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The Management of Multicultural Teams : The Experience of Afro-Occidental Teams

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Abstract

Multicultural team management appears today as a complex problem , especially in Africa. This problem concern companies in which many dysfunctions are often linked to misunderstanding and difficult relations between local employees and western expatriates managers in Africa. This article deals with SOCOMETAL, an African company in which Evalde Mutabazi and C. Brooklyn Deer observe afro-occidental team executives working to fulfill a large order. The case is representative of the many interviews and observations made concerning inter-cultural teamwork in Africa. The case shows that misunderstandings and difficult team relationships come from the clash between the African Circulatory Management Model and imported western models. We encourage other researchers to test the circulatory model and international multicultural companies to consider implementing the lessons learned in SOCOMETAL, about dangers of multiculturalism.

Keywords : intercultural management ; multicultural team ; Africa ; Circulatory Management Model

Résumé

Le management des équipes multiculturelles apparaît aujourd'hui comme un problème complexe, spécialement en Afrique. Ce problème concerne les entreprises dans lesquelles les dysfonctionnements sont souvent liés à des malentendus et des relations difficiles entre les employés locaux et les managers expatriés en Afrique. Cet article traite de SOCOMETAL, une entreprise africaine dans laquelle Evalde Mutabazi et C. Brooklyn Deer ont observé une équipe afro-occidentale de managers travailler ensemble pour répondre à une grosse commande. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'une situation singulière, ce cas est représentatif de nombreuses autres équipes multiculturelles observées dans plusieurs pays en Afrique. Il montre que les difficultés proviennent généralement du choc entre le modèle circulatoire de management assez généralement développé en Afrique avec les modèles importés de l'occident. Evalde Mutabazi et C. Brooklyn Deer encouragent d'autres chercheurs à tester ce modèle dans les entreprises internationales multiculturelles afin d'infirmer ou confirmer les leçons tirées de SOCOMETAL à propos des dangers du multiculturalisme.

Mots clés : management interculturel ; équipe multiculturelle ; Afrique ; modèle circulatoire

I. Introduction

Practiced by primitive man for hunting and gathering, teamwork has existed since the dawn of time (Erny, 1987; Guigo, 1994; Petit & al., 1999; Desjeux, 1987). These teams were composed of many members with complementary skills in order to be most effective. Many parts of the world, particularly Africa, have not abandoned teamwork as a primary method for efficient production (Chanlat & Kamdem, 1994; Henry & al., 1991; de Rouville, 1987). This method of work has found greater expression in the West since the beginning of the last century. Most modern companies today create their own cross-boundary work teams from members with different nationalities or ethnicities, or who come from different professional, political and religious cultures (Mutabazi & al. 1994; d'Iribarne & al., 1998; Mutabazi, 2001). Hence the question: why do cross-cultural team differences constitute a challenge for company management?

Faced with this question, we examined team management and team member interaction in French and African companies. We found that in most forms of team management, cultural differences had often been neglected in favor of the technical and financial aspects of management. This negligence has continually caused communication problems and relational differences between multicultural team members resulting in the absence of group cohesion. These differences were routinely denied or overlooked by multinational corporations (MNCs) whose managers wished to standardize work procedures and managerial practices in their overseas subsidiaries. The reality for many of these companies concerned shows that neglecting such differences will often end in a considerable loss of productivity.

Western business management has employed various techniques for team administration such as, quality circles in Japan and in the United States (Sasaki & Hutchins, 1984; Robin, 1984; Johnson & W. Ouchi, 1974); autonomous or semi-autonomous groups in Sweden and in France (Petit & al., 1999; Serieux, 1982; Durand & al., 1998); expression groups, progress groups and pilot groups in France (Crozier, 1989; Raynal, 1996); commando groups, on-site project teams or virtual project teams in the United States and Europe, both of which are currently very popular in international companies (Davidson, 1995; Picq, 1999; Waterman, 1993). Some studies reveal that it was not until the end of the 1970s that managers of MNCs began to show an interest in the multicultural dimension of the running of their companies (Wilkins, 1993; Franck, 1997). Before this time, competition was not really globalized and the hidden costs associated with neglecting cultural differences were very easily compensated for by focusing on the technical aspects of management, i.e. tax systems, currency exchange, new technology, social legislation and variable salary costs (Prichette, 1985; Jemison & Sitkin, 1986; Franck, 1989). However, by the 1980s, these compensatory techniques were widely known and used and could no longer be considered competitive advantage factors (Appadurai, 2001; Beck, 2001; Huntington, 2000).

