

Sociocultural Factors and Bureaucratic Practices in Universities in Ghana

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ARTICLE INFO

Available Online May 2014

Key words:

Bureaucracy;
sociocultural values;
managerial practices.

ABSTRACT

Max Weber, one of the pioneers in bureaucratic organisational studies believes in the ultimate triumph of bureaucracy over the collegial culture of universities. This paper argues that rather than ultimate triumph of bureaucracy over the collegial culture of universities (Weber 1947), the interests of universities would be better served when the bureaucratic culture is designed to accommodate some core socio-cultural expectations of organizational members, without compromising productivity. The research examined the implications of some selected sociocultural factors for bureaucratic practices in selected universities in Ghana through a mix method approach. The findings show that, the authority structures of the two universities typify the Weberian Ideal type bureaucracy with hierarchical culture and standardized rules and procedures for carrying out every task. This notwithstanding, the societal culture was found to be influential in shaping the bureaucratic behaviour and conducts of organizations' members. The paper aims at bringing to the fore the strength of the informal structures in reshaping bureaucratic culture and work behaviour, and the need to consider socio-cultural contexts in designing bureaucratic organizations.

Introduction

From an idealistic organizational perspective, pure bureaucracy relates to Weber's functional, impersonal, and hierarchical system based on legal rational authority that operates under a system of abstract rules and pursues legitimate organizational goals (Albrow, 1970 cited in Dias & Vaughn, 2006). Weber's bureaucratic organization follows a structured chain of command, which facilitates accomplishment of organizational objectives (Wren, 1994), with a rigid hierarchy of offices, and formal rules that govern action of the agency (Stojkovic, Kalinich, & Klofas, 2003). In the Weberian thought and tradition, organizational systems are important because they define performance standards, outline a proper chain of command, specify the hierarchy of authority, and establish formal lines of communication.

The above notwithstanding, the socio-cultural contexts are likely to influence bureaucratic practices (Fischer, Ferreira, Assmar, Redford & Harb, 2005, p. 35). Meyer and Rowan (1977) for example acknowledge the effects of social networks on social behaviour and relationships in a given organisation (1977, p. 341). They challenge the assumption that formal organizations function according to their blueprints and point to the many inconsistencies and uncertainties of organisational rules and decisions. From systems view point, there are environmental interrelations between and among systems; which suggests that organisations as open systems have an interrelation with its environments (Cohen, Fink, Gadon, & Willits, 1995).

As parts of a unified system, there is often an interplay and in some cases a conflict between bureaucratic values, institutions, procedures and expectations on one hand and traditional and socio-cultural values, norms and practices on the other. The fundamental argument is that, organisational behaviour has its foundations in the norms, values and beliefs of society. As such, culture's role in management cannot be overemphasised.

The paper discusses the extent to which managerial practices and conduct are influenced by sociocultural values, norms and practices of society. It primarily interrogates culture's role in bureaucratic behaviour and practices in Ghanaian universities. We focus our attention on the influence of sociocultural factors on the

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choice of managerial or leadership style, recruitment, selection, and promotion practices, decision making, performance management/appraisal, and employee relations. The social and cultural factors, whose influences on bureaucracy are being considered in this paper include religious beliefs, ethnicity and familism, respect for age, status, and other socio-cultural values.

Review of the Literature: Culture and Management

One of the fundamental questions that dominate organisational studies today is the extent to which managerial behaviour and practices are culturally contingent. Many research have been conducted in an effort to find answers to this fundamental concern. Some of these research have shown that one of the major challenges faced by management and organizations on the African continent is the practice of transferring management practices and organizations which have no relationship with the indigenous cultures (Apekey, 2001; Ahiauzu, 1986; Akuoko, 2008). This section reviews some important theoretical and empirical literature on these positions with particular attention to Ghana.

The African Socio-Cultural Milieu

The African sociocultural environment distinctly differs from other environments and thus requires a proper appraisal for the success of any organization operating within it. It must be emphasized here that we do not seek to suggest that Africa has a culture that could be conveniently labelled as African Culture by our description of the African sociocultural milieu. It may be inaccurate to propose a monolithic culture for Africa (Darley & Blankson, 2008). This is because of the strong national differences that exist on the continent. This important recognition notwithstanding, there are some cultural dimensions common to the sub-region (Grzeda & Assogbavi, 1999). The commonalities as observed by Darley and Blankson, (2008) include:

a hierarchical social structure, the importance of kinship, the primacy of the group, time orientation (Safavi & Tweddell, 1990), the driving norms of human interdependence, virtue of symbiosis and reciprocity (Mangaliso, 2001), the belief in ancestry and existence of a supreme being (Mwamwenda, 1999), and the value attached to the extended family (Darley & Blankson, 2008, p. 381).

An argument for cultural relatedness across the African sub –region has been strongly made by Mbiti (1990) and Ahiauzu (1986). To Ahiauzu (1986), African culture differs from other cultures in the way Africans construct meanings, negotiate social contexts and make sense of their environment (Darley & Blankson, 2008, p. 380). Hence, a discussion of an African Cultural environment could be permissible. This is aimed at widening our discussions on culture in this paper to give our discussions and conclusions a much wider coverage on the continent.

