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Cultural values: A conduit of shaping managerial thinking in Zimbabwe’s industrial relations

Farai Ncube

Human Resource Management Department, Midlands State University, Zimbabwe.

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Knowledge production remains a game of power. Over the years certain discourses have tried to naturalise and reinforce the position that world’s best practices are defined as Eurocentric and henceforth anything that is African is viewed as ‘traditional’, ‘barbaric’ and ‘bush’. The European ‘supremacy’ in knowledge production has been emphasised across disciplines and human resource (HR) management is no exception. It has been argued that ‘true’ human resource management policies were ‘invented’ by Europeans. This has however, fanned discord in industrial relations in Zimbabwean organisations. Employing a theoretical and literature review approach, this research critically explores the extent to which harmony and productivity can be achieved in Zimbabwe if managers adopt the ‘true’ Zimbabwean cultural values and allow them to shape their managerial thinking. This study contends that best HR practices are as old as humanity itself in the African society and Zimbabwean culture in particular. This study explores concepts such as, team work, quality circles, total quality management, works councils, respect, harmony, collective bargaining, which have been part and parcel of the Zimbabwean culture since time immemorial and which are important as markers of HR practices.

Key words: Culture, conduit, managerial thinking, industrial relations, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwe has come a long way in shaping its industrial relations climate, from the dawn of independence in 1980, the pangs of the economic structural adjustment program (ESAP) 1990 to 1996, the Zimbabwe programme for economic and social transformation (ZIMPREST) period, economic sanctions imposed on the country through the December, 2001 Zimbabwean democracy and economic recovery act passed by the American government, which helped to spur hyper - inflation, dollarisation and eventually the coming in of the inclusive government in February, 2009. Currently the indigenization and economic empowerment act (Chapter 14:33) seeks to empower the Zimbabweans to take majority control in all foreign owned companies, a situation that will further alter the industrial relations train. The call for indigenisation, demands the creation of indigenous knowledge in all disciplines human resource management included.

As such, this paper is timeously designed to support the government initiative of shaping the industrial relations climate that goes hand in glove with Zimbabwe’s national culture, ideology and thrust. Cultural values,
which are ‘purely’ Zimbabwean can help to shape and redesign managerial thinking, as the country thrives to take charge and control of the companies. We are indeed living in a globalised world, with the need to think globally but acting locally, benchmarking all HR practices, with the internationally recognised and accepted standards. However the paper undeniably highlights the Zimbabwean cultural values that can shape managerial thinking and maintain harmonious industrial relations system that is home grown just like that of the East Asian Tigers and the European countries. Incorporating cultural values into the industrial relations (IR) climate may result in the promotion of “ubuntu” an African flair and trade mark.

The current discourse in human resource management gives credit to the Europeans for having originated and modernized the human resource management concept (Beardwell and Holden 2001). The argument is that key human resource management concepts such as team work, quality circles, work ethic, commitment and loyalty historically belong to the Japanese culture and have become globalised in the human resource management discipline today. Afro-centric scholarship, however, submits that the discourses of saying concepts like teamwork, commitment and loyalty started in Asia and later Europe might be far from reflecting the truth. African scholars contend rather that these concepts were developed in Africa and have had a long presence on the continent albeit unwritten (Bhebhe and Vhiriri 2012). In light of that, one would be pardoned to contend that best human resource management techniques are as old as humanity itself on the African continent. Even Zimbabwe is no exception on the continent when it comes to the practice of best HR approaches. Such practices were and up to date remain anchored in Zimbabwe’s indigenous cultural practices. The paper therefore critically explores the industrial relations terrain in Zimbabwe looking at how the Zimbabwean culture can be used as a conduit of managerial thinking.

METHODOLOGY

The paper predominantly adopts a qualitative research approach, since it is a content analysis of relevant literature on cultural aspects and managerial principles in Zimbabwe. Employing a theoretical and literature review approach the paper looks at key Zimbabwean cultural aspects that can be used to inform managerial thinking by combining industrial relations concepts with these key cultural aspects. Literature on industrial relations, Zimbabwean culture and other management principles is analysed and the paper demonstrate the importance of understanding culture as a way to enhance good management of the employment relationship.