Today companies are compelled to focus on differences between their managerial methods and the diverse approaches of their partners, employees, clients, suppliers, as well as their shareholders

(Chevrier, 2000; Dupriez, 2000). Recent economic developments reveal catastrophic results for companies who did not anticipate a clash of cultures and what this means for the implementation of operations, mergers and international acquisitions (Drancourt, 1999; Boyer & Freyssenet, 2000; Mutabazi, 1999). Beyond the examples widely circulated by the media, such as the merger between Mercedes and Chrysler or Rhône-Poulenc, Marion and Hoechst (Entreprise & Carrières, 2000, p.11), how is it possible not to underscore these kinds of conflicts? For example, only twenty percent of mergers between international companies obtain the anticipated financial results within the forecasted time limit. Sixty percent are considered more or less caustic failures, and the remaining twenty percent enjoy mixed results (Raynaud, 2001, pp. 68-71). The fact that this percentage of failure has been oscillating between fifty and sixty percent since the beginning of the 1990s explains why accounting for cultural differences is currently a major, global management challenge for companies (Calori, 1999; Raynaud, 2001; Pierre, 2001). It is a critical factor in successful mergers and acquisitions.

Contrary to those who believe in the development of a common global business culture and a universal model of management, this percentage of failure shows that taking cultural differences into account is not a luxury or a philosophical or humanitarian problem (Torrington, 1994; Mutabazi, 2001). Many efficient companies have realized, in view of globalization, that without adequate facilitation of multicultural differences they can neither obtain the benefits anticipated with their partners of other cultures nor mobilize their personnel effectively enough in order to remain competitive (Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983; Hoecklin, 1993; Calori, 2000). Operating at a global level, they will fully and durably obtain the competitive advantages they are looking for, notably abroad, and should therefore rely more and more on the skills of their managers and executives to integrate the cultural differences and the different models of their global partners (shareholders, workers, suppliers) into their decision making processes, action plans and management policies.

The issue of multiculturalism is often at the heart of work relations between members in a team composed of people from nations or companies of unequal size or power. What exactly do we mean by “multiculturalism”? Although it is generally used to signify plurality, polyethnicity or diversity of cultures, here we use it to speak of the approach—the attitudes and behavior of managerial or corporate practices—by which individuals, teams, and political institutions use culture to block or reduce the effective management of cultural differences. Often founded on negative or reduced vision, this multiculturalism approach is unwilling to address cultural differences in order to serve geopolitical or economic ends. This attitude favors the dominant culture and managerial model, and is characteristic of imperialist logic used in colonial conquests, religious crusades, and more recently, the unfriendly acquisitions of small-sized companies by some MNCs. (Mutabazi, 2001). Whether it concerns economic or political partners, this kind of multiculturalism cannot develop without a “colonizer” and a “colonized.”

For our study, the problem associated with multiculturalism comes from preexisting attitudes about relations between Africa and the West. This is a deeply-rooted relationship with perceptions distorted by historical consternation. On one side, the West as the dominant partner overemphasizes its own culture, ideals and conceptions of the world (whether national or regional, political or racial, religious or

professional). When this multiculturalism is applied to business development, the resulting tendency is to impose this cultural determination upon the party that is considered inferior. It is when the African culture accepts this status of inferiority, for reasons we cannot fully explain in this article, that this characteristic of multiculturalism becomes embedded in the relationship creating a vicious cycle of misunderstanding.

At the work team level, multiculturalism causes relations between team members to be characterized by indifference toward the values and perspectives of fellow team members, and also by the inability of members to participate in spontaneous interactions. The professional and personal difficulties that ensue lead to a breakdown of operations. In this environment it is easy for complications to find favorable ground on which to spread within managerial or governmental systems. Team member skills are negated in the search for a solution to interpersonal relational problems and communication blockages. To overcome such multiculturalism at the team level, team members need to seek enrichment by cultural differences and to co-produce new values and rules vital to the optimal realization of common projects. This approach can be applied to phenomena observed in African countries linked to the resurgence of nationalist or independence struggles with Europe, and finally to the problem of intercultural team management.

