CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST GHANA : TOWARDS A LARGE SCALE RESEARCH AGENDA

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Abstract

Universities in Africa do not operate in a vacuum. Their success depends not only on socio-economic and political factors but also on cultural values that influence their activities. In this article, we draw upon the case of one Ghanaian university to illustrate the extent to which cultural values that individuals bring to the workplace pose challenges to performance management. We argue that an in-depth understanding of the micro and macro cultural contexts of performance management is critical, if the University of Cape Coast can cope with current competitive market demands. We finally put forward a proposal for an extensive research into the cultural challenges facing performance management in other African universities

Introduction

A key concern in university education today is how to manage the performance of its staff. Consequently, strategies for enhancing the performance management skills of academic and non-academic leaders have become crucial in discourses that focus on achieving sustainable competitive advantage. This is reflected in the theme 'Performance management and control: a neglected aspect of human resource administration' (Lubwama, 2004:8) that featured prominently in the April 2004 Stellenbosch, South Africa, Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). Similarly, performance management has become central to the institutional and professional development strategies of African public universities. In Ghana, as an example, the University of Cape Coast's corporate strategy adopts an 'action-driven means of measuring corporate performance' as a means by which managers at all levels could manage the implementation of action plans (UCC Corporate Strategy, 2003:12 & 13). Similarly, the Makerere University has put in place performance management tools such as ''departmental plans and individual work plans' as strategies for enhancing performance (Lubwama).

The Context

Public universities' increasing pursuit of performance management strategies is attributable to pressures emanating from changes in government policies; high public expectations and the need to meet international standards of operation (Mittal, 2004). Moreover the mushrooming of private universities in Africa does not only pose competitive threat to public universities but has more importantly necessitated the transformation of how they operate. The number of private universities in Africa that stood at about 27 in 1990 (Sawyerr, 1999), has now risen to nearly 100. Ghana, for instance, which had no private university in 1990 , now has almost 10 private universities as against 5 public universities. Activities of these private universities are increasingly attracting (more) interest of public compared to government-funded universities. A major challenge facing public universities therefore lies in how they could

attract and retain quality staff and effectively utilise their skills and knowledge towards meeting market demands.

Coping with these challenges we believe, has implications for the way public universities manage culture and individual performance. Increasingly, it has been acknowledged that a business or service organisation's ability to outperform its competitors partly depends on its culture. A study of the state of human resources management in one University in Ghana, the University of Cape Cost (Oduro, G. Y. (2004), illustrates the extent to which cultural values that individuals bring to the workplace pose challenge to the university's personnel and performance management. But will this be true for other universities across Africa? Although there is a plethora of literature on various aspects of challenges facing African Universities yet little attention has been given to micro and macro cultural issues that affect individual performance management.

The departure of our article lies in its focus on the cultural context of individual performance management. We draw upon Oduro's study and international literature in exploring the relationship between organisational culture and organisational performance and discuss its implications for the university. As a way of setting an agenda for future research, we argue that, firstly, understanding how African universities manage individual performance in the face of the variety of challenges facing them cannot be complete unless we explore in-depth the underpinning cultural contexts. Secondly, effective performance management in African Universities does not only call for a change in their bureaucratic structure but also poses the challenge of changing subcultures of individuals and groups within the universities. It also calls for a balance between the university's culture and that of the larger society's value, beliefs and practices to ensure that it meets the changing demands successfully. As Thornhill et al (2000:3) explains, 'alterations to the strategic direction and activity of an organisation may necessitate changes to its structures, systems, culture, managerial approach and technology.

The Study

The empirical basis of our article derives from Oduro's qualitative case study (Oduro, 2004) that sought to explore the perception of authorities of the University of Cape Coast on how cultural values and practices influence human resources management in the institution. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach because of the sensitive nature of the study. As Maykut and Morehous (1994) observe, qualitative research values context sensitivity that understands a phenomenon within a particular situation and environment. The study involved six people who were directly connected with management issues within the Vice Chancellor's office, the Registrar's office, the Faculties and the Academic departments of the university. The participants were purposively chosen for the study. Purposive sampling, according to Kane (1995), does not involve randomly selected samples in that participants are deliberately chosen because of some qualities that interest the researcher. In the light of the smallish number of the participants (6), the data were collected through interviews.

