
Guest editorial: Organizational and management practices in COVID-19 business environments in Africa – interactive models, structures and strategies

Guest editorial

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It is known fact that the world has witnessed several outbreaks of infectious diseases (such as SARS, Zika and MERS) in the first two decades of the 21st century that expanded across several continents (Kretzschmar *et al.*, 2022). It is also a known fact that these outbreaks variously grew out to a pandemic and caused a large number of deaths. There is no doubt that all these outbreaks required significant efforts in mitigation and control measures since they caused millions of deaths worldwide and disrupted the functional arrangements of business, which collectively had not only social impact but enormous economic impact. Yet, the COVID-19 pandemic was deemed to have had the largest effect on both humanity and the industrial space in almost all countries in the world in ways unimaginable before the year 2020 (Kretzschmar *et al.*, 2022). As it was highlighted in the editorial of the first special issue, the world has changed rapidly since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sanda, 2023a). Managing this change, especially during the epic of the pandemic, was probably the single most difficult structural and managerial challenge encountered by organizations and other business entities, especially those operating in African industrial environment (Sanda, 2023a). Aside the human health implication of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were also prevailed challenges associated with the effective and efficient functionalities of organizational structures and their associated practices models and strategies. This showed that the consequential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the global industrial environments transcended human factor challenges associated with the effective and efficient interactiveness of human systems and organizations' practice models, structures and strategies for enhancing performance and productivities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the criticality of the application of information technology in most organizational systems became even more evident. For example, in the education sector, the usage of virtual platforms as instructional media for teaching-learning dynamics across was very evident. Sanda (2022) observed that many organizations in the education sector re-strategized their practice models by re-structuring the human-structures systemic interactions to offset the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemics on their operations. In this vein, a comprehensive integrated information technology-led system, strategies and plans to enhance continuity in their teaching and learning activities were implemented by such institutions (Sanda, 2022). Virtual interactive platforms that sought to address specific educational problems, including real-time visualization of teaching, and learning activities by instructors and students were implemented to enable effective checks and administration of academic activities. This was based on the argument that the viability of digitized platforms was proven in the interactive social media environment and, as such will also be viable in the educational social space (Sanda, 2022).

Since the overriding challenge with all modeling is to find models that are complex enough to reflect sufficient details of a system, but simple enough to not get lost in the jungle of details (Kretzschmar *et al.*, 2022), it is imperative to understand the functional consequences of the



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interactiveness between human systems and practices models, structures and strategies of organizations in a generic way. Such understanding might have helped enhance the emergence of knowledge relative to a large range of organizational parameters and situations that evolved during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this vein, addressing the main challenge to the operationalities of organizations in the African business and industrial environment by providing insight into the interactiveness of human systems with practices models, structures and strategies, as interventions to mitigate constraints to organizational functionalities during the COVID-19 pandemic is very key. As it was observed by [Sanda \(2017\)](#), this change, manifested by globalization, liberalization, technological changes and advancement, and market changes rapidly transformed the business environment in which organizations operated during the pandemic. This affirmed the general view among management scholars that organizations are embedded in social, cultural, economic and political contexts (see [Kuada, 2012](#)), with sociocultural issues, such as power distance, embeddedness and collectivism shaping how most organizations operating in the African business and industrial environments are managed and led. Thus, using as a point of departure [Sanda's \(2017\)](#) argument that an organizational environment is a manifestation of a society which is stochastic in nature, the environmental dynamics of an organization might not be expected to remain stable in the midst of the rapid changes that were associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. According to an [UNCTAD study Report \(2020\)](#), even though the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed more consumers in developing countries to buy online many e-commerce businesses, in least developed nations, they have seen a slump in sales. Based on hard-to-collect data from 23 countries, mainly in Africa and Asia, a stark divide was found between the pandemic's impact on different actors in the digital economy ([UNCTAD Report, 2020](#)). As it is highlighted in the [UNCTAD study Report \(2020\)](#), most businesses have struggled to adapt and scale-up their operations online, despite the growing demand for e-commerce necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The human factor challenges and changes that occurred in the operating environments of organizations during the epic of the COVID-19 pandemic made it imperative to identify the human-oriented strategies that were introduced by the managers of business to help the future-oriented enhancement of their organizations' productivities. In this regard, the future outlook of an organization's productivity and performance can be situated in the intersection of changes in technology, organizational lifestyle, organizational diversity and geopolitics ([Hammel and Prahalad, 1994](#)) of globalization and economic liberalization. As such, there is the need for understanding the requisite organizational and management models, as well as organizational structures and systems that were developed for the efficient and effective management of the human-oriented transformational developments in organizations. This is based on [Sanda's \(2017\)](#) notion that for a manager to have the ability to lead an organization efficiently and effectively in a world of technological change, globalization, competition and social responsibility, as imposed by the COVID-19 dynamics, the manager might need to work effectively as a reflective leader manifesting self-awareness. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, such a manager was expected to have the capability of understanding organizational dynamics and how to improve efficiency and effectiveness and possess the ability to develop, adapt or adopt organizational development practices to lead an organization to success. This observation has brought to the fore an argument that though knowledge advancement has led to methodological refinements in human work and behavior assessment, it is imperative that normative procedures and associated guidelines and standards are also established to make visible the existing tensions among various testing techniques ([Sanda, 2023b](#)). Making visible these tensions are of interest and highlights the need for expansive research that could provide the path to developing innovative systemic and structural work-oriented activities ([Sanda, 2023b](#)). Though there are justified research boundaries in different scientific disciplines toward the development of such