The Relational Orientation of African Societies

Relational orientation refers to the modality of man's relationship to other men (Darley & Blankson, 2008). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) identified three divisions of relational orientations: the individualistic, the collateral and the lineal. When the individualistic principle is dominant, individual goals have primacy over the goals of the group. When the collateral principle is dominant, a primacy of the goals and welfare of the laterally extended group prevails. When the lineal principle is dominant, group goals have primacy and continuity of the group through time and ordered positional succession within the group are both crucial (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961, p. 19). The African social structure is collateral because the greatest concern is for one's group, extended family and/or clan (Dia, 1991). The relation orientation of the African is demonstrated in the respect for elders and the sense of community shared among many Africans (Sofola, 1973; Onwubiko, 1991).

Respect for elders is an important guiding principle for behaviour in Africa (Gyekye, 2003; Nukunya, 2003; Darley & Blankson, 2008). The elderly are seen as the true repositories of wisdom and knowledge, examples for the youth to emulate (Moemeka, 1996), forbearers or gate-keepers of society and treated with deference, respect and dignity. Africans also gravitate toward people since a man is what he is because he

lives in the company of others (Mphahlele, 1962). This view “gives expression to the whole idea of communal responsibility and interdependence; a concept which is the basis of the whole structure of the African’s cultural life” (Mphahlele, 1962, p. 112).

Time within the African culture is also socialized. Socialized time is “the use of time that does not sacrifice social duties and human relations on ‘the altar’ of clock-time punctuality (Hope, 2004; Darley & Blankson, 2008). Time in the African context is “programmed into socio-cultural norms of human behavior and interpersonal relationships” (Onwubiko, 1991, p. 25-27). Time use in Africa reinforces the relational orientation of African cultures. Socialized time here emphasizes interdependence and a shared heritage. Thus, time is most important when one can share it on family and social relations. Using time in social contexts takes precedence over the use of time in other contexts.

Culture’s Role in Management

Managerial conduct and organizational behaviour in general have been explored in the literature all over the world. Many of these studies have recognized the influence of culture on organizational behaviour (Hofstede, 1980, 2001; Weaver & Agle, 2002; Roundy, 2009; Liu, 2010; Hope, 2004; Apekey, 2001; Akuoko, 2008; Kuada, 1994). Some of these studies have identified cultural implications for performance management (Aluko, 2003; Mendonca & Kanungo, 1996), leadership styles (Al-Najem, Dhakal & Bennett, 2012; Pasa, Kabasakal & Bodur, 2001) and other management practices (Mendonca & Kanungo, 1996). From the literature, the volume of research conducted on Human Resource Management in Ghana is far less compared to other African countries. This notwithstanding, some studies have been done on the role of culture in management practices in the country (Kuada, 1994; Apekey, 2001; Akuoko, 2008).

In a study of managerial behaviour in Ghana and Kenya, Kuada (1994) provided empirical evidence which threw some light on the reality of the sociocultural environment of Ghanaian and Kenyan managers and how this influences their role perceptions and behavioral patterns. The underlying thesis of Kuada’s study is that “if we accept the premise that management is concerned with getting things done through people, then it is the primary responsibility of managers to understand the realities of their subordinates in order to encourage an effective task performance” (Kuada, 1994, p. 222).

Kuada (1994) found that Ghanaian and Kenyan managers are influenced to a great extent by the cultural values and rules of behaviour found in their societies. Notable among these values and rules of behaviour are age and the culturally defined relationships between elderly and younger people of the society, status arrangements and power differences defined by social class attributes like positions, wealth and educational levels. Others include familism, clanism and ethnicity and their practical manifestations in collective obligations as well as the disproportionate family burden on a few favorably placed family members.

In his contribution, Apekey (2001) investigated the system of management in work organizations in Ghana, its relationship to the traditional Ghanaian culture and the management preference of the Ghanaian worker. He found that the system of management in Ghana is more paternalistic than collaborative (Apekey, 2001). Typical Ghanaian managers regard rule –making as their exclusive prerogative; they believe in strict supervision and expect subordinates to be compliant with and loyal to the interests of their supervisors. However, these managers were found to be generous and indulgent to their subordinates and believe that the employees’ obligations to their families must be given due consideration in decisions that affect them. Similar to the works above, Akuoko (2008) in a study of the role of traditional values and sociocultural factors in management practices in the Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital, also found traditional Ghanaian values to influence the behaviour of Human Resource Management personnel, and their relationship with others at the workplace. He also recognized the extent to which familism played out in human resource management practices. Other factors found include respect for age and authority, mutual respect and trust, significance attached to funerals and gender discrimination against women.

On recruitments, Akuoko’s study revealed that heads of most organisations ignore the criteria set forth for the appointment of candidates to vacant positions so that they can employ their tribesmen. Hence, appointment is usually not based upon competence or merit and the job may not be offered to the best person. The traditional values and socio-cultural factors also put strains on the effective and efficient performance of the roles of HR managers. There are situations, according to Akuoko, where the HR manager

has to bend the rules in order to satisfy the demands of kinsmen at the expense of established organisational norms.

