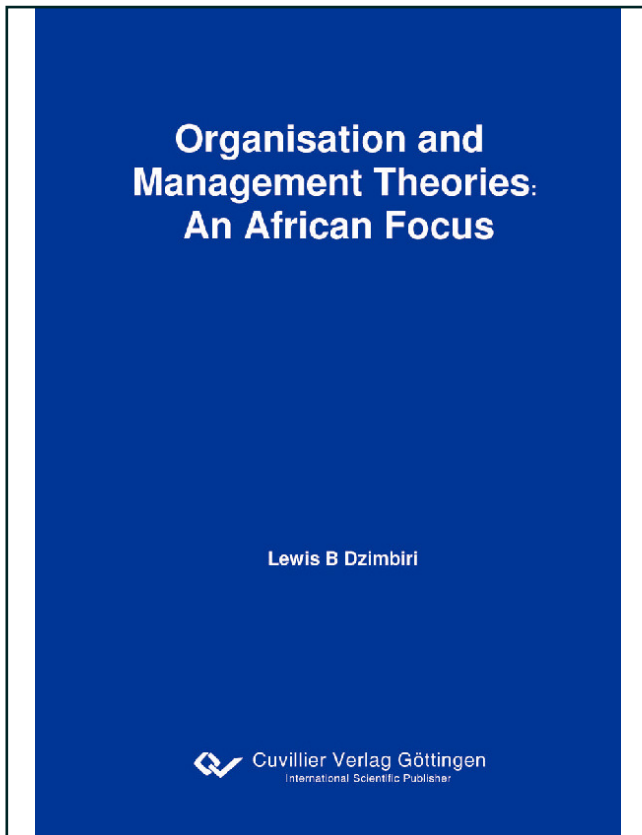




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## **Organisation and Management Theories: An African Focus**

Integrating structure, people, Processes and the environment for human happiness



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# About this Book

## Introduction

Organisation and Management Theories: integrating structure, people, processes and the environment has certain background and features that need to be introduced. This chapter focuses attention on the typical features of the book as a way of outlining what it contains and why it is written. It is an attempt to demonstrate why it should be added to the list of other well written books shelved in various libraries and bookshelves of universities, management development institutes and technical schools and in the offices and homes of directors, managers and administrators. The origin of the book is also explained. The question of whether there is tension between theory and practice is explored to demonstrate how both theory and experience are important attributes of anyone wanting to be an effective manager.

## The What Why and How of the Book

Imagine we went on a tour around cities, municipalities, districts and rural areas to ask people on the streets and roads what they would want to see in their lives if they were to feel more satisfied and happy in society. Certainly, they will tell us a lot. They will mention things like food, shoes, clothes, decent houses, nice cars, clean water, uninterrupted electricity, good education, health facilities, entertainment, recreation and many more. A study conducted by the author in Malawi on behalf of the Commonwealth Foundation in London as part of a Commonwealth-wide study on 'Civil Society in the New Millennium' in 1998, revealed more needs for what we termed 'the voiceless'. School drop-outs, farmers, local artisans, cattle herders, unemployed youths, divorced women, school boys and girls and others were asked what they thought were features of a good society. They were also asked to comment on whether those features existed in Malawi and if not what could be done in order to bring such a good society to Malawi. Respondents mentioned most of the above but added others like increased security to reduce armed robbery, eradication of poverty, violence against women, illiteracy, hunger, poverty, HIV/AIDS and corruption. Building of health centres in the various villages and tightening discipline in school were some of them. All these are human wants which cannot be achieved unless organised social structures are created and managed to undertake various

activities to produce goods and services for human consumption.

There are many excellent books written on issues regarding organisation and management theories. Most of them however do not combine the two areas in significant detail. There are those that dwell more on organisation theory and nothing on management. Others concentrate on management side of the organisation. Yet, others focus on topical issues dealing with managerial functions. For example, there are books written entirely on planning or strategic planning, leadership, communication, controlling, budgeting etc. It is a nightmare for students of organisation, management, business, public administration and human resource management to assemble all these bits and pieces together. A student would need to buy many books to ensure he captures issues of organisation and management theory. However, as the reader is aware, more often than not, financial constraints will inhibit. Again, where libraries are struggling to get a few textbooks every year due to funding problems, it becomes uneconomical to get books that have individual topics only. It is therefore much more convenient, economical, and hassle-free for libraries, managers and students to get a book that is close to a 'one-stop shop'. This book is closer to that.

