
Guest editorial: Organizational and management practices in COVID-19 business environments in Africa – The human factors

Guest editorial

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The world has changed rapidly since the advent of the COVID-19 and managing this change, especially during the epic of the pandemic was probably the single most difficult task that was encountered by managers of organizations, especially those operating in African business environment. This change, manifested by COVID aggravated globalization, liberalization, technological changes and advancement and market changes, is rapidly transforming the environment in which organizations operate. As it was observed by [Sanda \(2017\)](#), this change, manifested by globalization, liberalization, technological changes and advancement, and market changes has rapidly transformed the environment in which organizations operate. This, therefore affirmed the general view among management scholars that organizations are embedded in social, cultural, economic and political contexts (see [Kuada, 2012](#)), with sociocultural issues, such as power distance, embeddedness and collectivism shaping how most organizations operating in the African business and industrial environments are managed and led. Thus, using as a point of departure [Sanda's \(2017\)](#) argument that an organizational environment is a manifestation of a society which is stochastic in nature, the environmental dynamics of an organization might not be expected to remain stable in the midst of the rapid changes that were associated with the COVID-19 pandemics. According to an UNCTAD study [UNCTAD Report \(2020\)](#), Even though COVID-19 has pushed more consumers in developing countries to buy online many e-commerce businesses in least developed nations have seen a slump in sales. Based on hard-to-collect data from 23 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, a stark divide was found between the pandemic's impact on different actors in the digital economy ([UNCTAD Report, 2020](#)). As it is highlighted in the UNCTAD study [UNCTAD Report \(2020\)](#), most businesses have struggled to adapt and scale-up their operations online, despite the growing demand for e-commerce necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The human factor challenges and changes that occurred in the operating environments of organizations during the epic of the COVID-19 pandemic it imperative identifying the human-oriented strategies that was introduced by managers of business help the future-oriented enhancement of their organizations' productivities. In this regard, the future outlook of an organization's productivity and performance can be situated in the intersection of changes in technology, organizational lifestyle, organizational diversity and geopolitics ([Hammel and Prahlad, 1994](#)) of globalization and economic liberalization. As such, there is the need for understanding the requisite organizational and management models, as well as organizational structures and systems that were developed for the efficient and effective management of the human-oriented transformational developments in organizations. This is based on [Sanda's \(2017\)](#) notion that for a manager to have the ability to lead an organization efficiently and effectively in a world of technological change, globalization, competition and social responsibility, as imposed by the COVID-19 dynamics, such a manager might need to work effectively as a reflective leader manifesting self-awareness. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemics, such manager was expected to have the capability of understanding organizational dynamics and how to improve efficiency and effectiveness,



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and possess the ability to develop, adapt or adopt organizational development practices to lead an organization to success.

In the African context, as observed by Bolden and Kirk, there is the perception that the African cultures and institutions are characterized by tensions, some of which are frequently described in terms of dichotomies, such as, individualistic versus collectivist world visions, local versus global cultures, and formal versus informal relationships (Bolden and Kirk, 2009). This observation has helped situate the argument made by Binan about two and half decades ago, to the effect that the African society has historically faced momentous challenges, and thus needs visions of the future, which should be attractive, inspiring and compelling enough to be able to shift the mindset managers from focusing on just managing crises, but on how to make to anticipating the future (Binan, 1997). However, there appears to be a dearth of studies that explain the nature of human-oriented Organizational and Management Practices that prevailed in the COVID-19 Business Environments in Africa. For example, what empirical or conceptual answers do we know on how business managers organized and managed their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic? Also, going by the argument that effective leadership does not always translate from one situation to the next, what contemporary tools do managers of businesses use or require in tackling today's organizational development challenges? Since Africa is in a unique position as an emerging market economy pursuing affirmative action policies characterized by an open economy (Sanda, 2017), the provision of answers to these questions is of particular importance to our contemporary understanding of human resources management issues in a pandemic-infected work environments in African organizations. Thus, in moving away from the notion that sees organization and management research as focusing on the nature and consequences of managerial actions whereas business research primarily focuses only the determinants of corporate performance (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2012), this special issue of *AJEMS* brings together nine papers that provide new insights that add to our understanding of the contemporary Afrocentric perspective on human resources management advancement in pandemic-oriented industrial work environments. Of special relevance is making visible the dialogue of organizational and management activities in COVID-19 oriented business environments that promoted the relational, critical and constructionist perspectives on human resource management and organizational development. The papers discuss the development, implementations and functionalities of various human-oriented practices by African organizations in different country-contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent consequences on their work climate, in terms of the creation of climate for creativity and the consequence of work-related flow on employees' productivities.

