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Traditional leadership styles and modern human resources management: Cameroon and Germany in comparative perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study falls within SDG Focus Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth — Target 8.5: Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men; Target 8.8: Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers; Target 8.2: Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation.

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This study examines the comparative approaches to traditional leadership styles and modern human resources management practices in Cameroon and Germany, focusing on how each country's cultural values, historical legacies, and institutional frameworks shape the design and implementation of HR policies. The research analyzes the interplay between indigenous leadership philosophies and contemporary HR practices, the role of cultural norms in employee management, and the challenges and opportunities for integrating traditional and modern approaches in organizational contexts. A comparative analysis was conducted examining primary and secondary sources including peer-reviewed research, case studies, institutional documentation, and expert commentary covering recent developments to 2025-2026.

Cameroon presents a complex landscape where traditional leadership philosophies, particularly the Ubuntu concept of "humanness" emphasizing community and collective well-being, fundamentally shape human resources management practices. Recent empirical research based on interviews with HR managers, trade union officials, and top management has delineated four major endogenous organizational HRM phenomena rooted in Sub-Saharan African cultural norms . These socioculturally anchored practices serve as the "glue" between organizational stakeholders, enhance employee experience and well-being, and act as "appropriate caryatids of modern organizational HRM in Africa" . The Ubuntu philosophy, which underscores the community as the cornerstone of the African belief and value system, contrasts sharply with Western instrumental views of managing people as resources . Research on strategic HRM in Cameroon reveals a complex mix of local, imported, and adapted practices that are "socially embedded in a simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" depending on organizational context . Key features include prioritization of social capital, consensus building, family-friendly work practices, and extensive socialization as antecedents of agile HRM .

Germany presents a contrasting picture where leadership and HR practices are characterized by structured hierarchy, direct communication, and expertise-based authority, yet are simultaneously evolving toward more flexible, participative models. German business culture values clarity, order, and defined responsibility, with hierarchies that are respected but not autocratic—authority derives from competence rather than position alone . Decision-making is anchored in thorough analysis and detailed preparation, with implementation swift once decisions are made . Communication is direct and explicit, with emphasis on written precision in contracts, minutes, and project plans .

Contemporary German organizations demonstrate significant evolution: 65% of employers now offer hybrid working options, with 80% reporting improved employee performance . There is a trend toward flatter organizational models, particularly in startups and tech companies, promoting greater collaboration and innovation . A case study of Zurich Group Germany's Chief HR Officer Uwe Schöpe exemplifies modern German leadership—flat hierarchies, proximity to employees, participatory strategy dialogues, and co-creation of leadership guidelines with workforce involvement . Research using survey data from 2012-2018 identifies two distinct management styles in German firms, with highly persistent practices and structured management associated with improved performance .

Both countries demonstrate significant interplay between cultural traditions and organizational practices. Cameroon's strength lies in deeply embedded communal values that enhance employee well-being and social cohesion, yet faces challenges in balancing indigenous norms with imported Western models. Germany's strength lies in structured efficiency, reliability, and adaptability to modern work trends, yet faces tensions between traditional hierarchical preferences and demands for flexibility and flat organizations. Neither country has fully resolved the tension between preserving culturally authentic leadership approaches and adopting globally competitive HR practices.

Effective integration of traditional leadership and modern HR practices requires: (1) recognition that HRM is culturally embedded and cannot be understood through universal frameworks alone; (2) adaptation of practices to local cultural contexts rather than uncritical importation of foreign models; (3) understanding that indigenous philosophies like Ubuntu offer valuable alternatives to instrumental views of human resources; (4) balancing structured hierarchy with employee participation and voice; (5) investing in continuous learning and development; (6) fostering open communication while respecting cultural norms; (7) promoting work-life balance and employee well-being; and (8) developing context-aware leadership capable of navigating diverse cultural expectations.

KEYWORDS: Traditional leadership, human resources management, Ubuntu, Cameroon, Germany, cultural values, organizational culture, hierarchy, participative leadership, SDG 8, indigenous management, cross-cultural HRM.

RÉSUMÉ (French Version)

Cette étude examine les approches comparatives des styles de leadership traditionnel et des pratiques modernes de gestion des ressources humaines au Cameroun et en Allemagne, en se concentrant sur la manière dont les valeurs culturelles, les héritages historiques et les cadres institutionnels de chaque pays façonnent la conception et la mise en œuvre des politiques RH. La recherche analyse l'interaction entre les philosophies de leadership indigènes et les pratiques RH contemporaines, le rôle des normes culturelles dans la gestion des employés, ainsi que les défis et opportunités pour l'intégration des approches traditionnelles et modernes dans les contextes organisationnels. Une analyse comparative a été menée en examinant des sources primaires et secondaires, y compris la recherche évaluée par les pairs, des études de cas, la documentation institutionnelle et des commentaires d'experts couvrant les développements récents jusqu'en 2025-2026.

Le Cameroun présente un paysage complexe où les philosophies de leadership traditionnel, en particulier le concept Ubuntu d'"humanité" mettant l'accent sur la communauté et le bien-être collectif, façonnent fondamentalement les pratiques de gestion des ressources humaines. Des recherches empiriques récentes basées sur des entretiens avec des directeurs RH, des responsables syndicaux et des cadres dirigeants ont délimité quatre phénomènes organisationnels RH endogènes majeurs enracinés dans les normes culturelles d'Afrique subsaharienne . Ces pratiques ancrées socioculturellement servent de "colle" entre les parties prenantes organisationnelles, améliorent l'expérience et le bien-être des employés, et agissent comme des "cariatides appropriées de la GRH moderne en Afrique" . La philosophie Ubuntu, qui souligne la communauté comme pierre angulaire du système de croyances et de valeurs africain, contraste fortement avec les visions instrumentales occidentales de la gestion des personnes comme ressources . La recherche sur la GRH stratégique au Cameroun révèle un mélange complexe de pratiques locales, importées et adaptées qui sont "socialement ancrées dans un flux simultané d'adoption, de refonte et d'abandon" selon le contexte organisationnel . Les caractéristiques clés incluent la priorisation du capital social, la construction de consensus, les pratiques de travail favorables à la famille et une socialisation extensive comme antécédents d'une GRH agile .