The interface of culture, managerial thinking and industrial relations

Broodryk (2006a;b) indicates that, Africa has a long history of colonial oppression by Western countries, which included forced Western prescriptions of destinies for communities and persons. Africans were confronted with forced adoption of Western political, religious and economic dogmas, which were in direct contradiction to the beliefs of Africans. Post colonial theorists such as Fanon, – Ndlovu and Sabelo (2009) contend that even years after independence, colonial hangovers continues to trouble African people and Zimbabwe has not been spared. The violence of colonialism continues to be reflected on how people behave and execute their duties in everyday life. Probably this supports the argument by the Ghanaian scholar Kwame Anthony Appiah that “the attainment of independence by African countries does not mean the colonial is dead. In actual fact, the colonial is far from being dead” (Appiah 1992). In light of Appiah’s assertion, it can be argued that most managers in Zimbabwe feel that the Western Models are best practices that shape industrial relations. May be this also reflects how the modernization/ dominant paradigm of development continues to influence African people’s way of doing things. Such management thinking rooted in the western domination and subjugation does not only sour our industrial relations climate but totally paralyses our African ethos. This view is supported by Kase et al (2011) who on explaining the importance of indeginising knowledge suggests that Japanese, Korean, Chinese and Indian management thinking are rooted in their respective tacit philosophical traditions.

Black conscious movement leader Steve Biko (1978:46) declared: “The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great still has to come from Africa - giving the world a more human face”. Indeed if managerial thinking is preoccupied by our true African culture and spirit, the employment relationship will be based on a human face where all stakeholders learn to co-exist, thus maintaining harmonious industrial relations. Thus the interface between culture, management thinking and industrial relations can be summed up by Broodryk (2005) who suggests that, the African personality embraces humanism and the art of being a human person. Embracing humanism and humanness is an indication that such a person has gained vast knowledge of the subject. Gaining human knowledge is primarily to learn about African humanism, which is wisdom. This concept can be used by Zimbabwean managers as a conduit of managerial thing in shaping industrial relations. Cultural values shape managerial thinking in any society. Ibhawoh and Dibua (2003) cite Nyerere’s philosophy of Ujamaa that was rooted in traditional African values of familyhood and communialism. The manner towards which managers behave is greatly influenced by their cultural values and practices. Thus any industrial relations legislation, policy and interaction between management and labour is highly influenced by culture. The interconnectedness of all these values gives face to industrial relations in Zimbabwe and world over. Thus according to this paper culture refers to the norms, values
and beliefs that are of a Zimbabwean origin, that explains the Zimbabwean way of doing things at the workplace and all facets of life.

Whose culture? The ‘Zimbabwean’ culture and the Industrial relations terrain

The concept of culture remains one of the highly contested aspects in scholarship over the years. There is no uni-vocality on what constitutes culture among scholars. Williams (1964) contends that culture is the banal implying that even the simplest things we do in our everyday life constitute our culture. So from this definition culture is the whole way of life. But culture is dynamic and not static. This argument is further supported by Hofstede (1980) who views culture as the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another, which is passed from generation to generation, thus changing all the time because each generation adds something of its own before passing it on. From the above views it becomes clear that everything about a society or a people is cultural hence the view that culture can be a conduit of managerial thinking to shape industrial relations holds water. Interestingly Hofstede (1980) further points out that, it is usual that one’s culture is taken for granted, just like how the African culture was equally taken for granted and got eroded through, colonialism and globalisation. Chimuka (2001) reminds us that studies on indigenous cultures in Zimbabwe, which were carried out by ethnographers before independence, were driven by Euro-centrism. He notes that the problem is not that the scholars were European; rather the problem lies in the fact that they subscribed to a Euro-centric conception of history that made them biased against Africans and their institutions. The same notion today in most Zimbabwean companies compels some managers to embrace European literature that is dominated by European values and ignore to revisit the Shona Ndebele culture, which can shape their thinking. This is largely through the availability of Eurocentric literature in virtually all training institutions. It is largely a problem of educational curricular, a situation that requires an immediate solution. Mulholland (1991) suggests that culture is a set of shared and enduring meaning, values, and beliefs that characterize national, ethnic, or other groups and orient their behaviour. From this stand point it becomes clear that culture shapes and orients individual behaviour in a nation, community or industry. Thus, the industrial relations system that can be adopted can be best explained by cultural values that explain individual behaviors in a particular society. This explains my main gist by underlining why managerial thinking in Zimbabwean companies can be enhanced by our Zimbabwean culture. Culture can therefore be used to generate and manage knowledge, which is considered as one of the strategic resource of the organization and this strategic resource can also be used for crisis management.

