

Task and Relationship Orientations of Ugandans and Americans

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Abstract

Uganda is emerging as a significant political and economic force on the African continent, but this landlocked nation remains largely a mystery within the international community. The study seeks to build a better understanding of Uganda by comparing the task and relationship orientations of Ugandans and Americans. The Style Questionnaire was used to gather responses from 139 Ugandan and 484 American workers. The findings show that Ugandan workers are not only more relationship oriented than Americans, but their task orientation scores are also higher. The findings also show that Ugandan women are more task oriented than Ugandan men. Awareness of these differences will help international managers assigned to Uganda as well as Ugandan managers adjust their behavior to provide more effective organizational leadership.

Key words: Uganda; Task orientation; Relationship orientation; Gender; African culture

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INTRODUCTION

In the competitive world of international business, understanding cultural similarities and differences can be an important factor to management success (Matondo, 2012). Culture is important because knowing basic values tends to make individual behavior more predictable (Kagaari, 2011). Understanding how others perceive and value their environment also provides a guide for managers to anticipate behaviors and respond effectively (Alkailani, Azzam & Athamneh, 2012). The need to appreciate cultural differences is becoming increasingly important as globalization brings disparate people into closer contact (Scarborough, 1998). Certainly, the growth in international trade has significantly increased our understanding of the similarities and differences between eastern and western cultures (Gardenswartz, Rowe, Digh, & Bennett, 2003; Ishii & Bruneau, 1994; Mead, 2005; Mujtaba & Kaifi, 2010).

1. AFRICAN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Most African countries are just beginning to emerge as a subject of cross-cultural interest in business research (Seyoum & Manyak, 2009). Some interesting work on African cultural differences within the context of management has been done by Munene, Schwartz, and Smith (2000). Their study used the results of global surveys to demonstrate that African culture emphasizes hierarchical systems of ascribed roles, social embeddedness, and environmental mastery in contrast to other cultures that emphasize egalitarianism, autonomy, and harmony. Moreover, African managers stress reliance on formal rules and superiors in reaching decisions as compared to the cultural profile of Western Europeans. Other studies explore how African culture impacts specific areas of management concern. For example, De

Maria (2008) examined the applicability of the “culture-free” universal management model in responding to the climate of corruption that exists in some parts of Africa. Jackson, Hill, Tamangani, and Chipanbira (2000) investigated managers’ perceptions of their own and others’ management styles and the styles that are most desirable for the future of organizations in South Africa and Zimbabwe.

The present study sought to expand knowledge of African organizational culture by comparing the task and relationship orientations of Ugandans and Americans (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Schwartz, 1994, 1999). These orientations have their roots in the early studies of leadership when researchers became interested in learning how behavior orientations might contribute to the success or failure of organizations. Task-oriented and relationship-oriented behaviors quickly became central to the development of such widely recognized approaches to understanding leadership behavior as the Managerial Grid (Blake & Mouton, 1964), Contingency Theory (Fiedler, 1967), and Situational Theory (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982).

Task orientations focus on the efficient use of resources and making operations highly reliable and efficient. Specific behaviors associated with this orientation are short-term planning, clarifying roles and objectives, and monitoring performance. Task behavior finds leaders engaging in top-down communication by explaining what employees are to do as well as when, where, and how each function is to be accomplished. Relationship orientations are seen in having a strong commitment to the organizational unit and its mission by creating a high level of trust and cooperation. Specific relationship orientation behaviors include supporting, developing, and empowering others. Individuals with strong relationship orientations focus on getting tasks accomplished through staff development, motivation, and the building and managing of teams (DeCaro, DeCaro, & Bowen-Thompson, 2010; Van Wart, 2011). While research interests have expanded to examine other aspects of leadership (Cowsill & Grint, 2008; Yukl, O’Donnell, & Taber, 2009), task and relationship orientations remain as central variables in understanding organizational behavior (Northouse, 2013).

