

Company Cultures and Managements Séminar

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RECRUITMENT AND MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA : AN IMPOSSIBLE CHALLENGE ? THE NIGERIAN CASE STUDY

by

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Overview

How is recruitment and management of cultural diversity different in Nigeria from any other country? What are the implications of this diversity with respect to the management of teams in this country, and what important changes appear to be taking place in this field today? A discussion between a recruitment consultant and a sociologist about the 'African diamond' questions the link between Western management methods for universal application and the purely practical tools created in a specific cultural context. This is a question largely ignored by companies in Nigeria.

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TALK : Alexandre Fabre and Marjolaine Paris

The Nigerian context

Alexandre Fabre : The Adexen recruitment agency was created in Paris five years ago and operates exclusively in Africa as a result of a network of agencies in various countries there. 70 % of the people recruited by the agency are African and work for local and international companies.

People's views about Nigeria are largely coloured by clichés which are often critical and sometimes scandalous. The first time I went to Nigeria, people referred to the country as 'the last door before Hell' which was far from encouraging ! Nigeria is often associated with corruption, excesses, black magic, Internet rip-offs, and, after recent attempted attacks, Islamic terrorism.

Paradoxically, in contrast to the current gloomy French situation, a recent BVA and Gallup International survey ranks Nigerians in second place (behind the Vietnamese) as the people most confident and optimistic about their personal advancement and the economic development of their country. This survey highlights the discrepancy between the view that Westerners have of Nigeria and of its citizens who refer to their country as the 'African diamond'.

Marjolaine Paris : Nigeria has a population of 152 million of which 25 million live in the capital, Lagos. It is home to one-fifth of the population of the African continent and is the most populated country in sub-Saharan Africa. It covers an area twice the size of France and because of the resources in its subsoil, like South Africa, Nigeria is a driving force for economic development in the sub-Saharan region generating 40 % of the region's gross domestic product (GDP). It is also a political power and played a significant part in the founding and development of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) to which it supplies most of the military resources. This country is a demographic giant but relatively unknown.

Alexandre Fabre : In 2009, Nigeria's GDP was 341 billion Euros, and it had a growth rate of 7.4 %. Its foreign debt has dropped and its economy has been boosted by key areas such as the hydrocarbon sector which today represents 32 % of its GDP and 90 % of direct foreign investments. Nigeria produces two million barrels of oil each day : it is the leading African oil producer and Angola is in second place. The United States, Europe, India and Brazil are the principal importers of Nigerian oil. Recent indications from deep offshore sites suggest that production may top three million barrels per day by 2015.

One should not forget other key sectors, such as agriculture which represents 36.5 % of the GDP. Nigeria is the leading African producer of manioc and yams. Because of an agricultural plan costing about one billion Euros and aiming to revitalise the sector, Zimbabwean farmers have been able to set up farms in different regions of Nigeria, helping to boost local development. There has also been significant growth in the telecommunications sector, and today there are nearly 70 million customers in Nigeria.

The financial sector was completely restructured by a governor of the Central Bank who imposed reserve requirements which considerably reduced the number of banks. The 'universal bank' model was abolished.

The country's economy is very dependant on imports from Europe, especially from China. At the opening of the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai, the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, declared that China would soon 'lead the world' and that Nigeria was 'ready to co-operate with China in all aspects of life'.

In 2008, French trade with Nigeria exceeded four billion Euros and accounted for 22 % of all French trade with Africa. The French group PPR has been in Nigeria for almost a century, and now other leaders of French industry such as Total, Lafarge, Technip, Peugeot and Michelin have established companies in Nigeria.

Marjolaine Paris : So why is Nigeria regarded as a dangerous country ? Firstly, it is because the climate for business is characterised by tremendous political uncertainty. Depending on the results of different federal or local elections, the government's economic policies can change and modify the situation for private individuals and companies. Secondly, laws which exist are not often enforced even for everyday practices.