Defining Organisational Culture and Organisational Performance

Comprehending the relationship between organisational culture and organisational performance depends on how one conceptualises the two terms. Within the context of an organisation such as the university, culture is said to represent 'an interdependent set of values and ways of behaving that are common in a community and that tend to perpetuate themselves, sometimes over long periods of time' (Kotter and Hesket, 1992, cited in Brown, 1995:141). For Drennan (1992:3), it may refer to 'how things are done around here. It is what is typical of the organisation, the habits, the prevailing attitudes, the grown-up pattern of accepted and expected behaviour (Brown 1998:26). On the whole, writers appear to agree that culture is a 'shared' and a 'learned' phenomenon.

In contrast, Organisational performance may be understood in terms of an organisation's effectiveness, a concept that is itself relative in meaning. As Brown argues, 'each stakeholder group will have its own set of preferences for measuring organisational effectiveness' (p. 210). While some commentators appear to agree that performance can be understood in terms of how high or how low an organisation performs economically, others look at it in terms of 'an organisation's ability to extend its control over its environment'. Reeves et al (2002) identifies two perspectives of conceptualising performance management within the context of education: the managerial perspective and the professional perspective.

From the managerial perspective, performance management is seen in terms of 'specific set of practices developed to control the behaviour of individuals through formal appraisal systems and Performance-related Pay (PRP)' (p.4) Put in words of Armstrong and Baron (1998), it involves a strategic and integrated approach to delivering sustained success to organisations by improving the performance of people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of teams and individual contributors' (p.7) . As a professional phenomenon, performance management is defined in terms of individual professional worker's self-directed efforts towards the provision of quality services to the organisation's clients. In this sense, the responsibility of managing performance is located in the individual professional practitioner instead of managers. This is because, by being a professional, a person understands and acts upon the obligation to carry out the tasks effectively for the benefit of the client' (Reeves et al, p.5). Defining performance management this way connotes a sense of duty among individuals that 'pervades obligations, self-regulation in interests of client, maintain and enhance expertise and self-monitoring of performance' (ibid. p.6).

In the context of this article, however, we conceptualise organisational performance in terms of the level at which the university as an organisation, through an aggregation of the performance of individuals, is able to accomplish its mission compared to others on the competitive market. It has been acknowledged that micro and macro socio-economic demands on universities have necessitated changes in their mission and the traditional ivory towered roles of teaching and research. They are now expected to move beyond these traditional roles and contribute more to the development of the nations in which they operate. Specifically, they are required to prepare their nations to become more competitive in matters related to eradication of ignorance, the fight against poverty, hunger and disease, the promotion of democracy, good political and economic governance, human rights, peace, security and stability, and sustainable development (Njeuma, 2003). In sum, African universities are at present required to 'be in the forefront of research, education and action' in helping Africa find lasting solutions to these perennial problems.

Relationship between Culture and Organisational Performance

Theoretically, writers appear to agree that there is a relationship between culture and organisational performance. Hampden-Turner (1990) as an example suggests that it is the culture of an organisation that 'governs the way a company processes information, its internal relations and its values' and also defines proper behaviour codes and bonds, 'motivates individuals and asserts solutions where there is ambiguity' (p.11). Similarly,.

Towers (1996) cite Dill (1950) to have argued that the values, beliefs, norms and ideals that are embedded in a culture affects strategies of organisations. Empirically, Lorsch (1986, cited by Brown 1998, p. 213 & 214), in a study involving twelve successful companies found that all of them 'had a culture which supported the strategy they pursued'. In this light, as Brown suggests, it is now increasingly believed that organisational culture is crucial in our understanding of the successes and failures of organisations. The extent to which culture influences management, however, differs among nations (Hofstede, 1997).

