

# Classical Management Theories in an Emerging-Economy Context: A Documentary Case Study of the Dangote Group

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**Abstract:** This article examines the continuing relevance and practical application of Henri Fayol's Administrative Theory and Max Weber's Bureaucratic Theory within the Dangote Group, a major African industrial conglomerate operating in a volatile emerging-market environment. Although classical management theories are frequently criticised for their mechanistic assumptions, hierarchical orientation and limited attention to human and environmental complexity, their core principles remain visible in large-scale industrial organisations where coordination, standardisation, accountability and control are essential. The study adopts a qualitative documentary case-study design and analyses the organisation's publicly available corporate reports, governance disclosures and sustainability materials alongside established management literature. The analysis indicates that classical principles are particularly useful for division of labour, formal authority, standard operating procedures, governance, technical competence and organisational control. At the same time, contemporary evidence from Dangote's reporting shows increasing attention to employee development, sustainability, stakeholder engagement and governance, suggesting that the organisation cannot be adequately understood through a purely mechanistic lens. The article argues that the practical value of classical management at Dangote lies not in rigid adherence to hierarchy, but in the combination of structural discipline with adaptive and human-centred practices. The study contributes to management scholarship by demonstrating how classical principles can remain relevant in an emerging economy when they are selectively integrated with contemporary approaches to organisational agility, human resource development, sustainability and strategic adaptation.

**Keywords:** *Classical Management Theory; Henri Fayol; Max Weber; Bureaucracy; Dangote Group; Emerging Economy; Organisational Agility; Sustainability; Documentary Case Study.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The management of large industrial organisations requires mechanisms for coordinating people, technology, capital, information and operations across multiple organisational units. This challenge is particularly significant in emerging economies, where firms may operate amid infrastructure constraints, regulatory uncertainty, currency pressures and rapidly changing market conditions. Classical management theories emerged from attempts to create order, efficiency and predictability in increasingly complex industrial organisations. Fayol's Administrative Theory emphasised managerial

functions and principles of administration, while Weber's theory of bureaucracy explained how formal rules, hierarchy, specialised roles and legitimate authority could provide organisational stability.

The Dangote Group provides an important context for examining the contemporary relevance of these theories. The group has developed from a trading enterprise into a diversified industrial organisation with interests spanning cement, sugar, salt and other strategic sectors. Its listed companies publish extensive corporate governance, financial and sustainability disclosures, providing documentary evidence through which

aspects of its organisational architecture can be examined. Dangote Cement's 2024 reporting, for example, describes governance and sustainability as integral to the organisation's corporate culture and identifies seven sustainability pillars covering financial, institutional, economic, operational, cultural, environmental and social dimensions.

The central argument of this article is not that the Dangote Group simply operates according to an unchanged classical model. Rather, the case demonstrates that classical principles remain embedded in large-scale industrial coordination while being supplemented by contemporary practices. This distinction is important because an exclusively mechanistic interpretation would overlook evidence of employee development, stakeholder engagement, sustainability governance and organisational learning.

The study therefore addresses a broader question: how can classical management theories remain practically relevant in a contemporary African industrial organisation while organisations simultaneously face demands for agility, innovation, employee participation and sustainability?

#### ➤ *Problem Statement*

Classical management theories continue to influence organisational structures, yet their applicability to contemporary organisations is contested. Fayol's emphasis on authority, unity of command, scalar chain and centralisation can facilitate coordination and accountability, but excessive centralisation may slow decision-making. Weberian bureaucracy can promote consistency, procedural fairness and technical competence, but excessive formalisation may constrain flexibility and innovation. These tensions become more important in environments characterised by technological change and volatile markets.

Existing discussions of large African firms often emphasise entrepreneurial leadership, scale and economic impact without sufficiently examining how classical administrative principles interact with newer governance, human-resource and sustainability practices. The present study addresses this gap by using Dangote as a documentary case through which the continuing usefulness and limitations of classical management can be critically examined.

The study does not claim direct access to confidential managerial processes or employee perceptions. Consequently, conclusions are restricted to patterns that can reasonably be inferred from publicly available corporate disclosures and the established theoretical literature.

