

S Y M P O S I U M

ORGANIZATION AND MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP IN AND FOR AFRICA . . . AND THE WORLD

JAMES P. WALSH
University of Michigan

Africa is a compelling place. Measuring 5,000 miles from north to south and as many as 4,600 miles from east to west, the continent comprises almost 12 million square miles. More than 1.1 billion people belong to several thousand ethnic groups, speak more than 1,500 languages, and live in 54 countries and 10 non-sovereign territories (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2014). The continent has witnessed dramatic growth over the past decade. The World Bank (2015a) tells us that the world's average annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate over the past 10 (2004–2013) and five (2009–2013) years has been 2.65% and 1.86%, respectively. The United States lagged the world during the same periods, with an average growth rate of 1.72% and 1.17%, respectively. Africa, however, outpaced the world as well as the United States, with the growth rate for 52 of the 54 African countries from 2004 to 2013 reaching 4.99%, and the mean growth rate for 53 of the 54 African countries from 2009 to 2013 reaching 4.22%.¹ With those statistics as background, it is no surprise to see McKinsey & Company (2012) report that private consumption on the continent rose by \$568 billion between 2000 and 2010, and that consumer-facing industries will grow another \$410 billion by 2020. It is also no wonder to hear Chironga, Leke, Lund, and Van Wamelen (2011, p. 122) conclude in the pages of the *Harvard Business Review*, “In many ways, Africa holds the same potential that China did 20 years ago” or to see the *Economist* publish articles titled “Africa Rising” (2011) and

“The Hottest Frontier” (2013). Africa is a compelling place and a land of opportunity.

Yet despite these promising statistics, Africa remains a complex place. Alert to the perils of caricature (Wainaina, 2005), we can still acknowledge that it can be a place of suffering. The words Darfur, Somalia, and Rwanda conjure immediate, horrific associations. UNICEF (2015) tells us that since 2004, somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000 people have died and 2.7 million people have been displaced in Sudan (looking further back in time, the Central Intelligence Agency (2014) tells us that 2.5 million people died in conflict there between 1955 and 2005). Somalia was a failed state between 1991 and 2012; 500,000 people died of starvation in their famines of 1992 and 2010–12 (BBC News, 2014). Over 800,000 people died in Rwanda's 100-day genocide in 1994 (Dallaire, 2003). And with the Ebola crisis still unfolding (predominantly in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone), the Centers for Disease Control (2015) tells us that as of this writing 9,268 of 23,034 people infected with the virus are now dead (14,028 of those 23,034 cases are laboratory-confirmed). But there is more. There are also the largely unknown horrors. For example, few people know that 5 million people died there in what was the 20th century's third world war. Centered in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the war engulfed much of Central Africa between 1998 and 2003 (Stearns, 2012). Unfortunately, the picture of manifest capability outlined in the previous paragraph and the stark suffering illustrated here plays into a common narrative for the continent: that it is a place of contrasting extremes. The reality is more complex.

Table 1 captures some of the diversity of contemporary life on the continent (World Bank, 2015b; World Health Organization, 2015). Notwithstand-

¹ Because it attained autonomous status in 2005 and independence in 2011, there are no data for South Sudan between 2003 and 2008. No data are available for Somalia in any of these 10 years.

TABLE 1
A Snapshot of Life in Africa Today

	Population (million)	2009-2013 mean GDP growth rate (%)	Life expectancy (females/males)	Undernourished population (%)	Births per woman	Maternal mortality per 100,000 births	Enrollment in secondary school (%)	Adult illiteracy (%)	Access to electricity (%)	Access to safe water (%)	Access to improved sanitation (%)
Algeria	39.9	2.82	73/69	<5.0	2.8	89	97.6	27.4	99.3	84	95
Egypt	83.4	3.18	73/69	<5.0	2.8	45	86.3	26.1	99.6	99	96
Ethiopia	96.5	10.33	65/61	40.2	4.6	420	*	61.0	23.0	49	24
Ghana	26.4	8.68	62/60	<5.0	3.9	380	61.1	28.5	60.5	86	14
Kenya	45.6	5.61	63/59	30.4	4.5	400	*	27.8	23.0	61	30
Liberia	4.4	11.08	61/59	31.4	4.9	640	45.2	57.1	4.1	74	17
Niger	18.5	5.02	58/58	12.6	7.6	630	15.9	71.3	9.3	50	9
Nigeria	178.5	5.87	52/52	8.5	6.0	560	43.8	48.9	48.0	61	28
Tanzania	50.8	6.68	62/60	38.8	5.3	410	35.0	32.2	14.8	53	12
Tunisia	11.0	2.71	77/73	<5.0	2.2	46	91.1	20.9	99.5	96	90
Uganda	38.9	5.83	60/58	34.6	6.0	360	*	26.8	14.6	75	34
South Africa	53.0	1.91	58/54	<5.0	2.4	140	101.9	7.0	82.7	91	74
Sudan	38.8	-2.54	64/60	*	4.5	360	*	28.1	29.0	55	24
Zambia	15.0	7.86	59/55	47.4	5.7	280	100.8	38.6	18.5	64	43
Zimbabwe	14.6	8.86	59/57	32.8	3.6	470	*	16.4	36.9	80	40