innovative practices, complimented by the requisite organizational structure and strategies, such differences have now waned with the advent of multidisciplinary research, the application of such multi-theoretical conceptions and methodologies in understanding human work activity is valid and rational (Sanda, 2023b). Thus, the cross-adaption of theoretical concepts and methodologies has resulted in further advances in understanding human performance in organizations (Sanda, 2023b). Based on the notion that the work climates of most organizations operating in the African industrial environment are characterized by variety of dichotomous problems and tensions (Sanda, 2017; Bolden and Kirk, 2009), Binan's (1997) long-standing argument that African society has historically faced momentous challenges remains of interest and thus needs visions of the future through research and knowledge dissemination. However, there appears to be a dearth of studies that explore the interactive dynamics of human systems and practice models, organizational structures and organizational strategies that prevailed during the COVID-19 pandemic in the African business and industrial environments, with little attention given in the extant literature to how organizations in Africa organized in their own contexts (Sanda, 2017; Nkomo *et al.*, 2015; Kuada, 2010).

As it is espoused in the editorial of the first special issue (Sanda, 2023a), what empirical or conceptual answers do we have on the mitigation of functional challenges imposed by the pandemic the COVID-19 on the systemic interactivities between humans, practices models, organizational structures and strategies? Based on the notion that Africa has a unique industrial environment which positions it as an emerging market economy (Sanda, 2017), empirical and conceptual knowledge is very important since it stands to enhance our contemporary understanding of designing effective and efficient organization and human resource management systems in a pandemic-oriented business and industrial environments, especially in Africa. Thus, arguing from the perspectives of Easterby-Smith *et al.* (2012), this second special issue of *AJEMS* sought to move away from the notion that organization and management research should focus only on the nature and consequences of managerial actions with business research focusing only the determinants of corporate performance by bringing together nine papers that provide new insights that add to our understanding of the contemporary Afrocentric perspective on organizational design and human resources management advancement in pandemic-oriented industrial work environments. The papers provide relevant insights that make visible the interactive dynamics of human systems and practice models, organizational structures and strategies and their implications on organizational and management practices during the COVID-19 pandemic in the business and industrial environments of different African countries. The papers variously discussed the development, implementations and functionalities of different country-context practice models, organizational structures and strategies by different African organizational entities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the implications on both employees and organizational productiveness, in terms of the creation of climate for innovation, creativity and workflow.

In light of the above and with the development of knowledge and understanding of organizational development becoming increasingly important as a focus area in business research and strategic management practice, the first paper by Olatunde, Nathaniel, Gento Municio, Angel Manuel Awodele and Imoleayo examined the survival strategies adopted by quantity surveying firms (QSFs) in Lagos State, Nigeria with the intention of improving their performance in the first paper. The study was informed by the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the ways and manners businesses are conducted worldwide. Arguing from perspectives in the extant literature that SMEs are generally heavily impacted by the disruption caused by COVID-19 pandemics and specifically construction industry SMEs, due to their limited financial resources and their vulnerability to depend on the banks for finance as well as their lack of capability to deal with unexpected situations, the study provided insights on the main survival strategies adopted by QSFs in Lagos State Nigeria during the

COVID-19 disruptions which included downsizing, contract staffing, salary cuts, work from home and service negotiation strategies.

In the second paper, Mildred Deri and colleagues, as a point of departure, used the argument that the hospitality and tourism industry was not only largely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic but was one of the hardest-hit industries in the world ([Campbell and kahwash, 2020](#)) to assess the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operations of hotels within the Bono region of Ghana and the coping strategies adopted to enhance their operationalities. In their findings, the authors outlined measures used by hotels to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic on their operations, including the application of hygiene standards, employee training and awareness, reduction of employees' guest contact and ensuring a safer environment for both guests and employees.

