Africa and knowledge production

Towards a new model in the African knowledge system

By

Drs. M. Staps & Dr. B.J.W. Pennink

University *of Groningen*
Faculty of management and organization

Aegis European Conference 2007

June 2007

University of Groningen
Postbus 8000
9700 AV Groningen
The Netherlands
0031503637178
m.staps@rug.nl & b.j.w.pennink@rug.nl

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Towards a new perspective

Drs. M.Staps
Dr. B.J.W.Pennink
University of Groningen

This paper provides a new perspective on knowledge production about Africa by applying insights from intercultural approaches in social science. Since the truth of science has been derived from a 'North-Atlantic' point of view, indigenous knowledge systems have been moved to the background. In this article, we state that knowledge systems and solutions are culture-based and argue that perspectives of the indigenous people should be included. We will illustrate the impact of our knowledge systems on the continent and continue towards a new method, which shows more respect for indigenous knowledge. This perspective consists of a combination of different elements provided by, e.g. Weick (1995), Pennink (2004) and Staps (2005), whereas the work of Terence Jackson (2004) is in the centre of the framework. The method will be explained in this paper by including an empirical example from a Tanzanian organization. This example will show that social science in future research can apply this method of knowledge production to several subjects and integrate knowledge from the African minds.

Key words:

- Africa
- Science & knowledge systems
- Culture
- Terence Jackson
- Perceptions

Introduction

In this article we will introduce a new framework, which is different from the North Atlantic truth of science. This framework attempts to take the context as well as values, beliefs and manners of the continent into account and consists of different elements, which we combined. Within this article, examples are mostly derived from organizations, as this is our expertise. Nevertheless, this method should be tested in other social scientific research as well, in order to show this method could work in different fields.

The work of T. Jackson (2004) will be the centre of the framework, where perceptions of the indigenous people play an important role. In the international journal of cross-cultural management (2006, volume 6:5-13), Jackson summarizes the contributions of articles written from a cultural perspective, which takes indigenous knowledge into account. Unfortunately, few articles do focus on the indigenous context and few researchers attempt to provide alternative paradigms or methodologies for the understanding of the cultural perspective and the context dependent knowledge. This, in our view, especially is the case on the African continent.

We will start this paper with a description of science, where after we continue with the African context related to knowledge systems. After this, we will expatiate about the cross-cultural difficulties concerning knowledge production and explain the important role of perception. Our method is based on the method and model of T. Jackson, which will be explained in the next part. We will contribute to this new model with the help of an empirical example, which is derived from a Higher learning institution in Tanzania in 2005. After the introduction of this model, we will summarize the main points of the method developed so far, as we experienced ourselves in the Tanzania-experiment, but also give arguments why we think the model has perspectives to help African science to develop its own knowledge system, where there is space for indigenous knowledge systems as well and which could be a new perspective and method for all observing sciences.

The dominance of western science

Science knows so many aspects, that giving a solely definition is impossible. Tribes and nations have interpreted science differently and definitions have changed within nations in different era *(Bernal, 1971).* Science cannot be mentioned as a fixed concept, but rather should be seen as a process of growth, where several methods- related to questions, solutions, verifications and contexts- are developed. Science as well, should be seen as an accumulation of ideas, constructed from experiences and actions from the past and derived from different persons and locations. The results are not statically whereas theories, laws and facts are criticized and sometimes falsified. Despite of this construction of falsification, the whole of science becomes bigger, as science is constantly in repair, but at the same time in exertion.

A very typical aspect of science is the fact that the results of science are formalized in written concepts. Results and observations of practical actions are written down in books and articles, where people can refer to and the knowledge can be shared. On the one hand, this focus on written results of science is very helpful for progress, while on the other hand we could argue that science is restricted to certain kind of groups within society. When we look to the concept of science worldwide, we can see that some whole nations have been excluded, as they didn't have writing but oral traditions and were not able to share the knowledge or provide the scientific world with their knowledge. This is still a problem for development countries, as illiteracy is high, which causes running behind time. Besides the problem of illiteracy and oral traditions in most development countries, the lack of technique is also a cause of running behind time. Whereas North-Atlantic countries have libraries – in reference to the written tradition-, and almost every individual a computer and internet access, information sharing and gaining knowledge from different perspectives goes much more quick here. The **crucial** difference in learning processes between Africa and the colonial powers was the oral and the writing tradition of knowledge. This had many consequences, whereas literacy plays an important role in how knowledge is received and how it will be produced. From an economic perspective, we can say this is one of the main reasons why Africa is behind in their development. As Jack Goody (1977) put it: *'…it permits a kind of consistency that oral culture cannot and does not demand. Write down a sentence and it is there, in principle, forever; that means if you write down another sentence inconsistent with it, you can be caught out'.*

