

TALKING BURKINA FASO

IMPROVING THE AFRICAN WAY

Tessy van de Wiel

Hanzehogeschool, Hogeschool van Groningen, The Netherlands

author: Tessy van de Wiel
student number: 203364
tutor: Prof Richard Rogers
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PREFACE

On April 14th 2000 I left for Burkina Faso to do certain research in two certain companies. This introduction to my actual thesis is about that research, which, as you will soon find out, never actually happened. The reason the research in the first company didn't take place, was because the topic had been dealt with already. The second company simply refused to receive me.

I decided on a new research topic while I was in Burkina Faso, and realized that the experiences that I had had up until then were apart from being frustrating at the time, also very interesting material for my new subject. What happened the first few weeks I was in Burkina Faso showed beautifully some of the characteristics of the country I was in and its culture.

Now, why did I choose to put these experiences into a separate booklet? There are several reasons for this. Firstly, before I left to Burkina Faso, I had already done a lot of desk research, and written a lot about what I thought was going to be the subject of my thesis. Part I is a logical build up to where Part II starts. Secondly, the events described in Part I could not be squeezed into one little chapter of my actual thesis. They were too extensive and important to be reduced. To do so would have damaged the logic and the structure of my thesis.

In Part II you will find my actual thesis. Part II stands on itself but cannot be read without having read Part One. Part I ends with Chapter 6, Part II begins with Chapter 7. I have chosen to do so to emphasize that the two parts form one unity.

It is about exactly two years ago that I was sitting in my student room in Groningen, talking to my friend Karlijn Kuiper about my wish to go to Africa after finishing my studies. She said to me: "Why wait until after your studies, when you could also go now to do your research?". She told me she knew a professor at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG, university of Groningen), who had already arranged for many students to go to Africa and she advised me to get in contact with him. A week later I was sitting in the office of the professor she was talking about, Dr. Luchien Karsten, to talk about what the possibilities were for me to go to a country called Burkina Faso.

Since I wasn't a student of the university, but of the polytechnic 'Hanzehogeschool', I feared Dr. Karsten would be reluctant to help me, but the opposite turned out to be true. Within less than two weeks time, all was arranged and I was ready to book my ticket. I was very excited to go for I had never been in Africa and because I had talked to a few other students that had been there, who were ecstatic about their experiences.

There are quite a few people that I would like to thank for quite a few different reasons. First and foremost I want to thank Dr. Karsten of the Rijksuniversiteit van Groningen. The enthusiasm with which he offers his assistance to students, even to those not studying at the RuG, is unique. He welcomed me with open arms. Moreover, when I was back in The Netherlands after my research, and was having difficulty getting started on my thesis, he stimulated me to go on.

Many thanks also to Professor Richard Rogers, who agreed to be my 'long distance' tutor. I have received extremely useful pieces of advice from him, especially when I was in Burkina Faso and going through a bit of a confusing time.

I thank the family Regtounda in Ouagadougou for letting me live with them as a family member for two months. Without this experience I don't think I could have felt so at home in a country so different from my own.

Furthermore I am very grateful to my father, Mr. Frank van de Wiel, who morally supported me at the times I needed it most. Last but not least I want to thank my boyfriend David le Masney who corrected all the grammar and spelling mistakes I made (which were numerous, I have to admit). He also designed the cover for my thesis.

Tessy van de Wiel
Amsterdam, January 2002

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PART I

In which I learn about the possibility to go to Africa, find out many are enthusiastic about the idea, prepare how to do my research, prepare for my trip, find out how nothing is what I expected it to be and spend a whole lot of time trying to get things organized.

CHAPTER 1

INITIAL INTRODUCTION AND SUBJECT

1.1 FIRST CONSIDERATIONS

Dr. Luchien Karsten is a tutor at the Rijksuniversiteit of Groningen (RuG), department of Business Administration. One of his focus points is West African management. I contacted Dr. Karsten through one of his students. Although it must have been unusual for him to be approached by a student of a polytechnic, he was immediately enthusiastic about my idea of researching my thesis in West Africa. He wanted to give me the chance to go, and suggested a research topic to me that could also lead to interesting results for him. Dr. Karsten is presently writing a book on West African management in which the research results of his students will be included.

His suggestions are outlined in the following paragraph.

1.2 INITIAL IDEAS

Dr. Karsten knew through previous research that within several companies in Burkina Faso there were differences of opinion amongst the directors in relation to the management concepts of flexibility, quality and productivity. Dr. Karsten was however interested in further research in this subject. He advised me to undertake this research in two specific companies: Fasoplast in Ouagadougou and SAP Olympic in Bobo Dioulasso.

I approached Mrs. Iekje Smit, one of my tutors at the Hanzehogeschool, Hogeschool van Groningen, of the department of Communications at the faculty of Economics with this subject.

She was also enthusiastic but immediately pointed out that there is a significant difference between research for a university and that for a polytechnic. University research requires amongst other things theoretical analysis, whereas the Hanzehogeschool asks beyond that for concrete, practical solutions to a defined problem and for tools to implement these solutions. In response to Karsten's proposal, her suggestions were the following:

1. In regard to the differences of opinions outlined in Karsten's proposal, research the causes of these differences.
2. Knowing these differences and their causes, how can they be overcome.
3. What tools would be needed to achieve this.
4. How can these tools be implemented?

Although the subject interested Mrs. Smit, she felt that the topic might be of particular interest to Professor Richard Rogers, Associate Professor of Speech Communication at the School of Communication at Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, USA. Professor Rogers also teaches Intercultural Communications at the Hanzehogeschool in Groningen for one trimester per year.

Accordingly Mrs. Smit introduced the idea of my thesis to Prof. Rogers who took an interest in our suggestions. He appeared to be prepared to tutor me during my thesis because the subject coincided with his area of study. During my first meeting with Prof. Rogers I presented both Mrs. Smit's and Dr. Karsten's ideas on the subject. He agreed with their general outlines, and came up with his interpretation of the study subject from an intercultural point of view. From this interpretation, he advised me on how to approach the problem. This advice will be described in Chapter 4 'Initial formulating of the assignment'.

CHAPTER 2

INITIAL DEFINITION OF THE SUBJECT AND GOALS

2.1 SUBJECT

Since Dr. Karsten was my assigner, the first description of my thesis subject was determined as outlined:

1. Based on a previous thesis prepared by a student of Dr. Karsten; of what do the internal differences of opinions amongst different directors within the same company about the management concepts flexibility, quality and productivity, as exist?
2. Where do these differences originate from?

Furthermore Dr. Karsten readily agreed to the expanding of the subject to the specific, practical requirements of the Hanzehogeschool. The following points were added:

1. Is there a communicative solution to overcome these differences in order for the different directors to reach a consensus?
2. What tools could be developed to implement said solutions?

2.2 GOALS

Consequently, the goals to be reached with my research were defined as follows:

1. Based on the previously mentioned thesis, the first goal was to reveal the internal differences of opinions amongst different directors within the same company about the management concepts flexibility, quality and productivity, as described in a previous thesis of one of Dr. Karsten's students;
2. Description of the origin of these differences;
3. Write a communication plan that gives solutions that lead to overcoming these differences;

4. Provide tools to implement those solutions.

2.3 JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH METHOD

My research will have to lead to an in-depth understanding of the reason for which the different managers think differently about the management concepts productivity, flexibility and quality. To acquire this in-depth understanding I will have to find out what it is that the different managers think what these three concepts mean.

Furthermore, my research will have to lead to me being able to find a way for the different managers to reach a consensus on the three concepts. In order to find this way I will need extensive comprehension of the way the different managers are related to one another, how the different managers communicate, what their intentions are, what their habits are, what their work environment is like, what their relations with other people in their company are like, etc.

The first part of my research, obtaining a in-depth understanding of the reason for which the managers think differently about the three concepts, I will do by interviewing the managers. I need their personal views on the three concepts which I can obtain by asking open questions.

The second part of my research, finding a way for the different managers to reach a consensus on the three concepts, I will investigate by participant observation which allows me to investigate named activities in their natural context.

The primary reason for which I want to use observation as a research method is that it is direct. Forms of interrogation, whether interview or questionnaire, are indirect. They represent in the present context attempts to find out about a manager's job and conduct by offering stimuli (questions) where the response is mediated by the respondent's consciousness, whereas in observational studies one is observing that job, that conduct, that action directly and it is the beholder who has the (interpretive) prerogative of consciousness.

Another merit of observation as a method is that it gets one closer to the qualitative things. It helps to answer questions such as: what is the style of management (in this country), do they 'go about things' differently.

Observation is also calculated to yield unprogrammed insights. Most research is dependent on presuppositions. You think that training is important, so you send round a questionnaire asking about training. But what about the things that you would think were important if you ever came across them?

I realize that I am an outsider to the Burkinabè community, which means that my results may not represent accurately the communication patterns as seen by the members of the Burkinabè community.

Another thing I will have to keep in mind, is that organizations all in the same nation and societal culture will differ in their own cultures (and sub-cultures within them again). Before assuming that something is due to societal culture, it is as well to wonder how much it may be due to the ways of the particular organization or even of the industry.

Finally, what could come in the way of getting dear research results is the fact that I am Dutch, I will have to speak, interview and observe in French, the culture in which all this takes place is the Burkinabè and my thesis will have to be written in English. With every language being different and most of the time not directly translatable, information might get lost or deformed in the process if not treated carefully.

2.4 GENERAL REFERENCES SECTION 2.3

- Hickson, D.J. & D.S. Pugh (1995), *Management Worldwide, the Impact of Societal Culture on Organizations around the Globe*, The Penguin Group.
- Lawrence, P., 'In another Country'. *Doing Research in Organizations*. Routledge
- Martin, J.N. & T.K. Nakayama (1997), *Intercultural Communications in Context*, Mayfield Publishing Company.

CHAPTER 3

INITIAL FORMULATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

In Section 2.1 I described the subject of my thesis. This leaves me to discuss my assignment before making a start with my desk research in The Netherlands.

My assignment consists of various elements that together secure a successful basis for my research in Africa. To give an overview of these elements, certain practical preparational activities had to be undertaken before leaving, on top of the scientific research that is obviously also part of it. I will describe both aspects of my assignment here under.

3.1 PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF ASSIGNMENT

In view of the journey to a tropical country that I was about to undertake, it was vital that I obtained all the required documents and health injections. Furthermore I thought it wise to gain some general ideas about the country, by gathering common, tourist-like information about Burkina Faso. It also seemed important to contact someone who had already been there so that I could learn from their experiences. Dr. Karsten brought me into contact with a girl called Claudine Koers, who had also done her thesis research for him in Burkina Faso. I met up with her and asked what could be expected of living as well as working in Burkina. We discussed topics like social 'rules', ways of communication between people, family life and differences between the Burkinabè and the Dutch.

I was in the excessively fortunate position of having been introduced to a family that lives in Ouagadougou and that had agreed on accommodating me. Also this contact I owed to Dr. Karsten. All there was left for me to do was to contact them to inform about the details of my arrival.

3.2 THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF ASSIGNMENT

I had several meetings with both Dr. Karsten and Prof. Rogers in The Netherlands to discuss my full assignment with them for my research in Burkina Faso. These meetings brought insight into three topics. Firstly, we looked at which steps were best undertaken before I got on the plane, i.e. what part of the research could already be done while still in The Netherlands. Secondly, I was instructed to find out what exactly was known about the differences on opinions from the different directors about the concepts flexibility, quality and productivity. In this respect we discussed what areas needed special attention during my research in order to find out the origin of these differences. Thirdly, we stated how and where I would start my research once I would be in Burkina Faso and which people I could contact. The outcomes of these three aspects are stated below.

3.2.1 Research in The Netherlands

To find out more about the companies I was going to work in, Fasoplast and SAP, I had access to two theses of students of Dr. Karsten. To find out more about working in Burkina Faso in general, I did literature research; both Dr. Karsten and Prof. Rogers suggested several books to me, which I read before leaving. Next to that I looked for additional reading material related to my thesis subject, like Geert Hofstede's 'Cultures and Organizations, on cross cultural theories. Another source of useful information used for preparation of my thesis were the notes I still had from the classes I followed about intercultural communications given by Prof. Rogers a year earlier.

Another source of information was from Dr. Karsten. He informed me that a Dutch student, also doing her research in Ouagadougou, would still be there at my arrival date. She even stayed with the family with whom I would be staying and had also done part of her research in Fasoplast. I contacted her before I left, and she seemed willing to show me around town and introduce me to Fasoplast once I would get there.

3.2.2 Instructions about the assignment

Previous research by students as mentioned above, had shown that the differences of opinions between the directors varied in the following way. In one company two directors would agree for a great deal on the concepts flexibility, quality and productivity while another director didn't share their opinions at all (Figure 3.1). A research in another company showed that all directors interviewed had similar ideas about only a small part of the different concepts, but that other than those similarities, they didn't agree on the basic definition of the three words (Figure 3.2). In the first company, in Karsten's interpretation, it would be useful to find out if the director that stands alone in his opinions was from a different *ethnie*. In the second company the case might be that the directors hardly ever communicate at all. I would have to research the way communication within both companies was organized. This would be in respect to hierarchical structure, gender issues, communication in relation to age differences and cultural and religious differences. This would hopefully indicate where the diversity of opinions originated from.

Figure 3.1 Two directors agree, one director not on the basic definition of the concepts flexibility, quality and productivity

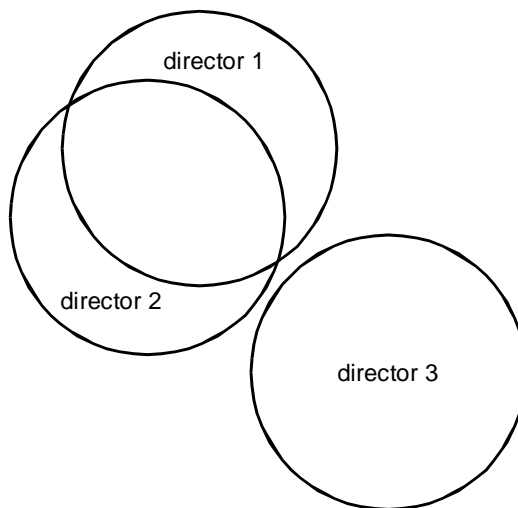
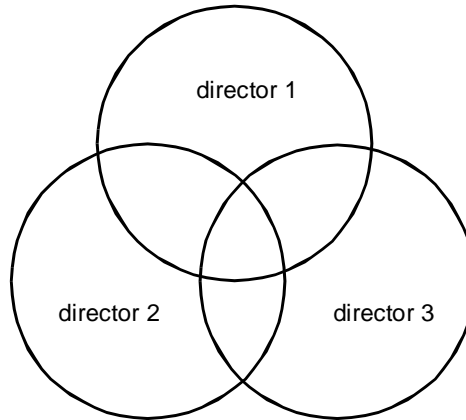


Figure 3.2 Directors don't agree on the basic definition of the three words



3.2.3 Research in Burkina Faso

I booked a flight to Ouagadougou for Friday April 14. I figured that this would give me the opportunity to acclimatize and orientate a little during the weekend, to enable me to start working the following Monday. Ilona, the Dutch student, with whom I had corresponded through e-mail, offered me to introduce me at Fasoplast. After one month of research there, it was planned that I would go to the firm SAP Olympique in Bobo Dioulasso. In both companies I would interview the Directeur Général, the Directeur Marketing and the Directeur de Production.

Dr. Karsten had already contacted Mr. Koanda of the University of Ouagadougou, who had kindly agreed to help me if I had any problems with my research. It was agreed that I would introduce myself to him as soon as I got the chance to go to the university of Ouagadougou.

Last but not least, Prof Rogers warned me before I left, not to approach the subject only from a western point of view, but to try to put myself as much as possible in the position of a West African person, and to approach the subject from there.

Since it wasn't possible during the desk research in Holland to talk the formulation of the assignment through with the companies involved, I had to consciously take

the risk that the people involved would disagree with this formulation afterwards. The decision to proceed this way however was also related to the fact that the preparations and arrangements had been made through the university.

CHAPTER 4

INITIAL PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES

Now that it was clear what exactly I had to do for my thesis (see Chapters 1, 2 and 3), I continued my desk research in The Netherlands by making a time schedule for the various activities. In this planning I included dates, place of activity, the activity itself and the contact persons involved. The planning covered 20 weeks. 19 Weeks (or 95 days) of working, the required period of time for graduation set by the Hanzehogeschool, and 1 week of rest: a few days just before and right after my trip from Ouagadougou back to The Netherlands. Concerning feedback, it was agreed that I would contact Prof. Rogers and Dr. Karsten regularly during my stay in Burkina Faso to keep them informed on my progress and to ask them for advice in case I needed it.

Table 4.1 Activities during the research

week	where	activity
1*	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Write introduction and define subject;- Formulate the assignment;- Plan activities.
2	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Gather information about the companies, the external environment those companies (i.e. the internal market of Burkina Faso) and the West African cultural environment;- Literature research and its analysis;- Preparation of journey by meeting people who were in Burkina Faso and by collecting general information.
3	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Literature research;- Fly to Ouagadougou on Friday April 14th.
4	Fasoplast, Ouagadougou	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- General orientation at Fasoplast's plant;- Check the assignment.
5	Fasoplast, Ouagadougou	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Interview + observe the <i>Directeur Général</i>;- Process results.

6	Fasoplast, Ouagadougou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview + observe the <i>Directeur Marketing</i>; - Process results.
7	Fasoplast, Ouagadougou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview + observe the <i>Directeur de Production</i>; - Process results.
8	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General orientation in SAP; - Check the assignment.
9	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview + observe the <i>Directeur Général</i> - Process results
10	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview + observe the <i>Directeur Marketing</i>; - Process results.
11	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interview + observe the <i>Directeur de Production</i>; - Process results.
12	Ouagadougou + The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fly home on Wednesday the 14th of June.
13	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Structure data; - Analyse data.
14	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summarize, draw conclusion and write recommendations; - Formulate proposal for implementation.
15-20	The Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write, ask feedback, rewrite thesis; - Corrections, layout etc...; - Hand in thesis on Friday the 11th of August.

* These elements had already been executed (partly) at the time of the drawing UP of the planning

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH IN THE NETHERLANDS

- DESK RESEARCH ON COMPANIES, EXTERNAL REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT -

In this chapter, containing the results of my desk research in The Netherlands, you will find a description of the companies that were selected to do research at and their setting in the regional and subsequently in the West African environment.

5.1 FASOPLAST

For obtaining some of the factual information about Fasoplast I consulted the theses of three students; T. Pouels, A.J. Zwartscholten and P. de Lange. I could only finish this chapter with additional information I gathered myself later on in Africa. No documents on this, like brochures or folders, are issued by the company itself.

5.1.1 Brief history

Fasoplast was founded in 1974 and was at the time owned by Indians. Their production was mainly focussed on manufacturing plastic raincoats (!). Fasoplast existed like this until 1982, after which the then proprietors abandoned the company because of the revolution that started in 1983 (see Section 5.3.2, 'History'). They left without having paid their outstanding debts nor any of their suppliers, which meant that Fasoplast went bust.

In February 1986, during what was to be the last year of the revolution, the government wished to open Fasoplast again. Three employees were appointed, but until

August of that year they still hadn't been able to get the factory working again. In August 1986 Mr. Berjonneau, the present *Directeur d'Exploitation*, came to Fasoplast and decided that the only way that Fasoplast could open her doors again was by producing sacks to hold raw cotton, as the only industry that had survived during the revolution was the cotton ginning industry. This turned out to be a good idea and the factory was up and running again in October 1986. The state was the biggest shareholder and appointed a *Directeur Général*. The rest of the capital came from private investors, the biggest being the *Banque Européenne des Investissement*. In 1995 the company was privatized and a new *Directeur Général*, Mr. M. Sanoh, was appointed.

Nowadays, Fasoplast is part of the IPS Group (Industrial Promotion Services) which owns 51% of its shares. Other shareholders are amongst others Sofitex, the principal cotton producer (ginning), and the state, which is keen to keep its say in the company.

5.1.2 Goals and philosophy

Today Fasoplast wishes to produce and develop the market of packaging, to maximize its market share in a profitable way. Production-wise this means to optimise the use of materials. The IPS Group strives for development through productivity. They have a long-term plan of development for a period of 3 to 5 years. All profit is re-invested.

5.1.3 Production

Today their range of profitable activities consists of the following items:

1. Woven polypropylene sacks 50%;
2. Products obtained by plastic injection, divided into moulded (e.g. buckets) and blown (e.g. bottles) products 30%;
3. Packaging film for food or other products 15%;
4. Negoce, i.e. buying and reselling of raw materials 5%.

The production line runs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

5.1.4 Organizational structure

Within Fasoplast, there are four managers, namely the *Directeur d'Exploitation*, the *Directeur Commercial*, *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières* and the *Directeur de l'Administration et du Personnel*. The first three form a coalition and manage the company in a democratic fashion. This structure was fairly new when I arrived; only six months earlier, Fasoplast had one *Directeur Général* who could be seen as the president of the company. I was not aware of this new situation before I left The Netherlands, I therefore planned on meeting the *Directeur Général* as soon as I arrived (see Chapter 4).

At the head of the production facilities is the *Chef d'Usine*. The factory is divided into three sections, each related to the style of production (see Section 3.1.3). Each section has a *Chef de Section*. The people who work in those sections are divided into four teams, each of which has a *Chef d'Equipe*. In a weekly cycle three teams work 8 hour shifts and one team is free. 45 Employees work for the administration and another 120 in the three teams.

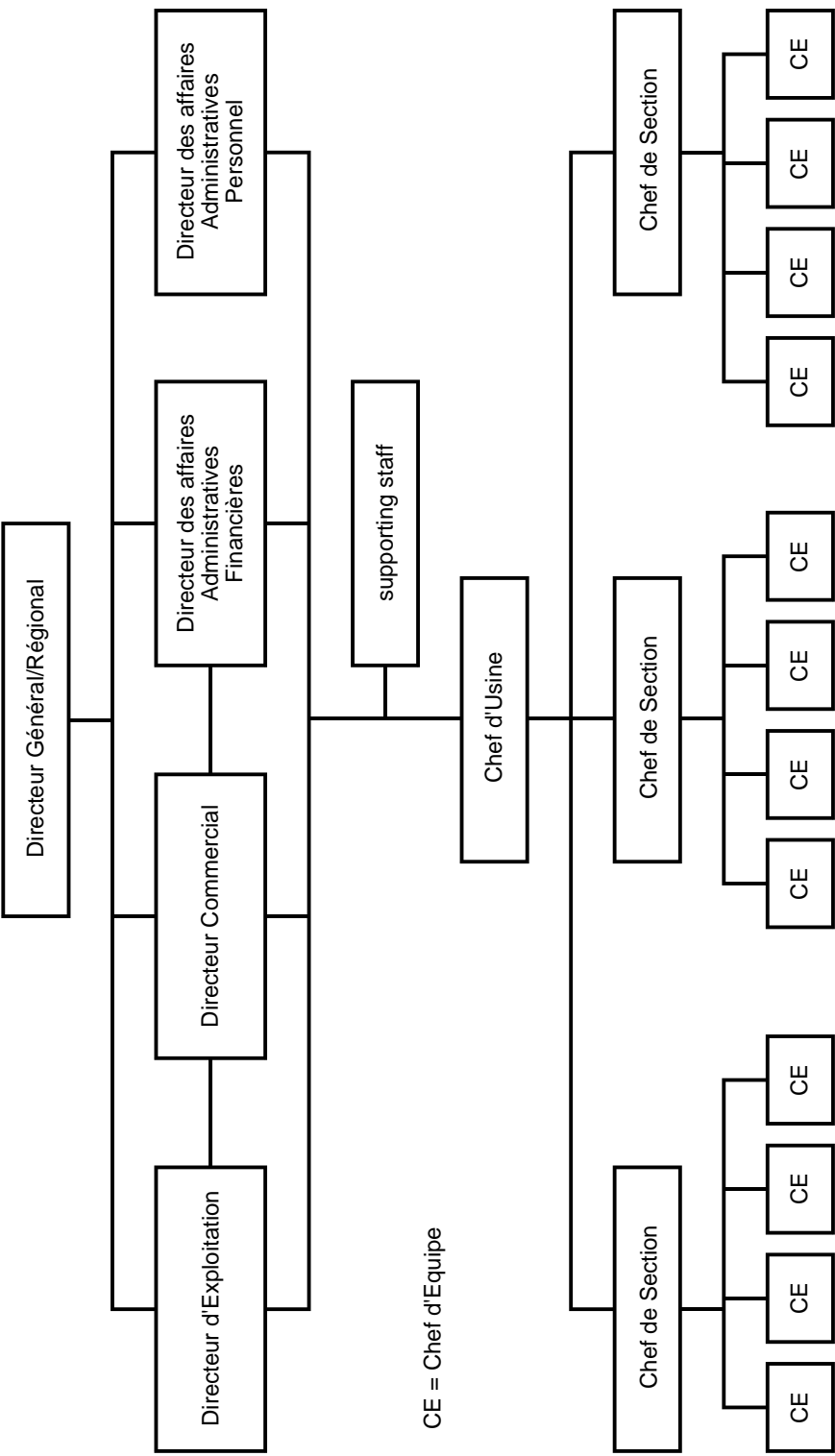
5.1.5 Finance

The annual turnover of Fasoplast is 6.5 billion FCFA (a little over \$10 million) and the company makes an annual profit of around 300 million FCFA (\$ 465.000). The labour costs are 211 million FCFA (\$ 326.000). In 1992 Fasoplast was the 11th largest company in Burkina Faso (Gamsoré, 1998). They have probably reached a higher position in the ranking list now, but more recent data was not available at the time of writing this.

5.2 SAP OLYMPIC

The *Société Africaine de Pneumatique*, SAP Olympic (further referred to as SAP), is a production enterprise that produces rubber tires. SAP has 202 regular employees and works with 15 temporary workers. The company has always been privately owned.

Figure 5.1 Organogramme of the IPS Group



5.3 EXTERNAL REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT: BURKINA FASO

For a better understanding of what is going to follow, I will give some general descriptions of Burkina Faso in this sub-chapter.

5.3.1 Introduction

A former French colony, Burkina Faso was earlier known as Upper Volta, named by the French colonists after the Volta rivers. In 1983 the leaders of Upper Volta changed the name of the former colony to Burkina Faso, a term combining two of the country's many languages, and meaning "land of the upright people".

As one of the poorest nations in the world, Burkina Faso counts people among its most important resources. I learned this even before I ever got to Burkina Faso, during one of my first encounters with a Burkinabè, being in the airplane on my way to Ouagadougou.

During the flight I met a man who was working for the government. He told me that the Burkinabè have virtually nothing, except for their people, according to him the country's biggest asset. Almost all Burkinabè seem to share this motto, I later found out. Besides that he told me that the only thing the people of Burkina have, is time, loads of it. I found out soon enough what exactly he meant by this...

Burkina Faso is renowned for its hospitality and integrity and is considered by many an oasis of ethnic and religious tolerance. It also used to be known as a country where you could go places at day or night, without having to fear any violence, but unfortunately in some areas of the big cities this is no longer the case for visitors, which unfortunately I was able to find out for myself.

Burkina Faso is the capital of African films industry. The country has some big name film makers and every year it hosts a festival of African films (FESPACO). It is also a big centre for arts and crafts.

By most people health and wisdom (often related to age) are the two most valued aspects of life, more so than for example materialism and monetary wealth.

5.3.2 History

One of the first peoples to settle themselves in what is now the south of Burkina Faso, were the Lobi and the Bobo, around 1100 C.E.. Migrants originating from present-day Ghana founded the Mossi dynasties in the north. The most powerful Mossi kingdom, Ouagadougou, was founded in the late fifteenth century. Both the Mossi and the southern peoples lived primarily from rainy-season agriculture, supplemented during the long dry season by hunting, foraging and in some places fishing.

In the sixteenth century, the Mossi expanded northward into the Sahel, where they were confronted by Arab armies from North Africa who wanted to convert them to Islam. Even though the Ouagadougou king refused, many Mossi traders eventually did convert. Nevertheless the Volta region has remained less Islamized than the rest of the Sahel.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slavery became a common practice in the Volta region.

By the late nineteenth century, Great Britain and France were racing against each other to become influential in the inlands of West Africa. In 1887 the French explorer Louis Binger visited Ouagadougou, of which he could only think as a suitable 'labor reserve' for French ventures elsewhere in West Africa. Over the next ten years France conquered regions to the east, west and north of the Mossi kingdoms, and in 1895 French troops occupied Bobo Dioulasso in the south.

In 1898 France and Great Britain reached an accord, granting France dominion over Upper Volta, which led to 25 years of extreme hardship for the peoples of the country. In 1919 the French made Upper Volta a separate colony, in order to better control its people and develop its economy. As in the previous decades, thousands of labourers were forcibly recruited to build an administrative post in the new capital, Ouagadougou, as well as roads and rail lines intended to facilitate the export of cotton. But the French invested little in irrigation, fertilizer or other agricultural improvements in Upper Volta, since it was still considered primarily a labour reserve for neighbouring colonies' projects.

1958, the year in which France's African colonies took part in a referendum on whether to become semi-autonomous, saw the rise to power of Maurice Yaméogo,

a Mossi member of the newly-formed *Parti de Regroupement Africain*. Unlike many emerging African leaders, Yaméogo argued that his people were not ready for total independence; as he told one French official in 1959: “We cannot even build matchboxes”. By then however, France was committed to pulling out of all its West African colonies. Upper Volta became independent on August 5, 1960, and Yaméogo became its first president.

‘Monsieur Mauric’, as Yaméogo was often named, was an authoritarian leader and made all the other political parties disappear. His way of ruling the country led to discontent and eventually to a military takeover in 1966, led by Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana. In the next 17 years one military coup followed the other, while the country remained heavily dependent on exports of cotton and migrant labour, as well as on foreign aid.

In 1983 there was drama on the streets of Ouagadougou. In the previous year, military officials had overthrown the regime of Saye Zerbo, and established the 120-member ruling *Conseil de Salut du Peuple* (CSP). A left-wing faction within the CSP, led by the young flight commander Thomas Sankara and his long-time friend Blaise Compaoré, had gotten Sankara appointed as prime minister in January 1983. In May the conservative wing of the CSP had Sankara arrested on trumped-up treason charges. Students protested en masse in the capital, and troops led by Compaoré launched a rebellion from the Ghanaian border. On August 4, they marched into Ouagadougou, freed Sankara, and captured the national radio, from where Sankara announced that the *Conseil National de la Révolution* (CNR) had taken over the country.

Upper Volta had seen many military rulers, but Sankara at age 33 was by far the youngest and most revolutionary. He initiated the renaming of the country Burkina Faso, “land of upright people”, and he himself was considered by many, both at home and abroad, to be a morally upright leader, though not always a pragmatic one. Once in power, he cut the wages of top civil servants (including himself) and donated all the government’s luxury cars to the national lottery, using the proceeds for public spending. Sankara governed the country in a way not well-received by everyone and was brutally murdered in 1987 (see Section 5.3.7)

Compaoré has ruled Burkina Faso since Sankara’s death. He took office pledging to ‘rectify’ the Sankara revolution, and moved immediately to mend rifts with Mossi authorities, the army, the business community, and Western donor nations.

Despite its status as one of the world's poorest countries, Burkina Faso has in many ways fared better than its wealthier neighbours. It has experienced no debilitating civil wars, and is considered by many to be an oasis of ethnic and religious tolerance.

I learned from talking to many different friends that most young people and practically all the students are fed up with Blaise Compaoré. They see him spending a lot of the development money from donor countries for personal use. The best (or actually worst) example of this, is a huge palace he is building for himself, and a smaller one for his wife, who doesn't want to live under the same roof with him. His palace is so big you can't see it is full size from any one place. He also has a car collection of about 25 brand new Mercedes cars, which are all used when he makes a visit somewhere in the country. There is always a cortège of Mercedes following him everywhere.

This makes a huge contrast with his predecessor, Sankara, who drove around on a scooter, just like anyone else. Young people see Sankara as the Ché Guevara of Burkina Faso, a hero for the people.

5.3.3 Geography

Burkina Faso is a land-locked country. The nearest port is located at 1145 km from the capital Ouagadougou in Abidjan, Ivory Coast. The area is 274,200 km² of which 273,800 km² is land and 400 km² water. The land is mostly flat, with hills in the West and the Southeast. It is bordered by Benin, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali, Niger and Togo. All but Ghana are French speaking countries.

The climate is a tropical one, with warm, dry winters and hot, wet summers.