Economic activity in Nigeria is made difficult by the level of insecurity in the country. Most of the conflicts which take place are localised and have little impact at a federal level, but they have do an effect on commercial activity which takes place in federal states, the cities and even areas within cities. These conflicts vary : they may be of an ethnic, religious or economic nature, or between communities, and they are heightened by a high level of violent delinquency which is linked to poverty, especially in Lagos. Therefore, Nigeria may be seen as a divided, tense country whose socioeconomic and identity schisms mesh together producing these violent situations varying in time and place.

Even though Nigeria is a relatively rich country on a macroeconomic scale, the fact that 54 % of its inhabitants live below the poverty line demonstrates that these riches are poorly distributed. The Gini coefficient which measures inequality was 42.9 in 2009, putting Nigeria in 158th place out of 182 countries studied. A World Bank report states that in 2004, 80 % of Nigeria's oil revenues benefited only 1 % of the population.

Cultural diversity in Nigeria

As far as religious divisions and identity issues are concerned, and against a background of political federalism, in 1999 Nigeria was divided into 36 States and 774 local governments. There are 250 ethnic groups in the country. Boundaries between the states only partially represent the ethnic frontiers, and rivalries linked to ethnic identity can be very strong. Today these ethnic frontiers are a problem, notably in applying the principle of 'Federal Character' which stipulates that, according to the Constitution, the federal state (like all the federated states) should take into account the ethnic diversity of the country. Legally, in a given state, indigenous and non-indigenous people live together. However, these two categories have different rights regarding access to land, employment and education, and this is a source of tension which regularly leads to confrontation.

When one adds religion to this situation, the result is a very marked geographical distinction between northern Nigeria where Islam is present, and southern Nigeria which is Christian. There are also animist religions which are still dominant, especially in rural areas. Zones where Muslims and Christians live together may be areas of marked conflict as is the case in the Middle Belt where there are recurring eruptions of violence regularly resulting in several hundred deaths.

It is therefore appropriate to talk about diversity on several levels, both domestic and international, because of strong economic trade with other countries.

Diversity here is taken to mean the large number of ethnic, religious and national identities which various people in the business world are likely to emphasise in order to set themselves apart. These identities are part of a series of power games which, on the one hand, are commonplace in the business world (hierarchical relationships, client relationships, and so on) and, on the other hand, are specific to Nigeria (political issues, balance between social categories). In an Alcatel-Lucent project in 2008, there were 54 different nationalities, and this diversity was also apparent in the large number of professions represented.

With regard to recruitment, three main methods are used : sub-contracting ; internal mobility between subsidiaries or direct recruitment ; and mobility from the company's head office (in other words, expatriation in the strict sense of the word). These three methods have varying implications in terms of salary and status.

If the economy is outward-looking, then Nigerian society will also be. Throughout time, the area within Nigeria's current boundaries has been occupied by foreigners over a very long period. In the 15th century, the Portuguese established trading posts and forts on the coast followed by the Danes, the Dutch and the French. In the 19th century, the British took economic control of the region, ousting the other Europeans and establishing a protectorate, before implementing a process of colonisation from the south, and introducing evangelism.

Within Nigeria's boundaries, there is a complex mixture of foreigners, including the Muslim empire of Sokoto in the north, the kingdom of Benin in the south-west, and the region of Biafra.

As a result of decolonisation, links with foreign countries have diversified and now foreigners in Nigeria are only there for business or religious reasons, with strong rivalries existing between them. Some diasporas, notably the Lebanese, have a very marked presence.

The existence of this wide diversity of origins in the world of business can also be explained by the difficulty in filling posts and the demand in certain sectors. Consequently, foreign companies recruit foreign executives and engineers to compensate for the shortage of qualified Nigerian employees. Even though the training of local executives was unable to keep up with the speed of development between 1960 and 1980, Nigeria has trained an economic elite which is larger than that of any other African country. However, like most other African countries, Nigeria experienced a substantial brain drain as qualified people were often attracted by better work opportunities in the West or in North Africa. The more affluent sectors of the Nigerian population are drawn towards foreign countries and often study in universities in England or the United States which have an international point of view. The Nigerian education system, which was a shining example in African countries, is now finding it difficult to cope with a burgeoning population.