II. Research Design and Methodology

The theory presented here is based on a qualitative study of fifty-six companies each consisting of members from various cultures in France and Africa (Ivory Coast, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, Rwanda and Senegal). We conducted 1266 interviews (both individual and group) of work production and worker interaction, each interview lasting between two and six hours. The interviews took place both inside and outside each company in order to take into account the national and local clan cultures as they translated to an imported business management model (Mutabazi, 1999 a). We presented the results of this study in the form of conference debates or work meetings to African and Western business experts (human resource managers, historians, anthropologists, executive managers, political and social sciences experts) both in Africa (Senegal, 1994; Benin, 1996) and in many other countries (France 1997, 1998, 1999, 2002; Canada, 2000; Mexico, 2000; Belgium, 2001, 2002, USA, 2003, Brazil, 2003). The presentation of the results have allowed us to deepen and prove our analysis, and to gain a better understanding of the phenomena linking African and Western models of societal government and business management in a multicultural context¹.

African culture itself makes for a unique subject of study. Firstly, it is unique in this study because of the diversity of communities and cultures, which populate the fifty-five countries studied. Secondly, the cultural study is somewhat unique because of Africa's (sometimes violent) experience with the meeting of cultures, which occurs as a result of Western intervention. Africa is differentiated by "significant gaps" between inhabitant values and their rules of life and management of collective work relations (Lévi-Strauss, 1952). Thirdly, Africa is an emerging marketplace that requires further study in order to develop the specific resources and skills of its members and this makes it somewhat unique. Development is key

to the survival of many companies whose products are finding competitive challenge or becoming more and more technically standardized, such as in the health, food, electronics, audio-visual, industries etc.

III. The Case Study: Team Multiculturalism at SOCOMETAL

Demonstrative of our qualitative research, the following case study is a microcosm of the way in which international companies often tackle the question of multiculturalism among teams composed of persons from a local African community vis-à-vis Western expatriates. The events take place in Socometal, a mixed Franco-Senegalese company located in Dakar, with a business team composed of French expatriates and Senegalese managers. The account is representative of 60% situations observed in the five other African countries studied, so this case allows us to identify the main contributions of the African experience with regards to the current cultural challenges facing multicultural team management.

Like 75% of companies we have studied in Africa, Socometal is a company with mixed characteristics. It is legally Senegalese but financed mostly with French capital and managed in reference of two management models relied on African and Western believes, values and roles. This status along with the implementation of an Africanization policy (in which a certain percentage of executive position holders must be African) largely explains why a Franco-Senegalese multicultural team directs the company. Our interviews took place in 1995, just after Socometal agreed to a contract requiring them to reach a volume of production never before realized. The work was to be completed in a very short time. In order to meet the new demand expectations, Socometal had to obtain such a high level of productivity from its workers that most team managers deemed the goal impossible. The production manager, Mr. Bernard, after having done a quick calculation, declared, "We'll never get that out of our workers . . . it'll take a miracle."

But this miracle was going to happen! Some days after confirming the order, Mr. Bernard suddenly fell ill and it was his assistant, Mr. Diop, a young Senegalese engineer and African executive, who took over during Mr. Bernard's sick leave. Though this solution was in keeping with the company's Africanization policy, many expatriates did not trust Diop - despite his being trained in a prestigious French engineering school and his having completed several missions in Western companies before returning to Senegal. Two days after Diop assumed Bernard's responsibilities, N'Diaye, a worker from a different Senegalese community and who knew of the large production order, asked Diop to meet. Diop knew N'Diaye only vaguely and was unaware that he was considered a model worker recognized throughout the factory and to whom several colleagues often went to seek advice in case of professional or personal difficulties. N'Diaye did not belong to a union and was not a staff representative. He worked on the line like the other workers. Hence Diop's surprise at the unexpected proposal N'Diaye made him.

