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**MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOUR IN GHANA AND KENYA
- A Cultural Perspective**

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*Dedicated to
Gitte, Eric, Esi and Senyo*

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PREFACE

The notion that management knowledge and skills are of universal validity has been vigorously challenged by several authors during the past two or more decades. The failure of numerous Western sponsored management transfer initiatives in Africa and elsewhere bears eloquent testimony to this. The available evidence underscores the importance of undertaking a critical examination of the assumptions underlying these transfer efforts. How can we, for example, explain the high incidence of relapse to former behaviour when African managers return from carefully designed and executed training programmes? In its search for explanation to this and similar phenomena, the contemporary literature has hinted at the possible influence of culture on managerial behaviour. The underlying premise for this line of enquiry is that management is culturally specific. That is, the dominant logic within an organization has its foundations in the beliefs, values of the ambient society as well as the cultural orientations of its leading members. If it is realized that Western management concepts, skills and techniques have evolved as solutions to specific socio-economic problems in the West and are, as such, dependent on the cultural values, norms and practices of these countries to succeed, it becomes instructive to argue that the cultures of non-Western countries do influence the receptivity and practice of concepts imported into them. The foundational concept in this study is therefore culture; Ghanaian and Kenyan culture to be more precise. In more specific terms, the study focuses attention on cultural frames of behaviour which are taken for granted by African managers and therefore not directly expressed in their encounters with other organizational members. By surfacing these cultural "influencers", I intend to draw attention to how African managers behave,

why they behave the way they do and the implications of their behaviour on organizational goal attainment.

The search for a deeper insight into management practices in Africa and ways of improving them is also the concern of foreign aid organizations who sponsor development projects in these countries and foreign business enterprises who have subsidiaries in Africa. Leonard (1987, p. 906) aptly captures the frustrations of all these groups when he writes "we certainly have no knowledge of what reforms might be used to improve the performance of Africa's public organizations. We can be reasonably certain that techniques imported from the West will fail unless they are revised quite fundamentally. Yet we also know that some African public organizations are performing much better than others. What we do not know is why". His observation holds true for non-public organizations as well.

This study has been guided by my awareness of this problem. I submit that current efforts at management development hardly attain their intended objectives because the skills and knowledge imparted are grafted on to the existing cultural values and norms of the countries in which they are to be applied. It had been hoped by management trainers that the "superior" values of Western management would eventually replace the traditional values and modes of behaviour. But this has hardly been the case. Thus, the transferred knowledge and skills have never taken roots within the cultures of their host countries.

Seen against this background the present study has both perceptual and normative goals. The normative goals are two-fold. First it is directed at helping Ghanaian and Kenyan managers to become conscious of the cultural foundations of their own behaviour, and the reasons why some of the intellectually appealing management skills and knowledge to which they have been introduced during their formal education and management training courses have limited influence on their work. Some may use this awareness as an excuse for not changing their behaviour. Others (and I hope a significant proportion) may use it to guide their efforts toward an improvement of their managerial behaviour. The second normative goal relates to changes in the design and implementation of management training programmes for Ghanaian and Kenyan managers and, by extension, for managers in other south Saharan African countries. By understanding the culturally grounded reasons why African managers

behave the way they do, and the demands made on them by their workers as well as society as a whole, it may be possible to introduce new skills and/or modify existing concepts and skills to fit their requirements in the long run.

It will be presumptuous for me to claim that the investigations reported here provide a complete view of managerial behaviour in the two countries. But I enter the claim that important (albeit selective) aspects of the managers' behaviour and operational conditions have been highlighted and some revealing observations have been produced. These observations, I hope, will stimulate further debate and studies into the relationship between culture and management in Africa, at both macro and micro levels.

John E. Kuada
Aalborg, Denmark
June 1994