#### ➤ *Objectives of the Study*

The study seeks to:

- Examine the relevance of Fayol's Administrative Theory to the management of the Dangote Group;

- Assess the extent to which Weberian bureaucratic principles are reflected in the organisation's formal governance and operational practices;
- Evaluate the strengths and limitations of classical management principles in a contemporary emerging-economy organisation; and
- Propose an integrated management perspective that combines structural discipline with adaptability, employee development and sustainability.

#### ➤ *Research Questions*

- How are Fayol's administrative principles relevant to the management of the Dangote Group?
- How are Weberian bureaucratic principles reflected in the Group's formal governance and operational arrangements?
- What organisational strengths and limitations arise from the continued use of classical management principles?
- How can classical management principles be integrated with contemporary approaches to organisational agility, human development and sustainability?

## II. LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL REVIEW

### ➤ *Fayol's Administrative Theory*

Fayol's contribution shifted attention from the technical efficiency of individual tasks to the administration of the organisation as a whole. His management functions are commonly expressed as planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling. His principles include division of work, authority and responsibility, discipline, unity of command, unity of direction, subordination of individual interests, remuneration, centralisation, scalar chain, order, equity, stability of personnel, initiative and esprit de corps.

For a diversified industrial group, several of these principles remain particularly relevant. Division of work supports technical specialisation; authority and responsibility establish accountability; unity of command clarifies reporting relationships; and control provides mechanisms for comparing actual performance with organisational plans. The contemporary relevance of Fayol therefore lies less in treating his principles as universal rules and more in recognising them as structural mechanisms that can be adapted to organisational circumstances.

### ➤ *Weber's Bureaucratic Theory*

Weber conceptualised bureaucracy as a form of rational-legal organisation characterised by formal rules, defined areas of responsibility, hierarchy, technical competence and impersonal procedures. Bureaucracy seeks to make organisational decisions more predictable and less dependent on personal preference. In large industrial systems, such characteristics can be valuable because safety, financial reporting, production quality and regulatory compliance require consistency.

However, bureaucracy can also generate rigidity when rules become ends in themselves. Contemporary organisations therefore face the challenge of retaining procedural reliability without allowing formal structures to prevent experimentation, rapid problem-solving or constructive employee voice.

#### ➤ *Contemporary Relevance and Organisational Agility*

Contemporary management research increasingly emphasises agility, cross-functional collaboration, adaptive leadership and the alignment of organisational structure with changing environments. Empirical research on organisational agility suggests that agility is multidimensional and involves structure, leadership, culture, processes and technology rather than a single organisational practice. This perspective provides a useful complement to classical theory: hierarchy and formalisation need not disappear, but their application may need to vary according to the task and environmental demands.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative documentary case-study design. The Dangote Group was selected as the case because of its scale, industrial diversity and availability of corporate disclosures. Documentary research is appropriate where the objective is to examine organisational structures, policies, governance arrangements and publicly reported practices without claiming access to confidential internal processes.

The documentary corpus comprises the assignment's original management-theory sources and publicly available corporate materials, including Dangote Cement's 2024 annual and sustainability reporting and corporate governance disclosures. The analysis was conducted thematically around the core dimensions of Fayol's and Weber's theories: division of labour, authority, hierarchy, formal rules, centralisation, technical competence, control, employee development and organisational adaptation.

The study uses documentary evidence to identify patterns rather than to establish causal relationships. Accordingly, statements concerning internal practices are presented cautiously, and claims that cannot be established from public evidence are not treated as verified organisational facts.

### IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

#### ➤ *Division of Labour and Technical Specialisation*

Division of labour is highly relevant to a diversified industrial organisation because different sectors require different technical capabilities, regulatory knowledge and operational processes. The existing case material correctly identifies specialisation as an important principle in understanding Dangote's industrial activities. The principle is also consistent with the organisational logic of manufacturing, where production, engineering, logistics, finance, procurement and safety require differentiated expertise.