However, it would be an exaggeration to say that companies lack sufficient candidates, because generally speaking, they have a large choice of CVs. The more pressing problem is the lack of candidates with sufficient qualifications, which is why it is the number one priority for companies to find people with the necessary skills.

Alexandre Fabre : The after-effects of British colonisation in Nigeria are not felt very much. By contrast with French-speaking Africa, there are no post-colonial expectations. Nigerians assume or even forget their past, and there is no specific preference today for British companies. There is a wide range of foreign nationals in the country who own companies or work for non-Nigerian companies in Nigeria. There are two reasons for this : firstly, the domestic market attracts many people, and secondly, a large number of countries want to diversify their energy supplies.

Historically, these various foreign communities have been tied to specific sectors of activity. Roughly speaking, one can say that the Lebanese (who have a large presence in Africa), Indians and Pakistanis are prominent in the catering, hotel and textile industries as well as in the mass retailing and consumer goods sectors. There is no doubt that there are more and more Chinese working in Nigeria. Apart from the sectors already mentioned, the Chinese are having an impact in the food sector (which is consequently experiencing a sort of revival), in the construction industry (where they are gradually replacing the Europeans), and in the oil industry. Americans and Europeans continue to be prominent in the high technology field, the building trade, and in oil and gas.

This diversity has an influence on our recruitment activity by forcing us to conform with requests which would be very politically incorrect according to criteria defined by the HALDE (Haute autorité de lutte contre les discriminations et pour l'égalité : The French Equal Opportunities and Anti-Discrimination Committee). This is why a job advertisement which appears to be banal often contains a real demand and sometimes very different expectations from the desired profile.

The sector of activity determines the nature of the recruitment. In the oil and gas sector, the most important criterion is the skill required to solve specific technical problems. In these sectors, work is generally offshore, in shifts, in project mode, with a wealth of resources, and a great deal of sub-contracting which means that the nationality of the expatriate candidate is not very important because what matters is expertise. By contrast, in the logistics and transport sectors, necessary technical skill is less strategic, operational margins are less, people management is more difficult, and the time factor must be optimised. One is faced with problems of customs, port authorities and strong trade union activity in this sector. These factors will strongly influence the choice of candidate. Generally speaking, companies ask us to give preference to men who are unmarried and who are of a similar nationality to employees already working on site.

Other criteria are defined according to the position needing to be filled. Certain large groups will give priority to the recruitment of expatriates for so-called 'sensitive' jobs, such as purchasing or finance, in which money plays an essential role. There may be justified concern about potential corruption if Nigerians are recruited. The lack of knowledge about existing networks and local practices by expatriates as well as the fact that contracts are temporary means that there is less risk. Similarly, large groups generally make sure that these candidates have already had experience in a head office. This provides additional security.

We also work with a number of Nigerian companies involved in the production of consumer goods for local markets, and whose management team is Lebanese. In these sectors, competition is strong, margins are small, the technical expertise required is weak, relationships built on trust are very important, and the ability to understand Lebanese culture is essential. The fundamental criterion therefore is to be Lebanese, and the impact of diversity is limited because recruitment is almost totally concentrated on Lebanese candidates. Similarly, in the position of a television operator, if the management is Korean and the human resources executives are Indian, candidate selection criteria and diversity are greatly influenced by the differences in nationality.

The geographical location of activity is also important. In the Delta, an area of oil extraction where employees live in high-security compounds, there is a strong risk of kidnapping and one cannot go out without a bodyguard. Recruitment here is therefore primarily male-oriented, especially unmarried and European men. It is very difficult to draw definitive conclusions as the market is evolving and practices are constantly changing.

