

Cooperation in Burkinabé Management Teams

*“We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly,
we shall hang separately.”*

Benjamin Franklin to John Hancock at the signing of the
Declaration of Independence, 4 July 1776

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Preface

This dissertation has been written as the result of my research in Burkina Faso, which was the final thesis for my Masters degree at the University of Groningen. This assignment has been carried out in the light of the cooperation between the Faculty of Management and Organization in Groningen and the Faculty of Economics and Management in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

To carry out this research I stayed in Ouagadougou from January until the end of May 2003. During this stay I spent two weeks in Bobo-Dioulasso and I concluded my stay in Africa with a journey through Ghana, which was the best closing of my stay in Africa I could have had.

In the light of the research of Honorine Illa and Luchien Karsten about Burkinabé management styles, it was my assignment to research a related subject and I chose to focus on how Burkinabé managers cooperate in top-level management teams. I knew in advance that with my Western cultural background it would be difficult to break through the surface of the directly perceptible and to get people to be honest and open when interviewed. I know I have not always succeeded in this; for that five months are just not enough and neither is my research experience.

However, living in Burkina Faso and getting to know so many people has certainly contributed to my understanding of their culture and it has made me understand many of the differences but it also made me realise the many, many similarities. I think that all the conversations with friends and with strangers at the Grand Marché, the *maquis* and the dancings have contributed even more to my overall understanding of the culture than the managers I interviewed and therefore I would like to thank the following people:

In the first place I would like to thank Bartjan Pennink and Luchien Karsten for offering me this wonderful opportunity to do my research in this beautiful country, for their guidance and practical and theoretical support and their motivation during this period of research and writing.

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Summary

Little has been written about African management, and especially little from the African point of view. This study focusses on the management in Burkina Faso, and more specifically on how Burkinabe managers work together in a management team. My research question was: *“How do Burkinabé managers cooperate in a management team?”*

Not any group of people is a team. One definition is that a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. The way that the team members cooperate to achieve this, is called team work. This cooperation is influenced by many factors, such as the societal culture, the organizational culture and the personalities of the people in the teams.

To research *team work*, I have chosen to make this term operational and chose some key dimensions that characterise cooperation. These dimensions are: decision making, problem solving, sharing knowledge, communication and mutual responsibility. The accompanying research questions are:

- To what extent are Burkinabé managers in a top-management team competent to make decisions as a team?
- To what extent do the managers perceive their competence as sufficient?
- To what extent are new or unknown problems being solved in a routine or creative manner?
- To what extent do the managers share knowledge?
- To what extent is the communication between the team members open? and;
- To what extent do the team members feel mutually responsible for the outcomes of team processes?

The managers interviewed for this research are all Burkinabe and their cooperation is influenced by African and Burkinabe culture. The African culture is a collectivist culture, as opposed to, for example, the European individualistic culture. It is also characterised by some authors with the *ubuntu* principle which, amongst other things, stands for a feeling of solidarity between African people. This implicates that the behaviour of African people towards other members of their society or organization is based on different norms concerning group behaviour.

The context of Burkina Faso as a country influences the way managers cooperate in teams because it determines for example what ethnicities of people work in the companies, what the macro-economical relations between these companies are, the legal boundaries and organisational structures and (partially) the educational possibilities that Burkinabé managers have had. This broader societal context, influences the cultural values, the organisational values in the Burkinabé companies, and the personal habitus of the organisation members. Relevant aspects of Burkinabe society that influence the Burkinabe culture are: the *economical structure* of the country, the *political situation*, the *urbanization*, the *educational possibilities*, the *social structures*, and the *diversity in population*.

The behaviour of team members in an organization is influenced by the organizational culture because, for example, when a problem is solved in a certain way and this works well, people start to see this as reality. But the behaviour of the team members is also influenced by for example their personal values, beliefs, and experiences.

The concept habitus is introduced, which means 'a set of dispositions acquired through experience'. It explains how managers share a culture and it's practices, within asymmetrical

social positions and relations of domination. Based on their habitus, managers fill in the gap between any principle and guideline of a management concept and its enactment.

The purpose of this research is to explore what characterizes the ways in which Burkinabé managers cooperate in top-level management teams. To do so, I have constructed a conceptual model that functions as a frame of reference. To find an answer to the research question, I have formulated six theses that were or were not confirmed based on the results of the research.

I have interviewed ten managers in four companies with semi-open questionnaires, about how they operate with their fellow team members. After that I let them fill in forms about the dimensions researched. Also I had open interviews with three 'experts', managers with a lot of experience in various companies, about their perceptions of cooperation in Burkinabé teams.

In the first place, I have based my conclusions on the results of the interviews with the team members. The results of the filled-in forms and the interviews with the experts I have used to add a critical note to the answers to the questionnaires. Finally I have added my own impressions.

The results of this research are the following:

- When Burkinabé managers cooperate in a management team, they are usually *not competent to make all necessary decisions* to perform their tasks as a top management team, this is confirmed by the experts. On the other hand almost all managers, independently of their actual level of competence, *perceive their decision making power as sufficient*. This is confirmed by the forms they filled in.
- They usually *solve unknown problems* or handle unforeseen situations *in a routinely manner*. The filled in forms indicate that the managers solve problems in a creative manner more often than in a routine manner. For the managers who scored this dimension based on the behaviour of their fellow-team members because it does not apply to themselves, this contradicts the results of the questionnaire. The opinions of the experts on this were not very conclusive.
- The vast majority of the managers interviewed claim that the *communication between the members in the team is open*. These answers correspond to the answers they filled in on the blank forms, but the experts interviewed completely contradicted this. So following their argumentation, the answers of the managers would be the result of social desirability. They do remark that the younger generation of managers is much more open in their communication.
- It was not very obvious whether or not relevant knowledge usually is shared between the Burkinabé team members. When asked directly, the managers said they do often share relevant knowledge with their fellow team members, but when asked for examples they usually illustrated their statements with an irrelevant example, usually concerning the transfer of data, information, or operational knowledge. This, combined with the remarks of the experts, has led me to the conclusion that indeed *Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members*. However, when filling in the forms, they claim they *do* share all necessary knowledge. The experts say that relevant knowledge is practically never shared between managers in a team.
- All managers say they *feel mutually responsible* for the results of the team processes. The other aspects of this mutual responsibility, like the official accountability of the team members and how they act out this responsibility in their everyday work, are not clear. The answers differ greatly or even contradict. The results of the blank forms indicate that the team members *are* mutually responsible (so this relates to the actual accountability). The experts

firmly deny the answers the managers gave to the questionnaires; according to them Burkinabé managers generally do not feel mutually responsible for their team results.

These characteristics of cooperation in Burkinabé management teams are influenced by the cultural aspects described above. The influence of the African culture on team work in Burkinabé management teams is the first factor that was discussed. Since African culture is characterised in literature as a collectivist culture with high emphasis on solidarity, this might be the reason for their open communication and for them feeling mutually responsible for the team results, although these are the two results of my research that were most strongly denied by the experts.

The context of Burkina Faso as a country influences the way managers cooperate in teams in various ways. Cooperation in management teams is influenced by the educational possibilities. The experts noted that often knowledge is not shared because managers often do not have the theoretical background to realise the importance of sharing knowledge. One expert even said that the only good managers are the ones who are educated in Europe. This is a strong statement but indicates the reputation of the level of management education in Burkina.

Another factor of influence is the political context. People are used to a lot of corruption and this might stand in the way of open communication and creative problem solving, because like one of the experts said: "It is easier to invest in corruption than in improvement". The historical and political context have some other influence. For example the system of the chiefs that is still vivid in the rural areas, and the French hierarchy system that was imposed on Burkinabé companies after the colonisation, have resulted in a very hierarchical structure and a lot of respect for the DG. As a consequence, the DG often has all the power and the management team has very little decision making power. But also because of this, the managers are used to this low level of competence and therefore do not perceive this as insufficient.

This background might also be the cause of the routinely manner of problem solving. Because managers never have to deal with problems themselves and the DG eventually solves everything, they have not been triggered not find creative ways of problem solving. Related to this and according to the experts, every manager wants to become the new DG and so a lot of power games that are going on. This could stand in the way of sharing relevant management knowledge.

Another relevant factor is the great ethnical diversity in population. As a result of this diversity management teams are heterogeneous and one would expect that this leads to for example creative problem solving. However, this is not illustrated by the results of this research.

In summary, the question of how Burkinabé managers cooperate in a top management team, can be answered as follows:

Burkinabé managers are usually not competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team, but almost all managers, independently of their actual level of competence, perceive their decision making power as sufficient;

They usually solve unknown problems or handle unforeseen situations in a routinely manner; Communication between the members in the team is open;

Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members;

The team members feel mutually responsible for the results of the team processes.

Because so little is known about Burkinabé management and even less about the cooperation in Burkinabé management teams, this research only provides a first impression and it would take further research to gain more detailed insights in cooperation in Burkinabé management teams.

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Introduction

“Ça va aller” is a phrase often heard in Burkina Faso, West Africa. It means something like: “Everything will be alright”, and is often used when people want to say: “Don’t worry too much about tomorrow”. Although this characterises some aspects of the Burkinabé way of life and management, there are many other characteristics of how the people in Burkina Faso live and work together. However, for someone with another cultural background it is often difficult to understand how culture influences the everyday life in an African organization.

The subject of this dissertation is how Burkinabé managers cooperate in teams. In this introduction I would like to explain the relevance of this research. In general there is little literature available on African management and most of the literature on African management is written from the Western point of view, which means the authors describe African management in terms of their Western ideas and concepts, instead of trying to explore it from an African point of view. Because of this lack of understanding of African management I decided to explore one element of it. I chose to focus on the aspect of *how managers work together at the level of the top-management team*, because the cooperation between these managers has a substantial influence on the performance of the organisation and might reveal some of the distinguishing characteristics of the African management in general.

The existing management knowledge on the subject of the functioning of top management teams is based on Western (mainly European, Northern American and sometimes Japanese) concepts, that are developed based on Western values and social norms. The African context differs greatly from the Western context because of, amongst other things, the great differences in historical, political, social, and cultural context. Therefore, Western theories and concepts cannot directly be applied in the African context, without translation to this other context. Some authors on African management even state that “(...) *developing countries should not adopt western knowledge, because it is imbedded in cultural and intellectual traditions of the west and, therefore, are not compatible with the needs of the developing countries*”. Those who share a moderate vision believe that knowledge is vital, but it should be in line with development priorities, and social and cultural preferences of developing countries. (L. Karsten and H. Illa in *Quest*, vol. XV, No. 1-2, 2001: 92)

However, in this paper I will explore the way Burkinabé managers cooperate in top-management teams with the aid of Western managerial literature, because there is hardly any African managerial literature at hand. To compensate for this, I will try to keep as much as possible an open mind and try to explore other important factors that play a role in the cooperation in these Burkinabé management teams.

The research question of this paper is: “*How do Burkinabé managers work together in a management team?*”

I will start this paper by giving a description of the Burkinabé context, because some insight in this context is needed to understand how the behaviour of Burkinabé managers differs from Western managers. In the second chapter I will give a review of what literature says about management teams and teamwork and I will describe five of the core characteristics of cooperation, which I have used in my research. In the third chapter I will discuss what literature says about African culture and I will discuss some aspects of the Burkinabé society. Also the impact of organisational cultures and the habitus (this term will be explained in

chapter 3.5) of the managers in the Burkinabé companies on their cooperation is discussed in this chapter. In the fourth chapter I will explain my research objective, how I performed my research and what companies I visited. Chapter five gives a review of the results of this research and in the last chapter, conclusions are drawn from these results. Finally, I will give some suggestions for further research.

I have started this research with the intention to find characteristics of cooperation in Burkinabé management teams and I was convinced that it would be possible to find positive as well as negative aspects of this cooperation. After living in Burkina for five months, and talking to many, many people about this issue, I did not find quite so many positive aspects as I had hoped for. With my research I found two positive characteristics by interviewing the managers, but according to the experts also included in my research these particular results are very doubtful.

Although the Burkinabé themselves are often not too positive about their own management and cooperation, I think it would be worth considering to research more in depth the aspects of Burkinabé management and cooperation that are adapted to the cultural context and therefore work well.

Chapter 1 The Burkinabé context

1.1 Introduction

Africa is a large continent with great differences in political, economical and social contexts between the countries and therefore it is difficult to make general statements about 'African management'. Besides that, it would be impossible for me in the context of my final thesis, to carry out a representative random sample survey in various countries. In my research I have therefore focussed on one country: Burkina Faso, of which I will describe some key characteristics in the next paragraphs.

When looking at Burkinabé management, it is of great importance to look at the context of the country as a whole. This importance is underlined by the 'embeddedness theorists' (Dacin et al. 1999), a concept based on the idea that organisational activities are embedded in the environment that consists of distinctive structures and institutions. The term 'embeddedness' was introduced by Polanyi (1944) but other theorists have extended this concept. Granovetter (1985) presents embeddedness as the contextualisation of economic activity in on-going patterns of social relation, and stresses the interplay between social structures and economic activity in industrial societies.

"Markets are not just allocative mechanisms but also an institutionally specific cultural system for generating and measuring value. (...) They provide a conceptual tool to recognise multiple levels of symbolic structures and material practices that contend for dominance in framing and giving orderly meaning to domains of organisational and practical action."
(Dacin et al., 1999)

Many of the comparative studies on political and economical organisation show that 'polity arrangements in Europe, Asia and the Americas embody distinctive institutional logics of action with consequences for the organisation of industries and markets' (Dacin et al. 1999). It is argued by Jepperson and Meyer (1991) that institutional features at the polity level drive patterns of economic activity.

Following these ideas, this would mean that the political organisation of Burkina Faso is a determinant of the possibilities and limitations of the economic structure and activities. The theory of embeddedness not only points out the relationship between politics and economics, but also with social structures. This is why it is important to look at some of the distinctive features of the Burkinabé context that determine the organisational context. I will discuss the *economic structure, the historical and political context, the population and urbanisation, education, and social structures* in Burkina Faso.

1.2 Economic structure

The economic structure of Burkina Faso has followed a very different path of development than Western countries because it was not installed through a gradual process but it was largely forced upon them by the French colonists. "The birth of 'modern' Africa was a bloody Caesarean", as Mbigi described it in an interview. (IS November 2002, page 25)

This revolutionary change has resulted in a structure consisting of three types of organisations. First, there is a very large traditional informal sector, which consists mainly of small family businesses, often small shops with one owner and up to five employees. This

type of organisation stems from the traditional African society and these companies are not registered and do not have to pay taxes. (note 1)

Secondly, there is the formal private sector that consists of larger companies that have developed from the informal sector and have become larger and have adopted formal structures, or companies that are started up by the colonists or by foreign (usually French) companies.

