importance as they get more distant from the centre. The 'club culture' is deemed by Handy (1978) to be an excellent one for speed of decision, and he suggests that it is found most frequently in the small entrepreneurial organisation. The speed of decision is thought to arise through an unusual form of communication, namely empathy, but the 'club culture', notes Handy (1978 : 27) 'can be a cruel culture if your empathetic guess is wrong'.

The following are the items in the questionnaire which relate to 'World 4':

- 'The best way to find out how to manage well is to find out about the nature and needs of the people you will be managing;'
- 'Companies succeed best when managers and supervisors are able to establish a culture of "co-creation" in the company as a whole, with ownership by all;'
- 'The best managers are those who relate well to the cultures, values and beliefs of their subordinates, and to their subordinates as people;'
- 'I like harmony and will work to bring it about, am good at seeing the effects of choices on people, and respond to peoples' values as much as to their thoughts'.

While there may be, it is proposed, only slender grounds for agreeing with Handy's (1978) notion that this culture is found most particularly in small entrepreneurial organisations, at least in a South African context (although that might indeed be the setting in which this culture is most likely to be effective), the elements which would appeal to someone who prefers the 'club culture' of these items is self-evident. The items also make it clear why subscription to this culture correlates better with a tendency to femininity than with a tendency to collectivism. The reliance on empathy as a mode of communication, predicted by Handy (1978), requires a great deal of concern for relationships, but the 'club culture' is as much about exclusion as about

inclusion, and is deeply power-focussed, so that the submersion of identity in a collective which is entailed by the value of collectivism is not really at issue.

It is proposed that 'club culture' is strongly represented in large South African organisations of the sort investigated in this study. Power is exercised from particular nodal positions, and advancement within the organisation depends upon becoming able vicariously to share in this power by 'joining the club'. Access into these 'in-groups' is not so much a function of collectivism as of particularised feminine values: not posing a threat to the person in power, a gift for 'guessing the mind' of the person in power, and endorsing that person's power. Robbins (1993) recognises selection as a process in the acquisition and perpetuation of organisational culture. What appears to be manifest here is a particularly perverse selection process. Hofstede (1991a: 97) has observed: 'Masculine culture countries strive for a performance society; feminine countries for a welfare society'. It is proposed that the South African manifestation of the 'club culture' creates welfare for 'in-groups' and relegates to the sideline questions of performance. It is held that this is easy to do in large organisations, and this culture is accordingly remarkably prevalent. Furthermore, it is held that this is consistent with the low incidence in the same research population of subscription to 'World 1' values, and masculine values, which favour the pursuit of competition and profit through individual performance.

It seems that this manifestation of the 'club culture' would appeal to managers who hold the values of Burger's (1995) 'clansman' manager. This is a relatively low-performing manager whose upward mobility appears to rely on admission to the 'in-group' at the node of power. Such managers need not be particularly collectivistic, it is noted: their corporate strategies entail seeking out the nodal 'in-groups' regardless of race, religion, or any of the other issues around which collectivities are usually built.

The same broad kind of manager was found in the United States by Blake & Mouton (1964). They propose the existence of the '1,9 managerial style', practised by the 'country-club manager', illustrated thus:

'From a 1,9 orientation, disagreement, negative emotions, rejection and frustration are to be avoided. Positive, harmonious and accepting relations are sought. The manager operating under a 1,9 orientation is very much concerned about his own acceptance. Unable to use stern or harsh methods of having his wishes acted upon by subordinates, the supervisor is likely to appeal to feelings and to reason' (Blake & Mouton, 1964: 66).

'A supervisor whose managerial assumptions are 1,9 might put it this way: "Meetings get people together to share ideas. Good relations can be cemented by free discussion. Quick and easy decisions often happen. If disagreement and conflict arise, it is better to table the discussion than to force the issue"' (Blake & Mouton, 1964: 64).

'Negative attitudes, if they do exist, are driven underground. Rather than expressing antagonism directly, the third party route of "gossip" tends to be the rule' (Blake & Mouton, 1964: 65).

Implications for South African management

There are substantial implications for affirmative action/employment equity programmes in South African organisations. It is implicit in Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) model that a prevalence of 'World 4' practices would ease the way of black supervisors and middle managers selected for accelerated advancement. Inasmuch as subscription within an organisation to 'World 4' however entails a 'club culture' occupied by managers who are 'clansmen', such accelerated advancement is actually likely to be impeded. It is proposed that such employees find themselves promoted to positions but denied access to the relevant 'clubs', and therefore to the vicarious power enjoyed within, and jealously guarded by, these 'clubs'. Often, they rapidly become disillusioned and leave the organisation (Roberts, 1997). Fuhr has stated:

'No matter how many blacks you place in managerial positions, if the environment is not receptive to their acceptance and advancement, the [affirmative action or black advancement] programme will fail dismally' (1992: 30).

This is supported by Thomas (1996a; 1996b).

In consequence, the pernicious effect of Burger's (1995) 'clansmen' who subscribe to Lessem's 'World 4' is apparently expressed not only in their own performance but also in the organisational culture – the 'club culture' – which they bring with them. In general, the effective implementation of affirmative action is problematic in South Africa, as Crous (1992) showed some time ago and Thomas (1996a; 1996b) notes more recently. It is suggested that some part of this failure is ascribable to 'club cultures' and the 'clansmen' who populate them.

