



Navigating informal business institutions in Africa: Expatriates' response to the 'magendo' phenomenon in Uganda

 Matthias Sebuttemba Mulumba ^{(a)*}  Ahmad Walugembe ^(b)



^(a)Dr. Lecturer International Business and trade, Makerere University Business School. Plot 21 A, New Portbell Road, P.O.Box 1337 Kampala Uganda

^(b)Dr. Senior Lecturer marketing and media studies, Makerere University Business School. Plot 21 A, New Portbell Road, P.O.Box 1337 Kampala Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how expatriates deal with host country informal business practices that differ from their home country institutional frameworks. We note that expatriate business people working in emerging markets of Africa often contend with corrupt business practices rooted in local informal institutions and the lack of strong formal institutions regulating business practices. We also observe that while local people take informal institutions such as magendo, as a way of life and adjust to them, expatriates being 'outsiders' respond in different ways. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design that involved in-depth interview of a small sample of expatriates operating in Uganda. For data analysis, NVivo 11 was used to search for and retrieve chunks of labelled data. The key findings indicate that expatriates from countries with strong formal institutions experience the most frustrations and often reject informal business practices. On the other hand, expatriates from countries with weak institutions are more pragmatic and easily adapt to existing practices in the new environments. Multinationals however, often reject informal business practices due to their market power and strict codes of conduct. The study recommends that small-medium category expatriates targeting Africa need to align with influential local people so as to navigate business informalities that characterise informal business environments.

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Introduction

Globalization continues to motivate business people to move and work in business environments other than their home countries. The home countries of expatriates may have different social, political, legal, economic and cultural institutions than what they experience in the host country where the business environment may be guided by different formal and informal institutions to their own. Expatriate businesspeople in emerging markets with weak formal institutions are often confronted by informal practices that may include corrupt business practices that affect their operations (Garcia-Bolivar, 2006).

Both formal and informal institutions have a big impact on the way business is practiced and how effective business operations may be implemented in different economic, social and cultural contexts. By examining informal institutions, this study and paper builds a better understanding of how they influence business behaviour through social capital (*networks and informal relationships*) and it provides an opportunity to understand them through business lenses.

Previous research on institutions, culture and business has been largely limited to North America, Europe, The Middle East and Asia (Arrindell, 2003; G. H. Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001; Vance & McNulty, 2014; Welsh & Raven, 2006). Similarly, research into cross-cultural experiences of expatriates has focused on the same regions (Batonda & Perry, 2003; Delios & Bjorkman, 2000; Harzing, Pudelko, & Sebastian Reiche, 2016; Lehmann, 2014; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2016). This paper notes, however that whereas

* Corresponding author. ORCID ID: 0009-0001-3383-7857

there is an increasing literature on the political and economic context on issues of the African continent (Hufbauer, Rutschmann, Serrate, Vermeil de Conchard, & Facon, 2013; Okpara, 2016), there is little research into informal institutions and expatriates' experience in African countries. Nevertheless, with Africa's role in the global economy rapidly changing, there is need to improve understanding of how informal institutions may affect business operations in Africa (George, 2015). This study and paper therefore focused on an informal institution called *magendo*. *Magendo* means corruption in an East African language, Swahili. Literally, doing *magendo* means transacting business illegally, unlawfully or without a licence (Mertz et al., 1998). *Magendo* is an informal institution predominating social, economic and political landscapes within East Africa in general and Uganda in particular (Lynch, 2011; Ruzindana, 1997; Sedigh & Ruzindana, 1999).

The research questions that guided this study were meant to obtain retrospective and real time accounts of expatriates working under different institutional frameworks than the ones from their countries of origin. The opening questions focused on i- respondents' business experience in Uganda, ii-Comparison of a respondent's home country context to that of Uganda. Another set of questions compared regulatory environments of Uganda to the countries of origin of the expatriates. Other questions underlined normative issues in Uganda, plus questions that addressed cultural cognitive perspectives in the study environment. Finally, there were specific questions on the informal institution called *magendo*.

The overarching research question that guided the study was "How do expatriate business people perceive and deal with corrupt business practices in Uganda?" The study therefore explored the experience of expatriate business people operating in an African emerging market, Uganda; and how they dealt with institutional contradictions, paradoxes and tensions in this business environment.

Literature Review

Doing business in emerging markets is complex not least because of informal cultures and institutions that have evolved due to fragile formal institutions which embed corrupt business practices. In these countries, business practices influenced by local institutions do not conform to generally acceptable standard practices (Herdman, Fox-Rushby, & Badia, 1998). Expatriate business people operating in these countries must however find a response to these institutions if they are to successfully pursue their business interests. To understand and analyse institutions in the study environment, this study adopted Hodgson's (2006) definition of institutions as 'durable systems of established and embedded social rules that structure social interaction' (Hodgson, 2006, p. 16).