The significance of specialisation, however, extends beyond efficiency. In contemporary organisations it also creates a coordination challenge: specialised units must exchange information and work across functional boundaries. Thus, division of labour is most effective when accompanied by mechanisms for integration and communication.

#### ➤ *Authority, Hierarchy and Accountability*

Fayol's principles of authority, responsibility and scalar chain remain useful for analysing how accountability can be established in a large organisation. Dangote Cement publicly emphasises corporate governance, regulatory compliance, risk management, transparency and business continuity. These practices demonstrate that formal responsibility structures remain important in contemporary industrial management.

The analytical caution is that publicly documented governance structures should not automatically be equated with a rigid command-and-control system. Modern corporate governance can combine hierarchical accountability with committee oversight, professional management, independent assurance and stakeholder engagement. The evidence therefore supports a more nuanced interpretation of hierarchy.

#### ➤ *Weberian Formalisation and Organisational Control*

Weberian bureaucracy is especially relevant where organisations must demonstrate consistency, compliance and traceability. Dangote's public sustainability and governance materials indicate formal systems of compliance, risk management, sustainability governance and reporting. Such systems reflect the broader Weberian logic that organisational processes should not depend exclusively on personal discretion.

Formalisation is particularly important in industrial settings because production quality, health and safety, environmental management and financial accountability require documented procedures. Yet formalisation becomes problematic when procedures prevent managers from responding to exceptional circumstances. The appropriate lesson is therefore not to eliminate bureaucracy but to distinguish necessary controls from unnecessary procedural barriers.

#### ➤ *Employee Development and the Human Dimension*

The original assignment tends to portray classical management as primarily concerned with output and control. Current corporate evidence supports a more differentiated picture. Dangote Cement reported 10,737 permanent employees in 2024, a 7% increase from 2023, while its employee turnover rate declined from 7% to 5%. It also reported expansion of its graduate trainee programme and initiatives involving benefits, inclusion, talent management and career development.

These practices are significant theoretically because they demonstrate the coexistence of structural and human-centred

management. Employee development does not replace administrative control; instead, it complements it by strengthening organisational capability. This supports a contemporary interpretation in which technical competence and employee development are strategic resources rather than peripheral concerns.

#### ➤ *Sustainability and Stakeholder Orientation*

Another important development absent from a purely classical interpretation is the increasing institutionalisation of sustainability. Dangote Cement reports seven sustainability pillars and integrates financial and sustainability reporting. Its sustainability reporting is benchmarked against frameworks including GRI Standards, the Nigerian Code of Corporate Governance, the Global Cement and Concrete Association framework, the United Nations Global Compact and the Sustainable Development Goals.

This evidence suggests that the organisation's administrative system has expanded beyond internal efficiency to include environmental, social and governance responsibilities. Classical theory remains relevant to the coordination and control of these responsibilities, but contemporary sustainability requirements broaden the purpose of management.

#### ➤ *Centralisation Versus Organisational Agility*

Centralisation can create consistency and allow senior management to coordinate strategic priorities. However, the centralisation of every operational decision can create delays, especially when local managers face rapidly changing circumstances. The documentary evidence does not justify the stronger claim in the original assignment that all major capital expenditure and procurement decisions are centrally controlled. That assertion should therefore be removed unless supported by internal documentation.

A more defensible conclusion is that large organisations require a balance between central strategic direction and delegated operational authority. Contemporary organisational agility research similarly suggests that agility involves multiple dimensions, including structure, leadership, culture, processes and technology. Dangote's continuing investments in governance, digital systems, employee development and sustainability can therefore be interpreted as evidence of an organisation evolving beyond a purely mechanistic model.

## V. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Fayol and Weber remain useful analytical lenses for understanding large-scale industrial organisations, but neither theory is sufficient on its own. Fayol explains the importance of administrative functions, authority, coordination and control, while Weber helps explain formal rules, role differentiation, hierarchy and rational-legal authority. Together, they explain why complex industrial operations require structure.