L'Allemagne présente un tableau contrasté où les pratiques de leadership et de RH sont caractérisées par une hiérarchie structurée, une communication directe et une autorité basée sur l'expertise, tout en évoluant simultanément vers des modèles plus flexibles et participatifs. La culture d'entreprise allemande valorise la clarté, l'ordre et la responsabilité définie, avec des hiérarchies respectées mais non autocratiques—l'autorité dérive de la compétence plutôt que de la position seule . La prise de décision est ancrée dans une analyse approfondie et une préparation détaillée, avec une mise en œuvre rapide une fois les décisions prises . La communication est directe et explicite, avec un accent sur la précision écrite dans les contrats, les comptes rendus et les plans de projet . Les organisations allemandes contemporaines démontrent une évolution significative : 65 % des employeurs offrent désormais des options de travail hybride, avec 80 % rapportant une amélioration des performances des employés . On observe une tendance vers des modèles organisationnels plus plats, particulièrement dans les startups et les entreprises technologiques, favorisant une plus grande collaboration et innovation . Une étude de cas du directeur RH du groupe Zurich Allemagne, Uwe Schöpe, illustre le leadership allemand moderne—hiérarchies plates, proximité avec les employés, dialogues stratégiques participatifs et co-création de directives de leadership avec l'implication du personnel . La recherche utilisant des données d'enquête de 2012-2018 identifie deux styles de gestion distincts dans les entreprises allemandes, avec des pratiques très persistantes et une gestion structurée associée à une amélioration des performances .

Les deux pays démontrent une interaction significative entre les traditions culturelles et les pratiques organisationnelles. La force du Cameroun réside dans des valeurs communautaires profondément ancrées qui améliorent le bien-être des employés et la cohésion sociale, mais fait face à des défis pour équilibrer les normes indigènes avec les modèles occidentaux importés. La force de l'Allemagne réside dans l'efficacité structurée, la fiabilité et l'adaptabilité aux tendances modernes du travail, mais fait face à des tensions entre les préférences hiérarchiques traditionnelles et les demandes de flexibilité et d'organisations plates. Aucun des deux pays n'a pleinement résolu la tension entre la préservation d'approches de leadership culturellement authentiques et l'adoption de pratiques RH compétitives à l'échelle mondiale.

Une intégration efficace du leadership traditionnel et des pratiques RH modernes nécessite : (1) la reconnaissance que la GRH est culturellement ancrée et ne peut être comprise à travers des cadres

universels seuls ; (2) l'adaptation des pratiques aux contextes culturels locaux plutôt que l'importation non critique de modèles étrangers ; (3) la compréhension que les philosophies indigènes comme Ubuntu offrent des alternatives valables aux visions instrumentales des ressources humaines ; (4) l'équilibre entre la hiérarchie structurée et la participation et la voix des employés ; (5) l'investissement dans l'apprentissage continu et le développement ; (6) la promotion d'une communication ouverte tout en respectant les normes culturelles ; (7) la promotion de l'équilibre travail-vie personnelle et du bien-être des employés ; et (8) le développement d'un leadership conscient du contexte capable de naviguer dans diverses attentes culturelles.

MOTS-CLÉS : Leadership traditionnel, gestion des ressources humaines, Ubuntu, Cameroun, Allemagne, valeurs culturelles, culture organisationnelle, hiérarchie, leadership participatif, ODD 8, management indigène, GRH interculturelle.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between traditional leadership styles and modern human resources management practices represents a critical yet understudied dimension of organizational effectiveness in an increasingly globalized world. As companies expand across borders and workforces become more diverse, understanding how deeply embedded cultural values shape leadership approaches and employee management becomes essential for achieving decent work and economic growth. SDG 8 explicitly recognizes this through targets on productive employment, labour rights, and economic productivity.

This study examines two countries that offer profound insights into the relationship between traditional leadership and modern HR practices: Cameroon and Germany. These nations, with their distinct cultural heritages, historical trajectories, and contemporary organizational challenges,

illuminate fundamentally different approaches to managing people in the workplace while revealing common tensions between tradition and innovation.

Cameroon, a Central African nation with over 27 million inhabitants and extraordinary ethnic diversity, represents a context where indigenous leadership philosophies rooted in Ubuntu—the African concept of "humanness"—continue to shape organizational practices . Recent empirical research has identified four major endogenous HR phenomena that serve as the "glue" between organizational stakeholders, enhancing employee experience and well-being . These practices reflect a humanistic view of people in organizations that contrasts sharply with Western instrumental approaches. Cameroonian organizations demonstrate a complex mix of local, imported, and adapted HR strategies, socially embedded in cultural norms of social capital, consensus building, and family-friendly practices .

Germany presents a contrasting picture where leadership is characterized by structured hierarchy, direct communication, and expertise-based authority, yet contemporary organizations are evolving toward more flexible, participative models. German business culture values clarity, order, and defined responsibility, with authority derived from competence rather than position alone . Decision-making is thorough and analytical, communication direct and explicit, and written precision paramount . Yet German workplaces are adapting rapidly: 65% of employers now offer hybrid working options, and there is a clear trend toward flatter hierarchies, particularly in innovative sectors . Case studies of modern German leaders reveal approaches emphasizing proximity to employees, participatory strategy development, and co-creation of organizational values .

The contrast between Cameroon and Germany illuminates critical questions for SDG 8 and organizational development: How do different cultural value systems shape leadership styles and HR practices? What tensions arise when traditional approaches encounter modern organizational demands? How can organizations integrate indigenous wisdom with global best practices? And what can countries learn from each other's experiences while respecting cultural specificity?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cultural Foundations of HRM: Ubuntu and Instrumental Views

A fundamental distinction in cross-cultural HRM research lies between Western instrumental approaches and non-Western humanistic philosophies. As Nyiawung and colleagues explain, these reflect different "loci of human value"—the instrumental view (Western) managing people as resources to meet organizational objectives, versus the humanistic view (non-Western) emphasizing the intrinsic value of people within workplaces .