The africanisation of human resources

There is one very clear trend : the 'africanisation' of management. All groups in all sectors are tending to move towards the africanisation of their resources. In Nigeria, it is called 'nigerianisation' and it is apparent because companies are increasingly giving jobs with a certain amount of responsibility to Nigerians.

Five years ago this was discussed at conferences ; today it is a market reality and we are increasingly being asked to recruit locally. However, even though the establishment of a legal framework has facilitated this trend, there is nevertheless a strong change in attitude which has had an influence on methods of recruitment and promotion by Western companies.

Marjolaine Paris : The legal framework which requires the appointment of Nigerian executives is quite old. Foreign investment and business practices used both by Western and

Nigerian companies are governed by the 'Indigenisation Decrees' of 1972 and 1977. These were completed by the 'Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree' in 1974 the aim of which was to put the key sectors of the Nigerian economy into the hands of exclusively national companies on a long-term basis, thereby limiting the margins of manoeuvre by foreigners in these sectors. These decrees operate according to the following parameters : the creation of opportunities for Nigerian entrepreneurs ; the appointment of executives and local employees ; the maximum retention of profits generated in the country ; and the increase in local production of intermediary consumer goods. In 1995, these decrees were replaced by the 'Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission Decree' and the 'Foreign Exchange Decree', which are more liberal. However, a certain number of measures remain, notably those which regulate recruitment : each foreign company has a quota of expatriates which is updated every two or three years, and the company has to justify the number of expatriates it needs to employ by stating the positions and the necessary qualifications which it cannot find in Nigeria. This quota of expatriates then serves as a basis on which the Immigration Ministry distributes individual work permits. After validation by the authorities, the decree authorises whether the directors of subsidiaries are Nigerian or foreigners, and whether they are residents or not.

Alexandre Fabre : As well as this legal matter, there is also a financial factor which encourages companies to recruit locally. Employing an expatriate is extremely expensive. This is because the expatriate package generally consists of a salary paid in his home country, plus a local salary, a car, a chauffeur, accommodation provided with the job, return airline tickets, payment of school fees and so on. It is a budget which fewer and fewer companies are able to pay. Africanisation has therefore had the greatest impact on companies whose margins are the narrowest because the cost of a Nigerian manager is 30 to 40 % less than that of an expatriate. It is not so much a question of differences in salary (which are becoming less important), but the cost of the material extras given to the expatriates which account for the difference. Furthermore, expatriation is not an absolute guarantee of better management in a country where one's first year is taken up by the process of adaptation, understanding the people and how teams work ; the second year, by creating one's networks and beginning to be operational ; and the third and often last year, by really starting to work efficiently.

The evolution of attitudes another factor which makes large groups realise that western management is not the only efficient solution in Africa. The uniqueness of Nigerians, their community spirit, their ethnic origins, the hierarchical divides, the myths behind the tribal chief, their deference to their elders, religion and temporality are all aspects which foreign companies find hard to integrate into their managerial methods. Today, they recognise these characteristics and attempt to find local solutions which can be implemented by local people. We have noticed that all classes are concerned by this change, including the managerial class. Therefore, the presence of a Nigerian head of human resources accelerates the process of nigerianisation.

The choice of local skills also guarantees a better understanding and knowledge of the local market in functions such as sales and marketing, and an understanding of the consumer 'codes', as well as more delicate negotiation with local authorities in areas where an expatriate would most certainly fail. There is also a recent tendency for qualified Nigerians who were trained and started their career abroad to return to Nigeria either because they have been severely affected by the economic depression in the West or because they have found attractive opportunities in their homeland. However, it is not always easy for these people to reintegrate themselves into society because they are not necessarily expected and have often been away from the country for too long.

Finally, large multinational companies such as British Gas, Schell, Schlumberger and Transocéan ought to set an example to all their subcontractors by favouring the recruitment of Nigerians executives, which creates a domino effect.