Burkina Faso has many natural resources like manganese, limestone, marble, small deposits of gold, copper, nickel, bauxite, lead, phosphates, zinc and silver. However, this sector only employs 2% of the working population and only weighs feebly on the economic balance of the country.

Recurring droughts form a dangerous hazard to the country's agricultural activities and the economy: both are severely affected by recent droughts and desertification, as well as by overgrazing, soil degradation and deforestation.

5.3.4 People

The most important topics are:

Table 5.1 The people

population	11.946.065 <i>note:</i> estimates for this country explicitly take into account the effects of excess mortality due to AIDS; this can result in lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality and death rates, lower population and growth rates, and changes in the distribution of population by age and sex than would otherwise be expected (July 2000 est.)
age structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 0-14 years: 48% (male 2.866.61; female 2.822.990) - 15-64 years: 49% (male 2.808.797; female 3.097.048) - 65 years and over: 3% (male 149.474; female 201.395) (2000 est.)
population growth rate	2.71% (2000 est.)
birth rate	45.26 births/1000 population (2000 est.)
death rate	17.04 deaths/1000 population (2000 est.)
net migration rate	-1.1 migrant(s)/1000 population (2000 est.)
sex ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - at birth: 1.03 male(s)/female - under 15 years: 1.02 male(s)/female - 15-64years: 0.91 male(s)/female - 65 years and over: 0.74 male(s)/female - total population: 0.95 male(s)/female (2000 est.)
infant mortality rate	108.53 deaths/1000 live births (2000 est.)
life expectancy at birth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - total population: 46.73 years - male: 46.29 years - female: 47.18 years (2000 est.)
total fertility rate	6.44 children born/woman (2000 est.)

nationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - noun: Burkinabè (singular and plural) - adjective: Burkinabè
ethnic groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mossi over 40%, - Gurunsi, Senufo, - Lobi, - Bobo, - Mande, - Fulani
religions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - indigenous beliefs 40%, - Muslim 50%, - Christian (mainly Roman Catholic) 10% <p>www.africana.com Burkina Faso enjoys a reputation for religious and ethnic tolerance.</p>
languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - French (official), - native African languages belonging to Sudanic family spoken by 90% of the population
literacy	<p>definition: age 15 and over can read and write total population: 19.2%</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - male. 29.5% - female: 9.2% (1995 est.)

The most striking and upsetting figure is that the life expectancy for men and women is less than 47 years.

5.3.5 Economy

With a Gross National Product of a little over 160.000 FCFA (approximately \$ 250) per capita, Burkina Faso is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has a high population density, few used natural resources and a fragile soil. About 90% of the population is engaged in agriculture, which is highly vulnerable to variations in rainfall. Industry remains dominated by unprofitable government-controlled corporations.

Following the FCFA currency devaluation in January 1994 the government updated its development program in conjunction with international agencies which re-

sulted in an increase of exports and economic growth. In order to maintain this economic progress in 2001, the Burkinabè state, primal investor in the industrial and economical fields, has designed reforms to encourage private investment. Economic growth also depends on whether or not the low inflation will continue and if the government is able to reduce the trade deficit.

5.3.6 Industry

It is difficult for Burkina Faso to escape its poor state of being. Wealth grows ever so slightly, for which the main reason is that seems impossible to carry the industry, representing 25% of the national income, into a higher level. This can partly be explained by the country's low level of literacy (see Section 5.3.4). Literacy, being the fundamental basis of all education, is crucial to firms which must rely on a large group of educated clerks, accountants, managers and administrators.

Another important reason is that highly educated men and women in Burkina Faso are persuaded for the most part into administrative positions which means entrepreneurs are faced with a shortage of professional managers that are interested in careers in the private sector. Interesting to know is that in 1993 the only category which had an excess of jobs over job seekers, was that of the manager function (see Appendix 2). A problem that occurs for entrepreneurs that can source professional, motivated managers, is a fundamental obstacle based on social norms that requires them to hire family members to work for them before anyone else. However, looked at this aspect from another angle, you could say family and friends of those at the top may indeed get the best jobs, but that is because they offer a loyalty that is indispensable.

Finally, another culture related issue stands in the way of the industry growth, which is the aversion of being part of an wealth-creating entity. In rural areas and cities, significant parts of the population cling on to the idea that wealth accumulation is linked to magical powers or ritual activity and that it must come at the expense of others. The colonial legacy has twisted this theme of illegitimate wealth further, into a shared belief that the state is the only true source of wealth and so all increases in wealth must be due to corruption.

5.3.7 Politics

In 1983, a young flight commander by the name of Thomas Sankara and his followers had started a revolution, by overthrowing the previous regime of Saye Zerbo (see Section 5.3.2, History). This revolution had a huge effect on the country's economy. For the first time the country had a president who was an outspoken proponent of women's liberation. He appointed five women in ministerial posts, launched a campaign against female circumcision and initiated changes in family law. The Sankara government's investments in rural schools, clinics and agricultural extension services brought modest improvements in living standards and quite dramatic increases in food production. Sankara's foreign policy, meanwhile, followed the example of left-wing regimes such as Cuba, Libya and North Korea. He rejected World Bank conditions and promised to 'fight against the forces of neo-colonialism and imperialist domination'.

His attitude discouraged foreign investment, just as Sankara's public references to the 'big, fat and gross' bourgeoisie led many Burkinabè merchants and entrepreneurs to take their businesses across the border. More seriously, Sankara's heavy-handedness alienated nearly all the country's traditionally powerful constituencies. The president's harsh treatment of critics and striking workers eventually turned even the labour unions against him. Ultimately, however, it were soldiers loyal to Sankara's best friend Blaise Compaoré, who assassinated him on October 15, 1987.

Compaoré has ruled Burkina Faso since Sankara's death. As said in Section 5.3.2, he took office pledging to 'rectify' the Sankara revolution, trying to restore relations with Mosi authorities, the army, the business community and Western donor nations. Faced with falling world cotton prices and growing debt, Compaoré agreed to a World Bank structural adjustment program in 1991. Economic growth in recent years has been somewhat uneven, but the fact that the government takes part in World Bank reforms has put Burkina Faso near the top of the list of poor nations targeted for debt relief by international donors.

5.4 WEST AFRICAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT: ASPECTS

In order to understand the different aspects of the West African cultural environment, I start this chapter by citing from literature a general definition of culture and its' different general characteristics.

General definition:

1. That set of capacities which distinguishes Homo Sapiens as a species and which is fundamental to its mode of adaptation.
2. The learned, cumulative product of all social life.
3. The distinctive patterns of thought, action, and value that characterize the members of a society or social group (Winthrop, 1991).

General characteristics:

1. In spite of many differences in detail, anthropologists do agree on three characteristics of culture: it is not innate, but learned; the various facets of culture are interrelated - you touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected; it is shared and in effect defines the boundaries of different groups.
2. There is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organized, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function (Hall, 1976).

5.4.1 Individualism vs. collectivism

Individualism, often cited as a value held by European Americans, places importance on the individual rather than the family or work teams or other groups. It is often cited as the most important of European American cultural values. By contrast, people from collectivist societies place importance on extended families and group loyalty (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the extended family (with grand-parents, uncles, aunts and cousins, and with the father's additional wives and their children) is an economic unit that has to care for itself.

While being educated in a European language, with western ideas of maybe utilitarian, individualist, profit-oriented values, children live a social life oriented towards continuity, collectivism and the fulfilment of social obligations. This impairs building an authentic identity. Consequently, they acquire two incompatible sets of strategies: one for the school life, the other for family life. In situations where a combinations of cognitive and social skills are acquired, individualist and holistic values start clashing. This applies explicitly to the world of work.

There is a great deal of approval-seeking in the African societies to the extent that people struggle to achieve not necessarily for themselves but for the satisfaction of the larger society which includes their families (Iguisi, 1995).

5.4.1.1 Collectivism vs. individualism

This dimension is defined as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose. everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in groups, which throughout people 's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Table 5.2 Collectivism vs. individualism

	individualism index (IDV)	rank (out of 50 countries and 3 regions)
West Africa	20	39/41
The Netherlands	80	40/301
USA (compared to highest and lowest rank)	91	1
USA	91	1
Guatemala	6	53

5.4.1.2 Key differences between collectivist and individualist societies

Table 5.3 Collectivism vs. individualism: General norm, family, school and work-place

collectivist	individualist
People are born into extended families or other in-groups which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty.	Everyone grows up to look after him/-herself and his/her immediate (nuclear) family only.
Identity is based in the social network to which one belongs.	Identity is based in the individual.
Children learn to think in terms of 'we'.	Children learn how to think in terms of 'I'.
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided.	Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.
High-context communication.	Low-context communication.
Trespassing leads to shame and loss of face for self and group.	Trespassing leads to guilt and loss of self-respect.
Purpose of education is learning how to do.	Purpose of education is learning how to learn.

Diplomas provide entry to higher status groups.	Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.
Relationship employer-employee is perceived in moral terms, like a family link.	Relationship employer-employee is a contract supposed to be based on mutual advantage.
Hiring and promotion decisions take employees' in-group into account.	Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.
Management is management of groups.	Management is management of individuals.
Relationship prevails over task.	Task prevails over relationship.

Table 5.4 Collectivism vs. individualism: Politics and ideas

collectivist	individualist
Collective interests prevail over individual interests.	Individual interests prevail over collective interests.
Private life is invaded by group(s).	Everyone has a right to privacy.
Opinions are predetermined by group membership.	Everyone is expected to have a private opinion.
Laws and rights differ by group.	Laws and rights are supposed to be the same for all.
Low per capita GNP.	High per capita GNP.
Dominant role of the state in the economic system.	Restrained role of the state in the economic system
Economy based on collective interests.	Economy based on individual interests.
Political power exercised by interest groups.	Political power exercised by voters.
Press controlled by the state.	Press freedom.
Imported economic theories largely irrelevant because unable to deal with collective and particularist interest.	Native economic theories based on pursuit of individual self-interests
Ideologies of equality prevail over ideologies of individual freedom.	Ideologies of individual freedom prevail over ideologies of equality .

Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goals.	Self-actualization by every individual is an ultimate goal.
--	---

5.4.2 Sexuality, ethnicity, gender and class

The ways in which cultures are heterogeneous are not the same elsewhere as compared to the US. It would be a mistake to map our structure of differences onto other cultures. How sexuality, ethnicity, gender and class function in other cultures is not necessarily the same or even similar to their function in the US. By viewing any culture as a contested zone or site of struggle, we can understand the complexities of that culture; we can become more sensitive to how people in that culture live (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

5.4.3 State interference

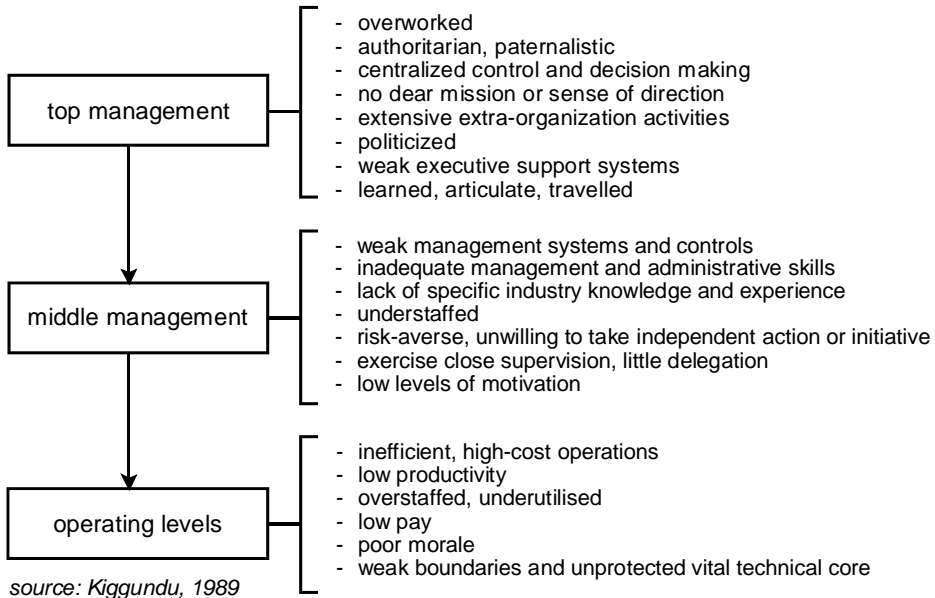
Though widespread, real control by the State (in developing countries) is incomplete. The State is irrelevant to subsistence farmers who work to feed their family, who exchange crops or animals with other families or at small local markets, and who help one another in the fields or with tending animals, just as it is to childbirth and to domestic crises. These are hardly, if at all, part of the money economy. But they are part of an extensive 'personal economy', made up of many small networks of personal relationships based on family, clan and religion, which is beyond the reach of impersonal administration (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

5.4.4 Corporate management

In most or all projections of economic development, the Sub-Saharan countries score poorly. Among several reasons for this dramatic situation, a lack of adequate and appropriate local management takes a prominent position. The noticeable back of success of many African organizations created and managed according to western theories and models can be attributable to this fact. Projects more or less functions as long as they are managed by expatriate experts - who in doing so exceed

their roles - but they flounder after having been transferred to locals. The new top African managers, although culturally more aware, do not perform better than their predecessors. Many show a back of responsibility for their jobs combined with inability to delegate (Iguisi,1995).

Figure 5.2 General profile of a developing country organisation



5.4.5 Power distance

Power distance can be defined as:

The extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.

Table 5.5 Power distance

	power distance index (PDI)	rank (out of 50 countries and 3 regions)
West Africa	77	40491
The Netherlands	38	40
USA (compared to highest and lowest rank)	40	38
Malaysia	104	1
Austria	11	53

5.4.5.1 Key differences between collectivist and individualist societies

Table 5.6 Power distance: General norm, family, school and workplace

small power distance	large power distance
Inequalities among people should be minimized.	Inequalities among people are both expected and desired
There should be, and there is to some extent, interdependence between less and more powerful people.	Less powerful people should be dependent on the more powerful; in practice, less powerful people are polarized between dependence and counter dependence.
Parents treat children as equals.	Parents teach children obedience.
Children treat parents as equals.	Children treat parents with respect.
Teachers expect initiatives from students in class.	Teachers are expected to take all initiatives in class.
Teachers are experts who transfer impersonal truths.	Teachers are gurus who transfer personal wisdom.
Students treat teachers as equals.	Students treat teachers with respect.
More educated persons hold less authoritarian values than less educated persons.	Both more and less educated persons show almost equally authoritarian values.

Hierarchy in organizations means an inequality of roles, established for convenience.	Hierarchy in organizations reflects the existential inequality between higher-ups and lower-downs.
Decentralization is popular.	Centralization is popular.
Narrow salary range between top and bottom of organization.	Wide salary range between top and bottom of organization.
Subordinates expect to be consulted.	Subordinates expect to be told what to do.
The ideal boss is a resourceful democrat.	The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or good father.
Privileges and status symbols are frowned upon.	Privileges and status symbols for managers are both expected and popular.

Table 5.7 Power distance: Politics and ideas

small power distance	large power distance
The use of power should be legitimate and is subject to criteria of good and evil.	Might prevails over right: whoever holds the power is right and good.
Skills, wealth, power and status need not go together.	Skills, wealth, power and status should go together.
The middle class is large.	The middle class is small.
All should have equal rights.	The powerful have privileges.
Powerful people try to look less powerful than they are.	Powerful people try to look as impressive as possible.
Power is based on formal position, expertise and ability to give reward.	Power is based on family or friends, charisma and ability to use force.
The way to change a political system is by changing the rules (evolution).	The way to change a political system is by changing the people at the top (revolution).
The use of violence in domestic politics is rare.	Domestic political conflicts frequently lead to violence.
Pluralist governments based on outcome of majority votes.	Autocratic or oligarchic governments based on cooptation.
Political spectrum show strong center and weak right and left wings.	Political spectrum, if allowed to be manifested, shows weak center and strong wings.

Small income differentials in society, further reduced by the tax system.	Large income differentials in society, further increased by the tax system.
Prevailing religions and philosophical systems stress equality.	Prevailing religions and philosophical systems stress hierarchy and stratification.
Prevailing political ideologies stress and practice power sharing.	Prevailing political ideologies stress and practice power struggle.
Native management theories focus on role of employees.	Native management theories focus on role of managers.

5.4.6 Femininity vs. masculinity

This dimension is associated most strongly with the importance attached to: for the 'masculine' pole:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1. Earnings | Have an opportunity for high earnings. |
| 2. Recognition | Get the recognition you deserve when you do a good job. |
| 3. Advancement | Have an opportunity for advancement to higher level jobs. |
| 4. Challenge | Have challenging work to do - work from which you can get a personal sense of accomplishment. |

For the opposite, 'feminine' pole:

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| 5. Manager | Have a good working relationship with your direct superior. |
| 6. Cooperation | Work with people who cooperate well with one another. |
| 7. Living area | Live in an area desirable to you and your family. |
| 8. Employment security | Have the security that you will be able to work for your company as long as you want to. |

Table 5.8 Femininity vs. masculinity

	masculinity index (MAS)	rank (out of 50 countries and 3 regions)
West Africa	46	30/31
The Netherlands	14	51
USA (compared to highest and lowest rank)	62	15
Japan	95	1
Sweden	5	53

5.4.6.1 Key differences between feminine and masculine societies

Table 5.9 Femininity vs. masculinity: General norm, family, school and workplace

feminine	masculine
Dominant values in society are caring for others and preservation.	Dominant values in society are material success and progress.
People and warm relationships are important.	Money and thing are important.
Everybody is supposed to be modest.	Men are supposed to be assertive, ambitious, and tough.
Both men and women are allowed to be tender and to be concerned with relationships.	Women are supposed to be tender and to take care of relationship.
In the family both fathers and mothers deal with facts and feeling.	In the family, fathers deal with facts and mothers with feeling.
Both boys and girls are allowed to cry but neither should fight.	Girls cry, boys don't; boy should fight back when attacked, girls shouldn't fight.
Sympathy for the weak.	Sympathy for the strong.
Average student is the norm.	Best student is the norm.

Failing in school is a minor accident.	Failing in school is a disaster.
Friendliness in teachers appreciated.	Brilliance in teacher appreciated.
Boys and girls study same subjects.	Boys and girls study different subjects.
Work in order to live.	Live in order to work.
Managers use intuition and strive for consensus.	Managers expected to be decisive and assertive.
Stress on equality, solidarity and quality of work life.	Stress on equity, competition among colleagues and performance.
Resolution of conflicts by compromise and negotiation.	Resolution of conflicts by fighting them out.

Table 5.10 Femininity vs. masculinity: Politics and ideas

feminine	masculine
Welfare society ideal.	Performance society ideal.
The needy should be helped.	The strong should be supported.
Permissive society.	Corrective society.
Small and slow are beautiful.	Big and fast are beautiful.
Preservation of the environment should have highest priority.	Maintenance of economic growth should have highest priority.
Government spends relatively large proportion of budget on development assistance to poor countries.	Government spends relatively small proportion of budget on development assistance to poor countries.
Government spends relatively small proportion of budget on armaments.	Government spends relatively large proportion of budget on armaments.
International conflicts should be resolved by negotiation and compromise.	International conflicts should be resolved by a show of strengths or by fighting.
A relatively large number of women in elected political positions.	A relatively small number of women in elected political positions.
Dominant religions stress the complementarity of the sexes.	Dominant religions stress the male prerogative.

Women's liberation means that men and women should take equal shares both at home and at work.	Women's liberation means that women will be admitted to positions hitherto only occupied by men.
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5.4.7 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance can be defined as:

The extend to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.

Table 5.11 Uncertainty avoidance

	uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)	rank (out of 50 countries and 3 regions)
West Africa	54	34
The Netherlands	53	35
USA (compared to highest and lowest rank)	46	43
Greece	112	1
Singapore	8	53

5.4.7.1 Key differences between weak and strong uncertainty avoidance societies

Table 5.12 Uncertainty avoidance: General norm, family, school and workplace

weak uncertainly avoidance	strong uncertainly avoidance
Uncertainty is a normal feature of life and each day is accepted as it comes.	The uncertainty inherent in life is felt as a continuous threat which must be fought.
Low stress; subjective feeling of well-being.	High stress; subjective feeling of anxiety.
Aggression and emotions should not be shown.	Aggression and emotions may at proper times and places be ventilated.
Comfortable in ambiguous situations and with unfamiliar risks.	Acceptance of familiar risks; fear of ambiguous situations and of unfamiliar risks.
Lenient rules for children on what is dirty and taboo.	Tight rules for children on what is dirty and taboo.
What is different, is curious.	What is different, is dangerous.
Students comfortable with open-ended learning situations and concerned with good discussions.	Students comfortable in structured learning situations and concerned with the right answers.
Teachers may say 'I don't know'.	Teachers supposed to have all the answers.
There should not be more rules than is strictly necessary.	Emotional need for rules, even if these will never work.
Time is a framework for orientation.	Time is money.
Comfortable feeling when lazy; hard-working only when needed.	Emotional need to be busy; inner urge to work hard.
Precision and punctuality have to be learned Tolerance of deviant and innovative ideas and behaviour.	Precision and punctuality come naturally.
Motivation by achievement and esteem or belongingness.	Suppression of deviant ideas and behaviour; resistance to innovation Motivation by security and esteem or belongingness.

Table 5.13 Uncertainty avoidance: Politics and ideas

weak uncertainly avoidance	strong uncertainly avoidance
Few and general laws and rules.	Many and precise laws and rules.
If rules cannot be respected, they should be changed.	If rules cannot be respected, we are sinners and should repent.
Citizen competence versus authorities.	Citizen incompetence versus authorities.
Citizen protest acceptable.	Citizen protest should be repressed.
Citizens positive towards institutions.	Citizens negative towards institutions.
Civil servants positive towards political process.	Civil servants negative towards political process.
Tolerance, moderation.	Conservatism, extremism, law and order.
Positive attitudes towards young people.	Negative attitudes towards young people.
Regionalism, internationalism, attempts at integration of minorities.	Nationalism, xenophobia, repression of minorities.
Belief in generalists and common sense.	Belief in experts and specialization.
Many nurses, few doctors.	Many doctors, few nurses.
One group's truth should not be imposed on others.	There is only one Truth and we have it.
Human rights: nobody should be persecuted for their beliefs.	Religious, political and ideological fundamentalism and intolerance.
In philosophy and science, tendency towards relativism and empiricism.	In philosophy and science, tendency towards grand theories.
Scientific opponents can be personal friends.	Scientific opponents cannot be personal friends.

5.5 DIFFERENT VIEWS ON THE AFRICAN WORLD

Balogun, a Nigerian scholar has come up with a conceptual scheme summing up the African world view. Theory N, as he terms it, proceeds from the following assumptions:

1. Truth depends upon who is telling it; relatives do not lie, but strangers are never to be trusted.
2. The perfect order of things can only be guaranteed by steering clear of trouble or by avoiding unnecessary risks.
3. Wisdom consists in following the ways of one's ancestors and maintaining the solidarity of the kinsgroup, the clan, or the tribe.
4. the Devil rules the earth and if one does not want trouble, one should not cross his path or challenge his authority.
5. The Kingdom of the Devil is inhabited by chaos, corruption and bigandage; to wish to restore order in place of chaos, or to suggest decency as a possible alternative to corruption is, at best, to attempt the impossible, at worst, to invite the wrath of the Devil with its dire consequences.
6. Success in life's pursuits is, in any case, not due to one's efforts or good deeds, but to the capricious behaviour of nature or the support of powerful patrons (mostly, blood relations or acquaintances).
7. By the same token, lack of progress at work or instability of the home front is attributable not to one's own actions, but to the whimsical behaviour of nature, evil spirits, or the conspiracy of powerful adversaries.
8. Material progress is a sign that the stars are in one's favour.
9. The wise person makes the best of his opportunities for material advancement; if his star shines, he should put aside in anticipation of the time when the star falls.
10. A constant pledge of allegiance to powerful groups and/or individuals is likely to help put the shine back on a fading star.

In my opinion, this Theory N, as described here, proceeds from gut feeling, voodoo, this-is-the-way-it-is, with the 10 assumptions deeply rooted in West African culture.

5.5.1 Comments on mentioned view mentioned in Section 5.5

The way forward for culture and management, according to Wamalwa, is to give serious consideration to how to operationalize and propagate an alternative, i.e. theory P. According to Wamalwa, the basic assumptions underlying Balogun's positive suggestions are a complete reversal of theory N:

1. Truth is independent of who is telling or denying it' the first test of truth is whether it welcomes or discourages independent verification and inquiry.

2. Wisdom consists in assessing the ways of one's ancestors in the light of new knowledge, goals and challenges.
3. The perfect order of the world is guaranteed by assuming the perpetual motion of the planets, and anticipating what changes we need to effect as inhabitants of our own planet to ensure constantly harmonious rather than discordant movements.
4. The Cause of all causes, the Mover of everything that moves, the Creator of whatever is, rules the universe; the sometimes invisible but ubiquitous Devil is one of the creatures operating in parts of the universe.
5. The Devil is powerful; it/he/she is capable of victimizing, cajoling, bullying, ensnaring, enticing, blackmailing and corrupting its victim. It (the Devil) will succeed only with those who accept its authority and who look for short-cuts to wealth and power, but not with those who persevere against all odds and are devoted to the cause of truth, fairness and excellence.
6. Man's illusion of the world without work, sweat or pain ended when Adam and Eve were evicted from Paradise; the reality on our planet, Earth, is that man cannot survive or grow if he refuses to observe certain natural laws particularly, the laws of cause and effects, and of retribution.
7. By the same token, he who plants banana cannot expect to harvest coffee.
8. Material progress may prove to be a mirage; a good name and a clean record are a lasting asset,
9. No condition is permanent; one who accumulates ill-gotten gains may be called upon by a 'corrective regime' to explain his source of income.
10. When the time is up, no earthly power can put the shine back on a fading star (Wamalwa, 1994).

This contra-theory of Wamalwa is, according to me, also deeply rooted in culture, but in a different one, namely the occidental one: his contra-theory comes across as thoroughly rational, abstract, as a reasoned belief and based on individualistic values. It seems like Wamla!wa personifies here a Jesuit missionary, who will teach them what is 'right'.

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CHAPTER 6

INITIAL EXECUTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

After the preparational work and flying to Burkina Faso, I was very anxious to start my actual research and to interview and observe the different directors. The meetings with Fasoplast had been previously arranged by the Dutch university, and the meetings with SAP by the University of Ouagadougou.

As will appear from the following chronological report, a quote that I found from Hickson & Pugh turned out to be literally applicable in my situation: “Sometimes the problem for foreigners is not so much getting a ‘no’ decision as getting no decision.”

6.1 INITIAL RESEARCH AT FASOPLAST

Week numbers correspond to the time schedule in Chapter 4.

6.1.1 Week 4

Monday April 17

On Monday the 17th of April I went to Fasoplast to meet the Directeur Général (DG), Mr. Sanoh, as planned. He appeared not to be present, but I was told that I could talk to the *Directeur de l'Exploitation (DE)*, Mr. Berjonneau. I introduced myself to him and said I was the Dutch student who was going to do her internship there, assuming that the Fasoplast management was expecting me. It was immediately obvious to me that he wasn't expecting me and soon it turned out that he didn't even know I was coming at all.

After my explanation of my intentions and planning, to my surprise he started from the beginning by telling me that I had to speak to the DG to get his permission to do the internship. He reasoned that in the meantime the whole company had been reorganized, that in fact it was him now who was in charge of Fasoplast, and that the previous DG, Mr. Sanoh, had been appointed, since a reorganization a few months earlier, as the *Directeur Régional (DR)* of the IPS Group, not only of Fasoplast (see Section 5.1.4).

This implied that the former *DG* had to divide his time as *DR* over the different companies, and that he didn't visit Fasoplast very often anymore. Mr. Berjonneau said, however, that the former *DG*, present *DR* would be back on Thursday or Friday first coming, and that I should try to speak to him then.

Thursday April 20

To my surprise, the secretary of the DG/DR was astonished to see me when I presented myself at her office on Thursday April 20. The *DG/DR* had left for a big conference in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, which wouldn't be finished until Friday. She told me that everybody at Fasoplast knew about that, especially Mr. Berjonneau, who had advised me to come see the *DG/DR* that day, for he was actually also going to go to the same conference. Moreover, she said that in her opinion, it was not even the *DG/DR* who had to decide about my internship, but that Mr. Berjonneau should do that, since he was in charge of Fasoplast now.

After having heard that, I went to Mr. Berjonneau's office again, and when he could finally spare me a minute, he told me that I should draw up an official request: *a demande de stage*, in which I should write down what it was exactly that I wanted to do at Fasoplast, and he asked me to hand over this request to him personally the next day (see Appendix 3).

Friday April 21

I drew up the request, and when I got to Fasoplast early the next day, Friday the 21st of April, it turned out that Mr. Berjonneau had already left for the weekend. There was nothing else for me to do at that moment to leave my *demande de stage* with the only secretary present: the *DG/DR*'s secretary. She promised me without showing any emotion, that she would give it to Mr. Berjonneau immediately after the weekend. That would be on Tuesday April 25, since Monday the 24th was a national holiday. She also told me that not only Mr. Berjonneau would be back on Tuesday (week 2), but also the *DG/DR*, and that I could speak to the latter too.

6.1.2 Week 5

Tuesday April 25

By the time I went to Fasoplast again early Tuesday morning, April 25, over one week of my time in Burkina Faso had already passed. The *DG/DR* was indeed at the office, but his emotionless secretary let me know that it was impossible to see him, for he was too busy and that the next day he would go to Abidjan again. However, she promised me that she would show him my *demande de stage* and that I could call the next day to ask her his opinion. The *DE*, Mr. Berjonneau was not at Fasoplast that Tuesday, so I couldn't talk to him either.

The same secretary however said in a flat voice, without making eye contact, that she would also ask Mr. Berjonneau what he thought of my *demande*, and that she would tell me the next day too. Again, no shown emotion, no apparent involvement, which struck me from my Western point of view, as her being completely uninterested. From my Western concept of communication incomprehensible.

Wednesday April 26

As arranged, I phoned¹ Fasoplast on Wednesday, April 26. The *DG/DR*'s secretary wasn't in, so I was instructed to call back later that day. After about six calls (time consuming telephone procedures), I finally talked to her late afternoon. She told me that both the *DG/DR*, Mr. Sanoh and the *DE*, Mr. Berjonneau had seen the *demande* and agreed with its content. Furthermore she informed me that permission

¹ About this important way of communication, phoning: almost no one has a telephone at home and the number of mobile phones is negligible; there is one network, but mobile phones are much too expensive for the vast majority of the people. In order to make a phone call, one goes to a local telephone office, specialized in phoning only, a *télécentre*. In this *télécentre* an official puts the *telephone compteur* at zero, then you can make your call in one of the few small hot telephone cabins. If you are lucky you can cool this cabin by a fan, if you are unlucky, all electricity gets cut off, and you are left making your call in the hot dark cabin. The system works correctly most of the time, and after having made your telephone call, you pay the official the amount due. Making calls is expensive compared to the annual income. To give an idea about how much a call is: for a short (less than a minute) local phone call, you pay 100 FCFA, a meal in a 'restaurant' would be 350 FCFA. The telephone book of the entire of Burkina Faso, is no thicker than 5 cm (for a population of over 11 million people). This considering the fact that in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of telephone lines is less than the island of Manhattan (Castells, 1998).

was also required from the *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières (DAF)* and the *Directeur Commercial (DC)*, because for my research I also wanted to interview them. Without me knowing, she had already shown my demande to Mr. So, *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières*, and he had approved. Please note here that I came to Africa with the idea that permission for my internship had already been given, and I just had to make the necessary appointments and arrangements with the people involved.

I now came to the point that through for me invisible manipulations, first of all the permission are not certain yet, and that it depended now on four people. Three of them had agreed at this point, and the fourth, the *Directeur Commercial* who was the only one who hadn't seen my *demande* yet, had become the key to permission. The fact that these last two people also had to give their permission, came for me as an unpleasant surprise. The secretary told me that that Wednesday (still April 26), the *DC*, Mr. Paré, wasn't in the office, but that he would be back Friday and that I should call back then.

Friday April 28

When I called Fasoplast on Friday, April 28, I talked to Mr. Paré's secretary, who informed me that Mr. Paré was out en mission and that he wouldn't be back until after the weekend. That would be a Tuesday again, for Monday was the 1st of May, Labour Day and Fasoplast would be closed. Then I asked for Mr. Berjonneau again, because I wanted to ask him if it was really necessary to get Mr. Paré's permission as well, but he wasn't in. The *DG/DR*'s secretary to whom I finally spoke, assured me that it was very necessary indeed. She told me to call back Tuesday.