In terms of progress science as an institution is very important in North Atlantic countries. This role of science is less important in African countries, as science is not very imbedded in their society. This is caused by several reasons. First of all, people in development countries have other things on their minds. In the hierarchy of needs *(Maslow, 1943),* people are still in the level of deficiency needs, which are based on survival. As these needs are not sufficiently met, people in development countries- in general- don't have the opportunity to fulfill the growth needs. Secondly as said before, illiteracy still is high which is caused by the low priority education did get in the last centuries. These first two points are related following a Tanzanian PHD-student who we interviewed concerning this subject. He said:

'Tanzanian *people look different to education. For them formal education is the only way to get a good job and get a better life. Therefore, the interest in the education is different, more functionalistic. It is a mean to get a better life and not an intrinsic motivation to explore knowledge. Getting the papers is the main goal. As I observe myself, this is different in Western countries, where people are really eager to learn more, discuss the topics and theories and not - like Tanzanian students do- just take the knowledge as given and copy this in their minds in order to get the paper'. In my country, the question 'how to create knowledge' is not there. They*

feel the knowledge is already there, handed over by generations. The awareness of reading related to thinking is hardly there. (Interview with Camillus Kassala, PhD student at the University of Groningen and teacher at a Higher Learning Institution in Tanzania)

The last argument we will give is that knowledge is culture-related. As African countries have oral traditions while their institutions have North Atlantic knowledge systems, it could be there is a mismatch in the African society concerning the production factor of 'knowledge'. Traditional cultures did not develop awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets, which is highly developed in scientifically oriented cultures (Wilson, 1970, p153). The differences between traditional religious theory of African societies and the theory of sciences of North-Atlantic countries, reside as well in the social organization of inquiry; they are products of different kinds of social organization. *'Experimentation, the publication and reproduction of results, the systematic development of alternative theories in precise terms do not exist in oral traditional cultures where knowledge is not questioned but adopted from elders'* (Kwame Anthony Appiah)[1]. The African logic and their function in explanation and prediction was the same as the North Atlantic logic, only they differed from natural science in being persons and not being material powers, which is common in the North Atlantic truth (Horton, R.1967)[2].

Emeke Manuwuike (1978) says the following towards these differences in educational traditions: *'…the present educational system in most parts of Africa is alienating the educated Africans from their heritage. The system is divorcing its participants from the society it purports to be preparing for. This is due part to the colonial mentality which has conditioned many Africans to think white and to look for some extra-African raison d'être in their native African environmental phenomena'. ….. 'The foundations of African education were primarily designed to strengthen Africa's service to Europe. Based on European ethnocentrism, illusions and myths of savagery about Africa, a purely paternalistic education was perpetuated.* In his book, Manuwuike shows how the civilizing mission of European countries failed in terms of contemporary Africa's cultural renaissance. According to Manuwuike, Africans now, are becoming aware that '*in order to move faster in this world, they must go back in history to recapture their originality and to gain momentum'.* Africa's dilemma is rooted in the crisis of identity, as there was no significant relation between African education and their cultural traditions. The average African today, whether educated or not, has a confused sense of values, which has torn him between worlds. (P.U.Okeke)[3]

[1] Derived from the book: Knowledge Culture (Hamminga, B.)
[2] Derived from the book: Knowledge Culture (Hamminga, B.)
[3] Derived from the book: Dysfuntionalism in African education (Manuwuike, 1978)

The development of Africa's knowledge system

When Europeans colonialized the African continent centuries ago, the two different knowledge and thought systems met each other. Traditional African ways of reasoning were very different from the dominant North Atlantic approach. In the article of Millar (2004), we see that systems concerning agriculture, development of health care, education and organizational design, were introduced by Western technologies, in order to substitute traditional practices. When introducing these systems, the colonializers helped Africa developing their knowledge, but didn't take the habitus and systems of the local people enough into account. In the article of Yoweri K. Museveni, this is shown by several examples from agriculture in Uganda. Museveni shows that colonizers in some ways failed to help the African countries develop because of lack of knowledge on contexts and non-foreseen side effects. On the other hand, Musenveni shows that African countries learned a lot from the colonizers through the introduction of new medicines, pesticides and so on. By slowly accepting these unfamiliar introductive products from Western countries, as well as the introduction of money, Africans learned that knowledge could also be derived from another source than only from the elders and ancestors (Museveni)[4].

In classical Africa, education was meant for use, not for knowledge for knowledge sake or knowledge production. Knowledge came from the elders, who handed this over to their children by telling the stories of their elders. Europeans changed this educational philosophy.