The third type of company is the one in the public sector. These state-owned companies used to dominate the formal sector, but are now being privatised on a large scale. (note 2)

The latter two types can be divided into small- and medium sized companies and large companies. In Burkina they have set the boundary for small- and medium sized at 6-50 employees and large companies are considered those with 51 or more. (note 1)

What characterises the economical situation of Burkina Faso, is that it is one of the poorest countries in the world. In 2002 the Gross Net Product per head of the population was 1100 dollar, the real annual growth in this year was 4,6% (CIA World Fact Book 2003). The economy is based on agriculture, industry and service sector, but approximately 90% of the population depends on agriculture (CIA World Fact Book 2003). The major problems for economical progress are high population growth, the absence of natural resources and the vulnerable soil. Burkina Faso receives economical support from the World Bank, the IMF and bilateral aid. (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2003)

1.3 Historical and political context.

After Burkina Faso became independent of France in 1964, a multi-party democracy was chosen as the new political system. It is a republic with a president at the head that is elected by the people every seven years. The president appoints the cabinet, recommended by the Prime Minister. (CIA World Fact Book 2003)

From the eleventh till the nineteenth century the area was ruled by Mossi-kings and partially also by Gourmantche kings. The other ethnical groups (with as the main groups the Fulani, the Bobo, the Lobi and the Senoufou) did not have a central state. In 1896 the French conquered Ouagadougou, which was already an important power centre of the Mossi-kingdom, but because of the lack of natural resources, the colony was of little economical value for them. The main export product was 'manpower'.

There have been several *coups d'état*, with the last one taking place in 1987 by the Organisation pour la Démocratie Populaire/ Mouvement du Travail, with president Blaise Compaoré as its president. The former president, Thomas Sankara, was killed in this coup. During this period the heavy influence of the state in public investments, administrative and institutional structures and the ownership of many large companies has been diminished. Many companies have been privatised by now and a lot of other companies are still in the transition phase. (Note 4)

The current policy of the government offers various possibilities and limitations to the Burkinabé organisations. Compared to other developing countries, the government has invested well in infrastructure, there are a lot of concrete roads. But there are many downsides of the government policy of Compaoré.

The costs of various institutions, for example for making up a contract or consulting a lawyer, are extremely high. Also the costs of electricity and water are low for the small consumers

and very high for the high consumers. This socialist system (introduced by Thomas Sankara) used to work well to spread the costs between the various income groups, but nowadays it is a huge limitation for enterprises, especially those with a production process consuming a lot of water. Another difficulty is that there is no juridical protection, for example to assure that products delivered are paid for. The costs of a lawyer are too high for the average company to pay for, and the police are said to do nothing.

The government has no policy to support the development of companies. There is a great lack of financial means; companies can't make investments because the banks don't want to invest, they don't take risks. For this reason there are only a few production companies. The maximum term for a loan with a Burkinabé bank is only three years and the interest over a loan is 17 percent.

Finally, there is the general problem of large scale corruption, which is manifest at the level of politics, institutions and companies. (Note 2)

1.4 Population and urbanisation

A factor that plays a role in the composition of Burkinabé management teams is the great diversity in ethnical groups that characterises the country. There are more than sixty different ethnicities in the country, all with their own language. The largest group are the Mossi, and their language Morée is understood and spoken by many members of other ethnical groups. Other dominant groups are the Gourmantche, Fulani, Bobo, Lobi and Senoufou. Between these groups there is traditionally a certain hierarchy in status, but despite this the various ethnical groups coexist peacefully. All ethnic groups have their own languages but the majority of the population speaks Moré (the language of the Mossi people) and French.

Religion is a factor that plays a dominant role in the every day life of the Burkinabé. All ethnic groups traditionally have their own animist religion, and this religion is still dominant for 40 % of the population. However, many Burkinabé have adopted the Islam (50%) and Christianity (10%) as their dominant religion. Especially in the villages, this does, however, usually not mean they have abandoned their animist beliefs. (CIA World Fact Book 2003). The animist religion is a generic term for various ancient African beliefs, but for example for the Mossi it is characterised by the belief that the 'being' is animated, and for this they use the terms *siiga* and *kiima* (Toonen, H. 2004). The *siiga* is the soul that marks the difference between life and death. Everything that is alive (people, animals and plants) has a *siiga*. The *kiima* is the human soul that lives on after death in the spirit world of the ancestors. (Note 4)

In July 2003 Burkina Faso was inhabited by 13,228,460 people (CIA World Fact Book 2003), with 46.1% of the population in the category zero to fourteen years, 51% in the category fifteen to forty-six years, and only 2.9% of the population is fifty-six years or older. (CIA World Fact Book 2003). The average life expectancy is 44.46 years. The child mortality rate is high: 99.78 on every 1000 births.

A development with great influence on the Burkinabé labour force is urbanisation. Because of the great poverty in the countryside, many young men and women move to the cities to try to find a job. During my stay I observed that life in the villages is still very much like it must have been before the colonial era. People make a living from agriculture, livestock, small shops, and there are markets that move from one village to another. Life in the cities is becoming very modernist, the technological development has evolved rapidly, and people are in a lot of ways adopting a Western lifestyle, for example when it comes to fashion, television

or mobile phones. So parts of the county are still an agricultural society and other parts are in a relatively far state of industrialisation. For the people who grew up in small villages with hardly any contact with the world outside their village (no television, no means of transportation) that move to the city, it is as having to mentally undergo the transition that has taken Western countries centuries, in just one lifetime. (Note 6)

Since large numbers of employees in the companies in Burkinabé cities are raised in small villages, this has major consequences for their perception and frame of reference. Therefore, it also has implications for the management of these people and for the culture and social structures within these companies.

1.5 Education

In contrast with most Western countries, the level of education in Burkina Faso is very low. Of the people age 15 and over, only 26.6% can read and write. (CIA Factbook 2003) And of those who are literate, most of them have only had primary education. Although French is the official national language, only the people who have been to school understand and speak French, and only people with a higher education can read and write it.

Most of the managers in Burkina have had a higher education in management in Burkina, other West-African countries or in Europe. According to one of the experts included in this research, there are not a lot of good management schools in Burkina and the best managers have had an education abroad. (note 2)

1.6 Social structures

The social structures in Burkinabé companies are mainly based on three types of structures; the structure of the extended family, the village and the French system. (Note 1)

The relation between a Burkinabé and his or her family members has a great influence on their everyday lives. Because of the lack of a system of social security, people are greatly depending on their relatives for support and family is always a priority. For the organisations in Burkina, and the family businesses in particular this means that if a relative of a manager or director needs a job, he or she will create a job for this person or give this person a vacant job, whether or not this relative is qualified. Family members are also promoted more often than others; the interest of a relative always has priority. (Note 2)

The political structure in the villages is based on the '*chefferie*'-system. This means that there is one chef, who is in charge of the entire village and makes all the important decisions. The oldest son of the first wife of the chef usually inherits this title. The social structure is also largely based on age, which provides a person with status and power. (Note 4)

With the colonisation, the French organisational system was introduced in Burkina Faso. The French subsidiaries were organised according to the French structure, and a lot of the Burkinabé companies (partly) followed this example of what they call the 'syndicate system'. The structure of most companies still resembles the French hierarchy system (in which the PDG has great power), but it is also influenced by the traditional structures of the clans, or the *chefferie*-system. (Note 2)

In Burkina the rule is "Le grand chef est le dieu", which means that the big boss is God. The General Manager (or Directeur Général, in the rest of this paper referred to as DG) has all the power and everybody wants to push the king off his throne. They wait for their chance, like in the 'system of the chefs' in the Mossi society. (Note 2)

The social structure between men and women is based on separation. The work is strictly divided; the men are sowing, planting, and harvesting the crops, the women work the land, prepare the food, supply the village with water, clean the house and take care of the children. It is a polygamous society and women have very few rights. Also the percentage of educated women is far lower than that of men. In the cities there is still a great inequality between men and women, but it is striking that women are relatively well represented in management positions. (Note 6)

1.7 Conclusion

All these characteristics of Burkina Faso shape the context within which managers have to operate within the management teams in their companies. The economical structure and historical development shape the possibilities and restrictions for companies to do business. The political context sets the boundaries and shapes the rules for companies to operate, and therefore influences the management possibilities for the Burkinabé companies. The composition of the population has an impact on how the members of management teams relate to each other, because the many different ethnical groups, languages and religions in this country also implicate great diversity within the management teams. The level and type of education can have implications for, for example, the communication and transfer of knowledge between the members of a team. Finally, the social structures that characterize Burkinabé society, and also Burkinabé companies, also affect the social structures within management teams.

This Burkinabé context is the basis of the national culture that is expressed in organizational culture, and the personal habitus of the individuals that live and work in this country. In chapter three I will further explore the cultural impact of this national context on these aspects and on how this influences the way Burkinabé managers shape the cooperation with other management team members. To gain more insight in this cooperation within management teams, I will give a description of the terms used in this theses in the second chapter, followed by a review of what literature says about these terms.

Chapter 2 Cooperation in top management teams

2.1 Introduction

To explore how managers in Burkinabé companies cooperate in management teams, it is important to define what we consider a management team and how we define cooperation. In this chapter I will start by defining the term ‘management team’ and I will give a review of what kind of teams are described in literature. I would like to stress that the term ‘management team’ in this paper refers exclusively to *top-management* teams, in other words, the team of highest-level managers in the company.

Secondly, the term ‘cooperation’ is described. Because, in literature, the cooperation within a team is often referred to as ‘team work’, in the rest of this paper I will use these terms interchangeably.

2.2 Management teams

To find an answer to my research question “*How do Burkinabé managers work together in a management team?*” I have decided to use the model of Katzenbach and Smith (1993), to define the dimensions of teamwork. I have used this model as a guideline, but I have adjusted it based on my experiences during the research (partially explained later in paragraph 4.7 and partially explained below). In the rest of their book, *The Wisdom of Teams*, it is described how a group of people can evolve from a *working group*, a *pseudo-team* or a *potential team*, to a *real team* or even a *high-performing team*. The authors give guidelines for how to create a well performing team.

I have chosen not to focus on the element of team performance, because this implicates a value judgement and it is not said that the correlation between how a Western management team scores on certain dimensions and how well it performs, is the same for that of Burkinabé management teams.

Katzenbach and Smith give the following definition of teams:

“A team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.” (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993: 45)

The focus of this thesis is on top-management teams, which means teams that consist of the heads (managers or directors, depending on the functional structure of the companies) of the various departments or functions. Katzenbach and Smith define ‘a small number of people’ as ‘usually less than twenty’ so we can assume that a top management team meets this criterion of consisting of a small number of people. Also, the fact that they manage different functions within the company means they have complementary skills.

Following this definition, we can find four fields in which a team works together. So in this study I will look at the way in which, and to what extent, the members of a team:

- 1) shape a common purpose
- 2) create performance goals
- 3) shape a common approach
- 4) hold themselves mutually accountable

According to Ancona et al. (1996) there are several types of teams: Quality circles, cross functional teams, self-managed teams/ autonomous work groups, office of the president, and transnational teams. The term ‘office of the president’ is often used to describe the set of top managers that run a corporation. They manage internal operations and help the CEO (in Burkina this is usually the *Directeur Général*, or DG) to formulate strategy and manage external relations. In this paper I will focus on this type of teams.

The four fields in which a team works together are the starting point for this research, and are operationalized with the aid of five dimensions that are detailed in research questions and interview questions. This is explained in Chapter 4.3 ‘dimensions of teamwork’. In the next paragraph these dimensions will be introduced.

2.3 Cooperation in management teams

According to Katzenbach and Smith, teamwork represents ‘a set of values that encourages behaviour such as listening and constructively responding to points of view expressed by others, giving others the benefit of the doubt, providing support to those who need it, and recognizing the interests and achievements of others’. (Katzenbach and Smith 1993: 21) In this definition, the emphasis is placed on communication and the fundamental attitude of the team members concerning their willingness to cooperate, which is based on their values. These values are individual, but influenced by their socialization and the influence of culture. I will discuss this further in chapter 3.

According to Coppoolse (1997) cooperation as a process follows a circular pattern:

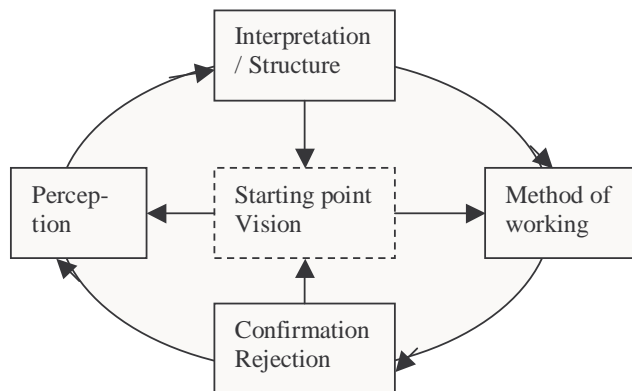


Figure 2.1 The process of cooperation

In the centre of this model we see that the vision is the starting point of the cooperation, and influences both the perception and working methods. The perception of the team members is subject to the habitus of the managers, which I will further discuss in chapter 3.5. In this paragraph it is also explained how perception is formed by confirmation or rejection of how somebody handles a certain situation, for example by his method of working. But these working methods are also influenced by the organizational culture.

How managers in a management team cooperate depends on their working method. As this model shows, the way managers work together is influenced by the interpretation of the individual managers and their vision, but in turn, it also influences what aspects of

cooperation are confirmed or rejected when the team works together. And this in turn influences the vision of the team members and (via the perceptions of these members) also the interpretation. So the cooperation between managers is partly shaped by their existing culture and habitus, and the cooperation itself too, eventually influences the processes of cooperation. A factor that is not integrated in this model, but which is very relevant in this context is *power*. All these processes are influenced by the power games that are being played in the organization and the different power assets that are being used by the various team members. This is reflected in the results in paragraphs 5.4 and 5.5.

Teams aim at achieving goals that are formulated in reaction to opportunities and threats that are perceived in the environment of the organisation. The way in which team members cooperate is amongst other things based on performing tasks and achieving goals. This is the goal realisation process. This corresponds with the 'shaping of performance goals', mentioned by Katzenbach and Smith (1993). The way a team is functioning is called the team process. The major categories of team processes are communication, influence, task and maintenance functions, decision making, conflict, atmosphere, and emotional issues. (Ancona et al., 1996)

The way managers in a team cooperate can also be described as: *How do the members of the team shape a common purpose and performance goals, how do they shape a common approach and to what extent do they hold themselves mutually accountable?* (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993)

To research *team work*, I have chosen to make this term operational and chose some key dimensions that characterise cooperation. Of course, team work can be characterised with the aid of many variables and the ones I have chosen are not meant to give a limitative summary of the activities managers in a team perform when working together. Below I will describe the research questions I have posed for every dimension. In Chapter 4.3 I will explain the relevance of the dimensions and with which interview questions I have researched them.

The first dimension I chose to focus on is **decision making**, or more specifically: *To what extent are Burkinabé managers in a top-management team competent to make decisions as a team?*

The second dimension of cooperation is one on the operational level; **problem solving**. My research question is:

To what extent are new or unknown problems being solved in a routine or creative manner?

The third dimension of team work is **sharing knowledge** within the team. The research question for this variable is:

To what extent do the managers share knowledge?

A dimension that has to do with all three dimensions above and that influences cooperation in many ways, is **communication**. I have tried to find out *to what extent the communication between the team members is open*.

The last aspect of cooperation is **mutual responsibility**. I tried to find out *to what extent the team members feel mutually responsible for the outcomes of team processes*.

2.4 Conclusion

Not any group of people is a team. One definition is that a team is a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. The way the team members

cooperate to achieve this, is called team work. This cooperation is influenced by many factors, such as the societal culture, the organizational culture and the personalities of the people in the teams. In the next chapter I will describe some of the main characteristics of these cultural influences.