6.1.3 Week 6

Tuesday May 2

Tuesday May 2 (my third week in Ouaga already!) I decided to go to Fasoplast and not to leave until I had spoken to the right person and knew what to expect from them. Luckily, all concerned were in. While I was waiting for my appointment with the *Chef Commercial*, Mr. Paré, Mr. Berjonneau coincidentally passed by and let me know he wanted to talk to me as well, after I had talked to Mr. Paré.

When I talked to Mr. Paré, it turned out that he had not yet seen my *demande*, but when I explained what it was about, he gave his permission straight away. I then went to Mr. Berjonneau's office, waited for over an hour (to which, by then, I had already got accustomed) and when he could finally receive me we went through my *demande de stage*. He explained to me that what I wanted to do, collecting data by interviewing and observing people, wasn't possible at the moment: during the following month there were many conferences that the people involved had to attend to, so they would simply not be at Fasoplast. Moreover, he thought I wouldn't get a dear vision of Fasoplast anyway at this time of year (end of April). It was the hottest season, during which power cuts occur almost daily. The factory can't run under those circumstances, and the workmen were therefore sent home. He told me he would be happy to receive me as an intern as from June, or more precisely, the 29th of May, the Monday of the first week of June. I asked him if I could come a few weeks earlier, since I would be leaving Burkina Faso on the 14th of June. The answer was however dear: it shall be then, or not at all.

Forced by these events, I agreed to change my program completely, and to do my research at Fasoplast from May 29 until Friday June 9. What I didn't know then, was that they would come up with other reasons on that first Monday, May 29, which would obstruct me to reach my goals (Section 3.2.3).

6.2 ATTEMPT FOR RESEARCH AT SAP

6.2.1 Back to week 5

In the meantime, during these first three weeks, I already tried to get in contact with SAP, the other company in which I had planned to do research, which I initially planned to do from Monday May 15 until Friday June 9. As arranged with Mr. Karsten, Mr. Koanda from the University of Ouagadougou was to help me organize that. The first week I was in Ouaga, Mr. Koanda was on a journey, but Tuesday April 25, my second week in Burkina Faso, he was back at the university and I talked to him there for the first time.

Tuesday April 25

He confirmed what Mr. Karsten had stated when I was still in The Netherlands, that it wouldn't be a problem for me to go to SAP and to find a place to stay in Bobo Dioulasso, where SAP was based. He told me he therefore would contact SAP as soon as possible. This surprised me, because I thought this had already been arranged before my arrival in Africa. Apparently he couldn't call them, because from the university one can only make local phone calls within Ouagadougou, so Mr. Koanda informed me he would send a fax. He asked me to come back on Thursday April 27 to hear about the results.

Thursday April 27

Back at the university (located at the other end of town) on Thursday (week 2) however, the fax hadn't been sent yet, I would have to come back the next day. Friday the fax hadn't been sent either, again for unspecified reasons, and I was told to come back after the weekend, on Tuesday May 2 (wk 3) for Monday May I was Labour Day. Since I was not yet accustomed to the social rules, I didn't want to be impolite by asking for the reason behind the unsent fax.

6.2.2 Week 6***Tuesday May 2***

That Tuesday May 2, in the third week I was there, I asked Mr. Koanda if he could make adjustments to the (unsent) fax; due to the change of my program at Fasoplast where I was only welcome the first two weeks of June (see above) which had forced me to advance my schedule, I wanted to leave for Bobo/SAP as soon as was possible. For the first time revealing the mysterious reason for which the fax hadn't been sent yet, Mr. Koanda told me now that he hadn't at his disposal the fax number of SAP (!). He had already sent a member of staff of the university to find a telephone book to look up the fax number, and he had even asked others to go to the Chamber of Commerce to try to get it there, which puzzled me, because I knew SAP's telephone number was very well known to him.

I understood that he couldn't make the call from the university itself, because only local calls were possible from there, but I found out by simple deduction that he hadn't wanted to make a long distance phone call from outdoors, in the *télécentre*, because he would have had to pay for it himself and that was too expensive. Again,

non functioning communication. It cost me three days, to find out the reason for this, which was twofold. Firstly: the cost of the call, a few francs. Secondly: here I was literally confronted with another significant reason influencing the communication: the western concept 'time is money' doesn't apply in West Africa in the same way as in Occidental countries at all. The option to send someone around town to get a fax number, wouldn't come up in a western mind. Time is not scarce.

Once having discovered the reasons behind this miscommunication, I proposed, in order to overcome this problem, to call SAP myself to find out the fax number. This meant that I had to speak to employees from SAP, but funny enough I couldn't ask them straight away if I could work there: Mr. Koanda had instructed me not to do so; he said it would be better they hear from him first, those were the normal procedures. It would have been against hierarchy (see Section 3.4) if I had asked them myself instead of by Mr. Koanda. The important thing was, however, that I could now ask myself for the fax number, so the fax of Mr. Koanda could be sent of, and I would know their answer soon enough. This Western logic turned out didn't work out as could be expected.

When I went back to the university with the fax number, Mr. Koanda informed me that the fax was broken. Since here a new reason for miscommunication popped up, it is worth while to analyze the problem of the fax machine. It appeared to be a gift from Dutch friends of the university, and was the only one at the university and was a very old machine. The fax operator asked me to repair it since the instructions on the machine were in Dutch. Unfortunately my technical knowledge was not sufficient. I suggested therefore I would go to a 'business centre', a place from which phone calls could be made and faxes be sent, in order to send the fax from there. I went straight to the one and only business centre (one hour on moped through hectic traffic) where I tried to get the fax forwarded. The result: 4 times fatal communication error, reasons unknown, but apparently of technical nature. After these 4 attempts, the business centre closed for the day. Please note here for one week and a half I am still talking about the same unsent fax.

Wednesday May 3

The next day, Wednesday May 3, after another ride in very hectic traffic through town, I went to the business centre again in another attempt to force the forwarding of the fax. This time, no problems, the fax had gone of. In the fax Mr. Koanda had asked if the SAP management could respond as soon as possible, for it was rather

urgent to have a quick reply, now that I couldn't start working in Fasoplast straight away. And now the reply.

Thursday May 4

Thursday of that same week (May 4), I visited the university a couple of times in order to see if SAP had answered by telephone yet, and on Friday the 5th I even stayed there all day, but from the telephone operator I understood that no reply was received. Mr. Koanda was not available during these two days. The fax operator told me that, although in the meantime the fax machine had been repaired, SAP had not responded by fax either.

6.2.3 Week 7

The whole of the following week (week 4 of my stay) was communication-wise if possible even more frustrating for me than the weeks prior to those. Every day a long dangerous ride to the university and every day I was informed that there was no reply. Mr. Koanda showed up, but kept insisting on me not calling SAP personally, but to be patient for, I was in Africa now and things didn't happen as quickly here as they do in Europe (time is not important). He didn't phone himself because of the reasons mentioned before (costs). Finally, on Friday May 12, he gave in that maybe it would be a good idea for me to call SAP myself after all, as long as I made sure I said I was calling in his name (hierarchy).

Friday May 12

A lot of expensive phone calls by myself in a *télécentre* and a couple of hours later, I was told by SAP employees to call again after the weekend for the person I needed to speak to wasn't in that Friday day. My money started to run out quickly this way, especially since I couldn't reach my bank account in The Netherlands.

6.2.4 Week 8

Monday May 15

On Monday, May 15, I eventually spoke by phone to the right official in SAP, it was my fifth week in Burkina Faso. I was told briefly that I couldn't do research in

SAP because they were informed of my coming much too late (?), Koanda knew already in the beginning of March of me coming to Burkina and my request to work in SAP. Already then he had been asked to make the necessary arrangements with SAP, for as far as I had understood). And now I was told that they simply couldn't receive me on such short notice.

6.3 ATTEMPT FOR RESEARCH IN OTHER COMPANIES

After I learned that I could only work at Fasoplast the last two weeks of my stay (weeks 7 and 8) and I was experiencing how slowly things were going at SAP (or rather, not going at all), I decided to try my luck elsewhere. Coincidentally I had met a Dutch girl called Nienke, who was doing her thesis research at, Unicef.

6.3.1 Back to week 6

Wednesday May 3

On Wednesday May 3, Nienke introduced me to her colleagues and explained my situation to them (after which they welcomed me to Africa!). I asked Nienke's colleagues to whom I had been introduced, if it would be possible to do research for Unicef. They told me they had to think about it, and to come back the next day.

Thursday May 4

Nienke's boss told me he couldn't help me at the moment. A colleague of Nienke's suggested that maybe I could do research for the company Orasel, an American firm producing and distributing a product that prevents dehydration. He phoned them straight away from his desk at Unicef (the communication worked!). Although the Orasel management were actually enthusiastic about a Dutch communication student doing research for them (they even suggested a topic straight away: 'How to improve the communication between the branches in different parts of the country?'), it was the same outcome there. Also: not enough notice.

6.3.2 Week 7

Monday May 8

The person who was in charge of the communication section of Unicef informed me there wasn't anything she could do for me on such short notice.

Wednesday May 10

Going hence and forth to Unicef to speak to the different people and waiting for the answers from their counterparts, took a couple of days, but eventually on Wednesday, May 10, halfway through my fourth week in Burkina Faso, it was apparent that it was impossible to undertake research in either Unicef nor Orasel.

6.4 SITUATION AFTER 4 WEEKS

Thus left to determine my own fate, there was nothing for me to do except for to wait until May 29, when I could start working in Fasoplast.

6.5 JUSTIFICATION OF (NO) PROGRESS

To get a dear overview of the events described in this chapter, I will insert a schematic presentation in Table 6.1. Week numbers correspond to division made in Chapter 5.

6.6 REFERENCES CHAPTER 6

Castelis, M. (1998), *End of Millennium, The information age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. III, Blackwell Publishers.

Hickson, D.J. & D.S. Pugh (1995), *Management Worldwide, the Impact of Societal Culture on Organizations around the Globe*, The Penguin Group.

Table 6.1 Summary of Chapter 6

week	date	Fasoplast	SAP	other
4	4/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management is not expecting me; - Learn from DE that DG is DR; - Told by DE to come back 4/20 to speak to DG/DR about permission research. 		
	4/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DG/DR not in; - Told by secretary DE should give permission - Asked by DE to draw up demande de stage. 		
	4/21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leave demande with secretary, because DE not in; - Informed by secretary that on 4/25 both DG/DR and DE are in. 		
5	4/24	National Holiday	National Holiday	
	4/25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DG/DR too busy to receive me; - DE not in, secretary promises to ask his opinion + tells me eau back next day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1st meeting with Mr. Koanda; - Informed by Mr. K SAP doesn't know yet of me coming; - Mr. K will send fax; - Told by Mr. K to come back 4/27 for answer fax; 	

Table 6.1 Summary of Chapter 6 - continued

week	date	Fasoplast	SAP	other
5	4/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secretary informs me DG/DR and DE give permission; - Secretary informs me DAF and DC need to give permission; - DAF approves; - DC not in, back on 4/28. 		
	4/27		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fax not sent; - Told by Mr. K to come back 5/2. 	
	4/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DC not in; - Secretary confirms that DC's permission is needed; 		
6	5/1	Labor Day	Labor Day	Labor Day
	5/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DC gives permission; - DE lets me know I can come 5/29, not earlier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fax not sent; - Informed by Mr.K fax number SAP is unknown; - Make phone call myself to get SAP's fax number; - Instructed by Mr. K not to talk to SAP about research myself; - Fax machine university broken; - Fax machine business centre broken. 	

Table 6.1 Summary of Chapter 6 - continued

week	date	Fasoplast	SAP	other
6	5/3		- Fax sent to SAP.	- Introduction at Unicef.
	5/4		- No reply SAP.	- Research is not possible at section where my friend works; - Orasel is called; no research possibilities here.
	5/5		- No reply SAP.	
7	5/8		- No reply SAP; - Reminded by Mr. K not to eau SAP myself.	- Research is not possible at Communication section Unicef.
	5/8		- No reply SAP; - Reminded by Mr. K not to eau SAP myself.	- Research is not possible at Communication section Unicef.
	5/9		- No reply SAP; - Reminded by Mr. K not to call SAP myself.	
	5/10		- No reply SAP; - Reminded by Mr. K not to eau SAP myself.	- Ask few more Unicef employees do they have ideas for research; - No research possible at Unicef or affiliated companies.

CHAPTER 7

REDEFINITION OF THE SUBJECT AND GOALS

When the day (Monday May 29) finally arrived to begin my definite research at Fasoplast, I was confronted with an impasse. In a meeting with the *DE*, Mr. Berjonneau, he explained that my original topic outlined in my *demande de stage* (relating to the management's differences of opinions in productivity, flexibility and quality; Section 6.1) had been addressed by the previous reorganization he discussed with me the first time I visited him. When I asked him how he had addressed this in his reorganization he stated emphatically that the matter was closed, and my original topic irrelevant. He asked as to whether there was anything else I would like to research?

So at the beginning of my first day, I had to decide on a new research topic. I immediately thought of Burkinabè communications; I realized I had already observed a lot in that respect. Firstly, the way people in Burkina Faso communicate with each other but more specifically, the communication I was involved in in Fasoplast, SAP, the University and Unicef. As a communication student, I was actually glad he asked me. I thought trying to find out more about how the internal communication in Fasoplast was organized would be an excellent research topic. I told Mr. Berjonneau that I had to talk this through with my tutor and my assigner first, because this wasn't what I came to Burkina Faso for. I knew it was going to take a while before I would know their opinions, but I decided it was best that I would start already immediately to collect data concerning my new subject and goals.

When I arrived home after that first day at Fasoplast, I formulated more precisely what my new subject and goals were. I stated them as follows:

7.1 SUBJECT

Main subject:

Could the communication in Burkina Faso and more specifically the internal communication in companies like Fasoplast be improved, not from our western point of view, know how and techniques, but by mobilizing Burkinabè insights, skills and cultural aspects?

To arrive at the main subject, the following sub-subjects needed to be attended to first:

1. How does communication in general take place in Burkina Faso?
2. How is internal communication in a Burkinabè organization like Fasoplast organized?
3. By which aspects is the communication in Burkina Faso influenced?

7.2 GOALS

Main goal:

Present ways of improving the communication in Burkina Faso and more specifically the internal communication in companies like Fasoplast by mobilizing Burkinabè insights, skills and cultural aspects with tools to implement this.

To arrive at the main goal, the following sub-goals needed to be achieved first:

1. Description of general communication in Burkina Faso
2. Detailed description of 'organized' internal communication in a Burkinabè company.
3. Description of aspects that influence the communication in Burkina Faso.

Again, as with my initial subjects and goals (Chapter 2), I formulated the new ones trying to satisfy both Dr. Karsten, my assigner, and the Hanzehogeschool, taking into account their specific, practical requirements.

I could only present this to Prof. Rogers and Dr. Karsten the next day, Tuesday May 30, since the one internet café in Ouaga had already closed for that Monday evening. I received very quick responses; when I went to check for their reactions

the following Wednesday (May 31), both had approved of my new approach. Prof. Rogers however, added that although at Fasoplast they said they didn't have any problems anymore concerning flexibility, productivity and quality, it could be interesting to keep an eye on that anyway, in order to see if the current situation is really optimal.

Of course, this development had already given me one extra interesting thing to consider: why, with all the people concerned within Fasoplast having read and approved of my *demande de stage* six weeks earlier, had no one mentioned then that my initial research topic had become irrelevant? Also amazing was that this time no one seemed to have to approve of the thesis subject, no consensus was needed, no secretary involved.

7.3 JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH METHOD

I decided to stick to the method I had decided upon with my initial research subject, i.e. participant observation and interviewing.

For describing the general communication in Burkina Faso and describing the 'organized' internal communication in Fasoplast I will use participant observation. To get more detailed on how the internal communication is organized, I will interview different employees of Fasoplast.

The reason for which I think that these two methods of research are most efficient in what I want to accomplish hasn't changed from what I described in Part I, Section 2.3, concerning my initial research subject. In stead of explaining this again, I wish to refer to that section.

CHAPTER 8

REFORMULATION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

With only two weeks left in Burkina Faso and with my thesis subject radically changed in such an unexpected way and moreover at such an unexpected time, I had to reformulate my assignment on an ad hoc basis.

I decided firstly that with the subject of my thesis now being Burkinabè communications in general and more specifically the internal communications in Fasoplast, it was important that I recalled events that had already happened previously concerning all types of communication, be it in Fasoplast, other companies I had visited or in informal situations, and to put them on paper. Observations that were earlier irrelevant for my thesis, suddenly became important now, in this situation where I had a new subject.

Secondly I had to think of the best way to collect data within Fasoplast during the short period of 2 weeks I would be there. I decided to put the emphasis on the communication to, from and between the three managers in charge, because of the fact that my contract giver, Dr. Karsten, would have most use for his book for data concerning the directors. Apart from interviewing, I furthermore wanted to observe as many employees as possible, in order to obtain a precise image of all the different ways of communication within Fasoplast.

I discussed these ideas with Mr. Berjonneau, who suggested that - apart from with himself, the *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières* and the *Directeur Commercial* - I could speak to the following people: the *Chef d'Usine*, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, who is a member of the supporting staff who looks after the security and the control in Fasoplast, and with a lady that runs the shop that Fasoplast keeps in the centre of town. This was the first time I heard that Fasoplast had a shop for the sales of their own plastic products, but I thought it would indeed be a good idea to include the shopkeeper in my research too.

When I suggested to Mr. Berjonneau I would also like to talk to a production worker of the factory, he laughed and said, for unspecified reasons, that that was not such a good idea. I actually thought I might get to speak to someone of the factory anyway. At that moment I didn't realize immediately, that if I observe members of the management, they implicitly also kept an eye on me, which didn't leave me the chance to talk to those to whom they didn't like me to talk to. Therefore I never got the chance to talk to a production worker (!).

In retrospect, it was extremely aggravating that apparently none of those involved needed to be informed about my new research subject nor give their approval. It was exactly this point that had caused the endless difficulties the first three weeks I was in Burkina Faso (see Chapter 6). This compounded the problem of having to come up there and then with a new subject for my thesis, and consequently with a new way of doing research in Fasoplast.

The first working day (Monday) at Fasoplast was very confusing. Firstly I had to change my ideas completely around. Secondly, I had to start working with these new ideas that only existed in my mind, not on paper. All these ideas for a new thesis subject were only in my head (I had, after all, only just been told that what I initially came to do had become irrelevant), for I didn't have the opportunity to just sit down and order my thoughts.

Moreover, on this first day I didn't have the certainty yet that Prof. Rogers and Dr. Karsten approved of these new ideas. It wouldn't be untrue if I said that at that point, I felt slightly bewildered about the events of that day and the course that my research had suddenly taken.

CHAPTER 9

PLANNING OF ACTIVITIES

The night after my first working day at Fasoplast I replanned my activities. I had already worked that day with the *Directeur Commercial*, but I decided to include this day in the planning also, as to get a dear overview. In order to put these two weeks events into perspective of my 19 week planning that stand for the total time of my thesis, I decided to put the original planning next to the new one (see Table 9.1).

With the way things had gone so far in Burkina Faso and within Fasoplast, I knew that I could expect this planning to change again, so I decided to follow the schedule as much as possible, and apart from that just see what would happen and react to that.

Table 9.1 The original planning and the new planning

week	original planning		new planning		
	place	activity	date	place	activity
10	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interview + observe the <i>Directeur Marketing</i> - process results 	5/29	Fasoplast	interview + observe DC
			5/30		interview + observe DC
			5/31		interview + observe shopkeeper
			6/1		(national holiday) prepare for remaining research
			6/2		interview + observe CSC
11	SAP, Bobo Dioulasso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - interview + observe the <i>Directeur de Production</i> - process results 	6/5	Fasoplast	interview + observe DE
			6/6		interview + observe DE
			6/7		interview + observe DAF
			6/8		interview + observe DAF
			6/9		interview + observe CU

Table 9.1 The original planning and the new planning - continued

week	original planning		new planning		
	place	activity	week	place	activity
12	Ouagadougou + The Netherlands	fly home on Wednesday the 14th of June	12	Ouagadougou + The Netherlands	fly home on Wednesday the 14th of June
13	The Netherlands	- structure data - analyze data	12	The Netherlands	- do additional literature research concerning communications in Burkina Faso - structure data - analyze data
14	The Netherlands	- summarize, draw conclusion and write recommendations - formulate proposal for implementation	14	The Netherlands	- summarize, draw conclusion and write recommendations - formulate proposal for implementation
15	The Netherlands	- write, ask feedback, rewrite thesis - corrections, layout etc... - hand in thesis on Friday the 11 th of August	15	The Netherlands	- write, ask feedback, rewrite thesis - corrections, layout etc... - hand in thesis on Friday the 11 th of August

CHAPTER 10

FINAL EXECUTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT

I will start this chapter by giving a definition of the concept of communication. After that I will discuss the different means of communication in Burkina Faso, divided into institutionalized and non-institutionalized communication. Finally, I will give an overview of the aspects that influence the non-institutionalized communication in Burkina Faso and more specifically in Fasoplast.

10.1 COMMUNICATION

With the subject of my thesis being to find out more about the communication in Burkina Faso, it is important to know what exactly communication is. Unfortunately, communication is a concept that is not easily defined. There are about as many descriptions of communication as there are people in this world. I define communication as a vehicle to transmit thoughts. Also, I found one definition of communication, given by Martin & Nakayama in their book *“Intercultural Communications in Contexts”*, which in my opinion is a very dear one and describes the concept more exhaustively.

The essence of communication is to establish meaning:

1. *Communication is a process, not a product.*

It is not a singular event but is ongoing. It relies on other communication events to make sense. When we enter into communication with another person, we simultaneously take in messages through all our senses of sight, smell, and hearing. These messages are not discrete and linear, but happen simultaneously, with blurry boundaries of beginning and end.

2. *Communication is a set of constructed meanings.*

That is, each message has more than one meaning; often, there are many layers of meaning. For example, the message I love you may mean, “I’d like to have a good time with you tonight”, “I feel guilty about what I did

last night without you”, “I need you to do me a favour”, “I have a good time when I’m with you” or “I want to spend the rest of my life with you”.

3. *Communication involves the use of shared symbols.*

The words we speak - or particular combination of letters we write or gestures we make - have no inherent meaning. Rather, they gain their significance from an agreed-upon meaning. When we use symbols to communicate, we assume that the other person shares our symbol system. We assume that he or she takes the meaning that we intend. When individuals come from different cultural backgrounds and experiences, this assumption may be faulty.

4. *Communication in both verbal and nonverbal.*

We communicate not only by words but also by our behaviours. Thousands of nonverbal behaviours (gestures, postures, eye contact, various facial expressions, and so on) involve shared meaning. Powerful social symbols - for example, flags, national anthems, and Disney logos - also communicate meaning nonverbally (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

10.1.1 Institutionalized means of communication in Burkina Faso

The internet gives us a good overview (in French) of all institutionalized means of communication in Burkina Faso. I only present these to be extensive, because this thesis is especially meant to describe the non-institutionalized communication. I would therefore like to refer to Appendix 3.

10.1.2 Non-institutionalized means of communication in Burkina Faso

Other than those institutionalized means of communication, of course there exist the noninstitutionalized ones, like the daily communication in families, schools and workplaces. In the light of the idea that communication can be seen as a vehicle to transmit thoughts, I have tried, as indicated Chapter 7 to find out by which aspects this transmission of thoughts is influenced in Burkina and more specifically in Fasoplast. As I described in named chapter, the main goal of my thesis is to present ways of improving the internal communication in companies by mobilizing West African insights, skills and cultural aspects with tools to implement this. This

means I will have to analyse the aspects that influence the communication first in order to know what can be done subsequently to improve possible failures in this.

10.2 ASPECTS THAT INFLUENCE THE NON-INSTITUTIONALIZED COMMUNICATION IN BURKINA FASO AND MORE SPECIFICALLY IN FASOPLAST

I have tried to resolve these influential aspects by both literature and empirical research, the latter mainly executed especially within Fasoplast. My research consisted of observation and interviewing (see Section 7.3 and Section 2.3). The research results gained through my research in Fasoplast are split up into different groups which are themselves divided into different aspects. The division of the three different groups is based on the extent to which the aspects in one group are liable to change.

The division into three different groups of aspects is as follows:

1. *Regional aspects* (10.2.1). This group concerns regional aspects that influence the communication and which, in my opinion, can't easily be changed, like climate, poverty and in connection herewith, failing technology.
2. *Cultural environmental aspects* (10.2.2). This group concerns the cultural aspects that influence the communication. Assuming that culture is learned and not innate (see Section 5.4.4.), these aspects are in principal more liable to change than the previous group, like time, hierarchy and social etiquette.
3. *Corporate aspects: know-how and skills* (10.2.3). This group concerns the knowledge and use of certain corporate know-how and skills that influence the communication in companies, like corporate communication transmission techniques and management theories. These 'assets' are learned - up until now in Burkina mostly from books based on occidental models - and, because they are learned, are indeed liable to change.

Each aspect is treated as follows: firstly there will be a short introduction to the aspect, followed by facts found in literature. Subsequently there will be examples of the aspect found by me through empirical research on the spot. Each aspect will be ended by my conclusions.

As will appear from the given examples which you find in Section 10.2, almost all aspects within the separate groups influence one another. Sometimes even aspects from different groups are interdependent. This means some aspects that influence the communication will be found in different groups or appear several times within the same group under different headings.

10.2.1 Regional aspects

10.2.1.1 Climate

10.2.1.1.1 Introduction

Climate determines the rhythm of the day and governs in fact the entire life and so to a strong extent the ideas concerning the concept time, the pace of life is slow. The ongoing heat and the subsequent periods of drought covers all experiences with a thin layer of dust, that penetrates everything. The climate is extreme, there is no escape.

10.2.1.1.2 Facts about climate that influence communication found in literature

Table 10.1 Average temperatures

	January	April	July	October
Ouagadougou	24 °C	33 °C	27 °C	29 °C
Bobo Dioulasso	26 °C	31 °C	36 °C	28 °C
Don	22 °C	38 °C	29 °C	27 °C

In certain areas temperatures can raise up to 48 °C during the hottest season. During this hot season, water is short, life becomes fluid, time immobilizes (Janin, 2000).

10.2.1.1.3 Facts about climate that influence communication found by empirical experience¹

1. In the afternoon every working person in Burkina Faso goes home for three hours, to eat, but also - and mainly - to sleep, because it is simply too hot in the afternoon to work.
Sleeping during the day and even at night is often not easy during the hottest seasons. The people sleep outside on their courtyard, out in the open air, to get at least some air while they are sleeping. Indoors it is too hot and too sultry to sleep.
2. In buildings where you'd find air conditioners or fans, the heat becomes unbearable when there is a power cut, which occurs regularly in the hottest season. Both the fact that it becomes so hot inside and the regularly occurring power cuts are related to the climate. The first one speaks for itself, but the second one might need some explanation: the electricity is generated by hydraulic systems, using the water from the city's reservoirs. During the hottest seasons the water level in these reservoirs drops dramatically, which is reason for those responsible for the water management to simply turn off the electricity in order to save the precious drinking water.
3. In this context, verbal communication slows down. Communication suffers from the blanket of heat that covers everything and everybody. Movements seem to get slower and less expressive.

10.2.1.1.4 Conclusion

Without making a direct connection between climate and communication, the ongoing heat influences daily life to an extent to which I think it is safe to say that communication is at least indirectly influenced by it. Indeed the heat slows down the experience of time, which makes communication stop completely or slowly drag out into infinity.

¹ You will find the original empirical research results and interviews in Appendix 5

In Section 11.2.1, there will be more on the influence of climate. The aspect ‘climate’ obviously can’t be influenced.

10.2.1.2 POVERTY

10.2.1.2.1 Introduction

Another omnipresent aspect is the prevailing poverty (see Section 5.3.5). This too is a factor of which, at first sight, you wouldn’t expect it to have a strong influence on communication. However, as will appear from the examples, this influence is substantial, for poverty in Burkina Faso manifests itself in the lack of sufficient tools for communication not only in the normal families, but also in public life, for example within companies or at the university. In the community the telephone is lacking almost entirely, let alone fax machines for example. It is true that there are public *télécentres* in Ouagadougou, but who has the money to make phone calls from there? There is also an internet café, but who has been able to gain the valuable knowledge to use a computer considering the fact that computers in the community are virtually non-existent; only in companies would you find them to a limited extend.

10.2.1.2.2 Facts about poverty that influence communication found in literature

In developing countries a minority may be wealthy, but most people live in sparsely furnished, crowded huts or small houses, and many in the cities on the streets under boxes and plastic sheets. They have an inadequate infrastructure - which is a coldly technical way of saying that they have just footpaths and tracks, or rutted roads (unless they squat in shanties on the edge of a roaring highway), meager or polluted water and no sewage system, and either no electricity or electricity for just a few hours each day, and even that unpredictably switched on and of (Hickson, & Pugh, 1995).

10.2.1.2.3 Facts about poverty that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. There are hardly any TV's. The situation is not unlike that in Holland in the 50's. If there is an interesting program on the telly, the whole neighbourhood comes round to that family in the street that do have that single TV.
2. Mr. Koanda, professor at the university, who wanted to help me by getting in contact with a company I wanted to do research for, SAP, needed to know that company's fax number. He couldn't call the company because outgoing calls from the university are, with the eye on limiting the expenditure, restricted to local numbers. Long distance calls are too expensive. He didn't want to go out to a *télécentre* either, because that would cost him his own money, and that would be too big an expense since it wouldn't be for personal use.
3. The vast majority in Burkina Faso doesn't have a phone because it is too expensive. If they want to make a call they have to go to a *télécentre*. In ordinary *télécentres* there are no fax machines. For sending a fax, one would have to go to a business centre of which there are very few in Ouagadougou. Sending emails is even more difficult; there is only one internet café in Ouagadougou.
4. The use of the telephone seems sacred in Burkina Faso. All the people I observed as a part of my research showed the same behaviour: any face-to-face conversation, regardless of who it was with, or any activity, regardless of the importance of it, was interrupted immediately when the phone would ring. The reason why I put this particularity about phoning in this group which is about the aspect poverty, is that I see a direct link between the two. It is because of poverty that the telephone as a mass product has only been introduced in Burkina Faso recently. And it is because of poverty that still today it is rare to have a phone. These two factors seem to be the reason for Burkinabè to treat the phone with priority and such, in my eyes old fashioned, respect.
5. At Fasoplast, being a big company, there are quite a few telephones. The directors and the secretaries each have their own, but some of the supporting staff members have to share one. Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, shares a phone with two others, one of whom is Mr. Sance, *Chef d'Usine*. The three of them have their desks in one office room. As said earlier, there is only one telephone in this three-man office. It is on a fixed place, on Mr. Sance's

desk. I witnessed once that the phone rang and it was for Marc. Marc had to go to Mr. Sance's desk to use the phone. However, in this particular example, Mr. Sance had two clients sifting at his desk. It was amusing to see how they dealt with this: Marc just started talking very loudly into the telephone, which caused the clients inability to hear Mr. Sance anymore, so he too starts speaking louder. Eventually, everybody in the office was yelling. As soon as the phone was hung up, voices went back to normal again.

6. Because of poverty in the country, computers are scarce. Within the company Fasoplast, there is a total of 7 computers; 4 for the accountant section, and 3 for the invoice section. Practically, this means that of all the directors, only Mr. So, the *Directeur des affaires Administratives Financières* has one at his disposition. The other computers are used by secretaries only. Others simply write a lot, for which they use a pen and huge notebooks (these items being basically all the stationary there is at Fasoplast. Typex, staplers, even selotape, are not readily available). Since they keep a close track of everything that happens within the company, piles of paper a day are being written. Mr. Paré, as Directeur Commercial, has no access to a computer. Mr. Paré uses many different sheets of paper with pre-printed tables on it to keep track of different procedures in the company, be it concerning the production, the schedules of different employees or any other kind of procedures. Every step or every change is precisely noted down in the therefore designated sheet. The problem with this as I witnessed it, is that initially clear and accurate schemes become an unreadable mess with all the corrections made over the course of days.
7. Another problem caused by the poverty, is that thefts happen regularly. To prevent thefts at Fasoplast, Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, has two specific tasks. The first one is administrating all the products that leave the Fasoplast premises. For this, he has a very big notebook, in which he has made columns on each page, so he can write down the date, the name of the client and the number of products he's bought. The guard at the gate does the same thing. Also, Marc writes all these details down on a separate sheet of paper, of which the client is to keep one carbon copy for himself and to give one to the guard at the door.
Marc's second theft-preventing task is keeping the 'bandits' out; for there are so many production workers in the factory, he can't know all of them, so sometimes a person who doesn't belong there gets in together with the other

workers. He is thinking of introducing badges to the employees, which they would have to wear visibly when they come in to work.