Table 1: Hotstede's four dimensions of national cultural differences

DIMENSION	CONTENT
Power	The extent to which the less powerful members of organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. In high power distance nations, inequalities among people are considered desirable and here is greater reliance of the less powerful on those who hold power. In contrast, inequalities among people tend to be minimised in low power distance nations and decentralised activities are more pronounced. Subordinates expect to be consulted by superiors, and privileges and status symbols are less evident.
Individualism/collectivism	Pertains to the extent to which individual independence or social cohesion dominates. Individualistic societies have loose social ties between individuals. Individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and possibly their immediate family. Here contracts with employers are based on mutual advantages and hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules.
Masculinity/femininity	Refers to the extent to which social gender roles are clearly distinct. In high masculine societies, social gender roles are clearly distinct and men supposed to be assertive, tough and focus on material success while women are expected to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life. In high femininity societies, both men and women are expected to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life.
Uncertainty avoidance	Refers to the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain situations. Where societies have weak uncertainty avoidance, there is greater tolerance of ambiguous situation, people are hardworking only when they need to be, precision and punctuality have to be learnt, people are comfortable with deviant and innovative ideas and behaviour, and are motivated by achievement, and belongingness. In strong uncertainty avoidance societies, there is fear of ambiguous situations, a feeling that time is money and there is an emotional need to be busy, precision and punctuality come naturally, novelty is resisted and people are motivated by security, and by esteem and belongingness.

Although the literature is explicitly on the relationship between culture and performance in organisations, determining the actual level of culture's influence on organisational performance is problematic. While some writers view culture as an asset to organisational performance, others see it as a liability. Central to this problem is, firstly, the assumption that culture can be either 'good' or 'bad' and that it is only when an organisational culture is considered good that it can enhance organisational performance. Considering that the meaning of 'culture' is by itself relative and violates a universally acceptable definition, we find the 'good' and 'bad'; dichotomy of culture complicated. This is because, as Jeffcutt (1993) observes, 'most aspects of culture are difficult to designate as clearly good or bad Contradictory interests – those of professions, divisions, classes, consumers, environmentalists, owners, top management, etc. may produce different views on what is good, important and appropriated (cited by Alvesson, 2002:4) argues, it would be strange to find a company where top management, middle management, clerical personnel, floor workers *etcetera* 'shared norms and acted upon them in similar ways' Moreover it is not easy 'to try to isolate norms and values shared throughout the organisation (or any other unit) as a separate causal factor in work performance' because norms and values are largely 'associated with different groups to different degrees and have different content'.

These problems notwithstanding, research evidence suggests strongly that culture influences, and can be engineered to enhance organisational performance, Mannion et al (2002).

Inference from Mannion et al's observation and the case of the University of Cape Coast. as we present later, suggests that an organisation's culture does not necessarily lead to its ssuccess. It may either enhance or retard performance in organisations. This is reflected in Sathe's (1985, cited by Brown, 1998) argument that 'shared beliefs, values and as mptions can interfere with the needs of the business and lead people to think and act in commercially and/or ethically inappropriate ways'.

Cultural Values and Performance Management: the case of UCC

Maintaining relationships and organisational ethics

A common feature across the discourses of all the respondents in the study suggests a dilemma as authorities of UCC find themselves entangled between commitment to cultural expectations and management governed by organisational ethics. Underpinning this dilemma is the issue of relationship. For the purpose of maintaining good relations with their colleagues, some heads tended to compromise their performance management principles This is reflected in the statement: the issue of communal living is very important Sometimes the nature of relationship is such that it becomes difficult to apply the rules as rationally as we have to' (An academic head).

This challenge is critical in matters relating to employee's use of official time. Some people in management, according to the data, found it difficult to ensure that employees used official time judiciously because it sometimes strains relationships. Others elucidated that although some junior staff and some departments of the university do not perform well, it was not easy disciplining them because they might be 'the son, daughter or spouse of a colleague or a lecturer'. As a result, the tendency is for some heads to compromise their performance management principles for the mere purpose of maintaining good relations with their colleagues. One respondent illuminated this as follows:

> *There are some workers who rally is not pulling their weight. But because of tradition and cultural implications, authorities hardly get the moral courage to dismiss such people.. This is where the cultural thing comes in. It needs a lot of courage, for anybody to come and say this person should go . (An academic head).*

Another relation-focused aspect of Ghanaian cultural practices that posed a challenge to performance management in the university relates to bereavement. This is reflected in the following remark:

> *Within African institutions. the issue of communal living is very important. When something happens to an individual everybody is expected to rally around him. So as a uni 'ersity, we tend to take on certain practices, which in other universities may not be seen, as important. We all rally around to support this person in the time of his bereavement (An administrative head).*