Management of multicultural teams

Marjolaine Paris : Generally speaking, teams are made up mainly of Nigerians with different positions and a multinational management board of expatriates. In the field, several management techniques are apparent. In general, there is no explicit and well thought out strategy inasmuch as most of local managers' time is devoted to the management of projects and relations with clients, which leaves them with little additional time to develop sophisticated managerial strategies.

There are various attempts made by management to try to make the best of these mixed teams. On a daily basis they have to emphasize a certain number of elements which help to encourage the team to be united. In this respect, projects play a determining role for those involved, because belonging to the same team project is a means of creating a united front to a client. This client, who is regarded by the managers as a sort of 'enemy' against whom the team needs to unite, also has some special features because he is Nigerian. These special features may include dishonesty, fits of anger or even well-known incompetence especially in technical fields. It is the work of the teams led by the managers to stand up to the client.

The idea of diversity is also displayed daily by all as a sort of expression which everyone can recognize in himself. This diversity, which refers to legitimate ideas in Europe and the United States, has very positive connotations and allows everyone to find his place regardless of status or nationality.

Management may, however, create certain exceptions within teams, deliberately or not, as illustrated by the example of handling security which is a particularly delicate subject in Nigeria. In general, security is the only area of business life where foreigners and Nigerians are handled in exactly the same way with the same rules and methods for everyone in their private life regardless of their position or employment contract. Generally speaking, local employees are only concerned by the rules of security which apply to them in their professional capacity. These security precautions, which expatriates consider to be essential for their presence in the country, and which are part of the contract generally given to them by their employers, give them access to services which are often regarded by Nigerians as privileges, and give rise to criticism and frustration. However, in the Delta region, Western sites are now so inaccessible that kidnappings are starting to target Nigerian managers who now have to resort to increased forms of security.

Diversity of identity within the Nigerian nation makes management even more complex. This is why companies use recruitment agencies which have knowledge of the local situation, or they themselves often choose to recruit a Nigerian human resources manager who is capable of handling interethnic tensions, since Western managers, even if they are aware of these complex realities, cannot understand or deal with them.

There are two ways of dealing with this. One way is mono-ethnic recruitment based on the human resources manager's networks and also on ethnic, family, religious and political links. The human resources manager has a social strategy expressed as a 'quid pro quo' practice which extends beyond the professional sphere. The alternative way is to reduce the excesses of mono-ethnic recruitment by the implementation of proactive practices.

Alexandre Fabre : Several scenarios exist in recruitment. With regards to recruitment for executive Nigerian positions, ethnicity does not play a role and, quite rightly, skill is the critical criterion. For more operational positions, management methods can be based more on ethnic criteria : for example, the management of a warehouse will be given to a member of the Yoruba tribe, but a position in supply chain management will be given to someone from the Hausa tribe reflecting the usual balance between the two sides. Even though this method of management is still widely practised, it is increasingly seen to be old-fashioned. A new approach, created by multinational companies, is based on objectives. It goes beyond ethnic

logic and attempts to choose candidates according to objective criteria and tests, using internal or official communication.

Other practices are restricted for geographical reasons. This is the case in the oil-producing area of the Delta where companies are forced to implement positive discrimination practices in favour of specific ethnic groups. They do so by asking local leaders to choose the people to work in positions which are generally not strategic, such as welders and security agents, and sometimes in human resources.

The increasing africanisation of employees poses questions about career management. Today, it is clear that companies are developing long-term strategies and invest in training for their African staff. As such, they have increasingly become a link in the chain of the public education system. Companies have started to develop more in-house training programmes which award certificates. These programmes sometimes have more value than state degrees. Companies also undertake programmes of provisional human resources management which enable them to define their priorities in terms of training. They call on external service providers both for short courses (such as Pepsi-Cola which sends its executives to Harvard for short sessions) and long courses (like Cegelec which manages the 18-month Chevron training session for young engineers). Companies are also developing the concept of career plans which are not purely national, and which can include the recruitment of African executives from other countries in the continent. Some groups aim to see more Africans who have been given responsibility occupying places on their executive boards.