10.2.1.2.4 Conclusion

In the community a lot of the interpersonal communication is done by calling on people, not just for paying a visit, but also to do business (e.g. the tailor), to ask for advice, to bring over a message from a third party, be it verbally or by handing over a note, or simply to watch TV. This is nice because of the social aspect it involves, but unfortunately this social communication is limited to walking distance; it is really hard to communicate with people who live or work far away from where you are. Therefore, long-distance communication can only be maintained by the wealthier individuals and the bigger companies. The wealthy-few do have many different tools for communication at their disposal, which enlarges the gap between the rich and the poor.

What's striking is, as in examples 4 and 5, that communication by telephone has a high priority. Face-to-face conversations are interrupted constantly when the phone rings, for the person who phones can't be just anybody, for not just anybody has access to a phone.

Most of the work in companies and offices is done by using simply pen and paper, in this group illustrated by examples 6 and 7, and often results in, to put it bluntly, a disordered, bureaucratic mess that can only be made sense out of by the people who created it themselves. Another result of the fact that professionals mainly use pen and paper is that the wheel has to be reinvented over and over again, since the communication of information is not electronically linked or stored. The management tasks of Mr. Paré in example 6, keeping track of all those different procedures, and the theft-preventing tasks of Marc in example 7 would be simplified, elucidated and made much more efficient, had they had use of a computer. Electronic spreadsheets and databases are thought indispensable by Westerners for these kind of activities.

It is hardly possible to influence the aspect treated here, poverty. This could only be done on a national and international level with the involvement of the respective governments. Even with the aspect of poverty in mind, however, certain small-

scale interventions could lead to possibilities for improvement. The recommendations for these interventions are outlined in Chapter 11.

10.2.1.3 Technology

10.2.1.3.1 Introduction

Non face-to-face communication requires a technical vehicle for its transport of thoughts. Also the ordering and saving of those thoughts can be simplified with the use of technical means. It are exactly these technical means that are lacking in Burkina Faso. Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle* once said about the lack of technology in Burkina Faso, that Abidjan (the capital of Ivory Coast) is ten years ahead of Ouagadougou. This made me think that indeed it is plausible that technology, as an exponent of wealth, could be seen as regionally dependent: the level of the advancement of technology is in my opinion interrelated with the (economic) interest that Westerners take in certain areas, for it was the Westerners who brought technology to these areas in the first place. Ivory Coast is a country with a long coast line and a friendlier climate than Burkina Faso. Because of this, when the French, ex-colonizers of both countries, first came to Africa, they took much more interest in Ivory Coast than in Burkina Faso, and continued to do so up until today. Subsequently there are many more French people living and working in Ivory Coast than in Burkina Faso. It is those people that brought the technology; more French people in Ivory Coast subsequently means a higher level of technology in that country.

Electricity, obviously a prior condition for the use of these technical appliances, is scarce in Burkina Faso. People who live in the countryside have no electricity at all, and in the cities, even in the capital of Ouagadougou, large areas aren't connected to the electricity network. Those who do have electricity, are often faced with power cuts, especially during the hottest season (see 10.2.2.1). This means that for large groups of people, simple apparatuses like an electrical lamp to read in the evening, let alone computers to send emails, are of no use.

10.2.1.3.2 Facts about technology that influence communication found in literature

Information technology, and the ability to use it and adapt it, is the critical factor in generating and accessing wealth, power, and knowledge in our time. Africa is, for the time being, excluded from the information technology revolution, if we except a few nodes of finance and international management directly connected to global networks while bypassing African economies and societies.

Not only is Africa, by far, the least computerized region of the world, but it does not have the minimum infrastructure required to make use of computers, thus making nonsense of many of the efforts to provide electronic equipment to countries and organisations. (...)

If the physical infrastructure is lagging behind, the human skills to operate information technology remain totally inadequate. (...)

Technological dependency and technological underdevelopment, in a period of accelerated technological change in the rest of the world, make it literally impossible for Africa to compete internationally either in manufacturing or in advanced services. (...) It follows a downward spiral of competitiveness, as Africa becomes increasingly marginalised in the informational/global economy by each leap forward in technological change. The disinformation of Africa at the dawn of the Information Age may be the most lasting wound inflicted on this continent by new patterns of dependency, aggravated by the policies of the predatory state. (Castells, 1998)

10.2.1.3.3 Facts about technology that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. When Mr. Koanda, my tutor at University of Ouagadougou at the time, wanted to send off a fax, the fax machine in the university didn't work. No one had the knowledge on how to repair it. The fax had been given to the university by a Dutch person, which made the repairing of the fax machine more difficult because the instructions on the machine were in Dutch. Moreover, the Dutch donor had delivered the fax without the full manual, which could have been of help for manuals are often written in several languages.

2. I observed Mr. Paré, *Directeur Commercial* of Fasoplast, shouting in the phone quite often. He explained to me this was caused by bad telephone lines, which result in a lot of noise. Once he had to shout exceptionally loud, and repeat everything he said a few times. When he hung up the phone, he laughed and explained to me that he had been phoning with someone in Bobo Dioulasso and that it was raining there, which caused even more noise than normally.
3. When I was left alone in Mr. Paré's office for a while, I realized, when the phone rang and it just kept on ringing, that he didn't have an answering machine or voice mail, or that the eau wasn't being diverted to the operator. This thought struck me, because it had become dear to me over the course of a few days, that Mr. Paré did a lot of his business by phone. When I later asked him about this, he confirmed that indeed at Fasoplast they didn't have answer machines, nor the automatic diverting of calls, and he frowned at voicemail, because he had never heard of that.
4. When I was working at Mr. So's office (*Directeur des affaires Administratives Financières*), a power cut occurred. Mr. So was working at his computer, which continued to work after the power cut. He explained to me that all computers at Fasoplast are connected to a small generator that keeps them working for about 30 minutes, so that everyone can save what they were working on, and can safely turn off their computers. Everything else though, the light, the air-conditioning in the directors' offices, even the entire factory, stops working at once.
5. In Marc's office (the office that houses three people), there is only one socket. This socket is used for a calculator.
6. Mr. Berjonneau explained that the shop used to have an annual turnover of 11 million FCFA, but now that Mrs. Compaoré runs the shop, this has increased to 18 million. The increase in turnover isn't due to higher sales, but to theft, he says. According to him theft is possible, because they don't have the technology to keep track of sales. Bar codes would be useful, but apparently that would be an investment that couldn't even be made profitable for very successful car sellers, let alone a shop that sells plastic buckets. They make an inventory of the shop on a monthly basis and from this they derive how much

money they should have received. The sold products are not registered individually.

10.2.1.3.4 Conclusion

Communication in Burkina Faso is hindered by the fact that one can never depend nor rely on the necessary technology, the reason for which is fourfold. Firstly, technical devices are often old, many of them being devices that are written off in Western companies, brought into Burkina as development aid, both on large and individual scale. This means that the existing technology is often out of date and subsequently functions defective.

Secondly, there are the reoccurring power cuts. Only very few of the large companies have emergency generators, that can act as a safety net in order to keep communication facilities going and machines working and computers not loosing their data. In all other cases everything running on electricity, stops.

The third reason for failing technology is that, because of the lack of electricity, technical devices can only be used by few people in few places - it can not be introduced on a large scale within a reasonable amount of time. Thus, the use of technical devices only remains of such small quantity, it will hardly have impact on a national level and will thus hardly contribute to faster development of the country.

Finally, the fourth reason is that the use of technical devices is not yet imbedded in the day-to-day life of the Burkinabè. Moreover (or subsequently?), they are not taught at school or at the university how to use a computer, nor any other technical devices. When other technical devices are used, someone is taught (usually by a non-professional, like a friend or a colleague) how to use this particular device, but when it stops working or when it malfunctions, there aren't many people at hand who know what to do to resolve the problem, who know about maintenance. There are no schools for mechanics, IT-system controllers or electricians for example.

Considering that the prevailing poverty is the main cause of failing communication technology, this aspect can hardly be influenced.

In Section 10.2.3.2 you will find more on how the lack of technology directly influences the corporate communication.

10.2.2 Cultural environmental aspects

10.2.2.1 Time

10.2.2.1.1 Introduction

Everywhere in the daily life in Burkina Faso, you can perceive that time is experienced completely differently than in Western societies. As we shall see from the literature and the examples found by empirical experience, a different experience of time, influences the communication. In this introduction there is a lot more to say about how the influence of time, but the literature on this is so dear and to the point, that I prefer to let the masters talk.

10.2.2.1.2 Facts about time that influence communication found in literature

No more common thread binds humanity than the passing of time. Yet it is perceived differently and valued differently. Time present is the primary concern of comparatively immediatist cultures. Latin American, in particular, see the past as having gone and the future as uncertain, and so want results here and now, preferring short-term benefits. In wealthier nations people become less dependent upon superiors and upon their extended families for their own survival.

Africans are not in such a hurry. There is more to be got from the moment at hand, even from the pleasantries incidental to the job, so why rush on prematurely? Other matters can wait. Whilst to an American the day is neatly arranged in advance into time-slots with little to spare in between, the African view of time is more flexible and fluid. The day can flow around people, who come first, rather than be divided up by punctual adherence to the clock. Sometimes the problem for foreigners is not so much getting a 'no' decision as getting no decision.

Queues patiently await a required signature or official stamp (Hickson & Pugh, 1995)

Hall makes a distinction between *Monochronic time* and *Polychronic time*: Monochronic time (M-time) and Polychronic time (P-time) represent two variant solutions to the use of both time and space as organising frames for activities.

Space is included because the two systems (time and space) are interrelated. M-time emphasizes schedules, segmentation and promptness. P-time systems are characterized by several things happening at once. They stress involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules. P-time is treated as much less tangible than M-time. P-time is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, and that point is sacred.

About *P-time*. Much of business is transacted in public instead of having a series of private meetings in an inner office. Appointments just don't carry the same weight as they do in (M-time cultures such as) the United States (or The Netherlands). Things are constantly shifted around. Nothing seems solid or firm, particularly plans for the future, and there are always changes in the most important plans right up to the very last minute.

Monochronic time is arbitrary and imposed; that is, learned. Because it is so thoroughly integrated into our culture, it is treated as though it were the only natural and 'logical' way of organising life.

Time and space are functions of each other. How can you meet a deadline if you are constantly interrupted, for example? How much you are interrupted depends on how available you are. And how available you are is a matter of how well you are screened from others.

Polychronic people, who are almost never alone, even in the home, make different uses of screening. They interact with several people at once and are continually involved with each other. Scheduling is difficult if not impossible with P-time people unless they have mastered M-time technically as a very different system, one they do not confuse with their own but use when it is situationally appropriate, much as they use a foreign language.

Theoretically, when considering social organisation, P-time systems should demand a much greater centralization of control and be characterized by a rather shallow or simple structure. How and when each activity is actually attended to is up to the employee (Hall, 1976).

10.2.2.1.3 Facts about time that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. I learned the most important thing there is to know about the experience of time in Burkina Faso, before I even got there, although, as I realized later, I couldn't immediately grasp the exact meaning of it at the time. On my way to Burkina Faso, I was told by a Burkinabè whom I had met on the plane, that Burkina Faso is a very poor country, and that it has virtually nothing. The only thing people did have, according to this man, was time. 'And we have loads of it!'
2. In general, it can be said that time is of no importance: when people coincidentally meet on the street for example, people always finish their elaborate stories without cutting them short because they have to go somewhere. People just never seem to be in a hurry. Stories are never ended with the eye on efficiency. In companies even, after business is discussed, people continue chatting about personal matters.
3. The fact that people never seem to be in a hurry, implies that when you want to see someone, might mean that you have to wait for a long time. The person whom you want to see could be doing something else for which he takes his time because he is in no hurry. From the waiting person's perspective, this doesn't matter, because he isn't in a hurry either. Apart from having had to wait myself on many different occasions for long periods of time, I also witnessed it happening to other people very often during my research at Fasoplast.
 - When I was working in Mr. Paré's office, a man had come to Fasoplast to place an order for his company, Cluff. Through the window of Mr. Paré's office I had seen the man sitting in the next door office space for quite a long time, waiting until he could be received by Mr. Paré. Mr. Paré also knew that this man was waiting there, because he was informed by the guard, but he had kept him waiting while he continued reading through some papers. When the man finally came into Mr. Paré's office, Mr. Paré answered a couple of calls elaborately and talked to a few of the staff members who had come into his office while the client was already sitting there. All this time, the representative of Cluff was still sitting opposite Mr. Paré. At long last they discussed the order.

- At one point, during the day I spent in the three men's office where Marc has his desk, there were three people waiting in the office. They didn't say anything and none of the chefs spoke to them.
 - In the same office, a bit later on, there was one client who had come to purchase some goods. He was kept waiting for a long time, he had been sitting on his chair without anyone saying anything to him for over half an hour. (When he finally received his receipt to collect his purchases, he didn't say anything, nor did the chef who had been handling his command. Of course they didn't smile either, but that is never done here, only men smile at women.)
 - At Mr. Berjonneau's office, similar things happened. When a (shabby looking) client walked in, Mr. Berjonneau greeted him, and continued working on his papers. The man sat down and stared at the ceiling. A second (less shabby looking) client came in, and he also sat I himself down and waited. When Mr. Berjonneau finished reading his documents, he first helped the client who came in second. I have witnessed this many times before, in shops or other offices. First in, last out seems to be the standard.
 - I witnessed another beautiful example of how people are kept waiting all the time, an event that happened outside of Fasoplast. I went to a company once with a friend of mine who wanted to speak to a certain person in that company. When we arrived, a secretary asked my friend who he wanted to see. He told her after which she summoned him to sit down and wait on a chair directly opposite of where she was sitting. She went about her business for about fifteen minutes, and only then picked up the phone to inform the person that my friend wanted to see, that he had a visitor waiting for him. I found this very peculiar, especially since she knew my friend could see exactly what she was doing for he was sitting directly opposite her.
4. I realized during my time at Fasoplast, that for big companies, time is in some ways important. A good example of that is how they deal with delivering goods to clients with their truck. The day before the truck leaves, it is checked for technicalities to see if it needs to be revised. If this is the case, the truck can't leave the next day and so the delivery can't happen on time. If the driver of Fasoplast would really arrive a couple of days later than was planned the clients would complain. However, if there is something wrong with the truck and they inform the clients in time about the delay and the reason for it, then the client will understand and accept it. In other words, apparently those clients seem not to depend on a fixed delivery day for the continuity of their

own business, but they would mind having to wait without knowing what's going on.

5. There have been a few times that I actually saw people trying to speed up things. One time this happened at Fasoplast, when I was working in Mr. So's office. A letter needed to be sent off to the tax office. Mr. So sent a Fasoplast employee down to the tax office to deliver the letter, he didn't want to send it by mail. The reason for this appeared that although mail is reliable, it apparently takes a few days to be delivered. By sending an employee, Mr. So was assured that the letter would arrive the same day.

Apart from that event, the only times I have seen people speeding things up were when I saw students or executives excusing themselves from conversations because they had an appointment elsewhere. However, they would never do this without making the necessary inquiries about the other person's health and the health of all of his family members, all mentioned individually.

6. Mr. Paré's answer to following question reveals the imbeddedness of the polychronic time system.

- Does it never bother you that people walk in and out of the office all the time, that you sometimes have 4 people at the same time in your office waiting their turn to ask you something?

(Looking surprised) That people feel free to walk in and out of my office is very valuable. They know that they can come to me for help. (After a pause he adds:) It can at some times be quite inconvenient. If you are working on taking care of urgent matters it breaks your concentration when employees walk in to ask you questions and expect you to solve them straight away.

10.2.2.1.4 Conclusion

From the examples it appears that the daily life and the communication between people in Burkina Faso happens at a substantially slower pace than in Western countries. Everything indicates that in Burkina Faso the hurried society that I've been brought up in doesn't (yet?) exist. It sometimes feels as if communication is simply stretched out to its very outer limits. One has the time to talk, one takes the time to talk and one hardly even excuses himself from a conversation. What I have

experienced seems to show a lot of similarities with what Hickson and Pugh said about the African view of time being flexible and fluid.

Also, Burkina Faso is probably the best example of ‘polychronic time’ as defined by Edward T. Hall. It became obvious over and over again, that the task is really what takes the central position. In Fasoplast this means: someone works on a client’s order, the client may expect that he’ll get what he wants at some point, but has no idea about the amount of time that it will take. He is however satisfied, because for him too, time is no issue; the order will be processed, that’s what is important. To me as a Dutch person the fact that they keep the client waiting for such a long time seems very weird, but clients don’t seem to be bothered by it at all. The main thing is that they eventually get what they came for, and the amount of time it takes is not important. People seem extremely patient. In The Netherlands people would definitely start to complain and get completely stressed out about having to wait for such a long time.

The examples given under 3, were just a few of all the times I witnessed other people waiting, without even including the times I myself had to wait. The examples on the other hand under 5, about how people hurry, cover literally all the few times that I have witnessed people speeding things up (only two different kind of events during my stay).

Waiting seems to be something you always end up doing, and that you always have to calculate into your schedule. There is something weird about it, though. Apart from the fact that people really don’t seem to care about time, it gives me the odd feeling that there is something else behind letting people wait, as if it were to show some kind of power. This especially seemed the case in the examples of Mr. Berjonneau and of that secretary in the company I visited with a friend of mine (3 d and e). This behaviour seems to be influenced by the position people have on the hierarchical ladder (see the next Section).

10.2.2.2 Hierarchy

10.2.2.2.1 Introduction

In Burkina Faso, there are several kinds of hierarchy to consider. The most important kind of hierarchy concerns age. Old people are generally highly respected and seen as the wise ones from whom others have a lot to learn. Regarding companies however, one's job determines one's position on the hierarchical ladder, unrelated to his age. The higher one's job appears in the tree, the higher he will find himself on that ladder. The person highest on the ladder, makes the decisions. If you are a bit lower on the ladder, you are not expected to make any decision at all. Also in the family there exist this hierarchy. In general, the 'pater familias' governs the family in a paternalistic way. The last form of hierarchy concerns money. The rich seem to have adopted the attitude that the former colonialists must have shown. In general, they command others and expect to be obeyed. Poor people seem to be in awe of signs of (extravagant) richness and don't seem to mind showing submissive behaviour (Hofstede also mentions this, see Section 5.4.5 and 5.4.6).

Hierarchy influences the communication in different ways. In some cases, and this would be the worst scenario, there is no communication at all. This could be the case when a production worker would want to speak to the General Director or when a poor person would want to speak to someone of great wealth. This is very unlikely to happen.

In other cases the communication gets congested by hierarchy by the many steps one is obliged to follow on the hierarchical ladder. Skipping a rung of the ladder is not done. In families one has to consult the 'pater familias' about certain steps. In doing so one shows the respect due. In companies this happens in quite a similar way, where the head man of the company can be seen as the pater familias.

The ways hierarchy influences the communication described here, are illustrated below.

10.2.2.2.2 Facts about hierarchy that influence communication found in literature

The managing of authority throughout the developing countries is done in a centralised fashion, sometimes verging into authoritarianism. The control exercised by

the male patriarch of a family is duplicated within the organisation, especially in the family firm, and full due respect is required and given, step by step, down the hierarchy. Accelerating matters by bypassing a superior to get to higher authority more quickly would be an insult (though that does not stop it happening), and in any case managing time is not an urgent problem. Tasks can wait whilst personal affairs are settled, and people can come back later. The night of signature is a highly regarded symbol of authority, and its careful use guards against abuse. When the wielder of signature power is away, there may be no provision for a substitute to sign in his place, for such a discretion could be taken advantage of. Lower officials, fearing reprimands, can find it tempting to refer questions upwards as often as possible, for to do the minimum carries less risk of doing something that incurs displeasure (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

Typically, they work beneath a centralized and hierarchical authority system. They are in no position to ask why. The chain of command is sustained by downward instructions and communications, so to get action, those fortunate enough to be able to do who may have to go to the highest level. The military have a higher status, they can ignore regulations that everyone else must comply with.

Overmuch of this both overloads those at the top and misallocates resources. Top managers may or may not have the experience and training to cope with the pressures, for people with the appropriate competence and qualifications can be even more scarce than money. Hence candidates ill-equipped for high office may be promoted, and this problem can be exacerbated if training is regarded as a source of status as much as of competence, so that the qualifications of those promoted do not fit the jobs they do.

It is often noted that in this kind of hierarchy the 'social distance' between those above and those below exceeds the gap between expatriate managers and their African subordinates (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

Respect for age and hierarchy means that superiors are expected to make decisions to be passed down to the subordinates (so no encouragement to participate in decision-making, Iguisi, 1995).

The weakness of the polychronic type lies in their extreme dependence on the head man to handle contingencies and stay on top of things (Hall, 1976).

The model of Kiggundu used Section 5.4.7 illustrates how hierarchy within a company can influence the behaviour of employees.

In Hofstede's IBM research, West Africa scores 11 out of a possible 53 in his 'Power Distance Index'. About countries with a large power distance Hofstede says, among other things:

1. "Inequalities among people are both expected and desired;
2. Less powerful people should be dependent on the more powerful; in practice, less powerful people are polarized between dependence and counter dependence;
3. Hierarchy in organisations reflects the existential inequality between higher-ups and lower-downs;
4. Subordinates expect to be told what to do, and
5. The idea! boss is a benevolent autocrat or good father." See Section 5.4.5.

10.2.2.2.3 Facts about hierarchy that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. At first sight, within a company like Fasoplast, you would see certain expressions of hierarchy that you would also see in companies in Western countries. In case of a problem, for instance, a Burkinabè employee would consult the manager about it, under who's domain the problem has occurred, like one would do in a Western country. Also the fact that production workers don't talk to the General Director isn't very different from what happens in Western factories.

The fact that people who come into Mr. So's office knock on his door before they enter seems normal to me, as does the fact that Mr. Berjonneau talks to Mr. So as an equal, since they have an equally high position in the company's structure. The fact, however, that these two examples are exceptions, indicates that maybe the hierarchy isn't as similar in Burkina Faso as it is in Western countries.

2. During my research at Fasoplast, I gradually learned more about how the hierarchy influences the way people interact. Hierarchy appeared to have a very strong influence on the communication.

The invoice secretary had seen in her files that apparently Mr. So hadn't paid for something. Mr. Paré suggested that the secretary goes to Mr. So herself to tell him this. She laughed at the idea of going to Mr. So herself, and Mr. Paré had to admit, while laughing himself, that indeed, this was a bit of a ridiculous idea. The secretary can speak freely with her own superior, but not with the superior of a different department.

The following case was to me, as a person from the West, puzzling. A factory worker was in Mr. Berjonneau's office. When Mr. Berjonneau's mobile phone rang, the factory worker picked it up, took the phone out of the cover, folded down the speech devise, pressed the 'yes'-button and handed over the phone to Mr. Berjonneau. All this time Mr. Berjonneau hadn't even looked at his ringing phone, obviously aware from the corner of his eye, that the factory worker was going to hand it over to him. From my Western point of view, I saw this as very submissive behaviour, instead of showing respect for your hierarchical superior, what it was probably meant to be.

Also puzzling: when Mr. Paré calls Mr. Berjonneau, he politely uses the latter's name regularly and he says 'vous'. Berjonneau never uses names when he talks to someone, and says 'tu' ('vous' and 'tu' both mean 'you' in French, 'tu' being the informal way and 'vous' the formal).

3. Hierarchy sometimes works frustratingly for business. In Fasoplast, the *Chefs de Section* come in regularly to ask questions to Mr. Sance, the *Chef d'Usine*. The *Chefs de Section* don't make any decisions themselves; even decisions about throwing or not throwing away certain waste from the factory are taken by the *Chef d'Usine*.
4. People higher on the hierarchical ladder are shown very much respect, sometimes to the extent that people lower in rank seem fearful. When a worker from the store house is in Mr. Paré's office, he seems not at all at ease. He has come to talk about an order of 5000 boxes of plastic bottles. There isn't enough in store, but the command has already been made. The boy is spoken to in a very curt manner and is told to go. He doesn't get an answer from his superior about what to do.

An exception to this in Fasoplast seemed to be Mr. Sance, the *Chef d'Usine*. Maybe it is because he is older, but when he was in Mr. Paré's office, I noticed something about his body language. I could tell by the way he acted, in a natural, relaxed way, that Mr. Sance feels very much at ease with Mr. Paré. Although Mr. Sance showed a lot of submissive politeness to Mr. Paré, this

didn't prevent the meeting from being very informal. Mr. Sance's behaviour is much different from many other people I had seen in the office. The worker from the store house, people from the factory, the truck driver and the representative/truck driver from Cluff, obviously weren't at ease. They were fidgeting a lot, and looking down, not looking Mr. Paré in the face. They kept moving on their seats and spoke in a very soft voice, using only short phrases or yes or no answers. Also, these are the people who were kept waiting the longest. This seems to be part of the general hierarchical system in Burkina Faso. People on the low end of the ladder often act very submissive. Part of this hierarchical system is for example that people even courtesy to older people or people of a higher rung of the ladder. However, 'the rich' don't seem to courtesy very often.

5. The people with high ranks (in Fasoplast the different directors) want to show their power as often as possible. I will use only a few of the examples that I have observed during my research. To be extensive would mean to be repetitive.
 - When Mr. Paré introduced me to two employees they were at the same occasion being yelled at by him, ignoring my uneasiness. So right in front of me I see to my embarrassment two people that I have just been introduced to, being reprimanded.
 - Another act of showing power was when Mr. Berjoimeau and I walked over to Mr. So's car to go to the shop of Fasoplast in town. Mr. Berjonneau yelled for his assistant. When the assistant arrived, Mr. Berjonneau didn't say anything but pointed at a fumbled up sheet of paper that laid on the ground and then looked at his assistant while raising his eyebrows. The assistant picked it up to throw it away but nothing was said. Mr. Berjonneau usually communicates in this power-showing way with his assistant. When Mr. Berjonneau needs his assistant, who has his desk in the room next to Mr. Berjonneau's office, he shouts out his name really loudly.
 - The best (or actually worst) example of this show-of of power that hierarchy can lead to is the time where two *Chefs d'Equipe* came into Mr. Berjonneau's office. Mr. Berjonneau was unhappy with the performance of the two chefs. He yelled a lot at them, didn't give them an opportunity to answer and swore continuously. He said that he wanted the maximum of productivity within a minimum of time, but that they did the exact opposite. As an example for this, he told them that a certain activity in the factory that they do would only have to take 31 seconds, but that it takes them 40

seconds. He made a calculation of what that costs per hour. If they can't even do that, said Mr. Berjonneau, they might as well go elsewhere. He took up a basin that came from the machine that one of the two chefs is responsible for and showed him the ridges, which were, according to him, not just a few ridges, but a 'god damn bad of ridges'. He then took a plastic cup he had once been given by a Dutch student and asked the chefs if they saw any ridges in that Dutch cup. He said there aren't any, despite of the fact that they are made by millions a day, because the moulds that are used in The Netherlands are clean.

The shouting and swearing went on for over an hour. The Chefs were being laughed at, were told that they must have some disease, were over-shouted when they wanted to say something in their defence, in other words, they were verbally completely trampled down. A long silence followed the shouting session, which Mr. Berjonneau ended after a few minutes by ordering them to leave his office at once.

After the two men had left, Mr. Berjonneau asked me what I was writing down. I told him that I wrote down what I observed. He advised me not to observe, but to listen.

While all this was happening, Mr. Paré, the *Directeur Commercial*, visited the office, about the purchase of raw material in Abidjan, for which he had just received the confirmation. Mr. Berjonneau laughed, and said: "Ha, do you have any idea how expensive that is? What a rip-off you've let yourself be talked into", and with that completely underlines (from my Western point of view) Mr. Paré's authority, because the factory men were witnessing this.

6. Hierarchy can also mean that one is in a position where one cannot speak freely. Such was the case when I was told by my tutor at the university Mr. Koanda that I couldn't call the company SAP myself. The same occurred when I wanted to know if I could work at Fasoplast and I was constantly told by the secretary that I kept needing more people's permission for doing research, without ever seeing these people in person so I couldn't ask them for clarification. Apparently students are of extremely low status.

Another example of this: in the Fasoplast shop in town a client encountered a similar situation where he couldn't speak freely anymore. The client asked for 23 plastic bags. When Mrs. Compaoré, the shopkeeper, put them on the counter she said: 'Give me the money.' When the client started counting the bags,

she interrupted him and said; ‘Here’ s ten, here’ s ten and here’ s another three, that makes 23’. The client didn’t (dare?) continue counting.

7. Hierarchy implies consultation of the one higher on the ladder, of whom the subordinate receives instructions. Although the consultation it is not structured or organised, often happens in a very dear way, as was the case in the next example. Mr. Paré had a meeting in his office with the *Chef d’Usine*, Mr. Sance. They were discussing an order of 5000 sacks, verifying what was necessary, what the *Chef d’Usine* had to do and what he should verify with the client. While the Chef was sitting down and writing very quietly without moving, Mr. Paré wrote down point by point, whilst dictating himself, what the Chef had to write down simultaneously (so everything was written down twice). Mr. Paré verified with Mr. Sance if everything he said was correct. Not efficient, but time is of no importance (see Section 10.2.1.1).

10.2.2.2.4 Conclusion

The conclusion of the above is that the communication is generally negatively influenced by the existing hierarchy. The behaviour of Mr. Berjonneau is typical for the hierarchical model as described by Tguisi and Kiggundu (see literature of this section). He, as a superior, takes all the decisions. By doing so, he not only prevents his subordinates from taking part in the decision making (which they don’t seek for anyway, see Hickson & Pugh and Tguisi in the literature of this chapter), he even prevents those equal in rank to him to participate in the decision making. He then complains that no one is doing a good job and that he has to do everything by himself (see for further examples the empirical experiences of Section 10.2.3.1). With the example of Mr. Berjonneau, I have to add that the fact that he is white presumably compounds the situation: his behaviour can without a doubt be called colonial. This colonial behaviour explains why he takes on the role as absolute superior towards his black fellow-directors, equal in rank.

The examples of Mr. Paré show that hierarchy in itself is influenced by the distinction of races. Towards his white fellow-director he shows submissive behavior. The communication between the two is top-down, the communication coming from Mr. Berjonneau. This combined with the fact that Mr. Paré is the victim of missing dear

job descriptions, makes the communication between the two difficult, chaotic and unclear. Communication remains ad hoc, they don't think long term.

As a whole, the communication within Fasoplast is top down and seems to be instruction. Subordinates hear exactly what they have to do and how, by their superiors. They do as they are told, and they can't cross hierarchical boundaries. Despite the strict hierarchy, people speak in a very informal manner but still tend to be submissive to those who have a higher rank in the company's hierarchy. People speak politely to older people. This does however not include the production workers or other old people with a very low status. They are all treated like dogs, irrespective of their age.

From previous chapters it appears that Fasoplast has a, typical for West Africa, top down structure. When I first wanted to work at Fasoplast I needed the approval of 4 different people and thus got the impression that Fasoplast was a company that works in a democratic way where reaching a consensus was highly estimated. In reality it appeared that they were showing risk avoidance behavior; subordinates or people other than the head man don't dare to make decisions because all that it could lead to is getting reprimanded by the head man. So it wasn't at all the democratic decision making that I first thought. That is also why there are no meetings, because everything is decided at the top, others don't have to think, their possibly valuable ideas are not used.

10.2.2.3 Social etiquette

10.2.2.3.1 Introduction

In Burkina Faso people have a way of communicating with each other that I sometimes thought rude, sometimes completely unexpected or seemingly inexplicable. During the course of my stay there, I learned that in very many cases, people act in seemingly rude ways that are never seen in the Western countries that I have been to but that are not at all meant to insult someone. The differences in the way people act, in other words in social etiquette between what I am used to from Western European countries and what I have seen in Burkina Faso, were so enormous, that, in spite of the fact that I couldn't find anything about this aspect in the literature, I felt I had to include this in my thesis as well. Doing business or even

just communicating with someone from Burkina Faso, when you don't know about these differences in social etiquette, could lead to unnecessary misunderstandings and could frustrate the communication completely.

10.2.2.3.2 Facts about social etiquette that influence communication found in literature

None

10.2.2.3.3 Facts about social etiquette that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. Examples of communication that could be perceived as rude by Westerners such as I.