The educational systems in African countries were copied from Western oriented educational systems, where the accents in African education concerning own cultures and habits were partly neglected. David Scalon said the following towards this[5]: *'The design for Africa's educational structure was conceived in the educational offices of Paris, London, Brussels, and Rome, refined by dozens of local governors, and executed by thousands of educators working in the field'. … 'Most of these expatriates were first imperialists, merchants, adventurers, or gospel preachers before they were educators. The educational system may be described as the blind leading the blind. The African was blind as to the intent and purpose of the Western educator; likewise, the educator was blind to the aims of education, curriculum content and environment'.* By this, Scalon points out that as a consequence, the educational system that evolved developed with the dogmas of colonial powers is neither African, nor wholly European. Manuwuike (1978) points out that Africans did not see European education as a value itself; they saw it only as a new trick to make money. This point made by Manuwuike in 1978, was confirmed by our African Interviewee (2007) from Tanzania who as well stated this functionalistic view towards education. Education in Africa is seen as *consumptive* instead of *productive.*

[4] Derived from the book: Knowledge Culture (Hamminga, B.)
[5] Derived from the book: Dysfuntionalism in African education (Manuwuike, 1978)

A difficulty for the Africans towards the implemented educational system was the language in which education was given. This, in some African countries, was not the mother language, which could have had negative effect on understanding. This point, as well as the point of European curricula and topics could have resulted in the fact that students had little interfaces with the education, which also had its consequences for the production of knowledge. As Bittinger (1941) put it: *'The African was not asked generally whether he favored the changes taking place in his country. He was trained only to assist in them. The church was bad enough, but the school was worse'.* As Africans were ignorant and saw, besides church and education, medical and technical aspects brought to their nations by the colonial powers, they had a feeling there should be something good in this in terms of progress and followed the colonial powers likewise. This system of education, as an unforeseen result, was destructive for the social cohesion, which played such an important role in Africans societies where education took part in communities from elders to children (Bittinger, 1941). The students who got the chance to study, didn't learn in the first place how to think, but learned how to do European work in an African way, more in an assistance manner. They were taught from without rather than from within, away from its own people rather than to and for their people. This caused alienation to the educated, far away from their own people. A research executed in 1977 by Manuwuike confirmed this alienation, by asking to what degree their education has hindered them from understanding and relating to their own local townspeople at home. 55% of the 390 respondents answered 'very much'. According to Camillus (Interview 2007), this split between educated and non-educated Africans, can still be seen in African countries.

Heinink and Koetsier (1984)[6] as well as Altbach (1978,1982)[7] point out most development countries had bad education systems as colonial systems didn't invest much in education during their power as education was given from two ruling principles: Religion or educating a very small elite in order to fulfill administrative functions in the colonial politics. Szirmai (1994) learns us more about the development of education in development countries. He states that the level was low, and the curricula of higher education were mostly based on social science, languages and administration (dependant on colonializer). Empirical data in his book teaches us that in 1960; only 2.5% of the GDP was spent on education. In 1989, this has risen to a level of 4.7%; between 2000 and 2002 this was 4.19% (www.nationmaster.com/graph/edu_edu_spe-education-spending-of-gdp).

[6] In Ontwikkelingslanden; Dynamiek en stagnatie (1994), Szirmai, A.
[7] In Ontwikkelingslanden; Dynamiek en stagnatie (1994), Szirmai, A.

The current Sub-Saharan African countries are a mixture of North Atlantic knowledge systems, which we above all can find in the organizations and institutions combined with an indigenous way of reasoning in family matters. These two often are conflicting with each other (Hamminga, B. 2005) and is very different from the North-Atlantic societies. Geert Sanders (2006)[8] helps us to explain how these differences in society work; although individuals are unique, their images are highly influenced with what is called: the collective mental programming. This programming is built up by *symbols* of a culture, their *heroes*, their *rituals* and eventually their *values and basic assumptions*. These four together results in norms, values and role models within a society, a culture or an organization. As this collective mental programming is very different among different cultures, especially intercultural research is highly sensitive. This as well, is a problem in knowledge production in Africa, as research in the past mostly has been done by foreign researchers.