Gerhart (2008) observes that knowledge of cultures outside the United States within business literature is based largely on the pioneering work of Hofstede (1980, 2001). By examining the mean scores related to value judgments obtained for the countries studied, Hofstede’s was able to make broad generalizations about the cultural characteristics of individual countries. However, such generalizations about national cultures may be of increasingly limited value as globalization continues to expand. More in-depth knowledge is required about generational, gender, ethnic and other key differences that will give more precise knowledge about the cultural values that provide a better comprehension of the people

in these countries. For instance, the values shared by younger people in Thailand show marked differences from those of previous Thai generations that experienced colonialism, war, and despotism (Murphy, Mujtaba, Manyak, Sungkhawan, & Greenwood, 2010).

The research undertaken in the present study seeks to expand knowledge of organizational culture in Uganda through a systematic study of task and relationship orientations of men and women in the workforce. The data are then compared to the data previously obtained from a comparable study conducted in the United States to see how Ugandan workers compare to their American counterparts. Particular attention is given to comparing the value differences of male and female workers in the two cultures. The knowledge gained can then be used to improve the cultural understanding of expatriates serving in Uganda as well as the effectiveness of Uganda managers in providing leadership to their Uganda workforce.

2. AMERICAN AND UGANDAN CULTURES

American and Ugandan cultures are marked by distinct beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In the case of the United States, Americans have a long and abiding devotion to “individualism” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1991). To many Americans, the ideal person is autonomous and self-reliant. Moreover, people should be left free to pursue their self-interest and be rewarded for their individual achievements. The devotion of individualism tends to manifest itself in intense competition, but does not rule a willingness to work in teams to achieve a common goal (ISSS, 2012). In a low-context, task oriented culture like America, it is assumed that people who are independent thinkers and strongly individualistic will be more successful in business and life in general (Edgell & Tranby, 2010; Sahertian, & Soetjijto, 2011).

An example of American individualism is the widely shared belief that children should be taught to express their own opinions and stand out from the crowd if they are to become leaders (Hall, 1976). Another example would be that American school children are encouraged to show their individualistic behavior through their choices in clothing. Unlike most countries, American children are largely free to choose their own dress styles rather than conform to the rigid standards of mandated school uniforms (Crockett & Wallendorf, 1998). The rewarding of children for developing their sense of individualism can have negative consequences particularly as decisions begin to have more important life-long consequences that may run counter to the values and expectations of the family (Douglass, 2012).

Uganda as a land-locked country of over 32 million is roughly the size of the United Kingdom. The cultural foundation of Uganda evolves out of a diverse range of

ethnic groups that make up this East African country. While English is the official national language of Uganda, the east, central and southern regions are dominated by Bantu-speaking peoples, most notably the Buganda. In the north, the Lango and Acholi people speak Nilotic languages while the languages of the Iteso and Karamojong in the east are of the Nilo-Hamitic group. Uganda has a very young population with a median age of 15 years. Universal education is a legal requirement in Uganda, but only two-thirds of the population over 15 years of age is considered literate (CIA, 2012; Otiso, 2006).

Ugandan culture contrasts markedly from the American culture. For instance, Roncoli, Orlove, Kabugo, and Waiswa (2011) found that “western” oriented non-governmental organizations in Uganda sought to ensure that all participants be given opportunities to speak in group discussions and to vote on decisions. However, Ugandans felt more comfortable with a “Kiganda” approach that emphasizes ties to a collectivity, respect for social structure, good manners, and consensus building. Another example of cultural difference is in the role of women within Ugandan society. Ugandan women reflect the broader African culture in terms of facing more disadvantages than men because of entrenched patriarchal attitudes and practices (Coleman, 2010; Lovell, 2010). In Uganda, it is common to hear demeaning phrases like, “Are you a woman?” when a man fails to meet performance expectations (Manyak & Katono, 2010).