- The first experience I had with someone from Burkina Faso was when I was still in The Netherlands and called Ms. Yvette Regtounda, a woman of the family I was going to stay with. She said very little over the phone, and after we had discussed the details of my arrival, she just hung up, without saying bye. Later on I learned that this was the standard policy.
- People would use phrases like 'Ça m'emmerde' ('That pisses me off'), without anyone thinking this language is uncalled for in a business environment. Maybe they don't feel embarrassed to use such language, because French is not their native language.
- When people part, e.g. leave the office after a meeting, they don't say goodbye, even if someone would be higher in the company's hierarchy.
- People walk in offices without ever announcing their coming by knocking on the door.
- When Mr. Paré is talking to a client to make an appointment, he is very short but to the point. They speak in the imperative. To me as a Western he sounds impolite: 'You must call' instead of 'Could you call'. This is however a normal way of expressing yourself in Burkina Faso. If someone offers you some food, for example, they would say: 'You must eat', or if you're about to go somewhere with friends, they would say: 'You/we must

go', instead of 'Shall we go?'. It's the French expression 'il faut' that is always used for this, untranslatable in Dutch or English.

- Instead of asking for someone else's name and telephone number that Mr. Paré needs, he says: 'Give me his name' and 'Give me his telephone number'; he uses the imperative.
- Mrs. Compaoré, the shopkeeper, says to a customer: 'He (the shop assistant) is counting for that customer now, after that he will help you (using 'tu', informal form), do you understand that?'

2. Examples of communication that could be perceived as completely unexpected by Westerners such as I.

- What struck me as typical was to see that whenever the phone would ring, Mr. Paré answered it at once, in the same way as described earlier, which to me seemed contradictory with, his seemingly submissive posture with Mr. Berjonneau in front of him.
- A man walks in the office accompanied by the representative/truck driver of Cluff that I had seen earlier. They come in without knocking and seat themselves while Mr. Paré is on the phone. Apparently not only people from within the company walk into an office without knocking on the door, but simply everyone does.
- When Mr. Paré and a client are talking about a transaction, they always talk freely about money. Money is definitely not an issue that is being avoided. A funny illustrative example is: when you go to the market to buy something, you will probably be told a price much higher than it actually is. People would then just say to the salesperson: 'I want to pay less'. The salesperson names a lower price and if you still think it's too much, you say again that you want to pay less. This goes on until a price is agreed upon by both parties (only Africans can do this at the market, or whites accompanied by Africans. As a white person alone, it is impossible to negotiate this way).
- What has happened quite often is the following: a subordinate gets yelled at pretty badly by his boss, simply because this person is his boss and because that's the normal procedure. Afterwards they laugh and talk about completely irrelevant matters, as if nothing has happened. It is as if the boss would ask the subordinate to do something differently or to tell him he's done something wrong in a way that is normal for Westerners, the subordinate wouldn't get it, or wouldn't take his boss seriously. In all the different places I've worked in different countries in Europe I have never (not even in France where they are so fussy about hierarchy) seen anyone being

put down so badly by their bosses, let alone not take it personally as in Burkina Faso.

10.2.2.3.4 Conclusion

I have seen many people in Burkina Faso speak in a very demanding way. The people who are being talked to in this manner, seem to interpret or deal with this kind of tone completely differently than if a person from The Netherlands would be talked to in this fashion.

People who talk in a demanding way, seem to enjoy doing so, and can ‘demand’ in a not necessarily very nasty way. People who are being talked to in a demanding way, seem to know that a lot of it is just for show and they don’t take it personally.

About the use of the imperative: if a Burkinabè company seeks to do business with a Western company, this could not be acceptable. If a Westerner however approaches a Burkinabè, he should be aware of this habit, otherwise he might think he is dealing with very impolite people.

It really just is a way of communicating that is very normal to them, not with malicious intentions or anything, but just a different way of expressing yourself. I noticed that even I was talking in this blunt way after a while, because there it isn’t blunt but just the way they speak.

The example given under 2, about communication that might come across as seemingly inexplicable, can be explained by the literature applicable to ‘Knowledge and use of management theories’. Hickson & Pugh state that “there is a risk that when on the job in a system imitating impersonal organisations elsewhere, people will too often be mere ‘performers’ of roles”. Looking at example 3 from that perspective, one could indeed assume that the superior yells as a part of his role as boss, and the subordinate allows the other to yell, as part of his role of being subordinate. In fact, nothing personal is said, nor done, it can be explained for both sides from the perspective of playing roles. After having ‘acted’ this job role, the daily conversation continues in a normal way.

10.2.2.4 Gender

10.2.2.4.1 Introduction

Women have a particular place in Burkina Faso. Most women in Burkina Faso that work, work in market places or in a shop. Not that many women work in offices, and if they do, they don't earn very much. The women that do work in offices, get a lot of respect. At home, the women and girls do all the chores but are also respected.

10.2.2.4.2 Facts about gender that influence communication found in literature

In Hofstede's IBM research, West Africa scores 30/31 out of a possible 53 in his 'Masculinity Index'. See Section 5.4.6.

This means that the femininity in society prevails slightly. This makes it hard to make statements on particularities about the Burkinabè society in the respect of gender issues. I haven't been able to find any specific literature about the roles of females in business environments. That is why I would like to give you my observations concerning gender issues, and show you what my conclusions of those observations are.

10.2.2.4.3 Facts about gender that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. A female client walked into the office. She tried to make jokes and be funny but she was very clear about what she wanted. Mr. Paré laughed politely and was very polite to her, much more than I have ever seen him be.
2. A woman of the invoice administration walks in. She's very angry and shouts at Mr. Paré that he can't let receipts lay about everywhere, but that he has to give them to her at once.

10.2.2.4.1 Conclusion

If a woman works in an office environment, she is very emancipated, although it is unlikely for her to obtain a job in a high position. Male employees seem to treat women with the biggest respect. This shows in the way they mutually communicate.

10.2.2.5 Collectivism

10.2.2.5.1 Introduction

The Burkinabè society has a very strong collectivist character. This implies that the code of conduct deviates from what I was used to in a Western, individualist society. This collectivism has its own communication pattern. Besides from different behaviour and different ideas about what is good or bad (see literature), communication differs on a very literal level as well: when the Burkinabè is with his own in-group and amongst people of his own ethnies, he speaks his own language (which is in Ouagadougou mostly Moréé), but when a Burkinabè is at work (or with foreigners) he speaks the more individualistic, for him second language, French. Situations in which people use French are linked to what kind of work they do; mostly when people work in big offices, Western companies or banks.

10.2.2.5.2 Facts about collectivism that influence communication found in literature: collectivism vs. individualism

This dimension is defined as follows:

Individualism pertains to societies in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself or herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism as its opposite pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.

Table 10.2 Collectivism vs. individualism

	individualism index (IDV)	rank (out of 50 countries and 3 regions)
West Africa	20	39/41
The Netherlands	80	4/5
USA (compared to highest and lowest rank)	91	1
USA Guatemala	91 6	1 53

Key differences between collectivist and individualist societies:

Table 10.3 Collectivism vs. individualism: General norm, family, school and workplace

collectivist	individualist
People are born into extended families or other in-groups which continue to protect them in exchange for loyalty.	Everyone grows up to look after him/herself and his/her immediate (nuclear) family only.
Identity is based in the social network to which one belongs.	Identity is based in the individual.
Children learn to think in terms of 'we'.	Children learn how to think in terms of 'I'.
Harmony should always be maintained and direct confrontations avoided.	Speaking one's mind is a characteristic of an honest person.
High-context communication.	Low-context communication.
Trespassing leads to shame and loss of face for self and group.	Trespassing leads to guilt and loss of self-respect.
Purpose of education is learning how to do.	Purpose of education is learning how to learn.
Diplomas provide entry to higher status groups.	Diplomas increase economic worth and/or self-respect.

Relationship employer-employee is perceived in moral terms, like a family link.	Relationship employer-employee is a contract supposed to be based on mutual advantage.
Hiring and promotion decisions take employees' in-group into account.	Hiring and promotion decisions are supposed to be based on skills and rules only.
Management is management of groups.	Management is management of individuals.
Relationship prevails over task.	Task prevails over relationship.

Table 10.4 Collectivism vs. individualism: Politics and ideas

collectivist	individualist
Collective interests prevail over individual interests.	Individual interests prevail over collective interests.
Private life is invaded by group(s).	Everyone has a right to privacy.
Opinions are predetermined by group membership.	Everyone is expected to have a private opinion.
Laws and rights differ by group.	Laws and rights are supposed to be the same for all.
Low per capita GNP.	High per capita GNP.
Dominant role of the state in the economic system.	Restrained role of the state in the economic system
Economy based on collective interests.	Economy based on individual interests.
Political power exercised by interest groups.	Political power exercised by voters.
Press controlled by the state.	Press freedom.
Imported economic theories largely irrelevant because unable to deal with collective and particularist interest.	Native economic theories based on pursuit of individual self-interests
Ideologies of equality prevail over ideologies of individual freedom.	Ideologies of individual freedom prevail over ideologies of equality .
Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goals.	Self-actualization by every individual is an ultimate goal.

Individualism, often cited as a value held by European Americans, places importance on the individual rather than the family or work teams or other groups. It is often cited as the most important of European American cultural values. By contrast, people from collectivist societies place importance on extended families and group loyalty (Martin & Nakayama, 1997).

In a society with strong familism, organisations work best when family and organisation coincide. It is honourable loyally to fulfill obligation to family members and to other people who are personally known, not only in family firms, but in other organisations as well, including government administration. It is honourable to share the benefits of one's employment by helping family members to obtain jobs. If the manager's brother-in-law walks into the office, it is honourable to welcome him and entertain him, even if colleagues or subordinates or customers have to wait - they will understand (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

Collectivism and communication:

The use of different languages reinforces a possible conflict between what is learned at home and at school. Each learning context demands another language and connected cognitive concepts. Cognitive development becomes a challenge; African children learn to differentiate between incompatible symbolic systems and motives early in life. On the one hand this yields a potential for creativity and flexibility. On the other hand individuals living in the African context enter a world of ambivalence. While being educated in a European language -with western ideas of maybe utilitarian individualist, profit-orientated values, children live a social life oriented towards continuity, collectivism and the fulfilment of social obligations. This impairs building an authentic identity. Consequently, they acquire two incompatible sets of strategies: one for the school life, the other for family life. In situations where a combination of cognitive and social skills are acquired, individualist and holistic values start clashing. This applies explicitly to the world of work (Igusi, 1995).

10.2.2.5.3 Facts about collectivism that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. One morning, Mr. Berjonneau thought it might be a good idea if I would have the small that was standing next to his desk, to work at. The table would have

to be cleared and moved though. For this, he called in his assistant, and shouts at him that he has to move a pile of papers from the table to his desk. Then he shouts even louder to move another pile from the table to the desk. He then yells to his assistant that he has to put the table on the other side of the room. From my Western point of view, I am amazed that the assistant puts up with this treatment and doesn't quit his job right there and then. I realize however that there are probably two reasons for him not to do so. Firstly, it is difficult to find good jobs in Burkina Faso, so why would he give up this one (see Section 10.2.1.2). Secondly, people in Burkina Faso are used to getting orders. I am sure that the yelling and shouting is not very usual, but in a family situation, no matter how old you are, you do as your father tells you, without questioning why. Collectivism includes a paternalistic manager. With the paternalistic way of managing in Burkina Faso (see literature and Section 5.4.4), the obedience you are expected to show towards your boss is not much unlike the obedience one would show to his father. They accept this as the natural way according to which society is structured.

2. Mr. Berjonneau asks Mr. Paré if the planning is well prepared for the coming week. Something turned out to be not right about the planning, which caused Mr. Berjonneau to start shouting and yelling again. Mr. Paré always remains calm; he doesn't go into defence nor does he start yelling back. They discuss several other subjects as well (with all the chefs still in Mr. Paré's office, waiting for them to finish talking). Mr. Berjonneau speaks in a horrible way, I find. After every other sentence he says 'do you understand?' and he basically speaks as if he is a very strict father talking to a son, even though in the company's hierarchy they are of the same rank (Section 5.1.4)
3. A lot of the time Morée is spoken in the three-men office, where Marc, Mr. Sance and another chef work, not only among the employees, but also to do business with the clients. When Mr. Paré or Mr. Berjonneau come into the office, the employees start speaking French again.
4. A friend of mine, Celestin, owned a garage. He complained to me about the fact that a lot of the young boys who worked for him, hardly knew what a car looked like on the inside. He explained to me that he had to hire the boys, and couldn't fire them, because of the fact that they were relatives of his or relatives of his other, more highly valued, employees. The fact that he is the only one in his family and the only one that his highly valued employees

know, who has his own business, means he has the social obligation to employ people of his own ingroup or the ingroup of his valued employees.

10.2.2.5.4 Conclusion

Examples 1 and 2 can partly be explained by Mr. Berjonneau's colonial attitude, described in the conclusion of Section 11.2.2.2. The reason for putting both examples in this chapter, 'Collectivism', is because they both illustrate the fact that in collectivist countries the relationship employer-employee is perceived like a family link (see Hofstede). In both examples, Mr. Berjonneau takes on the role of the father - Mr. Berjonneau's assistant and Mr. Paré that of the obedient sons.

Example 3 is a beautiful illustration of what is described in the literature of this chapter by Iguisi. The employees, colleagues of somewhat lower ranks and medium important clients (the big clients all go to Mr. Berjonneau) speak their own language when there is no one else around. As soon as a director enters the office, however, the employees feel they have to speak French again, even when it is Mr. Paré who enters, who also speaks and understands Morée. Speaking Morée belongs in a different world, not in the world of the (imitation of) impersonal organisation where they perform their role as employee.

Example 4 illustrates how collectivist values can work frustratingly even in a collectivist society. The garage owner of the example, Celestin, fulfilled his social obligation of employing people from his and his good employees' ingroup, but he is not happy, because they don't perform well.

10.2.2.6 Bureaucracy

10.2.2.6.1 Introduction

The necessity of innumerable amounts of stamps, unnecessary waiting, not knowing to whom to turn to for an answer; these are problems one is expected to encounter on a regular basis when one visits Burkina Faso. They are all part of the omnipresent

bureaucracy that seems to hold the whole of West Africa in a tight grip. There is no escaping.

10.2.2.6.2 Facts about bureaucracy that influence communication found in literature

All bureaucracies are oriented inward, but P(olychronic time orientated)-type are especially so. Organisations run on the polychronic model are limited in size, depend on having gifted men at the top, and are slow and cumbersome when dealing with the business of outsiders.

The weakness of the polychronic type lies in their extreme dependence on the head man to handle contingencies and stay on top of things (Hall, 1976).

In public administration it is usual for people to have to trek from office to office around the ministries to obtain multiple permissions for the same thing (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

10.2.2.6.3 Facts about bureaucracy that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. When I first went to Fasoplast, I found out that I needed the approval of 4 people in total to do my research there (see Section 6.1).
2. Mr. Berjonneau let me know that he needs to know everything about everything. This means that no decision can be made when he is not there or without his specific approval.
3. As said earlier, Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle* notes down everything that leaves the Fasoplast premises. He writes out a receipt for every client. Each receipt gets two stamps of approval, and each receipt has three carbon copies that also need to be stamped twice each. So for each receipt 8 stamps are needed. Of course, there is also the invoice and its carbon copies from Mr. Paré, that are also stamped. Apart from the receipts, Marc also has a

very big notebook, in which he has made columns on each page and in which he can write down the date, the name of the client and the number and type of products he's bought. The guard at the gate does the same thing. Filling out all those receipts and sheets of paper in his notebook seems simplistic and more importantly extremely time-consuming, but is done very precisely.

4. When I am in Mr. So's office, a secretary comes in with a pile of about fifty letters to be signed by Mr. So. He signs them without reading the contents.
5. I went to the swimming pool of a big hotel a couple of times. Your ticket gets stamped, as well as the copy of the ticket that the people at the hotel keep. The person selling and stamping the tickets was wearing a pair of glasses without lenses in them.

10.2.2.6.4 Conclusion

The communication in a top down organised bureaucratic organisation like Faso-plast passes off laboriously. Relatively simple problems are being passed on, by many detours, to higher levels, where the decision making finally takes place. Because of the bureaucracy the pace of the decision making is being slowed down.

The communication connected to this bureaucracy seems like the embodiment of the playing of roles that all players (employees) seem to have taken on, with the directors as the most important, even indispensable players. Those highest up in the hierarchy put stamps and signatures. It is the symbol of his power, it confirms him in his role. The wearing of glasses without lenses in them could, although of a different level, also be seen as confirmation of a role of authority, a status symbol.

The main conclusion of this section, is that, because of the bureaucracy, the communication starts dragging and the formal decision making is stretched to infinity.

10.2.3 Corporate aspects: know-how and skills

10.2.3.1 Knowledge and use of management techniques and tools

10.2.3.1.1 Introduction

Burkina Faso is a collectivist society and subsequently Fasoplast is structured according to the top down model with a paternalistic management (literature in Section 10.2.2.5 and below). The boss is very strict, he expects his subordinates to do everything for him, but at the same time he is (supposed to be) the protective father figure. Within Fasoplast this has become very obvious to me. The way I have seen subordinates act towards their superiors and vice versa was completely new to me. To my relief what I had experienced in Burkina Faso was confirmed in literature I read afterwards, back in The Netherlands. At the time I simply thought that the employees were just being treated very badly at Fasoplast.

One of the conclusion in Section 11.2.2.2 is that in West African companies a democratic decision making structure fails and that this is caused by lack of knowledge of common management structures and decision making techniques. The danger that lies within this is that the head man of Fasoplast, Mr. Berjonneau, could lose track of reality. One person alone can't know everything that is going on in an entire company, and without input of the middle management, concerning major aspects like commerce, production and finance, a well balanced decision making process is not possible.

This is covered up by ad hoc decisions of the head man and leads to risk avoidance behaviour of the middle management. There is no balance in decision making, no delegation, personal relations prevail over tasks, employees are only playing roles and the family comes first. You will find these observations both in the literature of this chapter as well as in the examples empirically found.

10.2.3.1.2 Facts about management techniques and tools that influence communication found in literature

Three major influences on the performance of indigenous entrepreneurship in less-developed economies have been identified in literature on the subject: inadequate supply of venture and working capital, low quality of management skill and ability, and inherent uncertainties in the 'economic environment'.

One of the major disadvantages that indigenous firms have in relation to their foreign owned counterparts is poor intra-firm organisation; this is not only due to a lack of high caliber organisational skill, but also to a conscious policy of employing inferior organisational resources of labour and management. Consequently, the entrepreneur seems to carry a large burden of managerial responsibility (Ahwireng-Obeng, 1986).

In literature I found an example that underlined my idea that in West Africa internal corporate communication is more or less limited to giving and receiving instructions: There is a risk that when on the job in a system imitating impersonal organisations elsewhere, people will too often be mere ‘performers’ of roles. They will be going through the motions the system asks of them, but the jobs they do are less genuinely a part of themselves than might be so in a developed economy, and their heart is not in it. They are more likely to do it mechanically, poorly motivated. They fail to confront problems openly, they lack trust in others in the organisation beyond those with whom they have a personal relationship, and they feel helpless to improve matters.

Too often, employees in the cities consider themselves fortunate to have any job at all. They work long hours for meagre wages at a low level of productivity, following instructions the purpose of which they do not see. In many ways they seem to be re-enacting the early Industrial Revolution in Britain

Since people in less-developed countries tend to think in a more visual, situation-linked manner than those in more economically developed countries they may make decisions in a way that to the latter seems ad hoc, even inconsistent. They respond more intuitively to the circumstances of the moment, less to the abstract logic which western cultures see as the ideal.

It has been said that Africa has been confronted with the difficulties of running twentieth century forms of organisation before its people have had time to adjust to what management requires of them. Small wonder that appraisals of the workings of the prevalent public sector have repeatedly found weak financial controls, waste, over-staffing and failure to meet targets.

African employees are comparatively more likely to take an instrumental view of their work. They are more likely to see it less as an end in itself, and rather as a way of showing what they can do for family and friends, drawing their own feeling of

pride and accomplishment from the regard in which they are held outside the organisation as a result. The giving and receiving of favors and gifts is a social obligation more than bribery, though it still has to be talked of in an unofficial jargon.

Officials have been criticized as being content to follow the rules rather than taking an initiative. For taking an initiative heightens the uncertainty, both of making a mistake and of incurring the displeasure of superiors. But then, generally speaking, Africans are not as competitive or eager to 'stand out' among their peers as are the individually assertive Anglos, for example (Hickson & Pugh, 1995).

The Western models of 'participation' and 'consultation' do not apply in Africa.

The new top African managers, although culturally more aware, do not perform better than their predecessors. Many show a lack of responsibility for their jobs combined with inability to delegate (Igusi, 1995).

In Hofstede's IBM research, West Africa scores 11 out of a possible 53 in his 'Power Distance Index' (Section 5.4.5). Concerning countries with a large power distance Hofstede says, among other things:

1. "Centralization is popular;
2. Subordinates expect to be told what to do;
3. The ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat or good father; and
4. Privileges and status symbols for managers are both expected and popular."

In Hofstede's IBM research, West Africa scores 39/41 out of a possible 53 in his 'Individualism Index' (see Section 5.4.1). Concerning collectivist countries Hofstede says, among other things:

1. "relationship employer-employee is perceived in moral terms, like a family link;
2. Management is management of groups;
3. Relationship prevails over task; and
4. Harmony and consensus in society are ultimate goals."

10.2.3.1.3 Facts about failing knowledge and use of management techniques that influence communication found by empirical experience

1. I asked Mr. Paré the following question concerning decision making.
 - How are problems or conflicts solved in Fasoplast?
We go see each other immediately and we discuss it. We don't wait with solving problems.
2. Mr. So answered the following questions concerning consultation structure.
 - How do you communicate with your colleagues?
When I need to talk to someone, I don't wait, but talk to the person straight away. If that person has a phone, I will call, otherwise I will go to the person. I won't use the phone if it concerns a delicate matter or a matter that takes a long time to discuss.
 - Is there, within Fasoplast, an organised deliberation structure?
At Fasoplast a meeting between the directors is held every Monday, at 16h30. However, these do not always take place (as they didn't during the two weeks I was there). In case of an urgent matter, we have emergency meetings. There doesn't really exist any organised form of internal communication for the non-directors.
3. Three workmen came into Mr. So's office. There seemed to be a problem about the replacement of a technique worker. Mr. So said he didn't know anything about it, but that Mr. Berjonneau should handle it, who was called immediately. It was a case, the workmen said, that they had been trying to solve for quite some time now. The first time they came to see Mr. So about it was one year earlier. Mr. So said he doesn't remember this.
4. Mr. Berjonneau and I talked for one hour about Fasoplast and its history (see Section 5.1.1). He also told me that regarding technology, "Africans are disastrous". He explains: "You can explain something to them this minute, the next minute they will have forgotten. They simply don't understand. For example, take the *Directeur Commercial* (Mr. Paré). He is 36 now, and has worked in Fasoplast for eight years, but he still can't plan a production of yogurt cups. He has talked with the client himself, and the client has told him how he wants the cups and he agreed! But the machine can't make the cups that size, which he knows, but he just says something about modifying the machine. This is not possible!! The machine can't be modified that way! "

5. Once Mr. Berjonneau came into the office and was very angry. The *Chef de Transport* in the office had forgotten to send plastic food bags to the shop that morning, and now there was a client waiting who wants them. The chef dropped everything he was doing, left two clients waiting that are sifting at his desk, and went looking for someone who could bring the bags to the shop. The clients were present when Mr. Berjonneau reprimanded the chef (using words like ‘god danm it’!).
6. A *Chef d’Equipe* came into the office to inform Mr. Berjonneau about an error that had occurred in the production of plastic cups. His team had produced 1000 cups for a certain client, but because of a gram left in the machine, these cups were damaged in a way that causes them to snap when they are used. The 1000 cups had become useless and needed to be thrown away. The client, who had already been informed about this, had decided to buy his cups from a company in Ghana. The error had occurred because the machine hadn’t been checked before using it. According to Mr. Berjonneau this has happened because the *Chef d’Equipe* isn’t interested. Apparently “he couldn’t care less if a bad succeeds or fails.”
7. Problems are being dealt with on an ad hoc basis. When Mr. Sance is in the office to discuss a certain order, he also remembers a problem in the factory and starts talking about this. He discusses together with Mr. Paré the possible solution.
8. Mr. Paré himself calculates the price of a certain order. The prices of all products are in a map with folders in it. Mr. Paré is making the invoices for clients. To me amazing that someone who is a director, who is partly in charge of an entire company, has to do these calculations himself.
9. If someone needs one of Mr. Paré’s files or documents, he brings them over personally. No delegation to a secretary, no internal mail system.
10. I learn from Mr. Berjonneau that shortage in stock happens all the time. The last day I work at Fasoplast he takes me to the store house (a big factory hall used only for storage), where stock literary bulges out of. He is furious that orders are accepted over and over again of products that they don’t have in store but need to be produced, and that no one ever makes the effort of trying to sell

what they have laying there. He says that some of the products have been laying on those shelves for years.

11. The phone rings and an order is taken on by phone of 10.000 yellow bags. Mr. Paré accepts the order, but after he hangs up the phone he calls the woman who keeps the shop to ask her to verify if there are enough of those plastic bags (again: first order accepted, then check if they have it or not!).
12. Mr. Paré is very busy all day, but his work is so ad hoc, that it just seems a coincidence that he's so busy all day. Nothing seems to come at a bad timing for him, he is very patient.
13. Mr. Berjonneau comes to Mr. Paré's office to talk about a problem he's noticed. Every day there are sales receipt that are being cancelled. Mr. Paré says he will go to Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, to find Out what is going on. Mr. Berjonneau says that he didn't even know Marc was responsible for this, he thought it was Mr. Sance, *Chef d'Usine*.
14. Every two days Mrs. Compaoré goes to the bank with the money earned in the shop to put in on an account. She gives one receipt of the bank to the *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières*, and she keeps one for herself. The bank is only open during the opening hours of the shop. She used to close the shop in order to go to the bank, which caused a stop in revenue, but since recently Mr. Berjonneau comes to the shop when she goes to the bank, and runs the shop while she's away.
15. There seems to be a problem with an order list - the man who is responsible for the error has already 'confessed' and is sitting opposite Mr. So. When the man is finally talking about what had happened exactly, Mr. So receives a phone call from an important bank, and talks to the bank for a long time. When Mr. So is finally informed about the ins and outs of the affaire, he told the 'culprit' what should be done to set things straight. The way in which Mr. So did this, was the following: he spoke in the I-form (I have to do this, I have to do that), spelling out what steps the other man had to take. It sounded completely patronizing and over-clear, but it happens all the time. It just means that the boss is a friendly guy (boss as father figure, Hofstede)

16. Mr. Berjonneau and I talked for one hour about Fasoplast and his history (see Section 5.1.1). He also told me that the problems with Africans is that they don't want to have responsibilities. "Everybody wants to be a chef, but nobody wants to have responsibilities."

17. Mr. Berjonneau talked to me about the way Fasoplast is managed:

Mr. Berjonneau mainly deals with the bigger, sometimes international customers, the smaller ones being the responsibility of Mr. Paré. For this, Mr. Paré is dependent on Mr. Berjonneau, because for the commands that he gets from the smaller customers, he needs to know about the production, which is Mr. Berjonneau's responsibility.

They work with a *carnet de commande*, in which orders are written down. Mr. Paré visits the clients, and comes back with the different commands written down in the *carnet*, all the orders are put next to each other and this is how the production is planned. Apparently carrying out these orders is difficult, because Mr. Paré would sometimes promise a client to deliver certain goods the following day, whereas that is impossible because the goods haven't been produced yet.

Every year they make an estimate of the production, based on previous years. They also know how many kilo's of cotton Sofitex is going to produce, so Fasoplast knows how many bags Sofitex is going to need. Sofitex is Fasoplast's biggest client, they ensure 50% of the company's production.

The strong point of Fasoplast is that they know what their customers are going to do, they know the markets. This way they can make predictions for investments. They invest with money from the bank. They did an investment with their own money once, in 1987, but that turned out to be a disaster.

The different commands give an idea of what the variable and constant production costs are going to be for the coming year. The production is interesting for the turnover of Fasoplast, on the *negoce* there are only small margins (see Section 5.1.3).

If the annual turnover of Fasoplast has gone down compared to the previous year, it means that the prices on the market have dropped. The production is always optimal, so that can never be the problem.

Fasoplast competes with low prices on certain markets. They have to because otherwise their clients will go to Niger, where they also produce plastic. Nigeria and Ghana also produce plastic, but because their money is a very feeble, unpredictable currency, people don't want to invest in those countries. (Niger has the same currency as Burkina Faso.)

10.2.3.1.4 Conclusion

All above items can be rubricated as examples of failing knowledge and use of management techniques as follows:

1. Decisions are made ad hoc, on short term. Structure in decision making fails. There is no organised way of consulting and deliberating to achieve consensus. This applies on the examples, 1, 2, 7, 12 and 14.
2. Fasoplast is hierarchically top down organised. One of the dangers in this is that, because all lower ranks rely on the head man for decisions but can't give their input in this, the head man loses track (example 13).
3. Inherent to this hierarchical structure is that there is no delegation of tasks to the middle management and further down. This is substantiated in the examples of 3, 8, 9 and 14.
4. Linked to hierarchy and no delegation is the phenomena of risk-avoiding behaviour of the middle management, wide spread in Fasoplast. "Why would I make a decision? I can only get in trouble over it, it is the head man who decides anyway." See examples 3 and 17.
5. Hierarchy is also linked to paternalism: examples 4 and 5.
6. No knowledge of management structure means no specific job descriptions: example 13.
7. Playing a role is linked with poor motivation: example 5.
8. Ad hoc decisions often take place in polychronic time based societies: example 12.
9. No knowledge of management techniques implies lacking marketing strategy: examples 10 and 18.
10. No management structure blocks balanced corporate decision making. For decision making the lacking of a good deliberation structure means a reinforcement of the hierarchical pattern, with all its consequences on communication. Due to this hierarchical pattern, those lower in rank do not feel the need for a deliberation structure, because all decisions are taken by one person anyway. This again (no delegation) leads to poor motivation and defeatism: example 10.

Taking all the examples into account, the conclusion at Fasoplast the knowledge and use of management techniques and tools are minimal. Due to the hierarchical paternalistic structure, there is no deliberation instrument, such as a regular management meeting, in which decisions can be made based on check and balance between the company's different departments. Also, the responsibilities of the departments

themselves are not well defined. In Fasoplast the head man takes commercial decisions as well as the commercial manager (example 17). A balanced management decision with input of the commercial manager, the production manager and the financial manager requires a clear separation of everybody's tasks and a consensus oriented way of deliberating. In this respect, responsibilities have to be defined in job descriptions and should not be overruled by ad hoc, paternalistic interventions.

As a result of this failing decision making system, Fasoplast has no well developed marketing plan, for a sales strategy. They take ad hoc decisions to produce what the market asks for and they accept orders without carefully considering the profitability. They have no fixed cost price calculation, they don't check their stocks in advance and sometimes even they accept an order without knowing if they are technically able to produce the ordered item.

Decisions seem to be taken more as a reaction, rather than anticipating on the market. The latter requires more abstract, analytical and long term thinking. In the end, a low price remains as the only valid sales argument.

Not many optimistic conclusions. In the Section, 11.2.2, I will give some ideas for improvement.

10.2.3.2 Knowledge and use of corporate communication transmission techniques

10.2.3.2.1 Introduction

Knowledge of communication techniques is scarce in Burkina Faso. This is clear from countless examples of daily life. It doesn't only concern the knowledge that is needed to use a copy machine, an overhead projector or a computer but it also concerns the lack of knowledge and use of more basic techniques like bulletin boards, flip-overs, Tipp-Ex etc.. The companies I have seen do not have these easy to use and relatively cheap means at their disposal.

The infrastructure for communication in Burkina Faso is very limited; could it be expanded and improved, the cooperation between people and between companies would be facilitated, which could lead to a higher standard of development. In this

country where the communication infrastructure needs expanding to get to a higher standard of development, the knowledge of communication techniques is indispensable and the shortage of education in such techniques is all the more smarting. This shortage is directly linked to the previously mentioned poverty (Section 10.1.2.1), that stands in the way of the purchasing of technical means and education material.