An expatriate is any person living in a different country from where he or she is a citizen-*ex* (out of) *patria* (fatherland) (Pine, 2000). In a business context, an expatriate may be described as an individual operating in a country other than his or her country of citizenship, temporarily or for an extended period. International business operators for a number of reasons use expatriates as agents of socialization – to transfer value beliefs; as network builders – to foster interpersonal linkages; as boundary spanners – to gather host country information; as language nodes – to bridge language barriers; and to transfer competence and knowledge-skills to local staff (Dowling, 2008; Horak & Yang, 2016). In this regard, intercultural awareness becomes a key component of preparing expatriate business people before moving to other countries, to help them cope with the unfamiliar and unexpected business practices of the host country. Prior knowledge and preparation may foster an appreciation of the host country's institutions so that the expatriates can respond accordingly; or at least develop appropriate coping behaviour patterns to deal with the formal and informal institutions encountered in the host countries (Dowling, 2008).

Institutional differences between home and host countries may lead to varied responses and behaviour by expatriate business people working in these countries. Such differences may lead to tensions due to the contradictions between the expatriates' home country institutions and the institutions in the host country. Discussing institutional differences that exist between countries, Grimstad (2011) notes that institutions that are present in Anglo-Saxon cultures are very different from those in Northern Europe and Nordic cultures; reflecting in part informal institutions (*i.e. trust regimes, degree of consensus and traditions*) and in part formal institutions (*i.e. constitutions, educational systems and unions*). She further contends that when faced with serious environmental issues, it is expected that the way or mode and means a business, business cluster or society respond may differ according to the country's formal and informal institutions (Grimstad, 2011). She thus affirms that expatriates who experience institutional contradictions between home country and host country business practices may respond in different ways to cope with these contradictions.

This paper suggests that various emerging markets, such as those in Africa, have substantial informal economy sectors where informal institutions influence business practices (Tonoyan, Strohmeier, Habib, & Perlitz, 2010). In an informal economy for example, commercial activities are unregulated or insufficiently regulated by the state and have a number of negative implications and practices (Garcia-Bolivar, 2006). Whereas a formal economy is characterised by predictable legislation, governance and sense of control (Guha-Khasnabis & Ostrom, 2006), an informal economy is characterised by sale of goods and services that often go unregistered or hidden from the state to avoid payment of taxes (Chen, 2012). Also, in an informal business environment, people circumvent bureaucratic decision-making procedures and seek to influence allocation of state contracts and public procurement. Business operators may, in addition, use influential government contacts to advance own beneficial business opportunities; or to obtain valuable market information and business transactions (Ledeneva, 2008). Often, the degree of informality in emerging markets widens due to governments' failure to recognise the need to develop formal regulatory institutions and implement them to regulate business activities (Godfrey, 2011).

Several studies have explored how informal institutions cognisant to specific cultures or countries, influence business behaviour. Such informal institutions include *guanxi* in China, *blat* in Russia, *jajmani* in India and *wasta* in Arab countries (Drew & Kriz, 2012). As the following discussions posit, these informal institutions have a substantial influence on business operations in their countries.

Guanxi is a Chinese informal institution that is defined as a relationship that can exist between people (Chang, 2012). It is rooted in the relatively continual, homogenous culture of the Chinese (Hofstede, 2007). Wong (1998) observes that it underlines friendship with implications of a continual exchange of favours. *Guanxi* is associated with both positive and negative connotations and it is viewed as one that fuels China's corruption and informal transactions (Wong, 1998). Its proponents, including Wong (1998) argue nevertheless, that this informal institution is important in supporting social connections and social networks which characterise conduct of business in China.

Blat on the other hand is an informal institution that uses personal networks to obtain goods and services in short supply (Ledeneva, 2000). This institution evolved during periods of economic challenges of providing and distributing basic necessities of life such as food, jobs and living space in the former USSR. *Blat* underlines distributive unfairness (Bempechat, Ronfard, Li, Mirny, & Holloway, 2013), whereby decisions are taken not on the basis of institutionalised rule but on basis of personal relationships and traditional forms of authority in Russia.

Jajmani is yet another informal institution that is associated with the Hindu caste practices of economic particularism (Gold & Guthrie, 2002; Gould, 1986) in India. This informal institution is based on social segmentations, focusing on professional groups and the influence of particular trades in India (Schütte & Kreuzmann, 2015). Under this informal institution for example, one gets a job according to one's family speciality or background; or one joins a profession based on the known family specialisation.

Similarly, *wasta* is an informal institution that facilitates social networks among Middle Eastern Arabs (Hofstede, 2001). Families in Arab collectivist societies are regarded as being centrally important, the main unit and backbone of society and in these countries, *wasta* is very important in that it facilitates social networks based on strong family connections (Hofstede, 2001). *Wasta*, like the other informal institutions, has business implications for expatriates who work in the Middle East or with Arabs.

Prior studies illustrate that cross-cultural experiences of expatriates have been fairly documented for N. America, Europe and Asia (Delious & Bjorkman, 2000; Lehman, 2014; Vijayakumar & Cunningham, 2016); but little or no empirical research has been documented on the African experience (George, 2015). This study therefore presents and discusses *magendo* as an informal institution that influences the conduct of business in the study environment. The authors note that prior to this study there was lack of empirical research into what *magendo* is, and even less on its influence on foreign business activities. The scientific study of *magendo* is therefore an addition to the broader spectrum of analysing informal institutions including *guanxi*, *blat*, *janmani*, *wasta* and others. The unique contribution of this study is that it examines *magendo* through the lived experiences of expatriates in order to better appreciate its impacts on their businesses and possible choices they make when they face it.

