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Using cultural metaphors to understand management in the Caribbean

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For several years, inspired by Martin Gannon's concept of using metaphors to describe cultures, students in international management at the University of the West Indies have written short papers exploring Caribbean cultural metaphors and how they relate to management. These have included: the Rum Shop, Carnival in Trinidad & Tobago, Crop Over and Pudding and Souse in Barbados, Sunday Lunch, Nine Mornings in St Vincent & the Grenadines, and the Blue Hole of Belize. There are lots more, but this gives an idea of the wide array of metaphors that can serve to help understand the West Indian/Caribbean culture. The *IJCCM* published a couple of metaphors in earlier volumes and we thought it might be timely to prepare a paper on Caribbean metaphor. We wrote to ask if such a paper would be of interest and got a response asking if we would be interested in doing a special issue on the Caribbean. Thus, this special issue was born. We could hardly say 'no', as we have been 'complaining' about the lack of management research on the Caribbean. We believe the papers presented in this special issue provide an interesting and insightful contribution to the literature on culture and management in the Caribbean. Nurse and Punnett (2002) noted this as one of the critical areas for research in the region.

The metaphors presented here are 'No ball! Ethical management and social capital in West Indian society', '*Calypso* in the Caribbean: a musical metaphor for Barbados', 'Caribbean liming: a metaphor for building social capital', 'Carry mi ackee go a Jamaican market: ackee as a metaphor for the organization and environment of Jamaican business' and 'Yoruba proverbs as cultural metaphor for understanding management in the Caribbean'. The reader will find that these metaphors provide an array of ideas for understanding the West Indian/Caribbean context better, and considering how these relate to management. It has been interesting and informative for the guest editors preparing this special issue. We are grateful to the editors of *IJCCM* for giving us this opportunity. In the following discussion we present some basic information on the West Indies to provide a context for understanding the metaphors which constitute this special issue.

The West Indies (sometimes simply referred to as the Caribbean, although technically, the Caribbean refers to all the countries bordering the Caribbean Sea) is a collection of islands in the form of an archipelago (Lewis, 1968) spanning some 1,500 miles from the north (just southeast of Florida) to the south (just north of the tip of South America). These islands were occupied by

various superpowers (the United Kingdom, France, Holland and Spain) for many years (Griffith, 2001). The influences of these countries have substantially impacted the lifestyles and behaviours of the people of the region (Paul, 2007). This influence has extended to the models of business found in these countries, and the social norms, values, beliefs and life choices are a reflection of western culture in general (Lewis, 1968; Paul, 2007). At the same time, the culture of the region was significantly shaped by the slave trade and the centuries-long system of master and slave or master and servant relationships. Depending on the island or origin, the peoples of the Caribbean adopted the patterns of behaviour and practices of the colonial powers (for example, the French, Spanish, English), but there was a creolization process that impacted both the colonizers and the colonized (Paul, 2007). Paul, referring to the work of Kamau Brathwaite, noted that Europeans were influenced by the African culture, just as the Africans were influenced by the Europeans. This has been a catalyst for the development of a rich and diverse culture in the region.

The Caribbean exhibits a strong African influence in terms of culture and traditions, as well as strong European and North American influences, combined with Chinese and Indian influences. The folklore, food, language and looks include African, Chinese, European and Indian tastes, preferences, nuances and genetic profiles. The culinary culture of the Caribbean is seen in its foliage, including fruit trees. Many of the traditional foods are Creole versions of either African or European dishes. The Europeans brought and planted trees from their mother countries and the slaves brought seeds from the African continent and these still define the Caribbean landscape. The ackee, one of the metaphors in this issue, is one of these fruits. The Ananci stories which are still told by the older people in the region have their genesis in West Africa (Punnett and Greenidge, 2009).

Religion was part of the strategy used by Europeans to acculturate the natives, indentured servants, and particularly the Africans who were brought to the islands and made slaves. This is still seen in the dominant religions in the region – for example, islands with a Spanish influence have a higher density of Catholic churches and citizens, those influenced by the British are more likely to be Anglican, although this Anglican influence has declined in recent decades. Most interesting is the development of 'Creole religions' in the islands of the Caribbean which are quite unique and dynamic (Olmos and Paravisin-Gebert, 2003). These religious traditions such as Santeria, Vodoo, Orisha, etc. are based on beliefs brought with African slaves to the Caribbean (which survived in spite of European attempts to suppress them), combined with Christian beliefs. The West Indian cultural identity is also reflected in speech. Allsopp (2001) argued that the Caribbean is the collective of speech, lifestyle and manner; however, he suggested that a Caribbean citizen is best identified by speech patterns that are uniquely Caribbean and which distinguish them from other English speakers. These speech patterns are strongly influenced by the African languages that the slaves brought with them. The Caribbean Creole language is thus a product of mixed cultures.