In light of the above, and with the development of knowledge and understanding of organizational culture becoming increasingly important as a focus area in organization and management research, as well as in management practice (Alvesson, 2012; Sanda, 2017), the first article by Aradhana Ramnund-Mansing and Kiveshni Naidoo contended that countries in Africa have undergone an unprecedented transformation that has shaped the continent as they move ahead from the clutches of colonialism. The authors discussed how the evolution of leadership and how organizations function optimally has given rise to the review of leadership practices, revolutionizing its position in the global markets. Aradhana Ramnund-Mansing and Kiveshni Naidoo reflected on the recent spate of global suffering from the pandemic that as resulted in the formal and traditional work structures becoming transient. Building on the perspectives that African leadership has been entrenched in centuries of culture and tradition, exemplified by Nguni and Xitsonga adage (Khoza (2006), Aradhana Ramnund-Mansing and Kiveshni Naidoo in their paper situated that African communal influences have universal application. The paper was focused on the global uncertainties and the emergence of an African leadership framework suitable in the context. The authors contended that the leadership framework is based predominantly on African values, which can be realistically and pragmatically applied. Based on the notion that African leadership

characteristics in an African context is not new (Abebe *et al.*, 2020), the authors used a systematic review to demonstrate that this leadership approach can be applied globally with success in specific exemplars of change and disruptive management. By evaluating and analyzing characteristics and success indicators from the blend of leadership competencies ascertained from Afrocentric principles in response to African associated problems, Aradhana Ramnund-Mansing and Kiveshni Naidoo posited that Africa could cement its leadership concepts without following the global north principles. The authors concluded that these philosophies are resilient enough to contend with a range of organizational and managerial complexities that arose from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic complemented by a range of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity challenges.

The second article by Rufai Kilu, Mohammed-Aminu Sanda and Ana Alacovska was inspired by Seetharaman's (2020) observation that the COVID-19 crisis will not only leave many creative organizations struggling for survival, but it will also force some to look for alternative strategic paths. In this paper, Rufai and colleagues argued that though there is growing scholarly discourse toward COVID-19 pandemic and creative entrepreneurship in the perspectives of global south, the extant literature lacks sufficient empirical evidence on the subject matter. The authors provided insights into business models, and business model shifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic among creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. Based on this purview, Rufai and colleagues explored how the functionalities of Business Models (Shifts) was demystified among Ghanaian Creative Entrepreneurs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors argued that the enormous challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic on business organizations also created spaces for innovations, which provided organizations the opportunities to identify new business models that enabled them to survive the organizational and managerial consequences of the pandemic. Guided by the qualitative methodological approach, using interviews, focus Group Discussions and field observations, the authors found the existence of a unique business model that captured ministries, agencies and departments; traditional authorities, foreigners and the diasporan community as key creative partners. The authors also established that the creative entrepreneurs they studied equally proposed value via quality deliveries, attractive pattern mix, pure handy crafts, mart finishing, imbibing culture into productions and symbolic meanings. The authors concluded that at a regime of business model shifts existed among the creatives, which included digitalization and diversification in their work systems in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third article by Kamel Mouloudj and Ahmed Chemseddine Bouarar provided an insight on the significant public health threats caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and how it engendered uncertainties and inevitably permeated every aspect of peoples' professional and personal lives (Yorulmaz and Sevinc, 2021), including health employees and medical students. Arguing from the perspective that the propagation of the COVID-19 pandemic caused increased need for volunteers (Mak and Fancourt, 2021; Siqueira *et al.*, 2022), such as health students (Umar *et al.*, 2022), Kamel Mouloudj and Ahmed Bouarar investigated Algerian medical students' intention to participate in volunteer work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors argued that volunteering in the time of COVID-19 was different from volunteering in other catastrophes, because the COVID-19 pandemic was an unfamiliar, universal, and complicated crisis, which brought about significant adversity to the emergency management (Lai and Wang, 2022). Using an extended theory of planned behavior framework by integrating the constructs of personal moral norms and perceived risk of COVID-19, and the quantitative methodological approach, the authors showed that attitude toward volunteering, perceived behavior control, personal moral norm, and subjective norm significantly and positively predicted medical students' intention to engage in volunteer work during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors posited that students' perceived risk of COVID-19 significantly and negatively predicted their intention to participate in volunteer activities. The paper provided implications for understanding