During the meeting N'Diaye asked Diop if he would accept an agreement to pay each worker for two extra hours in exchange for a thirty percent increase in daily production levels. If so, N'Diaye would be the guarantor for this target production level that would enable the company to meet the order in the shortest time period. "If you accept my offer," he said with a smile, "we could even produce more. We are

at 12,000 [units] a day, but we've never been confronted with this situation. I would never have made this proposal to Mr. Bernard, but if you agree today I will see that the 20,000 [unit] level is reached as of tomorrow evening. I'll ask each worker to find ways of going faster, to communicate this to the others and to help each other if they have problems . . . »

Diop calculated what N'Diaye proposed, and then did some investigating of the opinions of influential people in different workshops and departments. Some French and Italian expatriates told him they would not do overtime. Three hours after his meeting with N'Diaye, he felt confident enough to take the risk. The next morning N'Diaye and Diop met in front of the factory and Diop gave his agreement on the condition, however, that the thirty percent increase in daily production levels be reached the next evening. He and the management would make a final decision on a wage increase only after assessing the results and the evaluating the ability of the workers to maintain this level in the long run.

Three days after their first negotiation the contract between Diop and N'Diaye went into action. Throughout the day, N'Diaye gave his job on the line to two of his colleagues in order to have enough time and energy to mobilize the workers. The workers found the agreement an excellent initiative. "This will be a chance to earn a bit more money, but especially to show them [the French management] that we're more capable than they think," declared one of the Senegalese foremen. From its first day of application, the formula worked wonders. Every workshop produced eight percent more than was forecasted by Diop and N'Diaye working only one extra hour per day. Over the next two months the daily production level oscillated between 18,000 and 22,000 units per day—between thirty-eight and forty-three percent more than the normal daily production. It was at this production level, never experienced during the history of the company, that Mr. Bernard returned from his illness.

"I," said Diop, "was very happy to see the workers so proud of their results, so satisfied with their pay raise and finally, really involved in their work...In view of some expatriates' attitudes it was a veritable miracle...But instead of rejoicing, Mr. Bernard reproached me for giving two hours pay to the workers who were only really doing one hour more than usual. 'By making this absurd decision,' he said, 'you have put the management in danger of losing its authority over the workers. You have acted against house rules...You have created a precedent too costly for our business. Now we must stop this ridiculous operation as quickly as possible. We must apply work regulations...' and he slammed the door in my face before I had the time to say anything...After all, he has more power than me in this company, which is financed sixty-percent by French people...I thought he would go to see the managing director and that I would be summoned. I would then explain myself and present my arguments."

In the meantime, the workers decided to maintain the new production level in order to honor their word to N'Diaye and Diop. A foreman and friend of N'Diaye stated, "At least he knows how to listen and speak to us like men. Whatever the reason for the disagreement between our bosses, there's no question of turning back, losing what we have gained and putting the health of our company under threat, all because of an expatriate's stubbornness."

IV: The African Circulatory Model

At first glance, the facts described in this case concerning the relationship between Diop and Bernard could have occurred anywhere in the world. We observed a number of incidences with a similar relationship between those from Western countries and those in technically or economically less-developed countries. In other words, most of the phenomena regarding relations in this case are not uniquely reserved to Senegal or Africa but are generally based on what we previously defined as the problem of multiculturalism.

However, of the many similar situations we studied, the African experience demonstrates the uniquely complex role of a team manager who has to manage and anticipate several types of multicultural phenomenon. Many of the problems between Africa and the West are linked to the history of more-or-less violent clashes impairing the perception of both parties—a “cultural hiatus” existing between countries, regions or even African and Western civilizations (Mercure et al., 1997). In other words, we agree with Philippe d'Iribarne in saying that every person is a carrier of cultures (national, regional, religious or professional) relating to the social environment in which he or she was reared (d'Iribarne, 1989). Africans, generally, behave according to the rules of what is called a Circulatory Management Model (Mutabazi, 2001) : a model that we refer to as the major organizing principle of African societies - where goods, people, energy, work-force, services and information have to circulate, to be exchanged or shared between individuals and communities. It is an ideal model of social government characterized by an integrative vision of man and all human actions, and thus a model in which the company has legitimacy only when understood in its social context. The main goal of individual work, teamwork or any other community-shared work is to contribute to the integration and development of men and women in the communities (Mutabazi, 1999). In all the African countries studied, this Circulatory Model is inherited from their ancestors and is still firmly rooted in their communities today. This is a relied upon method used to mobilize individuals in collective work such as farming, fishing, arts and crafts, and transporting the ill to a hospital.