In countries colonized by the British Empire, cricket is recognized as a premier sport and was used as a major vehicle for socialization into British norms, values and behaviours. Cricket is a game that was introduced by the British as a means of social, political and psychological control (Beckles, 1994, 1998; Sandiford, 1998). Based in its hierarchical structure and racial differentiation which separated whites and blacks, promoted master and slave, the controller and the controlled, cricket for many decades mirrored the social and political structures of the English-speaking Caribbean/West Indian society. In spite of these initial discriminatory systems and structures, cricket eventually offered social mobility, personal and professional development and a sense of self-worth for many people of the Caribbean and the Caribbean Diaspora (Beckles, 1994; Sandiford, 1998).

Caribbean people have a history of closely knit communities where the people traditionally live with team spirit, looking after the welfare of each other. The islands of the Caribbean range from

small to very small (166 square miles in the case of Barbados) and this fact seems to be one of the likely reasons why there has been this tendency towards collectivism within each island. This spirit of working closely together for the common good would have been significant in the development of the labour movement in the Caribbean islands from early 1900s, as the masses sought to improve the impoverished conditions under which they lived. It was the labour movement that led the development of modern Caribbean political parties and systems, and the eventual political, social and economic freedoms that were won in the 1960s and 1970s. However, it must be emphasized that intra-island 'closeness' is contrary to the 'inter-island' insularity that was described by Lewis (1968) which still plagues the islands of the Caribbean. It may also be that the slow pace of economic union in the Caribbean, as proposed under the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) system, is a reflection of the historical problem.

Caribbean culture, like many African countries, has shown reverence and respect for the elderly in social life and this has extended to business and some argue that this reverence is a reflection of the vestiges of the extended period of slavery (Lamming, 2001). In recent times this seems to have been changing and fewer people actually live by this value system, perhaps because of the influence of technology, mass information and mobility of people in a modern world. The Caribbean has a spirit of celebration which is reflected in its music, art and theatre. Its many festivals celebrate this (for example, Junkanoo in Bahamas, Crop Over in Barbados, Carnival in Trinidad & Tobago, St Vincent, Grenada and St Lucia, the Creole festival in Dominica). Rohlehr (2001) contends that *Calypso* reflects Caribbean identity with particular reference to the African cultural influences. He argued that the roots of *Calypso* were set in the protestations and agitations of the artistes called *Calypsonians*, who collectively were seen as the national voice of the masses. The social commentary of the *Calypsonian* crossed social, economic, political and cultural boundaries and generally mirrored events in society (Rohlehr, 2001).

Research in the region (Punnett nd Greenidge, 2009; Punnett et al., 2006) has found that the management style reflects both colonial influences and African influences. This research suggests that the Caribbean is individualistic and collective, high on uncertainty avoidance and low on power distance. Punnett and Greenidge (2009) argued that organizations are hierarchical, reflecting colonial traditions, and that this is ineffective given the low power distance. Carter (1997) made a similar argument.

Over time, the roots of West African slaves have mingled with the European roots of their slave owners to create unique cultural composites that defy easy classification. To this has been added Chinese and Indian influence, brought to the region as indentured labourers, following slavery. Today the Caribbean has a vibrant and flourishing culture, with its own unique Caribbean aspects. At the same time each of the island countries has its own special cultural characteristics. As Caribbean countries develop on a global stage, we look for means to understand and interpret their cultures, in order to be able to conduct business effectively. Each of the following metaphors provides a facet to this understanding.

Phillips et al. use Jamaica's iconic national fruit, the ackee, in its various stages of development and use, as their metaphor to examine key aspects of Jamaica's culture and, by extension, its business and organizational environment. Anyone who has been to Jamaica will recognize the ackee fruit[1] and its place in Jamaican culture, and readers may remember the well-known refrain 'ackee and rice, saltfish is nice, and the rum is fine any time of the year' from Harry Belafonte. The ackee and its role in Jamaican culture provide an insightful look into that society. The following quotation illustrates the continuing role and importance of the ackee in Jamaican culture: 'It's not clear which is a fonder Saturday morning memory: Grandmother's lively rendition of a favorite folk song *Carry mi ackee go a Linstead*

Market complete with a jig and selling motions, or the family feast that eventually followed the song, where parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings gathered to partake of ackee and saltfish' .

The paper revolves around the growth stages of the ackee. At each of the four stages of the ackee's lifecycle, the authors identify the attributes that both the ackee and Jamaican national culture embody and they suggest how those attributes manifest themselves within the Jamaican organizational context. The attributes that they identify are instinctive resilience, transitional toxicity, multifaceted diversity and ritualistic identity.