While Ugandan and American cultures are unquestionably distinct, broader global forces may be bringing them closer together. From the Ugandan perspective, many western practices have been adopted as a consequence of the country’s British colonial past (Kjaer, 2009; Kyomuhendo & McIntosh, 2006). More recently, Ugandan culture has evolved due to the widespread availability of information over cyberspace highways. Radio, television, cell phones, and, increasingly, Internet services are becoming available in even the most remote areas (Mordi, 2012). Most important, Ugandans living in the economic center of Kampala exhibit individualist values that are associated with western economies (Katono & Manyak, 2012). Moreover, despite entrenchment of the patrimonial social structure, women are emerging as a force in the political and economic life of Uganda (Tripp, 2000). Women contribute 50 percent of GDP and own 39 percent of registered businesses. They also represent 80 percent of the unpaid workforce (Ellis, Manuel, & Blackden, 2006; UNDP, 2009).

The forces of globalization are also bringing about changes in the American work force. Many high-context cultural practices have been introduced as employers encourage their employees to work collectively in achieving organizational goals (Brandt, England, & Ward, 2011). The role of women in the workforce has also changed. Similar to Uganda, the number of working

women is expected to increase by 9% between 2006 and 2016 to comprise 47% of the U.S. labor force (USBLS, 2007). While the percentage of women in the labor force is increasing, women in both countries remain under-represented in management and have yet to achieve wage parity (Coleman, 2010; Rampell, 2010).

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The current study examined the extent to which the two cultures are responding to these forces for change by examining the task and relationship orientations of the respective populations. Specifically, the primary research question is to determine whether a high-context culture like Uganda has higher or lower average scores on the relationship orientation or task orientation when compared with the low-context culture of Americans. A second question was to ascertain whether Ugandan male and female respondents have a higher relationship orientation or task orientation than male and female respondents in the United States. The answers to these questions can suggest how awareness of these cultural differences might help international managers assigned to Uganda adjust their behaviors to provide more effective organizational leadership.

4. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The hypotheses are stated as being unidirectional partly to be consistent throughout the analysis and partly because the direction of the difference is viewed as being of less importance in judging the differences in the task and relationship orientations. The study will focus on testing the following hypotheses to determine how Ugandan workers compare in their task and relationship orientations to comparable workers in the United States.

- H1: *There will be no significant difference in the task orientation scores of Ugandan and American respondents.*
- H2: *There will be no significant difference in the relationship orientation scores of Ugandan and American respondents.*

The next step is to delve more deeply into both cultures by focusing initially on the responses of Ugandan workers. The purpose is to determine the extent to which Ugandan workers as a group compare in their task and relationship orientations. A second purpose is to determine the extent to which male and female Ugandans compare in their orientation scores. Thus, the second issue will be analyzed by testing the following hypotheses:

- H3: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of Ugandan female and male respondents.*

- H4: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of Ugandan female respondents.*
- H5: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation score of Ugandan male respondents.*

A similar set of hypotheses are proposed to examine American workers as a group and by gender with respect to their task and relationship orientations.

- H6: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of American respondents.*
- H7: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship scores for American female respondents.*
- H8: *There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientations of American male respondents.*

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Many instruments have been used to gather data on task and relationship orientations. The LBDQ developed by Stogdill (1963) and the Leadership Grid created by Blake and McCanse (1991) are the most well-known. However, the Style Questionnaire presented by Northouse (2013) was selected because the simple format is more amenable for data gathering in a developing country like Uganda that has had little exposure to survey research instruments. Respondents can complete the Style Questionnaire in both self-reporting and in rating their peers, bosses, and subordinates with minimal instructions. The results are easily calculated to provide a general profile of a person's general task and relationship orientation in daily work life.

The Style Questionnaire asks respondents to identify the options that best describe how they see themselves (or the person being evaluated) in a variety of situations. For each situational statement, respondents indicate the degree to which they (or the person being evaluated) engage in the stated behavior. A rating of 1 means the rater "Never" demonstrates the behavior and a rating of 5 means the rater "Always" demonstrates the specific behavior. To determine one's score for the Style Questionnaire, the responses for the odd numbered items are added to determine the score for task-oriented behaviors: The responses for the even number items are added to determine the score for relationship-oriented behaviors. A score of 10-24 would be considered in the low range while a score of 45 to 50 would be considered in the very high range (Northouse, 2013).