Culture is viewed at different levels ranging from the national cultural and organisational culture. Organisational culture can be understood as how the organization conducts its duties in everyday life. Hofstede and Usunier, (1999) indicated that national cultural value systems are quite stable over time; the element of national culture can survive amazingly long, being carried away forward from generation to generation. For most African nations this smooth passing of the baton stick from one generation to another has been thwarted by colonialism and globalisation. Colonialism is believed in a way to have helped to reinvented African culture, Hobsbawm and Ranger (2004). While the argument may hold water, I strongly believe for Zimbabwe this has been far away from reality since 100 years of colonialism has resulted in most people totally subordinating the Zimbabwean values to the Eurocentric values. Organisational culture is shaped mainly from the national culture and as such it shapes managerial thinking. Watson (2006) emphasises that an important trend in managerial thinking in recent decades has been one of encouraging managers to try to create strong organisational cultures, within their organisations and obviously this emanates from the national values and ideologies. In light of this O’Donnell and Boyle (2008) further reiterate that culture therefore gives organisations a sense of identity and determines, through the organisation’s legends, rituals, beliefs, meanings, values, norms and language, the way in which ‘things are done around here’, nonetheless influence harmonious industrial relations.

Industrial relations

Different scholars have come up with varied definitions of what constitutes industrial relations. Attempts to define industrial relations included the works of Flanders (1970) on job regulation, Dunlop (1958) with systems approach, Clegg (1979), Salamon (1998), Hyman (1975), Bendix (2003) among a host many others. Today industrial relations can be identified as work relations, employee relations, employment relations, and labour relations.

Flanders (1968) defines industrial relations as the study of institutions of job regulation. The same definition is also shared by Hyman (1975) who equally indicates that industrial relations refers to the study of processes of control over work relations. From these two definitions advanced by these scholars, it is interesting to note that they focus primarily on governing and exerting control over the work process. This therefore becomes crucial for our understanding of culture and how it therefore becomes part and parcel of industrial relations. Culture becomes the framework through which dynamics of
industrial relations can be understood. Control at the workplace is determined by the behaviour of employees and this behaviour is shaped by cultural values. Broodryk, (2002:56) suggests that: Ubuntu is an ancient African worldview based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family. If this exists surely it will be easy to manage the industrial relations. Gelfand (1981) identified a number of virtues upheld by the Shona, such as truthfulness, humility, love, compassion, self-control, forgiveness, mercifulness, sufficiency, trustworthiness, strength, courage and industriousness, among others. Such virtues can therefore form the fundamental base of industrial relations.

Farham (2002) notes that employee relations are the contemporary term for the field of study which analyses how the employment relationship between employers and employees is organized and practiced. This relationship is determined largely by the behaviors of both parties to the employment relation. Thus managerial thinking helps shape this relationship. In this regard fully adapting cultural values will be crucial to the success of the organisation. This is supported by Rousseau (1990) who suggests that organisational culture is made up of more ‘superficial’ aspects such as patterns of behaviour and observable symbols and ceremonies, and more deep seated and underlying values, assumptions and beliefs, which then can form the cornerstone of industrial relations.

Bratton and Gold (2003) defines employee relations are a set of human resource practices that seek to secure commitment and compliance with organisational goals and standards through the involvement of employees in decision making and by managerial disciplinary action. From this definition what is crucial to note is how managerial actions can help secure the commitment of all stakeholders in the employment relationship. To manage effective industrial relations there is need for Zimbabwean managers to go back to the cultural ‘roots’ that define and shape the behaviour of employees in an organisation. Regardless of the warning by Hall (1997) that, the aspect of roots is quite problematic since identities and culture in this post modern age has more to do with ‘routes’ than ‘roots’, this study strongly contends that it is imperative for the practice of industrial relations to go back to the cultural roots. That is they are more to do with where we are going than where we are coming from, this paper challenges that notion by invoking critical thinking on how culture can shape the new thinking in the process of developing indigenous knowledge. Blyton and Turnbull (2004) view IR as the collective aspects of relationships between the workforce and management. Thus, in managing this relationship culture which shapes behaviour becomes crucial. The same view is supported by Clegg (1979) who further reiterates that IR is the study of rules governing employment together with the ways in which rules are changed interpreted and administered.