***Magendo* – an informal institution in Uganda and Eastern Africa**

Magendo is an informal institution that embeds illegal dealings at both government and private levels whereby in order to have something done, one has to influence the process or give an extra incentive to expedite or conclude a transaction (Ruzindana, Langseth, & Gakwandi, 1998). Doing *magendo* connotes transacting business illegally or unlawfully (Mertz, Njogu, & Gooding, 1998). In Uganda, *magendo* emerged during the early 1970s because of shortages of goods and poor services due to a decline in this country's formal economy. This was a consequence of the Government's expulsion of Asians (principally Indians) who dominated Uganda's commercial sector (Southall, 1980). Even though deemed illegal, doing *magendo* originally assisted ordinary people to survive and access scarce goods and services.

Wekesa (2010) observes that *magendo* has its origins from the proliferation of informal activities at the Kenya-Uganda cross border, starting in the early 1970s. He contends that although *magendo* activities manifested in different forms and were known by different names, their main characterisation was that they were not part of these countries' national accounts. Like other informal institutions, *magendo* operates outside the official national economies (Wekesa, 2010). The existence of *magendo* economic activities at the time and its categorisation reflects, therefore, the ordinary people's struggle to survive outside the formal state defined networks. Wekesa (2010) also notes that scarcity and shortage of essential goods during that time created both high demand and high profits; thus making it hard to eradicate *magendo*.

The evolving trends of *magendo*

Colonisation of Africa has largely been accused of causing local social disruptions, which in turn provide fertile ground for informal institutions such as *magendo* (Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015). It is worth noting, however, that most post-independence African leaders, who took over from colonial rulers, did not establish credible formal institutions to reduce previous social/economic disruptions on the Continent. Instead across most of Africa, post-independence leaders fuelled the negative social or economic practices through mismanagement on one hand or by way of ill-conceived political-economic *experimentalism* on the other; for example *Ujamaa* (socialism) in Tanzania; *Humanism* in Zambia; *African marxism* in Ethiopia plus a combination of *nationalisation and Africanisation* in other parts of Africa. During the late 1980s and early 1990s Uganda embraced *liberalisation* and *de-regulation* economic experiments which resulted in various negative social or economic consequences. What happened in Uganda following

her economic adventurism opened a new dimension of *magendo* in this country. Overall, the social, political and economic misadventures in Africa have led to various kinds of stagnation from which several African countries are struggling to get out of.

In the case of Uganda where *magendo* took root more than fifty years ago, this informal institution has persisted despite the fact that political circumstances have since changed and improved (Flanary & Watt, 1999). Supporting this argument, Decker (2010) notes that *magendo* has irreversibly become a way of life or 'a culture' in Uganda. Southall (1980) further observes that with changing economic and political circumstances, *magendo* has evolved and transformed into new forms of informalities that affect business operators with a much wider reach than solving immediate scarcity of goods and services. Today, new forms of *magendo* include social, economic and political illegalities such as buying or influencing votes, inflating or deflating of tax dues plus buying or influencing tenders. Broadly speaking, *magendo* today not only influences business practices but is also explained in terms of illegalities such as buying examination results for students, buying or influencing promotions within security services or at the places of work, organising fake export schemes, land grabbing, extortion, creating ghost workers in public service, buying justice or stealing of public money by unscrupulous Public Officials; plus many other illegalities (Goodfellow & Titeca, 2012).

Besides influencing the conduct of business, *magendo* relentlessly continues to metamorphose into unscrupulous social, economic and political illegalities that include, but not limited to dishonest dealings; nepotism; lack of integrity; acquiring illegal wealth; buying well-paid jobs; buying legal justice or buying good school placements (Bukuluki, 2013). This informal institution can therefore be categorised as an informal institution of unscrupulousness and survival; rooted in informal practices that exist in place of formal institutions and procedures (Annis, Heidenheimer, Johnston, & Le Vine, 1990; Sedigh & Ruzindana, 1999). Proponents of *magendo* argue however, that it is supportive of Uganda's upcoming middle class (Stear, 1984).

Informal institutions' influence on corrupt business practices

Informal institutions may influence and inform various corrupt practices (Dias & Alves, 2008) and are often depicted as negative phenomena that promote corrupt business practices (Ross, 2002). There is however a growing recognition that informal institutions may influence business behaviour in a positive way; for example when there are economic or political circumstances that make corrupt behaviour a necessary part of a survival strategy (Browne, 2004; Rakowski, 1994).

According to the institutionalist approach, the problem of corruption is largely a consequence of the absence of strong formal institutions, which is then filled by informal institutions such as *magendo* that may provide incentives or disincentives for people to behave negatively (Kimemia, 2018). Kimemia (2018) observes further that if institutions were effective, they would provide structure, economic and political incentives that lead to good public governance. He also contends that strong institutions deter corrupt practices and punish those caught engaging in corruption. Yeboah (2016) and Dias & Alves (2016) concur that corruption is most prevalent where there are forms of institutional weaknesses such as political instability, bureaucratic red tape, and political interference in governance issues plus weak legislative and judicial systems. In addition, political and bureaucratic authorities in emerging markets often lack the power, will and/or resources to enact tough legislation against illegalities and sometimes they ignore enforcing existing laws.

