



Decolonizing Human Resource Management in South Africa: Universalism versus Particularism

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By

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Abstract

The compatibility of Western management theories and human resource management (HRM) methods with African cultural values and organizational realities has been a topic of continuous discussion in South Africa due to their growing influence. With a focus on opposition to Westernized management and HRM practices, this study examined the effects of universalism and particularism on South African public organizations. The study investigated how historical and cultural factors influenced organizational behavior and management practices in South Africa, drawing on the theoretical perspectives of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's universalism-particularism framework, Ubuntu philosophy, and intersectionality theory. The long-lasting effects of colonialism and apartheid, which persisted in influencing social interactions, organizational cultures, and opinions of Western management techniques, received special emphasis. Managers and staff members of a public organization in the Tshwane Municipality, Gauteng Province, participated in qualitative interviews and quantitative survey questionnaires as part of a mixed-methods research design. A purposive sample of 250 individuals provided the data, which were then analyzed using factor analysis, regression analysis, descriptive statistics, and analysis of variance (ANOVA). The study aimed to ascertain whether South African culture differed significantly from Western culture, whether apartheid and colonial legacies influenced organizational resistance to Westernized HRM practices, and whether African particularism contributed to resistance towards Universalist management principles. By emphasizing the significance of culturally grounded management practices, the study added to the conversation on decolonizing management and HRM in Africa. The results shed light on how South African public sector institutions developed indigenous management techniques that enhanced social cohesiveness, organizational efficacy, and cultural relevance.

Keywords: *Particularism, Universalism, Western Management Practices, Ubuntu, Apartheid Legacy, Cultural Diversity*

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1.0 Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) models and Western management ideas are being more widely used in a variety of cultural contexts due to the growing globalization of corporate practices. A prevalent aspect of modern organizational management is universalism, which encourages the use of uniform rules, regulations, and management techniques regardless of cultural variances (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 2002). However, because of the distinct cultural, historical, and social aspects that define African nations, the use of universalist concepts in African contexts has sparked significant discussion (Inyang, 2009). Particularly in South Africa, there are conflicts between particularism and universalism in the workplace due to the intersection of Western organizational practices with indigenous cultural values. Colonialism and apartheid, which imposed Western political, economic, and administrative institutions while marginalizing native African values and management practices, had a significant impact on South African society (Inyang, 2008). Even though the Republic of South Africa's 1996 Constitution and democratic transition encouraged equality, social cohesion, and cultural diversity, the legacy of past injustices still affects workplace relations and organizational behavior (Oelofsen, 2015; Whitehead, 2013). As a result, many South African organizations still struggle to strike a balance between internationally accepted management techniques and regional cultural norms and customs.

The idea of universalism is based on the conviction that laws, practices, and moral standards ought to be applied uniformly to all circumstances and people (Preez & Roux, 2010). Universalist cultures typically place a strong emphasis on impartiality, justice, success, and conformity to official rules. Particularism, on the other hand, gives connections, social responsibilities, and contextual factors top priority when making judgments (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Due to their strong emphasis on social harmony, communal relationships, and collective responsibility, African societies are frequently described as particularistic (Van der Walt, 1997). The Ubuntu concept, which emphasizes interconnection, respect for one another, and the well-being of the group as a whole, reflects these ideals (Inyang, 2008).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Human resource management in South African organizations is significantly impacted by the conflict between particularism and universalism. Individual accountability, merit-based awards, and standardized performance management systems are promoted by several Western HRM models (Hughes, 2002). These strategies might improve organizational effectiveness in some situations, but they might be at odds with African cultural norms that place a strong focus on social interactions, group decision-making, and reaching consensus (Iguisi, 2014). Employees and organizations may thus show opposition to Westernized management techniques that are thought to be at odds with regional cultural norms.

Additionally, the varied workforce in South Africa makes organizational administration even more challenging. Many racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups make up the nation, and their experiences have been influenced by apartheid's unequal access to opportunities and resources (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). Workplace relationships, organizational cultures, and employee opinions on management techniques are all still impacted by these historical disparities. Therefore, understanding organizational dynamics and opposition to universalist ideas still requires taking into account the intersection of race, gender, class, and culture (Segalo, 2015; Holvino, 2008).