Gaining knowledge about Africa

As knowledge systems are different, the question raises who should set the rules of science and whose images should be used in analyzing the problems of a continent. In order to understand the problems of a continent, first of al, history is said to be important. These histories come to life by findings (and interpretations) of archeologists, as well as by written documents or drawings. Since African people in the past had oral- instead of writing tradition, little is known about the societies, which came into existence. Although anthologists did great effort to study the African tribes and society, the history of Africa before the colonial period concerning knowledge systems is not very specified. This makes understanding the present of Africa more difficult. As *Davidson* says: '*To understand the African present, it is necessary to understand the African past'.*

Another important issue in understanding and developing knowledge about the African situation is to understand the culture and the people who are living there. This second point is a difficulty in science within the African context, since most research is executed by researchers who grew up in a different culture and context. Van Binsbergen (2003) wrote about this issue in his convincing book '*Intercultural encounters'*. He states that 'it isn't possible to describe or understand knowledge, while we are not taking part in the processes. Anthropologists, when studying a culture, learn they should stay objective, and therefore, should not mingle too much in the observing culture or process. As a consequence, the researcher will describe the culture or process through his own perspective. We argue that the results of these finding, will rather be more subjective since the researcher has a non-understanding and non-feeling with the culture or process and will easily make the wrong interpretations. And wrong interpretations can lead too

[8] G. Sanders gave this lecture based on his book 'Bedrijfscultuur: diagnose en beinvloeding (1999, van Gorcum)

wrong solutions. Bourdieu his theory concerning *Habitus* (1988) is related to this as well. Every society, organization as well as individual develops a certain habitus, which can be seen as a certain way of observing, thinking as well as the manner of dealing with life. This habitus is inscribed in the bodies of individuals and causes differences in perspectives towards situations. As the cultures and languages throughout the African continent are diverse, the habitus of the African people can be called different within the continent but above all different from the habitus of Western people (Hofstede, Jackson and Blunt & Jones).

Ahiauzu (1986) describes this African habitus with a focus on thought-systems by following Kant, Durkheim, Hanson, Cole and Levi-Strauss. He refers to the following explanation by Levi-Strauss: '…Traditional and scientific thought systems simply represent different "strategies" by which man makes nature accessible to inquiry'. Levi-Strauss stated that both thought systems, create coherent systems and seek objective knowledge. 'Both proceed by ordering, classifying and systemizing information. Both create coherent systems. The only difference is the "material" used for thought' (Ahiazu). According to Ahiauzu, the African thought system is characterized by the use of symbols and the high degree of harmony among elements within the system, which make it hard to subtract one item from the whole. Ahiazu also refers to the common-sense knowledge, which in Africa is based on the social thoughts, whereas theoretical thinking in the African thought system is "mystical thinking". Where Western people explain by science, Africans explain by referring in a structural manner to gods and spirits.

Most of the extensive anthropological researches in Africa have been carried out a few decades ago (by Western scientists). Therefore we wonder to what degree this "mystical thinking" is still the case in Sub-Saharan African countries. Even now, researchers refer to the work of – for example- Levi Strauss, while Africa has been exposed to so many external influences last decades. Will these theories still hold? And what differences in thought systems is presently there? We hope this will become clearer through future research, especially for the African people who are dealing with science themselves in order to find the best of both worlds to expand the African knowledge.

How to gain knowledge as an outsider? A serious brain twister!

The facts are, that still, illiteracy in Africa is high. Combined with the fact that people who are literated, often don't have a degree in higher education, the result is that little knowledge production is derived from Africans themselves. On the other hand, there has been done research by Western scientists, which is called cross cultural research.

For a Western researcher, research in Africa can be very difficult, because of the following brain twister: How can a Western researcher, as an outsider, get objective knowledge about Africa? And more important: What is objectivity in this case? Should the results correspond with the objectivity of the North Atlantic knowledge system? Or should the objectivity of the North Atlantic perspective take the habitus into account, or should the results be a reflexion of the African truth? This brain twister is a difficulty for every Western researcher, conducting research in the African context. The brain twister especially comes forward when the researcher- thinking about the best method- comes to the conclusion while thinking he is influenced by his Western-thinking process, which means he is not the right person to draw a correct conclusion. This thinking difficulty might be one of the causes that little efforts have been done to develop a method, which deals with the problem of developing a valid method in intercultural research.

That observing by non-intermingling (v Binsbergen) might not be the most objective approach deserves more attention in current ideas about analyzing problems in Africa. The conclusion can be made, that the habitus and thus, the perceptions of Western people and most Africans do differentiate to a large extent. We state that research in social science in Africa, needs a different methodological approach, in order to change assumptions about reality. In terms of North Atlantic science, this method is called: *the actors approach* (Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997*)*. The actors approach states that the whole is understood by the characteristics of its parts, in which knowledge is dependant on the actors and assumed to be independent of its observers. This means that the knowledge is derived from the actor, instead of derived from the observer. *Arbnor and Bjerke* (1997) say the following about this: The reality assumed by the actors approach, exists only as a social construction, which means that it is not dependent of us, its observers. Reality is thus regarded as consisting of a number of finite provinces of meaning that are shared by a larger or smaller number of people. These different provinces have separate socio-cultural significances. The finite provinces of meaning can overlap to varying degrees. The overlapping parts constitute common parts of reality for an inclusive group of people, which may be an organization or an entire society.