ing the generally high GDP growth rates, we see evidence of very different standards of living there. Life in Ethiopia and Niger, for example, is quite different from, say, South Africa or Tunisia. Almost three quarters of Ethiopia and Niger's population cannot read or write, only half of their people have access to clean water, and less than a quarter have access to electricity and decent sanitation. By contrast, in South Africa and Tunisia, despite their own long histories and their own challenging sets of contemporary problems, a large majority of their citizens are literate and the vast majority have access to electricity, clean water, and healthy sanitation.

If business is to be an agent of world benefit (to borrow David Cooperrider's phrase²) then I can think of no place where business may better reveal its benefits. The three papers in this symposium capture some of the continent's complexity and promise.

Since the papers follow my comments here, I do not need to recapitulate them in any detail. Instead, let me briefly flag why they matter. Rivera-Santos, Holt, Littlewood, and Kolk (2015) introduce us to the world of social entrepreneurship in Africa. There may be no hotter topic in business and business education today. Byrne (2010) recently reviewed the best business programs for training what he called "social capitalists." The top 10 list is populated with familiar names: Yale, Berkeley, Stanford, Northwestern, Harvard, Michigan, Duke, Wharton, Columbia, and NYU (David Cooperrider's Case Western Reserve University is number 11).³ Such interest and commitment signals just how important the topic is these days. Indeed, Blackman (2011) observed that as many as 90 Harvard Business School faculty members teach and do research in this area. Social entrepreneurs see the kinds of challenges identified above as opportunities for business solutions.⁴

² See <https://weatherhead.case.edu/centers/fowler/>.

³ Swap Dartmouth for Wharton, scramble the order a bit, and you have *U.S. News and World Report's* 2014 list of the top ten "nonprofit MBA" programs: <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-business-schools/nonprofit-rankings/>.

⁴ For example, such efforts provide people on the continent with clean water and sanitation (<http://water.org/solutions/watercredit/>), solar-powered energy (<http://www.theguardian.com/social-enterprise-network/2013/dec/03/african-social-enterprises-solar-power>), and the ability to read and write (http://harare.usembassy.gov/social_entrepreneur_bridges_literacy_divide.html).

Rivera-Santos and colleagues (2015) tell us that such initiatives are flourishing in Africa; they counted over 3,900 in 19 countries and collected data from 384 of them. The breadth of their research tells us that it is possible to do large-scale research in Africa.

Zoogah, Peng, and Woldu (2015) reference Boyacigiller and Adler's (1991) "parochial dinosaur" paper in their first sentence. Cited over 1,000 times since publication, the paper served as a wake-up call for scholars to question the universalism implicit in the U.S.-centric management research at the time. Observing that "parochialism is based on ignorance of others' ways," Boyacigiller and Adler (1991, p. 263) urged us to study management systems outside the United States. Our scholarly world has changed in the past 25 years. Almost half of the Academy of Management's members now live outside the United States. In fact, 7,947 of the Academy's 17,906 members live in 117 countries other than the United States. However, only 136 of them reside on the continent of Africa.⁵ Many of the world's organization and management scholars know little about business practice in Africa.

Caring deeply, Zoogah and colleagues (2015) beseech us to take a look. They all but beg us to look at the nature of organizational effectiveness in the unique institutional settings found there. Their timing may be perfect. Taking stock of our contemporary work in institutional theory, Greenwood, Hinings, and Whetten (2014) just asked for exactly this kind of work. They argued, "Our position is that it is time to rebalance [our] emphasis [on field level studies] with a deeper and programmatic concern for understanding how organizations are designed and function within those contexts" (p. 1210). They go on to say that "institutional theorists should compare *across* institutions in order to identify the differences in their archetypal organizational forms" (emphasis theirs, p. 1214). Zoogah and colleagues (2015) point us to a do-

<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-business-schools/nonprofit-rankings/>

⁵ While these members reside in 16 different countries, the majority come from just two: South Africa (47) and Nigeria (42). Only four countries account for more than two members: Ghana (11), Kenya (9), Egypt (7), and Uganda (7). Table 1 reveals that 425 million people live in these six countries. (A full breakdown of the Academy's membership is available at <http://apps.aomonline.org/MemberDirectory/main.asp>).