Kimemia (2018) also observes that under weak institutions, firms or business people have little or no fear of being caught or punished for engaging in illegalities or corrupt practices. There is also recognition in countries that lack strong institutions that if they are caught, chances of escaping prosecution are high, due to available opportunities to pay bribes to the police or the judiciary. While discussing the African environment, Kimemia (2018) highlights that due to weak political or economic institutions, several African countries experience high levels of corrupt business practices. As a consequence, it has been observed that business conduct in Africa faces numerous huddles which the operators must continuously navigate.

Research & Methodology

To conduct this study, *qualitative research* methods were adopted. By so doing, the researcher was able to examine *magendo* and its impacts based on the perceptions of the interviewees. The qualitative methods focused on depth rather than quantity. The study involved in-depth interview of a small sample rather than an experimental or manipulated setting. This approach was suitable for exploratory research questions that included explanation and understanding of the respondents' perceptions and behaviour; as there was lack of prior empirical research (Marshall, 2014). It was assumed that the study would be able to benefit from an outsider's in-depth and interpreted understanding of the contemporary business environment of Uganda.

In order to understand the changing business environment of Uganda from an outsider's perspective, the study adopted a *constructivist* paradigm that explores a social phenomenon that evolves over time. The goal of a constructivist research is to rely, as much as possible, on the participant's views of the situation being investigated. In support of this worldview, Neuman (2002) argues that a constructivist paradigm allows interviewees to develop subjective meaning of their experiences. In the case of the study environment, this brought about proper understanding of what may have influenced or informed the expatriates' actions while operating under an informal institution, *magendo*. Furthermore, a constructivist approach allowed focusing on a specific context (*Uganda*) and enabled exploration of the processes of interaction among expatriate business people and local officials in the study environment (Neuman, 2002).

Since the purpose of the study was to draw on the lived experiences of expatriate business people, to develop an understanding of how they perceive and deal with corrupt business practices in the study environment, a *phenomenological research design* was adopted. The phenomenological approach involved interacting with participants using their own frames of reference and on their own terms; to develop an understanding of their perceptions and actions in regard to the phenomenon (*magendo*) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In essence, the primary purpose of the study was to draw on the lived experiences of the expatriates so as to appreciate how they perceived and dealt with the *magendo* phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). The design allowed the understanding of how contradicting institutions between the host and home countries of the expatriates influenced their subsequent behaviour.

The study adopted *purposive sampling* which is criterion-based. As Barbour (2001) notes, purposive sampling offers a degree of control, and allows a comparison between the views and experiences of participants. Prospective respondents were sourced from up-to-date publicly available information from the Uganda Investment Authority's (UIA). From the list of registered expatriate business people working in Uganda, thirty prospective respondents were *purposively selected* in order to obtain a diverse sample, based on criteria such as; country of origin, length of stay in Uganda; business ownership, type and size. Once the individual expatriate had been identified he/she was approached through a personal letter inviting him/her to be part of the study. Each of the respondents was provided with an information statement about the project, what his/her rights were and how his/her information would be anonymised and kept confidential.

Data collection involved semi-structured open-ended questions following loosely an interview guide developed to examine the respondents' perceptions of institutional contradictions between Uganda's business environment and that of their home countries. The interview guide included the following main sections; (i) respondent's business experience in Uganda (ii), comparison of respondent's home country context to that of Uganda; (iii) perceptions and comparison of the regulatory environments of the host country Uganda to the countries of origin of the expatriates; (iv) perceptions and comparisons of underlying normative difference between ones' home country and Uganda; (v) perceptions and comparisons of culture-cognitive differences between ones' home country and Uganda; (vi) expatriates perceptions of the *magendo* phenomenon and how they navigated the contradictions they faced in this business environment and (vii) a general open-ended question aimed at extracting additional information that may have been missed during the main interview. The semi-structured procedure while following an interview guide, also provided room to interject with prompts in order to broaden the discussions, to seek clarity or to widen the scope of the narrative in order to better understand what was happening in the study environment. This procedure conformed to an exploratory qualitative inquiry as espoused by Ng & Hase (2008).

For data analysis, computer software *NVivo 11* was used as analytical support on the research issues defined for the study (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). The software assisted primarily in organising data (Tesch, 2013). Data analysis included breaking down, examining, comparing and categorising data through coding and pattern-recognition; to identify emerging themes from the interviewees' responses (Bryman, 2015).

The authors note that there were some *limitations* associated with this study. Some of the themes of this study, for example informal and corrupt business practices are socially, economically and politically sensitive areas and are not ideal for open discussion. Corrupt business practices in general and *magendo* in particular are usually looked at as anti-social practices. Consequently, inviting people to discuss *magendo*-related issues was challenging as it touched on a number of sensitive social, political and economic perspectives many people prefer to not discuss. During interviews for example, it was noted that many respondents were not willing or were uncomfortable to reveal much about their illegal business practices or experiences. When engaged, some respondents remained guarded and unwilling to discuss issues such as illegal business practices that they may have embraced in the course of doing business in the study environment or elsewhere. In addition, some respondents answered some questions with a single word/sentence response-for example 'yes' 'no' or 'maybe'. This resulted in generating minimal information and sometimes, unsustainable discourse. In order to minimise such challenges, each and every respondent was given a written guarantee on anonymity. In regard to evasive responses by respondents, the researcher employed probing approaches requesting for further explanation, elucidation or shedding more light on a particular issue.

