

## **MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AT CROSS-ROADS IN AFRICA: THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM**

*Keynote Speech delivered by prof. David Abdulai at IFSAM 2012, University of Limerick, Dublin, Ireland, 27<sup>th</sup> June 2012.*

The Chairperson of IFSAM 2012, Prof. Michael Morley, the Conveners of the conference, fellow keynote speakers, distinguished participants and distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen. I will first like to express my sincere gratitude to the conference organizers for inviting me to this prestigious conference. This is my first visit to Ireland your beautiful country and I am sure this will not be the last.

My topic today for this keynote speech is: ***MANAGEMENT EDUCATION AT CROSS-ROADS IN AFRICA: THE NEED FOR A NEW PARADIGM.***

**Mr. Chairman:**

The role of management education in the socio-economic development of countries cannot be emphasized enough. Management education contributes to the prosperity of nations, especially the numerous companies and industries that are located in them. Furthermore, management education produces the requisite management teams that contribute to the

development of innovative products and processes that afford the competitiveness of companies and countries. Unfortunately, African countries have benefited rather little from what management education has to offer and has thus lagged behind other regions of the World in development. One of the major reasons for that is because the few management schools set up after post-colonial rule in Africa were mainly to offer basic training to Africans to take over from the departing colonial masters. The focus was thus rather narrow and rudimentary.

Since that post-colonial period, numerous public and private sector business and management schools have been set up in Africa. (There are about 771 business schools in Africa today). This is because Africa's new leadership have come to realise that management education helps to develop the requisite entrepreneurs, managers and administrators needed to manage Africa's public and private sector institutions effectively. Entrepreneurs start new enterprises which provide employment but also contribute in diverse ways to the economies of respective African countries.

## **Mr. Chairman:**

After so many years in the economic doldrums especially in the 1970s & 80s and early parts of the 90s; when the economic growth of the continent was decimal and was described by publications like the *Economist* magazine as: “AFRICA THE HOPELESS CONTINENT,” and indeed by others like V. S. Naipul who claimed that: “AFRICA HAS NO FUTURE” have to eat their words. Africa has come a long way from the time when it was regarded by Afro-pessimist as “a poor continent with precarious states and beggarly peoples that arouse pity”. Africa’s current positive economic growth trajectory, which according to the *Economist* magazine, has over the past decade contained the world’s ten fastest-growing countries. The *Economist* also reports that in eight of the past ten years, Africa has grown faster than East Asia including Japan. Mckinsey Global Institute in its June 2010 publication titled, “*Lions on the move: The progress and potential of African economies,*” stated that “by the year 2020, Africa’s collective GDP will be \$2.6 trillion; its consumer spending will be \$1.4 trillion; and the number of African households with discretionary income will be 128 million.

It states that by the year 2040, 1.1 billion Africans will be of working age and 50 percent of Africans will be living in cities by the year 2030.”

**Mr. Chairman:**

This growth will require a cadre of skilled managers and leaders to manage and sustain this growth. These new cadre of skilled African managers and leaders need a new kind of management education that will train them to enhance and sustain Africa’s growth particularly in a new hyper-competitive global economy. This new kind of management education need a new pedagogy and philosophy that will borrow best methods and practices from all parts of the world. But those best methods and practices will be rooted in an African foundation, which comprises of Africa’s socio-economic and political realities, condition, environment and cultures — what I will like to call an Africa-Centred Management Education.

For management education in Africa to be able to make this new shift successfully, it needs a new paradigm. This new paradigm will require management schools on the continent to scale the generic challenges that management schools around the world face; but they

will also have to face Africa-specific challenges. In passing, let's touch briefly on the generic challenges facing management schools around the world which I am sure most of you are familiar with.

- The first is the shortage of academically qualified faculty, partly due to the shortage of Ph.D. holders or freshly minted Ph.D.s without any real life business experience.
- The second is the challenge business schools face in constantly adapting their curriculum to a constantly changing business environment.
- Added to that is the challenge of innovating the pedagogy to meet demands of a hyper-competitive marketplace.
- There is also the challenge of adapting to dynamic and constantly changing technologies.
- Finally, the issue of limited resources that many business schools face cannot be emphasised enough.

I am sure there are numerous other challenges that I might have not mentioned but I am sure the aforementioned drive home the point. Their impact on management education in general cannot be emphasised

enough. The consequence of these generic challenges for business schools in Africa is much more pronounced and the impact on the quality and form of management education in general in Africa leaves much to be desired. The developmental role that management education was to play in Africa's efforts at growth and development are thus missed.