10.2.3.2.2 Facts about knowledge and use of corporate communication transmission techniques found in literature

Sub-Saharan Africa lacks computer skills in all areas, including systems analysis, programming, maintenance and consulting, and at all operational levels, from basic use to management. Most countries lack the educational and training facilities needed to help people acquire the proper skills. The few training centres that do exist have not been able to keep up with demand. (...) As a result of unskilled and untrained personnel, user organisations are forced to hire expatriate staff, who in turn lack knowledge about local organisations and thus design poor systems. (Odedra et al., 1993)

10.2.3.2.3 Facts about the knowledge and use of corporate communication transmission techniques found by empirical experience

1. All letters are typed with random font. Not the unity many Western companies seek for. A friend of mine who went to college didn't even realize that there were different fonts, even though he had been using a computer to write his thesis. He belongs to the less than 1% elite that can go to university. They are not taught how to use computers at all.
2. The computer is hardly ever used by Mr. So so Mr. So writes everything by hand. For calculations he uses a small calculator, and fills out the figures in a self-made spreadsheet. No use of Excel spreadsheets or anything. When I finally saw Mr. So using the computer for ten minutes, he worked very slowly. His secretary had started up the program 'Word' for him, so he could write a

letter. It took him a long time to find each letter on the keyboard, for typing he used only one finger.

3. In Mr. Paré's office I saw the work planning that governs the supporting staff, the *Chef d'Usine* and the *Chefs de Section*. All said employees have their individual planning on one A4 sheet per person, all sheets piled up in protruded shelves. I studied more precisely the planning of Mr. Sance. This A4 sheet contains a week schedule. Every day of his is always divided in 4 activities in the morning and 3 in the afternoon. Employees make these schedules themselves and deliver them to Mr. Paré. This way, he can not only see what the employees are doing and where they will be, but it also allows him to compare the schedules per different employee. Per week Mr. Paré would have around twenty of these schedules, lying on a pile next to his desk. This means there is no visual overall view of a one week planning, no bulletin board, no plan board. With every new week the amount of paperwork grows steadily. Another aspect of these schedules is that this is an item that could be easily made much clearer, if only Mr. Paré would have access to a computer. Because of poverty in the country, computers are scarce, it is not at all self-evident that managers would have one.
4. From what I could see in Mr. Paré's office, he archives all the thousands of sheets of paper he uses to keep track of what's going on in Fasoplast that concerns his tasks in Fasoplast, unspecified and unarranged in big carton boxes divided into years. One huge box 1998, an even bigger one for 1999 etc.. I doubt whether it is possible to track specific documents from out of these boxes. Maybe for Mr. Paré himself this is possible, for he archived the papers himself and must have applied a certain logical structure. I fear however that in case Mr. Paré would be away from the office in case he gets ill or he's away on business trips, it would take a very long time for someone else to make sense out of how to find anything in those boxes.
5. Mr. Paré asks his secretary to send a fax. This will turn out to be the only time I see someone using a fax machine in the two weeks I am there. Walking around, even travelling, is part of the communication culture, even if it is to bring only a sheet of paper. In his office Mr. Paré has a file to store away the faxes he receives, which is almost empty.

6. Mr. Paré flits out a form of supplies for that week, again a sheet of paper with a preprinted table on it. These sheets are used by everyone throughout the entire company, and there are I don't know how many different kinds of pre-printed tables, one for each specific procedure or subject. Filling out all those sheets of paper seems simplistic and more importantly extremely time-consuming.
7. All external communication (communication to outside of Fasoplast) is done by messenger boys or phone, only more formal contracts or invoices go by mail. Fasoplast hardly uses the fax for doing business, and the use of email can be neglected. All internal communication (communication within the company) is done by ad hoc meetings, also by messenger boys, walking around and by using the internal phone, all of which happen very informally.
8. When one wants to make an external phone call, one calls the telephone operator within Fasoplast, lets her know who he wants to talk to and then hangs up. The telephone operator calls the person back when the telephone connection is made, and puts the call through. Sometimes it takes forever to get through to the person you want to speak to, so it is convenient if someone does this for you. There is another, technical, reason for this: the only company phone that can make calls outside of Ouagadougou, is that of the operator.
9. I asked Mrs. Compaoré, the shopkeeper, what happens in case a client wants something that she doesn't have in the shop. Mrs. Compaoré calls Fasoplast immediately. If it turns out they have it in stock in the store house, Mrs. Compaoré writes out a receipt for the goods, the costumer pays her in the shop, and can then go to the warehouse with the receipt to collect the goods. If she would ask someone from Fasoplast to bring it to her, it often takes a couple of hours before she gets it, and that would be too long. If the client doesn't want to go to Fasoplast, or has no time to do it or if Fasoplast doesn't have the wanted goods in store, Mrs. Compaoré makes an appointment with the client for a certain date on which the client can come back to collect the goods at the shop. Had Fasoplast made use of computers with a database of the inventory of stock, the time consuming procedures of this example wouldn't be needed.

10. Mrs. Compaoré, the shopkeeper, answered the following question concerning consultation structure.

- How do you keep in touch with your colleagues who work in the office of Fasoplast?

Almost all contact I ever have with Fasoplast is by phone. Even if for example the *Directeur Commercial*, Mr. Paré wants to know the turnover of the shop, he calls me and tells me for when he needs the figures. I then starts calculating (adding all the receipts), and when I have the figure, I call him back. In case of a problem, I also contacts Fasoplast by phone. If the problem can't be solved over the phone, I go to Fasoplast at night, after working hours, to speak to the person I need to see for that problem.

11. Mr. Paré answered the following question concerning communication transmission techniques.

- Can you tell me something about the way you use your telephones? It seems you always answer the phone immediately, even if you are talking face to face to someone else:

Of course I do. We can't keep a phone call waiting. If I don't answer he will think Fasoplast is closed.

12. Mr. Paré's answer to my next question, showed that in advertising, corporate communication techniques are being used, albeit solely on small scale:

- Does Fasoplast advertise? How do people know about Fasoplast?:

We have direct contact with clients, every client is visited individually. Apart from our existing clients, people know about Fasoplast because we advertise with banners alongside the main roads in Ouagadougou, radio, television, our truck, with the name of Fasoplast written on it and promotional activities where they distribute T-shirts with our name on it.

10.2.3.2.4 Conclusion

Corporate communication in Burkina Faso is hardly developed. The organisation remains intransparent and inefficient because electronic storage and database facilities are missing. For all the processed data, like sales, production data, stock and financial matters (cost price calculation). This makes comparing impossible, since overview and transparency of data are failing. This leads to time consuming

walking around or sending messenger boys and in spite of the endless, yet precise filling out of forms, important information can't be found back. Western countries don't know the concept of messengers anymore; in Burkina Faso many people still are officially employed as such. In The Netherlands the concept 'messenger' is for people of my generation only known by Bill Gates' computer program 'Messenger'.

However, luckily this aspect of inefficiency can be changed. Communication techniques are skills that can be learned. With relatively little money, a lot of changes for the better can be achieved already. You will find my recommendations for improvement in Section 11.2.2.

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CHAPTER 11

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FINAL CONCLUSION

11.1 SUMMARY

The non-institutionalized communication in Burkina Faso and more specifically in Fasoplast is influenced by regional aspects, cultural aspects and aspects of know-how and use of corporate skills. The regional aspects (poverty, climate and technology) are more or less unchangeable and can therefore hardly be influenced. The cultural aspects like time, hierarchy, social etiquette, gender, collectivism and bureaucracy are more liable to change, since culture is learned and not innate. The prospects to change the knowledge and use of corporate skills is even more optimistic.

In my opinion, the motivation for such changes has to be sought in the own West African culture, in family lives, in the daily conduct and lifestyle of the autochthons.

My conclusions about the liability for change of all three aspects that influence the Burkinabè communication, are contradictory to what Wamalwa says in his theory N, see Section 5.5. Wamalwa, in my opinion, talks like an old fashioned missionary telling people from a Western point of view what is good for them and that the devil only exist for those who believe in him. I think that we cannot and should not impose our cultural values on West African people like Wamalwa does.

Wamalwa's reasoning is in line with attempts of Western societies who tried for centuries to influence and change the West African cultural environment on the basis of their own culture which they considered as far superior. They failed, because they overestimated their own views and values as being a reason for West Africans to become enthusiastic and motivated for adoption of Western ideas in their own culture. Convinced of being in the right, said Westerners have always

tried to impose their own moral codes and values to the West Africans in order to substitute or change the local manners and customs.

The contemplated results, however, were never met. There is still:

1. poverty,
2. low levels of motivation (poor morale),
3. defeatism,
4. lack of knowledge,
5. low productivity and
6. weak and inefficient economy.

In my opinion changes in cultural aspects that have existed for centuries, can only occur when the motivation to get to these changes is rooted in that same culture. By neglecting this systematically, Western societies haven't succeeded to achieve a valuable symbiosis between their own and the West African culture. Today, the above mentioned results of their unsuccessful attempts can be observed everywhere in West Africa.

To improve the West African standard of life, I feel it as a must that we base our approach on the West African instead of the occidental lifestyle. This means the following needs to be considered. Again, according to my definition of communication as a vehicle for the transmission of thoughts (communication is instrument), it is my firm conviction that also the communication, which is necessary to achieve this higher goal like the improvement of the West African standard of life, has to be based on West African lifestyle.

I will explain this more labouriously. The Burkinabè live double lives. At home they are raised learning that family and the group is important. At school and at work they learn values imposed by the west such as individualism, the most important one, and the most contradictory to their own values. They are taught two different ways of thinking, ways that often clash. A result of this is an almost schizophrenic behaviour: the Western lifestyle is seen as a role, acted, or, as Hickson and Pugh say it: "their heart is not in it". There is no incentive to take responsibility. On the contrary, by only playing these Western roles instead of really fulfilling them, they avoid taking part in the decision making and taking responsibility. Proposing changes for communication based on this part of their lives, when their heart is not in it, won't work. We have to look in the other part of their lives; the more African part.

If one wants to carry the West African societies to a higher economical level and so to a higher standard of living, one would have to take as a starting point the indigenous cultural environment. Keeping in mind the main goal of this thesis, as described in Section 7.2 (to present ways of improving the communication in Burkina Faso and more specifically the internal communication in companies like Fasopiast by mobilizing Burkinabè insights, skills and cultural aspects with tools to implement this), I will reveal the approach that can lead to the desired improvements: to achieve the transmission of ideas that could lead to positive changes. or even to a symbiosis of the benefits of two cultures, one would have to use ways of communicating that are custom in the African part of their lives. Only then, when people are approached in their own language, with concepts, norms and values of their own experiences and convictions, the motivation which is indispensable to carry through these enormous changes, could be aroused. I assume that this wouldn't only count for Burkina Faso and Fasopiast, but for the entire of West Africa. What is needed is that the Westerner thoroughly studies the West African culture and its inherent philosophy, in order to be able to combine with this knowledge occidental and West African values that could help to achieve said improvements.

One could also just say; "Leave them be, why disturb their peace with our ideas", but in my opinion, West Africa already passed the point of no return: in our economically globalized world, the West African continent cannot survive anymore on their own. Overpopulation, poverty, diseases; all disasters that are momentarily hanging over Africa cannot be defeated anymore without adoption and implementation of the main benefits of Western society into the own West African identity.

As said, the development so far has become already irrevocable now. Things cannot be turned back anymore. West Africans know what is going on in the rest of the world, they know that the rest of the world uses technology that is not within their reach and achieved a standard of living they can only dream of. This causes frustration and the feeling that they are part of a lost continent. We don't care about them, as far as they can tell.

I believe that it is possible to contribute to an improvement of the standard of living in Burkina Faso, by improving the communication - not the communication from a Western point of view as promoted by Wamalwa, but the communication rooted in, as said earlier, West African values.

I should succeed in convincing the Burkinabè that the economy has to become more efficient to get a better life and that it therefore is important that for instance the fax machine works well. In order to communicate this convincingly, I should have at my disposal a profound knowledge of the cultural Burkinabè values and mores, imbedded in a wider West African cultural environment. Since I don't have this knowledge and since I don't know sufficiently about the indigenous culture in order to determine what drives the Burkinabè - which would require years of extensive research - I am glad to have found in literature a proposition for solving such problem, written by somebody who has a broader scope on West Africa. You will find his recommendations hereunder, in Section 11.2.1.

These recommendations cover the first part of the main goal of my thesis (to present ways of improving the communication in Burkina Faso by mobilising Burkinabè insights, skills and cultural aspects with tools to implement this). In Section 11.2.2 I try to fulfill the second part myself, namely 'to present ways of improving the internal communication in companies like Fasoplast with tools to implement this', by giving my proposition for implementations of some tools for improvement.

11.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.2.1 Long term: Proposition found in literature

A comparative study carried out by Iguisi (1993) reveals that for African workers, affectionate relationships between superior and subordinate motivated them much more than recognized achievement, challenging work and participation in decision-making, all which are considered high motivators by Herzberg.

One of the actions that can be taking to effect integration of the African culture and values onto modern management is the adaptation of paternalistic managerial leadership. Under such leadership, the responsibility for making rules exclusively vested in the leader to whom subordinates are expected to give absolute loyalty as children are assumed to give their father. The traditional concept of (paternalistic) leadership as enshrined in the family is closer to the prevalence culture in Africa and is more likely to produce a higher managerial effectiveness and workers productivity. The paternalistic component confers on management the right to give

orders and exact obedience and impose sanctions. But in the traditional family structure, authority is not only exercised for productive ends only; the leader who gives order is as well concerned with the welfare of the subordinates and their families. (Iguisi, 1995)

Harmonizing Cultural Values with modern Management in Africa.

How do we harmonize culture with modern management in Africa?

The following areas suggest themselves in traditional African societies:

1. recruitment,
2. managerial leadership (paternalism),
3. induction,
4. training,
5. discipline,
6. motivation and reward,
7. conflict resolution,
8. welfare, and
9. age.

11.2.1.1 Recruitment

The strength in African traditional system stems from reliance on the intimate knowledge of the person being recruited or selected for a job, his loyalty, and family background. In traditional community, emphasis is laid upon the collective interest of the people; not upon undue competition. The people in an assembly are addressed as a community with one interest and one purpose. Task that have to be done nearly always call people that can perform such task successfully. Specialized jobs are for people who are well-known for their appropriate specialized skills. When the choice has to be made about selecting the right candidate for succession to a throne in some traditional societies, an oracle or the ancestral spirits are consulted so as to invest the choice with the symbol of divine authority.

This method can be equated to the “modern” method of using industrial psychologist.

If we can harmonize some of the essences of traditional cultures and values with modern management in the selection of staff for our organisations, some of the banes of employer/employee relationships would have been demolished, disputes will be rare and the recruited work-force will function like an integrated traditional community.

11.2.1.2 Managerial leadership (paternalism)

One of the actions that can be taking to effect integration of the African culture and values into modern management is the adoption of paternalistic managerial leadership. Under such leadership, the responsibility for making rules exclusively vested in the leader to whom subordinates are expected to give absolute loyalty as children are assumed to give their father. The traditional concept of (paternalistic) leadership as enshrined in the family is closer to the prevalence culture in Africa and is more likely to produce a higher managerial effectiveness and workers productivity. The paternalistic component confers on management the right to give orders and exact obedience and impose sanctions. But in the traditional family structure, authority is not only exercised for productive ends only; the leader who gives order is as well concerned with the welfare of the subordinates and their families.

11.2.1.3 Induction

Induction into modern organisation can be substituted for with initiation rituals in the traditional African community. Initiation has rites and processes for assimilating a new employee into an organisation. There are prescribed roots that should be followed before one could qualify for induction.

The induction of new employee into an organisation, or promotion of employee into higher position of responsibility and authority should include an oath-taking ritual. With oath-taking ritual, the religious element in the culture is involved. Oath-taking features in almost all aspects of social relationship in traditional African communities. Can this cultural values of induction be correlated and harmonized with modern management in Africa? Indeed in some circumstances such as

appointing to important public offices such as those of President, Ministers, Judges etc., oaths of allegiance and of offices are administered through the swearing on the Bible or Koran. Therein lies some elements of the solemnity of induction. The effect of an oath, when adapted in modern management and properly administered in the traditional African way, with the necessary references made to the ancestral spirits and family or community shrines, is that the person, fearing the consequences of default, tries to behave always in accordance with what he has agreed to during the oath-taking ritual. In modern management setting, the Bible, Koran or any other religious holy books could be used for this undertaking by those who adhere to these religions, but for the non-Christians or Muslims, the traditional African deities priest could be invited to administer the oath taking in the presence of the chief executive and other management officials (Ahiauzu, 1989).

When this ceremony of induction is adapted and properly performed in modern, as it is done in traditional African setting, the degree of commitment, allegiance, and honesty of organisation members with regards to organisation and the achievement of its objectives will certainly increase. Oath-taking certainly should be conducted from time to time in the career of all within the management positions.

11.2.1.4 Training

In traditional African community, training involves a long-apprenticeship. The trainee is trained not only on the job but his whole personal character is also developed at the same time. Part of the training objective is that the trainee should be useful to himself and as well as meet the corporate goals of the community. Opportunity should be created for training and retraining organisation members about modern management techniques, about growth-positive and growth-negative culture variables of their societies through day releases, periodic courses, seminars and attendance in conferences. Moreover, action should be taken periodically to educate and update every member of the organisation's knowledge of the history of the organisation. Africans have a great regard for the oral traditions that inform them of their historical origins for when such traditions are related, very often by elders, some sort of consciousness is aroused in the young ones that generate a feeling of identity and attachment to one's 'roots'

Through continuous training on modern management techniques and traditional values, the spirit of culture and tradition for modern management in African can be reproduced.

11.2.1.5 Discipline

African culture attached great importance to discipline. This is reflected in the unwritten codes of conduct in almost all traditional professions practiced by elders according to community laws. When the community is relatively small and practically all members know one another it was easy to observe behaviour of one another. Indiscipline was difficult to condone: for if it violated the common law community had a way of dealing with it. With the family, even though extended, the members of the community were jealous of the good names of their families and would do every thing to preserve the good names and not bring shame to the family. Conversely, leaders had as their objectives the well-being of the whole community and so they were themselves attuned to lead by example. Nonetheless, any offending member had to be disciplined irrespective of his or her status. The homogeneous community, as it was, made everyone his brother's keeper. A deviant action is regarded as one against the community in which justice has to be administered. The elders are responsible for the administration of justice who in doing so, brought to bear on their judgment the experience of their age and accumulated wisdom that went with ripe age.

This traditional principle can be applied in modern management and would check abuse of office and instill discipline in the rank and files of the organisation.

11.2.1.6 Motivation and reward systems

In traditional African societies, there were systems of motivation and reward. In the community values were of the kind that strengthened and maintained the stability of the community. The past is constantly invoked in the present and the present lies the future. The young in the family is constantly motivated to emulate the great deeds of their ancestors. He would be exhorted to grow up and perform the kind of great deeds of his ancestors and would be motivated to perform wonders for the

good of the community and not just for himself alone. If he misbehaved, he would be judged to be unworthy of his forebears, i.e. the height of shame. If he performed well, he would be declared a true son of his ancestors.

What motivate persons in traditional African society differs from what motivate people in modern organisation. One of the ways to translate traditional values and adapt them into modern management would be to make use of non-materialistic methods of status symbols to show appreciation for hard work; e.g. inclusion of superior performers in an honour role incorporating the history/culture of the organisation, the use of letters of appreciation and citation during special awards. These should not, however, be seen as a substitute for well-articulated pay policy by management.

11.2.1.7 Conflict resolution

The African traditional culture has a rather well developed system of conflict resolution. There is respect for elder's wisdom whereby they are not made to lose face in the community. Those who resolve conflicts are usually good listeners and not persons who apportion blame. Their role is to bring about harmonious situation to enable the disputants resolve their conflicts. Their role is seeking and bringing out the truth in order to resolve the dispute to the satisfaction of both parties. These principles can be adapted to modern management in Africa.

11.2.1.8 Welfare

Traditionally, the welfare of each African is always the concern of every member of his community. It is observed, however, that the practice in present modern management in Africa is not far-reaching as that of our traditional organisations. Traditional society, upon its communal interest provided for the unfortunate and the handicapped among its people. The extended family took care of its members but it is also a truly open society. Strangers were welcomed and unless they proved intractable or criminally inclined they were soon absorbed into the host community through inter-marriage. The aim of the traditional community is to promote the welfare of all without making exceptions or destruction. This traditional value can

be adapted to modern management through the encouragement of all employees of the organisation to feel that they belong; to realize that they must contribute according to their ability and that they would be rewarded according to their deserts. Africa don't need modern 'ism' of philosophy for this it is inherent in the culture and traditional background which is feminist and welfare-oriented; not the welfare of the few and the privilege but welfare for all.

Worth stressing is the fact that Africans, no matter their level of involvement in their modern organisations either as managers or employees, do not stop living and being directed and influenced by the larger community. Even when many acquire their education and training in the western countries or at home in western type institutions and over adopt western value positions by becoming more Western than the Westerns, most, if not all still maintain the ties with the African wider community; ties which have been so rooted in their being that they are almost unbreakable. Also important is the element of maintaining permanent contact with the traditional leaders and elders of the community who ensure that their younger citizens who live and work in modern organisations do not loose touch with their culture but still maintain loyalty to it. The general situation for the average African, is that while they struggle to learn and understand the western ways of work life and try to use techniques for problem solving prescribed by western theories and models, they never really forget their culture and the pressure that comes from it. They are still dictated to, manipulated, coerced, and generally, influenced by groups outside their immediate work environment. They are influenced and pressured by immediate and extended family members, by non-family elders in society, by friends and peers, by local and national government, by religious groups, by ethnic groups of interest and so on.

11.2.1.9 Conclusion

This paper discussed the issues of the role of culture in management and a number of issues in western management theories and assumptions that are culturally conditioned. Effectiveness and appropriateness within a given culture, and judged according to the values of the culture, call for management theories and assumptions reflective of the local culture.

Experiences based on empirical evidences have shown us the problems that African nations are facing due to transplantation of Western intelligent theories and models aliens to the African culture. It has been shown that the different management theories of motivation, leadership, organisation in the form that they have been developed in the west, does not fit culturally in Africa. However, in developing theories and building models of appropriate management theories in Africa, it is unlikely to throw away all that the west has to offer. Rather, the process of appropriate management development should be to reflect on the cultures and assumptions of western management theories, compare western assumptions about social and cultural values with African cultural values and rebuild the theories or models through experimentation. In doing this, there is a need for the appreciation of anthropological concepts to the field of appropriate management theorizing in Africa in order to help understand how African organisations and institutions worked in the pre-colonial era. Certainly, Africans must have had a way of organising their world of work. They must have had a way of exercising power and leadership at the workplace; a way of motivating and rewarding people to make them work harder. The point we are making here comes out more clearly if one draws from both oral tradition and written historical records. Before the advent of colonial administration, the old African villages and towns had effective public administrative mechanism which the village and town heads, chiefs and kings administered. The use of anthropological concepts in this context will help in the development of appropriate and effective ways of management; organising, planning, motivating and rewarding.

Finally, African scholar and practising manager, conscious of his glorious past cultural heritage and aware of the possibilities of his culture even in modern organisation, can hold his/her head erect and put his best foot forward at any feat he may attempt. He/she need not assume the role of a black-European or American to be a good scholar or manager; there are enough strengths in African culture and tradition to enable him to perform wonders in any modern organisation. An African conscious of his glorious heritage and imbued with the growth-positive culture variables in his society can perform best as a scholar or manager in modern organisations in Africa.

We have said enough to show the link between culture and management. Evidences have been provided to illustrate the full awareness of the African culture, in all its ramifications and divested from the disrepute which colonization has cast upon it, can provide for the Africans, the confidence with which he/she can tackle

his assignment in a modern managerial organisation. Africans need not have inferiority complex. All the Africans need, to do is east his mind around into the culture and values of his society he would find enough to help him cope with modern management; recruitment, induction, motivation, leadership, discipline, conflict resolution, welfare and many other practices conducive to modern organisation management and sustainable economic development issue in Africa.

11.2.2 Short term: Proposition for implementation of tools

As appears from many examples found by my empirical research, there are several shortcomings and impracticalities in Fasoplast and at the University of Ouagadougou, that can relatively easily be solved by small and not too expensive interventions. I will give an overview of these practical recommendations in order of the appearance of the different aspects as treated in Section 10.2.

All propositions for improvement are meant to increase because, as we say, time is money. It should however not be presented in this western optie, because, as we have seen, time isn't really considered important in Burkinabè culture. The emphasis should therefore be put on money. This is important, because they don't have it: Burkina Faso is desperately poor.

Of course it is not possible to change poverty in Burkina Faso by those small, practical interventions. Improving the bad situation resulting from poverty is however in principle feasible and by upgrading their present low standard of living, in the end survival could become a bit easier: that is what is all about.

The bad communication in the company Fasoplast, as described in Section 10.2.1.2, can in some ways easily be improved. The biggest problem in Fasoplast was that everywhere in the company each day piles of paper were written without storing the file pile in a practical system, causing a chaotic mess in which it is impossible to recall information, especially by others than the 'owners of the pile'.

My conclusion about this was that there is no system and no visualization:

1. A short term solution for the inability to recall information could be by rubricating all papers in schematic systems or presentations.

2. Also, Mr. Paré for example, one of the many who's offices are covered with piles of paper, should consider introducing a bulletin board or a plan board in order to visualize the production and the factory workers' planning (shifts). These devices can easily be installed and taken into use without a lot of training.
3. During the planning of the production or at meetings it could be useful to use a flip over, to facilitate the discussions in those meetings and to get a transparent idea of what is happening in the production. An overall view on the production and stock could for instance diminish the acceptance of orders that can't be met within the agreed upon time. More about the planning of orders and production and about meetings further down in this sub chapter.

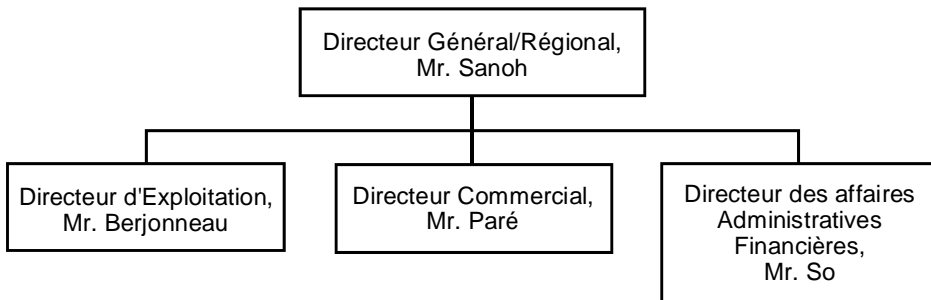
A tool to improve the poor communication caused by bureaucracy and hierarchy could be found in structurally organising regular meetings with all concerned employees around the table, to discuss the problems and the possibilities to solve them. In the example of my first request to do my thesis in Fasoplast and the confusion about the initial subject of this thesis (see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) such a meeting could have solved the problem in ten minutes. Now, as I have explained, it took 3 weeks in total of talking with all people involved. Sending me to each individual director in order to get everyone's approval because so called 'consensus' was needed, took half the available time I had for my research on the spot. Later on it turned out that the head man always took this and all other corporate decisions alone.

The problem as described in my initial subject (Chapter 2; how can the three different managers reach a consensus about the concepts flexibility, productivity and quality) could probably also have been solved by such meetings. As we have learned from the examples, sitting around a table for consultation, discussion and proper deliberation never happened. They just didn't do that, even though they pretended to officially have a weekly meeting. The managing directors simply didn't talk to each other about the important corporate matters, each of them worked in a risk avoidance way on his own island, leaving all major decisions to the headman. Organising meetings and having the discipline to hold them regularly requires a proper management structure.

This is the most important change that I would like to propose: the adaptation of the organisation structure. As we have seen in the examples, Fasoplast is a hierarchical managed organisation with top down communication.

Although they say that they have a democratic structure and that deliberations take place on an equal level between the *Directeur d'Exploitation*, the *Directeur Commercial* and the *Directeur des affaires Administratives Financière*, in reality only the *Directeur d'Exploitation*, Mr. Berjonneau, as we have seen, takes all decisions alone in a very undemocratic way. The position of the Directeur Général (now officially Mr. Sanoh), is not really fulfilled. It is more a paper position of honor. The individual, autocratic and paternalistic behavior of their colleague, Mr. Berjonneau, frustrates the other two managing directors enormously. As said earlier they show the classic risk avoidance behavior and the usual defeatism: "We can't change anything ourselves." Besides, there is no dear distinction between the different functions. The *Directeur d'Exploitation* deals with the bigger clients, the *Directeur Commercial* with the smaller ones.

Figure 11.1 The present organisational structure

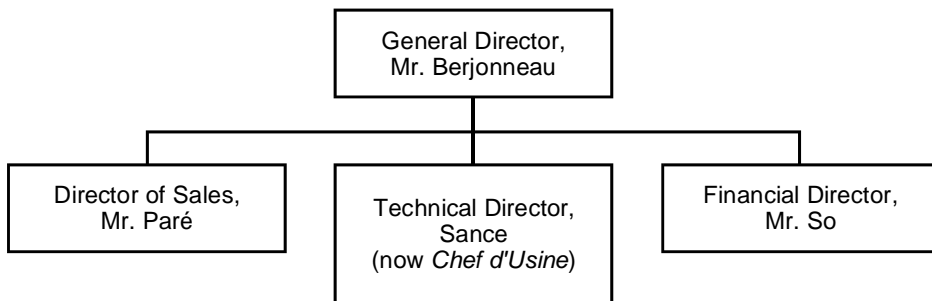


But it is even worse than it seems: dealing with clients in Fasoplast means not only doing the commercial part of that, which is negotiating with them, but also organising the production part for those clients and in this context even doing themselves the purchase of raw materials. This means that there are two managers doing both commercial work and at the same time the production work. This leads inevitably to chaos in as well the commercial department as in the production. The present organisational structure is schematically given in Figure 11.1.

Because of all failures like described above, in Fasoplast, there is not only no participation of the middle management in decision making, but also, due to the lack of clearly determined and distinct disciplines, there is no balance in it. Corporate decisions are only taken ad hoc. To improve this, it is important that the organisation structure is adapted in such way that all managing directors deliberate on an equal level, and that the general manager, having heard and evaluated the arguments and deliberations of the different disciplines, takes the final decision.

Therefore, I recommend another, more balanced, structure, with a clear cut between the different disciplines.

Figure 11.2 A new balanced structure



In order to warrant the social interests of the workers, a Personnel Director could be added to this structure.

Another improvement could be achieved in the education system, on a lower as well as a more scientific level. From all above samples we know that corporate communication transmission techniques fail in Fasoplast. This brought me to the idea that it would be recommendable to add the discipline 'corporate communication' to the program of business studies at the university in Burkina Faso. Also the subject 'computer skills' are now failing, but is indispensable. Helping them to organise that is much more valuable than sending over more computers.

For long term solutions it is indeed of great importance that besides of bringing communication tools like computers into the country, one would invest in education of communication techniques, use and maintenance.

I would like to end with a small practical suggestion for the university: In Section 10.2.1.2 you could read that Mr. Koanda, my tutor of the University of Ouagadougou, couldn't make a long distance phone call to the company SAP in Bobo Dioulasso. This situation at the university is caused by poverty. For improving this, the University of Ouagadougou could introduce a small budget for the guidance of their graduating students. If they can't raise the funds for this themselves, they could try to make an arrangement with the University of Groningen. For the University of Groningen the incentive to spend money on this could be, apart from helping their African colleagues, that at least the students they send over receive a bit more proper guidance.

11.3 FINAL CONCLUSION

With this thesis I would like to try to give those who read this a first impulse towards a change in our Western way of thinking. I would like to encourage other students that come after me, to continue the work with the willingness to study and to discover the West African society and its culture, and to consider that culture as the source out of which we have to help the West Africans in finding the motivation to pick and choose the positive out of the Western society so they can use it to their own benefit. In doing so, the good of two different cultures come together and are used.

It is my firm conviction that the merging of the attainments of different cultures can lead to a better world. In this perspective we, the Westerners have to first learn to step off our throne, to acknowledge that we don't always know best and to acknowledge and appreciate that Africans are driven by other motivations than we are. We have to learn to respect these different motivations, in order to make a new way of problem solving, to arrive at a better standard of living, possible.

Tony Blair said in his speech end of September 2001: "The state of Africa is a scar on the conscience of the world. But if the world as a community focussed on it, we could heal it. And if we don't, it will become deeper and angrier."

"Today our idea of society is shaped around mutual responsibility; a deal, an agreement between citizens, not a one-way gift, from the well-off to the dependent."