In regard to the limitations of the study context, we recommend further studies to be carried out in other contexts; using different methods and different units of analysis in order to generate other perspectives on *magendo*.

Findings

Table 1 provides an overview of the respondents' (*codenamed "R"*) attributes anonymising their identity through using codenames. The study obtained twenty-five interviewees sourced from up to date publicly available information from the Uganda Investment Authority's (UIA) website. The interviewees originated from eleven different countries i.e. India (8), Kenya (4), South Africa (3), UK (2), China (2), Scotland (1), Nigeria (1), Kashmir (1), Israel (1), Germany (1) and Egypt (1). To further ensure anonymity, the interviewee's nationalities were omitted in table 1 and instead a region of origin was adopted.

Table 1: Attributes of interview respondents

Code name	Region of origin	Gender	Age range	Length of stay in Uganda	Area of business	Size of business (Ug. standards)
R1	Europe	F	40s	13yrs	Nutritionist	Small
R2	Africa	M	40s	09yrs	Insurance	Big
R3	Africa	M	50s	01yr	Aviation	Medium
R4	Asia/Middle East	M	40s	03yrs	Food processor	Medium
R5	Asia	M	30s	10yrs	Forex/Finance	Small
R6	Asia	M	60s	36yrs	Manufacturing	Medium
R7	Europe	M	60s	20yrs	IT	Small
R8	Europe	M	60s	30yrs	Media	Medium
R9	Asia	M	40s	02yrs	Petroleum products	Medium
R10	Asia	M	40s	15yrs	Forex/Finance	Medium
R11	Europe	M	60s	30yrs	Health	Medium
R12	Asia	M	50s	05yrs	Import trade	Big
R13	Africa	M	50s	15yrs	Private Security	Big
R14	Africa	M	20s	07yrs	Education	Small
R15	Asia	M	40s	21yrs	Fabrication	Small
R16	Asia	M	30s	02yrs	Manufacturing	Medium
R17	Asia	F	50s	27yrs	Hotel	Small
R18	Africa	M	50s	08yrs	Insurance	Big
R19	Africa	M	40s	05yrs	Private Security	Big
R20	Asia	M	50s	03yrs	Banking/finance	Big
R21	Africa	M	30s	09yrs	Petroleum	Big
R22	Africa	M	40s	05yrs	Export/import	Medium
R23	Asia	M	50s	40yrs	Medical retail	Medium
R24	Africa	M	50s	03yrs	Banking/finance	Big
R25	Asia	F	40s	03yrs	Agro farming/export	Big

Source: Generated for this study.

The study aimed to generate an understanding of how expatriates respond to and navigate paradoxes and contradictions in one of Africa’s business environment characterised by an informal institution *magendo*. The findings from the study indicated that expatriates had varying degrees of knowledge about *magendo* as an informal institution that influenced business practice in Uganda and the neighbouring Eastern African countries-see table 2. It was also established that expatriates who had the longest time of stay in Uganda, (notably Africans and Asians, most especially those who operated big businesses) were fairly familiar with the *magendo* phenomenon; indicating that this is an informal institution that is fairly well known in Uganda’s business environment. Despite the fact that some interviewees lacked basic knowledge about *magendo*, majority of the expatriates interviewed had been exposed to *magendo-like* corrupt business practices.

Table 2: Summary of discussed concepts

Concept	Frequency	Transcript references
Business environment	23	R1,R2,R3,R4,R5,R6,R7,R8,R9,R10,R13, R14, R15, R16, R17, R18, R19, R20, R21, R22,R23,R24, R25
Policy issues	18	R1,R2,R3,R4,R5,R6, R7,R8,R14,R15,R16,R18,R19,R20,R22,R23,R24,R25
Standards	17	R1,R2,R3,R4, R7,R8,R13,R14,R15,R17,R19,R20,R21,R22,R23, R24,R25
Corruption	14	R1,R2,R4,R8,R10,R13,R17,R18,R19,R20,R22,R24,R25
Ethics	14	R1,R3,R4,R7,R8,R10,R13,R17,R19,R21,R22,R23,R24,R25
Magendo	13	R2,R5,R6,R8,R10,R12,R14,R15,R18,R19,R21,R23,R24
Economic issues	13	R2,R4,R5,R6,R8,R9,R10,R13,R17,R18,R20,R24,R25
Bribery	10	R2,R4,R7,R8,R14,R17,R18,R20,R21,R23
Social issues	10	R1,R3,R4,R5,R6,R7,R15,R20,R22,R24
Regulatory issues	08	R2,R3,R8,R14,R18,,R20,R22, R24
Integrity	08	R1,R3,R13,R17,R18,R19,R22,R24
Culture	06	R2,R7,R17,R22,R23,R25
Company codes	06	R18,R19,R20,R21,R22,R24
Fraud	05	R2,R14,R17,R19,R24
Networks	05	R1,RE,R6,R7,R22
Relationships	03	R7,R19,R22
Power	03	R8,R13,R23
Trust	03	R1,R17,R21

Source: Generated for this study

The findings of the study were therefore categorised according to how expatriates working in Uganda experienced contradictions based on Country context, regulatory, normative and culture-cognitive contradictions. The expatriates' statements, as expressed in the interviews, were coded and categorised; resulting in distinct themes or modes of responses as described in the following sub-sections or sub-themes.

