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MANAGING PEOPLE

Zen and the Art of Management

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For 20 years or more students of management have labored to minimize its mystique, reduce our dependence on "gut feel," and establish a more scientific basis for managerial behavior. All the while, practitioners have been cautious in embracing these pursuits; casting a wary eye on "textbook" solutions, they assert that management is an art as much as a science.

Yet even the most skeptical admit that some benefit has accrued from these efforts. All realms of management, from finance to human relations, have felt the impact of analytical inquiry.

One common theme in this evolution of a "management science" has been the desire to make explicit the tools and processes that managers have historically employed intuitively. With just such a goal in mind, I embarked in 1974 on a study of Japanese-managed companies in the United States and Japan. The purpose was to ascertain what elements of the communications and decision-making processes contributed to the reported high performance of Japanese companies.

A number of respected observers of Japanese ways had attributed their success in part to such practices as "bottom-up" communication, extensive lateral communication across functional areas, and a pronounced use of participative- (or consensus-) style decision making that supposedly leads to higher quality decisions and implementation. The research consisted of interviews of and questionnaires administered to more than 215 managers and 1,400 workers in 26 companies and 10 industries.

I made communication audits of the number of telephone calls and face-to-face contacts initiated and received by managers of Japanese companies in Japan, of their subsidiaries in the United States, and of near-identical American companies matched on an industry-by-industry basis. I took pains to document the size and length of meetings and the volume of formal correspondence and informal notes, to observe the frequency of interaction in managerial office areas, and to obtain managers' perceptions of the nature and quality of the decision making and implementation process.

What did I find? First, Japanese-managed businesses in both countries are not much different from American-owned companies: they use the telephone to about the same degree and write about the same number of letters. In their decision-making processes, both in their U.S. subsidiaries and in Japan, the Japanese do not use a participative style any more than Americans do. Actually, I discovered only two significant differences between Japanese and American companies:[1]

1. Three times as much communication was initiated at lower levels of management in the Japanese companies, then percolated upward.

2. While managers of Japanese companies rated the quality of their decision making the same as did their American counterparts, they perceived the quality of *implementation* of those decisions to be better.

These findings puzzled me. How could the style of decision making (in particular, the degree of participation) and quality of decisions be the same in the two groups, yet the quality of implementation be different? Evidently, the greater reliance by the Japanese on bottom-up communication played a role, but the causal relationship remained unclear.

A senior executive at Sony provided a clue. “To be truthful,” the Japanese manager said, “probably 60% of the decisions I make are my decisions. But I keep my intentions secret. In discussions with subordinates, I ask questions, pursue facts, and try to nudge them in my direction without disclosing my position. Sometimes I end up changing my position as the result of the dialogue. But whatever the outcome, they feel a part of the decision. Their involvement in the decision also increases their experience as managers.”

Many others, American as well as Japanese, alluded in interviews to the same technique. “It does not make so much difference,” reflected an American who ran a ball-bearing plant in New Hampshire, “if decisions are top down as it does how the top-down decision maker goes about touching bases. If he begins with an open question, he can often guide his subordinates to a good solution.”

In these statements, and in others like them, is the genesis of this paper. The important discovery of this research was not, as expected, that Japanese do some things differently and better. While that is true to a limited extent, the more significant finding is that successful managers, *regardless of nationality,* share certain common characteristics that are related to subleties of the communications process.

The term Zen in the title of this article is used figuratively to denote these important nuances in interpersonal communication often enshrouded in a veil of mystique. The phenomenon does not correspond to the analytical dimension of consecutive deductive responses. Nor is it directly akin to the human relations dimension that highlights the virtues of problem confrontation, participation, and openness. I refer to this Zen-like quality as the *implicit* dimension. It is as distinct from the other, better-known dimensions of management as time is from the other three dimensions of physical space.

