

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Tribe and Organizations in Africa

Guest Editors:

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As a follow-up to the Professional Development Workshop (PDW) on Tribal Identity and the Challenge of Building Inclusive Organizations in Africa, held at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in Boston, we decided to organize a special issue to explore in-depth the topic of tribal identity, diversity, and inclusion in African organizations. Since the beginning of the 21st century, there has been increased interest of management scholars and practitioners in Africa as indicated by conferences, symposia, and academic publications (Nkomo, Zoogah, & Acquah, 2015; Walsh, 2011, 2015; Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015). One of the key motivations is to understand the continent which is “marked by fast growth, limited growth, or no growth at all, Africa’s business, government, and civil sectors all need world-class management.”¹ As a result, several scholars have called for examining the different factors that may affect institutional and organizational effectiveness in Africa. Among such factors is the tribe (George et al., 2016; Zoogah, 2016) which undergirds not only socio-economic and political interactions but also entrepreneurial, organizational, and relational aspects of management (Zoogah, 2019). As George et al. (2016: 389) indicate, the profusion and diversity of tribes in Africa “raise interesting questions of managing and motivating employees to perform, as well as challenge the assumptions and boundary conditions that underpin constructs such as trust, justice, and identity.”

¹ <http://meeting.aomonline.org/international/southafrica>.

Africa has the greatest number and variety of tribes in the world. Unfortunately, there is limited research on how they influence organizations. Most scholars have not integrated the tribe in their attempts to understand management in Africa. Hence, the relationship between the tribe and organizations represents a missing link in the management literature on Africa. This is surprising because the tribe is at the center of the life of Africans (Lentz, 1995). It is the daily reality that the tribe represents a ‘salient feature’ in the lives of Africans. For example, within the same nation, ‘tribal affiliations’ often dominate political appointments.

According to the Afrobarometer survey, which has been examining ethnicity² since 1999, a significant proportion of respondents (56%) across all the countries surveyed indicate a strong or equal preference for their tribe and nation; about 44% of all respondents in Africa have strong feeling for only the nation (www.Afrobarometer.org). In fact, the tribal dynamic is such that it not only influences interactions and relations in the workplace, but it also affects cross-country interactions. Some ‘overlapping tribes’ (tribes that were split into different countries) tend to relate with each other more than with other tribes of the same country. For instance, the Akan tribes of Ghana and Ivory Coast were split. Yet, the Akans of Ghana and Ivory Coast tend to relate with each other more than with other tribes of the same country. The same is true for the Kru tribe in Ivory Coast and Liberia. The interactions of the ‘overlapping tribes’ likely have differential effects on organizations.

In the management and organization domain, research has focused on the structural components of ethnicity as a demographic variable in the dominant debate on diversity (see Proudford and Nkomo, 2006). It is only recently that interest in the tribe and its effects on organizational processes and outcomes (George et al., 2016; Zoogah, 2016) is emerging.

² It is the only barometer to do so; Asiabarometer (www.asianbarometer.org) and Latinbarometer (www.latinobarometro.org) do not examine ethnicity.

Previous research has shown the dysfunctional aspects of ethnicity or tribes at the national level (Collier, 2007). To some extent, African countries could be construed as ‘social experiments’ because African countries today are collections of tribes that in most instances, do not always share similar values related to government and power structure (Lentz, 1995). In fact, a tribe is a nation. It has a territory, a language, a distinct culture, and an economic and social system (Mathai, 2009). The creation of the African modern ‘nations’ has resulted in the regrouping of these disparate tribes to create nation-states (de Sardan, 1999). The challenge that African nation states face today is how to transform these different tribes into a cohesive group that can harbor a national identity and ensure economic development and prosperity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008). Echoing Samora Machel, the Mozambican leader, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) argues that “for the nation to live, the tribe must die”, which suggests that the tribe is problematic and antithetical to nationhood. This dysfunctional view of the tribe is opposed by others who present a functional view of the tribe by arguing that tribes are micronations that long existed before nations which arose from the colonial experiment (Mathai, 2009). An area where both the dysfunctional and functional views can be assessed is the organization. For example, creating effective and inclusive organizations in an environment where people have a ‘low-degree’ of national identity represents a daunting task.

Working on samples drawn from several sub-Saharan African countries, Michalopoulos and Paionannou (2015) found that respondents identified with their ethnic group as often as with the nation, pointing to the salience of ethnicity. It is possible that African organizations rest upon the social psychology originally evolved for tribal life (Cordes, Richerson, McElreath, & Strimling, 2006). Hence, management scholars could research the extent to which tribal identity, for example, affects organizational decisions, such as hiring, demotion or promotion to the extent

that attachment to one's tribe could affect employee behavior and actions within organizations (Thomas & Bendixen, 2000; Michalopoulos & Paionannou, 2015). De Sardan (1999) argues that the corruption complex is embedded within the culture of African societies, and is based on logics of negotiation, gift-giving, solidarity network, authority, and redistributive accumulation, such that individuals sometimes engage in corrupt behaviors to avoid shame emanating from ethnic members or groups.