The Ubuntu philosophy, originating from Southern Africa but resonating across the continent, represents the most elaborated articulation of African humanistic management. Ubuntu underscores "the community as the cornerstone of the African belief and value system" . It encompasses concepts of humanness, interdependence, and collective well-being that fundamentally differ from Western individualism.

2.2 Cameroon: Endogenous HR Practices and Ubuntu Philosophy

The Ubuntu Framework in Cameroon: Recent empirical research by Nyiawung, Smith-Auchmuty, and Piabuo (2024) provides the most comprehensive analysis of how indigenous cultural norms shape HRM in Cameroon . The study, based on exploratory qualitative research with HR managers, trade union officials, staff representatives, and top management, delineates four major endogenous organizational HRM phenomena rooted in Sub-Saharan African cultural values.

These socioculturally anchored practices serve multiple functions:

- They act as the "glue" between organizational stakeholders, fostering cohesion and trust
- They "beget immense reverence" from employees and communities
- They enhance employee experience and well-being
- They serve as "appropriate caryatids of modern organizational HRM in Africa"

The research challenges long-held assumptions that African endogenous practices are backward or inferior. Instead, it demonstrates their positive role within and beyond organizations, contributing to both organizational effectiveness and community well-being .

The Instrumental-Humanistic Tension: The study situates Cameroonian practices within the broader theoretical framework contrasting Western and non-Western approaches. Jackson (2002) posits that the instrumental view perceives people as resources to meet organizational objectives—whether through "hard" organizational perspective (utilitarian instrumentalism) or "soft" perspective (developmental human relations). The key cultural features underpinning this instrumental view include individualism and egalitarian commitment .

In contrast, the humanistic view reflected in Cameroonian practices emphasizes the intrinsic value of people, collective well-being, and social harmony. This fundamental difference in "locus of human value" shapes everything from recruitment and selection to performance management and employee relations.

Strategic HRM in Cameroon: More recent research by Nyiawung, Mandiefe Piabuo, Crowley-Henry, and Tieguhong Puatwoe (2025) explores strategic HRM in Cameroon through 74 qualitative interviews across organizations of different size and ownership . Key findings include:

- A "complex mix of local, imported and adapted SHRM strategies and practices" that are "socially embedded in a simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" depending on organizational context
- Organizations adopt, modify, or discard practices based on perceived usefulness and organizational particularities (size, sector)
- Macro-level cultural contextual factors include "prioritisation of social capital, consensus building, family friendly work practices, and socialisation" as key antecedents of agile HRM practices
- A theoretical model drawing on the Systems, Society, Dominance and Corporate (SSDC) framework explains how contextual features moderate HRM practices

The study presents Cameroon as exhibiting "socially embedded agile SHRM," where internal organizational stakeholders are informed by "dynamic, overlapping and changing multi-level factors over time in the pursuit of organisational goals" .

The Challenge of Foreign HRM Models: Critics argue that dominant management practices in Africa today primarily reflect Western ideologies and models that "have been unable to address

decades-old HRM problems in the continent because they are detached from local realities, and culture, and negate indigenous management practices" . This weakness has led to persistent calls for more research on applying endogenous norms and values in business organizations .

Research has shown that some challenges of doing business in Africa may relate to limited understanding of African cultural specificities and their impact on organizations . Cameroon, as a nontraditional setting increasingly participating in the global economy through foreign direct investment, offers an avenue for management research to reevaluate both HRM theories and policy design .

Table 1: Key Features of Cameroonian HRM

Dimension	**Characteristics**
Philosophical Foundation	Ubuntu (humanness); humanistic view of people's intrinsic value
Cultural Values	Collectivism, social harmony, consensus building, community orientation
Key HR Practices	Social capital prioritization; family-friendly practices; extensive socialization
Practice Origin	Complex mix of local, imported, and adapted practices
Adaptive Process	"Simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" based on context
Role of Practices	Serve as "glue" between stakeholders; enhance employee well-being
Relation to Western Models	Tension between instrumental Western approaches and humanistic indigenous values

2.3 Germany: Structured Hierarchy and Contemporary Evolution

German Business Culture Fundamentals: German organizational culture is characterized by several distinctive features :

- **Structured but not Autocratic:** Hierarchies exist and are respected, yet leaders are expected to be rational rather than authoritarian. Authority derives from expertise and competence, not position alone.
- **Decisions Anchored in Detail:** Leaders expect decisions based on thorough analysis and detailed preparation. This process can appear slow to outsiders, but implementation is swift and precise once decisions are made.
- **Direct and Explicit Communication:** German professionals communicate clearly and straightforwardly. Euphemisms and indirect hints are rare. "No" means no, and criticism is delivered plainly, though constructively.
- **Written Precision:** Contracts, meeting minutes, and project plans are carefully prepared and meticulously followed. Foreign partners used to informal agreements often need to adapt to this emphasis on documentation.
- **Work-Life Separation:** Work hours are respected as professional time, and personal lives are kept largely separate. There is strong emphasis on efficiency and productivity during working hours rather than staying late to demonstrate commitment.
- **Punctuality:** Arriving even five minutes late to a meeting may be perceived as unprofessional.

Modern Evolution of German Work Culture: Contemporary German organizations are adapting to new workplace realities :

- **Hybrid Work Adoption:** 65% of employers now offer hybrid working options, allowing employees to split time between office and home. 80% of employers report improved employee performance with hybrid models.
- **Flatter Hierarchies:** There is a clear trend toward flatter organizational models, especially in startups and tech companies, promoting greater collaboration, innovation, and quicker decision-making.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Companies increasingly recognize the importance of creating inclusive environments that welcome individuals from diverse backgrounds, enhancing creativity and innovation.
- **Work-Life Integration:** Modern German job culture increasingly focuses on work-life integration, creating environments that blend with personal life to allow better time management and stress reduction.
- **Continuous Learning:** Organizations emphasize continuous learning and development opportunities to keep employees updated with industry trends.