In trying to explain the implicit dimension, I find that the traditional language of management gets in the way. To work around the difficulty, it is helpful to explore this dimension through the lens of the Eastern metaphor. After many interviews with American and Japanese managers, I have come to believe that the perspective imbedded in Eastern philosophy, culture, and values helps make the implicit dimension more visible. Whereas Japanese managers find certain insights within easy reach of their Eastern way of thinking, American managers, while often just as skillful, must swim upstream culturally, so to speak.

Ambiguity as a Managerial Tool

Much of the lore of management in the West regards ambiguity as a symptom of a variety of organizational ills whose cure is larger doses of rationality, specificity, and decisiveness. But is ambiguity sometimes desirable?

Ambiguity may be thought of as a shroud of the unknown surrounding certain events. The Japanese have a word for it, *ma,* for which there is no English translation. The word is valuable because it gives an explicit place to the unknowable aspect of things. In English we may refer to an empty space between the chair and the table; the Japanese don't say the space is empty but "full of nothing." However amusing the illustration, it goes to the core of the issue. Westerners speak of what is unknown primarily in reference to what is known (like the space between the chair and the table), while most Eastern languages give honor to the unknown in its own right. Consider this Tao verse:

Thirty spokes are made one by holes in a hub

Together with the vacancies between them, they comprise a wheel.

The use of clay in moulding pitchers

Comes from the hollow of its absence;

Doors, windows, in a house

Are used for their emptiness:

Thus we are helped by what is not

To use what is.[2]

Of course, there are many situations that a manager finds himself in where being explicit and decisive is not only helpful but necessary. There is considerable advantage, however, in having a dual frame of reference—recognizing the value of both the clear and the ambiguous. The point to bear in mind is that in certain situations ambiguity may serve better than absolute clarity.

When an executive has access to too much data for human processing, he needs to simplify. If he has examined, say, different pricing schemes for 12 months and has identified all the choices available to him, the time has probably come to decide on one of them. "Deciding" in these circumstances has the benefit of curtailing the wheel spinning, simplifying things, and resolving anxiety for oneself and others.

But there is another kind of problem—for example, merging the production and engineering departments—where experience may suggest that the issue is more complicated than the bare facts indicate. Frequently the issue crops up around changes that arouse human feelings. Under these circumstances the notion of ambiguity is useful. Rather than grasping for a solution, the administrator may take the interim step of "deciding" how to proceed. The process of "proceeding" in turn generates further information; you move toward your goal through a sequence of tentative steps rather than bold-stroke actions. The distinction is between having enough data to *decide* and having enough data to *proceed*.

If an executive's perception of the problem and the means of implementation involve groups of persons at different levels of the organization with different mandates (like unions and professional groups) and the distribution of power is such that he lacks full control, successful implementation usually requires tentativeness. The notion of ambiguity helps make tentativeness legitimate.

Ambiguity has two important connotations for management. First, it is a useful concept in thinking about how we deal with others, orally and in writing. Second, it provides a way of legitimizing the loose rein that a manager permits in certain organizational situations where agreement needs time to evolve or where further insight is needed before conclusive action can be taken.

Cards off the Table

To watch a skilled manager use ambiguity is to see an art form in action. Carefully selecting his words, constructing a precise tension between the oblique and the specific, he picks his way across difficult terrain. In critiquing a subordinate's work, for example, the executive occasionally finds it desirable to come close enough to the point to ensure that the subordinate gets the message but not so close as to "crowd" him and cause defensiveness.

A Japanese manager conducts the dialogue in circles, widening and narrowing them to correspond to the subordinate's sensitivity to the feedback. He may say, "I'd like you to reflect a bit further on your proposal." Translated into Western thought patterns, this sentence would read, "You're dead wrong and you'd better come up with a better idea."[3] The first approach allows the subordinate to exist with his pride intact.

Part of our drive for the explicit stems from the Western notion that it's a matter of honor to "get the cards on the table." This attitude rests on the assumption that, no matter how much it hurts, it's good for you; and the sign of a good manager is his ability to give and take negative feedback.