Chapter 3 Influences of culture on Burkinabé management teams

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will give a review of cultural influences that have an impact on the cooperation in Burkinabé management teams. I will discuss these factors in a hierarchical order, meaning that I start with culture on a high level of abstraction (the African culture), stepping down some levels to the level of the individual (*habitus*). I hereby refer to the conceptual model (paragraph 4.2) that explains the relationships between the cultural aspects described in this chapter and the cooperation in teams.

I will start by describing some characteristics of African culture. This is a very broad concept, since Africa is a very large continent with many different countries with large differences among them. But there are some common aspects that are influenced by, and in turn influence themselves individual national cultures. In the second paragraph I will describe the impact of the characteristics of Burkina Faso, as described in chapter one, on the national culture. The organizational cultures within the various companies in Burkina are different, although they are all partially influenced by the same national culture, so in the third paragraph I will describe some of the factors that influence these organizational cultures and how this organizational culture influences team work. Finally, team work within management teams is also determined by the personalities of the members of these teams, and their behaviour which is in turn influenced by their socialization.

3.2 African culture

When trying to describe culture, it is important to start by defining this concept to make clear what this exactly means. There are several definitions of culture and I have chosen to use different definitions for the different levels of culture described in this chapter.

Adler (Blunt 1992: 189) says the following about culture:

“The cultural orientation of a society reflects the complex interaction of the values, attitudes and behaviours displayed by its members.”

This is a definition at the level of society, and is useful when looking at African or Burkinabé culture.

Although it is difficult to describe the African culture as a whole, as I stated in the introduction of this chapter, there are some authors who have described some general characteristics that distinguish African culture from other cultures. Two of them are Erez and Earley (1993), who state that *“(...) there are cross-national differences on the individual-collective dimension. In individualistic cultures such as the United States and the Netherlands people tend to use personal achievements to define themselves, view relationships more as short-term, and value the individual more than the team. In collectivist cultures such as Japan and Brazil, however, there is high commitment to, and identification with, the team, and group harmony, unity, and loyalty are valued more than individual gain.”* (Hill, L., in Management for the Future, Module 3: 8)

The authors state that these observations are generalisations and, therefore, do not hold for all individuals. And, in addition to this, *organisational culture can reinforce or reduce the impact of national culture on an individual*. Furthermore, there is some evidence that the more people are exposed to multiple nationalities, the less likely they are to conform to the customs and beliefs of their own (Hambrick et al., 1994).

African countries are generally characterised as countries in which collectivity is valued more than individuality. Another author who has written about the importance of the group within the African society is L. Mbigi. Mbigi (1997) describes the concept of Ubuntu, which he defines as:

‘The person is a person through other persons’

The principles of Ubuntu are the spirit of unconditional African collective contribution, solidarity, acceptance, dignity, stewardship, compassion and care, hospitality and legitimacy. The expression of a person as person through other persons is common to all African languages and traditional cultures. Ubuntu is enacted in African day-to-day occupations, actions, feelings and thinking, and the African conception of community is still under construction. (Mbigi, 1997)

Based on my experiences during my stay in Ouagadougou, I would like to make some critical notes on this matter. These comments are based on my personal experience, my observations, and the conversations I have had with my Burkinabé friends.

I wonder if Mbigi means that African people have this sense of collectivity towards all other Africans in their direct environment, or just their own tribe, friends, colleagues, or family. The use of the words ‘unconditional African collective’ in his description makes one suspect that he means all other members of African society. Either way, I have seen and heard many examples of situations that made me doubt whether African people really act based on solidarity more frequently than for example Europeans.

For example when I see a Dutch person fall off his bike, usually some passer-by stops to help or to ask if that person is alright. In Ouagadougou I have seen a lot of people in traffic-accidents, falling off their bikes or moped, without anybody stopping to help or ask if help is needed. One time I was attacked by what they call a ‘fou’ (a homeless person with mental problems) who punched me in the face, and nobody even reacted. At the level of companies, I have heard several stories that enfeeble the Ubuntu theory. Some managers and experts I interviewed, but also other people I have met, told me stories that in my opinion contradict the characteristics of Ubuntu theory as Mbigi describes it.

For example Mr Ilboudo, who said: “There is a lot of suspicion, a great lack of confidence. When there is a problem, people don’t start looking for a solution, but they start with looking for the one to blame, the one who caused all the misery (the one who caused the ‘Wack’, the African term for evil spirit), because they think that misery is always caused by a person”.

Other comments of the experts, also reflected in chapter 5, are:

“People in Burkina are very rancorous. For example: when somebody dislikes you personally and they have to process your application form for a scholarship; they tear it into pieces.”

“During the first contact they are usually not open. They assume that the other person wants to harm them. Or even that you will bring the ‘Wack’ onto them. But however, they keep smiling at you.”

“There is a lot of mistrust among managers, they do not want the other to be successful.” Of course it is difficult to say whether the opinions of these experts and my experiences are representative for the entire country, but it could be interesting to find out when Burkinabé show solidarity and in what situations they do not. (see chapter 6.2)

For cooperation in Burkinabé management teams this implicates that, according to Ubuntu theory, the behaviour of the members of these teams is largely based on these principles and therefore deviates from the Western, more individualistic, behaviour. For example, in the Ubuntu context, the social effect of conversation is emphasised with primacy given to establishing and reinforcing relationships (Mbigi 1997).

3.3 Burkinabé culture

The context of Burkina Faso as a country influences the way managers cooperate in teams because it includes amongst other things the legal context, the historical development of the country, the economical structure, the political context, education and the composition of the population. So it determines for example what ethnicities of people work in the companies, what the macro-economical relations between these companies are, the legal boundaries and organisational structures and (partially) the educational possibilities that Burkinabé managers have had. This broader societal context, which has been described in chapter one, influences the cultural values, the organisational values in the Burkinabé companies, and the personal habitus of the organisation members.

The *economic structure* of the country, described in Chapter 1.2, has various implications for team work. Most of the larger enterprises used to be owned by the government, and are now in transition from being a paternalistic employer who is responsible for the well-being of the entire families of their employees, to a competitive company that often has to compete with foreign (Western) companies. (note 3) This requires a change in the working attitude of the management team members, and in a lot of companies this still influences the way managers perceive their function and the way they behave in their function.

Another consequence is that as a result of this transition, many companies are still not competent to make all decisions freely because they are often not yet entirely privatised. Because the informal sector (with very small shops) is so big and large companies are a relatively new phenomenon in Burkina, often the “*attitude of the DG is still to behave as if his or her company is a tiny shop*” (quote from Mr. W. Ilboudo, note 5).

Also many of the larger companies are set up by the French, which also has several implications for the management of these companies. The formal companies with French ownership often have to deal with French, or mixed French and Burkinabé management and a Burkinabé labour force. This means that the French managers with their Western ideas and the Burkinabé managers with their African background and often Western education have to manage a company that is constricted by Burkinabé institutions and a labour force that works according to traditional African social structures.

The *political situation* brings as a consequence that there is a lot of corruption, in politics as well as in business. As a result of this, people have the tendency not to be too open because there is the danger of corruption being uncovered. (note 5)

As I also explained in this chapter, *urbanization* has certain consequences for the employees in Burkinabé companies. But for the relations between managers in top-management teams, this impact is smaller than for the average employee, since many of the managers are born and raised in the city and have been educated there. (note 2)

Because of the low rate of educated people and the fact that there are not a lot of good management schools in Burkina Faso (note 8), one would expect that managers on average have a potentially lower degree of education than in Western companies. But this is partially compensated for by the fact that many of them have received an education abroad. However, as indicated in the introduction of this theses, the managerial education they have received is based on Western concepts and theories, so they have to translate it into their own context.

The macro-social structures in Burkina Faso are reflected in the micro-social structures within its companies and the teams that manage it. Especially the ancient hierarchical structures of the villages and the French system are still of influence on the social relations in Burkinabé companies. Because of the political structure of the villages, or the 'chefferie-system', people are still used to obeying one chef, without asking questions. They say: «*Le grand chef est le Dieu.*» (note 8) Another consequence is that age plays an important role in these relations: the older a person, the more status and power he has.

The French system too, is based on the idea that there is one person in charge and his subsidiaries should never question his decisions. As I mentioned in Chapter 1.6, the consequence of these two factors, is that usually managers in companies where the DG in fact has all the power and the other managers feel they have too little, everybody wants to 'push the king off his throne', to gain this ultimate power. This makes cooperation more difficult, because they play power games in their own interest. (note 5) Of course this might also happen in western companies.

The influence of the social relations between men and women on their cooperation in management teams has stayed somewhat unclear to me, because in the Burkinabé society in general women have very few rights and they do not have a very strong position. Of the four companies I visited however, two were managed by a female General Director and also in these and other companies I heard about, women are relatively well represented in management positions. (note 6)

The great *diversity in ethnicity* in Burkina Faso means that within management teams, there is often great diversity too. It also means that communication between the managers is usually in French or Moré, hence it is often not in the manager's primary language since at home people usually speak the language of their own ethnic group. Language is not the only distinction, people from different ethnic groups are raised with the values and habits that are inherent to the membership of their tribe, and have been passed on from generation to generation throughout the centuries. There is also an hierarchical ranking between tribes; some tribes even used to be the slaves of other tribes. But in the cities where people from all different tribes live together now, this is no longer a valid hierarchy. However, it is still in the minds of the people and so it might influence their perception of the hierarchy within a management team. This diversity in ethnicity also results in a great religious diversity within the Burkinabé teams, as explained in chapter 1.4.

Some authors have written about the impact of heterogeneity and homogeneity of a team on the team processes, such as cooperation. Jennifer J. Dose (in Human Resource Management Review Vol. 9 No. 1, 1999) states that "*team norms refer to expectations regarding other's behaviour that are generally held by most members. (...) Members conform to norms because they desire the friendship, help, and recognition of others.*" So when the team is homogeneous in the norms they share, this conformance is very high. Although there is a lot of heterogeneity within Burkinabé teams (chapters 1.4 and 3.3), this desire to belong to the group is still relatively strong, because the culture of Burkina Faso is a collectivistic one

(chapter 3.2) and for example in their conversations the Burkinabé place great emphasis on establishing and reinforcing relationships (Mbigi 1997).

Although conformity helps the team to become unified and maintain standards, it can also lead to the suppression of conflict and ideas. Team members may consciously or subconsciously avoid expressing contrary feelings in discussion because they see them as antithetical to the nature of the team. This ultimately denies the access of the team to important information (Pelled, L. H., 1994). Based on my interviews with the *experts*, one could conclude that the homogeneity in group norms and values resulting from the common organizational and national culture is, for this matter, stronger than the heterogeneity resulting from the differences in ethnical backgrounds, ages and sexes. These experts noted that Burkinabé managers would never criticise a colleague, because it is considered mean to do so (“C’est méchant!”)

This is not very surprising because the differences in ethnicity do not seem to be an important issue in Burkina for this matter. People in the cities are been used to living and working together with people of many different ethnicities. The results of the interviews also suggest that they get along with colleagues of other tribes just as well as with people from their own ethnicity (see chapter 1.4).

It is hard to make any statements about the impact of diversity in teams relating to gender. In the companies I visited, the women in the management teams were a minority, and their answers to my questions indicated that they were often less involved in for example decision making or advising the DG than some of their male colleagues, but so were some of their other male colleagues. And on the other hand, in two of the four companies I visited the general director was a woman.

I did encounter some effects of differences in age and or experience, especially at SN Citec. The differences there between the somewhat older managers, who also had been working there for a longer period, and the new cohort of managers, lead to conflict, a lack of understanding, and lack of acceptance of the other group’s input (see chapter 5.4).

Not all management teams in the same country have the same way of cooperating. The common national culture contributes to the fact that there are some common elements that can be distinguished, but there are two other main factors that cause managers in different companies to behave differently towards each other. One of them is, of course, the fact that every management team in a company consists of different individuals with different personalities. The other reason for management teams to operate differently is the fact that every company has its own organizational culture. This I will discuss in the following paragraph.

3.4 Organizational culture

Organizational culture is defined by Schein (1992: 12) as “(...) *a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned to solve its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.*”

According to Schein, culture is what is passed on to new generations of group members, but it is very hard to uncover what it is exactly, because culture has different levels (the degree to which the cultural phenomenon is visible to the observer). At the surface we have the level of

artefacts, which includes all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group with an unfamiliar culture, such as the visible organizational structures and processes. This level of culture is very easy to observe and very difficult to decipher, because the same artefacts can mean different things in different cultures. It would be incorrect to deduct conclusions from this about the deeper meanings of the artefacts, since they would be based on the interpretation or projection of the observer.

The second level of culture consists of the espoused values of the group members. These values are reflected by the group learning, and are perceived in the strategies, goals, and philosophies of the group.

Finally there is the level of basic underlying assumptions, which consists of the unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings of the group as a whole. These assumptions show little variation within a cultural unit.

Because these layers of culture are either visible but hard to decipher, or not visible at all, it would take thorough research to make some valid statements about the various organizational cultures of the companies included in this research. Therefore I will not try to do so, but I will give some descriptions of the artefacts observed in chapter five.

The definition of Schein implicitly assumes that there can be in fact one overall culture within an organization with basic assumptions shared by all members. Often, however, within one company there is often an overall culture with some shared assumptions, but within this overall culture we find several subcultures (Sims, 1993), which also makes it difficult to make valid statements on one specific organizational culture. A management team can have its own subculture, but the team members can also be part of, for example, the various subcultures that are vivid within the different departments.

In chapter five I will also describe some artefacts of the organizational cultures of the companies included in this research, especially the visible organizational structures and processes, like the size, age, organizational structure, and ownership of the company, and the ages and other characteristics of the team members. Also I will discuss some of the statements on subcultures made by some of the managers interviewed.

The behaviour of team members in an organization is influenced by the organizational culture because, for example, when a problem is solved in a certain way and this works well, people start to see this as reality (Schein 1992). The behaviour of the team members is not only guided by this organizational culture but also by for example, their personal values, beliefs, and experiences. In the next paragraph I will introduce the term *habitus*, which provides some more insights into this.

3.5 Habitus

The French philosopher P. Bourdieu introduced the concept *habitus*, to provide a model with which we can understand linguistic practices in their broader social space. “*Habitus is a set of dispositions acquired through experience*. It explains how agents share a culture and its practices, within asymmetrical social positions and relations of domination. Based on their *habitus*, managers fill in the gap between any principle and guideline of a management concept and its enactment.” (Karsten, L. and H. Illa, *Quest*, Vol. XV No. 1-2, 2001: 98) The *habitus* of a manager is reflected by his ‘knowing’, and the gap between knowing and knowledge is bridged by the interaction between groups and individual members of groups. Their common experiences leads to a joint understanding of how things should be done, and this way they develop a shared meaning.

The African, Burkinabé, and organizational contexts all shape the habitus of the members of Burkinabé management teams, but these are not the only factors. The managers in these teams have been socialized from birth by many other contexts. They are born in a certain village or city, within a certain family, ethnic group, neighbourhood, and group of friends. They have followed a certain education, at a certain school and/or university, they might have been abroad, and might have gained experience in previous companies, or different functions. These different social contexts all have contributed to the formation of their ideas and beliefs.

Bourdieu describes *fields* as ‘*networks of social relations, structured systems of social positions within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over resources, stakes and access.*’ (Bourdieu, 1990) So the organization, like a field, is a space in which games take place, it is a field of relations between individuals who are competing for personal advantage. By this definition, Bourdieu underlines the role of power in the interpersonal relations within a certain social context.