Expatriates' responses to and navigation of context contradictions

Faced with contextual contradictions, expatriates adopted various measures in order to survive in the *magendo*-influenced business environment of Uganda. Socialisation is one measure adopted, as attested to by respondent(R) number 22: i.e. R22 who stated that, despite being a foreigner in Uganda, he had come to identify himself with Ugandans; and in his narratives, he referred to Ugandans as 'his brothers'. With a perceived relational mindset, this respondent appreciated the importance of personal attachment with the local people, as was captured in one of his statements: '*we have to negotiate, like brothers; we have to find our way out*'.

Expatriates' responses to and navigation of regulative contradictions

Faced with regulative contradictions, interviewees discussed a number of ways to navigate regulative business hurdles in Uganda. Strict adherence to laid-down rules was suggested as a good pathway to respond to regulative contradictions. In situations of uncertainty, or in the face of weak business standards, respondents suggested strict adherence to the rules in place, as Respondent 2 once stated during the interview: '*there may be bad standards or weak ones; however these have to be strictly adhered to, to ensure orderliness in the conduct of businesses*'. This respondent worked for one of the big organisations that have a global outreach.

Regulative contradiction was also discussed in terms of adhering to a specific code of business ethics. This social value attracted several levels of responses from the respondents. In one instance, unethical business behaviour was discussed as a concern for a number of respondents. Many however argued, in their statements, that they would '*never cross the red line*' or get involved in unethical dealings of any sort. For example, R3 stated that '*if things seemed difficult, just let go*'. Not every respondent, however, embraced this ethical pathway. R8's discussion, for example, attested to a different response to a regulative contradiction. He once stated that, in order to get his papers processed within a required timeframe, he paid a bribe to some Officials in the value chain. This was possibly an inducement to bypass stringent administrative requirements. On the other hand, R7 suggested a different response to ethical paradoxes. He stated that one time when he faced such a paradox, he chose to hire a lawyer. During one of his discussions, R7 stated that bribes had been paid at some point during a particular transaction; but he steered clear of it by shielding behind a local lawyer; he nevertheless suspected that the final cost of the transactions was higher than normal.

Expatriates' responses to and navigation of normative contradictions

While business operations in all countries rely on norms for how to utilise and benefit from networking and relationship building; a number of pathways were suggested to respond to the normative contradictions faced by expatriate businesspeople working in the study environment. Personal connections were suggested by R21 as the best way to navigate normative paradoxes. Discussing trust when faced with paradoxes, R21 intimated that personal connections with '*trusted important people*' were an insurance to overcome a normative paradox. This is so because, in the event of coming face-to-face with a business paradox the so called '*big people*' intervened to bail him out.

As with personal connections, business networks were cited as effective tools with which to navigate intricate business-related normative paradoxes in this business environment. An Asian expatriate, R6, clearly underlined the importance of having networks while doing business in Uganda. He stated that he had lived and worked in this country for at least 40 years and, during this long stay, he had mastered this business environment. His approach to navigating business paradoxes was therefore through creating contacts with important people. He stated for example that when he faced delicate situations, '*he knew where to go, which person to talk to and when*'. He therefore felt at home living and working in Uganda and this was partly attributable to his contacts with the important people. He backed this argument by citing past and future engagements with '*big people*' in Uganda when he stated, for example, that '*...soon I will meet the President (of Uganda) about an investment. In March, I travelled with the Vice President of Uganda for a business trip to my country....etc.*' For this expatriate, good connection with big people provided a safety net for success. The strategy of R6 concurs with the observation of Ledeneva (2008), who notes that people circumvent bureaucratic decision-making procedures and influence government contacts for beneficial business opportunities to find valuable market information and business transactions. Whilst R6 may have found a working formula for his businesses, not everyone else however could, and for the majority the paradoxes persisted.

Some respondents however, suggested '*no bribery payment*' as the best way to navigate the bribery-related normative contradictions. Several respondents for example complained about bribery in Uganda, and R14 in particular revealed being asked one time to part with '*kitu kidogo*' (something small – a bribe) to get the appropriate service. Most respondents however, such as R23, refused outright to pay bribes, and his argument was '*how many people would you bribe?*'. On matters of business consideration, he saw this as an unsustainable solution to the paradoxes and, as such, he argued, '*bribe giving does not stop it, it worsens the paradox*'.