No doubt there is a good deal of merit in this conventional wisdom. But between the mythology of our management lore and our foibles as human beings often lies the true state of things. It is desirable to get the facts and know where one stands. But it is also human to feel threatened, particularly when personal vulnerability is an issue.

There is no reason to believe that Westerners have less pride than the Japanese have or feel humiliation less poignantly than the Japanese do. An American Management Association survey indicates that issues involving self-respect mattered greatly to more than two-thirds of the persons sampled.[4] Eastern cultures are sensitive to the concept of "face"; Westerners, however, regard it as a sign of weakness. Yet look back on instances in organizations where an individual, publicly embarrassed by another, hurt himself and the organization just to even the score. The evidence suggests that explicitly crowding a person into a corner may in many instances be not only unwarranted but also counterproductive.

Delivering oneself of the need to “speak the truth” often masks a self-serving sense of brute integrity. “Clearing the air” can be more helpful to the “clearer” than to others who are starkly revealed. The issue of brute integrity is not just an outcome of a certain cultural tendency to speak plainly and bluntly, nor is it wholly explainable in terms of our assumptions about authority and hierarchy and the relationships between bosses and subordinates. At a deeper level, it has a sexist component. In our culture, simple, straightforward, simplistic confrontation—a kind of high noon shoot-’em-out—is mixed with notions of what masculinity is. Unfortunately, shoot-’em-outs work best when the other guy dies. If you have to work with that person on a continuing basis, macho confrontations complicate life immensely.

In contrast, ambiguity, in reference to sensitivity and feelings, is alleged in the Western world to be female. But if we set aside the stereotypes and contemplate the consequences of these two modes of behavior on organizational life, we may discover that primitive notions of masculinity work no better in the office over the long term than they do in bed.

Are brute integrity and explicit communication worth the price of the listener’s goodwill, open-mindedness, and receptivity to change? Explicit communication is a cultural assumption, not a linguistic imperative. Many executives develop the skills necessary to vary their position along the spectrum from explicitness to ambiguity.

More “Ura” Than “Omote.”

Earlier I noted the value of ambiguity in permitting time and space for certain situations to take clearer shape or reach an accommodation of their own. A certain looseness in the definition of the relationship between things can permit a workable arrangement to evolve, whereas premature action may freeze things into rigidity. For example, one of the most persistent afflictions in American organizations is the penchant to make formal announcements. Most things one does announce themselves.

The Japanese manager comes culturally equipped with a pair of concepts, *omote* (in front) and *ura* (behind the scenes). These ideas correspond to the Latin notions of de jure and de facto, with one important distinction: the Japanese think of *ura* as constituting *real life; omote* is the ceremonial function for the benefit of others. The Japanese relegate the making of announcements to a secondary place that follows after all the action has taken place behind the scenes.

"You Americans are fond of announcing things," said one Japanese manager in the study. "It sets everything astir. The other day we decided to try out having our personnel department handle certain requests that traditionally had been handled by the production people. Our American vice president insisted on announcing it. Well, the production department had always handled its own personnel affairs and got its back up. Rumors commenced about whether the personnel people were in ascendence, building an empire, and so forth. Given the tentativeness of the system we were trying out, why not just begin by quietly asking that certain matters be referred to personnel? Before long, the informal organization will accustom itself to the new flow. Clearly you can't do this all the time, but some of the time it certainly works."

To announce what you want to happen, you have to make statements concerning a lot of things that you don't know about yet. If certain processes and relationships are allowed to take their own shape first, however, your announcement will probably have to be made just once because you will only be confirming what has already happened. Consider how differently attempts at organizational change might proceed if they embraced the Eastern orientation. Instead of turning the spotlight on the intended move, parading the revised organization charts and job descriptions, management would reassign tasks incrementally, gradually shift boundaries between functions, and issue the announcement only when the desired change had become a de facto reality. In some situations this is the better way.