He also notes that “*the field, as a structured space, tends to structure the habitus, while the habitus tends to structure the perceptions of the field.*” (Everett, J. 2002) A country, organization, or top-level management team could all be considered a field (or a sub-field), so this indicates the two-way relationship between the individual team member and the management team, organization or broader society.

Pierre Bourdieu writes about symbolic structures and their relation to both the cognitive structures of the individual and social structures of society. He perceives power as being based on relations or processes. According to him it is a function of relations between subjects and so it must be seen to ‘*function through a multiplicity of functions, such as found in the educational system, the world of art, the family and the organization.*’ (Everett, 2002)

The fact that people all have a different habitus, underlines the statement in the introduction of this paper, that Western management concepts and practices are not always appropriate for companies in an entirely different context. “Management concepts, which are attempted in other geographic areas, can contain potential barriers to successful implementation due to the cultural differences and contrasts. The transfer of management knowledge for both the African private business community and the governmental bodies is highly complicated.” (Karsten, L. and H. Illa, Quest, Vol. XV No. 1-2, 2001: 101)

One very important aspect of African management practices is the role played by the cohesion between social groups. The habitus of the African manager is ingrained in the African culture and a product of an ancestral heritage where life in a community, hospitality and trust play a principal role. The social group constitutes the founding stone for the African habitus. The social cohesion within a group is fundamental for a proper understanding of the action of an individual African. (Mbigi, 1997)

3.6 Conclusion

Cooperation between different individuals is shaped by culture, at various levels. Africa, as a continent, has its own culture with some common characteristics, which are shared by all of its countries. Although one should not generalise this too easily, there are some authors who say they have found some aspects of culture that are typically African, such as the concept of Ubuntu, which describes how African people perceive the relation between the individual and

the group, and therefore also the relation between a manager who is member of a team, and his or her management team.

Stepping down one level, one could say the same about the Burkinabé culture, with all its structures and processes. This too sets the context for the people who live and work within this country. It influences the perceptions and values of people and, therefore, also their behaviour within a management team.

The third level of culture discussed in this chapter is that of the organizational culture. It is constituted by the lessons learned from the past, which have been personally experienced by the organization members or passed on from previous generations.

The last level discussed is that of the habitus, which is the set of personal dispositions and beliefs, that can vary from one person to the next because it is shaped by a person's personal experiences and socialization and so it differs for all team members within an organization.

Now we have considered the Burkinabé context, the aspects of cooperation in management teams and the cultural influences on this cooperation, the question is how these cultural aspects actually influence this cooperation. To find this out I have carried out an empirical research. In the next chapter it is described how exactly this research is carried out.

Chapter 4: Design and execution of the empirical research

4.1 Research objective

In this chapter I will explain the objective of my research, present the conceptual model that has formed the base of my research, clarify the operationalization of team work, present the criteria that have led me to choose my research objects and a description of them, and describe how I executed the empirical research and gathered and processed the data. Finally I will sum up the difficulties I encountered during this research and the adjustments I have had to make during my research.

Because there is little literature available about African management, let alone about African management teams or the cooperation within these teams, I decided to focus my attention to a certain aspect of African management. As described in chapter 3.2, literature suggests that the social interaction between African managers is something that distinguishes them from Western managers. Interpersonal interaction is reflected in, amongst other things, cooperation, and I have decided to focus my research on how African managers work together in top-level management teams. Regarding the limitations of this research, I have chosen to perform this research in one country: Burkina Faso.

In this research I will try to explore some of the characteristics of team work in Burkina Faso. Since there is yet so little known about this topic, it will be explorative. The purpose of this research is *to explore what characterizes the ways in which Burkinabé managers cooperate in top-level management teams.*

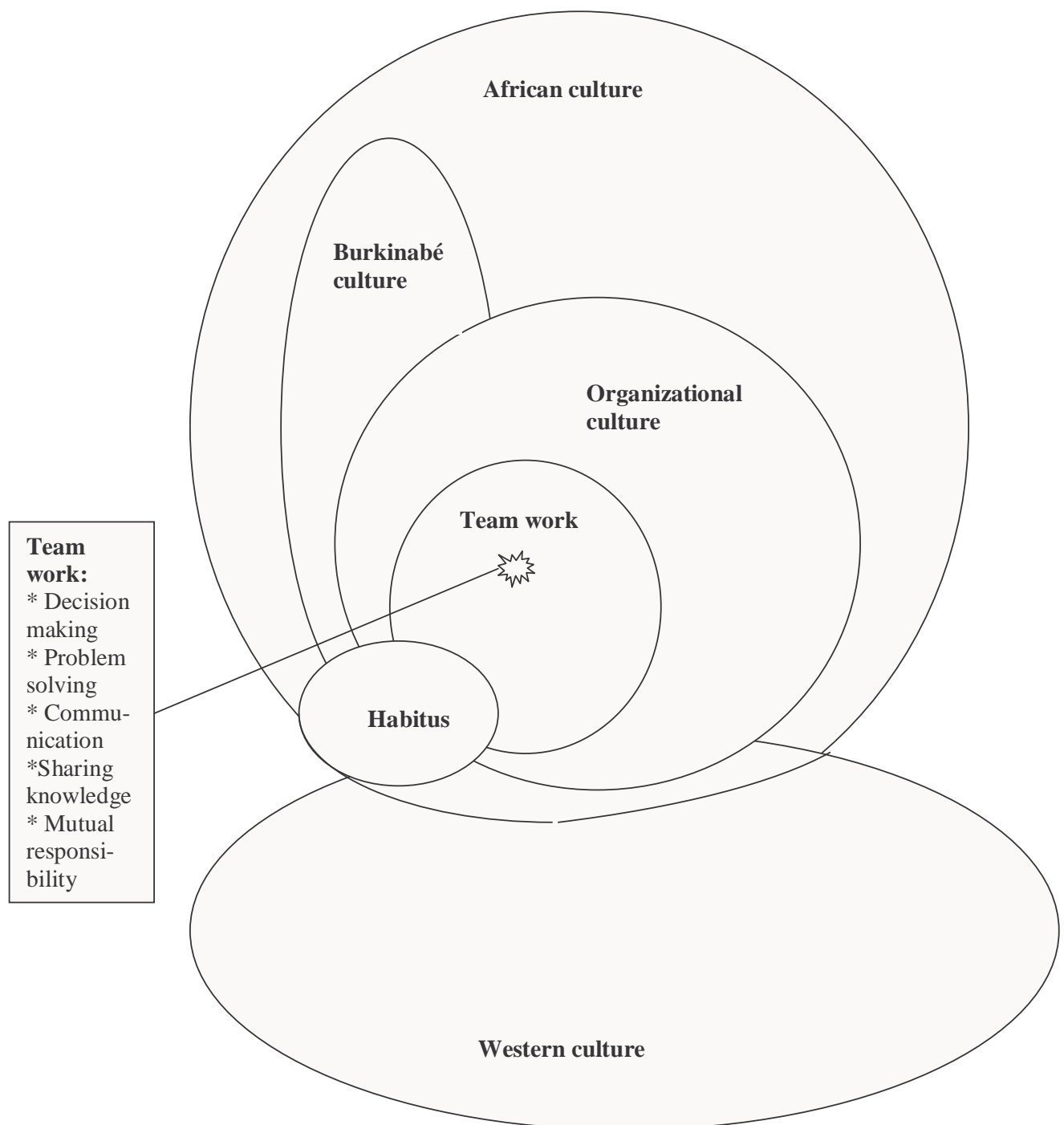
The research question that will have to be answered is:
“How do Burkinabé managers cooperate in a management team?”

I have performed my research based on a model that reflects the various influences of culture on this cooperation and the dimensions I chose to research to describe cooperation. These cultural elements have been discussed at the various levels in chapter three. The dimensions of cooperation will be discussed in chapter 4.3. In the next paragraph, I will present and explain this model.

4.2 Conceptual model

Figure 4.1 describes the relation between the various cultural factors and team work. The African culture (described in chapter 3.2) and Burkinabé culture (described in chapter 3.3) have an overlap with Western culture because of for example the cultural remains of the colonisation era, the Western scientific concepts with which people are educated and the influence of television on the popular culture. The organizational culture is mainly influenced by the Burkinabé culture but there are also possibly organization members who were for example born in other African countries have had an education in Europe and bring other cultural influences into the company. The way the managers in the management team work together is influenced by these cultural contexts but also by the individuals of which the team consists.

Figure 4.1 Conceptual model of cooperation in Burkinabé management teams



The individuals in the teams have their personal habitus. This concept will be explained in greater depth in chapter 3.5. This habitus is influenced by, and in turn influences, the other cultural factors and also team work.

As will be explained in paragraph 4.3, I have chosen to define teamwork with the aid of five dimensions, as indicated in the left section of the model.

In conclusion this model describes how the way Burkinabé managers cooperate within a management team follows from the interaction between the cultural factors that shape the context of this cooperation and the ways in which the team members perform the elements of team work.

4.3 Dimensions of team work

To find out how they cooperate, I have chosen to characterise their teamwork with five dimensions and five researched questions, based on these dimensions. Below I will describe these and explain the relevance of these dimensions. The five dimensions are:

1. Decision making
2. Problem solving
3. Sharing knowledge
4. Communication
5. Mutual responsibility

The first dimension I chose to focus on is **decision making**. This is one of the key characteristics of team work because to shape a common purpose, performance goals and a common approach, the team members have to *decide together* to agree on this.

In the first phase of my research, I learned that the Burkinabé managers I encountered were only involved in the shaping of a common purpose and performance goals to a certain extent. Most of them had an advising role for this matter, and a few of them had no influence on this process whatsoever. Of course an advising role can have a great impact on the coming about of these goals; in two of the companies (Brakina and SN Citec) the managers went through this process as a team, and the DG was sometimes giving input as a team member and sometimes only giving the final approval for a goal set or a common purpose decide on. At Sodepal only one manager was involved in decision making and the others not at all (except for operational and some tactical decisions) and at Jossira all managers had limited influence on strategic decision making.

Initially I wanted to research *how they make decisions as a team*, but because they only do this up to a limited extent, I decided to focus on the question *to what extent they are competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team?*. This question involves both the ‘objective’ level of competence, which means the extent to which they are actually free to make decisions themselves, as a team, as well as the subjective level of competence, which is how the managers themselves perceive their competence

The second dimension of cooperation is one on the operational level; **problem solving**. This is a key element because one of the main duties of a management team is to cope with new situations and to do so implies they have to react together to potential problems. I chose to focus on the level of creativity involved in the problem solving process. My research question is:

To what extent are new or unknown problems generally being solved in a routine or creative manner?

Another way to look at how the managers work together as a team, is to look at how they **share knowledge** within the team. Sharing knowledge is necessary to make sure that the individual members of the team are able to perform their work well in their own individual department, as well as on the team level. This also influences the quality of the decisions that are made and how well problems can be solved as a team. The research question for this variable is:

To what extent do managers in a team share relevant knowledge with other team members?

For every activity the managers act out together they have to communicate, so I am interested in whether or not **communication** between the team members is open. This is a difficult variable to research because the answer to this greatly depends on the perception of the managers interviewed. I have chosen to only focus on the subjective aspect of this, because of the limitations of my research. As I described in Chapter (4.7) it was not possible for me to observe them while they were communicating as a team, and another obstacle would have been that they normally do not communicate in French but usually in Moré. The question I posed is:

To what extent is the communication within the team perceived as open or closed?

The last aspect of cooperation is **mutual responsibility**. I tried to find out to what extent the members of the team feel mutually responsible for the outcomes of the team processes, so again this is a subjective matter. The research question for this is:

To what extent do the team members feel mutually responsible for team results?

4.4 Theses and research questions

I have formulated six theses concerning these five dimensions, which I will formulate and explain below.

1. Burkinabé managers are usually not competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team.

This is based on paragraphs 1.6 and 3.3, in which I explained the cultural and historical influence of the chefferie-systems and the ancient French systems, in which the chef or DG is the 'big boss' who does not delegate.

2. Burkinabé managers perceive their competence to make decisions necessary to perform their tasks as a top management team, as sufficient.

This is based on the assumption that because the Burkinabé people are historically used to this lack of decision making power (paragraph 1.6 and 3.3), they will not perceive this as being limited in their competence.

3. Burkinabé managers generally solve new or unknown problems in a creative, rather than in a routinely manner.

Because there is a lot of heterogeneity within the Burkinabé management teams, especially in ethnicity, gender and religion (paragraph 1.3) one might assume that this leads to more creativity in team processes (paragraph 3.3).

4. Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.

The importance of knowledge sharing has been acknowledged in western literature of the last decade, but not all Burkinabé managers have had a managerial education (paragraph 1.5) and the Burkinabé society is in another phase of development than western societies. With this I mean that they are still more in the transformation phase from agricultural society to industrialized society, versus the western development towards a knowledge-based society (paragraph 1.2).

5. Communication between team members is rather open than closed.

Because the group plays such an important role in Burkinabé society (paragraph 3.2), one could assume that they value the importance of communication, since this is a key process in interpersonal relations within a group.

6. Burkinabé team members feel mutually responsible for team results.

The importance of the group, of solidarity (paragraph 3.2) might lead one to believe that mutual responsibility is valued by Burkinabé team members.

To discover whether these theses should be confirmed or refuted, I have translated these dimensions into questions that I have assembled in my questionnaire (included as appendices I and II). Below I will give a review of how each question is related to one of the dimensions.

“To what extent are the managers competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team?”

This question is somewhat complicated because the managers have *perceived* as well as *actual* competence, so I decided to research both aspects. I have formulated the following questions that are numbered in the order of my questionnaire.

- 10) What is the frequency of your formal meetings?
- 11) Are there often informal meetings? Between two or three of you?
- 12) Is the DG always present at the meetings? What is the frequency?
- 13) Is there a team leader? Formally? Is this role fixed or interchangeable?
- 15) Do you, as a team, always have to consult the DG before making a decision together?
If not, what types of decisions can you make yourselves (without consult)? Also on a strategic level?
- 24) Are the decisions the managers make together usually short term, middle-long term or long term decisions?
- 25) Do you think the DG gives you enough space for you to make decisions? Does he/she delegate sufficiently? Are you satisfied with your power?
- 26) Is your individual power the same as your collective power as a team?

“To what extent are new or unknown problems generally being solved in a routine or creative manner?”

- 27) When you encounter an unknown or uncertain situation, how do you handle this? Do you think that in general the members of the team handle these situations in a innovative way or do they prefer to handle this routinely?
- 28) Do you prefer to make decisions that are somewhat risky?

- 29) Do your colleagues (in your opinion) have a positive tendency towards risk or an aversion against taking risks?

“To what extent do managers in a team share relevant knowledge with other team members?”

- 16) When there are strategic changes that have to be implemented and translated to the operational level, is this usually announced by the DG in the first instance to one of you, or to the group as a whole? (To whom? How does he/she transmit this to the others?)
- 18) How do you search for the information needed for your tasks as a team, individually or collectively?
- 19) Do you usually have enough time to share all information and knowledge with the other managers? And enough time for meetings to discuss this together, and to think together and create ideas together?
- 20) Do you think together about lessons learned from the past, to use for future activities ? Do you talk together about what you have learned?
- 21) Literature on management teams suggests that in Europe and the United States often have problems with the sharing of knowledge due to lack of time. Here in Burkina it seems like time has a different significance. Do you think here people feel less stressed and have more time to share knowledge or to do other things they do not do in western countries?
- 22) Do you think knowledge is a source of power?
- 23) Do you think that your colleagues sometimes find it difficult to share all their knowledge because they might lose their power? Do you sometimes keep knowledge to yourself for this reason?