From the various studies and arguments advanced here, one would agree that the often quoted view that management is universal or follows a universal pattern is being displaced with the knowledge that managerial attitude, values, behaviours, and efficacy differ across cultures.

Considering the literature, one sees a problem of a dearth of research that focuses exclusively on culture and how it influences managerial behaviour in organisations in Ghana. Since managerial performances are contingent on other factors apart from culture, the actual and real influence of culture cannot be determined unless the investigation focuses specially and exclusively on it. Although a great deal of studies in recent times have acknowledged the role culture plays in management (Akuoko, 2008; Apekey, 2001; Aluko, 2003), in most of these studies, culture is rarely isolated as “a defined category” (Kuada, 1994, p. 4). Consequently, not much is known about specific cultural values and how they inform managerial behaviour, practices and performance in organisations in general and bureaucratic establishments in particular.

Some researchers have put forth the argument that the effectiveness of leaders varies largely as a result of the cultural environment in which the leaders function. Universities are bureaucracies with some form of structure and predictability. From the works reviewed so far, this type of organization has not been well studied to see the role of culture in the manager’s conduct and managerial practices. So, beside the practical need, there are other important reasons to interrogate further the impact of culture on managerial behaviour. Could managerial behavior and practices be influenced by culture in well-structured organizations like universities? This is the basic concern addressed in this paper.

Methods of Research and Profile of Respondents

In studies that deal with norms, attitudes and socio-cultural values and practice, a mix research method approach tends to always yield better results. As was well recognised by Agyeman, Brown, and Awusabo-Asare (1990), the adoption of a single research instrument in studies of this nature has its own shortcomings. The study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to reduce the deficiencies that are bound to be caused by the use of a single research approach. The quantitative method adopted is questionnaire survey while the qualitative approach adopted is in- depth (key informant) interviews of selected managerial personnel and non-managerial staff.

The study employed a multi-stage sampling design, combining both non-probability and probability techniques to select the sample. In the first instance, the two institutions (private and public) were selected from a list of accredited universities in Ghana with exclusion criteria. Thus, only universities which were accredited before 2010 by the Ghana Accreditation Board were included in the categories to be sampled. These universities were placed in two categories (private and public) and through the simple random technique two universities (University of Ghana and Valley View University) were selected to represent the private and public universities respectively. In the second instance, the units selected consisted also of the actual units of analysis for the study (Kumekpor, 2002, p. 150) who are the managerial and non-managerial personnel of the institutions. The sampling frame was considered very elaborate and involved essentially scattered units. As such, this approach was envisaged to reduce the distance between the samples and further minimise cost.

In the public university, thirty –three units were sampled in the second phase of the exercise. This included 19 academic departments, 3 administrative directorates, and 11 other units which constitute a college, 2 schools, faculties, institutes, centres and residential halls. Apart from the academic departments, the head or the deputy of each of the sampled units as well as one senior assistant or assistant registrar were included in the survey. At the department level, however, only the head of department was included in the interview. In cases where the head was unavailable, he/she is replaced by the acting head.

After the managerial groups were selected, equal samples of non-managerial personnel were picked from each of the thirty-three units at random for the survey to gain further understanding into the subject matter. The above sampling technique was only applied in the selection of the study sample for the public university. The sample for the private university did not require any elaborate sampling procedure since the

population of interest was relatively small. The intention therefore was to interview all the heads (managerial personnel) of the various units of the university and to select an equal proportion of their number from the non-managerial personnel through simple random sampling techniques. It is important to mention however that some of the personnel declined to grant the interview. The total sample for the survey was one hundred and forty-four (144) personnel; of which 94 and 50 were earmarked for the public and private universities respectively.

For its qualitative nature, the key informant interviews employed a multiple of non-probability sampling techniques. They included quota, purposive, and snowballing techniques. In all, twenty-five (25) personnel were interviewed. Of this number, 15 were managerial and 10 non-managerial personnel from the two institutions. Of the 15 managerial personnel, 10 were interviewed from the public institution and 5 from the private. For the non-managerial group, 5 personnel each were interviewed from the two universities.

Two different but similar instruments were developed for the managerial and non-managerial groups of the organisations. In all, 134 questionnaires were retrieved. It is important to note, however, that this did not have any significant effect on the study and its outcomes. The 134 completed and usable questionnaires netted a response rate of 93.05% which is a high response rate.

The managerial personnel included heads of departments (and residential halls), directors, deans, registrars/faculty officers and finance officers among others. The non-managerial personnel also included lecturers, administrative assistants, teaching assistants, secretaries, librarians, lab technicians and messengers. The study involved 42 female and 25 male managerial personnel. Conversely, the non-managerial respondents included 40 females and 27 males. Seventy-eight (78) percent of the managerial personnel were aged between 35 and 54 years, and 15% between 55 to 64 years.

Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the respondents were second degree holders, while 22% and 22% were PHD and first degree holders respectively. The rest were Diploma (10%) and other lower qualifications (8.5%). Of all the respondents, 90% were Christians and 10% Moslems. Worth noting however, no Moslem was interviewed at the Private University.

The average household size of the respondents was found to be about six members per household which is higher than the national average household size of four members and much higher than the current Greater Accra regional value of 3.8 (GSS, 2012). The data reveal that over fifty percent of this category of respondents (53.7%) had at least one member of the extended family living with them.

From these statistics, one can deduce that despite reports that people in the urban areas and especially the middle class in society are becoming more and more nucleated, personnel in the institutions studied are still attached to their extended families. In line with this, nine of every ten of the respondents in the study share the opinion that everyone must try to avoid the impression that he/she does not have an interest in the extended family's well-being.

Data Presentation and Discussion

As emphasised by Aluko (2003), culture is a wide and multidimensional concept which makes it practically impossible for one to deal with exhaustively in a single study. As such, no attempt is made to deal conclusively with culture in the institutions studied. The focus in the study was on the non-material aspects of culture. Here, culture was treated as the independent variable and the concept that determines other behavioural characteristics exhibited at work.

Similar to the studies by Kuada (1994) and Akuoko's (2008), this study unearthed a number of cultural variables and sociocultural values which have implications for management practices and relations in the study institutions. The variables are familism, ethnicity, respect for age (the elderly), authority and traditional leadership, religious beliefs and other metaphysical considerations. The value placed on funerals and other social ceremonies, plea for clemency (*dwanetoo*), and fear of the unknown also influence managerial behaviour and practices according to the data. In the section that follows, these factors are presented and a discussion of their nature and relation with management practices established.

Familism, Ethnicity and Informal Relations

Personnel of the two universities show high attachment to their kinship groups. This is demonstrated in their household composition and the beliefs shared about the extended family in general (Nukunya, 2003, p. 52). Confirming earlier findings of Akuoko (2008) and Kuada (1994), familism and familial relations were found to influence managerial behaviour and for that matter managerial practices in the universities. All the personnel interviewed believe that everyone in society must make an effort to avoid the impression that he/she does not have an interest in the affairs of the extended family. As such, 90.5% indicated they cannot be described as people who are inconsiderate of the extended family. To these respondents, they always try their best to help the extended family members whenever the need arises.

The respondents also indicated that members of the family and other ethnic relations make demands on them about university admissions and job placement. Seventy-five percent (75%) of them indicated that relatives (extended family and ethnic relations) make demands on them expecting favours during university admissions and in job placement. While some of these personnel who could not help indicated that the relatives were not qualified at all, others said they could simply not go through the strict bureaucratic system.

It is instructive to note that some of the demands, according to the personnel, were in conflict with the institutional rules and regulations guiding the processes. This notwithstanding, 53% of the personnel follow through to get admissions for their relatives. To these workers, the candidates were qualified so they had to facilitate the process with their influence. In line with this position, 86% of the workers and 89% of the managers interviewed hold the opinion that when a relative needs the services of one's institution or department, it is only fair to influence (facilitate) the official bureaucratic processes for him or her.

The above belief is shared among organisational members irrespective of where they worked (private or public) or position on the hierarchy. In an analytical sense, the belief as represented here could manifest itself in (or at least be interpreted to mean) the possible existence of high levels of favouritism and nepotism. Following features of Max Weber's bureaucracy and Walberg's argument (Weber, 1947; Walberg, 1970; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), theoretically and sometimes practically, some of these ills of organisational life (nepotism and favouritism) are supposed to be minimal if not non-existent in bureaucratic establishments like colleges. This however seem not to be the case in the universities studied.

On the subject of ethnicity, some workers indicated they sometimes feel discriminated against on ethnic grounds. There were reports on allegations of discrimination and unequal treatment; where one set of standards and procedure are used for a particular group and another for others among both the managers and non-managerial personnel. While some argue that these allegations are not real, 37% of managers and 45% of non-managers hold the view that these allegations are real in practice although they also agree that in theory, nothing of the sort exists.

The interviews also unearthed a persistent effort by workers to often forge close interpersonal relationships with managers from their own ethnic groups and tribes. Some of the respondents described this as 'natural' (normal) although they agree it could be dysfunctional to the work organisation and the environment. A cross tabulation of responses to this item and institutional type showed no significant difference. This means that although the attitude may vary in intensity from one university to the other, its existence does not vary with institutional orientation.

On the same subject, one respondent (a Principal Administrative Assistant, Public Univ.) during the key informant interviews has been quoted below:

It is very true that workers forge close interpersonal relationship with Heads from their ethnic groups. It is the case with this department; I have been here for some time now and I have seen this happen with change of H.O.Ds; when we had a northerner as Head, northerners in the department formed some group around him. After him was a Ga and she got so much attachment from the Ga in the department. I really do not know why but it is happening. Now, we have an Akan, and all the Akans seem to always be around him; they are closer and on informal terms with him.