These two models side-by-side constitute a dual reference point for Afro-Occidental team members. The imported Model must be understood by Africans and is often also important to further rationalize work. However, the Circulatory Model must also be understood by Westerners because it is the vehicle by which work is accomplished.

In contrast to the bureaucratic models often imported and imposed by the West onto African countries, the Circulatory Model promotes neither the control of nature nor inter-individual competition, but rather the harmony of relations between man and nature on one hand and social relations on the other. This idea of harmony contrasts with—but does not oppose—the “always more productivity gains and individual enrichment” which characterizes many imported models imposed on African workers. For the African worker, the community, not necessarily the collective work, takes precedence over the individual. He invests most of his time and energy in the development and maintenance of social ties. Whether he

lives in the countryside or the city, his personal development depends not on the work he does nor on the salary he earns, but on the other members of the community and their network of relations.

It is not uncommon for a Western business management team to adopt a company culture not having made for any real democratic accommodation between the two cultures. In light of previous scholarship emphasizing the comparison of national and company cultures, our analysis of similar management situations in France and Africa shows that it is not enough just to know of the strengths or weaknesses in order to build an efficient multicultural team (Adler N., 1997; Bollinger D. & Hofstede G., 1987; Hofstede G., 1994; d'Iribarne Ph., 1989...).

The approach to time management is one of the main areas in which malfunctions between Western and African cultures occur. Where time is saved or wasted in the West, it is lived and shared in Africa. Where it is essentially invested in material or economic production in the West, it is devoted to the development of social ties in Africa, ties without which no African can durably and successfully complete any undertaking. In other words, in Africa time belongs to everybody and is never wasted, especially when invested in the development or upkeep of friendly relations (Bourgoin and Bollinger, 1984).

Turning back to the Socometal case, the differences between African and Western approaches to production and worker relations were not taken into account by the expatriates or the Senegalese executives. Though everyone perceived the new order as a common challenge, no shared vision emerged on how to meet the deadline. When Mr. Bernard declared, "it will take a miracle," he revealed his ignorance of African societies, their specific time investment priorities, the ability of their members to change dramatically when problems arise and, finally, the available conditions for collective mobilization. While members of the managing team had worked together for a long time, the methods normally practiced did not authorize any of its members to look for new ideas from outside of the management circle. The fact that there was no real acknowledgement of their different cultural characteristics, as well as the ignorance of their respective conceptions of team management, did not allow the Socometal managers to identify ways in which to mobilize the workers in the face of the challenge presented. In other words, Mr. Bernard's behavior was not as caricatured as it would appear.

N'Diaye's problem-solving approach found widespread support in part because of his demand for a pay raise for everybody, which addressed the problem of low worker salaries. However, in order to convince Diop and the foremen, he essentially utilized several principles of the circulatory model, and chiefly the reciprocity of rights and duties. In turn, the foremen used the corresponding rules of sociability to push their colleagues to increase their normal work rhythm. In fact, the wage demands alone would not have brought about the collective mobilization of all the Socometal workers.

In a Congolese subsidiary of a multinational corporation observed in the same research (Mutabazi E., 1999 a), individual bonuses were offered to workers and were subsequently rejected by the workers who went on strike for several weeks. Contrary to the approach initiated by N'Diaye, the bonuses offered to the Congolese subsidiary in an effort to increase daily production were not suitable. In this case, the bonus was an incentive for greater individual work development, regardless of the fact that this practice was diametrically opposed to the central rules of the circulatory model. The strike can be

explained by the fact that a bonus system risked spreading inter-individual competition to the detriment of social relations between the workers' original communities. A vast alliance network connected these worker relations across the region in which the factory was located.

Unfortunately, some local leaders misappropriate public goods/funds for the benefit of their own clan of origin, or to line their own pockets. Because their actions are opposed to the circulatory model they share with local citizens and workers, they are compelled to use intimidation or violence to mobilize staff (Bayart, 1989). N'Diaye succeeded because his approach was in keeping with the values and rules of sociability at the very center of this model. The solution he presented Diop and the foremen aimed both at the success of their common business goals and a monetary benefit for all involved. Several principles and rules of the circulatory model, such as mutual aid, are economically and socially useful or necessary for the survival of their members. Thus, imported models can create ambiguity and tensions between bosses and local workers, obstacles to teamwork and consequently costly malfunctions for local society and companies.

