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Peter Blunt and Merrick L. Jones

Managing Organisations in Africa

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To Professor Geoff Harcourt of the Universities of Cambridge and Adelaide for his early faith in my potential and his unwavering support throughout my career.

Peter Blunt

To Monica

Merrick L. Jones

Preface

This book expands and builds on *Organisational Theory and Behaviour: An African Perspective* which was first published in 1983. As with its predecessor, our aim has been to write a book which is helpful to anyone who is interested in organisations in Africa and their management and, in particular, in ways of making African organisations more effective and more efficient in what they do. Students of management undertaking postgraduate or undergraduate programmes of study will probably constitute the book's major audience, although we have attempted to write it in a way which will make it appealing and comprehensible to both practising managers and those with little or no work experience.

It is clear that the need for books of this type in Africa has increased with the passage of time, as we demonstrate more fully in Chapter 1. For many years, it has been widely accepted that institutional weaknesses in developing countries constitute a major obstacle to development. Resource scarcity is a major factor contributing to this state of affairs, but so also are questions of management and organisation, which are the subject of this book. Many commentators believe that such problems in Africa have worsened in recent times, particularly in public organisations, and there is persuasive evidence available to support this point of view (e.g., Adamolekun 1991a; Makharita & Brunet 1991; Phillips 1991). The consequences of such organisational ineffectiveness in Africa are clearly great: by virtue of the large numbers of people affected and, owing to their often precarious existence, their vulnerability to organisational mismanagement.

In dealing with these issues we have tried in this book to retain the distinctive qualities of the original and to augment these by, first, expanding the scope of the book to incorporate important new developments in the field of management and organisation. Second, we have included as much new empirical evidence from Africa as we could find. Third, while the focus of the book is still clearly African, in response to the increasing globalisation of commerce and trade, we have incorporated more references to the experience of Western industrialised countries and Japan, other East Asian economies such as China, and developing countries in general. Fourth, we have also made attempts explicitly to bridge the gap between theory and practice by writing in a way which is more problem oriented, rather than solely principle or theory driven, and by including at the end of every chapter a section entitled 'implications for managers and management development'. As a result of these additions and developments, this book is much longer than its predecessor. It is also, essentially, a different book.

Despite the increased length of the book, we have been unable to incorporate some material which, under ideal circumstances, we would have included. Our publishers, and we, were concerned that a longer book would have taken its price to levels which were beyond the reach of our primary target audiences, in Africa. To give a few examples, this has meant that chapters on 'researching organisations', 'selection' and 'performance management' unfortunately have had to be omitted. We had also hoped to be able to include African case examples and/or exercises at the end of each chapter, but this proved not to be possible for reasons of cost and space, too*. However, the omission of some this material is perhaps not as limiting as it might appear to be at first sight. In the case of performance management, for example, the book as a whole is concerned with the management of the performance of people and organisations in Africa. Too often in our view performance *management* is confused with performance *appraisal*, and too much time is spent by organisations on measurement – that is, appraisal – and too little on creating an organisational context which is conducive to high levels of individual and group performance. In an important sense we feel that if managers can create a positive working environment then performance appraisal almost takes care of itself. In some extreme cases it might even be seen as unnecessary. Our emphasis in this book has therefore been directed at issues such as strategy, leadership, structure, culture, motivation and job design, and roles which we feel are critical to the creation of positive working cultures. If these aspects of organisation have not been dealt with satisfactorily by managers, then imposing a system of performance appraisal, at best, will be perceived as a waste of time (because people will simply go through the motions); at worst it will be downright dysfunctional and make things worse because, say, people who do not respect their boss and do not trust him would be forced to interact formally with him in a way which might be seen to increase the opportunities for unfairness or personal reprisal rather than to reduce them. In other words, we are saying that managers and organisations who are seriously interested in performance management in Africa, as opposed to performance appraisal, will find much that is helpful to them in this book as it stands. For those who are interested in *techniques* of performance *appraisal*, many standard textbooks deal with the issues involved.

Another omission is a chapter on selection, which is clearly an important feature of managing organisations and their performance. Once again, however, it is necessary to distinguish between techniques of personnel selection, which are adequately dealt with in many texts on the subject (e.g., Blunt & Popoola 1985), and the circumstances surrounding their application. For example, a vital consideration is the motives which underlie selection. That is to say, problems of selection in Africa do not tend to arise from uncertainties about techniques, but from a wish to employ such techniques for reasons which are not so much associated with performance as with other – personal – characteristics of the individual (because, say, a manager is friendly with someone or is related to them and so on). The variables which underlie questions of this type have to do with deep-seated values and socioeconomic conditions (job scarcity, poverty etc.). Again, we think that much of what we have to say in this book is directed at the heart of the selection problem, namely, at questions of values, leadership, culture, and so on.

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* A comparison volume, "Managing Organisations in Africa", is to be published by De Gruyter in early 1993.

Implicit, then, in the title of our book *Managing Organisations in Africa* is the management of performance as well as the creation of working environments which are pleasant to be in.

The book is divided into five sections. The first deals with the nature of African organisational environments and the nature of managerial work generally, and provides a background against which to set the material contained in the rest of the book. Subsequent sections deal in turn with managing purpose and direction, managing the work setting, managing change and conflict, and managing and developing people. Our treatment of all of these topics has been more discursive and, we would hope, more analytical than would normally be the case in a conventional management text. We have tried in this way to convey the relevance to problems of management and organisation in Africa of the material presented and, at the same time, to encourage the development of indigenous solutions which are original, or the adaptation of methods and techniques used elsewhere. This is always much easier to say than it is to do, of course, and much remains to be accomplished in the way of developing African solutions to the problems mentioned.

Lastly, we would like to express our deep-felt thanks to Hallgerd Dyrssen and Anton Johnston and others in the Public Administration and Management Division of the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) in Stockholm without whose financial assistance this book might not have been published. In writing this book, it was a great comfort to us to know that we had the backing of people in SIDA who understood the problems of management and organisation in Africa, and who cared about the consequences as deeply as we did. A special word of thanks also to Stewart Clegg who in his customary alert and insightful way recognised the significance of the enterprise in the wider context of international management and agreed to include the book in the Walter de Gruyter series of that name. Most of the word-processing was handled with skill, efficiency, and some critical acuity, by Hemali Seneviratne, Marla Skartvedt, and Margaret Burden to whom we extend our warm appreciation and gratitude – as we do to David Richards for his helpful comments on part of the manuscript.

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Part 1: Introduction

Chapter 1: African Organisational Environments

'Ex Africa semper aliqid novi' (Out of Africa always something new)
Pliny the Elder.

A recent survey of the performance of formal organisations in Africa concluded that:

"Whether or not Africa will pull out of its present doldrums may well depend on the quality of its organisation and management practices ten to fifteen years from now and beyond" (Kiggundu 1988: 239).