A high task behavior score suggests that such an individual will engage in more top-down communication by explaining what the follower is to do, as well as when,

where, and how each function is to be accomplished. By contrast, a high relationship behavior score would suggest the individual will be oriented to engage in more joint communication with followers while providing socio-emotional support. The degree to which an individual engages in task or relationship orientated behaviors depends largely on the variables present in the situation. Some of the situational variables can include the difficulty of the task, the importance of the job, the time available to get it done, and the readiness of the follower to complete the task successfully without much input. Overall, it is assumed that effective individuals stay in control by managing through a balance of both task and relationship oriented behaviors to make sure the objectives and goals are accomplished (Van Wart, 2011).

The Style Questionnaire was submitted to 200 persons living in Uganda of which 139 usable responses (70%) were processed for the study. The usable responses included 74 males and 65 females. The Ugandan respondents were all working adults studying for management degrees at two academic centers in the Kampala-Mukono metropolitan area. Most of the unusable responses may be attributed to two factors. First, despite assurances of confidentiality, some Ugandans respondents experienced discomfort when asked to provide personal demographic information. This discomfort is most likely a carryover from the political culture of mistrust that is often associated with the infamous Idi Amin regime. Second, several respondents were deleted because they were found to be citizens of Kenya or Rwanda. While the cultures are similar, these individuals were excluded to avoid introducing variables that might distort the results.

In the United States, surveys were given to graduate business students across Florida and other responses came from a network of contacts through social media connections. Over 650 individuals completed the surveys. Of the total responses, 166 respondents were not currently working and thus their responses were excluded from this research. Overall, the survey was completed by 484 working adults including 184 males and 300 females working in a broad range of industries and occupations. As in Uganda, the respondents were assured that all responses were confidential and no names were recorded.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1 contains the mean scores of Ugandan and American respondents for both task and relationship orientations. The mean scores show that Ugandan and American respondents rank moderately high in their task mean scores (40.55 and 37.63) and high (43.12 and 41.99) in their relationship orientations. However, these mean scores show that Ugandans consistently rank higher than Americans in both task and relationship orientations. Another finding from Table 1 is that Ugandan women rank slightly higher than

Ugandan males on task orientations (41.05 to 40.12) and relationship orientations (43.23 and 43.12).

H1 and H2: There will be no significant difference in

the task and relationship orientations of Ugandan and American respondents.

Table 1
Ugandan and American Task and Relationship Orientation Mean Scores

| Respondents by Sex | Total Respondents | Task Mean Scores | Relationship Mean Scores |
|--------------------|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| Ugandans | 139 | 40.55 | 43.12 |
| Males | 74 | 40.12 | 43.00 |
| Females | 65 | 41.05 | 43.23 |
| Americans | 484 | 37.63 | 41.99 |
| Males | 184 | 38.90 | 41.16 |
| Females | 300 | 36.86 | 42.49 |

An analysis of the mean scores in Table 2 confirms that Hypotheses 1 and 2 cannot be accepted and that significant ($p < .05$) differences exist between the task and relationship orientations of Ugandan and American

respondents. Thus the Ugandan and American populations are significantly different in both their task and relationship orientations.

Table 2
Ugandan and American Task and Relationship Orientation Mean Scores

| | Ugandan Task Orientation Mean (SD) | American Relationship Orientation Mean (SD) | Mean Difference (DF) | t-value |
|--------|--|---|----------------------|---------|
| Total | 40.55 (6.95) | 37.63 (7.69) | 2.92 (621) | 4.03* |
| Male | 40.12 (6.83) | 38.90 (7.20) | 1.22 (256) | 1.249 |
| Female | 41.05 (7.11) | 36.86 (7.88) | 4.19 (363) | 3.952* |
| | Ugandan Relationship Orientation Mean (SD) | American Relationship Orientation Mean (SD) | Mean Difference (DF) | t-value |
| Total | 43.12 (5.41) | 41.99 (6.04) | 1.13 (621) | 1.99 |
| Male | 43.00 (5.08) | 41.16 (6.15) | 1.84 (256) | 2.279* |
| Female | 43.23 (5.79) | 42.49 (5.92) | 0.74 (363) | 0.917 |