“To what extent is the communication within the team perceived as open or closed?”

- 23) Do you think that your colleagues sometimes find it difficult to share all their knowledge because they might lose their power? Do you sometimes keep knowledge to yourself for this reason?
- 30) When the team members cannot agree on something and the ideas are really contradicting, what do you, as a team, do about this? Does the DG intervene?
- 31) When someone in the team thinks that the behaviour of one of the others annoys him or her, does he or she say this immediately, or does he or she say this later, or does he or she say nothing at all ?
- 32) Are there often tensions or conflicts between the team members? When this happens what, in your opinion, is usually the reason for this?
- 33) Do you have a lot of fun when working together as a team? Do you think that in case of conflicts, stress, tensions, etcetera, humour is used to improve interpersonal relations within the team?
- 34) When you think that somebody does not function well in the team, do you say this immediately? And do the others?
- 35) When you have finished your part of a team task, and you go and report to the DG, do check on the contributions of the other team members in advance? Do they check your work?
- 39) Do you think that the team members have confidence in one another? Do you have confidence in the other team members?

“To what extent do team members feel mutually responsible for team results?”

- 36) When somebody makes a mistake, or does something that has a bad influence on the team results or the performance of the team as a whole, how is held responsible; the individual or the team as a whole?
- 37) Do you feel personally responsible for the performance or results of the team as a whole?
- 38) Does the DG think that all team members are individually responsible for the performance of the team as a whole?
- 39) Do you think that the team members have confidence in one another? Do you have confidence in the other team members?
- 40) Do you think the team members sometimes shift responsibility onto somebody else?

General questions about the team members:

- 1) Name
- 2) What is your function in this company ?
- 3) For how many years have you been working in this position?
- 4) What is your age?
- 5) Sex
- 6) What kind of education have you received? Did you study in Burkina Faso or abroad?

General questions about the teams:

- 7) Number of managers in the team (DG not included)
- 8) Do you regard the group of managers/ directors as a team?
- 9) Have there been a lot of changes in the composition of the management team during the period that you work here?
- 10) What is the frequency of your formal meetings ?
- 11) Are there often informal meetings? Between two or three of you?

Other questions about how the team members perceive the cooperation and teamwork within their companies:

- 14) How would you describe your work together as a team? What do you do together, of which activities does your co-operation consist? (On what level of decision making?)
- 17) What is in your opinion the most important result of co-operation between the managers in the team?
- 41) How do you think the team in general performs? What is going well, what is not going very well?
- 42) What are, in your opinion, the advantages of good co-operation between managers in a team?

The replies to these questions are summarised for each dimension chapter five. Some of the less relevant results are added in appendix VI.

4.5 Companies and Experts

In this paragraph I will describe the criteria I have used in the process of selecting companies for the research, and I will give a description of some of the characteristics of these companies

and their management teams. Also I will describe the ‘experts’ I have interviewed and the reasons why I chose to include them in my research.

In the first place, I decided only to choose companies that operate in the agro-alimentary sector, because Burkina Faso depends largely on agriculture and most of the food-processing industry is in the hands of local management. Also it is easier to compare results of companies that operate in the same sector, to rule out potential differences that exist between different industries.

The second criterion is the size of the companies. In Burkina the differentiation between small, middle sized and big enterprises is different than the Western distinction. Small businesses are those enterprises with one to five employees and are usually only found in the large informal sector. Small and medium-sized business are those companies which have six to fifty employees and they cover the formal as well as the informal sector. Big enterprises are the ones with more than fifty-one employees and are only found in the formal sector. Because the topic of my research is the cooperation in top-management teams, I have chosen to focus only on the large companies with more than fifty-one employees. Even in these businesses, not every company has a management team (many companies are managed by the DG, the general director, who makes every decision by him- or herself) so chances of finding a company with a top-management team are much better in the larger-scale enterprises. Thus this decision implies that I also restrict my research to the formal sector.

A third criterion is the origin of the management. Because the cooperation between the team members is partially determined by their habitus and cultural background (chapter 3.3), I decided only to select companies that are owned and managed by Burkinabé people. By doing so I tried to eliminate the potential cultural influences of foreign management or ownership.

The decision to limit my research to four companies, is based on the nature of my research. I have used semi-structured questionnaires with closed as well as open questions, to give some space to the managers interviewed to give some insights into possible aspects of cooperation that I might not have thought of in advance. To do so this takes considerably more time and it limits the potential number of managers interviewed, but it does open possibilities to get a richer view on the team processes.

To rule out any potential regional influences on cooperation in management teams, I have selected two companies in Ouagadougou and two in Bobo-Dioulasso. I also decided to focus only on privately owned companies, to exclude possible influences of governmental culture.

The next decision was which managers to interview. I chose to interview all managers in the management team, and not the DG. There were several reasons for this. First of all, I wanted to research how the members of the team personally experienced the co-operation within their teams. Secondly, I knew in advance that in most cases it would have been impossible to speak to the DG, because he is always very busy, but in this period of balancing the DG was even more busy than usual. And in the third place I wanted to focus on the horizontal relations between the managers, and since the DG is in another hierarchical position than the other managers this could distort my impression of the cooperation.

Besides the interviews with the managers of the teams of the four selected companies, I have also interviewed three other Burkinabé managers. In the rest of this paper I will call them the *experts*, because I have selected them for their expertise on Burkinabé management. The

reason why I have chosen to interview managers about their general experiences, opinions and perceptions on the subject of cooperation Burkinabé management teams, is that during my first interviews I learned that those managers had great difficulty in being open and honest in answering my questions. During conversations with other Burkinabé people who work in big enterprises (and also during the rest of the interviews) I learned that in their culture it is very important that everybody always thinks one makes no mistakes whatsoever and people will always avoid answering with 'no'. Of course I took this into account when interviewing the managers, for example by asking for illustrations of their answers and anecdotes, but I thought it might be useful to support my research with some insights from people that have a lot of experience in managerial functions in several Burkinabé companies, and who can talk freely about Burkinabé management, because it is not about themselves.

Sodepal

The first company I visited is Sodepal. Sodepal stands for Société d'Exploitation de Produits Alimentaires, and is located in Ouagadougou. It is a production company of alimentary products, that has existed for more than two decades. Next to the factory, there is a small shop where the bakeries and other products are sold, but it also supplies the large supermarkets in Burkina Faso and some shop abroad. Sodepal is a member of la Fédération des Industries Agro-alimentaire (FIAB). This is the professional organization for the alimentary industry in Burkina Faso, which was founded by the DG of Sodepal.

Next to producing bakeries, fruit-based products and drinks, it claims to aim at providing natural products with high nutritious value for people who lack sufficient food and healthy infant-nutrition.

Impressions:

The company is relatively old-fashioned. The management team consists of five managers who have very small offices with no air-conditioning (except the office of the DG). It is led by a female DG. The managers come to work by moped and there is no parking space. The site is not secured and anybody can just walk in. The managers wear African leisure clothing (blouse and trousers) or African suits and the DG wears a traditional dress.

Brakina

Brakina (officially now Brakina-Sodibo) is a brewery of beer which produces the local brands Brakina, Sobebra and Castel, and is licensed to brew Guinness. It is also licensed by Coca Cola to produce its various softdrinks. It is the only Brewery in the country. It has two factories, one in Ouagadougou and one in Bobo-Dioulasso. It is part of the Skol international group.

Impressions:

Brakina is a very modern company with large office buildings with modern architecture. The site is secured by gates and to get in one should follow the security procedures. There is special parking space for the managers (who drive relatively big cars). They use a computer program especially designed for Brakina and Lotus Notes. Its management team consists of four managers, who wear Western suits.

Jossira

Huilerie Jossira is a production company, located in Bobo-Dioulasso, which produces oils for cooking. Its management team consists of three top managers.

Impressions:

It is also a modern company with a gate with security procedures, and a large office building with modern architecture and with a surprisingly modern interior. What is striking, is that it is a very young company, and when founded they created the organizational structure with the aid of Panaudit, a consultancy firm. The managers wear Western or African suits.

SN Citec

SN Citec (Société Nouvelle huilerie et savonnerie) is a production company that makes different types of oil, soap, animal foods, carités, peanut-sauce and sesame crackers. The management team consists of six managers.

Impressions:

It is a modern company with various office buildings, in more traditional architectural style. On the inside, the buildings are relatively simple and traditional. Some managers wear western or African suits and some wear traditional Burkinabé costumes.

Experts

I have also interviewed three general managers, apart from their company. In the rest of this paper I will call them the '*experts*', to distinguish them from the other interviewed managers. These experts all worked in the function of Directeur Général (DG), which is the general manager or director. Also, they experience in several businesses and other occupations, that provide them with more insights in the cooperation within Burkinabé management teams.

The first person I interviewed is **William Ilboudo**. He is head of an organization called Programme Néerlandaise de Coopération en matière de Management (PNCM). This is an organisation for veteran managers from The Netherlands, who work voluntarily in African companies during several months, and these managers have to report to Ilboudo about their findings and the progress of their work. He also has other occupations; in the first place he is the owner and manager of a small production company for 'fours solaires', ovens that work by reflecting the sun and don't need energy. He is also experimenting with producing things like tomatoes in jars (processed by these ovens) and he designs displays for stores. He has had an education in Burkina Faso and a lot of working experience in both Burkina Faso and Europe, so he knows both contexts. Because the veteran managers have to report to him during their work in one of the Burkinabé companies, Mr Ilboudo could tell me about his own view on Burkinabé management (as a native Burkinabé citizen) as well as their point of view as Europeans.

Also I interviewed **Richard Traoré**. He is the owner of the Burkinabé factories where tapes and compact discs are produced, and also the recording studio where the bands record their music but also where video clips and documentaries are made. His businesses cover the whole business chain in music production. He too has experience in European companies.

In Bobo-Dioulasso I interviewed **Isabelle Garango**. She is the vice president of ABMAC, the Burkinabé organisation for quality control and a member of FIAB, the organization for professionals in her business. Also she is the DG of SAP (Société Africaine de Pneumatiques), a tyres production company. She too has a lot of experience in management and has a lot of contact with managers of different companies. She has studied and worked in Europe and therefore knows the Burkinabé as well as the European context.

4.6 Data gathering, processing and analysis

Data gathering

To gather the necessary data I have chosen several methods. In the first place, I designed a structured questionnaire, as described earlier in paragraph 4.3. I have interviewed the managers in the teams of the four companies mentioned in the former paragraph. My interviews with the experts were almost completely unstructured. I started the interviews by explaining the goal of my research and then focussed on what these experts thought were important features of cooperation in Burkinabé management teams. At the end of each interview, however, I did ask them whether they wanted to add something to this based on each of the five dimensions.

The third way of gathering data, was letting the managers of the teams fill in blank forms, with the research questions on each of the dimensions, which they could answer from one end of the continuum to the other, varying from 'never' to 'always'.

Data processing and analysis

I have compared the results of the questionnaires and categorized them, resulting in chapter 5.2-5.6. The resulting data gathered by these interviewed are summarized in chapter 5.7. The results of the experts have been partly categorized and reflected in paragraphs 5.2-5.6 and the rest is reflected in paragraph 5.8.

To make any statements about the results of the blank forms, I have appointed a numeric value to the various categories of answers, from 1 to 5. This does not mean that the difference between e.g. 4 and 6 is exactly twice as large as the difference between 4 and 5, but it is by means of giving an indication to what extent this dimension is valued positively or negatively, and to make a calculation to see what answer was given most frequently.

The blank form is added in appendix III, the explanation and the results of the forms filled in are added in appendix IV, the numerical scores and the calculated averages in appendix V and a graphical representation of the results in appendix VI.

Validity of the data

When interpreting the results of the interviews and forms, one should take into consideration the following:

Because of the fact that I am Dutch and therefore have a cultural bias, means that I might have interpreted some questions in a way that is influenced by this bias. However, living together with Burkinabé people for over five months has given me many insights in their culture and hopefully this has diminished my bias when collecting and interpreting the data.

Secondly, French is not my first language and in Burkina there are a lot of local and national expressions, of which I have learned many but not all, so it is possible that I might have misunderstood or misinterpreted some things the managers have said.

In the third place, I do not have any personal experience with working in a management team, and can only interpret things based on my theoretical background (which is based on Western theories!), so this too could have influenced my interpretation.

Another point of attention when interpreting the results, is that I was told by many of my friends and especially by the experts interviewed that people in Burkinabé companies have a very strong tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. I have tried to avoid this by posing certain questions again later on during the interviews but then formulated differently. Sometimes this worked, sometimes it did not. Also I sometimes confronted the managers with contradicting remarks from their colleagues. But of course this phenomena is always a

problem when interviewing people about their work, and especially when one does not know the other's culture.

What I did notice, however, was that socially desirable answers and lack of honesty '(which I assumed when answers of managers in the same team were contradicting) played a larger role when managers indicated that they had very little power in the organization. Managers who claimed to have a reasonable amount of influence on decision making and were satisfied with this told me so much more than the ones who did not. And the one DG I interviewed was by far the most honest and open of them all.

The size of my sample is very small and therefore it cannot be translated, without a critical note, to all management teams in Burkina Faso as a whole. As will be explained in the next paragraph, the sample size unfortunately was even smaller than I had planned for.

The depth of the interviews is another point to make a critical note at. The duration of the interviews with the managers varied from one to two hours, depending on how open they were in the conversation and, unfortunately, also on how busy their schedule was. I shall explain this further in the next paragraph.

4.7 Difficulties and adjustments

During my research, I encountered some difficulties that have eventually influenced my research methods as well as the outcomes. In this paragraph I shall give a summary of these difficulties and their influences.

Criterion of all-Burkinabé companies

Although it was my intention to only visit companies that are owned and managed by Burkinabé, eventually I performed my research in one company (Brakina) that is a daughter of a French company, with a Burkinabé DG but with two French managers. The reason for this is that during the meeting with one of the managers in which we got mutually acquainted, I posed the question whether or not the company was managed and owned by Burkinabé and he replied that this was the case. It was not until during my interview with the second manager that I discovered that this was not the case, but, in this stage of my research it was no longer possible for me to find another company. So, to stay with my decision to focus only on Burkinabé management, I chose only to interview the Burkinabé managers in the team. Another company that later on turned out to be not entirely Burkinabé, is SN Citec. They said it operates entirely independently, but it is part of a French group. All the managers, however, are Burkinabé.

The reason why I have not switched to other companies was in the first place because I only found this out in a relatively late stage of my research, but also because it was a very difficult period to find companies in Burkina that were willing to participate in my research. The reason for this was that it was the balancing period, so all managers were very occupied with this. I was told it was simply impossible for their managers to find some time to be interviewed.

Appointments with managers

So, at Brakina I could not include all managers in the research, but at Jossira there was another problem. The PDG of Jossira had agreed that we would be allowed to talk to all the managers in the company, within the period of our stay in Bobo-Dioulasso. But when the appointments for the interviews were actually scheduled, it turned out that two of the four

managers were in Ouagadougou to solve certain problems with the machinery and weren't to be back before the end of our stay.