Expatriates responses to and navigation of cultural-cognitive contradictions

Faced with cultural cognitive contradictions, respondents suggested several responses that enabled them to cope with local cultural paradoxes to continue to live and work in Uganda. One example of cultural cognitive contradiction was the different perception of

time management by some of the local people working with the expatriates. R25, for example, lamented the many man-hours lost while dealing with some Ugandans. She complained that *'if we have an appointment with someone at 9.00 o'clock, they turn up at 2 pm. When I tell them to turn up at 10.00 am, I know they will come at 12.00 noon'*. From this experience, this respondent avoided disappointment by setting back time for appointments to accommodate lapses in time management by her employees. In this case, it appeared that R25 had accepted the short-term culture cognitive (time management) orientation of Ugandans (Rarick et al., 2013) and changed her strategy to organise meetings with Ugandans.

While a number of respondents lamented rampant corruption in Uganda, some were of the view that it can be reduced or minimised through political will; for example by exposing and shaming the corrupt. Apart from lamenting that it compromised their businesses, some respondents suggested intervention measures to curb it. R10, for example, observed that with tight regulations, corruption could be tamed, implying that he did not trust the stringency of existing regulations against corruption in Uganda. R8, on the other hand suggested involving the media to expose and shame the corrupt. For R23, the response lay in applying rules without discrimination, having observed inequity and weakness in the enforcement of rules or policies in this country.

Upholding integrity was discussed as the key to navigate cultural cognitive contradictions while doing business in Uganda. It was also observed that the issue of integrity or lack of it touched both local officials and foreigners who conducted business in Uganda. R17, for example, underlined this argument and stated that *'you have to pay in order for them to work on your case; else, the file is not moved!'*. All respondents, however, argued for upholding integrity in their business dealings and to this end, R18 stated that he *'never compromised the image of his company'*. Similarly, R19 emphatically stated that in business, *'for nothing would I bend rules for anything'*. R24 went further when he stated that compromising integrity in their company *'would not be limited to chastising the offender, but legal measures would be taken against an offender, in case of criminal offences'*. For this paradox, responses ranged between rejecting of illegalities and, in most cases, devising survival measures to continue working in Uganda.

In summary, while some respondents embraced some forms of illegalities, most of them rejected or resisted them and, instead; creatively devised survival techniques such as hiring lawyers or nurturing *'connections to powerful people in order to get things done'*.

The basis of the expatriates' responses

The findings of this study indicate that expatriates exposed to *magendo* practices responded differently, pursuing distinct pathways i.e.

- i. Rejection based on home country institutions.
- ii. Rejection based on company code of conduct.
- iii. Acceptance – pay the bribe to get the job done.
- iv. Compromise through using intermediaries.
- v. Adapting to particular local business practices.

The various pathways are indicative that there is no single pathway to navigate contradictions experienced under informal institutions. The majority of expatriates who rejected informal business practices in the study were of European backgrounds, from economies with strong institutions; regulations and guidelines. For these expatriates, their home country institutions would guide and instruct them to reject informal practices, even when operating in foreign countries. Some expatriates from large multinational corporations, whether they were from countries with strong or weak institutions would also reject informal business practices in Uganda; based on the company's strong codes of conduct that could not easily be compromised.

On the other hand, expatriates who were most likely to embrace or to devise *'creative ways'* in order to survive under informal corrupt business practices originated from either Africa or Asia; from emerging economies with weak institutions like those that they encountered while doing business in Uganda. Many expats originating from Africa or Asia pointed out that corrupt business practices they faced in the study environment were similar to those in their home countries; implying that what they faced was not unusual. Some noted further that while there were contextual differences, they did not find substantial contradictions between home and host country institutions.

It was also established that expatriate business people operating small to medium sized businesses and being dependent on getting *"the job done"* for their business to survive, were more vulnerable and prone to bribery. These often-devised survival techniques for instance by using intermediaries such as lawyers, local staff or people with strong links to powerful officials to help them navigate business huddles in this environment. In pursuit of some services that required certifications, official signatures and other essential administrative requirements, small to medium sized business would often easily fall for bribery, in order to get such services.

Another category of expatriates *'creatively devised'* survival technics such as hiring lawyers or initiating strong links with powerful local officials to seek protection and other business-related advantages. Those who were likely to devise survival strategies or tactics were Africans or Asian who had accumulated many years (*over ten*) working in Uganda. This category of business expatriates had

internalised the local business dynamics, to their advantage. This was an indication that over the years they had overcome the initial institutional contradictions; thereby pragmatically generating means and ways to navigate and respond to them.

Overall, respondents from countries with similar levels of institutional development to Uganda were able to embrace the existential contradictions. On the other hand, respondents from highly regulated economies and multinationals resisted and rejected engaging in any form of illegalities. In addition, respondents with the longest stay in Uganda more likely to devise survival strategies cited above – a typical case of acculturation.

Theoretical Framework: The need to adopt an institutional theory

Using an institutional theory to understand expatriates' dilemmas and responses to informal and corrupt business practices was deemed an appropriate approach to examine expatriates' individual responses to institutional contradictions experienced in a country that has a large informal economy. Unlike previous studies on informal institutions, this study focused on an African context. While studies done elsewhere on informal institutions (e.g. in China, India and in the Middle East or elsewhere) the respondents comprised of local people who were embedded in their own cultures and own institutional frameworks, this study sought to move away from '*an own culture or own institution frameworks*' by inquiring into an outsider's perspective.