In another interview, one female administrator (Assistant Registrar) had this experience to share:

My husband was promoted to a position here in this University. Immediately after his appointment, some ethnic relations gathered themselves together and came home to congratulate him saying "it is our turn now" and so on... He enjoyed so much loyalty from them. They were always ready for him".

The above quotes contain most of the views expressed during the interviews. These ethnic related concerns have however not become a major source of worry to members of the private institution because it is not as wide spread as the public university. This is the situation especially in public institution. This has created a situation which we term in this paper 'ethnic competition' in which the various ethnic and tribal groups in the university compete for positions in the policy determining structure of the organisation. Although this practice may lead to nepotism, favouritism, and some acts of discriminations, it is important to state that the primary purpose of this competition is to essentially enhance the status of the group and give it a voice in major decisions of the organisations.

Workers variously described their own account of ethnicity and ethnic biases in the university system. However, unlike studies elsewhere (Akuoko, 2008; Apekey, 2001; Kuada, 1994), ethnicity was found to play a very subtle role in recruitment practices in the two universities studied. Employment generally follows the general rules of the organisation and even when people are favoured, it is only up to a certain point of the process. Employment among senior employees especially is largely based on merit; qualification and competence as the underlying principle.

This notwithstanding, interactions held with some workers on recruitments in the universities revealed that some staff in the junior ranks secure their jobs through the help of relations within the organisations. Although this current study is unable to further confirm this claim, the data resulting from the interview in the two universities indicate that about four of every ten of the non-managerial respondents (43.3%) had a relative who ever worked in the institutions in which they are currently employed. This trend was observed to be slightly high among workers of the private university than the public. As argued by Cohen et al. (1995) and subsequently by Akuoko (2008), these are obviously spill overs from the social structure of society.

It is important to note that most of the allegations are on promotional issues. It appears a lot of workers, especially, senior staff (administrative) and other junior ranked employees find the promotion practices of the Universities as unfair and overridden by victimisations. While some accuse heads of trying to prevent the promotion of some people for personality clashes, others bemoan ethnic victimisation in promotion practices.

Although the bureaucratic policies and procedures of the Institutions in Weber's conception appear to make the influence of cultural variables like familism, ethnicity and religious associations impossible (Walberg, 1970); this fact only appears to be in theory. Personnel of the universities face a lot of pressure and demands during university admissions from relations. These demands and pressures are expressed in diverse ways. Some are just in the form of requests for minor assistance (normally from relatives and casual friends). Others come in the form of request for assistance in actually getting admissions and in some cases employment. These requests were found to run through all departments and offices. This is particularly because people outside think once a relative is an office holder or an employee of a university, he/she has the power to "pull a few strings" here and there whether or not it is in line with the institutional regulations. Comparatively, familism actually plays a limited role in all of these processes in both the private and public institutions. The overarching factor has to do rather with pressures from friends outside and colleagues within the organisation. Some workers in an attempt to help distant relatives, wards of friends and colleagues, exert so much pressure on the administrative personnel in charge of the functions or concerns. Although, friends and colleagues (academic and non-academic) exert pressure on the personnel during admissions, colleagues within the university system are said to be the more difficult to handle due to the collegial environment and informal relations that exist in universities. In the words of one Professor (H.O.D):

...what is even more worrying is the collegial relations and its effects. Colleagues and friends inside exert pressure on one another. This is reciprocal. They help each other because sometimes these personnel in charge of administration come to teaching staff seeking to have them change certain things in their favour. E.g. sometimes, some want grades of their wards and relations reconsidered and all that... By so doing, those in the academic section also seek their help and they are unable to resist.

Much of the studies conducted on the role of informal relations on the formal organisation over the years have tilted focus toward the direction of the Hawthorne experiments. These studies have essentially had to do with the effects of informal relations formed within the formal organisation on organisational behaviour as demonstrated above; all to the neglect the role of the sociocultural environment and how it influences organisational behaviour and managerial conduct in particular. The present study revealed that informal relations as mentioned earlier although have a great impact, those formed through religious groups and other associations sometimes prove to have greater implication for work in the organisations.

Similar to earlier arguments by Aktas et al. (2011), Weaver and Agle (2002), Gunther (2001) and Roundy (2009), commonality in religious faith (in organised religion) was found to have a greater impact on the work situation than even familial relations. In relation to this assertion, one Head of Department bemoaned his inability to help his nephew who subsequently got help from another officer who happened to fellowship in the same church as his (the Head of Department's) sister. He made the following comments during the interview:

...the gentleman (my nephew) called me to help him get a particular programme. All efforts to get him admitted proved futile. One officer in charge of this (unit) apparently insisted that there was no way my nephew could be admitted unto the programme because he was not qualified". "I was eager to help my nephew... you know this is Ghana, any opportunity to help a relative must be taken as such; otherwise you know the consequences... It actually did not work and so I told my sister, I mean the mother of the boy, that it was not possible considering the performance of my nephew". To my surprise, I received a call from my nephew who said: 'Uncle..., I am here now..., reading the same programme I wanted'

In an inquiry about how the nephew gained admission, this respondent (the HOD) was told there is this 'big' man who happens to be in the same church with them who helped after he had been approached by the mother of the boy in question. This confirms Weaver & Agle's (2002) earlier argument that religions' roles expectations and identity have the potential to influence ethical behaviour or individual work values. In this direction, it is revealing to know that the said 'big' man in the church happens to be the very same officer at the University who failed to help the Colleague (that is the Head of Department) on the same boy.