Few studies have explicitly looked at the connection between African particularism and opposition to Western universalism in South African public organizations, despite increased scholarly interest

in African management philosophies and the decolonization of management knowledge (Veeran, 2012). Without sufficiently examining how historical circumstances and cultural values influence organizational resistance to universalist practices, previous research has mostly concentrated on the adaptation of Western management theories or the promotion of indigenous concepts like Ubuntu (Inyang, 2009; Adeleye, 2011).

This study aimed at closing this gap. In particular, the study explores cultural differences between South African and Western societies, evaluates the impact of colonial legacies and apartheid on organizational attitudes toward universalist HRM approaches, and looks at how much African particularism influences opposition to Western management practices. The study offered insights that can aid in the creation of culturally appropriate and successful management strategies in South African organizations by adding to the conversation on decolonizing management and human resource practices.

2.1 Literature Review

The idea that Western management ideas are generally applicable across cultural contexts is called into question by the literature on decolonizing Human Resource Management (HRM) in Africa. Researchers contend that when Western HRM concepts are introduced into African firms, indigenous knowledge systems, communal values, and historical realities that influence workplace behavior are frequently overlooked (Inyang, 2008; Adeleye, 2011). Therefore, decolonization aims to advance culturally appropriate management techniques that combine African organizational experiences and ideas with modern management demands.

The argument between particularism and universalism is a major issue in this literature. While particularist viewpoints stress the significance of tailoring management practices to regional cultural and social contexts, universalist approaches promote standardized management principles based on formal procedures, meritocracy, and objective decision-making (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). African communities are sometimes described as particularistic, with social networks, societal responsibilities, and interpersonal interactions having a major impact on organizational behavior (Van der Walt, 1997). As a result, strict application of universalist HRM systems may face opposition if it is thought to be at odds with regional norms and values (Inyang, 2009).

A well-known indigenous paradigm for African management is the ubuntu ideology. Ubuntu, which emphasizes interconnectedness, empathy, communal well-being, and consensus-based decision-making, is based on the idea that people live via their interactions with others (Mangaliso, 2001). According to academics, Ubuntu-based management provides a culturally appropriate supplement or substitute for Western HRM techniques and is more in line with employee expectations in many African situations (Inyang, 2008).

The literature also emphasizes how colonialism and apartheid continue to have an impact on South African organizational behavior. Systems from the colonial and apartheid eras marginalized indigenous customs while institutionalizing Western bureaucratic institutions and hierarchical power relations (Tabensky, 2008). Perceptions of justice, trust, leadership, and organizational authority are still shaped by historical legacies, despite the fact that democratic reforms have improved equality and diversity (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Oelofsen, 2015). Employees may therefore view current management practices through the prism of historical injustice and exclusion.

Research on cross-cultural management, especially Hofstede's (2001) concept of cultural dimensions, highlights additional distinctions between collectivist African societies and primarily individualistic Western society. Employee expectations for leadership, communication, performance reviews, and decision-making are impacted by these variations. Research indicates that HRM systems created in individualistic settings might be less successful when used in collectivist settings without modification. By analyzing how race, gender, class, culture, and historical disadvantage interact to influence organizational outcomes, intersectionality theory expands knowledge of workplace experiences (Holvino, 2008). Intersectional perspectives in the South African context show that organizational attitudes and behaviors must take historical experiences and structural injustices into account in addition to culture (Segalo, 2015).

According to the research, effective HRM in African environments necessitates striking a compromise between locally rooted cultural values and global management methods. The combined impact of African particularism, cultural disparities, and apartheid legacies on opposition to Western HRM techniques, especially in South African public sector organizations, is still largely unexplored. This disparity emphasizes the necessity for empirical studies that look at how cultural and historical elements interact to influence reactions to universalist HRM systems.