At the same time, the Dangote case shows why contemporary management cannot stop at structure. The organisation's public emphasis on employee development, sustainability, governance and stakeholder value indicates a broader management architecture. This suggests a hybrid interpretation: classical mechanisms provide the organisational skeleton, while contemporary practices provide adaptability and social legitimacy.

The case also highlights an important emerging-economy dimension. In environments where organisations must manage regulatory, infrastructural and market uncertainties, formal internal systems may have particular value because they reduce ambiguity and establish repeatable processes. However, the same systems can become constraints if they prevent local responsiveness. The practical question is therefore not whether an organisation should be bureaucratic or agile, but where each mechanism is most appropriate.

This interpretation extends the original assignment's argument. Rather than presenting classical management as either successful or obsolete, the evidence supports a contingency position: routine, high-risk and compliance-sensitive activities may benefit from greater formalisation, whereas innovation, digital transformation and complex problem-solving may require greater discretion and cross-functional collaboration.

## VI. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The study contributes to management theory in three ways. First, it demonstrates the continuing explanatory value of classical management principles in a contemporary African industrial context. Second, it shows that classical principles should be treated as adaptable organisational mechanisms rather than fixed prescriptions. Third, it highlights the value of integrating classical theory with contemporary perspectives on agility, human capital and sustainability.

The case therefore supports a contingency-based interpretation of classical management. The appropriate degree of hierarchy, formalisation and centralisation should depend on the nature of the task, the level of risk, the speed of environmental change and the capabilities of organisational members.

## VII. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managers of large industrial organisations can draw several lessons from the case. Formal rules should be retained where they protect safety, quality, compliance and accountability. At the same time, managers should identify decisions that can be delegated without weakening strategic control. Cross-functional teams can be used for problems that cut across traditional departmental boundaries. Employee development should be treated as a capability-building investment, while feedback mechanisms can help identify operational improvements.

Succession planning is also important. Organisations built around strong founder or executive leadership require systems that institutionalise knowledge, leadership development and delegated decision-making. Such systems reduce dependence on individual personalities and strengthen organisational continuity.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Adopt a contingency-based management architecture in which the degree of centralisation and formalisation varies according to operational risk, task complexity and environmental uncertainty.
- Strengthen middle-management empowerment by clearly defining decision rights, escalation thresholds and accountability mechanisms.
- Expand cross-functional teams for digital transformation, supply-chain improvement, innovation and complex operational problems.
- Continue investment in employee development, graduate training, career progression and leadership succession.
- Maintain formal governance and compliance systems while periodically reviewing procedures that create unnecessary administrative delays.
- Use employee feedback and structured innovation mechanisms to incorporate operational knowledge into continuous improvement.
- Integrate sustainability objectives into strategic and operational decision-making rather than treating sustainability as a separate reporting activity.

## IX. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that classical management theories remain relevant to the analysis of large industrial organisations in contemporary Africa. Fayol's principles help explain the importance of planning, organisation, authority, coordination and control, while Weber's model illuminates the role of formal rules, hierarchy, technical competence and rational administrative processes. The Dangote case demonstrates that these principles can support scale, accountability and operational consistency.

Nevertheless, the evidence does not support interpreting Dangote as a purely classical or mechanistic organisation. Current corporate disclosures reveal substantial attention to employee development, governance, sustainability and stakeholder value. The more convincing interpretation is therefore one of organisational hybridisation, in which classical structural mechanisms coexist with contemporary practices designed to strengthen adaptability and long-term sustainability.

The central lesson is that classical management should neither be discarded as obsolete nor applied as an inflexible formula. Its principles are most valuable when selectively adapted to organisational circumstances. For large African industrial organisations, the future of effective management lies in combining structural discipline with empowered people, technological capability, responsible governance and the flexibility required by changing environments.

## X. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study is limited by its reliance on publicly available documentary evidence. It does not include interviews with Dangote executives or employees, direct observation of organisational processes, or survey data. Consequently, the study cannot establish employee perceptions, causal relationships or confidential decision-making practices. Future research could use interviews, surveys and comparative case studies involving Dangote and other African industrial conglomerates. Quantitative studies could also test relationships between organisational structure, employee engagement, innovation and performance.

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