The authors see a defiant spirit and accompanying intrinsic resilience eliciting admiration for the tree that bears their national fruit, and this attribute of fortitude amidst difficult circumstances as a defining feature of the Jamaican national character, common to its people and national heroes. They argue that Jamaicans' general response to adversity today is to rebuild quickly after natural disasters or man-made disturbances and to remain optimistic. The Jamaican attitude is described as fostering courage, sacrifice, working hard and trying to make a better life for oneself and one's family, buttressed by the belief that anything can be accomplished by hard work. They also say that Jamaica is characterized by a form of transitional toxicity – social and economic dysfunction, but with optimism for a brighter future. The dysfunctional nature of the state today is evidenced by the current level of violence and corruption endemic in the society. This highlights the multifaceted diversity of the ackee and the Jamaican people, who enjoy the traditional meal in a ritual expression of shared distinctiveness.

Charles and Clarke use the wonderful Caribbean concept of 'liming' as their metaphor, a concept which has spread across the region (and beyond) in the last 60 years. They give the following definition from Eriksen (1990) of liming: 'the art of doing nothing which depends on the creating of shared, spontaneous meanings. Liming is an informal activity which occurs in the vacuum of structured social gatherings and a lime is composed of individuals from across racial and social lines meeting without an agenda and outside the work world'. The current widespread use of the term within the British West Indies and elsewhere can be attributed to the growth of communication within the region through improved telecommunications and intra-regional air travel. Almost everywhere you go today, people seem to understand the term and it immediately conjures pictures of people socializing or gathering informally, the exchange of stories, jokes, anecdotes, politics etc. while sharing drinks and food in a laid-back, relaxed Caribbean atmosphere.

This paper discusses a variety of aspects of 'liming' and how these relate to interactions in a management context and building social capital. The authors argue that in the cultural context of the English-speaking Caribbean the lime leads to the creation of strong community norms and values which are also used by community leaders to build support. As the lime becomes increasingly formalized, in terms of place and organization, there is an increased likelihood that social relations will develop with less reliance on informality. The authors report on a series of interviews conducted in 2010 with four business leaders and academics from the islands of Trinidad and Grenada on the topic of liming, social relations and social capital. They also draw attention to the formal use of the metaphor lime, as the brand name of the telecommunications company, LIME (landlines, internet, mobile, and entertainment), noting that conversation is an integral part of the lime in the West Indies and so the predominant supplier of telecommunications, currently facing intense competition, is now trading on the notion of liming on the telephone and other media. They ask whether the connotations of liming – and by extension 'liming on the phone' and 'liming on the internet' – will produce a negative image of LIME as employees spend more time engaged in non-work conversations.

The authors note that the liming concept reinforces the multiculturalism of the region since the lime serves as a testing ground to measure verbal improvisation and ingenuity woven with a healthy dose of humour, which allows diverse individuals to connect on a deep level. They note that humour is important in Caribbean discourse as it embodies important lessons and truths that Caribbean folk tales typically also carry.

Rao and Sedlaczek explore a musical form, *Calypso*, that is familiar throughout the Caribbean, with a particular emphasis on Barbados, and considers *Calypso* as a metaphor for Bajan culture. It is true indeed that *Calypso* and its offshoots (such as *Soca* and *Reggae*) are almost synonymous with the Caribbean, to locals and tourists alike.

They note that *Calypso* has taken a central place in the English-speaking Caribbean and constitutes a way of expressing identity. With reference to Barbados 'the imperial influences on Barbados' architectural and urban forms have earned it the title of "Little England" or "Bimshire" . . . noted for the stability of its institutions and (is) considered highly stable in a political, economic, and social sense'. In this context, *Calypso* equates the goals of the Caribbean liberal democratic state with those of the *Calypso* audience, and the *Calypsonian* represents the will of the people and music constitutes an organ between the larger audience and the elected government officials. The *Calypsonian* is the voice of the people, especially of the marginalized.

Rao and Sedlaczek state that each of the Caribbean islands has developed with a slightly nuanced history, culture and style, and that, much like notes in a symphony, music as a cultural metaphor can help provide a detailed description of important aspects of cultures, both in their similarities and differences. This paper discusses Hofstede's dimensions of individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity/femininity and uses aspects of *Calypso* to explore these dimensions in Barbados. The paper examines attributes of *Calypso* music satire, call and response, masquerade and versioning in order to be au fait with some aspects of culture which are of interest to managers. This would assist managers in understanding the rich context and history behind the Hofstede scores and allow for more nuanced interpretations of these characteristics. Through *Calypso* the paper looks at a range of workplace behaviours such as managers and managed (power-distance), relationships between people (individualism-collectivism), gender differences in the workplace (masculinity-femininity), assertiveness and materialism and respect for rules and order (uncertainty avoidance).

