

How can African business schools best serve the often unique needs of African businesses and peoples? **Moustapha Mamba Guirassy** gives one example from Senegal that may serve as a guide

# MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA

“A human being is by nature a political animal,” said Aristotle. Antiquity believed that it is only by living in the human community that a man or a woman acquires their humanity. That is why Aristotle also said that “to live alone, one must be a beast or a god”.

It should be noted, however, that we only achieve our humanity through a psycho-social integration process we now call education. Initially the reserve of the family, clan, tribe or lineage, over time education has become the concern of the whole community. Determined by its own concerns, the specific problems occurring in its environment, its history and its teaching materials, each community develops its own educational system to form a type of human being who embodies its identity and who works for its progress.

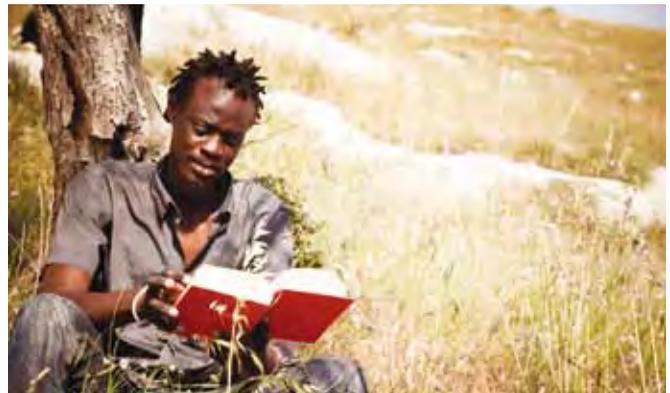
However, mainly because of colonisation, the African education system (and in particular the field of management education) was and is in large part more to do with training that meets the needs of other communities rather than its own. It trains for others rather than for itself.

It is the difficult relationship between the orientation of the African education system, in particular in management, and African identities (understood in terms of needs and expectations of the continent) that this article now examines.

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Management education in Africa needs an objective assessment of the existing situation to identify strengths and weaknesses in the three key elements:

- Business school and community
- Incubation projects
- Research policy





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### **Transfer factors and the current situation**

Change factors in business schools are many and various – individual and collective, material and spiritual, qualitative and quantitative – making it difficult to identify a specific factor responsible for a particular change. But, generally, there are two broad categories of factors: internal and external.

#### ***Internal factors***

African societies are hierarchical and/or stratified, leading to conflicts, which are, according to Marxist sociology, decisive factors in social change. In traditional African societies, stratification revolved around caste, professional, gender, cultural, demographic and geographic considerations, which caused conflicts and thus changes in behaviour.

#### ***External factors***

External factors have been the most critical in leading to profound changes in the political, economic and sociocultural agendas of Black Africa. These factors range from slavery to globalisation through colonisation, neo-colonialism, Islamisation and, in particular, new forms of American and Chinese imperialism.

When Canadian communications guru Marshall McLuhan likened the world to a global village, he implied that Western societies are at the centre while all the others are relegated to the periphery.

A similar consideration is found in two noted political scientists and authors, Francis Fukuyama (*The End of History and the Last Man*) and Samuel Huntington (*The Clash of Civilizations*), who supported the thesis that American capitalist and democratic models were able to be imposed worldwide with only limited resistance.

This is, one might say, an extension of the colonial model, whose concern was to weaken colonies by establishing a system of economic and cultural exploitation. Thus the trading economy began to take shape, which led among other things to the change from food crops to cash crops, manufacturing, the creation of urban clusters and so on.





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For the effective management of a trading economy, the colonial administration needed to rely on a local workforce trained in a certain way to be totally at the service of this large-scale exploitative system. Hence they trained factory workers, dockworkers, health workers, veterinary officials, tax collectors, translators, security guards and so on. There was no room for private initiative. It was all about taylorism and mimicry.

Today, more than half a century after the independence of most African countries, this model is far from being abandoned.

Indeed, the phenomenon of neo-colonisation suggests that the independence of African countries in the fields of economy, politics and culture is only nominal. They still remain heavily dependent on the decisions and policies of the former colonial powers.