Most of the literature tends to write issues about organisation and management theories without providing a clear link between structures, people, environment and processes. Consequently a student is left with the abstract world of theory without understanding that these concepts are about practical issues in his or her context. This book is therefore an attempt to stress this link so that organisation and management theories can be seen as part of what is happening around the world. Readers will be made to appreciate that the struggle for organisations is to meet their own needs while meeting the needs of society as a whole. And that to do this, they all have to handle issues to do with structure, people and the environment as they undertake various processes.

Another important issue to mention about the wider literature on organisation and management is that some of it is written without much effort to apply the theory to the specific contexts with which the African student is familiar. As we all know, effective teaching is characterised by providing more examples that are within the context of the student or is applied to certain practical contexts. A book which has to facilitate effective learning needs to be built on a firm experiential base- ie practical illustrations are essential elements of learning. This book tries as much as possible to provide practical illustrations, notably, within the context of Africa. It also provides review questions. More importantly, research activities aimed at enhancing the experiential part of the learning process within the context of the student are also provided.

This book is about the theory and application of organisation and management to produce goods and services for the happiness of human kind

all over the world. It is also an attempt to relate this to the management of organisations in the African environment. As a student of public administration, human resource development and industrial relations over the past two and a half decades, the author has written essays and examinations in Malawi and England. In these writings issues of the application or the relevance of a particular theory to his setting were examined. Throughout his teaching, consulting and research, he has used western theories like principles of management, scientific management, Douglas McGregor's theory X and Y, management by objectives, motivation and leadership styles among many others. He has also asked students and senior course participants how relevant such concepts are to their setting. Responses on the application of these Western principles and theories have in a big way influenced the direction the book has taken.

The idea to write this book was hatched over two decades ago when one former medical assistant student at the Staff Development Institute, Blantyre, over two decades ago, asked me a question: 'sir, are you management? When I waited for a couple of seconds without an answer, he went ahead to ask another question: I mean, did you learn the management theory and practice that you teach us or were you born with these ideas? I was still puzzled and could not have a direct and appropriate answer. He was surprised that although I was not a medical doctor, I was able to touch his heart in the way I taught health center management. In 1987, the Ministry of Health through the Howard University Health Institutional Development Project ( then coordinated by Dr Ross) asked me and my friend, the late John Mwale ( may his soul rest in peace!) to write a management manual for health centre management to be used for training of medical assistants who are managers of health centres in Malawi. My friend who initially accepted changed his mind on account that he was not a medical person and could therefore not write on drugs and medical supplies and other topics. I took the challenge all alone. I advised that I could do that after uncovering management skills and knowledge gaps for medical assistants.

I undertook a rapid needs assessment through interviewing, observation and reading of documents. I talked to medical assistants, district medical officers, patients, health surveillance assistants, ward attendants among others at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital, Central Medical Stores, Machinjili Health Centre in Blantyre, Thyolo District Hospital, Chonde and Thuchila health centres. My knowledge on office practice, general management, stores management, human resource management and communication and knowledge and experience in training helped me to pose appropriate questions throughout the research period.

I drafted the manual in which were topics such as drugs and medical supplies; communication systems at the health centre, personnel systems; records management and others. Using this manual, my colleagues at the

Staff Development Institute and I designed a course which over 200 medical assistants underwent over a period of three years. The medical assistant who asked me the above question belonged to the first group and was in effect one of the medical assistants who attended a meeting which I also attended at Thyolo District Hospital. During this meeting, I was introduced as 'a tutor from Mpemba College collecting information which he will use to teach us'. This student could not understand that a non-medical person could design and facilitate a management course that touched on health centre management to his satisfaction. I was doubly encouraged to realise that my ability to apply theoretical frameworks obtained through the study of organisation theory and management during my first degree in public administration to practical situations brought in satisfaction and excitement to my students. In fact, there were many more occasions when students and seminar participants expressed words of encouragement which acted as strongest motivators. 'Your students enjoy a lot; you make difficult concepts easy through illustrations', others would say.