This finding corroborates Fashoyin's (2000) observation that organisations in Africa tend to place greater value on care for employees than profitability or market shares', thus making business objectives secondary to welfare issues. It also strengthens Debrah's observation (Debrah, 2000) that cultural factors related to relationships such as sentiments and passion tend to post challenges to management in Thanaian organisations. Some respondents saw the communal support for bereaved workers as a liability in the pursuit of the university's performances targets. Disruption of the day's work and the frequent absences made by bereaved individuals were some adverse effects: 'At times the absences become too frequent

but the situation is such that it becomes difficult to apply the rules as rationally as we have to. So we use our discretion,' (An academic head).

Using the discretionary decision poses further challenge: 'it creates a problem if you are not fair'. A non-academic head saw the university's fulfilment of this cultural expectation as a drain on the university's finances. 'The negative aspect of it is that we spend so much money moving vehicles from one place to another'. In contrast, an academic head saw the practice as an asset for performance management: 'what we get from this is great. It makes them (workers) have a sense or feeling that they belong to an organisation that cares. It makes them go an extra mile when they are asked to.

Further, over-adherence to gender stereotyping emerged as a source of challenge. One respondent argued that sticking too much to cultural expectations from women had prevented many women on his staff from taking advantage of self-improvement opportunities in the university:

> *Let's take women for example. Some of them are so committed to cultural expectations of their family life that if you suggest a period of training that may take her away from home for sometime or that may keep her away from the family at certain times of the year she is not going to do it. (...)*

The foregoing trends demonstrate how entrenched values attached to aspects of cultural practices can shape the way managers do things. As Brown (1999:26) articulates, 'values are intimately connected with moral and ethical codes, and determine what people think ought to be done' and they have 'an association with attitudes that individuals put up at the work place'. Establishing healthy relations with workers, as we find in the case of UCC, is undoubtedly a crucial factor in the process of achieving organisational goals. It is even more crucial when we consider that the University, at present grapples with increasing market competition posed by the emergence of private universities, however, it becomes problematic when the fear of breaking relationships becomes a determining criterion for managing individual performance in the university.

Cultural expectations of managers towards subordinates

The statement, as a head, people see me more or less as their father' commonly characterised how some respondents think university workers perceive people in leadership positions at various levels of the university's hierarchy. This is commutative of the existence of a 'high power distance' between the university's leaders and workers. As Hofstede (1997) explains cultures that are characterised by 'high power distance' tend to accept inequalities among people with less power relying on those who hold power. Workers" perception of the head as a 'father', as shown in the case of the UCC, goes with expectations: 'when they come to me they think I have the magic and; whatever the problem they come with, I must be able to provide a +solution' (An academic administrator). Within the Ghanaian context a 'father' is considered as the provider of all that his family needs to make the family home lively for which he must be obeyed without questioning. In this light the Departmental Head, Dean, Registrar or the Vice Chancellor – viewed as a 'father' is obeyed for his/her authority and power. A parallel of this is found in Adlers' (1997) study in which he found that in similar high distance countries, such as the Philippines, Venezuela, and India, employees did their work in a particular way not because they believed that it is the best way to do it, but because their boss wants it done that way.

Implications for individual performance management
The themes discussed in the preceding sections have leadership implications for performance management in the UCC. They raise a question as to what type of leadership the vice-

chancery, academic headship, registry and all others involved in managing the university's resources need to enable them change cultural attitudes that tend to affect performance.

Two approaches that emerge from this study are of interest here. The first is an approach that stresses 'strict adherence to laid down rules and regulations and the use of countries with little concern for what happens to relationships (a non-academic head). This suggests a more authoritarian leadership approach, which according to Blasé and Anderson (1995), involves exercising control through formal structures and the enforcement of policies and rules. In this sense, Heads of Units, Deans, the Registrar and others with management responsibilities are required to exert much power over employees and enforce workers' compliance with the university's work ethics. This is reflected in the comment 'we' are not here to satisfy people's interests, we're here to satisfy first and foremost the organisational interest' (a non-academic head). Denotative in this quotation, is a performance management approach in which managers distance themselves from workers as a way of controlling the influence of familiarity. As Henry et al., (1999) explains, 'techniques of steering from a distance are usually adopted through the means of regulation, incentive and sanctions to make autonomous individuals and quasi-governmental and non-governmental institutions such as universities behave in ways consistent with their policy objectives.