medical students' volunteer behavior during health crises that can enhance their recruitment in the event of future waves of COVID-19 or other similar health crises.

The fourth article by Majoreen Amankwah examined the differences in values and job quality of employees' pre-COVID-19 era and peri-COVID-19 era due to several changes such as the shift in work culture in several economies including developing economies like Ghana. Arguing from the perspective that the COVID-19 pandemic did not only resulted in a dramatic shift in work culture, but also influenced people's daily lives, Majoreen explored the consequences of office workers being compelled to work from home because of the COVID-lockdown, and the requirement for businesses to adjust swiftly to the new circumstances through technological and managerial support ([Pataki-Bitto and Kapusy, 2021](#)). Using data on Ghanaian employees from both the private and public sectors, guided by quantitative analysis of human factor variables during the pre- and peri-COVID-19 pandemic era, the author identified alternate organizational and management work arrangements and practices that employees valued during the COVID-19 pandemic, and whose characteristics are contextual relative to reported practices in the extant literature.

In the fifth article, Rosemary Coffie and colleagues, examined how employee engagement influenced employee performance and how the relationship is moderated by job demands and resources in micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) in an emerging economy context during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study was informed by the authors' observations of the presumed inequalities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic in various spheres of societal life, and which effect accentuated the vulnerability of MSMEs. Rosemary Coffie and colleagues identified that the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges and threats that already existed in the MSME ecosystem resulting in most of them facing financial deficiencies due to the economic recession. Arguing from the perspective that empirical evidence on such challenges (e.g., [Caballero-Morales, 2021](#); [Akpan et al., 2020](#); [Tsilika et al., 2020](#)) have focused on MSME external to the African continent, this paper explored the consequence of such challenges in an African context. Guided by literature on Employee Engagement and Performance Practices and quantitative analytical approach, the paper established that employee engagement practices in the MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced the performance of their employees. The authors also established that didactic relation between the employees' engagement and performance in the MSMEs was significantly enhanced by the availability of job resources.

The sixth article was informed by Martha Harunavamwe and Herbert Kanengoni's observations of challenges imposed by COVID-19 pandemic on residential higher education institutions in their abilities to transition from the usage of the traditional face-to-face teaching-learning settings to the adaption of virtual and hybrid platforms. Underlined by the perspectives that most institutions are adjusting their way toward returning to the pre-COVID-19 work settings, and the argument that hybrid platforms remains relevant, a position that has exposed employees to a lot of ambiguity, and complexity which can potentially have a negative impact on work engagement ([Spagnoli et al., 2020](#)), Martha Harunavamwe and Herbert Kanengoni assessed the impact of technostress creators, work-family conflict and perceived organizational support on work engagement for employees operating in the virtual and hybrid work settings. Based on the notion that work engagement is a crucial motivational construct that results in a number of positive organizational outcomes, and that it is important to ascertain its antecedents and outcomes within the virtual and hybrid work settings ([Apouey et al., 2020](#)), the authors sought to redefine the antecedents of work engagement in work settings that are characterized by excessive technology and work-family conflict. Guided by the Job Demands Resource Model which focuses on the interaction between job resources and job demands and how the interaction results in employee engagement ([Demerouti et al., 2001](#)), Martha