3.0 Methodology

This study used a mixed-methods research methodology to look into the effects of particularism and universalism in South African public organizations as well as the reasons for opposition to Western management and HRM practices. The mixed-methods approach offered a thorough grasp of the topic being studied by combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Creswell (2014) asserts that mixed-methods research improved the validity and dependability of findings by allowing researchers to leverage the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. African particularism, opposition to universalism, cultural diversity, and the impact of colonialism and apartheid were among the elements that the quantitative component aimed to quantify. The goal of the qualitative component was to gain a deeper understanding of how managers and employees perceived and experienced both indigenous African values and Western management approaches. Triangulation was made possible by the combination of these techniques, which enhanced the validity and reliability of the study results (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

Research Population and Sampling

Managers and workers in the Tshwane Municipality in Gauteng Province, South Africa, made up the study's target group. Because the municipality employed people from a variety of racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, it was chosen as an example of a diverse public sector organization. Examining problems with universalism, particularism, and organizational opposition to Western management approaches was made possible by this diversity.

A sample of 250 people was chosen from the municipality's various departments. Non-probability purposive sampling was used in the investigation. Researchers were able to choose volunteers with pertinent skills, backgrounds, and traits associated with the study's goals by using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2014). Human resource managers, department managers, supervisors, and staff members with enough organizational experience to offer knowledgeable viewpoints on workplace culture and management techniques were among the participants. Male and female participants from a variety of age groups, racial backgrounds, and work levels made up the sample.

This diversity was crucial for analyzing how demographic factors affected the organization's conceptions of particularism and universalism.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were the two main techniques used to gather data.

Questionnaire Survey

A structured questionnaire created from the literature on particularism, universalism, African management philosophy, and organizational culture served as the quantitative data gathering tool. There were five sections to the questionnaire, which was given out in English. Demographic data, such as gender, age, race, educational attainment, and years of work experience, were collected in the first section. Perceptions of African particularism and its impact on opposition to Western universalism were assessed in the second segment. Perceived cultural differences between South Africa and the West were evaluated in the third component. Attitudes on Westernized HRM methods and the impact of colonialism and apartheid were assessed in the fourth segment. The elements that contribute to organizational resistance to Western management approaches were examined in the last section. Participants' answers were measured using a five-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree." Likert scales made statistical analysis easier and made it possible to quantify attitudes and perceptions consistently (Malhotra, 2010).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Managers and staff members participated in semi-structured interviews to supplement the survey data. Open-ended questions based on the goals and hypotheses of the study were included in the interview guide. Interviews gave participants the chance to go into further detail about their perspectives and experiences with regard to Western management techniques, African values, organizational culture, and the effects of colonial history and apartheid. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. A more complex understanding of the research problem was made possible by qualitative data, which offered contextual explanations for patterns found in the quantitative findings.

Reliability and Validity

For the study to be of high quality, the validity and reliability of the research tools had to be guaranteed. Validity was the degree to which an instrument measured what it was supposed to measure, whereas reliability was the consistency and stability of a measurement tool (Elliott, 2013). The questionnaire was pilot-tested with a small sample of participants who shared traits with the target demographic in order to improve dependability. Items that were unclear or ambiguous were revised based on feedback from the pilot research. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to evaluate internal consistency dependability; values greater than 0.70 were deemed acceptable (Burns & Bush, 2014). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were used to assess construct validity. Factor analysis verified if the questionnaire items accurately reflected the desired concepts and revealed the underlying dimensions of the variables being measured. A thorough analysis of pertinent literature and discussions with specialists in organizational behavior and human resource management were used to establish content validity.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze quantitative data. Frequencies, means, standard deviations, and percentages are examples of descriptive statistics that were used to summarize participant responses and demographic data. The study hypotheses were tested using inferential statistical methods. African particularism, opposition to universalism, cultural diversity, and the impact of colonialism and apartheid were all examined using multiple regression analysis. To ascertain the direction and intensity of correlations between variables, correlation analysis was also carried out.

One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and independent-samples t-tests were used to evaluate differences across demographic groups. These tests ascertained if opinions toward universalism and Western management approaches were significantly influenced by factors like gender, age, race, and social standing. Thematic analysis was used to examine the data from qualitative interviews. Finding, classifying, and categorizing recurrent themes and patterns in the interview transcripts were all part of the thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To support interpretation and improve the study's overall validity, themes that emerged from the interviews were contrasted with quantitative findings.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the whole research procedure, ethical guidelines were closely adhered to. All participants gave their informed consent prior to data collection, and participation in the study was entirely voluntary. The goal of the study, the participants' freedom to withdraw at any time, and the steps taken to ensure their privacy and anonymity were all explained to the participants.