This book aims to contribute to the study and understanding of organisational life in Africa, particularly the management of formal organisations. In this chapter we look briefly at some of the environmental influences on African organisations and their managers. As Kiggundu (1988) points out, "in Africa, as elsewhere in developing countries, society and environment pervade organisation and management" (p. 169). As elsewhere also, there has been a tendency to focus heavily on internal organisational processes at the expense of developing a more complete understanding of the environments in which formal organisations operate. One serious effect of this, in Kiggundu's view, is that whereas African organisations may find they can apply Western management concepts and practices to their technical core with few major modifications, these imported ideas and practices are generally found to be inadequate and/or inappropriate for the organisations' relationships with their environments.

It is unrealistic to suppose that we can say anything about the contexts of African organisations which will have equal validity across the whole vast continent, even if we confine our analysis to those nations generally referred to as south of the Sahara. Nevertheless, African nations, most of which have been independent for less than forty years, do have some similar experiences and characteristics amid great diversity. It is in the nature of this book that these similarities primarily will concern us.

The elements of a national environment are of course interrelated in a complex whole. In our brief explorations of some of those elements which are significant for organisational functioning it is important to remember that we have isolated these facets artificially for analytical purposes; in reality they are not isolated in their influences on formal organisations.

1.1 The Economic Crisis

A great deal has been, and continues to be, written about Africa's seemingly endless economic crisis. Prognostications range from gloomy to ominous to catastrophic. In line with global trends, current prescriptions for the continent's economic ailments, led by the International Monetary Fund, involve rigorous austerity budgets, import restrictions, currency devaluations, reduction of government subsidies, stimulation of exports, encouragement of the private sector and foreign private investment, performance incentives, imposition of fees for public services like education and health, and drastic reductions in the size and role of the public sector.

These measures appear to be drastic, but if the descriptions of Africa's economic predicament are accurate urgent action is certainly needed. According to Kiggundu (1988), the crisis in Africa south of the Sahara is 'severe, general and worsening'; production is generally stagnant; internal and external balances are in crisis; there is a crisis in agricultural performance; there is an "institutional crisis with weak and ineffective government decision making and implementing capacity, poor investment and resource allocation decisions, weak industrial sectors, and inefficient and compromised parastatal sectors" (p. 191). Nti (1989) points to low rates of growth, falling outputs of goods and services, and food shortages. Two graphs which are showing upward trends are population, at about 3% annually overall, and inflation. Some African countries are having to spend up to 50% of their export earnings on debt servicing.

Exogenous economic factors contributing to this depressing state of affairs include drastic oil price rises, global recessions, and deteriorating terms of trade. As if this were not enough, nature has conspired in parts of Africa to produce severe deterioration in climatic conditions, through droughts, changing rainfall patterns and desertification.

Restorative measures of the type described earlier are naturally controversial. To an IMF economist they may make eminent theoretical sense, but their social repercussions may be serious. As Nti (1989) notes, for example, mass retrenchments of public sector employees – for some reason the imposed target figure always seems to be around 30% – in the context of the African extended family dependency system is likely to cause more serious problems for more people than might be the case in other socio-cultural settings. Few African nations can afford comprehensive social security systems of the type taken for granted in the wealthy industrialised countries; redundancy for one employee is likely to cause hardship to many.

At the national level the imposition of such drastic economic reforms – for instance the reduction or withdrawal of subsidies on staple foodstuffs – may lead to serious social unrest; Zambia has been a case in point. These kinds of severe economic conditions are, as Kiggundu warns, and as a number of African countries have already seen, "associated with many social, economic and political risks" (1988: 198).

Are there then any alternative or associated steps which African nations can take to escape from this economic morass? It certainly seems important that they should search for alternatives, because it is by no means clear that the current pattern of imposed recovery measures will work. Nti (1989) is unambiguous: structural adjustment programmes "do not lead to the restructuring of the economy. The structure remains the same except for readjustment of the budget figures" (p. 128). Radical reductions in the size of the public sector are prescribed without any proper analysis; such across-the-board cuts are a blunt and clumsy instrument which can cause serious injuries to the patient.

Balogun (1989) finds some encouragement in what he refers to as 'recent concerted efforts' by African governments to consider other ways of overcoming these problems. Asserting that policy responses in the past to alarm signals of the dangers of economic collapse, and associated social upheaval and political instability, were largely inadequate, he points to what he calls recent 'radical policy initiatives', which actually amount to calls for:

- the formulation of effective human resource development and utilisation policies, especially in relation to the development of entrepreneurial skills;
- improved economic management through efficient allocation of resources;
- better management systems;
- reshaping of public services to be more development oriented;
- improvement of public enterprise performance; and
- the formulation of balanced population policies.

It is difficult to see anything in these generalities which would not be obvious to any secondary school student of economics. The question is: how are they to be implemented? The problem is noted by Kiggundu (1988) when he describes recommendations made by the United Nations Special Session on the African Crisis, which was held in New York in 1986. Priorities for action included "the need to improve human resources development, planning and utilisation, to strengthen local institutions ...", implying the need for "improvements in the organisation and management of African organisations both public and private" (p. 238). As Kiggundu points out, however, there is little guidance here about how such obviously desirable improvements are to be achieved.

Balogun and Kiggundu both assert the need to develop organisations in Africa which are capable of implementing urgently needed policies. Balogun (1989) notes that the many previous attempts to resuscitate the "battered economies of Africa" (p. 227) failed mainly because the institutions for policy making and management could not anticipate and respond to changes in the environment. Likewise, Kiggundu (1988) feels that economic prescriptions of the type described have been "based on the erroneous assumption of the existence of effectively managed organisations for their implementation" (p. 200).

What seems to be obvious from this brief survey of Africa's economic crisis is that the various national and international bodies concerned can go on making recommendations and formulating new policies *ad nauseam*, but nothing much will happen in the absence of sufficient numbers of effective organisations.

1.2 Forms of Organisational Activity

As we have seen, much faith is placed, under structural adjustment programmes, in the potential of the private sector to rescue Africa from its predicament. This attitude is based more upon dissatisfaction with the performance of the public sector since independence than any clear evidence that the private sector will necessarily do much better. This section considers evidence pertaining to the effectiveness and viability of a number of different forms of organisational activity.

1.2.1 The Public Versus Private Debate

Many commentators concur in their view that the public sector in most African states has become too large, bureaucratic and change resistant. Leonard (1987) observes that, in the recent intense concern of aid donors about the quality of public sector management and ways to improve it, "emphasis is not so much upon improving the operations of the state as upon finding ways to decrease its role altogether" (p. 899). Wamwala (1989) writes of the public sector having "expanded at a feverish pace" (p. 118), and Montgomery (1987) records that it grew after independence at a faster rate than the economy.

Two points should be noted about this issue of the size of the public sector. First, there were valid reasons for African governments, immediately after independence, to expand the role and, axiomatically, the extent of their public sectors. Among these were: the commitment of many of the new nation states to socialist policies which ideologically demanded that the state should be the dominant player in development; economic nationalism; the absence generally of a strong and sufficiently large private sector – confirmed in a large scale empirical investigation in the SADCC countries of southern Africa, reported by Montgomery (1987: 922); and the desire to guarantee employment for "the new educated aspirants to elite status" (Montgomery 1987: 912).