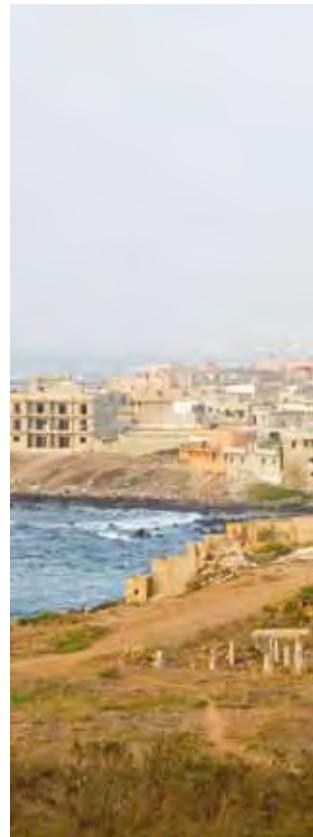
Added to this is the installation in many African countries of subsidiaries of foreign corporations that tend increasingly to dominate African economies. There is also a poor perception of business, which is not seen to compare well with a career in politics or the civil service.

In this context, business schools are effectively training people for the business development of companies controlled by foreign, and especially Western, concerns.

Fifteen years ago, there was only one university in Senegal, with no management faculty. The first management school, Cesag, opened around 1990. The University of Dakar only opened a management faculty in 2000 though so far it is more about administration than business.

This inevitably leads to a gradual disappearance of traditional knowledge and skills and, in some cases, profound ruptures between a business school and the community. We are here in the presence of factors that can significantly block local entrepreneurship by putting schooled people at the service of subdivisions of large multinationals.

Therefore, changes need to be made and these will be addressed in the next section.



### Some alternative proposals

In light of the problems outlined above, it is clear that reconsideration of the current system of training is now more necessary than ever.

This needs to be based on an uncompromising and objective assessment of the existing situation to identify strengths and weaknesses and to outline recommendations and suggestions that can contribute to strengthening management training in Africa.

There are three key elements:

#### *Business school and community*

At Institut africain de management (IAM) in Senegal, real efforts have been made for more than a decade to achieve and improve a joint school – community partnership. These efforts include the introduction of modules such as:

- African anthropology and sociology
- Fulani and Mandingo languages for business
- Economic intelligence
- A strong policy towards the corporate world
- Research on entrepreneurship

To this is added an immersion programme, where IAM students move every year for ten days to a little-known African environment for exploration, adaptation, identification and development of community potential.



### Incubation projects

IAM aims to help students achieve what is called a "Profile Djily", or an entrepreneur profile. (Djily Mbaye was a renowned Senegalese entrepreneur, locally trained and oriented towards agribusiness and real estate).

We learn lessons from the business-savvy Baol-Baol community, of which Djily Mbaye was a member. Members of the Baol-Baol community are not generally schooled in formal systems. They are self-taught. Yet they thrive in business, thanks to their sense of risk-taking and their work ethic.

### Research policy

Research policy at business schools should pursue the objective of updating the knowledge and know-how of the training given to students. At IAM, research policy revolves around the need to contribute to the renewal of knowledge and, correspondingly, to strengthen and improve training.

IAM is strongly committed to excellence and to the elucidation of fundamental issues that cross the African continent and has established three research laboratories in social sciences, financial engineering and computational techniques.

The Social Science lab, where there are researchers and academics but also students in the final phases of their programmes, works from systemic and multidisciplinary approaches to make sense of some key issues that challenge African societies in general and communities in WAEMU (the West African Economic and Monetary Union) in particular.

The critical themes concerning the lab relate to the problems of borders, political and economic governance, family businesses, CSR in Africa, the rural economy, social and institutional changes, macro-economic and macro-political settings, and cultural determinants of development.



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The Financial Engineering Lab, led by senior financial experts, is a melting pot of examination, analysis and solving of issues related to finance that challenge our communities.

These include currency issues, the financial policy of African business, micro-finance, access to credit, the impact of financial institutions, sub regional, regional and international fragile economies of the continent, Islamic finance and the financial environment of WAEMU States.

Finally, the Computer Techniques lab, which is cross-functional because its studies are undertaken to be made available to other labs, has a particular interest in the development of African societies.

The lab's studies revolve around various issues such as the identification, implementation and use of appropriate software in the business environment in Africa, computers in family businesses and African SMEs, ICT control and development across the continent, and training strategies to reduce the digital divide between North and South.

Let us say in conclusion that our business schools have come a long way. They have learned from their strengths and weaknesses but also from the experience gained by others, either on the African continent or in other places. That is why the work done in teaching and research consortia such as EFMD and AACSB is an important element in the uninterrupted movement towards excellence.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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#### FURTHER INFORMATION

IAM will host the EFMD Africa Conference from the 13-15 of November. Full details can be found on the EFMD website [www.efmd.org](http://www.efmd.org)