main that will give us rich comparative contrasts and at the same time afford us the opportunity to enhance the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

Finally, Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2015) tell us what we will encounter when we do this work. They show us how tribal institutions work side by side with the institutions of the modern state. Tribal chiefs, for example, play a large and respected role in settling disputes and allocating land in many parts of Africa today. Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2015) also share the results of some very creative work that used satellite images of light density to mark economic development. It turns out that luminosity today covaries with the strength of yesterday's pre-colonial political institutions. Much work is needed to understand how social organization, politics, language, religion, and cultural practices of the pre-colonial past commingled (or did not commingle) with the many African countries' colonial experiences to set the stage for today's economic activity. The authors tell us that any effort to understand entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, and larger-scale business activity must appreciate how the past shaped Africa's present.

So what does this mean for the readers of *Academy of Management Perspectives*? If the economic prognosticators are even half-right, the forecasted growth suggests that, as business professors, we should become better acquainted with this part of the world . . . and fast. What to do? I am no Africa specialist, but I have been fortunate to spend time there. I know many people are reticent to visit the continent, but all I can say is "go!" Maybe begin with a vacation. Baby boomers reading this might want to take the "Marrakesh Express" from Casablanca to Marrakesh. Other wonderful adventures beckon. Visit Egypt's pyramids, see Victoria Falls from either Zambia or Zimbabwe, go to a wildlife park in any number of places (say, in Botswana, Kenya, Madagascar, Namibia, Tanzania, or South Africa), spend time at a beach in the Seychelles or Zanzibar, or walk into the jungles of Rwanda or Uganda and see mountain gorillas. In so doing, you will connect with the people, culture, business life, and institutions of each place you visit. I guarantee that this experience will pique your interest. And when you get home, read, watch, listen, taste, and talk. Follow the news about the countries you visited (and beyond); read history and literature to better understand and appreciate this part of the world; listen to African music;

go to ethnic restaurants; seek out members of the diaspora and talk with them about their experiences. Embrace Africa. Before you know it, you will be eager to return.

Professional opportunities are plentiful and growing. I was privileged to help lead the Academy of Management's "Africa Strategy." We, the Academy, co-sponsored two 10-day faculty development workshops there, one in Accra, Ghana, and another in Kigali, Rwanda. We also co-hosted a unique global conference with the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science in Johannesburg, South Africa.⁶ The Academy of Management is always looking to foster new ideas for engagement. Reach out with yours. The Africa Academy of Management continues to do this kind of work. They sponsored a wonderful conference in Botswana last year and will welcome us all to Kenya next January. Having co-sponsored the Ghana and Rwanda workshops, they will offer another one in South Africa this summer. Just last month, they published the first issue of their new quarterly journal, the *Africa Journal of Management*. Always a presence at the annual Academy of Management meeting, they are eager to welcome enthusiastic new members to help build their association. Join them. And of course, entrepreneurial colleagues can bring their own dreams to life. Think about taking your students there. I have worked with MBA student teams in Benin, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Africa, and have also taken groups of undergraduate students to Ghana twice and will take another group to Rwanda this summer.⁷ Experience tells me that our colleagues are eager to connect and introduce us to their world.

Having said this, let me close with a word of caution and aspiration. The continent's stunning growth rates and the sometimes-difficult lives that people lead there will attract our commitments. Some may want a piece of the new African economic pie; others may want to help. Either way, Africa can become a reified place of opportunity for outsiders. Everyone should read Wainaina's (2005) essay. Africa is not an exhibit in some kind of

⁶ This video chronicles the conference experience: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gW7O73G_-0&list=UUg8haGV_AQRMy_6oviF7SNQ.

⁷ These videos capture the essence of the student trips, one in 2012 (<http://www.bus.umich.edu/Video/Play/new.asp?file=Ross/Ghana>) and another in 2014 (<http://www.bus.umich.edu/Video/Ghana>).

global theme park. Life is as real there as it is anywhere else in the world. It should go without saying that we should treat each other with humility and respect. This may be especially true in Africa. After all, people there have suffered the presence of foreigners for years. We owe it to ourselves, not to mention the past generations and their descendants, to study Africa's many colonial experiences and the reactions to them (cf Fanon, 1963/2005, 1952/2008; Nkomo, 2011; Said, 1993; Westwood, 2006). My hope is that we can all learn from this experience and, looking ahead, engage each other with understanding in our minds and love in our hearts. What happens in Africa does not stay in Africa. With any luck, the work we do together will inspire others around the world to also work for greater understanding and shared prosperity.

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Jim Walsh (jpw Walsh@umich.edu), a longtime professor at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business, was the 65th president of the Academy of Management. He was deeply involved in the Academy's many Africa initiatives between 2011 and 2013.