Ghana, being a country where relationships are characterised by high power distance, one may be tempted to agree that an authoritarian approach will work. Inference from the data, coupled with our own personal experiences, however, suggest that changing entrenched cultural values and traditions to which individuals ascribe through authorities management approaches is problematic. It could increase employer-employee conflicts that have often affected academic calendars of the university. This is because of the complex micro-politics involved. The university comprises groups of different interest; some of whom are likely to resist top-down initiated cultural changes. This is reflected in a case narrated by one of the respondents.

In the late 1980s, according to the respondent, UCC experienced a series of strikes by workers resisting cultural changes that its new administration attempted to introduce. Slackness in the judicious use of official time had become so entrenched in the culture of the institution that workers had internalised it as part of their privileges. Some workers tended to use official time for transacting private businesses with impunity, and received salary for no apparent work done. Attempts by the administration to change this aspect of the institution's culture towards enhancing performance therefore countered very disruptive work demonstrations.

The second approach stresses a leadership strategy that seeks to use trust, motivation and collaboration as tools for developing desired attitudinal qualities in workers. As academic head's statement exemplifies this, 'we want a university environment where there is cordially, where both students and staff trust each other and work together to achieve the best in the university'. Trust, according to Elmore (2003:17) is:

A compound of respect, listening to and valuing the views of others; personal regard, intimate and sustained personal relationships that undergird professional relationships: competence, the capacity to produce desired results in relationships with others; and personal integrity, truthfulness and honesty in relationships.

Employing this strategy will require a democratic leadership approach to the university's human resources management. Burns (1978) explains that this situation crises when members of staff raise one another to higher levels of motivation in order to bring about unity, collective responsibility and mutual trust.

It brings about successful utilisation of democratic management strategies by the university's authorities will, however, require deeper changes in the university's bureaucratic structure.

This is because, firstly, power relations in the university is structured along Hofstede's high power distance. Secondly, it has a hierarchical tradition whereby the head is viewed as a 'father' whose authority subordinates respect, and on whom workers depend for resolving welfare-related matters. It will therefore require that both those in leadership positions and workers re-orientate their minds towards power and authority and be prepared to operate in a more open environment where, as Blasé and Andershon (1995) observe, 'virtually anything can be questioned or challenged without fear'. As part of its strategic plan towards developing appropriate working attitude among workers, UCC has introduced 'regular durbars with staff to listen to their problems, to listen to their problems, discuss with them how best we can motivate them and talk to them about work ethics'. Yet, it is our argument that these durbars will be a mere formality unless, first, the authorities become mindful of the politics of self-interest that could characterise opinions erred by individuals during such durbars.

The politics of self-interest within the university, which its authorities need to strategically manage, is a complex one. Its nature is reflected in Hodgkinson's (1991) observation that organisational management operates in an arena of conflicting forces, where the interplay and blending of personal attributes and organisational rate expectations vary widely.

As illustrated in the figure 1 below , these interests derive from values that individuals bring to the organisation, value orientation of the individual's immediate work group, the formal values of the organisation as expressed in the overt and covert goals, work ethics and reward policies, purposes and organisational culture of the organisation. The interest also derives from the values of the immediate explicit and implicit values of the national culture. These complex interests need to be considered if cultural values that affect human resources management in the university can be effectively managed.