When a Western scientist executes a research, we suggest using the actors approach. This is a labour-intensive method, because of the different perspective on reality (habitus) towards the observing material. Within the actors approach, the intercultural researcher should not observe a certain process, organization or society but rather gather perceptions of the indigenous people. Although this has been done in several researches, the mistake of first gathering data through the indigenous people followed by conclusions drawn / consultations given by the intercultural researcher has often been made. Interesting would be what priorities, consultation and solutions the people themselves see after they are confronted with the results and analysis of the research.

This is more in line with the actors approach. But still not all of the problems are solved. If we listen well to a senior staff member of an institute of higher education and working on his PhD:
'*The problem with science in African countries at the moment is not that we do have an oral tradition. We indeed do have an oral tradition, but this has changed tremendously in last decades. In educated environments, there exists a writing tradition for a long time already. The point is that often this writing is done in their own language, which is not the scientific language in the world. Sharing this knowledge and following former researches or comparing researches then becomes more difficult'.* This means that researchers are again confronted with different perceptions about the same situation.

The role of perceptions in knowledge systems

In the former analyses of knowledge systems, habitus and the history of colonialized Africa, we saw that perceptions related to knowledge systems are very important towards behavior of people. By explaining how perceptions work, and how these perceptions interact, we will start to get an idea how important it is to take perceptions of the objects researched into account, especially in cross cultural research.
Weick (1995) created an excellent contribution in theory about perception within organizations. In his work *'sense making in organizations'* he focuses on how people within an organization create diversity through their individual perceptions. Perceptions are created by selecting active elements into a certain frame, where after the individual is able to value this frame. First of all, Weick explains in his book how sense making is created within the individual. People get input from other persons in their so-called 'framework', which enables them to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict (Starbuch & Milliken, 1988, Sense making in organization, p4) where after they can make a conceptualization and perception on a subject. "*Individuals anticipate where after they can make assumption which can serve as predictions to the future*" (p4). Sense making doesn't only consist of individuals, but of groups as well. Norms, cultures, existing structures and values play an important role in this. Therefore, sense making never stops, since values, structures, norms and eventually cultures change. Also Weick explains to us that sense making is influenced by social aspects and is grounded in identity. Sense making is done within the individual, but within this individual, there will always be an audience and the monologue within the individual changes when the audience changes (p.40). When we start thinking about sense making in organizations, Weick explains that not only individuals' identity, but also organizational identity plays an important role as well. Porac et al. (1989) say the following towards this: "*Human activity is portrayed as an ongoing input-output cycle in which subjective interpretations of externally situated information become themselves objectified via behavior…This continual objective-subjective transformation makes it possible eventually to generate interpretations that are shared by several people… over time, individual cognitive*

structures thus become part of a socially reinforced view of the world" (p78, in sense making in organisations*.).*

We as well believe that knowledge about perception is very important in coordinating organizations, although we must note within this believe, the observation statement about observation made by Weick: "…. describe not perceptions, but planned perceptions. Data are not given by experience, but by the concept of the language used to interpret it" (p107, sense making in organizations)

Weick his work is of much value, but unfortunately, he leaves the perceptions itself, as well as how to deal with differences in perceptions out of his analysis. Pennink (2003) has written a good contribution to these missing subjects. Pennink writes about perceptions and the importance of dialogue and coordination for situations in which managers together want to manage and cooperate. In his work 'Managen met beelden' (managing with images) he discusses the role of perception within organizations. He argues that managers in an organization have different perceptions towards the same physical environment, the same situation or an organizational goal: every individual creates his own images, based on his history and interpretation. Perceptions of individuals are also related to change. As things are moving and become innovative in the world, gradually, the perceptions in the mind of the people change. Organizations don't exist without people, nor do societies, which leads to the conclusion that organizations as well as societies are always in transition. Pennink created a model in which all these perceptions or images can come together in order to compare the images systematically. This model can be useful when organizations want to have better cooperation among its staff. Through creating a common image and get awareness of other images, as well as awareness about perception of images of images (looking into another one's head and by doing this, create a perception for another individual which is not tested by asking if this image of an image is correct) cooperation can improve much according to Pennink.