According to the 2007 Zimbabwean culture policy, Zimbabwe has a rich cultural heritage built over a long period of time. The defeat of indigenous people by settler colonialists in the first Chimurenga witnessed some erosion of our traditions, values and religion. The policy further highlights that, colonialism wanted to create a black man with foreign cultural traditions. This argument is also reinforced by Fanon (1990) one of the celebrated African revolutionary thinkers. Fanon (1990) argues that one of the approaches employed by colonialism was to denigrate the African culture so that Africans felt ashamed and eventually shunned their culture. The same was also implemented in Zimbabwe, and post-colonial Zimbabwe finds itself in a quagmire with citizens who fail to appreciate their heritage. The rich Zimbabwean cultural heritage, which withstood this onslaught, has to be promoted and preserved as it defines Zimbabwe as a people within the global community, a situation that can sustain and enhance our Zimbabwean industrial relations system. Indeed these cultural values, norms, rituals and religion have managed to shape Zimbabweans as a people with own way of life, religion, beliefs and the way we relate to the environment. The Zimbabwean cultural systems and beliefs give the country an identity as a people and this identity defines us within the global context, the same identity that should mold and shape our industrial relations.

The 2007 Culture policy further highlights that, some of the traditional; values and beliefs seem to be disappearing owing to various factors, which include colonialism, urbanisation, globalisation and acculturation. The need to promote and preserve our cultural heritage has become more important in the face of the above factors. Concerted efforts have to be put in place to preserve this cultural heritage for posterity and to maintain it as a unique part of world cultural heritage. Against this background the paper explores on some of the cultural values that can shape managerial thinking and create a harmonious industrial relations system in Zimbabwean companies. Generally, culture has basically been viewed as particular way of life, shaped by people’s values, norms, beliefs, assumptions, traditions and social practices. These values and norms that govern people in their day to day lives should equally govern their working life and help determine industrial relations. WaThiong’o (1981) succinctly culture as a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavor to live and come to terms with their total environment. This translates to the work environment as well. Following this, the cornerstone of the Zimbabwean culture has been historically located in five distinct ethnics groups recognised in the country, Shona and Ndebele being the major ones, then Tonga, Venda and Shangani being the minor ones Msindo (2012).

It is worth noting however that the culture of Zimbabwe
has now been westernised. That is, it has been diluted and/or blended with the Western culture. Colonisation by the British with the aid of globalisation has led to what is referred to as culture acculturation. This means a ‘bastard’ culture whose parents or roots are not so clear and whose values are of mixed origins. In support of this Biko (1987) argued that whenever colonisation sets in with its dominant culture, it devours the native culture and leaves a bastardised culture. It is this bastardised culture that has misdirected some managers, who now believe in individualism, selfishness and corrupt tendencies in companies, in the process soiling employer employee relations.

Culture as an informant of management practice

Kramsch (1996) suggests that language plays a crucial role not only in the construction of culture, but in the emergence of cultural change. Language is essentially one of the most important aspects of the Zimbabwean culture; it basically forms the basis of people’s identity. People, for instance, become classified as Shona or amaNdebele because of the language they use. These two languages are the most commonly used in people’s everyday lives in Zimbabwe. In organisations, English is the language of business transactions and this has caused a lot of complications in the working environment because people fail to express themselves fully and the interpretation and understanding of English differs with individuals and thus presents serious challenges in proper communication.

The adoption and use of vernacular language can help boost high productivity and create good harmonious work relations. The use of local languages mainly Shona and Ndebele can help create meaning in the creation of a company code of conduct and other policy documents. As already highlighted people will better understand what is expected of them especially those with lower levels of literacy, mainly in the mining and agricultural sectors. The use of these languages will enhance common understanding to all parties in the employment relationship; as a result an enforcement written in vernacular is mostly likely to get compliance in return. Hyman (1975) indicates that industrial relations refer to the study of processes of control over work relations, indeed with rules and regulation designed in vernacular language it will foster mutuality in terms of understanding hence making culture a conduit of managerial thinking. This can be done through conscientisation of key stakeholders and through legislation, as in countries like Japan and France.