DISCUSSION

The significance of ethnic affiliation

Question : *Many African executives, once they have been trained by Western companies, are quickly snapped up by the Nigerian administration which needs them to negotiate complex contracts with Western companies. As a result, these executives are quickly 'off market' to companies.*

Alexandre Fabre : In Nigeria, this is a phenomenon which is beginning to disappear. The desire of all these newly trained African executives is to earn more and more money and eventually to head up their own companies. Consequently, they will not be part of the administration and even less likely in the government.

Q. : *Does one's noble or sacred status associated with one's ethnic tribe sometimes interfere with the hierarchical structures of the company ?*

Marjolaine Paris : It is possible that a person who, in spite of his reputation for being incompetent, is in charge of a team whose members are his subordinates in a tribal setting. A foreigner cannot be aware of these links. It is therefore important to place this person in the most suitable position.

Q. : *Is this practice unique to Africa ? It can also be found in families ! Social status is often a major 'skill' in our companies too.*

A. F. : In Africa, practices based on ethnical factors are so ingrained and election sometimes so strong that in some companies, in order to limit the harmful effects, one uses it as a screening process, prior to choosing skills which can then be done according to more objective criteria.

Q. : *How is your agency organised in order to match up these many criteria with the ideal candidate ? What are your networks in Nigeria ? Do you have rival African recruitment agencies ?*

A. F. : Adexen is an agency with an office in Paris, and an office run by Nigerians in Lagos where we are registered as a local company. In Lagos, we employ eight consultants and sourcing specialists who manage local recruitment exclusively. Executive selection is subsequently managed by our Paris office. Local competition exists, of course, but we are clearly recognised as a local agency with a local team.

Today, our networks are still developing, and therefore only work to a limited extent. However, since the markets are in the process of being structured, people react positively to our job advertisements in newspapers or in official channels, and we receive a huge number of applications for each position. People also recommend candidates to us spontaneously which thereby increases the size of our database.

As far as expatriates are concerned, it is a small world where it is quite easy to find people used to working in complex situations as in Nigeria. The overriding risk then is that certain expatriate practices like this might become a little too 'africanised'.

So why go to Harvard ?

Q. : *It is obvious that imposing various Western models in Africa or Asia is unusual. What is the purpose of sending executives for training at Harvard ?*

A. F. : For the companies concerned, it is more a question of career management strategy and attractiveness. Executives are undoubtedly very motivated to work for a company which offers them training periods in Europe or the United States (even if they are generally for short periods) which enable them to go outside their country of origin. It is also a form of recognition. Despite all this, there is an MBA programme in Lagos which has an international reputation ; a good institution for training people in the oil industry in Port Harcourt financed by oil operators ; and a university system which was once a model in Africa in the 1970s. The paradox is that, in spite of the shortcomings of academic teaching in Nigeria, our candidates often get excellent results in standard selection tests.

M. P. : What I have managed to read by Nigerians about management in general seems to be extremely influenced by western models.

Q. : *Can we really talk about 'nigerianisation' as a whole when there are 250 different ethnic groups in the country ? It is not difficult to sack a Western executive overnight if he is not well suited to the job, but the same is not true of a Nigerian executive who is integrated in complex social networks and family ties.*

M. P. : Employment law does exist in Nigeria, but it is quite difficult to apply. It is therefore relatively easy to come to an amicable agreement in order to end an executive's contract. The choice of human resources manager is therefore extremely important as he will be in charge of this negotiation, and will be aware of the problems so that there will not be any unforeseeable consequences.

A. F. : More and more large oil companies are subcontracting out recruitment to paymasters who recruit and pay the employees for the companies. This allows companies to have greater flexibility and relieves them of all social and trade union problems.