Socometal's results of high levels of production and a successful collective mobilization shows that the circulatory model is not opposed to a company's economic and production demands. N'Diaye demonstrated that several of these sociability principles act as powerful and effective levers which managers could pull more often in order to integrate differences and to transform them into positive forces for their companies. In fact, the ignorance or denial of these principles is all the more costly as they favor behavior (such as absenteeism, work delays, abuse of the telephone or over long meetings) that is inflexible toward the differences between African and Western cultures and business models.

Taking into account the privileged relations which exist between France and Senegal, the establishment of the head of Socometal was based on the comparative study of its members CV's by a North American firm. But the members of this consulting firm themselves only had a very vague vision of their differences and the links between their cultures and their deep requirements in the way of managing five types of work relations in a multicultural context. Furthermore, most of the expatriates saw the Senegalese, Diop included, as having a lack of technical skill, industrial experience or professionalism and ability to manage the production requirements. The expatriates were in turn perceived with a generally more flattering image, though distorted.

V. Theory: Case Analysis

Our analysis of the relationship between intercultural partners such as Diop and Bernard becomes clearer when we take into account the work of Philippe d'Iribarne (1989) and Renaud Sainsaulieu (1987). Their scholarship states that this kind of partnership is influenced by a triple-faceted history: the history specific to their countries or their original cultural communities, the history of political or economic relations between these countries or communities, and finally the history of the company in which they have an experience of work relations. In other words, the talk, attitudes, and relations between Diop and Bernard, and by extension between the French expatriates and the Senegalese personnel, are marked by this triple

history. This history is ignored or neglected by the management of the company, as well as by the actors themselves.

As long ago as the arrival of the first Westerners to Africa may seem, one important element which comes out of our field investigations is the African perception of Western style management. Their perception of the West comes from their relationship with the first companies to tap local natural resources, both human and environmental. This historical fact still remains strongly in peoples' minds and generally leads to a rather wary approach of "the white man." It is a relationship established with the slave trade and reinforced by experiences that brought Africans to feel exploited by Westerners. All through the colonial age, a rather negative image was handed down from generation to generation, and sadly; the Africans discovered the Western expatriates to have a brutal and distant behavior and management style (Mutabazi, 2001).

In the Socometal case, Mr. Bernard epitomizes this image and it is further reinforced in the interviews by the words and behavior of the majority of expatriates towards the local personnel. Their behavior refers, on one hand, to the history of colonial relations between France and Senegal, and on the other, to that of the French run company for which they work. The crosscheck of interviews held with expatriates and the Senegalese personnel shows that this triple history explains why most of the expatriates did not think Diop capable of replacing Bernard as the head of production. Mr. Bernard in turn clearly expressed this by his attitude.

Most of the Senegalese workers we observed were very confused by the actions of the expatriates. Misunderstanding the culture, values and rules of Western social and work life, they perceived the expatriates as "ambassadors of France," representatives of the majority shareholders of their company, and also as "experts." Some expatriates took advantage of this flattering image to develop lofty and distant attitudes. The majority of the Senegalese dared neither to ask them questions about decisions affecting them, nor to take initiatives in their work. The autocratic management developed by Mr. Bernard, along with the attitudes and behavior of most of his colleagues, relied on this fascination and intimidation.

Senegalese executives whose behavior and attitudes to work were modeled on those of the expatriates were treated as "coconuts"—black on the outside and white on the inside. The local workers viewed these Senegalese executives as displaying contradictory behavior towards work and extra-professional life. Whereas the workers could have approached these managers more easily, this ambiguity of references meant they inspired no more confidence than the expatriates. Interviewed on this subject, the Senegalese employees declared that they preferred "to keep quiet and remain distant instead of rousing the anger of their bosses by asking questions about their work conditions." But as we saw in the Socometal case, not all African executives can be characterized this way. After all, N'Diaye approached Diop, his fellow countryman. In other words, N'Diaye preferred to make his proposal to Diop rather than Bernard because he knew his idea would be examined on its merit and not by his worker status. N'Diaye stated that he felt comfortable approaching Diop "unlike Bernard and some of his colleagues who often treat us like idiots and never listen to what we have to say."