As the previous section demonstrated, there is broad agreement among commentators concerning the poor performance of the public sector in many African countries. Balogun's (1987) views are representative: after "years of ineptitude and resistance to change" (p. 230) the generally negative image of the public sector has ensured wide acceptance of moves to reduce its size and role. Debate now focuses on the optimal relative size and roles of the public and private sectors, particularly as agents of change and development, because, as Kiggundu (1988) asserts, the pervasive role of the state is now believed to be detrimental to the development of entrepreneurship and competitive production. African governments have, in his opinion, tried to do too much in attempting to manage both government bureaucracies and business.

Current experience in Africa confirms that there are considerable difficulties involved in finding an appropriate balance between the public and private sectors. Collins (1989b) points out the methodological problems of even measuring the existing size of the public sector: there is little in the way of an empirical base for assertions of gross overstaffing. Comparisons between the size of some African public services and the United Nations secretariat would be an interesting exercise! There is also, as one might expect, little agreement about what the public sector should be left with after the radical reduction of its size and role. Balogun (1989) opts out of the argument, advocating that the appropriate balance between the public and private domains should be achieved on the basis of "what they are best placed by nature to do" (p. 231). The report of the proceedings of a conference sponsored by the (British) Overseas Development Administration (ODA 1989) is a little more specific. Some activities, the conference believed, were better left to the private sector, such as manufacturing, marketing, and some services. But certain activities should remain the direct responsibility of the state, including economic policy, law and order, regulatory and planning functions, and some social services.

Most contributors to the debate advocate a productive partnership which assumes a reduction of the role of the public sector and improvement of the institutional capacity of both sectors. This latter point is important because structural rigidity in both the public and the private sector is a barrier to growth; what is needed is "a sustained effort in the direction of institutional flexibility and reform" (Wamwala 1989: 118) in both sectors. The ODA conference (1989) made a similar point: the aim of reform should not simply be to divest the state of activities for which it is not suited, but to increase overall resource mobility.

As indicated earlier, there is little in the way of convincing empirical evidence that Africa's private sector organisations are necessarily better equipped than those in the public sector to undertake the complex business of development and change. A rare study in this area, reported by Montgomery (1987), posed the question in relation to the SADDC countries of southern Africa. The hypothesis that private sector organisations were "small, unimportant, and administratively superior" (p. 922) was supported by the data in the first two adjectives but *not* in the third. The data did not support the claim of greater rationality in the sector in terms of goal seeking. The popular expectation that managers in the private sector behave very differently from those in the public domain, similarly, was not confirmed. There were, in fact, surprisingly few differences in management styles and required skills between the public sector, the private sector, and public corporations (parastatals and public enterprises). The study noted, significantly, that 'ideological resentments' against the private sector remain. Montgomery's (1987) caution, that "current development theories that call for reliance on the private sector are not as easy to apply" (p. 922) as may have been the case elsewhere at similar stages of development, is apt.

Balogun (1989) implies similar concerns, demanding that the private sector must become more innovative and entrepreneurial, and rely less on government.

1.2.2 The Informal Sector

Associated with the public sector/private sector debate is the issue of the so-called informal sector. Now that most governments have recognised that future growth in the formal public sector is likely to be severely restricted, much interest is being shown in the employment generating potential of the informal sector. In Kiggundu's (1988) view there is "an urgent need to develop an active and fairly sizable indigenous private sector" (p. 223); this will demand a change in government policies, which at present "range from neglect to outright hostility" (p. 223).

It is perhaps worth entering a note of caution here: it would be ironic if the new faith in the promise of the informal sector were to be dashed by the very attention it is currently receiving. Whenever governments turn their attention to something which holds out some promise there is an almost obsessive tendency to fence it around with regulations and procedures – the control mechanisms which all too often concern bureaucrats far more than organisational performance. The acute danger is that the unique feature of the informal sector – its informality – will be destroyed as the state and the international aid agencies try to make use of it.

1.2.3 Public Enterprises

It is also appropriate in this section to consider very briefly current views on the role and performance of public enterprises in Africa. Following Nellis (1986), "public enterprises are defined as government owned or controlled entities which are supposed to earn the bulk of their revenues from sales, have a distinct legal identity, and are self-accounting" (p. vii). Conservative estimates indicate that there are more than 3,000 organisations in sub-Saharan Africa which satisfy the restrictions of this definition. They are important economic actors, and dominate the economies of many African countries (Nellis, 1986). In general these public sector organisations have failed to perform as was intended by their political masters. Noting the current concern about public enterprises in Africa, Kiggundu (1988) remarks on the large number of these organisations; the extent to which they dominate some economies (e.g., Zambia); their commonly politicised nature; the fact that many of them make heavy losses at the expense of the treasury; and that they tend often to be "bureaucratic, overstaffed and inefficient" (p. 202).

White (1987) comments on the heavy investments of resources in public enterprises and the disappointingly low yields which they have produced, as does Nellis (1986). White (1987) advances the following reasons for this: ambiguous and sometimes conflicting objectives; political interference; rotation of managers between organisations; use of unsuitable public service procedures for commercial operations; and lack of competition. In addition, the existence frequently of a weak private sector, coupled with international pricing decisions, makes African public enterprises particularly vulnerable.

Collins (1989b) has examined some of the reasons for the failures of African public enterprises. He cites problems of efficiency and overstaffing, but cautions that analysing the performance of public enterprises in Africa is difficult because of their multiple objectives, including social and non-commercial ones. Hence annual losses do not *necessarily* prove overall poor organisational performance. A major study of public performance in sub-Saharan Africa conducted by Nellis (1986) concludes that:

"African public enterprises present a depressing picture of inefficiency, losses, budgetary burdens, poor products and services, and minimal accomplishment of the non-commercial objectives so frequently used to excuse their poor economic performance" (p. ix).

Nellis (1986) has attributed these low levels of performance to poor initial investment decisions, inappropriate pricing policies, undercapitalisation and high debt/equity ratios, high inventories (which limit working capital), failures by governments to pay for services rendered resulting in tax avoidance by public enterprises, and managerial and institutional impediments including inadequate incentives and political interference in day-to-day management decisions.

Surveys of performance in the public enterprise sector have produced much debate on the steps which should be taken to improve matters. Generally, alternatives include the abolition of enterprises whose continued existence cannot be justified; privatisation of enterprises whose functions appear to be suited to private sector ownership and operation; return to the public service of the functions of some – usually minor – enterprises where there is, in the light of experience, no reason for their continued separate existence; and rehabilitation and reform of their performance, primarily through better management. Nellis (1986) has drawn up an agenda for institutional reform in Africa which we shall consider in greater detail in Chapter 3. As yet, according to White (1987), there has been little divestiture to the private sector.