Reference can be made to the Chinese, Japanese and the French who stick to their languages which are used in their schools used as mediums of instruction. In as much as Zimbabwe gained political independence culturally the country is still under the yokes and shackles of colonialism. Appiah (1992) bemoans that the attainment of independence by African nations does not mark the end of colonialism. The colonial is far from being dead. He is supported by Zaffiro (2002) who bemoans that at independence the young nation Zimbabwe became pseudo heirs of the outgoing Rhodesian system. He further highlighted that from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe it was change without change, thus highlighting Foucault’s (1980) concept on discourse, power and knowledge which suggest that knowledge creation is a game of power and those that create knowledge remains powerful. So Africa or Zimbabwe needs to decolonize its knowledge systems and culture in totality. If this is properly done industrial relations in companies can be enhanced.

Ilima/Nhimbe (teamwork)

Within the context of the Zimbabwean culture there is an aspect of Nhimbe/Ilima highly valued that can help managers maintain a positive industrial relations climate. Nhimbe/iingga concept embraces the modern day (team work), in Shona and Ndebele respectively. There are different types of nhimbe, ranging from, nhimbe dzekurima (tilling), dzekusakura (weeding), dzekukohwa (harvesting). It is those nhimbe/iingga which sow the coining of African idioms, chara chimwe hachitswanyi inda (one thump cannot crush lice). Bhebhe and Viriri (2012) further explain the above proverb by indicating that a backed up cause is sure to succeed, suggesting that unity is strength. They were encouraging mushandi-rapamwe (team work). Individualism was discouraged. The African elders had seen that it’s actually cold outside. Thus a thorough understanding of how these concepts were practiced may help managers to maintain a positive industrial relations climate. By embracing these concepts in their original form can help mangers understand their colleges and their workers.

Constructive co-existence is a reflection of the possibility of effective team or community work. Stone, (2003) suggest that a sense of teamwork implies more commitment, and builds a momentum that leads to benefits like better problem solving, greater productivity, more joy from work or association, and a sense of purpose that is motivating and fulfilling. Nhimbe/iingga explains a situation whereby people in the community come together to partake or help someone in the field or any other work which need collectiveness. It is apparent that this kind of culture if properly rekindled can be a conduit of managerial thinking since it promotes oneness and togetherness in the contemporary organisations. In the organisational set up, this tells that if people work together productivity and harmony is guaranteed, whereby as team skills will complement each other, there will be one mutual objective, collective problem solving and sharing of ideas will be prevalent. Armstrong (2000)’s
assertion is found to apply where he argued that synergy is the best ingredient for increased efficiency. Effective teamwork is essential to the success of any business. As "no man is an island," the positive effects of productive teamwork can energize an entire organization, just as the negative effects of a lack of teamwork can cripple an organization, thus based on our own culture managerial thinking can be enhanced effectively, which can help during collective bargaining sessions, works council business, and productivity meetings.

A practical example could be drawn from Japan where teamwork is key and quality circles are an indicator of oneness. Interestingly because of Japan’s unbreakable culture of oneness it is one of the fast growing economies in the world, disputes rarely erupt and if ever they are encountered they are easily resolved (Beardwell and Holden 2001). Dessler (2004) viewed teamwork as a cost cutting strategy to the organisation, because individuals feel they are recognised if they belong to a particular group, as such become motivated, their moral boosted and high levels of commitment which this translate to high productivity in the organisation. In such instances conflict between management and employees become minimal if not none at all, no time lost for bargaining, dispute resolutions and reduced industrial action which might bring detrimental effects to the organisation’s performance, costs spent on arbitration and conciliation will be kept at minimal yet attention paid on attaining high profits. Based on the above argument I argue that since pre-colonial Africa/ Zimbabwe we had this principle only that it was not documented in books as Europeans did. So to say the concept was developed by Europeans; becomes a power game Foucault (1980).

Dare, enkundleni (participation and Involvement)

Another cultural aspect which informs managerial thinking in the context of increasing efficiency and attaining harmonious work relation is what in Shona is called dare or enkuhleni in Ndebele (male elders gather to discuss critical life issues). Under this practice men would gather in the evening and discuss their life time experiences and challenges. Men would seize the opportunity to discuss manhood issues with their boys. Concerns and views would be shared by all at the idale. This cultural aspect to the organisation comes as a lesson that for management to come up with informed decisions employee involvement is crucial. Just like team working employee involvement is a strategy to evade industrial disputes, yet encouraging increased performance. It pains in most cases to hear employees arguing that they were not involved in major decisions. Most managers do not consult their employees let alone communicate with them as cited by Ncube (2012) through the experiences of agricultural rehabilitation development act (ARDA) rating middle Sabi estate where managers decided to reduce the salaries of their employees against the national employment council regulations. Such practices sour industrial relations and can cause industrial disputes.