The relationship between the Senegalese personnel and Western expatriates at Socometal is by no means enough to account for all the relational phenomena observed in Africa. The observations made in other national contexts (Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo) show that relations between expatriates and local personnel rely on company culture, or more precisely, their specific approaches to the management of collective relations. This is to say that the management of work teams does not develop within an empty framework, but rather, upon cultural foundations of management developed in the country and notably on its particular way of managing relations between colleagues, work team members and the leader.

Whereas the analysis model for work relations elaborated by Renaud Sainsaulieu (1981) (referred to above) proved to be pertinent in understanding relations between the expatriates and Senegalese at Socometal, the relational phenomena observed in countries who were not colonized by France - with companies equally financed by local and Western partners, lead us to complete it as relations to time and the foreigner. In other words, phenomena at the forefront (such as delay, absenteeism, respect of project deadlines, cooperation, competition) of the situations studied show very clearly that each culture carries with it a vision of the world and a powerful collective imagination - creating an order of priorities very different in African and Western countries (Castoriadis, 1975). It thus appears that the misunderstanding of relations between cultures and the project management favored our negative definition of multiculturalism, ending sometimes in even violent conflicts between the expatriates and local personnel, notably over time investment priorities.

VI. Conclusion

Several lessons have been learned from the research conducted on the African experience of intercultural team management. The first lesson is that there are significant differences between cultures and business models which pose a problem of multiculturalism between partners. A second lesson is that a real acknowledgement of different managing methods is one of the main conditions for team effectiveness for globally successful companies. Achieving synergy between members in Africa (as elsewhere) largely depends on the ability of their managers to create and develop management systems that foster complementarity and are favorable to the integration of cultural differences. More precisely still, this cooperation is cultivated and refined through the duration of projects and daily experience of work relations.

The third lesson is that this co-production implies a real investment in resources by the company, especially in terms of time. In other words, some time is needed so that a group, composed of people from different cultures (professional and national) can develop a real team spirit. That is, the diverse team needs more time than a group composed of people reared in a single national culture, who are trained in the same schools or who share the experience of a single managerial system. If this team spirit is not formed, the time used for information exchanges, decision-making and implementation is greater. Conditions favorable to teamwork will conciliate or harmonize different or even contradictory visions of the

company. Without these conditions, imposed decisions or weak consensus accepted by the manager leads to his loss of credibility and the ability to mobilize all the team members. Unhealthy rivalry along with over-sensitiveness can arise and tensions or latent conflicts can divert the team's energy, much to the detriment of the collective project.

Faced with the stress which is felt more and more keenly by the members of cross-cultural international teams, the fourth lesson is that team members must be given time to express their perceptions of the project so that they may more fully understand the purpose and overall vision—reconstructing the modalities and deadlines individually in their own reference system. This time is necessary in order for each member to apply or question their experience and work habits if they are not adapted to the context of the new team. However, the manager must not compromise on operational deadlines nor the quality norms decided upon with the multicultural team members.

The last lesson of the African experience concerning team management is that the results of collective work are proportional to the degree to which the members are integrated. As several situations involving Western expatriates and local executives in Africa have shown, perfect integration is impossible. However, when the conditions concerning multiculturalism are eliminated, maximum integration can be obtained and can transcend the superficiality of affinities required by the work which ends in the opportunist addition of know-how techniques. These never correspond to a real commitment, without which there is no development of talents in the intercultural team. In reality, optimum integration implies that the real confrontation of their differences and specific skills allows each person to see through the group illusion to calmly confront his colleagues on the political and cultural dimensions of their coexistence at work.

We believe that the Circulatory Model used in this paper for explaining key differences between African and Western teams may also be generalized to other settings. For example, it may have implications for organizational development (change management) efforts and for organizational design. We encourage other researchers to further use and test the model.

At a much more macro-level, more companies seem aware of the current dangers of multiculturalism. The strong feeling of Islamic countries about the imposition of Western culture and Western models is a most recent case in point. The failures experienced in trying to conquer foreign markets has taught global companies that, on one hand, socializing mechanisms and the dynamics of collective work in multicultural contexts are never totally subjected to the external will of the corporation but also, on the other hand, that there is always a way to conciliate their team members' multiple logics and expectations with the productive demands of their companies. This is why, in terms of grouping communities (professional and national) and devising complementary organizational schemes that rely on their members' own individual skills, several global companies seem to be a step ahead when compared to political institutions.