It was not until I left this institution and joined the University of Malawi where I taught organisation theory and management for several years, that the urge to write this book came to me in very strong terms. While preliminary drafts started at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College, more serious work started sixteen years later at the University of Botswana after a long academic and professional journey. Thus, this book is a product of advanced study of management theory as well as practical management experience as a head of department, dean of faculty and vice president of the University of Malawi's Chancellor College. It has also benefited from my teaching experience and the experiences of senior managers in government, private and non-governmental sectors who participated in most senior management training programmes that I facilitated at the Staff Development institute, Malawi Railways Training Centre, National Bank training Centre, Nasawa Malawi Young Pioneer Training College and Hotel Training School, now the Institute of Tourism in Blantyre.

Other areas of greater insights are the workshops and seminars I conducted for the Employers' Consultative Association of Malawi (ECAM), Council for Non-Governmental Organisations of Malawi (CONGOMA), Trade Unions and the Ministry of Labour. At the regional level, my involvement in workshops organised by the Eastern and Southern African Universities Research Programme in Dar-es-Salaam (ESAURP) and the SADC Centre of Specialisation in Public Administration and Management (CESPAM) at the University of Botswana, have in a big way, exposed me to experiences of participants from the 14 SADC member states. Again, as programme coordinator and key lecturer for the two year mature-entry BA Human Resource Management programme at Chancellor College, the experiences of private and public sector managers and professionals who were my

students played an important part in the understanding of the application of organisation and management theories to local setting in Malawi. My experience in numerous consulting and advisory assignments to several organisations in the public, private and non-governmental organisations in Malawi and the SADC region have been instrumental in shaping my journey towards writing this book. It would certainly have been a huge disappointment to most of my former students if I did not write this book.

Two decades of teaching organisation theory and management against the above background experiences have given me an added advantage of being able to conceptualise what is happening in the 'management theory jungle' to determine the key issues at stake. This book is also a process of operationalising organisation and management to ensure simplicity, ease and relevance to those uncomfortable with concepts. I am convinced that there are four key issues one can identify and link in organisation and management theories. We are talking of the integration of structure, people, environment and organisational processes. In the process of planning, organising, directing and coordinating and decision-making for the achievement of organisational goals and through that the achievement and satisfaction of human needs (societal needs), managers are integrating-through various techniques- people, structures and the environment. Modern society is highly organised because each organisation is destined to satisfy just one or two aspects of human wants. We can imagine how dull and uninteresting the world would be without organisations to meet the health, food, clothing, leisure, transport and other societal needs. Thus, the presence of organisations has, in no small measure, brought in our lives some degree of human happiness.

The central terrain of this book, therefore, is to examine the theoretical basis for the structure of organisations because it is the foundation of organised social grouping which we call organisation, company, ministry, department, university, non-governmental organisation, police, prison, college, water or electricity corporation or the World Bank. This structure is created and composed of people whose effort creates the goods and services we so much desire, use and cherish. Theories which deal with the human element in organisations aim at creating a comprehensive understanding of the motives, needs, aspirations, ingenuity and potential of people and how to harness and tap them for the benefit of the organisation and the wider society. The next important aspect of this book is to acknowledge and discuss the significance of the environment- the immediate and wider social, economic, political context -within which organisations function. The student and reader know too well that companies, government departments, banks, universities, parastatal bodies, non-governmental and international organisations do not operate in isolation from their environment. They are dependent and interact with the environment- customers,

competitors, regulatory authorities, government laws, fluctuating economic outlook and governance patterns which have a huge impact on the growth, performance and survival of the organisation. It is also worth noting that while they are being influenced by their environments, organisations are also struggling to influence those environment through advertising, social responsibility, product innovation etc. There are various processes in which organisations engage themselves. These are the actual operations of the organisation. They involve lots of activities like managerial, accounting, security, commercial, production or technical. The managerial include planning, staffing, coordinating, controlling, budgeting, communication, leading, decision making, team briefing, conflict resolution and grievance handling. These processes are the day to day operations in organisations. Like the circulatory system in the human body, these processes integrate structure, people and environment on a daily basis.