The exact direction and extent of efforts to restructure the balance between the public sector, public enterprises, and private firms is not yet clear. It will obviously find different expression from country to country, and as Kiggundu (1988) believes, "for most African countries a mixed economy is the most likely scenario" (p. 203). This does not seem very dramatic, but for many African nations it will represent a radical change.

1.3 Organisation and Management

The following chapters of this book will deal in more detail with issues of African organisations and their management. In this section we briefly preview some of those issues by presenting some views about organisational performance in African countries. Consistent with the aim of this introductory chapter, this brief sample of recent views is intended to provide a contextual background to the management of African formal organisations.

Sweeping generalisations concerning the poor performance of African organisations are very common. Many of them stem from impressionistic judgments of the 'when I was in' type; and many are followed by prescriptive lectures on what African managers must do to rescue their failing organisations. For a variety of reasons, rigorous empirical research into issues of African formal organisations is sparse. Thus, judgments about their performance must necessarily be made with caution. Relevant statistics are often difficult to obtain, out of date, incomplete or unreliable. Information about organisational performance is especially scarce, particularly concerning public services and public enterprises.

Internal information systems very rarely produce data concerning job performance. Again, some of the reasons for this are discussed later.

Brown (1989) argues that such studies as there are frequently tend to have a limited systems perspective and therefore neglect environmental issues which exert crucial influences on the management of formal organisations. Much current debate, he claims, is not about organisational performance but about "assumed optimal criteria for organisational efficiency" (Brown 1989: 371). Brown rejects 'simple formula' explanations of alleged differences in management practices in Africa as compared to elsewhere – primarily of course the industrialised nations of the West – of the kind advanced for instance by Hyden (1983) and Reilly (1987). They are reductionist and they ignore obvious features of African societies "which it requires no great imaginative leap to comprehend" (Brown 1989: 375–376): political centralisation; patronage; poverty of resources; low capacities for growth; low risk political strategies; and political instability. Using data from a case study of the Liberian public service, Brown has shown that such realities provide obvious explanations for organisational performance; there is no need to resort to conspiracy theories of the kind constructed by Reilly (1987). In view of the urgent need for empirical data, Brown urges "less emphasis on assumed optimal performance criteria and more upon how organisations actually perform" (1989: 371).

Despite this dearth of reliable data about African organisational performance, it is possible to obtain some useful insights into the contemporary situation from overall trends and the small number of empirical studies which exist. Some clues emerge from the report of the Conference on Civil Service Reform (CCSR) in sub-Saharan Africa, organised by the ODA in 1989. Delegates agreed that, in general, performance of public services in the region had declined, in some cases drastically. There had been huge declines in public service incomes in some countries, which had caused serious losses of skilled manpower. Concurrently, overstaffing, caused by 'employer of last resort' policies, existed in many public services. Government budgets were overwhelmingly spent on civil service salaries. A common dilemma is how to reduce the size and cost of the civil service while increasing the rewards of those who remain, in order to produce a more efficient public service?

The symptoms of poor organisational performance identified by the CCSR included inability to make policy and routine decisions and implement them; failing services; low morale; high spending on staff; overstaffing; declining revenue; and weak financial management, budgeting, control, accounting and audit. Since independence, the Conference agreed, new demands had been placed on the civil services of African nations which emphasised their role as the motive force for development. In addition, the new and sometimes more difficult political environment made the role of the civil service more ambiguous and vulnerable. The results were often 'disappointing' and in some cases 'disastrous', but not entirely surprising considering the degree of political and economic instability.

Other factors identified during the CCSR included neglect of the civil service or "hasty and ill thought-out changes" (ODA 1989: 20), confusion concerning issues of centralisation and decentralisation of government business, and mismatches between the resources provided to public organisations and the responsibilities imposed on them. All this led the CCSR to infer the possibility that there exists in some African countries a 'crisis of governability', a real danger that "a number of governments of poorer countries might soon be unable to carry out the basic functions of law and order and service provision, let alone those summarised under the heading of 'development administration' " (ODA 1989: 19).

Balogun (1989) has provided further details of the typical pattern of public administration in African countries which contribute to the disappointing performance of public services:

- Career public servants are comfortable with bureaucratic methods of organisation and focus primarily on protocol.
- There are too many hierarchical levels, typically.
- Information systems are often chaotic.
- There frequently exist mismatches between job content and required educational attainments.
- Attachment to the principle of specialisation/ departmentalism causes jurisdictional disputes.

In short, Balogun (1989) complains of "protocol, empire building, arbitrary job creation, (and) endless form filling" (p. 230).

1.4 The Political Context

African politics are complex and sometimes baffling, as new nations experiment with different systems in attempts to find suitable patterns for governance. It is not our intention here to delve into these complexities in depth, but it is clear that political realities are a crucial element of the contexts in which African organisations function. We will refer to these issues again in various later parts of this book, so it is perhaps sufficient here to record the comments of several recent commentators.

Leonard (1987), for example, notes that the state in Africa is still a fragile institution and that political systems depend heavily on patronage: "Politics still dominates all other organisational and policy considerations" (p. 908). In his fascinating study of the careers of four eminent Kenyan managers Leonard (1988) remarks that "there is no doubt that the environment for public management is frequently inhospitable in Africa" (p. 35). One factor which emerged in the study as essential to managerial success was the building and maintenance of political connections. This consisted not in building an independent political base, but in gaining regular access to top politicians in order to influence policy decisions, supply of resources, and protection against politicisation and inappropriate policies. Such political support has to be earned through loyalty and careful network building.

Brown's (1989) Liberian case study mentioned earlier also confirms "the crucial influence of the political environment" (p. 380) on the functioning and management of African organisations, as does Nellis (1986).

1.5 The Socio-Cultural Context

The report of the recent ODA conference on civil service reform (CCSR) in sub-Saharan Africa, referred to earlier, notes that "the theme of cultural factors and their impact on civil service reform recurred repeatedly in discussions throughout the Conference" and that there was among delegates a degree of unease about "the imposition of a cultural pattern implicit in current reform approaches" (ODA 1989: 36). The delegates, despite these concerns, do not appear to have taken the issue any further.

Similarly, a report based on the proceedings of no less than four policy seminars and a 'round up workshop', involving policy makers at top political and administrative levels from 29 African countries, admits that they did not raise "the critically important issue of the impact of culture on management" (Adamolekun 1989: 17).

If the brief note in the CCSR report seems inadequate and the omission of such a 'critically important issue' from the African senior policy seminars appears astonishing, we would caution that these examples provide good evidence of the problems we all experience when trying to come to terms with cultural factors in organisational behaviour.