Institutional theory has previously been used to understand the diversity of institutional spheres that structure society; to examine ways in which individuals are empowered and constrained by shared normative systems and to explore ways in which symbolic systems and schemas shape and support social life (Scott, 2010). This study therefore saw institutional theory as a productive lens through which to examine aspects of contemporary business life in Uganda and Eastern Africa as experienced by expatriate business people working in this environment.

This study notes that during the course of international business transactions, expatriates and their organisations face contradicting institutions between home and host country business environments that result in tensions and a variety of coping strategies (Smith & Lewis, 2011). It is further noted that expatriates are often subjected to tensions or paradoxes as they move from their home countries into host country business environments, where they encounter contradicting elements with respect to culture (Johnston & Selsky, 2006) or institutions (Wijen & Ansari, 2007). Such paradoxes may be real or simply represent a puzzling phenomenon (Clegg, 2002). Paradoxes, however, have for long been recognised as important analytical tools for cross-cultural studies (Johnston & Selsky, 2006). This study therefore sought to explore the expatriates' responses to such institutional contradictions by adopting the institutional theory; so as to understand existential diversities within different business environments.

Implications and contribution of the study

The examination of the *magendo* phenomenon contributes to our understanding of how expatriates' experience of contradicting institutions can lead to different outcomes regarding informal business practices.

Theoretical implication

The study contributes to institutional theory by building an institutional theoretical understanding of the informal institution *magendo*, through the lived experiences of expatriates living and working in Uganda. In addition, the study finds out that contradictions between home and host country institutions seem to be most important for expatriates' response to regulatory and cultural-cognitive institutional differences. On the other hand, responses to local informal regulatory and cultural cognitive institutions could be either rejection or adoption depending on home country institutions and length of stay in the host country. It is also noted that business operations in all countries rely on normative institutions as guidance for how to utilise and benefit from networking and relationship building. However, this study notes that expatriates found contradictions in normative institutions less problematic as these did not impair conduct of business; in comparison to other factors such as informality.

Consequently, this study has broadened the institutional theory to guide and enable understanding of business operations in Uganda and Africa where informal institutions such as *magendo* had previously not been scientifically studied or analysed.

Implication for policy and management practices

The study provides insights for country policy makers (Uganda) into how *magendo* impacts business behaviour. By exploring and highlighting how informal institutions in general and *magendo* in particular influence business behaviour through social capital-networks and informal relationships, the study enables the enacting of policies that are relevant to guiding better conduct of business in Uganda, Eastern Africa or in any other environment where local informal institutions affect the conduct of business. By focusing on a developing country Uganda, the study provides an opportunity to understand this phenomenon through the business lenses of outsiders. This helps to make better sense of business practices from an outsider's perspective and in turn it alerts local policy makers on the ways and manner in which informal institutions affect business experiences of expatriates in emerging economies. The study is therefore a good basis for better policy formulations and improvement of the business environment of Uganda and any other environments that grapple with informal business institutions.

Implication for expatriate business practitioners

The study presents and discusses *magendo* as an informal institution that influences conduct of business in Uganda and Eastern Africa. Broadly, it has been noted that *magendo* is an informal institution that embeds illegal dealings at both government and private levels. As there was lack of empirical research into what *magendo* is and what its influence on foreign business activities are, this study lays down a foundation to examine the meaning of *magendo* and its trends. Based on this study, expatriate business practitioners are better placed to appreciate its impacts on their businesses, perceptions of its practices and the possible choices they can make when they face it.

Overall, this study contributes to *scientific research* whereby it explores and seeks to get an outsider's perspective of a local informal institution *magendo*. Ultimately, the selection of expatriate business people from different countries whose institutions are different from those of Uganda broadened the study of institutional contradictions and paradoxes that affect expatriate business people.

Conclusions

This study illustrates that expatriates' responses to informal institutions vary. The study further illustrates that to navigate an informal business institution such as *magendo*, depends on i- home country institutional framework of the expatriate ii-the cultural background of the expatriate iii-the nature of business or industry iv-the size of business plus v- the length of stay in a particular environment. The key strategies that enable an expatriate business person to succeed in an environment characterised by informal institutions such as *magendo* include i- strict adherence to company or local rules ii- refusal to pay or to accept bribes iii- hiring of lawyers where need be iv- relying on personal connections and networks and iv-upholding integrity.

This study therefore provides a mechanism by which to understand how expatriate business people may perceive and respond to contradictions embedded in an informal institution in a foreign environment. Expatriate business people may either i-embrace the informal institution, ii-Reject the informal institution or iii- devise survival strategies.

Future research

Whereas this study focussed on obtaining expatriates' perspectives on *magendo*, future studies may conduct quantitative inquiries on how local Ugandan business operators perceive the *magendo* institution. It may also be interesting to study and understand how *magendo* impacts political, gender plus other social economic landscapes in this Country and region. In addition, while this study concentrated on Uganda, it will be interesting to conduct similar studies in other regions of Eastern African that may be grappling with *magendo*. Similarly, future studies may focus on comparative studies conducted in other contexts that have strong informal institutions, such as South and Central America.

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