Conclusion

The most important and direct implication for the African management movement of this research is that it will have to seek out a better model than Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) if it wishes to use that model to explain the cultural differences between managers from various race groups in South Africa. As it happens, Godsell's (1983) research brought the ethic of *ubuntu* to the surface, and Lessem's (1996a; 1996c) subsequent model has really added very little to the understanding that it is this ethic which sets apart the black culture from white culture in South Africa. However, in the work-place, traditional national and ethnic cultures become blurred. Burger (1995) has spoken of the difficulty in rigidly applying a cultural or values model with set features. It is contended that much of this difficulty arises from the interference of individual and circumstantial values. In the work-place, this is compounded by the interference of organisational values. Authors such as Hampden-Turner (1990) and Hofstede (1991a) have shown that there is a distinction to be drawn between national and organisational culture, and, although the latter is influenced by the former (Trompenaars 1993), there are certainly important factors other than national culture, internal and external, which will influence organisational culture (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Hofstede, 1985). In South Africa, Thomas & Bendixen (1997) have also queried whether a uniform national culture prevails, or whether it is more

pertinent to consider organisational cultures (and specifically management cultures) as being influenced by a multiplicity of ethnic cultures.

Many of the 'cultural differences' which preoccupy African management writers may be merely an expression of racism. It is not a white cultural value but racism on the part of white managers which has led to '... white managers' failure to try to get to know black employees as complete people' (Beatty & Harari, 1987: 104). Perhaps it would be fair to ascribe the failure of white managers to learn African languages, as called for by Alfred (1992), African practices, as called for by Mutwa (in Morgan, 1996), or African symbolism, to the fact that white culture has been dominant, and sheer convenience has made a degree of cultural laziness possible, but it is unlikely that this deficiency can really be blamed on European or North American value systems. It has yet to be proven that any such value system prescribes parochialism or jingoism. This is not of course to deny that there are racists who subscribe to European and Northern American culture; but there are racists also who subscribe to African culture and no doubt to other cultures too. To typify these cultures by the racism in them is fallacious.

The African management movement is caught between two broad impulses, as it is. On one side are the writers who would introduce into management the visible trappings of African culture, such as Mbigi & Maree (1995), who for instance speak of the use of special clothes and symbols as paralleling totemic emblems (*chidawo*) and mission statements (*mutupo*) to obtain a broad base of involvement for such initiatives, while on the other hand there are others who believe that the only way to 'Africanise' management is to introduce more African managers, such as Sachs (1996).

Once this debate has been resolved, African management thinkers are going to have to face the fact that industrialisation means, regardless of one's traditional cultural background, the adoption of a different value system, one more compatible with the reality of the industrialised work-place. It is here that the best results may be achieved by building from traditional culture rather than simply brushing it aside. In this respect Hofstede has argued:

'Many third-world countries want to transfer new technologies from more economically advanced countries. If they are to work at all, these technologies must pre-suppose values that may run counter to local traditions, such as a certain discretion of subordinates toward superiors (lower power distance) or independence of individuals toward in-groups (more individualism). In such a case, the local culture has to be changed; this is a difficult task that should not be taken lightly. Since it calls for a conscious strategy based on insight into the local culture, it's logical to involve culture-added localization in strategy formulations. Often, the original policy will have to be adapted to fit local culture and lead to the desired effect' (1980: 62–63).

The end is not to re-build tribal culture, but, in the words of Khoza (1993: 124) to produce the kind of

'eclectic corporate culture that recognises that European and other countries have had and will continue to have a lot to offer to the body of knowledge crucial for business and economic development',

in a way which does not treat traditional culture with disrespect.

Crucially, it will be important for a model of African management not to stereotype, and make assumptions on the grounds of presumed cultural preferences. To illustrate, a typical fallacy is that blacks prefer the humanities to the sciences. This notion overlooks the legacy of apartheid education, as Crous (1992) has pointed out. Perhaps the most pernicious stereotyping is to ascribe to all blacks the circumstantial values of labourers. Collectivism, for instance, is an important survival mechanism for labourers, especially in a society with high income differentials. The present research has shown that the same value is not predominant among black middle managers and supervisors. Whatever its tribal antecedents, it must be understood as being, at least, in part a circumstantial value, and may have to be rejected as stereotyping when it is used as a blanket description for all black employees.

Above all, proponents of African management must be wary of positing a set of values which are in conflict with the values which employees (regardless of race) will simply have to acquire if they are to succeed in the industrial work-place. This research has found a prevalence of the values associated with Schein's (1996) 'operator culture'. These values are racially neutral and are required for successful management in the operative parts of the organisation. If the African management movement takes a position which makes it impossible for organisations to establish the appropriate kinds of culture for competitiveness, then inevitably the African management movement will undermine its own credibility and have nothing to offer to its adherents other than a poisoned chalice.

Note

1. 'Black' in this article does not include members of the Indian or 'Coloured' groups.

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