Q. : *Do high-flying executives have people who defend their interests ?*

A. F. : Currently, there are no agents who act on behalf of executives despite a very high turnover in Nigerian executives. In Nigeria, there has been a massive increase in higher executive salaries. The oil sector, in particular, has badly affected other companies. In Port Harcourt, Michelin has rubber plantations and, in a rather paternalistic way, has trained its young engineers in its own school. Oil companies exploited this reservoir of young talent and paid them much more attractive salaries, and in so doing, siphoned off all Michelin's resources. However, if one notices on a candidate's CV that he has already changed companies four or five times, it will negatively affect his credibility, and companies have

grown wise to this. In Angola, where there is a real shortage of qualified candidates, salaries are extremely high and skill is a very expensive commodity. In Nigeria, however, the situation is very different.

Q. : *Does the fact that Nigerian executives are trained in Western management practices make life difficult for management to assert itself at a local level ? To what extent does nigerianisation provide appropriate solutions ?*

A. F. : Even if a Nigerian manager is trained at Harvard, he will still remain Nigerian, and the understanding he has of his environment will encourage the implementation of methods tested internationally at a local level. The question is particularly relevant in large groups. In local companies, management implements decision-making processes which are much more African than international. For example, in a large 100 % Nigerian group which employs 20,000 people where the management is purely Hausa, one never knows who is in charge, the person one is dealing with is constantly changing and yet, somehow, the company makes money ! Power is concentrated in certain hands, and even the purchase of a vehicle bought by the company can only take place with the big boss' signature.

Is nigerianisation useful ?

Q. : *What is written about this area concentrates on the manager, and pays little attention to whether the methods that he uses to run the company will have any significance and efficiency at a local level. It tends to ignore discussion about those who are managed and did not attend Harvard. This is where one should question the connection between methods intended for universal application and the tools created in a specific cultural context. Until now, these questions have been completely ignored and instead people prefer to talk vaguely about diversity.*

A. F. : In Lagos, a middle class is emerging whose members have not studied abroad, but have still found positions which require a certain level of responsibility. There are also local companies which have made their name regionally and which aim to become players on an international level by implementing a management model which is clearly more African than those of their rivals.

M. P. : When I was researching for my thesis, as there was no literature about French or Nigerian managers' practices, I could only understand their practices by watching how they adapted themselves on a blow-by-blow daily basis. What I noticed was that relations with clients were often confrontational and dramatic.

Q. : *Your example of a company run by the Hausa tribe and managed according to their practices, is not really that of a company trying to become africanised. You mentioned a Lebanese company : it is not trying to become africanised either and prefers to remain traditionally Lebanese. And then there is the model of the multinational French company which sets itself up and employs lots of expatriates. I do not think it is possible to create a link between these three situations and declare that africanisation can solve everything. True intercultural management exists where there is a convergence of management tools coming from elsewhere which are used in an African context. If companies have not yet considered this point, then I think that it is a mistake to get rid of expatriates. You emphasised the fact that there are no more white people in human resources management apart from the fact that control management of key recruitment positions remains in the hands of Westerners as does finance and strategic management. Why is this the case ? One reason might be that they are in positions where, if there is a situation of client favouritism, they can intervene neutrally, without being influenced by interests other than those of their company. There is clearly a lot of work to be done in order to break free from this unique method of africanised management where white people are used to try to solve African problems. People need to consider both management tools and favouritism. Favouritism is not necessarily irrational with regard to Africa : its origin is in what every society imposes on its employees as a way to interpret each situation. And this is also true of recruitment practices or the transfer of money.*

M. P. : In spite of this, we africanise the composition of companies very quickly, particularly because head office demands that costs are lowered, and this also applies to any Nigerian subsidiaries. However, this financial approach does not take local circumstances into account.

Presentation of the speakers :

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Marjolaine Paris : PhD in sociology. She is a consultant in the sociology of work and organisations, the author of a thesis on Franco-Nigerian business relations (2010), and a book entitled 'Collectifs interethniques au travail. Fonctionnement et gestion d'entreprises pluriculturelles dans le secteur des télécommunications' (pub. Éditions universitaires européennes, Sarrebrücken, 2010).

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