Although Penninks theory is specified towards management teams, the design- to a certain extend- could be used in the methodology of African knowledge production as well. Pennink stresses that managers have very diverse perceptions towards different concepts, while it is important in a management team to create one policy. Therefore, Pennink argues 'inclusion' and the discussion about 'inclusion' in management teams is very important. This 'inclusion' is a very useful term for future cross-cultural research.

The African perceptions as the base of a new knowledge system

This article is specifically meant to present our efforts towards an inclusive method of African knowledge production. In the next part, we will present and explain this method, starting by analyzing the work of Terence Jackson.

Terence Jackson (2004) developed a method of analyzing management and change in Africa in his book 'Management and change in Africa' (2004). Although his method is specified towards the management sector, we believe this method can work for other areas as well. *'Jackson'* his point of departure, is the view of the people from within an organization itself. In this way, researchers can learn from the organization and by describing their views, it will help to show the organization where diversity is between different groups. Measuring and comparing perceptions is one of the best ways to do cross-cultural research according to Jackson. But how can we capture these perceptions? How can we find the perceptions without using an ideal type of a system or organization? Jackson found a manner of capturing all this by listening to the voices of different groups of the community. He asks the working-community questions on subjects on the following dimensions:

- The way things are (which means the current situation)
- The way things ought to be (which means the ideal of the individual)
- The way things are going (which means, the way how things are changing and are to be like in the future)

Jackson dedicates his work to African organizations and finds this is a neglected area. Jackson argues that western organizations can learn from African organizations and this 'learning processes' are not only the other way around. More and more authors recognize this perception of Jackson the last decade and fortunately, more research has been done in the area of cross-cultural research.

In his work, Jackson writes about cultural crossvergence, which results in a number of hybrid systems, some of them are adaptive to their context and some are maladaptive. In his view, it is important to understand the dynamics of hybridisation and to learn from the successes of those adaptive organizations, but also learn from the shortcomings of those that are mal-adaptive. Organizations need to become 'meaner and leaner' and globally competitive in the future.

An interesting article in relation to Jackson's method is: '*Observations, indigenising organizational change: localisation in Tanzania and Malawi*' (Journal of Managerial psychology, vol. 16). In this paper, observations are done through narrative accounts about various scenarios where people live in and they come across in daily work life. They hereby identify "windows of opportunity" for genuine organizational development. Their starting point is not a western theory, since this would

be un-Afro centric. Conclusions are that individuals place social achievement above personal achievement. In a research to the reaction on personal promotion individuals were very negative. They would discourage this, since one should not encourage others to do better than oneself. Factors, which could explain this, are traditional factors, as disrespect for an established organizational hierarchy and reserving of encouragement for family and friends (collectivism). This ambivalence between self-promotion (individualism) and social motivation, possibly fuelled by global pressures, suggests a dynamic conflict. Individuals are fixated on meeting material needs because of insecurity of the economy and do still think too much in societal terms instead of individual development. Their community pride is more important than individual goals of development, which also will reflect in the perception towards knowledge in the African mind. Our hypothesis is that collective knowledge (through oral tradition) is more important than individual knowledge production. If our hypothesis is correct, knowledge production becomes has another disadvantage in Sub-Saharan African countries. This is also confirmed by Millar (2004): 'As local knowledge and values still form the main driving force for rural people's decisions on land use, food production, community management, health practices, religious practices, teaching, learning and experimenting, these should be seen as the main point of articulation for development activities and development workers'.

By showing one of the most famous cross-cultural researches, executed by *Blunt & Jones (1992),* we would like to elucidate our method to a further extent. Blunt & Jones said the following about perceptions, focussed on staff within organizations (p.278): '*An individual's perception of his job and work in general is substantially determined by the stock of cultural values and norms he has acquired from his living environment. Traditionally, theories of motivation at work have placed little emphasis on the perceptual set which the individual brings with him to the work place, preferring instead to analyse in detail those characteristics of the workplace itself and the job to be performed which have some bearing on the individual's performance'.* We do agree here with *Blunt & Jones*; analysis of staff in organizations should not only being focussed on processes and the increase of productivity. Researchers should take the personal situation and its culture into account. In our method, we try to capture perceptions without adding a value by ourselves. Blunt & Jones are right in their analysis, but should have exaggerated more about the value added to the result of research. By doing this, researcher will find out more about the African truth.

Empirical example in Tanzania

Introduction

In 2005, we executed a research in Tanzania, using an applied version of the theory of Jackson. The method in this research still wasn't perfect, as we didn't have enough experience in intercultural research yet. We will first give a little insight in the research executed, where after we

will summarize the most important points of this method. After this, we will give insights we got after the research was analysed. As the conclusion of this research was only for internal use, we will not discuss the content of this research into great detail, but focus on its method.