Gaining an understanding of the culture and sub-culture of the environment, the informal organisation and the individuals who compose th   e
organisation, according to Hodgkinson, is necessary for managers to make adaptive organisational responses. In this context, we argue that awareness of the nature of cultural values upheld by individuals and groups within the university and those of the larger society can help university leadership to utilise appropriate impression management techniques to win the   support of individual workers towards optimum commitment and performance. Impression management has been identified as a viable tool by which managers 'justify an event' or 'enhance the perception of the actor in the eyes for his or her audience'. It deals with how mangers 'manage verbal and nonverbal communication to convey a positive image of self to others (Rahim & Buntzman, quoted in Giacalone & Rossenfeld, 1991:158).
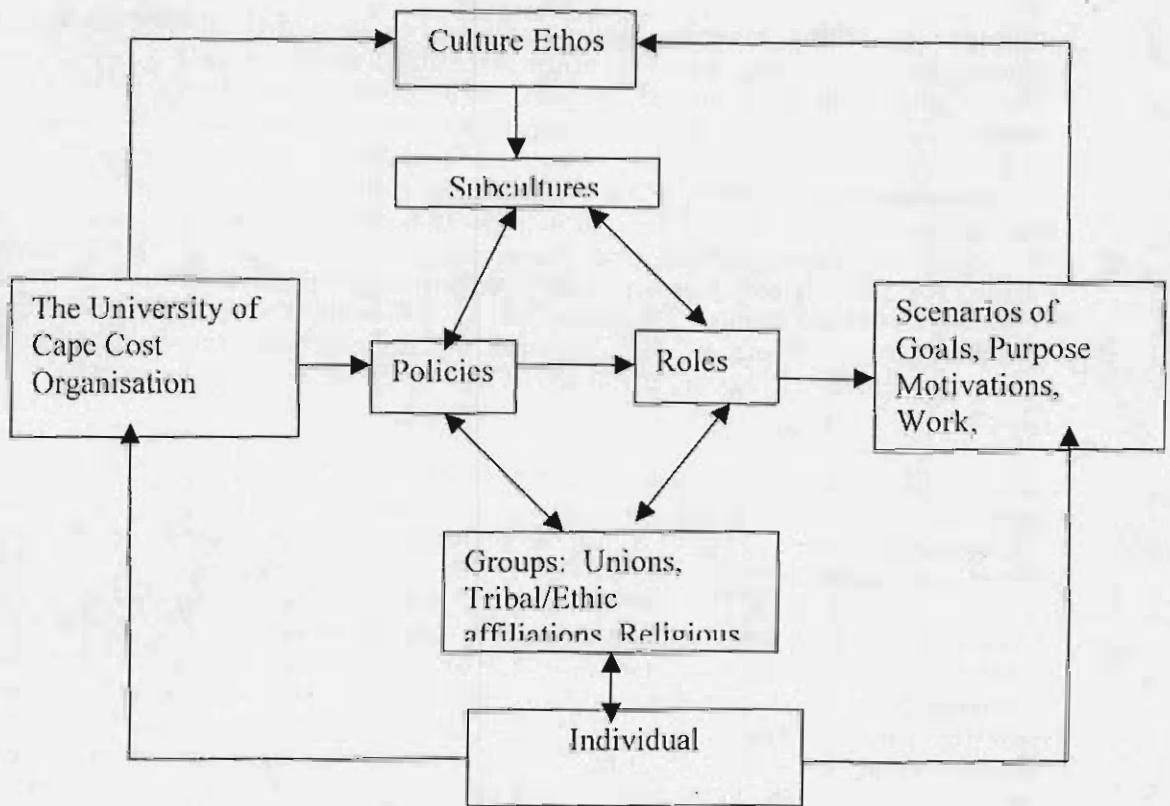
Fig 1. Complexities of interests related to the management of culture. Adopted and modified from Hodgkinson, (1991).

Creating the desired Culture for enhancing individual performance.

Creating a culture of excellent performance in the university is not easy. Vice chancellors, registrars, deans and departmental heads and all those who have the responsibility for managing individual performance therefore have a Herculean task in terms of helping people to develop the right attitude for achieving the university's goals. To succeed, performance managers need to, firstly, have clear knowledge and understanding of the content of the university's corporate strategy and the determination to implement the change (Brown, p. 219). Secondly, they must have an in-depth knowledge on the existing and the desired individual performance cultures; exhibit confidence in managing performance and be prepared to delegate part of the authority associated with their positions to subordinates. As positions to subordinates. As Steward (2004) exhorts, every executive who desires to create a culture of excellence in his/her organisation, must be willing to pay a price.

Also crucial in any cultural engineering effort is the creation of a non-threatening atmosphere that encourages stakeholders at all levels of the university to contribute towards the change initiative. Active involvement and participation of members of an organisation, according to Denison, "create a sense of ownership and responsibility" and leads to a greater employee commitment to the organisation, leading to performance enhancement' (cited by Brown, p. 227). Academic and non-academic staff's support for a university's cultural engineering will be more meaningful when deans, heads of departments and units who are directly involved in managing individual performance are able to identify most influential workers and actively involve them in decision-

making (Stewart, 2004). We need to re-learn old lessons about how culture ties people together and give meaning and purpose to their day to day lives. (Parker, 2000:12-13).