The final report had no personally identifiable information, and all information gathered was safely preserved and utilized only for educational purposes. Prior to the start of data collection, authorization was requested from the Tshwane Municipality and ethical approval was acquired from the relevant institutional research ethics committee.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

A total of 250 administrators and staff members of a public organization in the Tshwane Municipality of South Africa received questionnaires. 232 of these were returned and found to be usable, resulting in a 92.8% response rate. In order to ensure adequate diversity for inferential analysis, the sample included respondents from both managerial and non-managerial positions, as well as representation from a variety of racial, age, and gender categories.

4.1 Quantitative findings

Reliability and Measurement Adequacy

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to evaluate the reliability of internal consistency. Every construct showed acceptable to exceptional dependability, above the suggested cutoff point of 0.70.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's α
African Particularism	10	.87
Resistance to Universalism	10	.89
Cultural Difference (South African vs. Western)	10	.85
Apartheid Influence	8	.83
Resistance to Western HRM Practices	8	.86

These findings support their potential for additional statistical analysis by confirming good internal consistency across all measurement scales.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Strong perceptions of cultural influence on HRM practices are suggested by descriptive data, which show typically high levels of agreement across all important dimensions.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 232)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Interpretation
African Particularism	4.12	0.63	High agreement
Resistance to Universalism	3.98	0.71	High agreement
Cultural Difference (South African vs. Western)	4.25	0.58	Very high agreement
Apartheid Influence	4.31	0.60	Very high agreement
Resistance to Western HRM Practices	4.05	0.66	High agreement

Apartheid influence had the highest mean score ($M = 4.31$), suggesting that respondents strongly believe that historical causes have shaped current organizational behavior.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine relationships between the study variables.

Table 3: Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. African Particularism	1				
2. Resistance to Universalism	.68	1			
3. Cultural Difference	.72	.65	1		
4. Apartheid Influence	.60	.71	.66	1	
5. Resistance to Western HRM	.74	.77	.69	.73	1

Note: $p < .01$

The findings show that every variable has a strong, positive, and statistically significant association. The theoretical idea of culturally motivated resistance was supported by the substantial

correlation between African particularism and opposition to Western HRM practices ($r = .74$, $p < .01$).

4.4 Regression Analysis

The predictive efficacy of African particularism, cultural differences, and apartheid influence on resistance to universalism was examined using multiple regression analysis.

Table 4: Regression Results (DV: Resistance to Universalism)

Predictor	β	t	p
African Particularism	.42	6.85	< .001
Cultural Difference	.31	5.12	< .001
Apartheid Influence	.37	6.01	< .001

Model fit statistics indicated strong explanatory power:

$$R^2 = 0.71$$

$$\text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.69$$

$$F = 88.45, p < .001$$

The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.71$) indicates that the three predictors which are Apartheid Influence, Cultural Difference, and African Particularism collectively explain 71% of the variance in the dependent variable. The model's high explanatory power is demonstrated by the fact that these predictors can account for a sizable portion of the variation in the outcome. The Adjusted $R^2 = 0.69$, which is just slightly less than the R^2 value, indicates that the model's explanatory strength is still strong even after taking into consideration the number of predictors included. This minor decline suggests that the predictors make a substantial contribution to the model and that the explained variation is not solely due to model complexity. Additionally, the model as a whole is statistically significant ($F = 88.45$, $p < .001$), meaning that when the predictors are taken into account collectively, they much better explain the dependent variable than would be predicted by chance.

Model fit statistics indicated strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.71$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.69$, $F = 88.45$, $p < .001$). The model explains 71% of the variance in resistance to universalism, suggesting that African Particularism, Cultural Difference, and Apartheid Influence collectively make a substantial contribution to predicting resistance to universalism. The remaining 29% of the variance remains unexplained, indicating that additional factors not included in the model, as well as random error, may also influence resistance to universalism. Among the predictors, African Particularism ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by Apartheid Influence ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$) and Cultural Difference ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < .001$). All predictors made statistically significant positive contributions to the model.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing Results

All hypotheses were tested at a 95% confidence level.