However, tensions exist between traditional values and modern practices. Rigid scheduling, direct communication, and structured hierarchy can conflict with startup cultures emphasizing adaptability, casual interaction, and flat teams .

Case Study: Zurich Group Germany's Modern Leadership: Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer and Work Director of Zurich Group Germany, exemplifies contemporary German leadership approaches :

- **Flat Hierarchy in Practice:** Schöpe works from a standard height-adjustable desk in an open-plan office, rejecting private office and driver. He maintains proximity to employees across all levels, using informal interactions (coffee bar conversations) to build relationships.
- **Participatory Strategy:** The company conducts "strategy dialogs" where all employees are invited to participate, with 300-400 colleagues typically attending. The core question: "Where are we lacking and what can we do better?" Employees present improvement ideas directly to the Board of Management.
- **Co-Created Leadership Guidelines:** In 2021, workshops brought together Works Council, Board of Management, managers, and employees to jointly formulate six leadership guidelines: "Trust in people," "Show appreciation," and "Facilitate performance" are examples. These apply to everyone, not just managers.
- **Transparency:** The Board meets in a glazed area visible to all employees, literally demonstrating operational transparency.

- **Employee-Centric Recruitment:** Schöpe instructed recruiting teams to prioritize "character and cultural fit" over skillsets alone. 40% of new hires come from employee recommendations.
- **Low Turnover:** Voluntary staff turnover is just 2.5%, indicating strong employee satisfaction and retention.

Research on German Management Styles: Englmaier, Hofmann, and Wolter (2023) analyzed repeated survey data from German firms (2012-2018) using unsupervised machine learning to identify management style clusters . Key findings include:

- Two distinct management styles exist: one employing many highly structured practices, the other lacking these but retaining training measures
- Sizeable differences in styles across German firms can only partially be explained by firm characteristics
- Management practices are highly persistent over time; newly adopted practices are often discontinued after a short period
- Miscalculations of cost-benefit trade-offs and non-fitting corporate culture may hinder adoption of structured management
- Since structured management increases firm performance, unstructured firms fail to catch up and continue to underperform

This research has important policy implications, suggesting that organizations may need support in adopting effective management practices.

Leadership Impact Research: Darie (2024) examined leadership styles across Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, finding that transformational leadership universally enhances organizational performance and employee retention, yet the effectiveness of leadership styles is "significantly shaped by cultural and economic factors" . The study concludes that "adaptable, context-aware leadership is crucial for navigating the complexities of global economic systems" .

Table 2: Key Features of German HRM and Leadership

Dimension	**Characteristics**

Hierarchical Structure	Structured hierarchies respected; authority from expertise, not position
Communication Style	Direct, explicit, clear; "no" means no; written precision essential
Decision-Making	Thorough analysis and detailed preparation; swift implementation
Work-Life Balance	Clear separation; efficiency during work hours; punctuality non-negotiable
Contemporary Evolution	65% hybrid work; flatter hierarchies in startups; diversity focus
Participatory Approaches	Strategy dialogs; co-created leadership guidelines; employee voice
Modern Leadership Example	Flat hierarchy, proximity, transparency, employee-centric recruitment (Zurich)
Management Styles	Two distinct styles identified; highly persistent; structured management improves performance

2.4 Comparative Dimensions: Cultural Values and Organizational Practices

The comparison between Cameroon and Germany illuminates several critical dimensions:

Philosophical Foundation: Cameroon's HRM is rooted in Ubuntu philosophy emphasizing community, collective well-being, and intrinsic human value. Germany's approach balances structured hierarchy with expertise-based authority, increasingly incorporating participative elements.

Cultural Values: Cameroonian culture prioritizes collectivism, social harmony, and consensus building. German culture values order, clarity, defined responsibility, and efficiency.

HR Practice Adaptation: Cameroonian organizations demonstrate fluid adaptation, with practices adopted, redesigned, or abandoned based on context. German organizations show high persistence of management practices, with structured approaches linked to performance.

Employee Relations: Cameroonian practices emphasize social capital, family-friendly approaches, and extensive socialization as "glue" binding stakeholders. German practices increasingly emphasize employee voice through strategy dialogs and co-created guidelines.

Tension Points: Cameroon faces tension between indigenous humanistic values and imported Western instrumental models. Germany faces tension between traditional hierarchical preferences and demands for flexibility, flat organizations, and rapid iteration.

Change Dynamics: Cameroonian change appears organic and context-driven, with organizations navigating multiple influences. German change is more structured, with research documenting practice persistence and barriers to adoption.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the key characteristics of traditional leadership styles in Cameroon, particularly as expressed through Ubuntu philosophy, and how do these shape modern HR practices?
2. What are the key characteristics of leadership and HR practices in Germany, including both traditional hierarchical approaches and contemporary evolution toward participative models?
3. How do the two countries compare on dimensions of cultural values, organizational structure, communication styles, employee participation, and adaptation to change?
4. What tensions arise in each context between traditional approaches and modern organizational demands, and how are these being navigated?

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative analysis methodology to examine traditional leadership styles and modern HR practices in Cameroon and Germany. The research design integrates secondary analysis of peer-reviewed research, case studies, institutional documentation, and expert commentary to develop comprehensive understanding of cultural foundations, organizational practices, and contemporary evolution in both countries.

Research Design: The comparative approach is appropriate for examining how different cultural value systems and historical trajectories shape leadership and HRM. Cameroon and Germany were selected as cases that offer complementary insights: both have distinctive cultural traditions influencing organizational practices, yet face different challenges in integrating tradition with modern demands.