Of even particular sociological significance to the current discussion is the fact that the Head of Department's problem was not the nephew's admission or the officer's assistance but the implications of the act. His worry was that he would be said to have failed to help 'his own' and that if it had not been for the intervention of a 'stranger', his nephew could not have been admitted in the University he lectures.

Funerals and Other Ceremonies

Funerals and festivals are deemed important by workers of many organisations as would be found among members of the general community of Ghanaians (Nukunya, 2003; Akuoko, 2008). This has several implications for the work situation and managerial behaviour. Thus, a manager's ignorance of these open secrets about the sociocultural milieu may be disastrous. The degree of importance attached to these ceremonies is however not blatantly distributed among individual workers; it is largely dependent on the cultural setting of one's origin. An employee's value placed on funeral ceremonies, for example, is seen when one is bereaved. For instance, worker 'A' when bereaved might ask the department or colleagues not to bother traveling all the way to the funeral while a failure to show up in worker 'B's' hometown for a relative's funeral may be given very austere interpretations.

In an effort to explore the possible effects of the importance attached to funerals on work, a majority of the respondents conceded that funerals do place a strain on work, especially that of heads of departments in the universities. As a head of a department, even when one is busy and cannot attend one ceremony or the other, workers misinterpret it to mean a dislike. In an attempt to avoid this, some heads forgo some activities and sacrifice personal care just so they can attend funerals. This is exemplified in the following response by one Professor (head of department) to a question of whether or not the attendance of funerals place any strain on managers:

Funerals do place a strain on managers and this is not restricted to this institution alone. The University has not really taken care of the problem of funerals...whenever there is a funeral 'inside', the department has to look for money and organise people to go. As a Head, if you fail to go, trouble. They expect to see the Head always. If you do not go, it means you do not like the fellow.

Similar to what Kedia and Bhagat (1988) describe as abstractive versus associative work behaviour, when one is bereaved in these organisations, he / she is given quite a long time (two weeks or a month) to mourn depending on the closeness of the dead relative. Any human resource management personnel who attempts to query an individual who comes to work late after such a period of mourning, is seen by many in such a culture as one who is "insensitive to the context". Such human resource management practitioners are often ridiculed in the organisation and called 'names'. When it comes to visiting relations and friends in hospitals, and so forth, only a few workers ask for permission. Workers were found to attend so many programs in a year. Some even leave for funerals, weddings and to visit sick relations without permission.

Due to personal involvement, and their believe that funeral attendance is a social responsibility and a cultural requirement, managers are often faced with a difficulty when it comes to reprimanding subordinates who come to work late after attending such ceremonies.

While other workers do well to go on social visits and come to work, others would not show up at all. These workers, according to the managerial personnel, find it incongruous that superiors who are Ghanaians would want to discipline or penalise them for taking a few days off to mourn in cases of funerals. This finds expression in what is termed high associative thinking (Kedia & Bhagat 1988). This type of thinking leads to an emphasis on context –determined rather than principle –dominant behavior. Here, work behaviours are determined to a very large extent by the immediate context relevant to workers. They do not follow normative work ethics, neither are they guided by abstract principles governing particular job behaviours as the case of bureaucratic rules may be.

In cultures such as this, there is a high sense of 'living in the present' and take the job as it comes (Mendonca & Kanungo, 1996). However, since the 'present' keeps changing, workers with this thinking often prove to be very unpredictable with performing required job behaviours uniformly. That is to say that although avoiding uncertainties may be a good description, its counterpart –predictability would not be appropriate for such a culture.

Religion and Superstitious Beliefs among Workers

Another variable found to have implication for work and management practices in the universities is religion and other metaphysical concerns. It is worth noting that the effect of religion on worker behaviour has long been recognized by Weaver and Agle (2002), Roundy (2009), and Liu (2010).

To all the respondents in the present study, praying to God and resorting to the supernatural can improve one's career prospects and opportunities. Also, according to 64% of the managerial personnel, workers are concerned and do talk about the activities of witchcraft and other spirits. According to these personnel, not only do workers talk about the existence and activities of witchcraft and sorcery but also their activities are deemed potent by these workers. When asked whether workers deem the activities of these spiritual entities potent, 61% of the managerial respondents answered in the affirmative. It is worth emphasising, however, that reckoning activities of spirits as potent must not necessarily be confused with their use. In line with this, workers in most of the departments of both the private and public universities attribute failures and mishaps, as well as job success and career prospects to spiritual sources. This is not out of place, since workers in all of the departments of the two institutions believe that the supernatural could have a hand in their job success and career prospects.