"Impossible!" some will argue. "People resist change. Only by announcing your intentions can you bring the organization into line." But is it really "into line?" Unquestionably, decrees have their part to play in some organizational actions. But more often than not, the sudden lurch to a new order belies an informal process of resistance that works with enduring effectiveness. One has only to look at the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for an illustration of this phenomenon. A congressional mandate and 20 years' worth of frustrated presidents have not greatly altered the character of the three distinct bureaus comprising that agency.

The notion of achieving gradual change, rather than launching a head-on assault, runs deep in Eastern culture. It provides a manager with a context for thinking about outflanking organizational obstacles and in time letting them wither away. "It is well to persist like water," counsels the Tao saying. "For back it comes, again and again, wearing down the rigid strength which cannot yield to withstand it."[5]

With such an orientation one can accept the inevitability of obstacles rather than view them with righteous indignation—as some Western managers are inclined to do. And as the Tao saying suggests, acceptance does not convey fatalistic resignation. Rather, it points toward the value of patiently flowing with a solution while in due time it overcomes the obstacles in its path.

To Get Recognition, Give It Away

One way of thinking about the rewards employees receive is in terms of a triad: promotion, remuneration, and recognition. Of the three forms of reward, the first two are relatively unresponsive in the day-to-day operation of an organization. Promotions and wage hikes seldom come oftener than six months apart. On a daily basis, recognition is the reward most noticed and sought after. In the American Management Association survey to which I alluded earlier, 49% of the respondents indicated that recognition for what they did was their most important reward.

Recognition may become an increasingly important "fringe benefit" since a central problem facing American society is how to reward people in a period of slowed growth when employees win promotions and raises less often. Enriching our understanding of recognition and the role it plays may provide some helpful guidance.

Recognition is a powerful operating incentive. People who live in organizations develop uncanny sensitivity to where it is flowing. If you ask a person to change, one of the most relevant rewards you can provide in return is recognition. If, on the contrary, you try to induce change but you are seen as unwilling to share the recognition, you are not apt to get very far. It is an ironic axiom of organization that if you are willing to give up recognition, in return you gain increased power to bring about effective change.

The Eastern frame of thinking embodies the dual nature of recognition, as this Tao proverb shows:

A wise man has a simple wisdom

Which other men seek.

Without taking credit

Is accredited.

Laying no claim

Is acclaimed.[6]

We are all acquainted with "expressed" recognition, the big prize that modern organizational knights vie for. "B.L.T." is the recognition sandwich…"bright lights and trumpets," that is. When you receive a B.L.T., everybody knows about it. But Eastern thinking reminds us of a second variety, which might be called implied recognition. It is subtle but no less tangible, and it is acquired over time.

In its positive form it is the reputation of being trustworthy, skilled in making things happen in the organization, and accomplished in getting things done through people. In its negative manifestation a person is regarded as using people, prone to cutting corners, and out for one's self. Implied recognition can be given in a variety of ways that may seem insignificant, except to the recipient. An effort to seek another's opinion, for example, communicates respect for his insight. So does an invitation to participate in a significant meeting from which the person might otherwise have been excluded.

The phenomenon of implied recognition generally plays an important role in organizations that run smoothly. Problems arise when organizations overemphasize incentives that rivet attention on expressed recognition and undermine regard for implied recognition. As a result, all the members of the "team" try to grab the ball and nobody blocks. They seldom win consistently. But why grab from others what they will give you voluntarily? When you make sure you get the credit you deserve, in the long run you get less of it than you would otherwise.

Eastern perspective provides a further insight. It reminds us that the real organization you are working for is the organization called yourself. The problems and challenges of the organization that you are working for "out there" and the one "in here" are not two separate things. They grow toward excellence together. The sense of the "implied" for accommodation and timing and the sense of the "expressed" for the jugular must be woven together like strands in a braided rope, alternatively appearing and disappearing from sight but part of the whole. Good executives master the art *and* the science of management—not just one or the other.