Data Sources: Primary and secondary sources analyzed include:

- Peer-reviewed research on endogenous HR practices in Cameroon
- Strategic HRM research in Cameroon
- Research on German management styles using survey data
- Comparative leadership study across Germany, Switzerland, Austria
- Case study of Zurich Group Germany's HR leadership
- Cultural guides to German business practices
- Analysis of modern German work culture evolution

Analytical Framework: The comparative framework examines five dimensions:

1. **Philosophical Foundations:** Cultural values and assumptions underlying leadership and HRM
2. **Organizational Structure:** Hierarchy, authority, and decision-making processes
3. **Communication and Participation:** Styles of interaction and employee voice mechanisms
4. **Adaptation and Change:** How practices evolve and respond to new demands
5. **Employee Outcomes:** Impact on well-being, satisfaction, and retention

5. RESULTS

5.1 Cameroon: Ubuntu, Endogenous Practices, and Strategic Adaptation

Ubuntu as Philosophical Foundation: The Ubuntu concept, meaning "humanness" or what it means to be human, provides the cultural underpinning for Cameroonian HRM. This philosophy underscores "the community as the cornerstone of the African belief and value system" . It contrasts sharply with Western instrumental views that perceive people in organizations as resources to meet organizational objectives.

As Nyiawung et al. explain, there are two fundamental "loci of human value": the instrumental view (Western) managing people as resources, and the humanistic view (non-Western) emphasizing the intrinsic value of people within the workplace . Cameroon exemplifies the humanistic approach, where employees are valued not merely for their productive capacity but as members of a community deserving care and respect.

Four Major Endogenous HR Phenomena: The 2024 study by Nyiawung, Smith-Auchmuty, and Piabuo identified four major socioculturally anchored HRM practices in Cameroonian organizations :

1. **Social Capital Prioritization:** Organizations actively build and maintain social relationships among employees and between employees and management. This social capital serves as the foundation for trust, cooperation, and mutual support.
2. **Consensus Building:** Decision-making processes emphasize achieving consensus rather than imposing top-down directives. This reflects cultural values of harmony and collective agreement.
3. **Family-Friendly Work Practices:** Organizations accommodate employees' family responsibilities and extended family obligations, recognizing that workers exist within broader kinship networks that make claims on their time and resources.
4. **Extensive Socialization:** New employees are integrated through comprehensive socialization processes that transmit not only technical knowledge but also cultural values, organizational norms, and community expectations.

These practices serve multiple functions: they act as "glue" between organizational stakeholders, "beget immense reverence" from employees, enhance employee experience and well-being, and serve as "appropriate caryatids of modern organizational HRM in Africa" .

Strategic HRM in Practice: The 2025 study by Nyiawung et al. reveals how Cameroonian organizations navigate multiple influences . Key findings include:

- **Practice Mix:** Organizations employ a "complex mix of local, imported and adapted SHRM strategies and practices" rather than purely indigenous or purely Western approaches.
- **Dynamic Adaptation:** Practices are "socially embedded in a simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" depending on organizational context and perceived usefulness.
- **Context Sensitivity:** Adoption decisions vary by organizational size, sector, and ownership structure. Multinational enterprises may import practices that local firms adapt differently.
- **Cultural Antecedents:** Macro-level cultural factors—social capital prioritization, consensus building, family-friendly practices, socialization—serve as "key antecedents in the adoption of agile SHRM practices" .
- **Theoretical Framework:** The Systems, Society, Dominance and Corporate (SSDC) framework helps explain how contextual features moderate HRM practices, with Cameroon demonstrating "socially embedded agile SHRM" where internal stakeholders are informed by "dynamic, overlapping and changing multi-level factors over time" .

Critique of Foreign Models: The research strongly critiques the dominance of Western HRM models in African contexts. Critics argue that these imported approaches "have been unable to address decades-old HRM problems in the continent because they are detached from local realities, and culture, and negate indigenous management practices" . This detachment has led to persistent calls for more research on applying endogenous norms and values in business organizations.

Table 3: Cameroonian HRM Practices and Their Functions

Practice	Cultural Foundation	Organizational Function

Social Capital Prioritization	Ubuntu; community orientation	Builds trust and cooperation; "glue" between stakeholders
Consensus Building	Harmony; collective values	Ensures acceptance of decisions; maintains social peace
Family-Friendly Practices	Extended family obligations	Accommodates employee responsibilities; enhances well-being
Extensive Socialization	Knowledge transmission	Integrates newcomers; perpetuates culture
Agile Adaptation	Context sensitivity	Enables appropriate response to multiple influences

5.2 Germany: Structured Hierarchy and Contemporary Transformation

Traditional German Business Culture: German organizational culture has long been characterized by distinctive features that continue to shape workplace practices :

- **Structured Hierarchy:** Hierarchies exist and are respected, yet leaders are expected to be rational rather than authoritarian. Authority derives from expertise and competence, not position alone.
- **Analytical Decision-Making:** Decisions are anchored in thorough analysis and detailed preparation. This process can appear slow to outsiders, but once decisions are made, implementation is swift and precise.
- **Direct Communication:** German professionals communicate clearly and straightforwardly. Euphemisms and indirect hints are rare. Criticism is delivered plainly, though constructively.
- **Written Precision:** Contracts, meeting minutes, and project plans are carefully prepared and meticulously followed. Documentation matters.

- **Work-Life Separation:** Work hours are respected as professional time; personal lives are kept largely separate. Efficiency during work hours is emphasized rather than demonstrating commitment through long hours.
- **Punctuality:** Arriving even five minutes late to a meeting may be perceived as unprofessional.

Contemporary Evolution: German workplaces are adapting to new realities :

- **Hybrid Work Adoption:** 65% of employers now offer hybrid working options. 80% report improved employee performance with hybrid models.
- **Flatter Hierarchies:** There is a clear trend toward flatter organizational models, especially in startups and tech companies, promoting greater collaboration, innovation, and quicker decision-making.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Companies increasingly recognize the importance of creating inclusive environments that welcome diverse perspectives.
- **Work-Life Integration:** Modern German job culture increasingly focuses on work-life integration, allowing better time management and stress reduction.
- **Continuous Learning:** Organizations emphasize continuous learning and development to keep employees updated.