According to Dessler (2004) employee involvement is an important tool to empower employees which leaves them with greater scope to exercise their discretion. Such kind of culture is evident in Germany through co-determination. Michael (2006) defines as a set of right that give employees the possibility to actively participate in the shaping of their work environment e.g. at the establishment level by works council and on supervisory board of the company. Such dare gatherings facilitate the transfer of knowledge from elders to the young. This is supported by Sherif, (2006) who suggests that organizations are a kind of complex system where knowledge resides in parts (among individuals) and varies both in content and quality. He goes on to say some person may have expertise in one thing while lacking the knowledge of other things. More diversity and scope of the knowledge assets within the knowledge repository leads to high possibility of generating new knowledge through aggregation, specialization, generalization or cross-fertilization across domains. Indeed for managers this part of culture can inform their thinking through allowing participation by all stakeholder employees included, hence making culture a conduit for managerial thinking and the maintenance of a positive IR climate.

Kugara Nhaka (Succession)

One key Zimbabwean culture that can inform managerial thinking is the kugara nhaka, the concept of (succession) normally referred to as inheritance which can really have an impact on promoting productivity. Mhondoro (1997) supports this by underlining that this shows the Shona man’s sense of duty. Inheritance is when someone leaves behind a legacy which others shall use if he is dead. This part of culture emphasizes automatic succession in the event that the company head dies, thus emphasizing the concept of coaching and mentorship to prepare their successors before they even leave. Armstrong (2000) argues that for an organisation to have a competitive advantage over others tacit knowledge has to be shared and developed. Succession planning has been very popular and successful in Japan where at any particular point in time successors for any job are there and this has been a strategy for doing away with bottlenecks production. A core component of dealing with the sorrow of others is claimed to be able to listen with compassion to the pain of someone else (Frost, 2003).

Sharing

Zimbabwean culture as well resembles the spirit of sharing; this is reflected in the people sharing food during
their meals (the community plate) and family gatherings. Mhondoro (1997) indicates that in the Zimbabwean Shona and Ndebele cultures children are taught to share all they have with others. He notes that they shared the same plate, eating with their hands, each careful that he does not take more than his share. This is explained through the Shona proverb, ‘ukama igaswa hunozadziswa nekudya’, (relationships is half measure, the full measure is attained by sharing food) as explained by Bhebe and Viriri (2012). This provides a useful lesson to any organisation that sharing of resources is one of the best ways of yielding profits. Mealtimes are cultural sites not only for eating but also for communication and interaction between and among family members and this can be transferred directly to the workplace where all stakeholders have to share the returns, careful enough not to take more than own share. Through sharing equitably and massive interaction during the process knowledge and ideas are transferred from one person to another. This dimension is supported by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) who are of the view that interaction among individuals is one of the prerequisite for knowledge creation and transfer in organization.

Treating each other as a family in the organisation will also promote good understanding among people thereby smoothening industrial relations by having time together and exchange ideas, thereby generating new knowledge that can shape and guide the company into the attainment of its goals and values. The same cultural value can be explained in the context of the Japanese and Chinese experience’s Confucianism culture. William, and Neuberger (1976) suggests that throughout the history of the China and Japan, a cultural legacy known as Confucianism was infused into each country’s respective societies and had a profound effect on all aspects of life in the two countries. Confucianism is described as “rational thought system that is intended to serve the people and the whole society rather than any particular class”. The culture emphasised on the development of good human relationships, which then resulted in both countries transforming themselves onto perennial powerhouse in many industries such as technology and finance something Zimbabwean managers can learn from our culture and inform their thinking and maintain a positive industrial relations climate.