The findings regarding religion above provide impetus for the fact that the hitherto distinct line between religious beliefs and work is blurring (Roundy, 2009). Religiosity in the universities is open to be observed and very rampant in the workplace. The religiousness and especially workgroup fellowship was found to sometimes affect effective performance management. The study revealed a certain belief among workers that to be religious is to be good, accommodating, tolerant, patient and forgiving. There is therefore the expectation that managers who are religious should possess all of these characteristics. This expectation

was found to present a hideous challenge for managers in the universities in the sense that workers find it incongruous that superiors who are devoted and so close to God would not want to forgive when mistakes and offences are committed at work.

Age, Tradition and Authority

The relation orientation of the African discussed earlier is demonstrated in the respect for elders and the sense of community shared among Africans (Sofola, 1973; Onwubiko, 1991). Kuada, in his study of “managerial behaviour in Ghana and Kenya”, acknowledged that age in the African context is a very important factor within organisations. The case in universities studied is not different. As many as 92% of the managers interviewed, in both universities believe that respect for age must be preserved even in management. Sixty –one percent (61%) of them also believe that age and experience in life is worth more than ‘paper’ qualifications.

As could clearly be deduced from the above, respect for the elderly is considered an important guiding principle for behaviour. The elderly as posited by Moemeka (1996) are seen as the very source of wisdom and knowledge in society. Within the Ghanaian and for that matter African context, the elderly are examples for the young to emulate. They are treated with utmost deference, respect and dignity (Darley & Blankson, 20008; Nukunya, 2003; Kuada, 1994; Assimeng, 1981).

The relational orientation of the African was very evident in the two universities. Age in this context was found to be a very important factor. Respect for elders and a high sense of community is shared by the workers in most of the departments visited. Similarly, respect for chiefs and other traditional leaders is a shared value among personnel of the universities. Chiefs are treated with respect and reverence in these organizations. This is an important guiding principle of behaviour and presents a daunting challenge for HR practitioners; especially, the young. This and other reciprocal relationships encouraged by the collegium and the collegial atmosphere of the universities, was found to make effective management of performance difficult for the managerial personnel.

Plea for Clemency (The Concept of ‘dwanetoo’)

As was the case in Akuoko’s (2008) study, personnel in the two universities indicated the existence of a traditional practice whereby individuals found to have misconducted themselves in traditional societies could plead for clemency by seeking the intervention of some respected and renowned people in the society. Akuoko (2008) describes this as a customary practice of conflict resolution whereby a third party intercedes on behalf of an offender. Similar to the practice in the larger Ghanaian society, workers who misconduct themselves and are sanctioned or envisage some sanctions plead for clemency as a way of either reducing the intensity of the likely punishment or having them evaded altogether. The Akan call this practice *dwanetoo* (a two syllabic word which literally mean: ‘run to mend’). The practice takes many forms and happens at almost all levels of the organisational hierarchy.

In every human society, there is a level of negotiation and mediation. As such, should someone really realise that he/she has offended somebody or going to be punished, this negotiation, intervention and mediation which Ghanaians (Akan) call *dwanetoo* is brought to use. It is important to note that this is not necessarily an African character but a human character. Therefore, the African who would not want his dirty linens washed outside would always find every means to mitigate that. This practice as could be deduced from the following quote is understood and acceptable to many organisational members including managers:

“in the European system, queries may come and you reply the query but once you have answered it well, you are free. But the African system is not like that –there is no letter to answer, you go! Even where there is a query and you have answered well, it still sets you one foot out” (A head of department at the public university).

People obviously do not want this; that is why workers are always quick to resort to ‘*dwanetoo*’. To the Ghanaian, the fear of losing his or her job is not just economic but also psycho social. Work defines the African and for that matter the Ghanaian in society.

While *dwanettoa* may be a good way of dealing with conflicts in organisations, it sometimes proves to be a daunting heddle for leaders in lower and middle managerial positions in organisations. The practice is found to inhibit effective performance management. Some managerial personnel of the private university expressed their frustration with the practice at the university. A Principal administrative Assistant in one of the departments in responding to a question on the existence of the practice stated that,

"the practice (dwanettoa) is very frequent and frustrating. I have seen this in at least two out of the three units I have served in. Most often when a subordinate has to be punished or reprimanded, he / she goes to some other senior members especially higher than you in age and qualification to come and plead on their behalf for you to withdraw the query or punishment. It is very rampant and so frustrating in this department".

Many of the respondents during the key informant interviews shared similar experiences with the practice of *dwanettoa* in both universities.

Leadership Styles and Managerial Approaches

Al-Najem et al.(2012) posit that leaders can better "lead by setting up example and inspire people by encouragement" which "are proved to be a positive and influential factor in overall organisational performance" (Al-Najem et al.,2012, p. 122) . Many quality management experts have acclaimed leadership as one of the key factors for quality management which cannot be ignored. Thus, the importance of leadership in organisations cannot be overemphasised.

Culture and leadership always work hand in hand. Al-Najem et al. (2012) argue that both culture and leadership (and not a single one of them) are important ingredients in determining the success of an organisation. As such, an attempt was made in this study to examine the relationship between socio - cultural values and managers' choice of leadership style. The study argues that there exists a close relationship between leaders' behaviour and choice of leadership approach and some socio-cultural variables and considerations.