Tensions Between Traditional and Modern: Aspects of traditional German work culture can conflict with modern workplace dynamics :

- Rigid scheduling may clash with project-based workflows requiring flexibility
- Direct communication may be perceived as too blunt in casual startup environments
- Structured hierarchy can hinder flat, team-based approaches to innovation
- German efficiency can seem rigid compared to agile, occasionally chaotic startup operations

Case Study: Zurich Group Germany's Modern Leadership: Uwe Schöpe's leadership at Zurich Group Germany exemplifies contemporary German HR practices :

Practice	**Description**

Flat Hierarchy	Works from open-plan desk; no private office; accessible to all employees
Proximity	Informal interactions (coffee bar) build relationships across levels
Transparency	Board meets in glazed area visible to all employees
Participatory Strategy	"Strategy dialogs" with 300-400 employees; workforce presents ideas to Board
Co-Created Values	Six leadership guidelines developed jointly with Works Council, Board, managers, employees
Employee-Centric Recruitment	Prioritize character and cultural fit over skillsets; 40% of hires from employee referrals
Low Turnover	2.5% voluntary turnover indicates strong employee satisfaction

Schöpe's philosophy reflects core principles: "You have to like people," "When your heart is into it, you can get the most out of your work," and "The success of a company is dependent on having motivated employees" .

Research on German Management Styles: Englmaier, Hofmann, and Wolter's analysis of German survey data (2012-2018) reveals important patterns :

- Two distinct management styles exist: structured (employing many highly structured practices) and unstructured (lacking structured practices but retaining training measures)
- Sizeable differences in styles across firms can only partially be explained by firm characteristics
- Management practices are highly persistent over time; newly adopted practices are often discontinued after a short period
- Miscalculations of cost-benefit trade-offs and non-fitting corporate culture may hinder adoption of structured management

- Since structured management increases firm performance, unstructured firms fail to catch up and continue to underperform

This research suggests that supporting organizations in adopting effective management practices could yield significant performance improvements.

Leadership and Cultural Context: Darie's (2024) comparative study confirms that while transformational leadership universally enhances performance and retention, "the effectiveness of leadership styles is significantly shaped by cultural and economic factors" . The study emphasizes that "adaptable, context-aware leadership is crucial for navigating the complexities of global economic systems" .

Table 4: German Leadership and HRM Evolution

Dimension	**Traditional**	**Contemporary Evolution**
Hierarchy	Structured, respected	Flatter models, especially in startups
Communication	Direct, explicit	Remains direct, but more participative
Decision-Making	Top-down, analytical	Strategy dialogs; employee input
Work Model	On-site, fixed hours	65% hybrid options; flexible
Employee Relations	Formal, separate spheres	Co-created guidelines; proximity
Recruitment	Skills-focused	Character and cultural fit emphasized
Retention	Traditional loyalty	2.5% turnover (Zurich example)

5.3 Comparative Analysis

Table 5: Comparative Summary—Cameroon and Germany

Dimension	**Cameroon**	**Germany**
Philosophical Foundation	Ubuntu (humanness); humanistic view of people's intrinsic value	Structured efficiency; expertise-based authority; evolving participative approaches
Cultural Values	Collectivism; social harmony; consensus; community	Order; clarity; defined responsibility; directness
Organizational Structure	Context-dependent; fluid adaptation	Structured hierarchy respected; flatter trends in startups
Decision-Making	Consensus-building; collective agreement	Thorough analysis; swift implementation once decided
Communication Style	Harmony-oriented; social capital emphasis	Direct, explicit; written precision
Employee Participation	Socialization; family-friendly practices	Strategy dialogs; co-created guidelines (Zurich model)
HR Practice Origin	Local, imported, adapted mix	Predominantly home-grown with international influences
Practice Adaptation	"Simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, disuse"	Highly persistent; new practices often discontinued
Key Tensions	Indigenous values vs. imported Western models	Traditional hierarchy vs. flat, flexible demands
Research Base	Qualitative interviews; strategic HRM studies	Survey data; management style analysis; case studies
Employee Outcomes	Enhanced well-being; social cohesion	2.5% turnover (Zurich); performance focus

Key Differences:

1. **Philosophical Foundation:** Cameroon's HRM is rooted in Ubuntu philosophy emphasizing community and intrinsic human value. Germany's approach balances

structured hierarchy with expertise-based authority, increasingly incorporating participative elements.

2. **Practice Adaptation:** Cameroonian organizations demonstrate fluid adaptation, with practices adopted, redesigned, or abandoned based on context. German organizations show high persistence, with newly adopted practices often discontinued.
3. **Decision-Making:** Cameroon emphasizes consensus building and collective agreement. Germany emphasizes thorough analysis with swift implementation once decisions are made.
4. **Employee Participation:** Cameroon emphasizes socialization and family-friendly practices reflecting community values. Germany increasingly emphasizes formal participation through strategy dialogs and co-created guidelines.
5. **Change Dynamics:** Cameroonian change appears organic and context-driven. German change is more structured, with research documenting barriers to adoption.

Key Similarities:

1. **Recognition of Human Value:** Both cultures value employees, though expressed differently—Cameroon through community and care, Germany through respect for expertise and efficiency.
2. **Adaptation Pressures:** Both face pressures to adapt to global trends and changing workforce expectations.
3. **Tension Between Tradition and Modernity:** Both navigate tensions between traditional approaches and contemporary demands.
4. **Importance of Trust:** Both recognize that trust between stakeholders is essential for organizational effectiveness.
5. **Focus on Employee Well-Being:** Both increasingly emphasize employee well-being and satisfaction as organizational priorities.
6.