*Significant at $p < .05$

While no statistically significant differences were found between the task orientation of Ugandan and American males, Ugandan males do have a significantly higher relationship orientation score than their colleagues in the United States. On the other side, while there were statistically significant differences between the task orientation of Ugandan and American females, no significant differences were found in the female scores between the two countries.

the task and relationship scores of Ugandan female and male respondents.

Table 3 shows that Hypothesis 3 is not accepted because a significant difference exists between Ugandan's task and relationship orientations. Based on the results, Ugandan respondents favor relationship orientations over task orientations as their preferred style of behavior.

Hypothesis 4: There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of Ugandan female respondents.

7. UGANDAN RESPONDENTS

Hypothesis 3: There will be no significant difference in

Table 3
Ugandan Task Versus Relationship Orientations

| Ugandan Respondents | Task Orientation Mean (SD) | Relationship Orientation Mean (SD) | Mean Difference | T-Value |
|---------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Total | 40.55 (6.95) | 43.12 (5.41) | 2.57 | -3.44* |
| Male | 40.12 (6.83) | 43.00 (5.08) | 2.88 | -2.91* |
| Female | 41.05 (7.11) | 43.23 (5.79) | 2.18 | -1.92 |

*Significant at $p < .05$

With regard to hypothesis 4, the analysis in Table 3 indicates this hypothesis cannot be rejected as no significant difference exists between the Ugandan female

respondent's mean task and relationship scores.

Hypothesis 5: There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of

Ugandan male respondents.

The results indicate that Ugandan male respondents differ in terms of their relationship and task orientation. As shown in Table 3, the differences in mean scores are 2.88, the *t*-value is -.291.

8. AMERICAN RESPONDENTS

Hypothesis 6: There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship orientation scores of American respondents.

Table 4 shows the mean scores of American respondents for relationship orientation (41.99) fall in the “high range” and task orientation (37.63) falls in the “moderately high range” on the Northouse scale.

Table 4
American Task Versus Relationship Orientations

| American Respondents | Task Orientation Mean (SD) | Relationship Orientation Mean (SD) | Mean Difference | T-Value |
|----------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Total | 37.63 (7.69) | 41.99 (6.04) | 4.36 | -9.80* |
| Male | 38.90 (7.20) | 41.16 (6.15) | 2.26 | -3.24* |
| Female | 36.86 (7.88) | 42.49 (5.92) | 5.63 | -9.89* |

*Significant at $p > .05$

With respect to hypothesis 8, Table 4 calls for the hypothesis not to be accepted. Based on the results, American male respondents have significantly different scores on their task and relationship orientations.

9. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

American managers assigned to work in a Ugandan organization might find some commonality with their Ugandan associates because both have seemingly similar leadership orientations. Respondents from both cultures score “high” in relationship orientation and “moderately high” to “high” in task orientations on the Northouse scales. However, this surface similarity may hide subtle but statistically significant differences that could lead to misunderstandings in the workplace.

The first key difference is that Ugandans score significantly higher in both task and relationship orientations than do Americans. The explanation for this finding, while highly speculative, might be found in the dual nature of Ugandan society. The hierarchical decision-making structure of traditional tribal and village society was reinforced by colonial administrative structure that supported task oriented behavior. Orders are given to subordinates and little attention is shown to such concerns as empowerment. Conversely, the high-context culture of Uganda moderates task driven behavior by suppressing feelings of impatience and devoting the time necessary to establish personal and social relationships. Ugandans may well be more sensitive than American managers due to the circumstances that surround social exchanges.

A second key difference shown in the findings is that

The difference was found to be statistically significant. Thus Hypothesis 6 cannot be accepted since respondents in the United States have dissimilar scores on task and relationship orientations.