A recent issue of the journal of *International Studies of Management and Organisation* (Summer 1986) consists of five articles on issues in the management of African organisations. The guest editor, Augustine Ahiauzu, comments that "it is becoming increasingly widely accepted among social scientists, especially managers and organisational theorists, that patterns of management and employee behaviour in the workplace are largely culture-bound" (1986: 3). The five articles in the journal provide examples to support this view. In common with the five contributors, Ahiauzu stresses the need for empirical research in this field, particularly into 'questions of persistent interest', including:

- the nature and evolution of African management thought and work;
- the meanings of work for Africans;
- frameworks for analysis, theoretical perspectives and methodological consequences, in African organisations;
- cultural variations in African societies and their influences on organisational behaviour;
- tradition and modernity in work organisations; and
- what can be learned from the experiences of industrialised countries.

Ahiauzu's (1986) concern with the need for more research is appropriate. There is indeed a growing body of literature concerning questions of socio-cultural influences on organisational behaviour; but much of it is of poor quality, consisting of anecdotes, prescriptions based on Western experience, and fantasies. Research methodologies are often question-able, which is not altogether surprising in view of the problems of defining 'culture' and devising useful categories for investigation. As in other areas of the behavioral sciences, research has not produced conclusive evidence for or against the 'divergence' hypothesis that management is culture-bound; or the contending 'convergence' argument that the imperatives of modern complex organisations will prove so powerful and pervasive that managerial attitudes, values and behaviour will become increasingly uniform around the world.

The most influential large-scale cross-cultural studies are those of Haire, Ghiselli and Porter (1966) and Hofstede (1980, 1984). The investigation by Haire and his colleagues produced evidence indicating that in some respects managers had common views which cut across national boundaries. There was evidence also that cultural factors were significant in differences between clusters of countries with common cultural attributes. However, in the three developing countries in the study it was the shared stage of economic development which accounted for some common characteristics. Replications of the Haire *et al.* study in African countries by, among others, Blunt (1973, 1976), Howell, Strauss and Sorenson (1975), Blunt and Jones (1986), and Jones (1988a), similarly have produced evidence of 'convergent' and 'divergent' elements in the thinking and behaviour of managers.

Hofstede's (1980) massive investigation was based upon a model developed from his view that culture is essentially the collective mental programming of people in their environment. His data revealed marked differences in national cultures which would be expected to have a significant impact on organisational behaviour.

Montgomery's (1986a, 1986b, 1987) report on a large scale study of managerial behaviour in the Southern African Development Coordinating Conference (SADCC) countries provides insights into the work and attitudes of African administrators which reveal significant culturally specific influences. Montgomery's research was designed to investigate the validity of the exotic images of African management created by unsubstantiated anecdotes; this was achieved by focussing on specific contingencies in the organisational environment of these managers. We shall return to this important study and consider its findings in greater detail in the next chapter.

Balogun (1986) and De Graft-Johnson (1986) have also provided examples of specific aspects of African traditional values and practices which could be significant for an understanding of African management and systems of organisation. Murrell (1986) similarly draws attention to the realities of organisational environments in Africa which clearly do not possess the same history of modern organisational or industrial life as the West. Western management models cannot be merely adopted or copied in such environments; they have to be adapted in the 'most culturally appropriate manner'.

Leonard (1987) has provided some specific examples of cultural influences on African managers, and argues that differences in organisation behaviour between them and their counterparts in the industrialised West are due to fundamental differences in values. Leonard stresses the need to develop an understanding of the effects of such cultural realities on organisational behaviour and cautions against the unthinking transfer of alien management concepts and practices. Western social science makes certain assumptions about the functioning of formal organisations, according to Leonard (1987):

- the assumption of purposive rationality, implying commitment to organisational goals; and
- the assumption of economic rationality, which views economics as the fundamental social process which provides an understanding of all human transactions.

He asserts that such assumptions are not applicable in all societies, and that their validity in Africa is particularly limited.

As we have indicated earlier, the issues involved in the transfer of Western management concepts and practices to African environments raise many complex questions about cultural factors. There are in Africa many cultural contradictions and tensions as new nations make their painful transitions from colonial dependencies to modern nation states. The nature of this situation for individual managers is nicely captured by Balogun (1986): "As they seek to accomplish their varied tasks, they are torn between going back to the good old days of pure traditional despotism, and coming to terms with, and mastering, the alien systems of government and administration which they inherited from the colonial authorities" (p. 195).

1.6 Transportation, Communications and Technology

Africa is a gigantic continent with great river systems, mountains, deserts, lakes, forests and a huge variety of geographical and climatic conditions. Many of Africa's artificially drawn countries are landlocked. Trade links have to be maintained often across vast distances and difficult terrain. Transport links such as roads and railways are relatively undeveloped, often old and in need of updating and regular maintenance. Air transport links between different parts of the continent are often made via European cities. These and other factors make the job of the African manager additionally problematic, especially if they are combined with political instability in surrounding countries, as Jones (1989), for example, shows in the case of landlocked Malawi.

In terms of technology, as Kiggundu (1988) remarks, sub-Saharan Africa is "lagging behind in the importation and effective utilisation and management of foreign technology ... Africa is not a technology developer because almost no research and development takes place on the continent ... Africa is also a poor copier of technology ... and there is a tendency to view new technology as static, fixed ..." (pp. 216–217).

1.7 Agriculture[1]

Overall, Africans are almost as poor today as they were thirty years ago. As we indicated at the beginning of this chapter, most African states suffer from "high population growth rates, declining *per capita* food production, severe land degradation, declining export revenues, worsening trade balances and enormous debts" (Macgregor 1990: 4). The common thread running through all of these factors is agriculture. It accounts for 33 per cent of Africa's GDP, employs 66 per cent of its labour force, and produces 40 per cent of its exports. Yet today in many African countries agriculture is in crisis. It is estimated that one in four Africans (more than 100 million people) in 36 of the continent's 52 countries is threatened by famine and malnutrition. The long-term nature of the crisis is a function of deteriorating food production – which has grown by only 20 per cent in the last twenty years – and a population which has increased in size by 30 per cent over the same period.[2]

Inevitably, the people most at risk when times are hard are small scale farmers who can no longer produce enough food to feed their families. Within this group the most adversely affected are women and children; poor people in the cities who cannot afford to buy food; and refugees.

To some extent African agriculture is a victim of its colonial past and an unforgiving and uncaring world economy which is geared to serve the interests of the industrialised countries. But the agricultural crisis is also a function of internal factors, subject to internal control. The imbalance between population growth and food production, together with inept and wasteful government policies and management practices are major contributory factors – although the latter can sometimes be grossly exaggerated, and will in any case vary greatly between countries (Jamal, 1988). We have dealt already in this chapter with different forms of organisational activity and levels of performance in Africa. But the urgent need to rectify the problems mentioned is brought home by a more detailed consideration of the effects of population growth, urbanisation, and environmental depletion.

Despite the gloomy picture painted by the statistics, it is still possible to say in theory that Africa has the capacity to become self-sufficient in food. Competent management and administration has a crucial role to play in the realisation of Africa's potential in this most basic of all areas of economic and organisational activity. As the *Economist* (1990) notes: "Africa's comparative advantage may well be in farming. But efficient agriculture needs efficient towns to provide banks, marketing systems, agricultural training, and so on" (p. 20).