Harunavamwe and Herbert Kanengoni studied academic academics and support staff employees at a selected University in South Africa and found that the combined effect of technostress, work family conflict and perceived organizational support on work engagement indicate that work-family conflict is a critical component in the relationship between technostress and work engagement. The authors also established that even though perceived organizational support is seen as a job resource that lessens stress, the influence of work-family conflict is stronger than that of perceived organizational support. They argued that even if support is provided, the prevalence of technostress creators and work-family conflict issues, and the increase in work demands will negatively influence work engagement. Martha Harunavamwe and Herbert Kanengoni posited that implementation of positive technology designed solutions in virtual and hybrid work settings presents possible inhibitors of techno-overload, techno-complexity, and techno-invasion which and, in turn, increases work engagement.

In the seventh article, using Caligiuri *et al.* (2020) and Collings *et al.* (2021) observations of the COVID-19 pandemic as a human crisis that highlights the role of human resources to help firms overcome the crisis successfully, and the argument that human resources management policies and practices contribute to building organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall *et al.*, 2011), Amira Bouteraa, and Fatma bouaziz investigated the impact of talent management practices on organizational resilience in Tunisian firms in times of the sanitary crises due to COVID-19. By relating to the argument that an effective talent management is required to strengthen organizational resilience in the face of global crises like COVID-19 (Lee *et al.*, 2022), and using a hypothetico-deductive approach, Amira Bouteraa, and Fatma Bouazizi hypothesized and tested four talent management practices that positively affect organizational resilience hypotheses. The authors established that talent identification positively affects organizational resilience, which they operationalized through the three dimensions: agility, integrity and robustness. The authors posited that while talent retention has no effect on this three dimensions of organizational resilience, Talent development and talent succession planning has positive influence on the firms' agility.

The eighth article by Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah, Farhad Hossain, Aminu Mamman and Christopher Rees contended that having the right intent, aspiration, ability and attitude to become an entrepreneur has become the mantra in the extant literature to be drivers of entrepreneurship and SME growth. In this wise, Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah and colleagues and colleagues sought to provide an understanding as to why zealous and ambitious individuals who possess all the rightful attributes so required of entrepreneurs, have to fizzle out few years after venturing into business. Adopting the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which is elaborated by Icek Ajzen for the purpose of improving the predictive power of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah and colleagues conceptualized a systems framework to analyze how SMEs either flourish or fail in developing countries. Guided by the TPB, which is a psychological theory that links beliefs to behavior, maintains that three core components, namely, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, together shape an individual's behavioral intentions (Ajzen, 1985), Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah *et al.* argued that the interplay of "internal ecology" and "external ecology" of prospective entrepreneurs provides a useful framework to explain the general SME outlook of an economy. The authors postulated that many internally driven prospective SME entrants (with entrepreneurial attitudes, abilities and aspirations) mostly in the developing economies may have their dreams shattered because of obstructive external ecological elements which tend to frustrate new business entrants as well as existing ones. Emmanuel Yeboah-Assiamah *et al.* discussed this postulation and using lessons and cases from empirical literature and datasets.

The ninth article by Euphrasie Kaningini and colleagues determined the factors that explain the intention of women traders in a developing country like DRC to adopt electronic commerce during a health-crisis period. This empirical study was motivated by a government a decree proclaiming a state of health emergency against COVID-19 with several lockdown decisions that lead to a paralysis of economic activities and total or partial closure of several micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, especially those run by women, because the latter have not been able to put in place resilience strategies to survive (Ntererwa, 2020). Euphrasie Kaningini and colleagues argued that though the extant literature is abound with findings related to the adoption of e-commerce that emanates from studies associated with the impacts of financial crisis and bridging the digital divide, such studies associated with resilience strategy for women entrepreneurs during a pandemic has so far received little empirical attention. Guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior, which is elaborated by Icek Ajzen for the purpose of improving the predictive power of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), and quantitative approach, Euphrasie Kaningini and colleagues posited that the intention of women traders to adopt electronic commerce is influenced only by factors that are attitudinal. The authors situate their study as novel with implications for both research and practice.

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Further reading

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