6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 The Ubuntu Alternative to Instrumental HRM

Cameroon's experience powerfully illustrates that indigenous African management philosophies offer alternatives to Western instrumental approaches that may be more appropriate for local contexts. Ubuntu's emphasis on community, collective well-being, and intrinsic human value contrasts sharply with views that perceive people merely as resources to achieve organizational objectives .

The research demonstrates that these endogenous practices are not backward or inferior but serve as "appropriate caryatids of modern organizational HRM in Africa" . They enhance employee experience and well-being, build social cohesion, and create trust between stakeholders. For organizations operating in African contexts, ignoring these indigenous approaches may mean adopting practices "detached from local realities" that fail to address persistent HRM problems .

This finding has profound implications for multinational enterprises operating in Cameroon and across Africa. Importing Western HRM models wholesale, without adaptation to local cultural values, may prove ineffective. Successful organizations will be those that understand and respect indigenous practices while integrating appropriate global standards.

6.2 The Structured Efficiency of German Management

Germany's experience demonstrates that structured hierarchy, clear responsibility, and analytical decision-making can produce highly effective organizations. The research showing that structured management increases firm performance, and that unstructured firms fail to catch up, underscores the importance of deliberate, well-designed management practices .

Yet Germany also demonstrates that tradition need not be static. The evolution toward flatter hierarchies, hybrid work models, and participative strategy development shows how even deeply rooted cultural practices can adapt to new demands. The Zurich case study exemplifies this synthesis: maintaining efficiency and clear responsibility while embracing transparency, employee voice, and co-created values .

The tension between traditional hierarchy and modern flexibility remains, particularly in sectors where startups with agile cultures coexist with established firms maintaining structured approaches . Navigating this tension requires context-aware leadership that understands when structure serves and when flexibility is needed.

6.3 The Challenge of Practice Transfer and Adaptation

Both countries illuminate the challenges of transferring management practices across cultural contexts. Cameroon's experience with imported Western models that "negate indigenous management practices" echoes broader critiques of ethnocentric HRM. The "simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" that characterizes Cameroonian organizations reflects the difficulty of finding appropriate syntheses between local and foreign approaches.

Germany's experience reveals that even within a single national context, management practices are "highly persistent over time," with new practices often discontinued after short periods . This suggests that organizational change is inherently difficult, requiring not only adoption of new practices but their embedding in organizational culture.

The implication for both countries is that effective HRM requires careful attention to cultural fit. Practices that work in one context cannot simply be transplanted to another; they must be adapted to local values, norms, and institutional frameworks.

6.4 Employee Participation and Voice

Both countries demonstrate growing recognition of employee participation as essential for organizational effectiveness, though through different mechanisms. Cameroon's emphasis on consensus building and socialization reflects cultural values of collective agreement and community . Germany's strategy dialogs, co-created guidelines, and participatory workshops reflect more formalized approaches to employee voice.

The Zurich case study's "Where are we lacking and what can we do better?" question, posed to hundreds of employees, and the Board's commitment to reporting back on implemented measures, exemplifies a powerful model of participatory governance . The co-creation of leadership

guidelines involving Works Council, Board, managers, and employees demonstrates that formal structures can support genuine participation.

For Cameroon, the challenge may be to develop more formalized participation mechanisms that complement existing informal consensus-building processes. For Germany, the challenge may be to ensure that participation is genuine rather than performative, and that employee input genuinely influences decisions.

6.5 Implications for SDG 8

The findings have important implications for achieving SDG 8 targets:

Target 8.5 (Full and productive employment and decent work): Decent work requires attention to cultural context. Cameroon's emphasis on employee well-being and social cohesion demonstrates that productivity and worker welfare need not conflict. Germany's low turnover rates (2.5% at Zurich) show that effective management practices support employment stability.

Target 8.8 (Protect labour rights): Labour rights must be understood within cultural frameworks. Cameroon's family-friendly practices reflect recognition of workers' broader social obligations. Germany's participatory mechanisms provide channels for workers to voice concerns and influence decisions.

Target 8.2 (Economic productivity): Both countries demonstrate that culturally appropriate management supports productivity. Cameroon's agile adaptation enables organizations to navigate complex environments. Germany's structured efficiency drives performance.

Target 8.3 (Development-oriented policies): Policies supporting enterprise development must engage with local management practices. Cameroon's experience suggests that promoting indigenous approaches may be as important as importing foreign models. Germany's evolution shows that policy can support adaptation without abandoning cultural strengths.

7. CONCLUSION

This comparative analysis of traditional leadership styles and modern human resources management practices in Cameroon and Germany reveals profound insights into how cultural values shape organizational life and how different societies navigate the tensions between tradition and innovation. The two countries, with their distinct philosophical foundations and historical trajectories, each illuminate critical dimensions of effective people management in the 21st century.

Cameroon's experience demonstrates the power of indigenous management philosophies rooted in Ubuntu—the African concept of humanness that emphasizes community, collective well-being, and the intrinsic value of people. Empirical research has identified four major endogenous HR practices that serve as the "glue" between organizational stakeholders, enhance employee experience and well-being, and act as "appropriate caryatids of modern organizational HRM in Africa" . Cameroonian organizations exhibit "socially embedded agile SHRM," navigating a complex mix of local, imported, and adapted practices in response to dynamic contexts . This challenges long-held assumptions that African endogenous practices are backward, demonstrating instead their positive role within and beyond organizations.

Yet Cameroon faces persistent challenges. Imported Western HRM models often prove "detached from local realities" and unable to address decades-old problems . The tension between indigenous humanistic values and instrumental foreign approaches requires constant negotiation. Organizations must find appropriate syntheses that respect cultural heritage while meeting contemporary demands.

Germany presents a contrasting picture where structured hierarchy, direct communication, and expertise-based authority have long characterized organizational life. Research confirms that structured management practices improve firm performance, and that unstructured firms fail to catch up . Yet Germany is also evolving rapidly: 65% of employers now offer hybrid work, there is a clear trend toward flatter hierarchies, and innovative companies embrace participatory approaches . The Zurich case study exemplifies this synthesis, combining efficiency with transparency, employee voice, and co-created values, achieving remarkably low 2.5% voluntary turnover .