In principle I do agree with above statements of Tony Blair as the only way to 'rescue' Africa. I only fear that the nowadays world-wide tendency to always let economic interests prevail, will hinder the resolute cooperation of the first and second world countries to heal the scar: the state of Africa. To me it seems that indeed today's world is driven more by individual and economical interests, rather than taking up common and mutual responsibilities. However, the recent development of the world-wide anti-movement against globalization gives hope. A part of the young generation apparently understands that the tremendous problems like in West Africa can indeed only be solved if the richer countries are willing to do with a bit less and are prepared to share their economical and, even more important, intellectual wealth generously and altruistic with the poor.

11.4 REFERENCE CHAPTER 11

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF FRENCH WORDS USED IN TEXT

French	English
Banque Européenne des Investissement	European Investment Bank
bisap	very sweet West African drink
carnet de commande	command notebook
chef de section	chief of section
chef de sécurité et de contrôle	chief of security and control
chef d'équipe	team leader
chef d'usine	factory leader
chefs de section	chiefs of section
chefs d'équipe	team leaders
compteur	machine that counts
demande	request, here: short for demande de stage
demande de stage	internship application
directeur commercial	commercial manager
directeur de production	production manager
directeur des affaires administratives financières	financial manager
directeur des affaires administratives personnel	personnel manager
directeur d'exploitation	resource manager
directeur général	general manager
directeur marketing	marketing manager

directeur régional	regional manager
en mission	out on a mission
ethnie	the world used in Burkina Faso for tribe (or ethnic background)
FCFA ; Franc du Communauté Financière Africaine	Currency of former French colonies in West Africa 1 FF 100 FCFA (linked) 1 € = 655.975 FCFA (linked) 1 \$ = 741.05 FCFA (July 2001)
maquis	Bar, restaurant or dancing
Morée	language of the Mossi, spoken by 53% of the Burkinabè population (www.africanet.com)
réseaux politiques économiques	political economical sources
Société Africaine de Pneumatique	Pneumatic African Society
télécentre	centre from which one can make phone calls

APPENDIX 2

STRUCTURE OF OFFICIAL EMPLOYMENT SEEKERS AND OFFERS

occupation	professionals	bureaucrats	managers	service workers	agriculture	skilled labor
males seeking jobs	1894	8053	98	1029	60	13743
females seeking jobs	599	3778	62	62	1	172
jobs offered	246	548	421	218	13	1805
ratio of seekers to offers	10.1	21.6	0.4	5.0	4.7	7.7

source: INSD, *Various Tables*, 1993

APPENDIX 3

DEMANDE DE STAGE

Tessy van de Wiel
Etudiante de la Communication

Stage à Fasoplast

On m'a demandé de faire un stage à Fasoplast avec mission de finir la recherche qu'Ilona Pouels a commencé. Notre professeur, Mr. L. Karsten, de la faculté de Gestion, m'a demandé d'examiner s'il y a des possibilités d'arriver à un consensus entre le Directeur de l'Exploitation, le Directeur Commercial et le Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières en ce qui concerne les trois conceptions: productivité, qualité et flexibilité. Mr. Karsten m'a demandé aussi comment les possibilités d'arriver à un tel consensus, si j'en trouve, pourront être implémentées. Une question complémentaire que je me suis demandée moi-même, c'est si la nécessité pour arriver à un tel consensus. Mon mémoire doit être sous forme d'un mémoire de communication consultatif. La question principale de mon mémoire est:

Qu'est-ce qui peut être fait afin d'arriver à un consensus en ce qui concerne les conceptions de productivité, qualité et flexibilité entre le Directeur de l'Exploitation, le Directeur Commercial et le Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières?

Les autres questions que je mentionne ci-dessous, sont des sous-questions.

Je voudrais travailler à Fasoplast pendant trois semaines. Les deux premières semaines, je voudrais suivre le Directeur de l'Exploitation, le Directeur Commercial et le Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières, afin d'obtenir une compréhension de leur manière de communiquer, c'est à dire, comment se passe la communication interne. Pendant les deux premières semaines je voudrais aussi voir si ce que moi j'aperçois sur les perceptions des conceptions de productivité, qualité

et flexibilité des trois directeurs correspond avec les résultats de la recherche d'Ikona Pouels. La manière sur laquelle je veux atteindre ceci, est par l'observation. Je voudrais suivre les trois directeurs chacun pendant trois jours de travail. Afin de collectionner des données je ferais une horaire, divisée en quarts d'heures, dans laquelle je marquerai minutieusement ce qui est fait chaque quart d'heure. Au bout de neuf jours, je comparerai les données que j'aurais sur chaque directeur et j'espère de pouvoir venir avec une manière de réaliser un consensus.

La troisième semaine je voudrais parler avec les trois directeurs individuellement pour voir ce qu'ils pensent de la solution que j'aurai proposé et s'ils pensent que cette solution est réaliste. J'écirai mon mémoire aux Pays-Bas, mais évidemment j'envoierai une copie à Fasoplast.

Mon mémoire devrait être fini au mois de Juillet.

APPENDIX 4

INSTITUTIONALIZED MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN BURKINA FASO

Depuis Mars 1995, par le biais de la démocratie, la Ville de Ouagadougou s'est dotée d'un organe de délibération: Le Conseil Municipal.

Aussitôt les membres installés, le Conseil s'est fixé pour objectifs à travers son programme d'action de réduire les problèmes de logement, de santé, d'éducation, d'emploi, des fléaux tels que la délinquance, la prostitution, mendicité, etc.

Pour atteindre ces objectifs, l'information et la sensibilisation devenaient des outils non moins importants de travail. D'où la nécessité d'un service de la communication.

Le service de la communication

Il est chargé:

1. D'assurer les relations avec la presse(communiqués de presse, dossiers de presse, conférences de presse, contacts avec les Journalistes ...);
2. De la publicité des textes et/ou des délibérations de portée générale devant être portés à la connaissance du public;
3. De la confection du bulletin de liaison de la Commune;
4. De concevoir et exécuter la politique de communication du Maire.
5. De concevoir et exécuter la politique de promotion de l'image de marque de la Ville partout dans le monde.

A4.1 PUBLICATIONS MUNICIPALES

La Commune édite et publie:

1. Un trimestriel d'information 'Ensemble Construisons'; en vente à la Hôtel de Ville, dans les mairies des cinq arrondissements, à la Police Municipale,

dans les boutiques Marina Market, à la librairie Diacfa, chez tous les revendeurs de la place.

2. Un bimestriel 'Nekr Wagati'; support d'information et de sensibilisation de l'Association des maires du Burkina Faso; distribué gratuitement.
3. Un mensuel 'Lagem-Taaba'; la Gazette des jeunes du Comité Local de Jumelage de Ouagadougou; en vente dans les kiosques à journaux de la Ville.
4. Une rubrique hebdomadaire 'Le Journal Communal'; dans les colonnes du quotidien national Sidwaya tous les mardis.
5. Des dépliants sur l'histoire de la Ville, sa présentation administrative, ses monuments et sites touristiques, ses lieux de loisirs, etc.
6. Ces différents documents sont disponibles au Service de la communication de l'Hôtel de ville.

Panneaux d'affichage

Dix (10) panneaux d'affichage situés au coeur de la Ville et dans les zones à forte affluence, permettent d'annoncer les manifestations municipales et les comptes rendus du Conseil Municipal.

A4.2 LA PRESSE ÉCRITE

Les quotidiens

Les quotidiens de la ville de Ouagadougou sont au nombre de cinq:

1. Sidwaya: quotidien d'information du Burkina Faso;
2. L'Observation Paalga: quotidien d'information;
3. Le Pays : Quotidien indépendant d'information générales du Burkina;
4. Le Journal du Soir : quotidien Ouest Africain d'Information;
5. Bulletin de l'Agence d'Information du Burkina.

Les hebdomadaires

Les Hebdomadaires paraissant régulièrement.

1. J.J : Le Journal du Jeudi;
2. L'Indépendant;
3. Sidwaya Hebdo;
4. L'Observateur Dimanche;
5. Évasion;

6. Le Matin;
7. L'Opinion.

Les bimensuels

1. Burkina Sports et Loisirs;
2. Bendré.

Les mensuels

1. Horestour;
2. Racines;
3. Votre Santé;
4. Tradition et Modernité;
5. Trait d'Union.

A4.3 QUELQUES TITRES D'INSTITUTIONS

1. Les Cahiers de la Présidence du Faso;
2. Culture Démocratique;
3. La Dépêche;
4. Minergie;
5. Fespaco Newsletter;
6. Communicator;
7. Culturoscope.

A4.4 LES AGENCES DE COMMUNICATION

La Ville de Ouagadougou compte de plusieurs agences de communication, et de publicité. Les plus importantes sont:

Les agences d'état

1. ONATEL: Office National des Télécommunications;
2. SONAPOST: Société Nationale des Postes.

Les agences privées

1. CDT INTERNATIONAL;
2. CINECOM;
3. FREEDOM PRODUCTION;
4. EDIFICE;
5. MES SAGE ET MEDIA;
6. MEDIA 2000;
7. STIMULUS;
8. SYNERGIE;
9. TOUCAN INTERNATIONAL;
10. FIDELIS;
11. ZAMA PUBLICITE.

A4.5 LES RADIOS

1. La R.N.B : Radio Nationale du Burkina;
2. La Radio Rurale;
3. Canai Arc en ciel: C.A.C;
4. Pulsar;
5. Horizon;
6. Salankoloto;
7. Savane FM;
8. OuagaFM;
9. R.F.I;
10. Africa No. 1;
11. R.E.D : Radio Évangile Développement;
12. Radio Maria.

A4.6 LA TELEVISION

1. TNB :Télévision Nationale du Burkina;
2. M.M.T.V : Multimédia Télévision;
3. T.V.5;

(www.mairie-ouaga.bf/debut9.htm)

APPENDIX 5

RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

Day 1, Monday, May 29

The first two days I spent with the *Directeur Commercial*, Mr. Paré.

Fasoplast has six one-storied buildings on their terrain, including the factory and the store house. The *DG/DR* and the *DAF* have their offices in the same building. The offices of the *DE* and the *DC* are both in different buildings.

During the first day I found out that Thursday of that week was a national holiday, and Fasoplast would be closed. One day less for me.

The business language in Burkina Faso is French. At home or amongst each other in a different context than at work, people speak their own language.

As had already become dear when approval was needed for my *demande de stage*, not one decision is taken by one person. All decisions are taken democratically, based on consensus. There officially is a deliberation structure (meetings etc.), but what is clearly missing is the lack of discipline to keep to this structure. This means that reaching a consensus takes a lot of time, but, time is of no importance. This delays the communication to reach decisions tremendously.

Mr. Paré has a small office. He doesn't have a computer, but he does have a normal and a mobile telephone. He has a lot of note books and paper files. Next to his office, in a bigger office space in which several people have their desks, you can find his secretary working (with computer). Mr. Paré has a notable amount of paper laying about everywhere.

At 9h15 Mr. Paré has a meeting in his office with the *Chef d'Usine*, Mr. Sance. They are discussing an order of 5000 sacs, verifying what is necessary, what the *Chef d'Usine* has to do and what he should verify with the client. While the *Chef*

is sitting down and writing very quietly without moving, Mr. Paré writes down point by point, whilst dictating himself, what the Chef has to write down simultaneously (so everything is written down twice). Mr. Paré verifies with Mr. Sance if everything he says is correct. Not efficient, but time is of no importance.

Mr. Sance shows a lot of submissive politeness to Mr. Paré, but this doesn't prevent the meeting from being very informal. Because of all the interrupting phone calls, Mr. Sance patiently stays for over an hour.

Problems are being dealt with on an ad hoc basis. When Mr. Sance is in the office to discuss a certain order, he also remembers a problem in the factory and starts talking about this. He discusses together with Mr. Paré the possible solution.

Here in Mr. Paré's office I saw for the first time the work planning that 'rules' the supporting staff, the *Chef d'Usine* and the chefs de section. All said employees have their individual planning on one A4 sheet per person, all sheets piled up in protruded shelves. I studied more precisely the planning of Mr. Sance. This A4 sheet contains a week schedule. Every day of his is always divided in 4 activities in the morning and 3 in the afternoon. Employees make these schedules themselves and deliver them to Mr. Paré. This way, he can not only see what the employees are doing and where they will be, but it also allows him to compare the schedules per different employee. Per week Mr. Paré would have around twenty of these schedules, lying on a pile next to his desk. This means there is no visual overview of a one week planning, no bulletin board, no plan board. With every new week the amount of paperwork grows steadily. Another aspect of these schedules is that this is an item that could be easily made much and much clearer, if only Mr. Paré would have access to a computer. Because of poverty in the country, computers are scarce, it is not at all self-evident that managers would have one.

In general Mr. Paré spends a lot of the day studying and comparing figures.

Completely and utterly absurd: Mr. Paré finds out now, that all employees who have a work schedule, have also included Thursday in this week's schedule, whereas they knew literary a year in advance that that Thursday is a bank holiday, for every year that holiday is on the same date.

From what I could see in Mr. Paré's office, he archives all the thousands of sheets of paper he uses to keep track of what's going on in Fasoplast that concerns his

tasks in Fasoplast, unspecified and unarranged in big carton boxes divided into years. One huge box 1998, an even bigger one for 1999 etc. I doubt whether it is possible to track specific documents down from out of these boxes. Maybe for Mr. Paré himself this is possible, for he archived the papers himself and must have applied a certain logical structure. I fear however that in case Mr. Paré would be away from the office in case he gets ill or he's away on business trips, it would take a very long time for someone else to make sense out of how to find anything in those boxes. There is no transparency. There is no data transmission.

The telephone always has priority, Mr. Paré always answers it immediately. I have witnessed several times that he is in a meeting with someone and answers his phone without excusing himself to the person he is having the meeting with. On the other hand, Mr. Paré would also address himself to the person he is sitting face to face with, while at the same time being on the phone, without notifying the person on the phone that he is going to talk to someone else. (No phone protocols.) Telephone conversations end very abruptly. After the topic is discussed, they simply hang up.

Mr. Paré is almost only called on his mobile phone.

Mr. Paré uses many different sheets of paper with pre-printed tables on it to keep track of different procedures in the company, be it concerning the production, the schedules of different employees or any other kind of procedures. Every step or every change is precisely noted down in the therefore designated sheet. Problem with this as I witnessed it, is that an initially clear and accurate schemes becomes an unreadable mess, with all the corrections made over the course of days. Note here also the earlier described archiving systems and what has been said about the lack of computers.

Wednesday Mr. Paré will go to Bobo Dioulasso on a business trip.

People speak in a very informal manner, but tend to be submissive to those who have a higher rank in the company's hierarchy (class system). People speak politely to older people. This does however not include old production workers or other people with a very low status. They are all treated like dogs because of this class system, irrespective of their age. Remarkable: people would use phrases like 'Ça m'emmerde' (That pisses me off), without anyone thinking this language is uncalled for in a business environment. Maybe they don't feel embarrassed to use

such language, because French is not their native language. After business is discussed, people continue chatting about personal matters. Time is of no importance.

When people part, e.g. leave the office after a meeting, they don't say goodbye.

A truck from Fasoplast is to depart the next day to deliver products to different clients in the country. In a *cahier de camion* it is precisely noted down where the truck driver will go and what he will be doing, when he will leave exactly, at what time he is supposed to arrive, what he is bringing for what clients. He too has a week schedule like described for other employees earlier. This schedule and what is noted down in the *cahier de camion* allows Mr. Paré to check if the driver is doing what he is supposed to be doing, and not, as Mr. Paré said, 'drinking in bars or hang out with his friends or family in the towns he will be visiting'. In the *cahier* space is left for Mr. Paré to make notes after the trip on the performance of the driver. The driver also has to make an estimate of how much money he thinks he will bring back to Fasoplast. If this estimated amount is not reached, it is Mr. Paré's task to find out what went wrong. The day before the truck leaves, it is checked for technicalities and if it needs to be revised. If this is the case, the truck can't leave the next day. Time is not important. However, it should be in a way for a big company like Fasoplast. If they would really arrive a couple of days later than was planned it wouldn't look good on Fasoplast, but if there is something wrong with the truck and they inform the clients in time about the delay, then the client will understand and accept it. In other words, apparently those clients seem not to depend on a fixed delivery day for the continuity of their own business. The truck is loaded in the afternoon.

The *Directeur d'Exploitation*, Mr. Berjonneau, comes in the office. He and Mr. Paré discuss the fact that the next day a client from Canada will come to Fasoplast. Mr. Berjonneau instructs Mr. Paré on what exactly he has to say and do in an excessively curt way. Mr. Berjonneau has a very authoritarian attitude, even to those of equal rank to him in the company's hierarchy, those with whom he forms a coalition to 'manage Fasoplast in a democratic fashion'. I am without doubt that this is because Mr. Berjonneau is white and French, the only one in the company. (Superior, post-colonial attitude)

The way Mr. Berjonneau makes sure that Mr. Paré agrees with him seems suggestive and intrusive. He would say things like 'You have to do this, right?' or 'You should ask that, huh?'. Mr. Paré would confirm with a simple 'yes' to all Mr.

Berjonneau's 'suggestions'. Typical to me was to see that whenever the phone would ring, Mr. Paré answered it at once, in the same way as described earlier, which to me seemed contradictory with, his seemingly submissive posture with Mr. Berjonneau in front of him.

People walk in offices without ever knocking on the door. [protocol]

Mr. Berjonneau keeps saying Fasoplast, he never says never 'we'.

Nobody in Fasoplast has a job description.

Mr. Paré asks his secretary to send a fax. Calling on people is part of the communication culture, also to deliver a paper. In his office Mr. Paré has a file to store away the faxes he receives, which is almost empty.

The country is excessively poor. This means that thefts happen regularly. To prevent thefts at Fasoplast, there is one supporting staff member who's task it is to administrate all the products that leave the Fasoplast premises. Again, if there would have been computers, things could be handled much more efficient. A database could give overview of all the products leaving Fasoplast. Poverty.

A second supporting staff member counts the kilometers of plastic that come in, and the kilo's of bottles that are produced with it.

When Mr. Berjonneau sits down, his trousers get tom a bit by a nail that sticks out of the chair. He starts yelling and screaming until his face is purple (How can a simple chair bother him??). He commands Mr. Paré to call for someone to bring a hammer at once, and resolve the problem.

Mr. Paré fills out a form of supplies (*approvisionnement*s) for that week, again a sheet of paper with a pre-printed table on it. These sheets are used by everyone throughout the entire company, and there are I don't know how many of different kinds of pre-printed tables, one for each specific procedure or subject.

When Mr. Paré is talking to a client to make an appointment, he is very short but to the point. They speak in the imperative. To me as a Western he sounds impolite: 'You must call' in stead of 'Could you call'. This is however a normal way of expressing yourself in Burkina Faso. If someone offers you some food, for

example, they would say: 'You must eat', or if you're about to go somewhere with friends, they would say: 'You/we must go', instead of 'Shall we go?'. It's the French expression 'il faut' that is always used for this, untranslatable in Dutch or English. A tool for companies who want to do business with Occidental countries could be a training on how to verbally communicate with Westerners, make them aware that this is not a common way of speaking throughout the world.

At one point when Mr. Paré is not in his office for a while, the telephone rings. It just keeps on ringing, there is no answer machine or voice-mail and the call is not automatically diverted to the telephone operator.

During Mr. Paré's absence the truck driver comes in and sits down in front of the desk to wait for Mr. Paré's return.

Mr. Paré has another phone call with a client. He talks really loud because of bad telephone lines (technique). Instead of asking for someone else's name and telephone number that he needs, he says: 'Give me his name' and 'Give me his telephone number' (imperative). Again case of different way to talk to each other. For doing business with the West, this would not be acceptable.

A lot of the work (like filling out all those sheets of paper) seems simplistic and more importantly extremely time-consuming, but is done very precisely.

During the telephone calls, Mr. Paré often consults one of his big notebooks. Apparently he has no difficulty finding the information that he needs. Again: if he would be sick or not in the office, someone else might have much larger difficulty finding the info.

Mr. Berjonneau is often consulted by Mr. Paré, either by phone or in person if he happens to be near Mr. Paré's office.

All day no contact with Mr. So, the *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières*.

Mr. Paré himself calculates the price of a certain order. To me amazing that someone who is a director, who is partly in charge of an entire company, has to do these calculations himself. The prices of all products are in a map with folders in it. Mr. Paré is making the invoices for clients.

If someone needs one of Mr. Paré's files or documents, he brings them over personally. Not delegated to secretary, no internal mail system.

A worker from the store house is in Mr. Paré's office. He seems not at all at ease. He has come to talk about an order of 5000 boxes of plastic bottles. There isn't enough in store, but the command has already been made. The boy is spoken to in a very curt manner and is told to go. Later, I learn from Mr. Berjonneau that shortage in stock happens all the time. The last day I work at Fasoplast he takes me to the store house (a big factory hall used only for storage), where stock literally bulges out of. He is furious that orders are accepted over and over again of products that they don't have in store but need to be produced, and that no one ever makes the effort of trying to sell what they have laying there. He says that some of the products have been laying on those shelves for years.

There is a visitor for Mr. Paré. The visitor is announced by the guard who stands at the entrance gate of Fasoplast next to the road (which is of red dust). The guard phones Mr. Paré to inform him of the arrival of a visitor, and indicates the visitor where he can find Mr. Paré's office. The guard will never walk a visitor to someone's office, for he is not allowed to leave his post. Someone receiving visitors will never come to collect the visitor at the gate, unless it is someone of very great importance.

This visitor seems not important. He only wants to purchase one roll of plastic sheet. He also complains about the plastic sheet he's bought at Fasoplast previously, but he does this in a jokingly, almost apologetic way. Mr. Paré doesn't even react to that. (Big problem: there is no competition, so if client is not happy that's tough luck for him. They're not afraid of losing clients, for they can't go elsewhere. This doesn't include products like cups and buckets, there is one other firm who produces those, but for all the other products, Fasoplast has a monopoly.) During the conversation with the client someone else comes in the office who wants to speak to Mr. Paré as well. It is not dear to me who he is or what he wants, for he just keeps standing in the office without saying anything, awaiting the end of the conversation with the client. This seems to be a perfectly normal procedure, Mr. Paré and the visitor never stop their conversation. The telephone rings and Mr. Paré answers. Then his mobile also rings, and he answers that too, while still on the phone with the first caller. In the meantime the visitor and the other man in the office just wait. After the telephone calls, Mr. Paré calculates for the visitor the price of the plastic roll he wants to buy. The visitor says he brought 80.000 FCFA

with him, apparently not enough, but Mr. Paré settles for that and takes the cash right there in his office and makes up an receipt. The visitor can go with the receipt to the store house and get his plastic.

To my surprise Mr. Paré informs me that this client is in fact a very important one, that he buys at Fasoplast regularly, but that this time he just needed a small roll of plastic of 100 meters. That is why he could pay on the spot and get his plastic. Normally, for such small purchases, the clients are told to go to the shop in town.

For internal phone calls, people don't say their names when they call [protocol].

Mr. Paré's personal telephone book is very old and dingy, with hundreds of additional little notes and scribbles in it.

During a phone call, Mr. Paré's secretary walks in and shouts out that she has someone on the phone who also wants to speak to him. Mr. Paré immediately hangs up, to answer the next one.

Mr. Berjonneau knocks on the window of Mr. Paré's window and signals the latter to come with him. They leave and have a discussion behind closed doors for half an hour.

When Mr. Paré introduces me to two employees, they are at the same occasion being yelled at by him, ignoring my uneasiness. So right in front of me I see to my embarrassment two people that I have just been introduced to, being reprimanded.

People who work in the factory but are not the production workers wear blue overall coats.

The Western concept: first in, first served doesn't apply here. You can see this everywhere; who comes in last, is helped first. Mr. Paré also works with this system. The chefs of the factory that want to ask him questions (and have all come at around the same time, very peculiar), wait patiently until it is their turn.

The co-operation is striking. One chef and Mr. Paré are calmly discussing the next order, the planning of the coming week is discussed and everything is noted down precisely on a sheet with a pre-printed table. They keep asking for each others confirmation, they keep checking if what they are saying is correct. In the

meantime Mr. Berjonneau also comes by. He and Mr. Paré talk about the material that will be used for a certain product, and about how less material can be used to make big plastic bags with the same quality. Berjonneau is happy about this and says this way they can make more profit, to which Mr. Paré laughs and says he must mean less loss.

Mr. Berjonneau then asks if the planning is well prepared for the coming week. Something turned out to be not right about the planning, which caused Mr. Berjonneau to start shouting and yelling again. Mr. Paré always remains calm; he doesn't go into defence nor does he start yelling back. My guess is that he must be used to this squeaking white man by now.

They discuss several other subjects as well (with all the chefs still in Mr. Paré's office, waiting for them to finish talking). Mr. Berjonneau speaks in a horrible way, I find. After every other sentence he says 'do you understand?' and he basically speaks as if he is a very strict father talking to a son.

Striking is, that people can talk about things of which they know that the person they talk to, knows about already. Yet the person who is being talked to, will react as if it is the first time he hears this, and eventually they are both happy that the topic has been discussed again.

At one point, Mr. Paré phones someone, and when the phone is answered on the other side of the line, he says, before giving his name, 'I have got to hang up, I have another phone call coming in'. He hangs up and answers his mobile.

All external communication by Mr. Paré is by phone, contracts or invoices go by fax, he doesn't use email. All internal communication is done by ad hoc meetings, by walking around and by using the internal phone.

A woman of the invoice administration walks in. She's very angry and shouts at Mr. Paré that he can't let receipts lay about everywhere, but that he has to give them to her at once.

Apparently de *DAF* hasn't paid for something. Mr. Paré suggests that the woman goes to the *DAF* herself to tell him this. The woman laughs at the idea of going to the *DAF* herself, and Paré has to admit, while laughing himself, that indeed, this is a bit of a ridiculous idea. What does this say about the hierarchy. According to the

way Fasoplast is structured, the *DC* and the *DAF* have the same ranking. Why is it such a weird idea then for her to go to the *DAF*?

She is wearing traditional African clothes. Most women at Fasoplast do (except for the *DG/DR* 's secretary), men don't. Most women have this funny attitude of being a bit harsh on men. They later always laugh about it, they never intend to be really mean.

A man comes in to place an order for his company, Cluff. Through the window of Mr. Paré's office I had seen the man sitting in the next door office space for quite a long time, waiting until he could be received by Mr. Paré. Mr. Paré also knew that this man was waiting there, because he was informed by the guard again by telephone, but he had kept him waiting while he continued reading through some papers. When the man is finally in Mr. Paré's office, Mr. Paré continues to read through the papers and lets the man sit there. Then the phone rings and an order is taken on by phone of 10.000 yellow bags. Mr. Paré accepts the order, but after he hangs up the phone he calls the woman who keeps the shop to ask her to verify if there are enough of those plastic bags (again: first order accepted, then check if they have it or not!). Clients are called to inform them that there is a coloured line on the sacks they ordered. He asks them if they mind, and if they still want to have the sacks. All this time, the man who came in earlier is still sitting opposite Mr. Paré. I understand that the man is a representative of Cluff, and is also their truck driver. At long last they discuss the order. Mr. Paré shows the man some bags and says that this is what the people like around here. When Mr. Paré is on the phone again, the client walks out without saying anything, because he wants to look at the store house. (Sometimes people do this, make people wait like that. A good illustrative example is when I went to a company once with a friend of mine who wanted to speak to a certain person in that company. When we arrived, a secretary asked my friend who he wanted to see. He told her and she summoned him to sit down and wait on a chair directly opposite of where she was sitting. She went about her business for almost fifteen minutes, and only then picked up the phone to inform the person that my friend wanted to see, that he had a visitor waiting for him. Why? Especially since she knew my friend could see exactly what she was doing for he was sitting directly opposite her. To show some kind of power?? I don't know.)

All day long a lot of phone calls are made and a lot of papers filled out. Every sheet of paper gets a stamp. That is something that this country is addicted to, to putting stamps on everything they can get their hands on.

A normal working day is 7h30-12h00 and 15h00-18h00. On Saturday's they work from 8h30-12h00. During working hours, they never take a short brake, to get coffee for example or smoke a cigarette.

Factory workers work 8 hours in a row, the guard 12 hours.

When I started working here this morning, I was asked by Mr. Paré to give some personal information, like my full name, nationality, etc., which he noted down carefully. I have no idea where that paper is now.

The supporting staff who have their desks in the office space next to Mr. Paré's office are all very kind to each other, they talk a lot about items unrelated to their work (not unlike Europe!!).

A man walks in the office accompanied by the representative/truck driver of Cluff that I had seen earlier. They also come in without knocking, and seat themselves, while Mr. Paré is on the phone (So not only people from within the company walk into an office without knocking on the door, but simply everyone does). After he's finished his phone call they start negotiating about the products and the prices (bit like in market place). When they reach an agreement, Mr. Paré immediately takes the phone to call the command through to the store house.

When Mr. Paré calls Mr. Berjonneau, he politely uses the latter's name regularly and he says 'vous'. Berjonneau never uses names when he talks to someone, and says 'tu' ('vous' and 'tu' both mean 'you' in French, 'tu' being the informal way and 'vous' the formal).

Brakina, a Burkinabè beer producer, lets Mr. Paré know they don't want to buy their crates at Fasoplast, because they think Fasoplast is too expensive.

When Mr. Paré makes a phone call to a company in Bobo Dioulasso, he has to yell in the phone to make himself heard, and often he doesn't hear what the person on the other end of the phone is saying, because it rains in Bobo and this effects the telephone line.

At the end of the day, Mr. Paré puts all the different planning schedules of the different employees (that up until then had been laying around on his desk) into folders. Planning, according to Mr. Paré, is important for two reasons. Firstly, with the employees working with a tight schedule, he will know exactly where everybody is at what time, which leaves them no time to hang around in maquis or do other things they are not supposed to be doing. Secondly, this way the boss shows he is interested in the people that work for him. He sees the employees of whom he holds the schedules once or twice a week. This way the employer will feel involved in the whole organization and appreciated.

Mr. Sance comes back to the office. This time I notice something about his body language. I know Mr. Sance feels very much at ease with Mr. Paré, and you can tell it by the way he acts in a natural, relaxed way. This behavior is much different from many other people I have seen in the office today. People from the factory, the truck driver and the representative/truck driver from Cluff, obviously weren't at ease. They were fidgeting a lot, and looking down, not looking Mr. Paré in the face. They kept moving on their seats and spoke in a very soft voice, using only short phrases or yes or no answers. Also, these are the people who are kept waiting the longest. This is part of the general class system in Burkina Faso. People in a low (unofficial) class often act very submissive. This is also influenced greatly by the nature of the people itself. Not everyone who is poor and works as for example a production worker necessarily acts that submissive. Part of this class system is for example that people even courtesy to older people or people of a higher class. However, 'the rich' don't ever courtesy to anyone.

Two people are in Mr. Paré's office, discussing with him the quantity of a new production line. Mr. Paré notes everything that is said down on a tiny piece of paper, I wonder how he will find that back.

When Mr. Paré and a client are talking about a transaction, they always talk freely about money. Money is definitely not an issue that is being avoided. Funny illustrative example is: when you go to the market to buy something, of course you will be told a price much higher than it actually is. People would then just say to the salesperson: 'I want to pay less'. The salesperson names a lower price and if you still think it's too much, you say again that you want to pay less. This goes on until a price is agreed upon by both parties. (This is what only Africans can do at the market, or whites accompanied by Africans. As a white person alone, it might be impossible to negotiate this way.)

A man comes into the office with a plastic rope. He says he wants to buy more of that sort of rope, but he is immediately told to go to the shop in town. The man doesn't know where the shop is, to which Mr. Paré responds by drawing a little map for the man.

Mr. Paré is very busy all day, but his work is so ad hoc, that it just seems a coincidence that he's so busy all day. Nothing seems to come as a bad timing for him, he is very patient.

Clients are being called *cher ami*, dear friend, which comes across as denigrating.

What has happened quite often today is the following: a subordinate gets yelled at pretty badly by his boss, simply because this person is his boss and because that's the normal procedure. Afterwards they laugh and talk about completely irrelevant matters, as if nothing had happened. It's like if the boss would ask the subordinate to do something differently or to tell him he's done something wrong in a for Westerners normal way, the subordinate wouldn't get it, or wouldn't take his boss seriously. In all the different places I've worked in, in different countries in Europe, I have never (not even in France where they are so fussy about hierarchy) seen anyone being put down so badly by their bosses, let alone not take it personally as in Burkina Faso. It really just is a way of communicating that is very normal to them, not really with vicious intentions or anything, but just a different way of expressing yourself. I noticed that even I was talking in this blunt way after a while, because there it isn't blunt but just the way they speak.