At Sodepal there was another thing I had not foreseen. During the first interview, a manager told me that the fourth manager I wanted to interview did not speak French, only Moré. So it was impossible for me to communicate with him.

At SN Citec the DG offered his time to be interviewed and although I had initially decided not to include DG's in my research for reasons explained in chapter 4.5, I did not want to turn down the opportunity. This interview turned out to be very interesting and after this I realised it would have been better to interview the DG's in all companies, because I had not thought in advance of the possibility that a DG has more overview on management team processes and can be much more open because he does not have to fear for his position when certain information leaks to other managers. I know that he was more open than the others because he said so himself and he also explained why some of the managers gave contradicting answers to my questions on team processes. The main reason had to do with power games that were going on in the company, especially between the 'older' and the 'newer' generation of managers. I have amplified this in chapter 5.4.

The downside was that I could not pose all questions, because some of them related to how a team member personally experiences the team work.

Research methods

Because of the problems I encountered with my initial research method, like the lack of openness in the responses of the managers interviewed, I started with interviewing the experts later on in the process. It would have been better to start with interviewing these people in a much earlier phase, because this would have given me more insights in possible characteristics of cooperation in Burkinabé management teams. I might have formed my questionnaires differently based on this or used in my interviewing techniques.

To gain a better understanding of the cooperation between the managers in their team, I had decided to make observations when they were acting together in a meeting. Unfortunately this was not possible for several reasons. At Sodepal the meetings were in Moré so I would not have understood one word of what they were saying. At the companies in Bobo-Dioulasso there just was no meeting in the period I was there.

A downside of my research was that I did not have time, and especially the managers did not have time, to meet on various occasions. This would have made it easier for me to gain their trust and gather more reliable information.

Questionnaire and blank form

I have adjusted my questionnaire several times. After my first interview at Sodepal I realised that I had to adjust the questions regarding decision making within the management team.

Initially I wanted to know how the process of decision making (at a strategic level) takes place, but I found out that the managers in this company don't make any strategic decisions together with their fellow-managers, they only have decision making power in their own department. In the other companies the managers appeared to have more decision making power, but still very little. So I shifted my focus to the question how much competence they have and how they themselves see this.

Initially I had also included questions about managers' religions, ethnicities, and whether or not they were married. After the first interviews I have eliminated these because they turned out not to be very relevant or useful. These questions were included in the first place because I wanted to gain insights into the homo- or heterogeneity in the composition of the teams. I

eliminated these questions because it was clear that the teams were very diverse in their compositions and I sensed that the managers found it an awkward question to answer.

After the blank forms were filled in by the managers of three companies I noticed that the managers filled in these forms, scoring the dimensions with 'usually' and 'often' more than proportional. Although this does not mean that they are not reliable, it would have been better to reverse some of the questions posed, so that scoring on the right side of the form has a positive value for some dimensions and a negative value for others. This could have also reduced the possible influence of giving socially desirable answers to the questions. Also it would have made more sense to pose the questions in the form of the theses. So if the thesis was posed negatively, so should have been the question on the blank form and vice versa. Looking back at this research method of using blank forms, I think this has very little value used in this way. It is too much subject to the tendency of the respondents to answer positively.

These difficulties have lead to several adjustments in my research methods but with this adjusted method I have come to find the results, reflected in the next chapter. In this chapter the results of the interviews with the managers and the experts as well as the results of the blank forms that are filled in by the managers are given, and shown for every dimension and also the extra remarks of both the managers and the experts are added.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained the methodology I used to come to an answer to my research question. With the aid of five dimensions of team work, I have formulated six theses that have been researched with the interviews with the managers and the experts, and the blank forms. Eventually the research was not performed exactly as planned, but after the adjustments made I managed to gather the information I needed. The results are summarised in the next chapter, and used to judge the theses formulated in this chapter. Based on this, I have found an answer to my research question, as will be described in chapter five.

Chapter 5 Cooperation in Burkinabé management teams

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will summarize the results of my research. These results are based on three sources. First of all they are based on the answers to the questionnaires that I have gathered by interviewing ten managers at four companies. These results are the foundation for my conclusions. The results of the blank forms are added to see how the managers score the dimensions when asked in a direct manner. In appendix IV the results of the blank forms are represented and the interpretation and conclusions of these results are given in appendix V, together with a graphical representation of the results for each of the dimensions.

To put these results in a context, I have added the remarks of the three experts on the Burkinabé culture and the dimensions. Finally I have given my own vision, based on my personal experiences and the conversations I have had with other Burkinabé.

Most of the results that I describe below are based on the perceptions of the people interviewed, except for decision making. These results are divided in the degree of competence based on the actual level of decision making power, and to what extent they themselves are satisfied with their decision making possibilities. The blank forms they filled in, however, only referred to their perceived competence.

In Appendix VI, I will discuss some additional team work characteristics, resulting from the questionnaire results. The remarks of the experts with reference to cooperation in management teams, that have not already been discussed, are summarised in paragraph 5.7. For the explanation of the results of the blank forms and how I have calculated the averages I refer to appendices IV and V.

5.2 Decision making

“Are the managers competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team?”

The results of this question are split into what the managers *perceive*, as well as their *actual* competence.

Results of the questionnaires

Frequency of formal meetings

At Brakina and Jossira the formal meetings take place once per month. At Sodepal the team gathers every month for the HCCP (the quality standard) meeting and also once per month there is a general meeting with the DG. And if there are problems concerning quality or other issues, immediately there is an extra meeting.

At SN Citec two managers said that the team meetings are once a month as a minimum plus an extra meeting if this is needed, but the DG says the meetings are once every one or two months.

Informal meetings

The informal meetings at Brakina take place very frequently, but with only two or three managers. This is the same for Jossira, but the frequency varies from week to week. At Sodepal most of the informal meetings are set up to generate ideas, to stimulate creativity,

usually on the subject of new product designs. They don't take place very often. One manager says these meetings are just with a few people and another manager says that everybody is present at these meetings; it's never just between two or three. At SN Citec there are frequent informal meetings between everybody who is concerned with a certain decision, including the DG.

Presence of the DG at the meetings and frequency

At all four companies the DG is always present at the top management meetings, but only the formal ones.

Presence of a formal team leader, interchangeability

One manager at Brakina said that the financial director is the team leader (*"as is usually the case in large enterprises"*). Another manager said that the DG is always the team leader, and this role is fixed. At SN Citec too, the managers respond differently. One manager says that usually there is a team leader; the DG designates someone. Another manager says that there is one formal team leader, and this is a fixed role. The third manager says it is always the DG who is the team leader. So it is not very clear how this works in reality.

At Jossira all managers said that the financial director is the team leader and this role is formal and fixed. At Sodepal the quality manager is the leader of the team, because he is the head of the quality assurance and they say that most of the meetings as a team are about this subject.

Freedom in making decisions autonomously as a team

The managers of Brakina can make tactical and sometimes strategic decisions. At Jossira, they cannot make any strategic decisions themselves but they play an important role in informing and advising the DG before she makes a decision. The team members can make tactical decisions.

One manager of Sodepal (the quality manager) talks about some kind of freedom to make tactical decisions, never any strategic decisions and the others can only make operational decisions. The quality manager advises the DG on decisions in various areas (although usually on quality and human resource matters), the others mainly on decisions concerning product development.

At SN Citec the managers say they are not allowed to make strategic decisions as a team and the DG says they *can* but they don't *want* to take these decisions because they do not want the responsibilities that come with this competence.

Level of competence in making decisions as a team

Later on in the interview I asked the same kind of question in a different manner and got answers that partly did and partly did not correspond with the answers to the previous question. This time two of the managers of SN Citec answered that they could make decisions at all levels, except for the manager of Human Resources. She only makes short term and occasionally tactical decisions. At Brakina the managers answered the same; the team makes decisions on all strategic levels (but more often short and middle long term decisions).

The managers of Sodepal and Jossira too, answered the same; they only make operational decisions. One manager of Jossira explained that at this moment the DG takes all the middle and long term decisions herself, but this is changing. Jossira is a very young organisation and at the beginning of the organisation, the DG was the only manager, so she had to decide everything herself. Now that there is a management team, she can delegate more and more,

but the structure is still being developed. He thinks that the more the structure is being completed according to the design of the consultancy firm that has been working on this, the more she will delegate to the management team. This process has already started.

Satisfaction with the amount of decisions making power

Nine of the managers are satisfied with their delegated power, this is the same for the managers who can only decide on operational level, as for the ones that can decide on strategic level. Only the manager at SN Citec, who told about the changes that are due to come, is not satisfied.

Individual competence compared with collective competence as a team

All managers think that their individual power is equal to the power of the group, except for one manager who thinks that the collective power is smaller than the individual power.

In conclusion, the actual decision making power of the managers is relatively low since the managers can only make decisions on the operational, and sometimes on the tactical level. On the strategic level most of them only have an advising role and for the few that are competent to make strategic decisions this rarely happens.

Their perception of their competence, however, is very high. The only ones who indicate they are not satisfied are the ones who know they will have more power in the short range.

Results of the blank forms

On the blank forms the managers indicate that *usually* the managers perceive their decision making power as sufficient to accomplish their tasks as a team.

Comments of the experts

- According to one of the experts the problems within Burkinabé companies relate to hierarchy and trust, especially between the boss and his or her subordinates. “The French system and the traditional ‘chefferie’ system have led the Burkinabé to place great value on respect for their boss or leader. The result of this is that they are afraid to speak their mind. The system of quality circles has started a process; more and more people dare to give their opinion and come with ideas.”
- “There are great differences but very often the DG makes the decisions alone. Managers with a higher degree of education dare to contradict their bosses. But: ‘A good Mossi doesn’t contradict his boss’. This value is mainly vivid in Mossi community, but in general it is Burkinabé culture not to do this. Still, this depends greatly on the personality of the manager. Because of the more than sixty different ethnic groups, culture is very diverse and you cannot make any general statements. Only that in Burkina the DG is respected more than for example in Europe.”

Thesis 1. Burkinabé managers are usually not competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team.

To judge this thesis, only the results of the interviews with the managers and the experts are reflected here, because the results of the blank forms only relate to the managers’ perceived competence (thesis 2).

The role of the leader in the management teams in the four companies is not very clear, because in two of the companies the answers of the different managers within one team were not consistent. However, it is clear that the role of team leader is not interchangeable between

the team members, because, although the answers are not always consistent, ten out of the eleven managers say that the role of team leader is fixed.

The first time I posed the question on decision making competence, three of the eleven managers said they sometimes make strategic decisions. All managers sometimes make tactical decisions, except for two, who can only make operational decisions. The second time, when I posed the question differently, two other managers claimed they occasionally make strategic decisions.

So either three or five managers can make strategic decisions themselves, as a team, but they all add to this that it happens occasionally. When looking at our definition of team work (paragraph 2.3) it can be concluded that *Burkinabé managers do not have enough competence to make all necessary decisions as a team.*

Based on these results, this thesis can be confirmed.

The experts confirm that the competence of Burkinabé managers to make decisions is very limited and they give various explanations for this, relating to the historical development of the Burkinabé companies, the social structures of the country and the cultural values of the Burkinabé.

Thesis 2. Burkinabé managers perceive their competence to make decisions necessary to perform their tasks as a top management team, as sufficient.

Nine of the managers are satisfied with their delegated power, this is the same for the managers who can only decide on operational level, as for the ones that can decide on strategic level. Only the managers that are in a transitional phase, concerning their decision making power, are not satisfied. All managers do not perceive any difference between their individual and their collective competence as a team.

It can be concluded that the *managers perceive their decision making competence as being sufficient.*

Based on the results of the interviews this thesis too can be confirmed.

When looking at the results of the blank forms filled in it can be concluded that although their actual competence to make the necessary decisions as a team is not sufficient, their perception of this is different. Filling in the blank forms, again the managers claim that *usually they perceive their competence as being sufficient to make all necessary decisions.*

5.3 Problem solving

“Do the managers tend to solve problems in a creative or in a more routine manner?”

To discover to what extent the managers have the tendency to solve problems in a creative or more routinely manner, I asked them how they handle unforeseen situations and how they solve unknown problems. Also I asked whether they or their colleagues prefer to make decisions that imply a certain level of risk, or if they'd rather avoid this type of decision.

Results of the questionnaires

Creative or routine problem solving

Half of the managers claim they never solve problems themselves in unknown or unforeseen situations, because it is always the DG who decides what to do. Only three claim they usually solve the non-routine problems in a creative manner. The other seven managers usually do this in a routine manner, but this is also because they usually only solve routine problems. When talking about their fellow-team members, six of them say the problems are usually handled routinely, three of them say they are usually handled in a creative manner, and one says it sometimes happens routinely, sometimes creatively.

Risk taking in decision making

The managers at Brakina are risk averse; they try to avoid all kinds of risk. At Jossira, the managers don't have the competence to make decisions that involve certain level of risk. At Sodepal, the team leader (the quality manager) says that in urgent situations he makes decisions that might imply a certain level of risk, but only if it is impossible to ask permission of the director in advance. The other two managers say that nobody ever makes a decision that involves risk.

At SN Citec one manager says especially the 'older generation' of managers do not want to take risks. The newer generation is more innovative. Some of the 'senior group' adjust to this because they understand the need for this, others stay stubborn.

Of the five managers that are competent to make decisions on a level where this might imply a considerable risk, three say they are sometimes willing to take some risk when making these decisions and two of them say they want to avoid all risk.

It can be concluded that usually the problems are solved routinely, but the fact that they are usually not competent to handle non-routine problems themselves must be taken into account.

Results of the blank forms

Based on the blank forms it could be concluded that the way the managers solve problems is *often* creative.

Comments of the experts

- "People do not invest in innovation and improvement, but in corruption. This is much faster and easier."
- "The variety in ethnicity leads to a rich variety in ideas, a lot of creative resolutions (ways of resolving problems). But this can only lead to creative problem solving when the managers have a good leader."
- "The managers in general have an extremely conservative attitude. They are not open for new information."

Thesis 3. Burkinabé managers generally solve new or unknown problems in a creative, rather than in a routinely manner.

As explained above this thesis does not apply to all managers included in the research because five out of ten managers claimed they never have to solve problems that are new or unknown because the DG is always the one who decides what to do. Partly due to this, only three out of ten managers claim to use creative methods to solve problems. When talking about how problems are generally being solved in general the majority, six out of ten say that these kinds of problems are usually solved routinely and only three say they are solved in a creative

manner. In conclusion, *Burkinabé managers usually solve new or unknown problems in a routinely manner.*

The thesis can be refuted.

The filled in forms indicate that the managers solve problems in a creative manner more often than in a routine manner. For the managers who scored this dimension based on the behaviour of their fellow-team members because it does not apply to themselves, this contradicts the results of the questionnaire.

The opinions of the experts not very conclusive. One states that the variety in ethnicity leads tot a rich variety in ideas, a lot of creative resolutions, but this can only lead to creative problem solving when the managers have a good leader. The others said that generally the Burkinabé managers are conservative and do not invest in improvement.

My personal opinion is that indeed, Burkinabé managers usually solve new or unknown problems in a routinely, rather than in a creative manner. I suppose this has to do with the low level of autonomy and competence of the teams. They are not used to solving problems themselves because it is always the DG who does this. If one rarely solves a problem himself, it is difficult to become creative in this process.

5.4 Communication

“Is communication between the team members open or closed?”