When a manager is planning, he cannot afford to forget the structural imperative of the plan nor can he ignore the human implication of such a plan. Furthermore, he has to account for the implication of the plan on the relationship with the environment. No wonder when strategic planning is being done, we starts with scanning the environment first in order to identify strength, weakness, opportunities and threats and this helps us to develop our strategies based on such a scan. Thus, these processes are performed as the organisation is implementing its goals and objectives and producing a good or a service for the benefit of society. The book is therefore a synthesis of the organisation and management theories to illuminate four major properties- structure, people, environment and processes. These in a way are illustrated using experiences and examples within the African context.

The book also provides a review activity at the end of each chapter to ensure that the reader can be stimulated to think about what they have read. There are research activities for students of organisation and management theories. These are aimed at enhancing their understanding of the practical world through interviewing managers and administrators in public, private and non-governmental organisations. Not only does this enable students to relate theory and practice in various contexts, it also develops their conceptual, analytical, communication, problem-solving and social skills useful in their future job.

## **Theory and practice: any tension?**

What is theory? What is experience? Which is better in ensuring effective management of organisations? Put in a simple layman's language, theory is what one knows about a phenomenon based on what is written and read in

books or journals. This might be something about the structure of organisations and how they are managed. For many students of management in Africa, this theory is obtained from books which were written on the experience or research of organisations in Europe and America.

Experience, on the other hand, is knowledge of a phenomenon which one has learned through his own action- learning by doing. There are many managers and administrators in the public, private and non- governmental and international organisations who have been managing departments, sections and divisions of organisations, ministries, departments of government without having studied management or organisations in formal academic settings. There is a saying that 'experience is the best teacher'. Others even say, 'life is a teacher, the more you live the more you learn'. Taken in this way, the more you learn by being involved, the more you understand the practical realities of organisation and management.

To a large number of highly experienced managers with less formal training in management, experience is probably the most important thing that counts. The author recalls a few decades ago when he joined the Staff Development Institute, that most of the trainers had no formal qualifications in the areas they were teaching. They had amassed several years of experience which enabled them to move to senior levels of their field in the main stream public service. Others came from Accountant General's Department, Local Government, Traditional Courts and the then Department of Personnel Management and Training, now the Department of Human Resource Management and Development (DHRMD). Others taught financial and store regulations and procedures, public service commission regulations, public service regulations, office practice and accounting to clerical, secretarial staff, courts clerks, accounts assistants, executive officers and other senior public servants who came for induction, proficiency and promotional courses.

On the other hand, a few came straight from the University of Malawi. They taught management theory, human resource management, communication, local government theory, law and other financial and personnel procedures as practised in the Malawi Civil Service. One would hear through the grapevine, sometimes, from course participants or colleagues that a war of words went round either at the Staff Common Room or at a bottle store where trainers/lecturers would exchange arguments over experience versus theory. Those without experience would burst into a sudden rage and fight back with the words 'what is experience if it is not just a year's routine repeated several years?' 'You are mere theorists and you do not know what actually happens in practice. We know the craft well ourselves,' experienced practitioners would say, in return.

The author participated in these conversations and appreciated both views. To repeat what we said above, what is theory? Is it not practice written



down? And is practice not theory put into practice? In other words, what is being theorised is something that is being practised. Earlier on in this chapter, I mentioned that a medical assistant was impressed by the manner in which the author presented issues regarding health centre management when he was not a medical man. Yet what was perceived to be very relevant to the medical man was a research into the practice of health centre management which was written into a manual and later presented to them. Their own experience was written down. It became very relevant.

Thus, managers and administrators need both the theory and practice of management for them to do their job well. Without theory, practice remains a huge amount of experience which cannot be subjected to description, analysis and evaluation. One may not know whether what they have been doing is comparable to other practices elsewhere or departs from generally accepted principles or frameworks and models developed and shared by others, world-wide. In other words, such experience will lack concepts to describe it, comparability to determine where things are and cannot be learnt by others systematically because it is not written. After all, modern society is so advanced that it has the art of keeping records in the form of books, files, memoirs and dairies for the benefit of posterity as well as for training others.