Table 5: Hypothesis Summary

Hypothesis Statement		Result
H1	African Particularism significantly influences resistance to universalism.	Supported
H2	South African culture differs significantly from Western culture.	Supported
H3	Apartheid influences resistance to Western HRM practices.	Supported
H4	South African organizations exhibit resistance to Western HRM practices.	Supported
H5	Apartheid significantly influences cultural resistance in organizations.	Supported

All null hypotheses were rejected.

Group Differences Analysis

Gender Differences (t-test)

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test

Gender	M	t	p
Male	4.02	2.11	.036
Female	4.18	—	—

Male and female respondents differed statistically significantly ($p < .05$), with female respondents expressing more opposition to universalism.

Age Differences (ANOVA)

Table 7: ANOVA Results for Age Groups

Age Group (Years)	M
20–30	3.89
31–40	4.05
41–50	4.22
51 and above	4.30

Age-group differences were statistically significant, according to ANOVA results ($F = 5.67$, $p < .001$). Compared to younger respondents, older respondents showed greater opposition to Western universalism.

The main claim that African particularism has a major impact on opposition to Western universalist HRM techniques in South African public organizations is strongly supported empirically by the findings. The results also demonstrate that cultural differences between South African and Western institutions and the legacy of apartheid continue to be important factors influencing organizational views. All independent variables strongly predict resistance to universalism, according to regression analysis, with African particularism emerging as the most significant predictor. Furthermore, it was discovered that demographic factors including gender

and age moderated perceptions of resistance, highlighting the significance of intersectionality in organizational behavior.

4.6 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative results from semi-structured interviews with particular managers and staff members of the Tshwane Municipality are presented in this section. The qualitative component's goal was to increase knowledge of how apartheid legacies, Western universalism, and African particularism affect organizational procedures and worker behavior. To find recurrent themes and meanings in the participants' answers, thematic analysis was employed.

Emerging Themes

Five major themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Cultural tension between African ideals and Western HRM systems
2. Ubuntu and collectivism's impact on behavior at work
3. The idea that Western universalist methods are inflexible
4. Apartheid's legacy and mistrust of established institutions
5. Preference for flexible decision-making and relational leadership

Theme 1: Cultural Tension between Western HRM and African Values

A discrepancy between African cultural norms and Western HRM systems was frequently mentioned by participants. Formal HR policies were deemed "too rigid" and "not reflective of real-life situations" by numerous employees.

A participant said:

"The policies are clear, but they don't take community or family duties into account. Rules are occasionally implemented without taking into account our circumstances.

This conflict was also noted by managers, who pointed out that standard operating procedures frequently don't take into account workplace contextual circumstances.

Theme 2: Influence of Ubuntu and Collectivism

Ubuntu became a dominating cultural framework that shaped expectations in the workplace. Values like respect, cooperation, and group decision-making were highlighted by the participants.

One respondent clarified:

We don't make decisions on our own in our culture. We confer, we talk, and we come to a consensus. Ubuntu operates in this manner.

Western individual performance systems, which some participants believed encouraged competition rather than cooperation, were frequently contrasted with this collectivist perspective.

Theme 3: Perceived Rigidity of Universalist HR Practices

Western HRM systems were often characterized by participants as being too rigid and rigid. Concerns were raised about promotion standards, disciplinary actions, and performance rating systems.

A manager observed:

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Everything is determined by policy. Even in situations where flexibility is obviously warranted, there is little room for discretion.

Departmental opposition and unofficial rule adaptation were influenced by this perception.

Theme 4: Legacy of Apartheid and Institutional Mistrust

The long-lasting effects of apartheid on trust in organizational systems were a recurring subject in the interviews. Participants connected past injustices to present-day conflicts and disparities in the workplace.

A participant said:

The workplace of today is inextricably linked to that of the past. There are still discrepancies in how people are treated as a result of apartheid.

Skepticism of Western systems, which were occasionally seen as continuations of earlier restrictive structures, was linked to this history.

Theme 5: Preference for Relational Leadership

Relationship-based, empathetic, and consultative leadership styles were strongly preferred by participants above rigid authority and regulations.