Leaders Go Straight—Around the Circle

Western concepts of leadership embrace a number of images—strength, firmness, determination, and clarity of vision. In American management lore, leaders are seen as lonely figures capable of decisive action in the face of adversity.[7] Eastern thinking views leadership in significantly different ways. Whereas Western leaders are supposedly selected from among those who are outstanding, Eastern culture values leaders who stand "in" rather than stand "out."

In Judeo-Christian cultures, words very nearly possess sacredness. Men are willing to sacrifice for, live by, and die for words. We cling to them and make them swell with meaning; they are shafts of light that give form to our experiential darkness. Anthony G. Athos of the Harvard Business School notes the distinction between two everyday words, choice and decision. Managers, we are taught, “make decisions”; lovers “choose.” The former term implies mastery; the latter conveys a difficult selection among choices, in which we can gain some things only by giving up others.[8]

Athos’s insight is particularly important for managers because the word “decision” and the phrase “decision making” conjure up an extensive mythology of meaning. Good decision makers, our mythology tells us, have command of the facts, are aware of the options, and select from among them the best one.

The Japanese, however, do not even have a term for decision making in the Western sense. This linguistic curiosity reflects something deeper, a tendency of the culture to acknowledge the ambivalence experienced when our mastery of situations is imperfect. Faced with difficult trade-offs, Japanese “choose” one over the other; Westerners like to think they “decide.”

The lore of Eastern management more fully acknowledges the inevitable sense of incompleteness that stems from having to choose. It sensitizes its managers to the illusions of mastery and trains them to suspect the accompanying belief that anything is ever truly decided. Whereas the mythology of Western management tends to cast solutions as fixed and final, Eastern philosophical tradition emphasizes individual accommodation to a continuously unfolding set of events.

Think of the consequences of these outlooks as managers of these two cultures go about living up to their cultural imperatives. Eastern managers accept ambivalence. When faced with the necessity to “juggle,” they do so with reassurance that the experience is congruent with what management is all about. Faced with the same set of events, some American managers may feel uneasy. This problem is exacerbated by the absence of cultural underpinnings for thinking about certain activities in which mastery of the situation is either impossible or downright undesirable. (Also, their language is not attuned to expression of this mode of thinking.)

The Western notion of mastery is closely linked with deep-seated assumptions about the self. The professional life of some Westerners, and certainly many who move into management positions, is dedicated to strengthening the ego in an effort to assert and maintain control over their environment and their destiny. In contrast, the Eastern frame of reference views pragmatically appropriate limitations of the ego as a virtue.

To the Easterner, overt strength is not unequivocally a desired attribute. This notion of strength may be likened to the endurance of coral reefs that survive the massive forces of sea and wind during typhoons. Reefs do not attempt to resist the sea like defiant walls of man-made steel and concrete. Instead, the reef extends wedges out in a seaward direction. The waves deflect off these wedges, one against the other. Consequently their power, rather than directed at the reef, is turned against itself. The reef does not insist on standing higher than the sea. In times of typhoon, the waves wash over the reef. And it survives.

Let things flow. “Success is going straight—around the circle,” says the Chinese adage. How often in organizations does the forcing of events precipitate needless resistance and even crisis? Yet the Western notion of leadership, fueled by the high value placed on logical, purposive, goal-blinded action, impels many to leap before they look.[9]

Dam up a river. In time the water rises until a trickle finds its way around the obstruction, gradually increasing in flow and force until its original course is resumed. Managers, of course, do not have to watch torrents of frustration and energy needlessly build up behind an organizational obstruction. But perhaps the solution is not always to dynamite away the obstruction; sometimes it is to trace a way around it with a light touch, enough to get a trickle flowing. Let the flow of events do the rest of the work. By embracing an alternative concept of leadership, managers can choose, where appropriate, to seek a contributing place in the flow of things rather than impose a false sense of mastery over events.