The foregoing implies that the performance management of the university need s to be driven by a human resources model, which according to Torrington & Hall (1998) recognises people as 'the key to competitive advantage' (p. 28). Butler (1988) identifies the human resources model as a shift 'from human resources as the implementers of strategy to human resources as a driving force in the formulation of strategy' (in Torrington & Hall, p. 28). Central to this model is effective communication. As Buckingham and Coffman (1999) in their book, Break All the Rules, "... helping an employee excel lies in the details; the details of his particular recognition needs, of his relationship needs, of his goals, and of his talents/non-talents". It is our opinion that with a human resources driven model, the university will, firstly, be able to facilitate its strategies for bridging the gap between the cultural values that individuals bring to the work place and the university's corporate plans. Secondly, it will be able to work out more positive reconciliation strategies between the university's culture and that of the larger society.

Summary
Our discussion so far suggests a strong link between culture and performance management. Cultural values that individuals and groups bring to the university can be both an asset and a liability to individual performance management. These cultures can, however, be engineered to enhance performance. For performance to be enhanced, heads of both academic and non-academic departments need to understand their departments and the university better in terms of values and practices that shape work practices. To get a broader picture of the cultural problems facing other African universities, however requires a further exploration of the emerging issues on a wider scale. For example, will the observation that cultural role expectations tend to undermine efforts of UCC towards developing female workers be true in all the other universities? Do other universities in Africa experience the same cultural challenges as found in the case of UCC? These may or may not be the case in other public universities in Africa.

A Research Proposal/Recommendation
In this article we have explored some challenges that cultural values pose to the management of individual performance in one African University – the University of Cape Coast. The issues emerging from the article sets a scene for further research into the effects of cultural values on performance management. We hypothesise that effective management of individual performance within African universities depends on the extent to which university authorities understand the micro and macro cultural values within which their institutions operate. It also requires an in-depth understanding of how university authorities conceptualise indicators for performance and the extent to which the university promotes the culture of shared leadership for learning. These, as we have outlined below depend on a range of factors:

a.   **Constructions of the modern** role of the university
   * Administrator's beliefs and role expectations of the university.
   * Academics' beliefs and role expectations of the university.
   * Non-academics' beliefs and role expectations of the university.
   * Students' beliefs and role expectations of the university.

b.   **Change, Human resources and Performance management**
   * Human resources as implementers of change strategy.
   * Human resources as triggers in policy formulation.

c.   **Cultural dimensions of university performance**

- Culture ethos of the university.
- Culture of the larger society.
- Sub-cultures of individuals and groups.

d.   Leadership and management

We propose that these four factors should form the foundation for a large scale research project that will shed more light on the extent to which micro and macro culture values pose challenges to the management of individual performance in African universities. It should also provide the empirical bases for identifying the best practices for enhancing performance through cultural engineering in African universities. The proposed research would be a collaborative project focusing on universities in the Western, Eastern and Southern regions of Africa. It will, however, draw upon literature from other countries, especially in England, China and India.

Tentatively, the research would aim to:

1.   Explore the cultural challenges facing performance management in African Universities.
2.   Examine the extent to which existing performance management styles either promote or inhibit the implementation of corporate strategies of universities.

3.   Identify and evaluate how those in leadership positions at various levels of universities align cultural values that individuals carry along to the university with the university's culture ethos.

4.   Examine the wider international university performance management policy context and thinking about cultural influences through agencies such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS).

5.   Draw out key messages for university leadership.

Conclusion

We propose that an in-depth understanding of the micro and macro cultural contexts of performance management in African universities is critical, if the current numerous national and international-sponsored university improvement initiatives are to achieve their desired goals. The time has come some extensive research that will empirically inform university leaders and their international partners about the effects of African cultural values on change initiatives and the leadership styles needed for coping with cultural challenges. We need a cultural-focused empirical evidence, which may be drawn on for the benefit of performance management, professional development, capacity building and networking.

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