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1 This section and the next two sections draw heavily on Macgregor (1990).

2 It is important to note here that aggregate figures conceal significant differences between countries – see, for example, Jamal (1988), Tabatabai (1988), and Collier (1988).

1.8 Population Growth and Urbanisation

The population of sub-Saharan Africa has doubled in size since 1965. By the year 2010 it is expected to have risen to over 1 billion. These growth rates far exceed those of any other continent (including Latin America and Asia). The sheer magnitude of these increases is complicated by population distribution, density, age, and patterns of migration.

Africa as a whole cannot be said to be overpopulated. But while there are still vast tracts of uncultivated arable land, there are larger areas of desert and semi-desert which are virtually uninhabited, and other areas in which exhausted land is unable – because of high population densities – to support the people who live there. Yet it is in these latter areas (which include parts of southern West Africa, the East African lakes region, parts of the Ethiopian highlands, and South Africa) that more than half of Africa's total population lives. These are the areas which make the greatest demands on governments and organisations.

Urban migration and the age distribution (high proportion of young people) of Africa's population have contributed to agriculture's reduced "percentage share of the economically active population, while the growing proportions of female and child labour have qualitatively worsened the composition of labour resources" (Macgregor 1990: 7).

These factors clearly have major implications for public policy and the strategic management of public sector organisations. There are signs that some African governments are beginning to take notice: for example, in Zimbabwe the government has spent considerable sums on the development of Chitungwiza, a township some 15 miles from the capital, Harare. Likewise, Zambia's government has attempted to develop Kafue, 30 miles from Lusaka. The idea in both cases has been to relieve congestion in the capitals; but the costs have been hours of commuting (and waiting) for Chitungwiza's workers and over-strained public transport systems. It is partly to escape such costs that the poor have built their homes closer to industrial and employment centres; hence the sprawling slums of cities like Lagos and Nairobi. The issues are pressing but far from straightforward.

Across Africa, city populations are growing at twice and three times the rate of the general population. By the year 2020 the World Bank expects that there will be about 30 cities in the continent with populations in excess of 1 million. Some will be far bigger than that: for example, it is predicted that Lagos will grow from 5 million to 26 million before its population stabilises (*Economist* 1990).

1.9 Physical Environment and Resources

Deserts occupy about 40 per cent of the African land mass; dense rain forests with poor soils account for a further 7 or 8 per cent of the continent. The remaining land is of highly variable quality; the soils are old and easily degraded; an additional restraint (conservationists might say 'blessing') is "the widespread incidence of the tsetse fly which infests more than two-thirds of the sub-humid zone (which) has held back the economy of entire regions" (Macgregor 1990: 8).

Rainfall is marginal and erratic, and in the semi-arid regions of the continent drought is a recurrent phenomenon.

With a diminishing supply of fertile arable land, and difficult access, a pressing concern is the rate and extent of environmental degradation in Africa, as in the rest of the world (Montgomery 1991). Macgregor (1990) is emphatic on this point:

"Africa's ecology is fragile. In the first half of the 1980's it was estimated that as many as 7,432 million hectares of land in Africa, equivalent to 26 per cent of the continent's total land area, was in the process of desertification; the Sahara Desert alone expanding at the rate of 1.5 million hectares a year" (p. 8).

Population pressures, which have resulted in overcultivation, overgrazing, and deforestation (brought about by demand for wood and construction), and increasing herd sizes, have had a major influence.

In view of the above, in Africa, as elsewhere on the planet, environmental policies should be of increasing concern to governments, corporations, associations, and even households and individuals. Unfortunately, while a few organisations and governments in Africa are trying to deal coherently with the ever increasing threats to their environments, most are ignoring, postponing, or exacerbating the problems (Montgomery 1991). Multinational corporations have been particularly lax in this area, although public opinion worldwide has induced a more concerned and creative approach to environmental issues in recent years (Blake 1990).

1.10 Labour Market Trends

Jamal and Weeks (1988) have drawn attention to a number of labour market trends which in their view reveal "the need for a sharply revised view of African economies" (p. 273):

- Real wages of urban workers have fallen during the 1980s, in some instances dramatically. Unskilled workers have fared worst of all. With excesses of supply over demand, the minimum wage has become the actual wage for most unskilled workers.
- The security and stability of formal sector employment have diminished. Again, the limited evidence suggests that employment has declined more for unskilled workers than for the semi-skilled and skilled.
- As a result of the first two trends, the distinction between the formal and informal sectors is becoming blurred. Income differentials between the two sectors are decreasing, as are differences in lifestyles and living standards. Decreasing opportunities in the formal sector have forced many formal sector workers out into the informal sector.

- The income gap between urban workers and the rural population has decreased. According to Jamal and Weeks (1988), "in some cases the scales have even begun to tip in favour of peasant smallholders" (p. 274).
- The above four trends have contributed to a worsening distribution of income in most African countries. This contradicts the conventional wisdom which suggests that reducing the gap between urban and rural incomes automatically leads to an improved overall distribution of income. It is no longer a question of privileged urbanites versus disadvantaged farmers, but simply a question of rich versus poor, with the latter including urban wage earners, operators in the informal sector, and peasants.
- Migration from rural to urban areas seems, if anything, to have increased, despite decreasing income differentials.
- Thus, according to Jamal and Weeks (1988), we can infer that:

"Increasingly the primary dynamic distributional relationship in Africa is between rich and poor within both the urban and the rural sectors ... This tendency for the poor in both urban and rural areas to suffer most has led to interactive rural-urban survival strategies whose precise nature is not clear. However, there is evidence (particularly in the extreme case of Uganda) of nominally urban households supplementing their livelihoods from agriculture" (p. 275).

1.11 Conclusion

The aim of this first chapter has been to provide a contextual background to our examination of African formal organisations and their management, which follows. The factors briefly introduced combine to constitute crucial environmental influences on the practice of management, and organisational behaviour generally. All organisations, everywhere, function within a specific environment, and it is becoming more widely recognised in contemporary discussions of organisational performance that managers have to develop an understanding of their environments if their organisations are to survive and function effectively. We have attempted to show some of those aspects of African organisational environments which are unique or in some important ways different from those elsewhere, for a variety of reasons. In the following chapters these issues will be examined in more detail.

1.12 Implications for Managers and Management Development

For senior managers the implications of this opening chapter are of crucial importance. In Africa, where change is both rapid and in many countries turbulent, it is imperative that formal organisations develop and maintain the ability to understand their environments. Senior managers need to develop an outward-looking stance so that their organisations can monitor, anticipate, initiate and manage change. For profit-dependent enterprises this is the key to their survival; for public service organisations this is how they can make sure that their services remain relevant. Foreign managers and experts working in Africa, and foreign corporations, should pay particular attention to the issues we have raised in this chapter. Kiggundu (1991) endorses this view:

"The foreigner interested in designing, implementing and evaluating effective management development programmes must read widely in order to gain an appreciation of this diverse and complex continent, its peoples and social organisations, and the context within which organisation and management takes place" (pp. 32–33).