**Mr. Chairman:**

There are specific challenges that business schools in Africa face apart from the generic challenges. As a board member of the African Association of Business Schools (AABS), one of the specific challenges we are trying to find a solution to is the lack of African case studies. Most of the case studies used by some African business schools are the Harvard Business School case studies. For current and future African managers, most of whom are going to work in public and private sector organisations in Africa, African case studies will fit these managers and leaders with the requisite lenses and enhance their ability to operate effectively in the African environment with a deeper understanding of Africa's unique socio-political, economic and cultural realities. More specifically,

management education with an emphasis on the human, societal, environmental dimensions, which involves what we call in Africa *Ubuntu (I am, because you are)*.

The second specific challenge to management education in Africa is that business schools mimic or reproduce or offer the same subjects as their counterparts in the West, with most of them emphasising on shareholder value and the bottom-line. Little thought has gone into developing innovative programmes or courses that answer Africa's yawning developmental challenges. For example, I am yet to see an African business school that has as part of its pedagogy a study tour of other regions/countries on the continent to learn from failures and successes of companies in different regions/countries from theirs. But most of these schools are quick to send their students to the U.K., the U.S.A. and Asia on study tours as if these students upon graduation are going to be managers in those countries or regions. I think it is important to learn from other countries and regions of the world; but such learning must begin at home.

A third specific challenge that is synonymous with developing countries but more pronounced in the case of Africa is that appointments to head most business and management institutions, particularly public institutions are based more on political affiliations or ethnic/tribal relations rather than on merit and experience. For most private institutions, it is based on family relations than on merit. The quality of graduates that these schools produce leaves much to be desired as in most cases the leadership have no clue about the intricacies of management education as their concept of management education is detached from reality. Students graduate from these schools with the requisite paper qualifications but limited on their knowledge of the subject matter of study and its application. At issue is also the relevance of the kind or quality of management education offered in this knowledge era. Their contribution to the development process of the continent is left wanting.

The issue of political stability and instability in general has a great impact on any longterm planning for the growth of management education in African institutions. Furthermore, most of the public management schools in

Africa find it rather difficult to plan for the longterm as some African governments depend on external assistance to supplement their budgets. With the current challenges in the global economic environment, especially in Europe, most of these funds are cut or have dried up. This also has an impact on the quality and delivery of management education in Africa.

**Mr. Chairman:**

There are so many of these challenges to mention here due to time constraints the few mentioned should suffice. From the few I have outlined, it is quite clear that management education is at cross-roads in Africa. Thus if management education in Africa is to contribute to the sustainable growth and development efforts of the continent today and into the future, it will need to be built on a new paradigm. This new paradigm will have to bring about the development of a new kind of management education in Africa that is Africa centered in its approach, methods, case studies and realities without compromising on quality but could also borrowing from best practices around the world. What form and shape should this new paradigm take?

First, courses and programmes need to be developed and taught, taking into context, the existing realities, cultural dynamics and nuances in Africa, the programmes should require the use of mostly African case studies and examples, supplemented by international ones. This is because the current Euro-centric approach and pedagogy of management education in Africa is yielding the wrong results.

Second, Africans themselves must begin to take a greater responsibility in the growth and development of their business and management schools and raise them to competitive levels with comparative schools globally. African policy makers, business men and women, academics as well as friends of management education in Africa must walk-the-talk and put their monies where their mouths are, so to speak. Policies, processes, funding and financing of management and business schools and their programmes must move from “No Action Talk Only”(NATO) to verifiable, implemented and evaluative actions. Bilateral partners can help, but Africans themselves must do the heavy lifting.

Third, even though technology is a double-edged sword, the effective employment of technology in management and business schools in Africa can enhance and open management education to many Africans who were previously denied such an opportunity because of distance and affordability. Africans can use new technology to leap-frog different stages of pedagogical delivery that their counterparts in the developed world had to go through. We are seeing what mobile telephony has done to the growth and development of the continent, especially the agricultural sector.

**Mr. Chairman:**

This new paradigm of an Africa-Centered Management Education is not far-fetched. New management schools like the African Graduate School of Management and Leadership are practising that and have developed new programmes that are taking into consideration such concerns. The school is also introducing the exposure to practical situations as part of the requirements of most of its programmes. It is also introducing mandatory internships for some of its programmes. As we grow, we will make sure that faculty members are from time to

time placed in African businesses to work on real-life projects to gain practical experience that they can bring back to the classroom.

It is obvious that if in Africa we continue to do things the same way over and over again as it has to with management education, we will continue to get the same results. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, “we cannot change the outcome of something with the same mindset that was used to created it.” We a need a change of mindset and approach to the current approach to teaching management education in Africa. Our future depends on it.

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