Every client has his own file.

The directors and some of the chefs always have time for one another.

At the slightest misunderstanding, Mr. Berjonneau start yelling and screaming. Why? Is it to make the other feel stupid and small? He first starts yelling and only then explains why, in such a way that the other person would have to agree with him and say 'Yes, you were right and I was wrong'. Mr. Berjonneau even asks this (very much like John Goodman's role in the film 'The big Labowski') while he's yelling; 'Am I not right? Is this not true?' After his explanation on why he is right, he starts talking in a normal voice again.

Not one decision is taken by one person. All decisions are taken democratically.

Only the secretaries and the *DAF* have computers. Others just write a lot. Since they keep so closely track of everything that happens within the company, piles of paper a day are being written. Poverty

Everyone has these huge notebooks.

Telephone conversations end very abruptly. No telephone protocol.

When I am observing, people don't seem to be bothered by my presence.

When one wants to make an external phone call, one calls the telephone operator within Fasoplast, lets her know who he wants to talk to and then hangs up. The telephone operator calls the person back when the telephone connection is made, and puts the call through. Very clever indeed, for sometimes it takes forever to get through to the person you want to speak to, so it is convenient if someone does this for you. There is another, technical, reason for this: the only phone that can make calls outside of Ouagadougou, is that of the operator.

Day 2, Tuesday May 30

Day 2, Tuesday May 30, I work with the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, introduced to me as Marc. Marc shares an office with two other people, one of whom is Mr. Sance, whom I had met the day before, the other is the *Chef de Transport*. The difference with the directors' offices very large. There is no air conditioning here, the furniture is even older than that in the directors' offices, there is only one telephone for three employees. Also, people in this office speak Morée, not the three chefs who share the office when they are talking to each other, but when a client or a worker from the store house comes in who start speaking in this language.

On the wall: 'Il n'y a rien de plus gênant pour eux qui travaille, que la présence de ceux qui n'ont rien à faire'. There is nothing more disturbing for those who work, than the presence of those who have nothing to do.

When there is a client, Marc takes all the time in the world to deal with the client. Many stamps are being used for many different sheets of paper.

The atmosphere in the office is very sympathetic. Everybody just walks in and out, the door is wide open.

If someone has a question about the factory, they can just walk in and ask it, the chef that knows the answer to it, answers or helps immediately. The hierarchy or class system seem a lot less present in this office.

Marc is the person writing down everything that leaves the Fasoplast premises in order to prevent theft. He has a very big notebook, in which he has made columns on each page, so he can write down the date, the name of the client and the number of products he's bought. The guard at the gate does the same thing. Also, Marc writes all these details down on a separate sheet of paper, of which the client is to keep one carbon copy for himself and to give one to the guard at the door. Both the original 'receipt' (this is not the official invoice!) as the carbon copies are stamped and carry the same number.

If something seems to have gone wrong or is missing, that concerns for example the domain of the *DE*, Marc goes to the *DE* at once to inform him about the problem. Marc then can suggest what could be done about the problem, and needs the *DE*'s permission to undertake action. Usually though, it is the *DE* himself who comes with a solution or finds the cause. If this is the case, Marc is notified about it, and if needed, is to carry out the solution. He is to go to the person responsible for the error to reprimand him.

As said earlier, there is only one telephone in this office. It is on a fixed place, on Mr. Sance's desk. I witnessed once that the phone rang and it was for Marc. Marc had to go to Mr. Sance's desk to use the phone. However, in this particular example, Mr. Sance had two clients sitting at his desk. Funny to see how they deal with this: Marc just start talking very loudly into the telephone, which causes the clients to be able to hear Mr. Sance anymore, so he too starts speaking louder. Eventually, everybody in the office is yelling. As soon as the phone is hung up, voices go back to normal again.

Women have a particular place here in Burkina Faso, despite of the fact that very often they don't work very often, and if they work, they don't earn very much. There is a certain kind of respect for women. When a woman comes into the office, she would always try to make jokes and be flmny but she is very dear about what

she wants. The men in the office laugh politely and are very polite to them in general.

People are extremely patient. There is one client who has come to purchase some goods. He is kept waiting for a long time, he has been sitting on his chair without anyone saying anything to him for over half an hour. When he receives his receipt and can go with his purchases, he doesn't say anything, nor does the chef who's been handling his command. Of course they don't smile either, but that is never done here, only men that smile at women. To me as a Dutch person the fact that they keep the client waiting for such a long time seems very weird, but he doesn't seem to be bothered by it at all. The main thing is that he eventually gets what he came here for, and the amount of time it takes is not important. Burkina Faso is probably the best example of 'polychronic time' that you'll ever get. Someone is working on the client's order, and he knows that he'll get what he wants, that's what is important. (What the man in the plain had told me, that in Burkina Faso almost all that people have is time. This is proven to be true over and over again. The only people I've sometimes seen excusing themselves because they had an appointment elsewhere, were students and executives. However, they would never do this without making the necessary inquiries about the other person's health and the health of all of his family members known to the inquirer, all mentioned individually.)

There always seem to be a lot of clients in this office. It's never quiet. There aren't enough seats for everyone, but people don't mind standing.

Someone smokes and flicks his ashes on the ground for there are no ashtrays. This doesn't bother anyone, it is normal. Even in homes people flick their ashes on the ground, I have never seen an ashtray anywhere. This doesn't matter because the floor is swept every evening and morning, and people don't have carpets.

When someone is busy and you want to ask him something, you don't wait until he's finished, you interrupt him.

The *Chefs de Section* come in regularly to ask questions to Mr. Sance, the *Chef d'Usine*. The *Chefs de Section* don't make decisions themselves; even decisions about throwing or not throwing away certain waste from the factory are taken by the *Chef d'Usine*.

Here also: the telephone has priority, clients in the office are kept waiting.

The production workers work in 4 teams, of which 3 per full day work. The hours of the shifts are as follows:

7h30- 15h00

15h00-23h00

23h00-7h30

Marc is at Fasoplast for every change of shift. He comes to Fasoplast especially for that every evening, between 22h30 and 23h30. He is not allowed to search the production workers, but he would like to. He fears that despite all the preventive measurements taken, there is still a lot of theft.

There are about 170 factory workers. They can't communicate with the directors, although Mr. Sance says they can. (contradictory information) The production workers have their *Chef d'Equipe* who goes to the directors if it is necessary.

Marc claims that Abidjan (capital of Ivory Coast) is ten years ahead of Ouagadougou.

At one point there are three people in the office waiting. They don't say anything and none of the chefs speak to them. I don't know what's going on.

House style Fasoplast: a green and red F. Letters and envelopes carry this logo. Not the invoices, they come from standard invoice note books. The stamps used for the receipts and invoices do have the name Fasoplast on it, not in same font as logo. The overall coats of the factory workers don't carry a logo.

All letters are typed with random font. Not the unity many Western companies seek for. A friend of mine who went to college didn't even realize that there were different fonts, even though he had been using a computer to write his thesis. He belongs to the 1% elite that can go to university. They are not taught how to use computers at all.

Mr. Berjonneau comes in the office and is very angry. The *Chef de Transport* in the office has forgotten to send plastic food bags to the shop this morning, and now there is a client waiting who wants them. The chef drops everything he was doing, leaves two clients waiting that are sitting at his desk, and goes looking for someone who can bring the bags to the shop. The clients were present when Mr. Berjonneau

reprimanded the chef (using words like ‘god damn it!’ in this highly religious country).

All receipts are kept in carton boxes.

Marc writes a letter to the company they employ their guards from. The letter is about the fact that still many thefts occur and that guards have been caught sleeping twice. (No wonder if you work 12 hours in a row during the night all by yourself in the heat)

If clients have bought something, the Chef de Transport goes with them to the store house and the client can collect his goods for which he has to carbon copies of the receipt. The client goes to the gate, gives one copy of the receipt to the guard, waits for the guard to note everything down in his note book of outgoing goods and check the goods, and can then leave.

Marc wants to introduce badges for the employees, in order to keep the ‘bandits’ out. For there are so many production workers, no one can know all of them, so sometimes a person who doesn’t belong there gets in together with the other workers.

The notebook of the truck driver is also checked here, so not only by the *Directeur Commercial*, Mr. Paré.

About the stamp culture: every receipt gets two stamps of approval, and each receipt has three carbon copies, that also need to be stamped twice each. So for each receipt 8 stamps are needed. Of course, there is also the invoice and it’s carbon copies from Mr. Paré, that are also stamped.

Mr. Sance is giving orders to a boy who has been hanging around in the office for over an hour. Only now it becomes dear to me that he works here, apparently in charge of deliveries.

Internal communication very extremely informal.

In the office, there is only one socket. This socket is used for a calculator.

After everyone has left for lunch, I am left in the office with only Mr. Sance. He wanted to let me know that everybody is a little bit scared for Mr. Berjonneau, but he also stated that Fasoplast as a company depends greatly on his leadership. A friend of mine who attends the university and who is Burkinabè, has told me the following: according to him Africans don't work. Even if it is in their own interest or in the interest of their community, they don't work. Only when you kick them or hit them, will they do something. ***Not my words, but those of a highly educated Burkinabe!*** Exaggerated, and laughing loudly when saying it, but still.

(After half a day at this office, I can't help myself to make the comparison with my friends and myself when we were kids playing post-office. The way they simply take forever putting stamps on every single piece of paper, and drawing lines with pen and ruler in note books to get some sort of spreadsheet they can fill in, all this happening at very low pace, and with lots of stones and jokes in-between.)

Afternoon at Mr. Paré's again

Mr. Berjonneau comes to Mr. Paré's office to talk about a problem he's noticed. Every day there are sales receipt that are being cancelled. Mr. Paré says he will go to Marc, the *Chef de Sécurité et de Contrôle*, to find out what is going on. Mr. Berjonneau says that he didn't even know Marc was responsible for this, he thought it was Mr. Sance, *Chef d'Usine*.

How do you communicate with your colleagues?

When I need to talk to someone, I don't wait, but talk to the person straight away. If that person has a phone, I will call, otherwise I will go to the person. I won't use the phone if it concerns a delicate matter or a matter that takes a long time to discuss.

When I ask him if it never bothers him if people walk in and out of the office all the time and that he sometimes has 4 people at the same time in his office waiting for their turn to ask him something, he looks surprised: That people feel free to walk in and out of my office is very valuable. They know that they can come to me for help.

Can you tell me something about the way you use your telephones? It seems you always answer the phone immediately, even if you are talking to someone else:

Of course I do. We can't keep a phone eau waiting. If I don't answer he will think Fasoplast is closed.

How are problems or conflicts solved in Fasoplast?

I have already told you. We go see each other immediately and we discuss it. We don't wait with solving problems.

Does Fasoplast advertise? How do people know about Fasoplast?:

Direct contact with clients

Banners alongside the main roads in Ouagadougou

Radio, television

Truck, with the name of Fasoplast written on it

Promotion activities where they distribute T-shirts

Every existing client is visited individually

Day 3, Wednesday May 31

Early in the morning a driver of Fasoplast and I leave in a company car filled with products to the shop. On our way to the shop the driver has to drop off the goods to the client. The driver has the invoice for the goods. When the client pays him, he doesn't have change. It takes over an hour for someone to change the money at a shop. Shops usually don't have much cash either, if you pay with a 1000 FCFA note (10 FF), it is often difficult to get change. In this case change was needed for a 5000 FCFA note. After this delivery the driver takes me to the shop in town, for which he has also brought goods.

The shop keeper is a lady called Mrs. Compaoré (same last name as the president, no connections). She is assisted in the shop by a boy who carries the delivered goods to the shelves, and takes goods off the shelves for the customers in the shop.

When we enter with the goods, Mrs. Compaoré calls Fasoplast immediately to talk to the *DE* about the plastic food bags we brought. Apparently it weren't the ones she ordered.

The contacts with the clients in the shop happen in the same way I have witnessed in virtually every shop or service rendering company. There is no greeting, the pace at which things happen is slow, there is no smile on the shop keepers face and no eye-contact is made (rather the opposite, she keeps looking away from the client in front of her). This is not impolite, the philosophy behind it is very logical. The customer is here to buy something, the shopkeeper is there to sell, business is done and that is what it is about. There is no particular reason why any of the two should smile, or why any of the two would use more words then the ones they need for the transaction.

Question: If the client wants something that she doesn't have in the shop, what happens? Mrs. Compaoré calls Fasoplast immediately. If it turns out they have it in stock in the store house, Mrs. Compaoré writes out a receipt for the goods, the costumer pays her, in the shop, and can then go to the warehouse with the receipt to collect the goods. If she would ask someone from Fasoplast to bring it to her, it often takes a couple of hours before she gets it, and that would be too long. If the client doesn't want to go to Fasoplast, or has no time to do it or if Fasoplast doesn't have the wanted goods in store, Mrs. Compaoré makes an appointment with the client for a certain date on which the client can come back to collect the goods at the shop.

There are different types of clients: firstly the people who buy big supplies, and then re-sell the goods at the market. Secondly, the people who buy in somewhat smaller quantities, who use Fasoplast products for their own business (for example little plastic bags which the fill with *bisap* to sell on the market). Finally there are clients that Mrs. Compaoré is not so happy with, those who buy one or two items for their personal use. According to Mrs. Compaoré these clients are very demanding, ask to see all the different types and colors of for example the cups they have, and they don't bring in much money.

Question: How do you keep in touch with Fasoplast?

Almost all contact she ever has with Fasoplast is by phone. Even if for example the *Directeur Commercial*, Mr. Paré wants to know the turnover of the shop, he calls

her and tells her when he needs the figures. She then starts calculating (adding all the receipts), and when she has the figure, she calls him back. In case of a problem, she also contacts Fasoplast by phone. If the problem can't be solved over the phone, she goes to Fasoplast at night, after working hours, to speak to the person who she thinks can solve the it.

About the supplies; she precisely notes down what comes in to the shop and she keeps the receipts in a file. No accounts are made of what leaves the shop. If she sees that certain products are starting to run out, she orders new supplies by phone.

I am told later by Mr. Berjonneau that before Mrs. Compaoré worked in the shop, the revenues were very low and the shop was constantly out of supplies. The previous shop keeper was fired, because Mr. Berjonneau suspected the lady of theft. This couldn't be proved however, because as said earlier, no one keeps track of what is sold in the shop. Now with Mrs. Compaoré in the shop, business is going much better.

On the windows of the shop is still written: Merry Christmas and a happy 2000.

On the wall next to the cash register is a poster with written down on it the kind of products sold in the shop: agricultural, food, indigenous craft, industrial, house keeping and commercial products.

There is a client in the shop who asked for 23 plastic bags. When she's put them on the counter she says: "Give me the money." When the client start counting the bags, she interrupts him and says; "Here's ten, here's ten and here's another three, that makes 23". The client doesn't (dare?) continue counting.

Every two days Mrs. Compaoré goes to the bank with the money earned in the shop to put in on an account. She gives one receipt of the bank to the *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières*, and she keeps one for herself. The bank is only open during the opening hours of the shop. She used to close the shop in order to go to the bank, which caused a stop in revenue, but since recently Mr. Berjonneau comes to the shop when she goes to the bank, and runs the shop while she's away.

The lady is very peculiar. She says to a customer: ‘He (the shop assistant) is counting for that customer now, after that he will help you (using ‘tu’, informal form), do you understand that?’

Mrs. Compaoré speaks Morée, Djoula, French and English. This way she can speak to the different customers in their own language.

Day 4, Friday June 2

This day I spend in Mr. So’s office, who is the *DAF, Directeur des affaires Administratives et Financières*. I am being announced by his secretary, who calls him to say I have arrived.

Mr. So has his office in the building where the *DG/DR* also has his office if he is at Fasoplast. The office is slightly bigger and more luxurious than the two I have seen earlier. He has a computer, which has access to the internet. Mr. So tells me that Fasoplast also has an e-mail address.

He phones up his secretary and says: ‘You have to eau Mr. ..’, and then hangs up.

The *Directeur des affaires Administratives et Personelles (DAP)*, comes into the office, hands over a paper sheet, Mr. So signs it, and the *DAP* leaves again. Nothing is said on either side.

Mr. So is talking to someone on the phone. His secretary comes in and says there is someone else on the phone who also wants to talk to him. He tells the person he is on the phone with now, that he will call back and hangs up straight away to answer the other phone call.

Mr. So’s telephone calls are extremely short and extremely to the point. No words are wasted.

Mr. So has shelves with impressive looking files. They seem well arranged, every file for a different subject, written on the back. Where he leaves the files in case they don’t fit on the shelves any longer I do not know.

Almost all his phone calls are external. The office is very quiet, he is mostly by himself.

When someone comes in Mr. So's office, he knocks on the door first, except for his secretary.

Mr. So works at a pleasantly relaxed pace.

Mr. Berjonneau comes in the office (also without knocking), and he and Mr. So converse in a very pleasant way, no screaming and yelling this time, and no patronizing tone of voice.

There is a pile of about fifty letters to be signed by Mr. So.

Three workmen come into Mr. So's office. They seem relaxed. There seems to be a problem about the replacement of a technique worker (*technicien assimilé*). Mr. So says he doesn't know anything about it, but that Mr. Berjonneau should handle it. The workmen start laughing nervously when this name is mentioned. Mr. So calls Mr. Berjonneau about it. It is a case, the workmen say, that they have been trying to solve for quite some time now. The first time they came to see Mr. So about it was one year earlier. Mr. So says he doesn't remember this.

There seems to be a problem with a order list, the man who is responsible for the error has already 'confessed' and is sitting opposite Mr. So. When the man is finally talking about what had happened exactly, Mr. So receives a phone call from an important bank, and talks to the bank for a long time. When Mr. So is finally informed about the ins and outs of the affaire, he told the 'culprit' what should be done to set things straight. The way in which Mr. So did this, was the following: he spoke in the I-form (I have to do this, I have to do that), spelling out what steps the other man had to take. Sounds patronizing and over-dear, but happens all the time. Just means that the boss is a friendly guy (boss as father figure, Hofstede)

Mr. So hardly sees anyone during the day. Most people he has contact with is over the phone.

Mr. So has management books and books about finance on his book shelves, as well as an English-French and a French-English dictionary.

A letter needs to be sent of to the tax office. Mr. So is sending a Fasoplast employee down to the tax office to deliver the letter, he doesn't send it by mail (mail is reliable, but takes a few days). Before he lets the employee leave for the tax office, he calls to notify them of the arriving of the letter.

The computer is not being used. Mr. So writes everything by hand. For calculations he uses a small calculator, and fills out the figures in a self-made spreadsheet. No use of Excel spreadsheets or anything. When I finally see Mr. So using the computer for ten minutes, he works very slowly. He is writing a letter in Word, which his secretary has started up for him. It takes him a long time to find each letter on the keyboard.

Again I realize that people don't take 'coffee breaks', but just continue working throughout their working hours.

There is a total of 7 computers in Fasoplast. 4 for the accountant section, 3 for invoice section.

Day 5, Monday June 5

At Mr. So's office. There is power cut. Fasoplast has a generator that keeps the computers working for about 30 minutes. All the lights and also the entire factory stop working (and unfortunately also the airconditioning).

Few stationary articles. People have their own one pen. Typp-ex, staplers, even selo-tape, they don't have. They do have glue, the darlings.

People keep walking in and out of Mr. So's office to have papers signed.

Mr. So said that there was going to be a meeting this afternoon, but it hasn't happened.

Mr. So is from Senegal.

Mr. So does all the administration concerning all business with external companies. Internally, every director has his own administration. Previously, he also used to do

the personnel administration, but now there is a separate director for that. Everything that is being invoiced, comes here. Together with the bank they invest for their own productivity???? Fasoplast has shares in a sugar company in Banfora, an area in the south of Burkina Faso. Mr. So only has contact with the clients in case they don't pay and don't respond to reminder notices.

Everybody working at Fasoplast is always free to go where they want; if someone has a problem, he just goes to the person who he thinks can best solve it. This can at some times be quite inconvenient. If you are working or taking care of urgent matters it breaks your concentration if employees walk in and out of your office all the time to ask you questions and expect you to solve them straight away.

At Fasoplast a meeting between the directors is held every Monday, at 16h30. However, as Mr. So admits, this is not always the case. In case of an urgent matter, they have emergency meetings.

Within Fasoplast there doesn't really exist any organized form of internal communication for the non-directors.

Day Six, Tuesday June 6

Today I am the guest of Mr. Berjonneau. His office is the largest one in Fasoplast that I saw (I haven't been in the DG/DR's office). The air-conditioner is not functioning well here, so it is quite hot. His office is attached to the factory, only separated from it by a glass wall with a glass door in it, which leads directly into the factory hall. This means it is rather noisy in his office, for this glass wall is not at all sound proof to the noise of the machines. Many plastic items produced by Fasoplast are displayed on his desk. He doesn't have a computer.

He starts this working day by examining samples of recently produced plastic plates and cups.

When I walked in first this morning, Mr. Berjonneau thought it might be a good idea if I would have the small table that was standing next to his desk, to work at. The table would have to be cleared and moved though. For this, he called in his assistant, and shouts at him that he has to move a pile of papers from the table to his

desk. Then he shouts even louder to move another pile from the table to the desk. He then yells to his assistant that he has to put the table on the other side of the room. From my Western point of view, I am amazed that the assistant puts up with this treatment and doesn't quit his job right there and then. I realize however that there are probably two reasons for him not to do so. Firstly, it is difficult to find good jobs in Burkina Faso, so why would he give up this one. Secondly, people in Burkina Faso are used to getting orders. I am sure that the yelling and shouting is not very usual, but in a family situation, no matter how old you are, you do as your father tells you, without questioning why. With the paternalistic way of managing in Burkina Faso, the obedience you are expected to show towards your boss is not much unlike this obedience to a father.

Two *Chefs d'Equipe* come into Mr. Berjonneau's office. Mr. Berjonneau is unhappy with the performance of the two chefs. He yells a lot to them, doesn't give them an opportunity to answer and swears continually. He says that he wants the maximum of productivity within a minimum of time, but that they do the exact opposite. As an example for this, he tells them that a certain activity in the factory that they do would only have to take 31 seconds, but that it takes them 40 seconds. He makes a calculation of what that costs per hour. If they can't even do that, says Mr. Berjonneau, they might as well go elsewhere. He takes up a basin that comes from the machine that one of the two chefs is responsible for and shows him the ridges, which are, according to him, not just a few ridges, but a 'god damn bad of ridges'. He then takes a plastic cup he has once been given by a Dutch student and asks the chefs if they see any ridges in that Dutch cup. He says there aren't any, despite of the fact that they are made by millions a day, because the moulds that are used in The Netherlands are clean.

The shouting and swearing go on for over an hour. The Chefs are being laughed at, are told that they must have some disease, are over-shouted when they want to say something in their defence, in other words, they are verbally completely trampled down. A long silence follows the shouting session, which Mr. Berjonneau ends after a good minute by ordering them to leave his office at once. (Not encouraging people by complimenting them on what they do right, but by emphasizing what they do wrong)

After the two men have left, Mr. Berjonneau asks me what I am writing down. I tell him that I write down what I observe. He advises me not to observe, but to listen.

While all this was happening, Mr. Paré, the *Directeur Commercial*, visited the office, about the purchase of raw material in Abidjan, for which he had just received the confirmation. Mr. Berjonneau laughs, says: 'Ha, do you have any idea how expensive that is? What a rip-off you've let yourself be talked into', and with that completely undermines (from my Western point of view) Mr. Paré's authority, because the factory men are witnessing this.

A man wearing a very impressive snow-white traditional costume comes into the office. He appears to be a very good client of Fasoplast and seems to be on very friendly terms with Mr. Berjonneau. When the client has just arrived in Mr. Berjonneau's office, the telephone rings. He picks up the receiver, but continues talking to his client for about a minute. Only then does he talk into the phone.

After a very warm greeting between the two, Mr. Berjonneau suggests they should get to business. The man answers he's come to do a lot of business, to which they both laugh. They discuss a lot of different products, mainly sacks, and negotiate about the prices.

During the negotiations Mr. Berjonneau is phoned very regularly.

After this client has left, another client walks in. He and Mr. Berjonneau leave, and I am told to wait in the office because he will be back soon. Soon turns out to be one and a half hour later.

When Mr. Berjonneau needs his assistant, who has his desk in the room next to Mr. Berjonneau's office, he shouts out his name really loudly.

Mr. Berjonneau makes a lot of internal phone calls, usually to ask for an explanation about papers he is reading.

A *Chef d'Equipe* comes into the office to inform Mr. Berjonneau about an error that has occurred in the production of plastic cups. His team had produced 1000 cups for a certain client, but because of a gram left in the machine, these cups were damaged in a way that causes them to snap when they are used. The 1000 cups have become useless and need to be thrown away. The client, who has already been informed about this, has decided to buy his cups from a company in Ghana. The error has occurred because the machine hadn't been checked before using it. According to Mr. Berjonneau this has happened because the *Chef d'Equipe* isn't

interested. Apparently 'he couldn't care less if a bad succeeds or fails.' A form needs to be filled out for the throwing away of the damaged cups.

Despite of the fact that Mr. Berjonneau always shouts to everyone (not only to his subordinates), it seems people still don't hesitate to walk into his office.

A factory worker is in Mr. Berjonneau's office. When Mr. Berjonneau's mobile phone rings, the factory worker picks it up, takes it out of the cover, folds down the speech device, presses yes and hands over the phone to Mr. Berjonneau. All this time Mr. Berjonneau hadn't even looked at his ringing phone, obviously aware from the corner of his eye, that the factory worker was going to hand it to him. Very submissive behavior, in my opinion.

Mr. Berjonneau makes a phone call to a supplier of raw material, to make a command of ten tons of this material. During the phone call, prices are negotiated, while the factory worker is still sitting in Mr. Berjonneau's office; every sort of business is discussed with whoever being present. When the supplier lets Mr. Berjonneau know, that it might take a while before he receives his goods, Mr. Berjonneau starts yelling and swearing to him as well (so he doesn't only do this towards his own colleagues and subordinates). (I wonder how he would act if he would work in Europe). He demands to speak to the boss of the person he is talking with.

Mr. Paré comes in the office to ask if he can borrow Mr. Berjonneau's car. That is no problem, Mr. Berjonneau hands him over the keys straight away. He just warns that the driver is not allowed to touch the radio.

The following needs to be said; I have seen many people in Burkina Faso speak in a very demanding way. The people who are being talked to in this manner, seem to interpret or deal with this kind of tone completely differently then if a person from The Netherlands would be talked to in this fashion.

People who talk in a demanding way, seem to enjoy doing so, and can 'demand' in a not necessarily very nasty way.

People who are being talked to in a demanding way, seem to know that a lot of it is just for show and they don't take it personally.

Mr. Berjonneau goes to the shop and invites me to join him. We leave in Mr. So's car, for Mr. Paré had borrowed Mr. Berjonneau's car earlier. When we walk over to Mr. So's car, he yells for his assistant. When the assistant arrives, Mr. Berjonneau doesn't say anything but points at a fumbled up sheet of paper that lays on the ground and then looks at his assistant while raising his eyebrows. The assistant picks it up to throw it away, nothing is said.

During the trip he tells me that during the 14 years he has lived in Ouagadougou now, he worked for Fasoplast, and that he's lived in Africa ever since he graduated from college.

According to him one shouldn't compare Africa to Europe, but to other third world countries like there are in Asia. He says there is a huge difference in productivity between African and Asian nations. He doesn't agree with people from France when they claim Africa is interesting for business because of cheap labour, because in Asia labour is much cheaper. People there are also much harder workers, so actually he doesn't see why Western companies would still invest in Africa. Africans, he says, are everything but hard workers. The reason for which he lives in Africa is because he likes the lifestyle very much. He teaches me wise lessons about living in Africa: you should never get angry here. When you get angry, you can't achieve anything. If you smile and speak friendly to people, they will do anything for you (*says he!?!?!?!?*)

He explains that the shop used to have an annual turnover of 11 million FCFA, but now that Mrs. Compaoré runs the shop, this has increased to 18 million. The increase in turnover isn't due to higher sales, but to less theft, he says. According to him theft is possible, because they don't have the technology to keep track of sales. Bar codes would be useful, but apparently that would be an investment that couldn't even be made profitable for very successful car sellers. They make an inventory of the shop on a monthly basis and from this they derive how much money they should have received. The sold products are not registered individually.

When we get back to Mr. Berjonneau's office, he works on some documents, a few people walk in and out of the office to ask questions, there are a few phone calls.

Day 7, Wednesday June 7

Mr. Berjonneau and I talked for one hour about Fasoplast and its history. Some of the notes about Fasoplast itself and all the notes on the history of it, I will have to convert into a chapter, the rest of the notes follow here under:

The *Directeur d'Exploitation*, Mr. Berjonneau, mainly deals with major or foreign clients. The *Directeur Commercial*, Mr. Paré, is responsible for the smaller customers and is dependent on the *DE*, because the latter is also responsible for the production. The *DE* needs to know everything that happens within Fasoplast.

Mr. Berjorneau and Mr. Paré work with a carnet de commande which contains the planning. Mr. Paré visits all the clients and brings in several commands. All commands are put beside each other and this is how the production is planned. Making the planning is apparently really difficult. The *Directeur Commercial* for example, would say to a client that they will deliver certain products the next day, while he knows this is impossible because Fasoplast simply doesn't have these products ready.

If there are minor problems in the factory, the *Directeur d'Exploitation* isn't immediately called, but rather the first person who can solve the problem.

Mr. Berjoimeau and Mr. Paré make an estimation of the production based on previous years. For example, they know how many kilo's of cotton Sofitex is going to produce, so therefore they know how many bags they will be needing.

The strength of Fasoplast is that they know what their clients do, they know the markets and with this information they can make predictions for investments. They always use money from the bank from investments, never their own. They tried to invest with their own money once, in 1987, but that turned into a catastrophe.

Production is interesting for Fasoplast, the *negoce* only has small margins.

When the annual turnover is low, it means that the prices on the market have dropped. The production is always good and maximum, so that can never be a reason.

50% of the production goes straight to Sofitex, so one client is good for half the production.

On certain markets they compete with very low prices. They have to do this because Nigeria and Ghana (neighboring countries) also produce plastic, but their currency is worth nothing, so their prices are low.

He also tells me (as one whity to another), that the problems with Africans is that they don't want to have responsibilities. "Everybody wants to be a chef, but nobody wants to have responsibilities. Also regarding to technology, Africans are disastrous. You can explain them this minute, the next minute they will have forgotten. They simply don't understand. For example, take the *Directeur Commercial* (Mr. Paré). He is 36 now, and has worked in Fasoplast for eight years, but he still can't plan a production of yogurt cups. He has talked with the client himself, and the client has told him how he wants the cups and he agreed! But the machine can't make the cups that size, which he knows, but he just says something about modifying the machine. This is not possible!! The machine can't be modified that way!!" Mr. Berjonneau continues by saying that Africans are highly impractical. "They can talk nicely, reason a little bit, they know what the other wants to hear and in theory they are not crazy, but in practice they are clumsy and refuse every responsibility."

A *Chef d'Equipe* walks into the office with production papers that he wants to have signed. Mr. Berjonneau gets angry and says that he can't be expected to do 36 things at one time. When the Chef argues that it is important, Mr. Berjonneau lets him know that he must be crazy, walking into the office like that and sitting himself down, without permission, and expecting him to sign some papers. Mr. Berjonneau sends him away and goes back to the papers he was working on earlier.

When I first got here, I wondered how people could work without having a computer. Now I wonder what they could possibly do with it if they would have one installed.

A (shabby looking) client walks in. Mr. Berjonneau greets him, and continues working on his papers. The man sits down and stares at the ceiling. A second client comes in, and he also sets himself down and waits. When Mr. Berjonneau finishes reading his documents, he helps first the client who came in second. I have witnessed this many times before, in shops or other offices. First in, last out.

Rest of the day a lot of short phone calls, visits of clients, employees of Fasoplast with quick questions, more shouting and swearing.

Day 8, Thursday June 8

Today I am guest of Mr. Sance, the *Chef d'Usine*. We spend the whole day in the factory. In the morning we make a tour in the factory, he introduces me to some of the workers, and he explains all the machines, what they make, and what different steps the production processes consist of.

Day 9, Friday June 9

Today I spend the day walking around in Fasoplast, going to all the different people I have worked with to thank them. A lot of chatting with them, but also with people whom I haven't worked with, but that were curious about what I had been doing in their company for two weeks and who wanted to talk to me.