In line with other findings from studies of influence of culture on leadership behaviour (Pasa et al., 2001; Kuada, 1994), leaders and for that matter managers in the present study were found to show paternalistic attributes. Here, the factors include a combination of both elements of autocratic and nurturant behaviours. The leader in this type of leadership model / approach acts like a father to the subordinates.

This leadership model is favoured by both leaders and subordinates in the two universities. It combines authoritarian ideals with some level of benevolence. This is what Selmer, Kang, and Wright (1994) term the "paternalistic authoritarian style" (1994, p. 51). A benevolent and respected manager like the head of a household, is considerate of his subordinates and is also seen to be shrewd and decisive in action (Whitley, 1992). However, unlike the traditional Chinese corporate organisations as reported in Selmer et al. (1994), decision making in the universities studied are not centralised in the manager or head. Here, policy and important administrative decisions are taken by committees which are represented by virtually all the levels in the institutions. This notwithstanding, employees in the organisations (especially, junior employees) see themselves as not involved in the decision making process in practice.

Employees or subordinates involvement in decision making and goal setting was found to be low in the universities. According to the key informant interviews conducted in the two universities, subordinates especially the junior staff are only involved in decision making in theory. What this means is that the subordinates on paper, are in the decision making structures of the organisation but in practice, they are rarely involved in the activity of decision making and goal setting. Talking about theoretical involvement is to suggest that they are represented on some committees and bodies of the organisation. Practically, these representations are in such a way that they are insignificant and therefore rendering subordinates' views at the committee levels irrelevant and sometimes, non-existent.

To an appreciable extent workers are involved in decision making, although once in a while some decisions come imposed. Examples may include some policy decisions. In such cases, although the structural functions are followed, the decisions differ from what emerges from the various opinions expressed during meetings at the lower levels. *"It appears as if the decisions change up there. It also appears the decision is taken before the deliberations begin. Either way, it is not the best. But theoretically, the level of involvement is*

okay" a personnel at University of Ghana stated in expression of her sentiments. Similar sentiments were expressed by a majority of the administrative personnel and junior staff of the Valley View University. This probably accounts for the reason why most of the decisions in terms of the policies face some initial resistance from the university community.

In the midst of all these, 90% of subordinates would obey administrative instructions without question. They do that, particularly when they are very junior in rank. This is evident in both the private and public universities. The subordinate always recognizes the power to do or undo residing in the superior. He/she can easily be dismissed or if not dismissed at all, 'if the superior has registered me as a bad person in his mind, then I am not going to be happy here'. They can create all kinds of problems for you, "so I better behave so that I will be in his good books."

Many factors may be responsible, but whatever accounts for the obscurity among subordinates and junior employees, culture is one and major. It is not only found in administration, but in the school as well. Teachers and lecturers also tend to encourage this. There is a certain continuity about the way people are raised in the socio-cultural system through to formal education. Ghanaians are especially brought up not to raise questions, and not to collide with elders and superiors (Assimeng, 1981; Nukunya, 2003.). This finds explanation in the fact that the Ghanaian worker recognises the power to make and un-make as residing with the boss and would therefore not do anything that would appear to be a challenge and a threat to the boss' status and authority. This appears to be in tandem with traditional Ghanaian values of respect for authority, unquestioning acquiescence (Assimeng, 1981) conformity, and absolute submission of the young to the old.

Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated beyond doubt that traditional cultures and social structure of societies are influential in shaping institutions, practices and behaviour of the members of bureaucratic organisations. Some of the socio-cultural variables that have implications for managerial and bureaucratic practices include familism, ethnicity, respect for age, authority and traditional leadership, religious beliefs and other metaphysical considerations, social ceremonies, plea for clemency and gender concerns. These socio-cultural variables as has been discussed in the paper, influence student admissions, recruitment and selection of personnel, interpersonal relationships, decision making and other practices in the organisations.

It must be admitted that the universities modelled after the manner of Max Weber's bureaucracy have a hierarchy culture. There are standardized rules and procedures for carrying out every task within the universities. This fact notwithstanding, the study's findings establish that managerial practices and behaviour in Ghanaian universities are greatly influenced by elements of the sociocultural environment. Individuals working in these universities engage in a constant negotiation and sometimes compromise in adherence to rational formal structures while keeping non-rational informal relations running. Significantly, the paper demonstrates the extent to which sociocultural factors creep into formal, bureaucratic organisations. It shows the strength of the informal structures in reshaping bureaucratic culture and work behaviour, and brings to the fore the need to consider sociocultural contexts in designing bureaucratic organizations.

From the above, it could be said that an individual manager's effectiveness in organizations such as universities in Ghana therefore would lie in his or her ability to strike a good balance between the bureaucratic culture and the larger sociocultural subsystem within which the universities are located. In much the same way, unlike believing in the ultimate triumph of bureaucracy over the collegial culture of universities as contended by Weber (1947), the interests of universities would be better served when there is a harmony between the bureaucratic subsystem and the socio-cultural environment.

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