For management development practices the chapter suggests that managers must be alerted to the implications of change in the environment and be assisted to learn the skills of collecting, recording, analysing and synthesising information. This implies that the traditional focus of management textbooks and management teaching on the internal processes of the organisation will have to be modified. As we shall see in Chapter 13, major criticisms of the performance of management training institutes in Africa are their attachment to the textbook and their lack of contact with the world of managerial work. This chapter implies that these institutes will have to move out of the classroom and into the organisation, to identify and use learning opportunities for helping senior managers to develop their abilities in dealing with their environments. Ironically, of course, it also means that Africa's management training institutes must themselves develop similar skills. Otherwise, as has already happened in some cases, they themselves will be left behind by the changing realities of their environments.

Chapter 2: The Nature of Managerial Work

In the previous chapter we considered characteristics of the general environments of African organisations and the constraints these environments imposed on organisational functioning and effectiveness. This chapter delves within the organisation to examine the nature of managerial work and to consider the extent to which the behaviour of African managers takes on distinctive characteristics. It asks the question what do managers actually do as distinct from what are they supposed to do? This question raises another: how can an understanding of the nature of managerial work help us to improve our ability to manage organisations effectively? We shall take the view that a detailed knowledge of the nature of managerial work and its meaning, and its variations between organisations and cultures, will help us, first, to understand why organisations function in the ways that they do. And second, it will help us to devise ways for creating more effective organisations and for training and developing managers.

Our ability at present to gain such understanding in the African context is somewhat limited by the lack of direct empirical research evidence on the nature of managerial work in the continent. Nevertheless, what is known about the nature of managerial work in the West together with theory and evidence from other developing countries (e.g., China), and the small amount of African research evidence provides a basis for an informed discussion of this important topic.

2.1 The Importance of the Topic

A major reason for studying the nature of managerial work is the global expansion in the twentieth century of managerial hierarchies responsible for coordinating and controlling resources of increasing magnitude and variety (Whitley 1989), or what Chandler (1977) has referred to as the growth of the 'visible hand'. The importance of management as a distinctive activity and occupational category has developed as a function of the growth and spread of large enterprises and their increasing economic, social, political, and environmental impact. Moreover, in recent years it has been argued that the significance of management has been enhanced by the declining influence of markets, and their replacement by hierarchies, especially in newer industries (Whitley 1987).

In Africa, as we shall argue more fully below, the case for the dominance of managerial hierarchies over markets can be put with even greater force, thereby adding considerable weight to the significance of the topic in an African context. But irrespective of context, the analysis of managerial work and the development of effective managers are important simply because the growing influence and impact of managerial hierarchies has placed them among the most significant features of industrialised and industrialising societies (Whitley 1989; Willmott 1984).

2.2 What Do Managers Do?

Research findings regarding the nature of managerial work need to be distinguished, first, from the prescriptions of the 'founding fathers' of management thought, and second, from what Willmott (1984) refers to as the images and ideals of the 'pundits'., that is, characteristics of management work by popular writers such as Drucker (1977) and Peters (1989). We shall take the view that the contributions of both the classical writers and the pundits suffer from a lack of empirical foundations, vagueness, and the claim that they are universally applicable.

However, as much of the received wisdom in management continues to rely heavily on such formulations, it is necessary to review briefly what they have to say.

2.2.1 Classical Theorists

The contributions of three writers stand out: Taylor (1911), Fayol (1949) and Barnard (1938). Taylor argued that the work of managers should be more scientifically based so that standardised rules and precise formulae could be used to control worker behaviour. Fayol developed a number of principles of administration, most of which were consistent with Taylor's views. These principles, which have dominated management vocabulary since they were first introduced in 1916, assert that managers plan, organise, coordinate and control (Mintzberg, 1989). Barnard's (1938) contribution, which foreshadowed the advent of so-called 'behavioral' studies of management and organisation, drew attention to management's role in developing an effective fit between the purpose of an organisation and its environment and between its structure and the characteristics of its personnel. These elements of Barnard's writings continue to occupy a central position in management theory, as we shall see in subsequent chapters in this book.

2.2.2 Popular Writers on Management

Following Willmott (1984), a general idea of the characterisation of managerial work by management pundits can be gained from the writings of Dale (1965) and Drucker (1977). Dale's view is a universal one which sees the work of managers as being concerned with 'getting things done through other people' (Dale 1965: 5). Inspired by Fayol, Dale also characterises managerial work as consisting in planning, organising, staffing, directing, and controlling. He assumes, moreover, that the form of organisations and management is unproblematic and historically constant. In this view, the manager is "simply a functionary who applies technical expertise to ensure that 'things get done' " (Willmott 1984:

354). It is assumed, further, that little if anything can be achieved without the benefits of managerial direction and control.

Unlike Dale, Drucker (1977: 25) accepts that management is "a social function embedded in a tradition of values, customs and beliefs, and in governmental and political systems". According to Drucker, competent management rests on "an understanding of the fundamentals of management" (Drucker 1977: 26). What these fundamentals entail, however, is less clear. Reference is made to the development of the skills of 'communication within organisations', 'making decisions under conditions of uncertainty', and 'strategic planning', but they are left largely undefined. One of Drucker's major recommendations is the idea that management behaviour and performance should be governed by clearly defined and achievable objectives which are directed towards the success of the whole organisation (the well known 'management by objectives').

The nature of managerial work conveyed by such popular writings is that of "the 'professional' who impartially carries out the universally and technically defined functions of management" (Willmott 1984: 355).

2.2.3 Folklore and Fact

Mintzberg (1989) asserts that none of the above helps us to understand very much about what it is that managers actually do. Neither classical nor popular writings on the subject have been very good at distinguishing 'images' (observations of managers at work) from 'ideals' (what it is thought that managers should do). From his study of various kinds of managers – foremen, factory supervisors, staff managers, sales managers, hospital administrators, presidents of companies and nations, and even street gang leaders – in the United States, Canada, Sweden, and Great Britain, Mintzberg (1989) paints a significantly different, and more valid, picture of managerial work from that presented above.

Mintzberg's (1989) account of managerial work begins with the refutation of a number of myths. The first of these is that managers are systematic planners who spend a great deal of time thinking ahead. Empirical studies have shown, however, that invariably this is not the case. Rather, managers' activities are characterised by brevity, variety, and discontinuity, and a dislike of reflection. For example, a study of 160 British middle and top managers found that their work was so discontinuous and varied that they were able to work for half an hour or more without interruption only once every two days. When planning does take place, it seems to happen implicitly and to be carried out in conjunction with or as a part of other activities. Mintzberg (1989) observes "the plans of the chief executives I studied seemed to exist only in their heads – as flexible, but often specific, intentions" (p. 11).