On the other hand, theory without practice can be more than mere visions about how organisations are managed, how managers plan, organise and budget. The author is reminded of a brother, who in his primary school days, learnt the definition of zebra crossing and memorised it very well. One day when he and his brother walked along Glyn Jones Road in Blantyre, they passed near a zebra crossing. He asked the 'young boy' what that thing was called. The boy said he did not know. When he was asked to define zebra crossing, he said correctly, 'it is a place where pedestrians cross on busy streets in town'.

In other words, he was not able to link what he had learnt in class with what he saw in a real situation. He did his primary education in a rural village where there was no zebra crossing. This is a pointer regarding the manner in which trainers or teachers should teach. There is need to blend theory with practice. It is becoming clear that theory without experience is not sufficient. This calls for the need to combine both theory and experience. However, it does not mean that one should have the two at the same time before they start working. It is not possible for the first time. Rather it means those who are in management positions but have not had formal management qualifications, would enhance their theoretical background through management training and development programmes.

On the other hand, those without experience have the potential to acquire it within a short period of time as they join organisations. It is also a commendable practice for management training or education institutions to

provide hands-on experience through attaching student to public or private sector organisations as part of their training. The department of political and administrative studies in the universities of Malawi and Botswana, and indeed others elsewhere, undertake attachment as part of management and administrative training. This book therefore is premised on the assumption that there is no tension between theory and practice. Rather, theory enriches better practice and vice-versa. An ideal situation is where managers combine the two in order to enhance organisational effectiveness, efficiency and health for the satisfaction of societal wants and human happiness.

## **Organisation of the Book**

There are four major thematic areas in this book. The first theme focuses attention on structure. It defines organisations and delves into its properties, activities, and ways of studying them. It also discusses classical theories of organisation and management. Chapter 1 gives the background to the origin of the book and links theory to practice and whether there is any tension between them. The central argument is that both are two sides of the same coin and that none is sufficient enough without the other when it comes to managing organisations. Chapter 2 examines the definition, importance, features, resources and activities in organisations. It also examines ways in which organisations can be visualized and why we should study them. Chapter 3 looks at classical theories of organisations, mainly, the scientific management, principles of management and bureaucracy.

The second theme deals with people aspect of organisational life. This is where behavioral scientists of various persuasions have made an enormous contribution to our understanding of the human aspect of work organisations. Chapter 4 looks at the behavioural science school which focuses more attention on the human relations school, hierarchy of needs theory, theory X and Y, theory Z, two factor theory of motivation and immature-mature theory.

The third thematic area is the environment with which the organisation interacts. A discussion of the open systems and contingency theories contributes to our understanding of this theme. Chapter 5 looks at the open system and contingency theories as an attempt to integrate the organisation and its environment. The final thematic area is processes- those that bind the various properties together. More importantly, in this theme, managerial functions, which constitute the major processes in organisations, shall be examined. Chapter 6 introduces the concept and role of management and why organizations need to be managed. Chapter 7 examines the planning function and its processes while chapter 8 examines the organising function

and its processes. Chapter 9 analyses the processes involved in the staffing function. Performance appraisal and performance management system are examined in chapter 10. The functions of directing, controlling and coordinating are examined in chapter 11. Chapter 12 looks at decision making and communication while chapter 13 focuses attention on leadership. Chapter 14 is a summary and conclusion to the book.

Throughout the thematic areas, the author attempts to link western theory of organisation and management with practical realities in the African environment. The idea is to illustrate how much of Western theory is applicable to the context in which organisations in Africa find themselves. Chapter 14 consolidates our discussion of the four thematic areas and looks at the relevance of organisation and management theory to the African context. It maintains that since organisations in Africa are to satisfy human wants, and empirical evidence shows that they deal with structural, people and environmental dictates and processes, organisation and management theory is relevant to Africa. However, the context within which managers and administrators find themselves will determine how the four aspects can be integrated. It is not a question of whether they are applicable or not, rather how they are applicable. This calls for a diagnostic application of issues of structure, people, and environment within organisational processes to achieve organisational goals and human happiness at the same time.

## **Review Questions**

1. What is theory?
2. What is experience?
3. What is the importance of theory in management?
4. What is the importance of experience in management?
5. To what extent is it important for managers to possess both the theory and practice of management?

## **Research Activity**

Interview three managers, one from each of the private, public and non-governmental organisations. Find out their views on the role of theory and experience in managing organisations. Are there any differences among them? Why or why not?