East-Africa; a research at a higher learning institution.

This higher Institution had the aspiration to become a university, while having a staffing problem, as the grades of their staff were too low to teach in a university. First of all, an organizational analysis was executed in order to get more background information and to find out what the real problem was. We got familiar with history, structure, finances and strategies through documents and the culture and habits were observed by being there and by talking with several people with different positions. We also did interviews with external organizations about higher education in Tanzania in general. We tried to create as many conditions as possible to gather the necessary information. On purpose, we choose to work within the organization itself, always opened our door to be able to observe and welcome everybody and lived with one of the staff members in order to gain more knowledge about the culture. All these small things helped us to create an as contextual best fitting research design, which, when looking back to the research, helped us to understand their culture in a better way and apply this as well in the research method. By trying to become a member of the organisation instead of being an outsider- as the anthropology often suggest- we had the feeling we were able to understand the differences in a better way.

The research on purpose was descriptive, as we felt we were not the right persons to draw conclusions from a culture so different from ours. Instead of giving advises ourselves, we tried to **capture the perceptions of the people** and **describe** these perceptions. After the pre-research, we constructed the research design, thought of best methods and made questionnaires. All these steps were discussed with several people from the organization; a time-consuming process, but well worth in terms of results. Also the definitions we used in our conceptual model were discussed, mostly starting with open ending questions. The **dialogue** was an important aspect in our research design. When all this was adapted, we started intensive interviews, as we wanted to purchase all interviews face to face. People were divided into groups, based on how far they were in their development in a way we were able to compare different groups on different dimensions. Furthermore, groups were compared concerning age, gender and position. This resulted in solutions, but solutions, which came from the people themselves.

The questionnaire was divided in questions about different aspects concerning staff development on a liquert scale, which were captured from pre-research, accomplished with (African) literature. From each aspect we asked respondents:

- The way things are (which means the current situation)
- The way things ought to be (which means the ideal of the individual)

- The importance of movement between the former two points (which gave measure on priority)

After the analysis of quantitative data, we purchased open qualitative interviews, which gave us more insights into the problems and where dialogue again was of extreme importance. With all this information we were able to compare the perceptions of different groups in their development as well as giving best solutions from the point of view of the people themselves.

Instead of asking the board of this institute to bring the differences in perceptions together as suggested by the method of Jackson, in this research the differences were described and compared but not taken together in one summary. If that had to be done, an open discussion should at least have been one of the possibilities instead of the board that summarizes and brings out one image. This is the first difference with the framework of Jackson. Not just the way the differences can be brought together but also a close look at the differences themselves results in a different view compared to Jackson's framework. In that framework their perceptions about "the way things are", "the way things ought to be" and perceptions about "how to come to the desired situation". Not just differences between these three can exist but also about each of these subjects themselves there might exist differences between those who are involved. In the model of Pennink (2004) the suggestion is given that there will also be differences between perceptions about the same situation. And also these differences in perceptions have to be discussed. The last difference between the theory of Jackson and our method is the question towards priority. As responded had to give a value to different aspects of staff development, we think it is as well important to find out where priorities are. Especially in cross-cultural research, as logic in African organizations can be very different from Western logic and the conclusions of the research without doing this, could easily be interpreted wrong.

Reflections on the research in Tanzania and consequences for the new model to be used in the African knowledge system

- A premise of knowledge production in Africa should be that the researcher has knowledge about the context of Africa. How far this contextual knowledge should go is dependent on the topic of research, but in most cases the knowledge should at least be about the countries economy, the culture, habits, organizational culture, structure and resources. By having background information about these concepts, plus the concepts relevant for the topic of research, will make the framework of the research more valid. Ideal circumstances would be that the researcher has lived in the country for a few months, in order to gain experience with people, habits, resources, structure and culture.

- Secondly, this method stresses that **perceptions** of the people researched are of extreme importance. Researchers in an intercultural setting are in most cases highly aware of their difference in background, but strangely enough don't take this point into account when it comes to research design. Often, existing theories are taken over in the design, without wondering how the actors in the situation of research look upon this research design and theories used.
- A flexible attitude during the whole period of research. As each organisational culture is different, there doesn't exist a best method or theories where an organisational research should be based on, it is important to stay flexible and adapt the research while executing it.
- The method as well as research design should not be fixed at the start of the research, as circumstances will always be different as expected.
- Problems as well as solutions should come from the people themselves, as they have different perceptions towards these concepts. Dialogue and an open attitude are important in this.