Another myth is that a manager spends relatively little time on operational activities, such as dealing with customers, because – like a good conductor – his job is to plan and schedule whilst others execute. However, the evidence indicates that managers devote a great deal of time to regular operational activities involving negotiations, the interpretation of 'soft' information regarding the organisation's links with its external environment, a certain amount of what Mintzberg refers to as ritual and ceremony (e.g., meeting visitors, attending official occasions, handing out long service awards etc.), and – particularly in smaller organisations – considerable contact with customers.

A third myth is that managers rely a great deal on aggregated and quantified information supplied by formal management information systems. Again, research contradicts this picture. Of the five media at their disposal – documents, telephone calls, scheduled and unscheduled meetings, and observational tours – managers appear strongly to prefer oral media, namely, telephone calls and meetings. A number of studies have shown that managers devote more than 70% of their time to oral communication (Mintzberg 1989), and place high value on 'soft' information – gossip, hearsay, and speculation – because it so often presages new developments. It is also the case that much soft information of high value never gets written down, and access to it can therefore be achieved only via informal channels.

Finally, Mintzberg discounts the proposition that management is fast becoming a science and a profession by demonstrating that much of what managers do, which involves judgment and intuition, is not amenable to scientific analysis. As Mintzberg says, many of the reasons underlying managers' work "remain locked deep inside their brains" (1989: 14) and inaccessible to observation and scientific study.

Mintzberg's own empirical investigations have led him to the conclusion that managerial work can be accurately described in terms of ten roles or coherent sets of behaviours.

2.2.4 Managerial Roles in the West[1]

Three of the ten roles stem directly from formal authority and have to do with relationships with other people (*see* Figure 2.1).

Figurehead

This aspect of managerial work is concerned with ceremonial activities associated with a manager's position as head of an organisational unit. The director or permanent secretary will receive visiting officials and dignitaries, the marketing manager will entertain valued customers by taking them to lunch, and so on. Naturally, the extent of involvement in such activities, as with the other nine roles to be discussed, will vary according to the manager's level, type of organisation, and the organisation's cultural context. In some Asian cultures, for example, ceremonial activities are central to most managers' jobs (Blunt, Richards & Wilson 1989). Their significance in Western societies is demonstrated in Mintzberg's (1973) original study where chief executive officers spent 12 percent of their contact time on ceremonial activities, and 17 percent of their incoming mail dealt with similar issues.

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1 Much of this section is based on Mintzberg (1989).

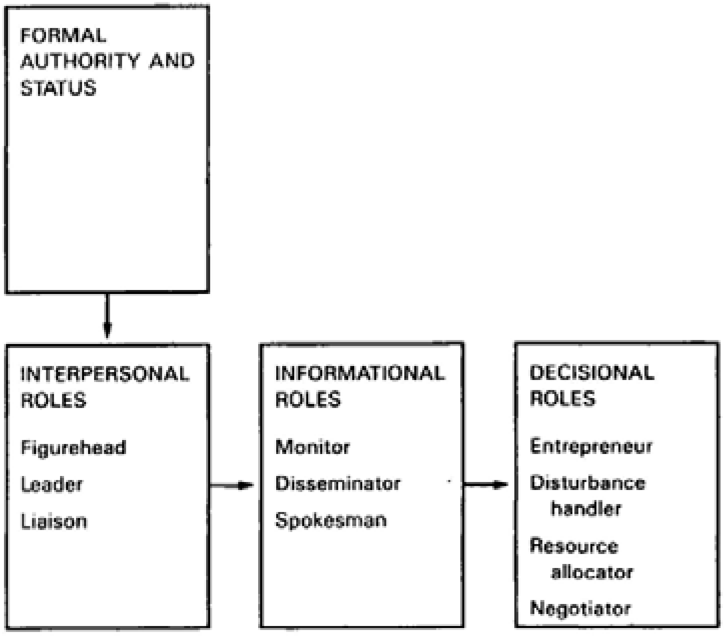

Figure 2.1 : The Manager's Roles

Motivator

Mintzberg's (1973) original account of this role referred to it as that of 'leader'. Our own view is that his description of this role is described better by the word 'motivator'; hence our use of this term in preference to the original. In addition, however, modern debate concerning the notion of leadership – of which there has been a great deal (e.g., Bennis 1989; Kotter, 1990; Krantz 1990) – interprets the term somewhat differently, and distinguishes it quite clearly from management (Kotter 1990). We shall return to this important question later in this chapter.

The motivator role arises from the manager's responsibility for the output of others in addition to his or her own. The activities making up this role would include hiring and firing, goal setting, and performance appraisal and reward. In all of this, the manager seeks to attain some workable balance between the interests of the individual and those of the organisation.

Liaison

This role reflects the consistent research finding that managers spend as much time with peers and other people outside their own units as they do with their subordinates. Relatively little time (around 10 percent) is spent with superiors. The chief executives studied by Mintzberg had contact with a wide range of people including subordinates, clients, business associates, suppliers, managers of similar organisations, government and trade union officials, and so on. These contacts were used primarily for gathering information.

The three roles described thus far, those of *figurehead*, *motivator*, and *liaison*, are largely interpersonal in nature. As the centre of networks of interpersonal contacts, the manager becomes a key source and repository of information. The next three roles described are connected with the informational aspects of managerial work.

Monitor

This entails scanning the environment for relevant information, using formal channels and informal networks for gathering information, and creating a receptive and psychologically safe climate for unsolicited information, much of which will be transmitted orally.

Disseminator

The disseminator role is concerned with the sharing and distribution of information. Information to which the manager has access, which in many respects is privileged information, can thereby be made available to people – subordinates, external contacts etc. – who might otherwise not have access to it.

Spokesman

This role focuses on the provision of information to people outside the manager's own unit, especially those who are seen to have the capacity to exert a major influence on it. This is a particularly important aspect of the work of chief executives.

The final set of roles described by Mintzberg are *decisional* roles which make use of the manager's special access to comprehensive and up-to-date information.

Entrepreneur

This involves the manager in taking initiatives which are designed to improve the effectiveness and/or competitiveness of his unit. Such initiatives will often take the form of development projects which the manager may delegate to a subordinate. The nature and extent of these projects will frequently evolve gradually over time, as a series of small decisions or actions, rather than being the outcome of a single decision or grand plan. Mintzberg's view is that this gradual process allows managers to come to terms with the complexities of projects and to accommodate them into their busy work schedules. Some of the executives studied by Mintzberg had as many as fifty projects in a wide variety of areas (e.g., public relations, internal morale, computing systems, purchasing, and so on) in progress at the same time. These activities are subject to a continuing process of review involving the resuscitation or abandonment of existing projects and the initiation of new ones.

Disturbance Handler

As the name implies, this role is concerned with dealing with disturbances and conflicts which either occur within the manager's work unit or impinge on it in some way. Even the best run and most efficient and effective of organisations will experience disturbances because not every contingency or likely occurrence can be anticipated. As Mintzberg (1989: 20) remarks: "disturbances arise not only because poor managers ignore situations until they reach crisis proportions, but also because good managers cannot possibly anticipate all the consequences of the actions they take". It is a question of degree. On the