Hypothesis 7: There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship scores for American female respondents.

The results show in Table 4 that hypothesis 7 is not accepted because the evidence is insufficient to accept the hypothesis. As such, one can conclude that American female respondents will favor relationship over task orientation.

Hypothesis 8: There will be no significant difference between the task and relationship scores for American male respondents.

Ugandan women are not significantly different in their task and relationship orientations while their Ugandan male associates prefer relationship to task orientations. The difference shown between Ugandan females and males also calls for a speculative interpretation. One clue is the United Nations Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which ranks Uganda at 51 of the 179 countries measured. GEM reports that women in Uganda represent 35% of the professional and technical positions and 33% of the senior level positions. However, the earnings ratio was only 0.71 of male earnings (2009). Working women in Uganda also come from a very patriarchal society that tends to resent their stepping out of traditional family roles. Given this environment, women who enter the Ugandan working world are probably driven to be more task-oriented than their male counterparts while striving to maintain good relationships.

The third interesting outcome that would be of interest to an expatriate manager is the contrast in value orientations of Ugandan and American women. Ugandan women show very high scores on both of the Northouse scales and they also show a balance between task and relationship orientations. By comparison, American women rank lowest among all males and females on the Northouse task orientation scale. They are also statistically different in their task and relationship orientations. Part of the explanation for the difference displayed by Ugandan and American women again goes back to the cultural environment of Ugandan women. They need to be more task-driven than males if they are to succeed in a highly patriarchal society. While American women also need to be task driven, the cultural environment in

the United States places more emphasis on women being “lady-like” and relationship-oriented in their demeanor. As several authors have noted, women may choose to be more relationship oriented because they are aware of the social costs involved (Bowles & McGinn, 2005; Powell & Graves, 2003). This interpretation continues to be speculative, but future research might give greater clarification and understanding to these differences.

10. LIMITATIONS

This study is by necessity exploratory because so little empirical research has been conducted in Uganda let alone sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, care must be taken in evaluating the results of this study. The explanations given the results are also highly conjectural, but they do provide a starting point for directing future research efforts.

One limitation that concerns the researchers is that Ugandans might have a different cultural understanding with respect to their relationship orientation because of the strong influence of ethnic identity. For instance, it is not uncommon for an otherwise caring nurse in a public health center to make sure that members of her ethnic group are treated before giving aid to members of other ethnic groups. Americans would view this behavior as favoritism, but a Ugandan may see this behavior as fulfilling an important relational obligation to their ethnic group.

Finally, data gathering has unique challenges in countries like Uganda. Part of the problem is the design of survey research instruments and data gathering strategies in developing countries (Harzing, 2006). For instance, many questionnaires were rejected because respondents’ demographic information was not provided. Part of the problem is that most Ugandans are not familiar with survey research and do not see the importance of providing personal information. Another part of the problem is that Ugandans have a legacy of political despotism in their country. One must appreciate their sense of caution in providing personal information to unknown researchers.

CONCLUSION

American managers assigned to work in a country like Uganda would most likely assume that employees in such a high context culture are more relationship oriented than American workers due to their societal conditioning. The implication is that a high relationship orientation may cause employees to be less focused on completing their tasks in a timely manner. For example, they may not be assertive enough to pressure their peers toward working faster when there is a backlog. They may even resist asking for help when necessary because they do not want to appear “pushy” or “rude.”

This research suggests that reality may be quite different. While Ugandans do appear more relationship-

oriented than their American counterparts, their task orientations are also significantly higher than those of Americans. Therefore, managers and supervisors should feel comfortable in knowing that Ugandan workers, with proper leadership, will be task oriented while maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships.

The findings further suggest that Ugandan women require much more investigation to better understand the cultural foundations of their task and relationship orientations. For instance, ethnographic studies or other methodologies might help to explain why Ugandan women appear more driven in terms of both their task and relationship orientations than Ugandan men. Such studies might also shed light on why Ugandan women appear to have achieved more of a balance between their task and relationship orientations than their American women counterparts.

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