One worker clarified:

"A good manager is not just someone who enforces rules; they are also someone who understands people."

This shows a distinct preference for African relational leadership styles, which place a higher value on social ties and interpersonal trust than on formal protocols.

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative results show a significant cultural difference between African particularist ideals and Western universalist HRM systems. The significance of Ubuntu, relational leadership, and contextual flexibility in organizational decision-making was emphasized by managers and staff. Simultaneously, Western HRM approaches were often seen as inflexible, impersonal, and inadequately cognizant of sociocultural factors.

By fostering skepticism of formal institutional processes, the legacy of apartheid exacerbates these beliefs. Overall, the qualitative results corroborate the quantitative findings, demonstrating that cultural values, past experiences, and organizational realities are the main causes of South African public organizations' opposition to Western HRM approaches.

Overall, the study offers solid proof that, primarily because of cultural and historical contextual variables, Western HRM methods are not widely adopted within South African public organizations.

Discussion

This study examined how opposition to Western universalist human resource management (HRM) approaches within a South African public organization in the Tshwane Municipality was influenced by African particularism, cultural differences, and the legacy of apartheid. In order to provide a thorough knowledge of organizational behavior, the study used a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative interview data. Overall, the

results show a continuous pattern: cultural beliefs, past experiences, and organizational realities systematically shape opposition to Western HRM. The claim that HRM systems in South Africa function within a hybrid cultural environment impacted by both African and Western perspectives is strengthened by the integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence (Inyang, 2009; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Quantitative and Qualitative Integration of Key Findings

African Particularism and Resistance to Universalism

African particularism and resistance to universalism were positively correlated, according to quantitative findings ($r = .68$, $\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$). Regression research also verified that opposition to universalist HRM methods was best predicted by African particularism.

Qualitative evidence provides substantial support for these conclusions. Decision-making was consistently characterized by participants as relational and context-dependent rather than rule-bound. Organizational regulations "do not consider family or community responsibilities," according to one responder, underscoring the tension between inflexible HR systems and actual social realities. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (1998) universalism-particularism theory, which contends that particularist cultures place a higher value on connections and situational judgment than on formal norms, is supported by this. Additionally, it is consistent with Van der Walt's (1997) emphasis on the importance of communal bonds in African value systems.

Additionally, African collectivist tendencies were reinforced by the Ubuntu principle, which emerged prominently in qualitative responses (Mangaliso, 2001; Inyang, 2008). This suggests that resistance is a preference for culturally appropriate and relationship-sensitive HRM systems rather than a hostility to structure per se.

Cultural Differences between South African and Western Systems

The quantitative results demonstrated a high degree of agreement that there are major differences between the organizational cultures of South Africa and the West ($M = 4.25$). A high correlation between cultural differences and resistance to universalism was further supported by correlation analysis ($r = .65$, $p < .01$). This view was supported by qualitative evidence, which showed that participants frequently contrasted African collectivist norms with Western individualized HR systems. Workers emphasized group harmony, consensus-building, and consultation as crucial working ideals. This lends credence to Hofstede's (2001) idea of cultural aspects, especially with relation to individualism versus collectivism. It also supports the claim made by Dartey-Baah (2013) that African organizational environments are hybrid systems influenced by both Western and indigenous cultures. Therefore, it is impossible to view South African organizations as exclusively Western or African; rather, they reflect a hybrid cultural framework where universalist HRM techniques are constantly modified to meet local demands (Inyang, 2009).

Influence of Apartheid Legacy

Apartheid influence was the most highly rated construct ($M = 4.31$) according to the quantitative data, and regression analysis verified its considerable predictive potential ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .001$). Strong correlations between resistance to Western HRM techniques and the legacy of apartheid were also seen in correlation data ($r = .73$, $p < .01$).

This statistical pattern was highly supported by qualitative observations. Participants frequently connected apartheid-era structures to current organizational mistrust and inequality. "You cannot

separate today's workplace from the past," said one respondent. This bolsters the claims made by Booysen and Nkomo (2010) that apartheid still influences how organizations behave and how fairness is perceived. Additionally, it is consistent with Oelofsen (2015), who emphasizes how historical inequality still exists in post-apartheid organizational systems.