However, given the functionality of tribes among Jews, Chinese, Japanese, British, and Indians (Kotkin, 1993), is it likely that positive behaviors associated with tribes can advance organizations in Africa. How do attitudes and behaviors of tribal members influence cohesion, climate, culture, strategy, and even structures of organizations? How do attitudes such as tribal identity, commitment, and satisfaction influence not only behaviors of employees and groups but also organizational effectiveness? To what extent is human resources effectiveness in organizations dependent on tribal antecedents (e.g., loyalty) and processes? How do philosophies (e.g., tribalism) and mindsets (e.g., 'tribe first, all others second') affect performance, promotion, and interactions of members in the organization? There is evidence that discrimination along tribal lines is prevalent in many African organizations, specifically state-owned organizations and those built by Africans. Kragh (2012) underscores the prevalence of discrimination along tribal lines in Kenya. A direct consequence of tribal identity is nepotism. Although "nepotism is widespread in developing countries where it influences and shapes organizational behaviors and business transactions" (Kragh, 2012, p. 248), it is poorly studied and therefore, poorly understood (Hayajenh, Maghrabi, & Al-Dabbagh, 1994; Vinton, 1998).

Hence, understanding the internal dynamics of how tribes function could provide insights into the inner workings of African organizations. For example, loyalty, identification,

reciprocity, and devotion are the cornerstones of the tribe's or clan's survival. Clan members are bound by strong, non-contractual norms (Ouchi, 1980; Chan, 1997). These strong bounds could lead organizational members to espouse the organization's goals and comply with managerial authority. These values are also important in building strong organizations.

In this call for papers, we invite scholars to explore interesting questions around the *tribe and organizations* related to entrepreneurship, international business, strategy, organizational behavior, and human resources management. We believe there are macro, meso, and micro-level issues around the *tribe and organizations* in Africa. Addressing the questions below is significant and relevant for management knowledge and practice in Africa. The list is only a guide but not exhaustive or exclusive:

1. How does the tribe influence the structural and processual aspects of organizations in Africa?
2. How do managers build inclusive organizations in societies where people tend to remain more loyal to their tribes than their nations?
3. Does tribal identity affect organizational decisions, such as hiring, demotion or promotion?
4. To what extent the ethnic make-up of the top management of an organization affects the hiring process?
5. Are the effects of tribal identity more salient in state-owned enterprises and organizations owned by Africans than in subsidiaries of multinational corporations?
6. How can management scholars conduct meaningful research on this phenomenon and provide guidelines to managers and policy makers to build more inclusive organizations?

7. To what extent and under what conditions can tribal identity be considered a force for good?
8. How could scholars define and operationalize tribal diversity in the African context?
9. How does practical wisdom or knowledge of African tribes apply to management and organizations?
10. How do attitudes (e.g., commitment, loyalty, identification) towards the tribe enhance or impede organizational functioning?
11. How do ethnic norms (e.g., ethnic obligations) influence operations and interactions in organizations?

Submission Guidelines and Process

Abstract Submissions: This Call for Papers has adopted a two-stage process. Authors must first submit a **five-page abstract** (double-spaced, 12-inches, New Times Roman, 1-inch margin around the paper with appropriate paragraphing) that specifies the following: 1) research question, 2) hypotheses (for empirical papers) and 3) methodology (for empirical papers). For conceptual papers, we would appreciate clarity on the contribution and model (if any) and how the paper will enhance the science of management. The deadline for submitting abstracts is **June 30, 2020**.

Full Paper Submissions: Authors whose abstracts are accepted will be invited to submit full papers. It is expected that the authors at this stage will meet the deadline in order for the Special Issue to meet the publication deadline. Papers should be no more than 10,000 words, including references, tables, figures, and (12000 with appendices). They will be blind-reviewed following the journal's standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the

guidelines of the Africa Journal of Management (AJOM)

<https://www.tandfonline.com/action/authorSubmission?show=instructions&journalCode=rajm20>

Authors should refer to the AJOM website for instructions on submitting a paper. Submission

must be done via the Africa Journal of Management Editorial Manager at

<http://www.edmgr.com/rajm/default.aspx>. The deadline for submitting full papers is **October 31, 2020**.

The Special Issue's tentative publication date is December 2021. Authors may send queries to the SI editors at tribeorganizationafricasi@gmail.com.

Africa Journal of Management (AJOM)

AJOM is published by Africa Academy of Management (AFAM), an affiliate of the US-based Academy of Management. As the first scholarly journal of AFAM, AJOM gives voice to those who are committed to advancing management scholarship, education and practice in or about Africa, for the benefit of all of Africa. The purpose of the journal is to advance management theory, research, education, practice and service in Africa by promoting the production and dissemination of high quality and relevant manuscripts. AJOM welcomes manuscripts that develop, test, replicate or validate management theories, tools and methods with Africa as the starting point. The journal also publishes research notes, book reviews and insights, and comments and debates from readers on published papers or important management questions of the day.

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