To answer this question I reused the question about knowledge as a source of power, because withholding knowledge or information for this reason indicates closed communication. I also looked at how they communicate in case of tensions or conflict, or when having fun together. I asked them about their openness in criticism and about to what extent they feel there is mutual trust between the team members.

Results of the questionnaires

Openness and power

As mentioned above, there are two managers who think their colleagues sometimes keep knowledge to themselves to avoid the risk of losing their power, and according to the DG of SN Citec, the reasons for this are that the old managers are afraid to lose their power to the new cohort of managers and that a lot of managers do not realise the importance of sharing knowledge.

Lack of agreement

In situations where team members cannot agree on something or a conflict needs to be resolved, seven of the managers talk about arbitrage; five of them say it is usually the DG who interferes (sometimes only as a last resort) and two managers talk about somebody else in the company who acts as an arbiter.

Five of the managers report that conflicts are being resolved by the managers themselves (in the first instant or exclusively). The way this happens is described as exchanging or searching new information, and exchanging ideas and opinions in a discussion.

Annoyance

Nine of the managers say that in their experience people, always or most of the times, immediately say so when the behaviour of one of the others annoys him or her. One manager says that people wait and eventually say nothing (unless it happens again). This contradicts with the answer of her fellow team member. Three managers note that everybody is different and sometimes things are said immediately and in other situations it is not said at all.

Conflict

In two companies the managers say that there are never or rarely any conflicts. In the other two companies the managers say that conflicts occur often or regularly. They name tiredness and problems at home as examples of possible reasons for these conflicts.

Humour

Seven of the managers interviewed say that they have a lot of fun when working together, and they say it is a way of coping with stress and reducing tensions. Three managers say that they don't have any fun in their cooperation. In three of the companies, the answers are contradicting. Some of the managers in a team say they have a lot of fun when working with the other team members, while one other members of the *same team* says they don't have any fun and humour is not part of their cooperation. Only at Brakina the answers correspond.

The managers of Brakina say that the fun they have is partly due to the fact that they are all of the same age and because they often socialise outside the workplace (for example they go out dancing together). At Sodepal one manager says that to deal with tensions people make jokes, which are often about ethnical backgrounds. They have certain types of jokes for certain types of ethnic groups, for example, one group used to be the slaves of another group.

Criticism

All the managers except one say that if somebody doesn't function well in the team, the other team members say this immediately. They say it is more important to be direct with feedback, than to be liked by others, and it is generally accepted. One manager says people think it is difficult to give negative feedback, and it is not always accepted, but still they do it and they always find a solution.

Control

All managers say that before anything is reported to the DG, they report the individual contributions to each other, so that everybody can check the work of the others in advance. One manager says that everybody has his own individual task. Since they don't make mutual decisions, their "*work is separated*".

Mutual trust

Eight of the managers said they all have a lot of confidence in the other team members. One of them said: "*La confiance est sacré*". One manager said that not everybody has confidence in their fellow team members, because everybody is different. The DG of SN Citec said that there is a lot of mistrust among the managers, and this stands in the way of good cooperation. According to him this is the result of a combination of personality of the individual, and external problems. "*They don't want the other to be successful*".

So although the answers are sometimes contradicting, the managers think that *usually their communication is open*.

Results of the blank forms

The managers indicate on the blank forms that communication between the managers in the teams is *usually* open.

Comments of the experts

- “During the first contact the Burkinabé are usually not open. They assume that the other person wants to harm them, or even that you will bring the ‘Wack’, the African term for evil spirit, onto them. But however, they keep smiling at you.”
- “People in Burkina are very rancorous. For example: when somebody dislikes you personally and they have to process for example your application form for a scholarship; they tear it.”
- “There is a lot of suspicion, a great lack of confidence. When there is a problem, people don’t start looking for a solution, but they start with looking for the one to blame, the one who caused all the misery (the one who caused the Wack), because ‘misery is always caused by a person’.”
- “‘Gentillesse’ is very important; everybody wants to be liked. Being direct and saying what you honestly think is not appreciated and considered mean/ rude (‘méchant’).”
- “Superiors hide it when somebody doesn’t do his work well, because they don’t want to loose their gratifications (like their 13th month).”
- According to one expert, if any of the managers answers the question in my interview “When you think somebody in your team doesn’t function or perform well, do you immediately tell this person?”, with yes, it cannot be true. “C’est faux!”
- “The managers in general have an extremely conservative attitude. They are not open for new information.”
- “People don’t want to talk about their company. Nothing is clear. They don’t want others to know what is happening in their company, because there is so much corruption. They especially don’t want financial experts.”
- “People will always answer your questions with ‘yes’ to please you. This is why a market- research will never work.”
- “The new generation of managers is much more open in their communication. They identify themselves more with the organisation. They no longer work just for their salary but also for the development of the organisation.”

Thesis 4. Communication between team members is rather open than closed.

One manager interviewed mentions power games that motivate people to keep knowledge to themselves, but this is usually done by the older managers. But in situations where there is a lack of agreement or annoyance between the members of the team, most of the managers are open in their communication and work it out. Although sometimes the answers of managers from the same team are contradicting, most of them say that humour plays an important role in their communication and helps them to cope with tensions.

All the managers except one say that if somebody doesn’t function well in the team, the other team members say this immediately. Eight of the managers said they all have a lot of confidence in the other team members. The DG of SN Citec said that there is a lot of mistrust among the managers, and this stands in the way of good cooperation. According to him this is

the result of a combination of personality of the individual, and external problems. *“They don’t want the other to be successful”*.

The vast majority of the managers interviewed claim that the *communication between the members in the team is open*.

Based on this it can be concluded that the thesis can be confirmed.

These answers correspond to the answers they filled in on the blank forms, but the experts interviewed completely contradicted this. So following their argumentation, the answers of the managers would be the result of social desirability. They do remark that the younger generation of managers is much more open in their communication.

Personally, my first impression was that the Burkinabé managers are not very open in their communication. The experts named so many different arguments that it makes their statement plausible. But it could be that the new generation of managers is indeed much more open and since the managers I interviewed are on average relatively young, it is very well possible that they are right.

5.5 Sharing knowledge

“Do the managers share all necessary knowledge with their other team members?”

Results of the questionnaires

Communication of strategic changes to and between the team members

Seven of the ten managers say that when the DG announces strategic change, all team members receive this kind of information simultaneously, and in all companies it is usually spread during a meeting. Six of the managers say it is also spread by a written note. At Sodepal, all three managers interviewed said that sometimes the information is given to one person, who has to transmit the information to the others.

Search for information

All managers said that information necessary for their team work is searched individually. Except for Sodepal, where the quality manager searches for all the information needed by the other managers in the team.

Time

Five of the managers said they often have difficulty finding time for sharing knowledge or even that they never have enough time for this. The other five say that time is rarely or never a problem when it comes to sharing knowledge.

When I asked about sharing knowledge, three of the managers only talked about sharing information and also these managers said time is never a problem. Meetings are usually the occasion for the managers to exchange their knowledge, but in two of the companies the managers admitted that the formal meetings do not always take place as planned, so they meet less often as a result of lack of time.

The General Director of SN Citec said the following about the role that time plays in Burkinabé management: “The problem of African managers is that they spend 25-30% of their time on non-organisational matters. Making phone calls, social problems etc. So there’s not always enough time to see each other and to discuss problems.”

One manager at Sodepal said this about time: “There are problems that are taking time. Especially the explanation of very simple things to employees that have not received any education. This is time lost.”

Learning together

Seven of the managers say that they do talk together about lessons learned from past experiences, but for some this exchange of knowledge is limited to the operational level. Three managers say they never do this. In the management teams of Jossira, Sodepal and SN Citec, most members say that they do talk about this, but in all teams there is one person who says that they don’t.

Comparison with Western companies and factors influencing time spent on sharing knowledge

There are two managers who think they have more time to spend on sharing knowledge than Western managers. Three managers think there is little or no difference. The other ones think there might be a difference, but there are other factors that influence the amount of time they can spend on sharing knowledge. Two examples that were mentioned are the fact that a lot of time (more than in Western countries) is spent on non-organisational matters such as social obligations and making phone calls, and the time the managers have to spend on explaining things to uneducated employees.

Knowledge as a source of power

There are two managers who do not think knowledge is a source of power, one does not know whether she thinks so, one says it is only a source of power at the department level, not between managers and the other six are convinced that knowledge is power.

The use of knowledge as power

There are two managers who think their colleagues sometimes keep knowledge to themselves to avoid the risk of losing their power. The other eight managers think that nobody does this. The DG of SN Citec thinks that it happens sometimes that managers are keeping important knowledge to themselves and the reason for this is that the old managers are afraid to lose their power to the new cohort of managers. *“In the organisation there are two groups; one is willing to share knowledge and the other one is not. The people who have been working here for many years do not want to share their knowledge with others because they are afraid to lose their power. Also, some of the management have not had a theoretical education.”*

The DG of SN Citec also said that the managers in his company have the tendency to keep knowledge to themselves because they do not realise the importance of sharing it. They do share specialist knowledge but not general management knowledge, except when they have seminars. This is when external experts come to the company, but usually this is only on one domain.

One manager at Brakina thinks that in general older managers more often have the tendency of keeping knowledge to themselves.

One manager at Sodepal told the following story about the sharing of knowledge between Burkinabé people:

“The manner in which knowledge is shared depends on civilisation. In the Burkinabé tradition, people are used to pass on their knowledge, their wisdom, through storytelling. (“raconter des comptes”). This starts when children are very young, in the form of some kind of African fairytales, and when they are older it takes on the form of parables. The general lesson they want to teach is usually not pronounced directly, but explained in the form of a comparison with an everyday life (or sometimes an ancient everyday life) example. It is embedded in the Burkinabé culture to share as much knowledge as possible. Therefore they are not too aware of their knowledge transfer; it is more or less taken for granted.”

About the transfer of knowledge in his own company, he told: “A production line manager has to do certain tasks himself, but these are tasks which can easily be done by one of the workers. If the manager isn’t there, the worker cannot take over the job because the manager is unable to make his procedural knowledge explicit.”

And also:

“The transfer of knowledge can be difficult for other reasons than power. The main problem with knowledge transfer is that some of the managers can’t explain to others what they know.” He calls this a ‘language problem’.

Results of the blank forms

Based on the blank forms it could be concluded that *usually* the managers share all necessary knowledge with the other team members.

Comments of the experts

- “The DG has all the power and everybody wants to push the king off his throne. They wait for their chance, like in the ‘system of the chefs’ in the Mossi society. For this reason, delegation is very difficult. Another problem is that during their education, managers only learn how to learn; not how to create. They don’t learn to see the advantages of a ‘two-way-traffic’; the advantages for the two parties when they share their knowledge.”
- “When the boss (the DG) dies, often the company goes bankrupt. All the children fight over the largest part, but nobody knows how to manage the company. If there is somebody who does know how to manage, he or she is not allowed to be the successor of the DG.”
- “Knowledge is not shared equally or honestly. Politics and power play a huge role in this.”
- The anecdote of storytelling was named by one of the managers to illustrate how sharing knowledge is ingrained in the Burkinabé culture. One expert commented on this: “storytelling is not to transfer knowledge or wisdom but is only used to transfer the rules and ways of life. So this does not support his statement that managers often share their knowledge with other team members.”
- “Knowledge about managerial matters is often only shared after approximately ten years. There is a great fear of sharing knowledge; it can always be used against you.”

- “Family businesses are going to disappear, because nobody can take over the management when the owner dies. The knowledge is not being shared.”
- “State companies have more difficulty with sharing knowledge.”
- “In private companies often the directors compete amongst themselves for the power, they all want to become the new DG. Nobody will admit this, but it is very often the case.”

Thesis 5. Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.

Half of the managers said they often have difficulty finding time for sharing knowledge or even that they never have enough time for this. The other five say that time is rarely or never a problem when it comes to sharing knowledge.

Seven of the managers say that they do talk together about lessons learned from past experiences, but for some this exchange of knowledge is limited to the operational level. Three managers say they never do this. In the management teams of Jossira, Sodepal and SN Citec, most members say that they do talk about this, but in all teams there is one person who says that they don't.

Six of the managers are convinced that knowledge is a source of power, but eight managers think that nobody uses knowledge as a source of power.

The DG of SN Citec again pointed out the influence of the power games in his company and said that especially the older managers do not want to share their knowledge. Another reason he gave is that they do not realise the importance of sharing knowledge

Based on the answers to the questionnaires, it is not very clear whether this thesis should be confirmed or refuted. When asked directly, the managers said they do often share relevant knowledge with their fellow team members, but when asked for examples they usually illustrated their statements with an irrelevant example, usually concerning the transfer of data, information, or operational knowledge.

This finally led me to the conclusion that indeed *Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.*

The thesis can be confirmed.

However, when filling in the forms, they claim they *do* share all necessary knowledge. The experts say that relevant knowledge is practically never shared between managers in a team.

My personal view on this matter is mainly based on the things I have heard about the power games that are being played in the companies. But also when they tried to illustrate their statements about sharing knowledge, they gave examples concerning the transfer of data, information, or operational knowledge. So my overall impression is that in fact *Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.*

5.6 Mutual responsibility

“Do the managers in the team feel mutually responsible for the team results?”

To answer this question I asked the managers who is held responsible by the DG, who they think is responsible for the team performance, if the other members take responsibility for the outcomes of the team processes and whether they feel personally responsible for team performance.

Results of the questionnaires

Individual or collective responsibility

Four of the managers said it is the team as a whole that is held responsible for the results of the teamwork and also four of them said that the individual is held responsible. Two of them said it is only the team leader who is held responsible.

It is striking that the answers from members of the same teams are not always consistent with the others. At Sodepal the three managers gave three different answers. One manager at Brakina said they do everything together and thus, are responsible as a group when answering the previous question, and he answered stating that the individual is held responsible, because they try to find the person who is responsible for the area where the problem becomes manifest, because they want to find the person who is 'guilty'.

Personal view

All managers interviewed felt personally responsible for the results and the performance of the team as a whole.

Responsibility according to the DG

Eight managers answered that the DG thinks that all individual team members are mutually responsible for the performance of the team as a whole. One manager said that the DG does not think so, and one manager said it all depends on the domain and the level of responsibility of the manager.

Three of the four managers who previously answered that the individual is held responsible only for their individual contribution to the team and the three that answered that it is the team leader who is responsible for it all, now answered that the DG thinks all individuals are responsible for the results of the team as a whole.

Mutual trust

Eight of the managers said they all have a lot of confidence in the other team members. One manager said that not everybody has confidence in their fellow team members, because everybody is different. The DG of SN Citec said that there is mistrust among the managers, and this stands in the way of good cooperation. According to him this is the result of personality of the individual and external problems. "*They don't want the other to be successful*".

Shifting responsibility

Three managers said that it never happens that members of the team shift responsibility onto one of the others. But two of them say it does happen a lot in the rest of the organisation. Seven of the managers said that it does happen. Four of them said it happens very often, three of them said it rarely happens.

All managers say they feel mutually responsible for the results of the team processes, but the other aspects of this mutual responsibility, like the official accountability of the team members, are not clear. The answers differ greatly or even contradict.

Results of the blank forms

Based on the blank forms, it could be concluded that the managers *often* feel mutually responsible for the team as a whole.