Crucially, apartheid's legacy arose as a psychological and institutional effect that shaped HRM systems' legitimacy, acceptability, and trust in addition to being a historical issue. This supports Segalo's (2015) claim that organizational identity and interaction patterns are still influenced by historical trauma.

Resistance to Western HRM Practices

The quantitative results showed strong connections between all independent factors and resistance, as well as high levels of resistance to Western HRM techniques ($M = 4.05$). Resistance is multifaceted and influenced by historical and cultural factors, as shown by the regression model ($R^2 = 0.71$).

This statistical trend was given depth by qualitative observations. Western HRM systems were characterized by participants as "rigid," "policy-driven," and deficient in adaptability. The lack of contextual awareness in performance management and disciplinary procedures was especially criticized.

Resistance was not unqualified, though. Rather, participants reported that regulations were informally modified to account for local reality. This bolsters the claim made by Inyang (2009) that Western HRM approaches are frequently used selectively in African settings. Therefore, resistance should be viewed as adaptive reinterpretation rather than rejection, representing organizational attempts to strike a balance between local circumstances and global standards.

Leadership Preferences and Organisational Behaviour

Qualitative results showed a high preference for relational leadership even though it was not directly measured quantitatively as a separate construct. Workers preferred interpersonal understanding, empathy, and consultation over strict hierarchies.

The quantitative findings on African particularism and cultural difference are indirectly consistent with this finding. Additionally, it upholds the values of Ubuntu-based leadership, which emphasize collective accountability, relational ethics, and human dignity (Mangaliso, 2001; Inyang, 2008). Leadership legitimacy in this environment is profoundly relational, as seen by the participants' repeated description of a "good manager" as someone who knows people rather than just implementing laws.

Demographic Differences and Intersectionality

Significant variations were found by quantitative analysis according to age ($p = .001$) and gender ($p = .036$). While female respondents expressed somewhat higher levels of hostility to universalism, older respondents showed greater resistance. Intersectionality theory, which contends that social identities including age, gender, and past experiences interact to form workplace attitudes, supports these findings (Holvino, 2008; Segalo, 2015).

Additional explanation is provided by qualitative data. Older workers regularly brought up experiences from the apartheid era, indicating that exposure to the past affects how people view justice and authority. Younger workers, on the other hand, seemed more receptive to global HRM systems, probably as a result of their greater exposure to organizational procedures and foreign

schooling. Booysen and Nkomo's (2010) claim about distinct workplace experiences in South Africa is supported by the possibility that gender inequalities reflect differences in organizational roles and experiences rather than underlying cultural differences.

Theoretical Implications

The results incorporate historical context, specifically apartheid, as a structural driver of organizational behavior, extending the universalism–particularism thesis of Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998). Additionally, they show that cultural values are constantly altered by historical and sociopolitical factors, supporting Hofstede's (2001) theory of cultural dimensions.

Significantly, the study advances African management research supporting culturally grounded HRM systems, especially Ubuntu-based strategies that put relational ethics and group welfare first (Mangaliso, 2001; Inyang, 2008; 2009).

Practical Implications

The results indicate that strict implementation of Western HRM systems in South African public organizations is likely to result in opposition and decreased efficacy. Rather, companies ought to implement hybrid HRM models that incorporate:

- Efficiency of standardized performance systems.
- Adaptable, context-aware implementation (cultural alignment).
- Relational leadership techniques (Ubuntu principles).

To increase the adoption and execution of HR policies, HR professionals should place a high priority on cultural competence training and participative decision-making frameworks.

5.0 Conclusion

The combination of quantitative and qualitative results offers strong proof that African particularism, cultural diversity, and the legacy of apartheid are the main causes of opposition to Western universalist HRM approaches in South African public organizations. Employees reinterpret and modify Western systems within culturally relevant frames rather than completely rejecting them. This emphasizes how crucial it is to create context-sensitive, hybrid HRM models that take into account the intricate socio-historical backdrop of South Africa. Overall, by showing that effective HRM in African contexts must be culturally grounded, historically informed, and relationally oriented, the study adds to existing discussions on decolonizing management theory.

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