The main points of this method

The main point this method learns us, is the focus on the differences in perceptions of the people researched. By capturing their perceptions, indigenous knowledge will come to the surface and problem statements as well as solutions drawn, are coming from their minds instead of with the usage of the North-Atlantic theories and methods only. By making use of dialogue, North Atlantic and African perspectives can be combined, as well as oral and writing tradition can be combined. In terms of Jackson the knowledge about a situation should be constructed by finding out the perceptions concerning "the way things are", "the way things ought to be" and perceptions about "how to come to the desired situation". In our terms we add to this that a dialogue should be created with those who are involved about these perceptions and also about the differences between people about the three different aspects of that situation (the things they are, the things etc). Taken into account that all these perceptions can create a balance between the Western and African knowledge system.

Ndiritu Muriithi, contributes to this a bit more in detail in the International Journal of Project Management (Volume 21, Issue 5), which in both the books of the famous researches on Africa (*Hofstede* and *Blunt and Jones)* cannot be represented enough. Muriithi says that cultures vary from country to country, as well as within countries. As a result, values at work and in social settings will vary accordingly. '*Personal choices and work values are culturally dependent*. *Central to validity of cross-cultural management concepts, is the supposition that these variations can be measured, or at the very least represented'*

Conclusion: To crossvergence in science

Knowledge production is a very important aspect in developing a country. Economically, African countries run behind time, which among other reasons, can be explained by how knowledge about Africa has been produced in the past. In order to get Africa involved in the global economy in the future, it will be necessary that knowledge production will become bigger, while produced in an African way. Logically, it would be best if there would be more indigenous scientist on several subjects in Sub-Saharan Africa in the future. This is difficult because of the fact these countries are development countries with (higher) education only available for a small number of people. Fortunately, education is one of the most important targets in the millennium goals, which results in much expenditure on education. We hope in this trend, African countries will not dread to develop their own ways in education instead of simply adopting North-Atlantic ways of science. The African manner of reasoning is different; they should not neglect this and simply copy North-Atlantic ways of reasoning, as this in the longer run will not lead to sound solutions. African countries should think what would bring development to them in terms of knowledge production. Is this oral or writing knowledge? Both systems have advantages and disadvantages. African countries do have a heritage of the colonial times and adopted their systems in the post-colonial systems, also in relation to education; this historical fact cannot be erased. On the other hand, it has become clear after some decades, that simply adopting North-Atlantic systems does not work because of differences in cultural background and especially differences in thought system and knowledge transfer systems. In the current African situation, institutions of knowledge are ones with writing tradition, whereas the culture of the African people in their private lives, still hold on to the oral system of learning from elders and ancestors. These two often are conflicting with each other, especially concerning knowledge production. Western science is based on theories which are encouraged to falsify. African theories, are not encouraged to do this as truth of ancestors is highly respected and taken as it comes. In African society it is socially not accepted to raise objections towards a colleague's or persons knowledge (especially not if the person is older), as a result of poor collective societies where people need each other to survive as well as a result of the knowledge being adopted from the ancestors, which knowledge is the truth from their perspective.

'When two cultures meet, a blending may result in some new crossed-form of values. The "crossvergence" perspective recognizes the importance of economic ideology and national culture, and the interaction between the two. "Crossvergence" results when an individual incorporates both national culture and economic ideology influences synergistically to form a

unique value set supported by either national culture or economic ideology' (Raltson 1999)[9]: This crossvergence thinking can also be applied in adapting the African knowledge system, especially through dialogue. Important in this is, that African knowledge will be produced in English as well, in order to be able to keep the dialogue ongoing between Western and African scientists, in order to reach inclusion.

Therefore, we state it is necessary to think of ways where African and North-Atlantic implemented manners of knowledge and knowledge production can meet each other. While the production of knowledge is still little, there is much knowledge. We believe Jackson contributed by his method by bringing the two systems closer to each other. Capturing people ideas and thought on several subjects in an oral manner, writing them down in the writing tradition of science, and discuss these results and differences of perceptions with the referents in order to write this down again. This mixture of systems will bring the Africans closer to its own traditions, while producing knowledge at the same time, which will result in *inclusion.*

According to our interviewee of an institute of higher education in Tanzania, there is becoming more awareness of indigenous knowledge these days. The question only is: how to apply this impact in combination with Western knowledge? And how to change the attitude of Africans towards knowledge in such a way that the positive value of both systems will survive. In this paper, we tried to create a framework for this, for which we believe can partly help answering this question.

Limitations of this paper

This paper is situated in the context of discovery. So we can't prove our ideas and we still have to develop them further on. We hope that discussions about this paper will help us to find out in which directions we have to develop our ideas.

[9] In: Diversity in Africa (p15), Mendelek Theimann, N & April, K. (2007, Palgrave macmillan)

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