Germany faces its own tensions. Traditional hierarchy and rigid scheduling can conflict with startup cultures demanding flexibility and rapid iteration . Direct communication may be perceived as blunt in more casual environments. Organizations must navigate between preserving cultural strengths and adapting to new workforce expectations.

Several cross-cutting insights emerge from this comparison:

First, **HRM is culturally embedded**. Neither country's practices can be understood through universal frameworks alone. Cameroon's Ubuntu philosophy and Germany's structured efficiency reflect deep cultural values that shape how people are managed in organizations.

Second, **indigenous practices have value**. Cameroon's experience challenges the assumption that effective HRM must follow Western models. Indigenous approaches rooted in community and collective well-being enhance employee experience and build social cohesion.

Third, **adaptation is essential but difficult**. Both countries demonstrate that organizations must continuously adapt to changing contexts, yet management practices are highly persistent. Cameroon's "simultaneous flux of adoption, redesign, and disuse" and Germany's discontinued new practices both reflect the challenges of change.

Fourth, **employee participation enhances effectiveness**. Whether through Cameroon's consensus-building or Germany's strategy dialogs, involving employees in decision-making builds trust, improves outcomes, and supports retention.

Fifth, **context-aware leadership is crucial**. Leaders who understand and respect cultural context while guiding adaptation are essential for organizational success. Darie's conclusion that "adaptable, context-aware leadership is crucial for navigating the complexities of global economic systems" applies equally to both countries .

Sixth, **tension between tradition and modernity is universal**. Both countries navigate the challenge of preserving cultural strengths while meeting contemporary demands. There is no single right balance; each organization must find its own path.

Seventh, **well-being and productivity need not conflict**. Cameroon's humanistic approach and Germany's efficient management both demonstrate that organizations can achieve performance while supporting employee welfare.

For Cameroon, priorities emerging from this analysis include:

1. Continue researching and documenting endogenous HR practices to strengthen understanding of what works in local contexts.
2. Develop HRM education and training that respects indigenous values while incorporating appropriate global knowledge.
3. Support organizations in finding effective syntheses between local and imported practices, avoiding uncritical adoption of foreign models.
4. Encourage multinational enterprises operating in Cameroon to adapt their practices to local cultural contexts.
5. Build on strengths in social capital, consensus building, and family-friendly practices as competitive advantages.

For Germany, priorities include:

1. Support organizations in adopting structured management practices that improve performance, addressing barriers to change identified in research .
2. Continue evolving toward flatter hierarchies and participatory approaches while maintaining cultural strengths in efficiency and reliability.
3. Address tensions between traditional and modern work cultures through dialogue and adaptation.
4. Learn from innovative cases like Zurich Group Germany to spread effective practices across sectors.
5. Ensure that hybrid and flexible work models maintain the social cohesion and trust that support organizational culture.

For the international community, the lessons are clear: effective HRM must be culturally appropriate. Indigenous management philosophies like Ubuntu offer valuable alternatives to

Western instrumental approaches. Organizations operating across borders must develop context-aware leadership capable of navigating diverse cultural expectations.

The ultimate measure of success for SDG 8 is not whether organizations adopt particular practices but whether they achieve productive employment and decent work in ways that respect workers' dignity, support their well-being, and contribute to sustainable economic growth. Cameroon and Germany, in their different ways, are both working toward these goals.

8. LIMITS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the comparative analysis relies primarily on secondary sources rather than primary empirical research. Direct observation of organizational practices in both countries, interviews with HR professionals, managers, and employees, and participatory research would provide valuable additional perspectives and ground-truth the findings from published literature. Second, data availability and comparability vary significantly between countries. Cameroon benefits from recent qualitative research on endogenous HR practices and strategic HRM, but quantitative data on practice prevalence and outcomes is limited. Germany benefits from survey data and management style analysis, but qualitative depth varies across sectors. Third, the study focuses on formal organizational settings, with less attention to informal economy workplaces that constitute significant portions of employment in Cameroon. Fourth, the voice of employees themselves is mediated through research reports rather than captured directly. Future research should prioritize participatory methodologies that center worker perspectives on leadership and HR practices. Fifth, the study does not comprehensively address the political economy dimensions—the interests, power relations, and structural forces that shape organizational practices in both countries. Understanding why certain practices persist or change requires deeper political economy analysis. Sixth, the transferability analysis is necessarily speculative. While principles can be identified, actual transfer of HR practices depends on countless contextual factors including legal systems, economic structures, educational institutions, and historical legacies that cannot be fully anticipated. Despite these limitations, the comparative analysis provides valuable insights into the relationship between traditional leadership styles and modern HR practices, with implications for both countries and for broader efforts to achieve SDG 8.

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10. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author conceived the study, designed the research methodology, conducted the literature review and document analysis, synthesized findings across countries, and drafted the complete manuscript. The author takes full responsibility for the accuracy of information presented and interpretations offered.

11. COMPETING INTERESTS

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential competing interest. No funding was received from organizations with interests in human resources management, leadership development, or related sectors.

12. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

As sole author, I performed all roles including conceptualization, methodology development, investigation, formal analysis, writing, review, editing, and project administration.

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14. DATA AVAILABILITY

All sources analyzed in this study are publicly available documents, including peer-reviewed articles indexed in academic databases, institutional publications, case studies, and cultural guides. Primary sources are cited in the bibliography and accessible through the referenced publications and organizations.

15. DISCLAIMER

The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution or organization with which the author may be affiliated. The analysis is provided for scholarly purposes and should not be construed as policy guidance or management advice. Leadership practices, HRM approaches, and organizational cultures are subject to change, and readers should consult current sources for specific information about Cameroon, Germany, and human resources management.

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