The third paper by Osaro Aigbogun, Mathews Matinari and Olawole Fawehinmi was informed by the perspective that the pharmaceutical industry was riddled with operational inefficiencies, which negatively impact competitiveness ([United Nations Industrial Development Organization, 2021](#)). Using this as a point of departure, the authors explored the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the operationalities of firms in the pharmaceutical industry in Zimbabwe by examining the empirical link between firms' usage of certain technology predictors in e-marketing. Underlined by the argument in the extant literature that the COVID-19 pandemic challenged many logistical procedures and punctuated several distribution channels in the pharmaceutical industry and which challenge made it difficult for firms to craft a functioning supply chain (e.g. [Dovbischuk, 2022](#); [Lozada-Contreras et al., 2022](#)), the authors situated that the pandemic accelerated the environmental change within the business context of logistics and supply chain management (LSCM), with technology playing a significant role in driving successful LSCM complex interrelationships ([Stank et al., 2019](#)). The authors provided analytical insight that situate that leadership support and perceived usefulness are significant predictors of e-marketing continuance intentions while perceived susceptibility and perceived severity on e-marketing use continuance intention were not significant.

The fourth paper by Rovier Djeudja and Yang Salomon evaluated the contribution of the business climate on the sustainability of Cameroonian SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the notion that a good quality business environment improves the level of private investment and, in turn, growth ([Escribano et al., 2013](#)), the authors applied the simple LOGIT model to conduct a quantitative study. They outlined series of findings showing factors that negatively influenced the sustainability of Cameroonian SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic and also made a case on the importance of need for institutional bodies to establish rigorous policies to support and improve the business climate as additives to their resilience.

In the fifth paper, Wael Elgharib applied the "Event Study" method that addresses the impact of a particular event or group of events on to study the efficiency of the Egyptian stock market by testing the effect of COVID-19 outbreaks advertising on stock returns listed in the country's index EGX100. In the paper, the author argues for the rationale behind the usage of the event study approach, which the author qualified as a new methodology to analyze three results. The author outlined findings that situated the efficiency levels of the Egyptian market during the COVID-19 pandemic the effect it has on stock exchange returns.

In the sixth paper, Solomon Yeboah, Yasmeen Haider and George Amoako explored the relationship between buyer–seller interactions and customer satisfaction and the moderating role of COVID-19 protocols implementations in the small apparel fashion enterprises. The study was inspired by the observation that apparel fashion entrepreneurs like any other enterprises had to contend with the impact of the change that was brought by the COVID-19 pandemic on management practices, especially those related to buyer–seller interactions and customer satisfaction in a typical apparel shopping environment ([Runfola et al., 2021](#)). By dividing the effect of buyer–seller interactions on customer satisfaction into three constructs,

namely, interactions relating to the overall customers shopping experience, payment process and in-store interactions, and using COVID-19 protocols implementations as a moderator, the authors made arguments to show that while in-store interactions, shopping experience and payment processes directly influence customer satisfaction, the implementation of COVID-19 protocols failed to moderate the relationship between buyer–seller interactions and customer satisfaction.

The seventh article by Obi Damoah used the resource-based view to provide an understanding on how male and female entrepreneurs differ in their perception of the internationalization critical success factors. Using the exploratory qualitative research approach to analyze the perceptions of male and female small business entrepreneurs in Ghana engaged in exports, the author argues that evidence exist to suggest that male and female exporters differ their perceptions of key internationalization success factors. The author provided analytical insight on situations where both gender showed similar degree of basic knowledge on a few success factors and those where they differed.

The eighth article by Wisdom Akpalu and Kwami Adanu is complementary to this special issue and looks at the role of time discounting as a determinant of COVID-19 masking among artisanal fisherfolks in Ghana. Inspired by the notion that daily COVID-19-related morbidity and mortality rates were high globally during the pandemic and masking was considered a reliable method of preventing its infections, the authors, in this study, sought to understand the rationale behind the very low rate of voluntary compliance with masking in most parts of the world, especially in developing countries. The authors used a logit model to investigate the determinants of the decision to wear a mask and surmised that feel-good benefits from pro-social behavior and from wearing fashionable masks are substantial. The authors outlined findings that showed that masking compliance increases in time discounting for fishmongers, suggesting that private benefits from pro-social behavior or feel-good benefits from wearing a mask are very strong.

The ninth article by Kwesi Amponsah-Tawiah, Nana Kojo Ayimadu Baafi and Justice Mensah also complements this special issue by seeking to ascertain the mechanism through which an employee engages at the workplace when faced with an uncivil act. The authors sought to provide an understanding as to whether emotional intelligence matter regarding the influencing dynamics between co-worker incivility and employee engagement among Ghanaian bank workers. The authors provided an insight into their application of the appraisal theory (Biggs *et al.*, 2017) and a cross-sectional survey design to sample bank employees in Ghana for their study. They also made an analytical argument that co-worker incivility significantly and negatively predicted employee engagement, while emotional intelligence predicted employee engagement positively and serve as a mediator between co-worker incivility and engagement.

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