Bernard and Fernandez use a metaphor which encapsulates the historical development of the Caribbean, a critical aspect of the current culture and management environment. The paper presents a proverb which originates in the Yoruba tradition of West Africa about a turtle with the secrets of the world written on his back. They argue that proverbs can be used to present the native or insider's viewpoint and that proverbs can help outsiders develop an understanding of everyday situations. Through the process of interpretation, outsiders can learn about ways to function within the social, economic and political fabric of a culture. This process of interpreting and applying proverbs can also help outsiders understand the potential situations, outcomes, moral lessons and values that govern everyday life in a particular culture.

The authors provide a number of proverbs and examine their meaning in the Caribbean context. Apart from the insights that these proverbs provide regarding management, the proverbs themselves are interesting to read and the various interpretations are fascinating. As the authors note, alternative interpretations are always possible with proverbs, so the reader can choose to look for their own interpretation. The authors say 'this exercise should encourage participants to seek a higher level of understanding that merges their knowledge of their own culture with that of another from both an insider and outsider perspective. Here they can begin to see and critique the boundaries that separate their understanding of their own cultures with that of another, and hopefully they will also begin to

acknowledge the areas of overlap in-between.' These authors believe that sharing Yoruba proverbs through cross-cultural competency or leadership training workshops can be a strategy to empower employees in (and perhaps outside) the Caribbean to create the conditions they desire within their workplaces.

Overall the paper explains the Caribbean culture as a 'Creole Cultural Continuum', with Caribbean culture encompassing a multitude of shared experiences and meanings passed down, with modification, through generations, and generally subscribed to by the broader society, rather than a plural society consisting of multiple distinct sociocultural sections and patterns. This is how most of us in the Caribbean see our culture – we are African, Chinese, European and Indian. These influences have been combined in unique ways to make us a unique people.

Grant explores a particular aspect of cricket, the 'no ball', as a metaphor for addressing ethical issues in the Caribbean. Cricket has long been a major cultural icon for the English-speaking Caribbean and, as Grant notes, 'with its rules and protocol (it) was more than a game to the region. It was proof that the West Indian nations and their peoples can win when the rules are clear and the proverbial playing field is level.' The particular aspect of cricket that is explored in this paper is the 'no ball' which refers to an infraction of the rules that can be called against a player whose actions do not meet the guidelines of the game, as judged by the presiding source of authority on the field, the umpire. Calling ''no ball' attempts to rectify the perceived unfair advantage of one side.

Grant's 'no ball' metaphor serves to draw attention to the need for the Caribbean to enhance ethical management in the society. He outlines a specific situation in Antigua, where one of its former financial overseers is alleged to have taken kickbacks to overlook infractions of financial regulations by a Texan billionaire, Allen Stanford. Interestingly, Stanford took a liking to cricket in the West Indies and provided substantial financial support for the sport in the region. The financial overseer was to be the corporate umpire calling 'no ball', where rules were violated and unfair advantage sought; however, the umpiring was ineffective and indeed corrupt.

Grant notes that the English-speaking West Indies had an upsurge in unionization and workers' asserting their rights at the turn of the twentieth century, which was necessary and critical to human dignity, coming as the island countries did from a tradition of exploitation of the majority population on the islands. The independence movements in the islands were all led by people from a trade union and worker mobilization background (for example, Manley and Bustamante in Jamaica, Barrow in Barbados, Williams in Trinidad & Tobago, Bird in Antigua, Bradshaw in St Kitts, Joshua in St Vincent & the Grenadines). Fairness and social justice around employment were drivers of this movement to independence.

This paper urges West Indian leaders to remember the importance of calling 'no ball' and ensuring that ethical leadership is a force of renewal of West Indian society, reigniting the liberative drive of social justice that was the earlier impetus for independence and reflecting a fundamental aspect of the regional sport.

The Caribbean has a culture that may be termed complex and it is even challenging to adequately define it. As argued by Lamming (2001) a critical aspect is the creolization process that reflected the European, African, Chinese and Indian roots. This reality leads to richness in the culture that is mirrored in the Caribbean society with its language, food, art and business practices. The nature and practice of business and management are rooted in what we term the broader Creole Caribbean culture and subcultures.

Managers in organizations are recognizing that it is impossible to maintain parochial views while doing business across cultures. Cultural knowledge and a global focus are crucial to survive, and to thrive, within today's business environment. To understand organizational culture, one must

understand the basic assumptions of the employees, namely, their national cultural values and beliefs. Culture is not a characteristic of individuals; it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same history, education and life experience. Therefore, effective management practices need to be linked to cultural values.

This issue attempts to show how important it is for managers to understand cultural values in the Caribbean and how these affect management practices. It is hoped that this will stimulate more dialogue, making cross-national research in the Caribbean more of the norm and less the exception in the field of management.

Note

1. Interestingly, the ackee tree is unusual in the Caribbean outside of Jamaica; in other islands, the 'ackee' is a small green fruit, known as a 'guinip' in Jamaica.

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