Having said this, it would be naïve to believe that the denial of cultural differences in favor of the standardization of human managerial practices has completely disappeared from the minds of managers currently involved in international management development. It is precisely because this multicultural

mentality continues that many companies encounter difficulties or sometimes fail in certain regions of the world, such as in Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and even in the United States (Franck, 1997). However, it is no less true that globalization constitutes a movement which is implemented by global companies just as much as by political institutions and that it is indispensable for the former to take cultural diversity into account when managing multicultural teams in order to succeed in achieving their global strategies.

Notes:

1)

In addition to conducting interviews among the members of these companies, 309 useable questionnaires were returned from managers (N= 103), first line supervisors (N= 101) and factory workers (N= 106) in two countries: Niger and Senegal. The questionnaire sample was taken from three different kinds of companies within each country (N= 6): a multinational corporation, a government agency and a local business.

The average age of the questionnaire sample was 32 years, with 26.74 % of the respondents, 40 years of age or older and the rest 39 years or less. 10.68 % of the respondents had educational experience outside Africa, and 53.73% had at least a high school diploma. 25.88% of all respondents had five years (or less) of service in the same company; 33,68% had been with the company between six and ten; 32.68% between ten and 20 years; 7.76% had more twenty years of service.

The religious traditions of the sample population were mixed in the six countries of our research. Of these countries in which a questionnaire was administrated, 84.14% of respondents were Muslim, 11.32% were Catholic, 4.54% were other (e.g. animist, Jewish, protestant or professed no religion).

2)

The principal conferences at which the results of this research have been explained and debated were : Mutabazi defence thesis, Paris, June 1999; Mutabazi presentations and executive programmes (AIG Europe, Adventism, EDF, Dan one, Leg rand, Philips, Renault, Schneider, Société Générale, Total-Fina, Thomson) and in conferences at Dakar,1994; Cotonou, 1996, Paris,1997-1998; Québec, 2000, Zacatecas, 2000, Bruxelles, 2001-2002, Utah,2003, Salvador da Bahia, 2003.

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Tables and Figures:

Figure 1 : **Principles, values and rules of the Circulatory Management Model**

(Note to IJCCM editor – this figure is to be placed in part IV “The African Circulatory Model”. It is to be placed preceding the paragraph beginning, “ a model that we refer to as the major organizing principle of African societies ...”)

Principles	Values and rules
Parentality : Identity roots of every person are in their clan (system of families with the same ancestor)	Circulation of people through visits, marriages, relations inside and out with the clan. Circulation of belongings (gifts ...).
Relationality : Every member of community has to create and to develop a network of relations inside and outside of his clan: circulation of information and energy .	Circulation of Human Energy by the respect of the African rule of reciprocity of rights and duties. Every person have to contribute in exchanging services (solidarity and assisting others among clan members and their allies.
Verticality & Spirituality : The age is one of the legitimacy criteria generally in favour of « seniors » who have a long social and political experience and are near ancestors. Africans believe that ancestors are neighbours of God.	Circulation of Information & Spiritual energy : To communicate lessons of life experience. To be able to listen, to understand and to integrate their personal life experiences especially by the meetings and by consensus decision-making processes (importance of oral communication, spirituality and exchanges in Africa)
Horizontality : The members of “one age group” contribute in exchanges among different generations and in sharing expertises among the allied clans.	Circulation of power through rites and community celebrations in which know-how and power are shared among the allied clans.

Figure 2 : **Comparison of the Western Imported and African Circulatory Model**

(Note to IJCCM editor – this figure is to be placed in part IV “The African Circulatory Model”. It is to be placed preceding the paragraph beginning, “The two models side-by-side...”)

IMPORTED MODEL	CIRCULATORY MODEL
✂✂ Segmented approach to life and to collective action	✂✂ Integrative approach to life and to collective action
✂✂ Rationality : segmenting and organizing life and collective actions (companies) around work and continual research of wealth	✂✂ Relationality : organizing life and collectives projects around family and social networking individual’s families, clans...
✂✂ Individual development is central	✂✂ Community (or clan) development is central
✂✂ Primary objective: economic profit	✂✂ Primary objective : social profit . It is not opposed to economic profit
✂✂ Time is money : avoid wasting it (material or financial security)	✂✂ Time is relations with other persons : It is never lost, it is a social investment (a health security)



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