Comments of the experts

- “Everybody shifts responsibility onto somebody else. Burkinabé managers find it very difficult to take responsibility. They have fear for their bosses which stems from the *chefferie*-system and if they admit a mistake their chances of becoming DG might decrease. They think: ‘I am the best so therefore I have not made a mistake’. They always try to hide their mistakes.”
- “Responsibility is usually taken individually. There is a group spirit but they see their responsibility as an individual thing. As a DG, this expert personally calls the other managers together in his office and tries to make them think together as a group about the problem and the responsibility for this.”

Thesis 6. Burkinabé team members feel mutually responsible for team results.

Four of the managers said it is the team as a whole that is held responsible for the results of the teamwork and also four of them said that the individual is held responsible. Two of them said it is only the team leader who is held responsible, so the official accountability is not clear. This problem is enhanced by the fact that answers from members of the same teams are not always consistent with the others and by the contradicting answers concerning the opinion of the DG.

All managers interviewed said they felt personally responsible for the results and the performance of the team as a whole.

Three managers said that it never happens that members of the team shift responsibility onto one of the others. But two of them say it does happen a lot in the rest of the organisation.

Seven of the managers said that it does happen. Four of them said it happens very often, three of them said it rarely happens.

In conclusion, all managers say *they feel mutually responsible for the results of the team processes*, but the other aspects of this mutual responsibility, like the official accountability of the team members, are not clear. The answers differ greatly or even contradict.

Since the thesis concerns the personal view of the managers interviewed, it can be confirmed.

The results of the blank forms indicate that the team members *are* mutually responsible (so this relates to the actual accountability). The experts firmly deny the answers the managers gave to the questionnaires; according to them Burkinabé managers generally *do not feel mutually responsible* for their team results.

They all say they feel mutually responsible for the results of the team as a whole, but it is difficult to tell whether they take this responsibility. The official accountability is not clear, which makes it even harder to make any statements on this. There were some remarks made about ‘finding the guilty one’ and my overall impression is that often the responsibility is often not mutually shared in their everyday work.

5.7 Additional aspects of team work mentioned by the experts

The experts interviewed all had additional ideas about what characterises the Burkinabé way of cooperating in management teams. These ideas are described below together with their ideas about cultural factors that, according to the experts, influence the way Burkinabé managers cooperate. Some of them have already been mentioned in the former paragraphs and are summarized to give a complete review of the experts’ ideas.

According to the experts one should not make generalizations about a Burkinabé management style or style of cooperation too easily, because the differences are so big. They say that “one cannot find any typical Burkinabé companies” and “there is no typical Burkinabé management style”.

They all say that a factor of great influence is that the structure of most companies still resembles the French hierarchy system and is also influenced by the *chefferie*-system. As a consequence, the structure is very hierarchical and the employees have a lot of respect for their DG. Also it is ingrained in their culture (especially Mossi-culture) not to contradict ones superior. The DG often makes all decisions himself and so the managers do not have to cooperate to develop strategy together.

A critical note one expert made in this respect is that this is very dynamic; more and more people are born in the cities and their upbringing is to a lesser extent influenced by these traditional values. And even in the villages these ancient structures are nowadays abandoned. Another expert notes that the implementation of systems of quality circles, which occurs more and more since more companies are competing internationally, contributes to a change in attitude: “More and more people dare to give their opinion and come with ideas.”

Another comment was made on the commitment to the organisation. One expert spoke of a lack of commitment and according to her the cooperation in teams is not directed at improvement. In chapter 3.2 the differences between individualist and collectivist cultures are described, and according to this literature Japanese and African culture are both collectivist cultures. One of the experts, however, states that concerning commitment and improvement, the cooperation of managers within a team is actually the opposite of how Japanese managers work together.

The experts make the critical note that the new generation of managers identify themselves more with the organisation than their precedents and that “they no longer work just for their salary but also for the development of the organisation”.

Burkinabé managers in general have an extremely conservative attitude, says one of the experts. They are not open for new information, which influences the exchange of information between team members.

How managers work together is greatly influenced by where they have been educated, according to the experts. One of them even stated that “the only good managers are the ones who have had an education in Europe”.

Another factor which is said to influence cooperation between managers is their mutual suspicion and their rancorous attitude. This makes them less open towards each other, but also results in a non-collaborative attitude. However, they will always stay polite and friendly even when they do not approve of their team members' behaviour, because “everybody wants to be liked” and being honest and critical is considered mean or rude. Relating to this, the managers are also said to have a very strong tendency to answer any questions with ‘yes’ to please the other.

In this respect, the experts again make a critical note on the dynamic aspect and emphasise that the new generation of managers is much more open in their communication.

When cooperating, managers have a strong tendency to shift responsibility onto somebody else, the experts say, because Burkinabé managers find it very difficult to take responsibility. This is related to the hierarchical structure mentioned above.

5.8 Conclusion

In summary, when Burkinabé managers cooperate in a management team, they are usually not competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team, this is confirmed by the experts. On the other hand almost all managers, independently of their actual level of competence, perceive their decision making power as sufficient. This is confirmed by the forms they filled in.

They usually solve unknown problems or handle unforeseen situations in a routinely manner. The filled in forms indicate that the managers solve problems in a creative manner more often than in a routine manner. For the managers who scored this dimension based on the behaviour of their fellow-team members because it does not apply to themselves, this contradicts the results of the questionnaire. The opinions of the experts were not very conclusive. One stated that the variety in ethnicity leads to a rich variety in ideas, a lot of creative resolutions, but this can only lead to creative problem solving when the managers have a good leader. The others said that generally the Burkinabé managers are conservative and do not invest in improvement.

The vast majority of the managers interviewed claim that the communication between the members in the team is open. These answers correspond to the answers they filled in on the blank forms, but the experts interviewed completely contradicted this. So following their argumentation, the answers of the managers would be the result of social desirability. They do remark that the younger generation of managers is much more open in their communication.

It was not very obvious whether or not relevant knowledge usually is shared between the Burkinabé team members. When asked directly, the managers said they do often share relevant knowledge with their fellow team members, but when asked for examples they usually illustrated their statements with an irrelevant example, usually concerning the transfer of data, information, or operational knowledge. This, combined with the remarks of the experts, has led me to the conclusion that indeed Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.

However, when filling in the forms, they claim they *do* share all necessary knowledge. The experts say that relevant knowledge is practically never shared between managers in a team.

All managers say they feel mutually responsible for the results of the team processes. The other aspects of this mutual responsibility, like the official accountability of the team members and how they act out this responsibility in their everyday work, are not clear. The answers differ greatly or even contradict.

The results of the blank forms indicate that the team members *are* mutually responsible (so this relates to the actual accountability). The experts firmly deny the answers the managers gave to the questionnaires; according to them Burkinabé managers generally *do not feel mutually responsible* for their team results.

The experts have all made some additional comments on cooperation in management teams and the underlying cultural factors. Although they say the differences are big, there are some important influences of Burkinabé culture on how Burkinabé managers cooperate. The most important influences they mentioned is the ancient *chefferie*-system and the French hierarchy system, which have resulted in a very hierarchical structure and a lot of respect for the DG. The experts do note that this is subject to change.

In the next chapter I will draw conclusions from all previous chapters and point out the relations between the chapters on culture and cooperation. Finally I will give some suggestions for further research.

Chapter 6 Conclusions and suggestions for further research

6.1 Conclusions

How do Burkinabé managers cooperate in a management team? With this question I have started this research. In the last paragraph the characteristics of this cooperation resulting from my research have been listed. In this chapter I will give a review of the aspects of cooperation discussed in chapter two and the Burkinabé context and cultural aspects influencing this cooperation that have been discussed in chapters one and three.

In chapter two a team was defined as: ‘a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable’. The way that the team members cooperate to achieve this, is called team work. This cooperation is influenced by many factors, such as the societal culture, the organizational culture and the personalities of the people in the teams.

To research *team work*, I have chosen to make this term operational and chose some key dimensions that characterise cooperation. These dimensions are: *decision making, problem solving, sharing knowledge, communication* and *mutual responsibility*.

The influence of the African culture on team work in Burkinabé management teams is the first factor that was discussed. African culture is characterised in literature as a collectivist culture, as opposed to, for example, the European individualistic culture. Also the African culture is characterised by some authors with the *ubuntu* principle which, amongst other things, stands for a feeling of solidarity between African people. This influences their group behaviour and might be the reason for their open communication and for them feeling mutually responsible for the team results, although these are the two results of my research that were most strongly denied by the experts.

The context of Burkina Faso as a country influences the way managers cooperate in teams because it determines for example what ethnicities of people work in the companies, what the macro-economical relations between these companies are, the legal boundaries and organisational structures and (partially) the educational possibilities that Burkinabé managers have had. This broader societal context, influences the cultural values, the organisational values in the Burkinabé companies, and the personal habitus of the organisation members. Cooperation in management teams is influenced by the educational possibilities. The experts noted that often knowledge is not shared because managers often do not have the theoretical background to realise the importance of sharing knowledge. One expert even said that the only good managers are the ones who are educated in Europe. This is a strong statement but indicates the reputation of the level of management education in Burkina.

Another factor of influence is the political context. People are used to a lot of corruption and this might stand in the way of open communication and creative problem solving, because like one of the experts said: “It is easier to invest in corruption than in progress”.

The historical and political context have some other influence. For example the system of the chiefs that is still vivid in the rural areas, and the French hierarchy system that was imposed on Burkinabé companies after the colonisation, have resulted in a very hierarchical structure and a lot of respect for the DG. As a consequence, the DG often has all the power and the management team has very little decision making power. But also because of this, the managers are used to this low level of competence and therefore do not perceive this as insufficient.

This background might also be the cause of the routinely manner of problem solving. Because managers never have to deal with problems themselves and the DG eventually solves everything, they have not been triggered not find creative ways of problem solving. Related to this and according to the experts, every manager wants to become the new DG and so a lot of power games that are going on. This could stand in the way of sharing relevant management knowledge.

Another relevant factor is the great ethnical diversity in population. As a result of this diversity management teams are heterogeneous and one would expect that this leads to for example creative problem solving. However, this is not illustrated by the results of this research.

Not every management team in Burkina Faso operates exactly the same because they consist of different individuals, and because every company has its own organizational culture. This is also based on experiences from the past. For example, when a problem is solved in a certain way and this works well, people start to see this as reality. This is why in all companies there can be found differences in for example how open the managers communicate, how much knowledge they share and how they solve problems.

But the behaviour of the team members is also influenced by for example their personal values, beliefs, and experiences. In this context the concept of habitus was introduced. It explains how agents share a culture and its practices, within asymmetrical social positions and relations of domination. Based on their habitus, managers fill in the gap between any principle and guideline of a management concept they are educated with, and its enactment. The habitus of the managers in the teams have many similarities, because the majority of these managers have been raised in the same country, they have often had a similar education and working experience in the same company. But there are also many differences, since they all have had a different upbringing in different families, often in different ethnical groups, and different experiences in life in general.

To find out what characterises cooperation in Burkinabé management teams, I have started by constructing a conceptual model and with this model as a frame of reference I set up my research. The research question is specified by defining cooperation in terms of five dimensions; decision making, problem solving, sharing knowledge, communication and mutual responsibility.

The results of the research are based on interviews with ten managers in four companies with semi-open questionnaires, about how they operate with their fellow team members. In addition to this, I let them fill in forms about the dimensions researched. Finally, I had open interviews with three *experts*; General Managers with a lot of experience in various companies, about their perceptions of cooperation in Burkinabe teams.

In the first place, my conclusions are based on the results of the interviews with the team members. The results of the filled-in forms and the interviews with the experts I have used to add a critical note to the answers to the questionnaires. Finally I have added my own impressions.

How Burkinabé managers cooperate in a top management team, can be described as follows:

- Burkinabé managers are usually not competent to make all necessary decisions to perform their tasks as a top management team, but almost all managers, independently of their actual level of competence, perceive their decision making power as sufficient.
- They usually solve unknown problems or handle unforeseen situations in a routinely manner.

- Communication between the members in the team is open.
- Burkinabé managers often do not share relevant knowledge with other team members.
- The team members feel mutually responsible for the results of the team processes.

This description is, as I stated before, based on the results of the interviews with the managers and therefore based on their perceptions and their answers are possibly subject to social desirability. Therefore I have made some additional comments based on the experts' opinions and some of my own impressions.

Because so little is known about Burkinabé management and even less about the cooperation in Burkinabé management teams, this research only provides a first impression and it would take further research to gain more detailed insights in cooperation in Burkinabé management teams.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

During this research and my stay in Burkina I have encountered some aspects of Burkinabé management that might be interesting for future researcher to explore in greater depth.

The results of the interviews with the experts indicated that there is a very fast development going on in Burkina Faso, in several area's, as discussed in chapter one. The urbanisation (chapter 1.4) has many consequences for the development of the cities and the companies located there. Their workforce, as well as their customer groups are influenced by this. The economical structure (chapter 1.2) too is changing because so many companies are privatised, and larger companies are starting to emerge. More and more companies are starting to compete globally. It could be interesting to research how these and other dynamics influence the management in Burkina and what implications they will have on future management.

Although the Burkinabé society can be marked as a collectivist society (chapter 3.2) and group solidarity is very important in the everyday lives of the Burkinabé (chapter 3.5), this solidarity is not always reflected in their group behaviour (see the grey section in chapter 3.5). It could be further explored what causes this and how this impacts the cooperation in management teams. It could be that these 'African' values are mainly vivid in rural areas where the interdependence between people for their everyday survival is much higher. My experiences and the examples of non-solidarity I have heard about were based on the big city and large enterprises so this could be a factor but this should be explored in greater depth.

Another potentially interesting research area is the restaurant business in Burkina Faso. It appeared to me that the employees are not instructed to be customer-oriented. Waiting times at restaurants can vary enormously and ingredients are not available on a regular basis, of which they usually inform you after about forty-five minutes or longer. The waiters are not customer-friendly and moody and make many mistakes in taking orders etcetera. It might be interesting to do research in this business to see what are the causes of this and how this can be improved, by for example better motivation of personnel and logistics management. But it should also be researched if it even has to be improved, because it is possible that the majority of the Burkinabé customers do not mind this.

At for example banks or public services such as the energy or water company, queues are enormous and waiting in line for more than one hour and a half is normal. I noticed that there are a lot of bureaucratic activities that have to be performed that are one of the causes of this.

To cash money in a bank the employee has to stamp and/or sign at least five papers and sort them. Customers cannot take a number and wait in a chair but have to stand in line all this time.

As I described in the introduction unfortunately I did not find many positive aspects of cooperation. The collectivist culture does not seem to offer the advantages for group work as I expected. Or at least, I did not see them. The Burkinabé themselves too apparently do not see them, as can be concluded from the negative remarks of the experts interviewed. The managers interviewed often came up with positive things but mainly when it was about themselves which makes it less credible.

I think it would be worth considering to research more in depth the aspects of Burkinabé management and cooperation that are adapted to the cultural context and therefore are the strengths of Burkinabé cooperation..

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Notes

Some of the information used in this chapter stems from interviews with the experts whom I have interviewed, the managers interviewed, from Mrs. Drs. H. Illa, and other various Burkinabé friends or managers as indicated by the notes below. All of the information has been cross-checked with other informants.

(note 1) H. Illa

(Note 2) Comment of expert

(Note 3) Comment of manager

(Note 4) H. Toonen (2004)

(Note 5) Conversations with various Burkinabé

(note 6) My own observations