Knowledge

Mietlewski and Walkowiak (2007) suggest that knowledge has been defined as crucial for the growth of any company and one should know where it stands. The lack of knowledge may lead to failure of the company. In the Ndebele culture there is what is called etshwaleni and in shona ndari where in a particular homestead bear will be brewed people will then be invited to come and drink, this is the time where people get social aspect of their lives after a long period of hard work in the fields. They take such opportunities as time to relax their minds and facilitate knowledge sharing through interaction. The ndari/etshwaleni practice can inform managerial thinking through socialization, where both managers and non managerial employees take time informally to discuss business freely. A platform must be provided for employees and management to have time to brainstorm in an informal setting as well as to establish networks that will lead to idea generation. Organisational problems can as well be solved in such an informal setting.

Imitation

Culture influences managerial thinking when it comes to copying and imitating the behaviors and attitudes that are good from others. This is explained by Bhebe and Viriri (2012) who explain the Shona proverb, Kugara nhaka huona dzevanwe, (copying from what others do enables one to do his own similar thing), however this is the concept of benchmarking in relation to HR terminology. Thus the Shona culture is not selfish but equally encourages people to learn that which is good. This can equally inform managerial thinking in terms of benchmarking good practices such that companies remain competitive. Benchmarking has proved vital in such a volatile business environment. If managers benchmark accordingly they can be in a position to attract and return their employees, keep them well motivated and committed. This undeniably shows the benefits of sticking to the traditional Zimbabwean Cultural values and help prove that these practices are not modern and that new to Zimbabwe but they are as old as humanity itself but just lacked recognition and popularity within the academic circles and literature to prove to the international world.

Social responsibility

One other critical Zimbabwean cultural aspect that managers can inform their thinking from is the Zunde Ramambo practice, (chief’s granary). In both traditional Ndebele and Shona culture the chief would set aside a plot of land and all the villagers would work in the plot together, harvest, and store the grain in the special granary. This food would be distributed to the elderly, orphans, disabled and sick in need. These help managers to realise the significance of working together and sharing. Companies in Zimbabwe have to be socially responsible through extending and reaching out to the needy just like the scope behind the traditional Zunde Ramambo concept. This shows that leaders have not only the obligation to look at their own employees but to extend their hand to the society which may give the
company a good image and increase customer loyalty. In as much as Flanders (1965) suggests that industrial relations is concerned with job regulation, its scope still goes beyond the workplace realm and stretches into the society. From this line of thinking it becomes crystal clear that these practices that are still viewed as western were and are still rooted within the African cultures.

In search of possible explanations of culture in industrial relations in Zimbabwe

Spender (2006) concludes that culture is one of the critical issues for success of knowledge management process and acts as the first barrier for knowledge management. Indeed through adopting the Zimbabwean culture in totality management thinking can be refreshed and revisited. The Zimbabwean industrial relations climate is still developing but however if all parties to the employment relationship stick to the cultural basics then the workplace will become one of the most excellent place. Through adopting cultural principles Ubuntu will be exercised which is an epitome of good industrial relations. This can help solve industrial relations disputes and shape employee behaviors.

The Zimbabwean culture has now been blended with Western culture, but in its unique fashion can equally and greatly inform good work relations which could see organisations transformed to having higher productivity. The indigenous culture is so rich of good teachings as it promotes our own language which is better understood by all, teamwork, encourages hardworking, respect among other factors. Zalami (2005) notes that culture can either facilitate or inhibit institutional transformation depending on whether or not the existing culture is aligned with the goals of the proposed change, if indeed we manage our culture decisively we can manage to take Zimbabwean firms to new heights. This is supported by O'Donnell (2006) who suggests that culture facilitates innovative initiatives. Through fully supporting the Zimbabwean culture managers can become innovative and come up with long lasting cultural solution that can harness the current industrial relations woes bedeviling the country.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the paper demonstrates how culture can be used to inform managerial thinking. Indeed the Zimbabwean traditional Shona/Ndebele culture is rich with traditional cultural practices that can be used as a conduit for shaping managerial thinking. The culture is rich with traditional practices that can inform the modern society and that can shape the industrial relations terrain. Zimbabwe is moving in the right direction in relation to its economic development mode, through the adoption of indeginisation and economic empowerment act. As Zimbabweans we are a people with a vision and direction. As a nation we have a dream and without our roots that dream will never materialise into anything but will crumble. Culture determines the altitude a country can be at, it defines and shapes the dominant ideology, and it defines a people and shapes their thinking. Human resources management practices can be strongly informed by our cultural values.

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