For Employees, Idiosyncracies vs. Systems

The typical Western organization prides itself on having made a science of the secular virtues of efficiency and impartiality. In trying to cope with the slowed growth and economic uncertainty of recent years, organizations have intensified the emphasis on efficiency. A different set of forces has put emphasis on impartiality—among them the regulations aimed at eliminating discrimination of all kinds. The dilemma is how to treat people as equal without treating them as the same. Many organizations appear to be insensitive to this distinction. As a result they, like white bread or pure sugar, become bland and somewhat unhealthful; all the vital human elements seem to get refined away.

I should acknowledge that many Western executives show deep concern for the people working for them. In a survey of American managers, psychologist Jay Hall found that those most highly rated in interpersonal skills were generally regarded as the most competent by their bosses. “Good managers,” Hall wrote, “use an integrative style of management in which production goals and people's needs are equally important."[10]

Obviously, organizations need efficient systems to accomplish their tasks. But enough is enough, and more may be too much. The human touch is often lacking, and its absence breeds isolation and detachment. Lonely people perform instrumental functions as if they truly were interchangeable parts in a great machine. The explanation, I suppose, is that the increasing physical density of workers in our landscaped offices and automated factories has nothing to do with the psychic distances. Hard-edged procedures enhance this sense of aloneness.

Japanese companies, despite their evident prowess at adopting Western technology, have not followed the Western pattern where trade-offs between human relationships and secular efficiencies are concerned. Of more than 600 American employees of Japanese corporations interviewed in my study (including 100 managers and 500 workers) almost all expressed an awareness of the more personalized approach of their employers. The Japanese have a word describing a special quality of master potters who make the "perfect" bowl. The bowl is endowed with an ever-so-slight imperfection—a constant reminder of the object's relation to the humanity of the maker. The master knows that the perfection of mass-produced bowls is less satisfying than ones that lean a little. In this context, it might be said that Japanese companies lean a little.

The Japanese distinguish between our notion of "organization" and their notion of "the company." In their minds, the term organization refers only to the system; their concept of the company includes its underlying character as well. A company's character describes a shared sense of values long held by members and enforced by group norms. The result is an institutional way of doing things that is different from what efficiency alone would require. The "company" may accomplish the same tasks as an "organization" does, but it occupies more space, moves with more weight, and reflects a commitment to larger ends than just the accomplishment of a mission.

In Japan, companies are thought of as taking all of an employee. (In the United States the prevailing notion is that they take a piece of an employee.) The relationship is akin to the binding force of the family. Lacking such a philosophy, Western organizations tend to rely on what bureaucracies do best—championing "systems solutions"—rather than deal with the idiosyncratic requirements of human nature. The result can isolate people into the lonely illusion of objectivity.

Is the Bottom Line the Measure?

From the Japanese vantage point, the sense of incompleteness in our working lives stems from a divergence between what many people seek and what most Western organizations provide. Most people bring three kinds of needs to their organizational existence: a need to be rewarded for what they achieve, a need to be accepted as a unique person, and a need to be appreciated not only for the function performed but also as a human being. The term "reward," as used here, refers to the tangible payments one receives from an organization (such as salary and promotions) in exchange for services provided.

I use this narrow, rather instrumental definition of rewards to distinguish it from "acceptance" and "appreciation," which represent other kinds of benefits sought. In this context, acceptance refers to the quality of being known in a human sense rather than simply valued for the function one performs. The worker feels acceptance when people and organizations know him for who he is and make allowance for that uniqueness in their relationship with him. Appreciation goes a step further, conveying not only an acknowledgment by others of a person's distinctness but also a valuation of it in a positive and supportive way.

In an effort to express their commitment to people, the Japanese companies in the United States that I studied spent on average more than three times as much per employee on social and recreational facilities and activities than their American counterparts ($48.85 per employee per year versus $14.85). Some of these programs were probably largely symbolic, but many also fostered increased off-the-job contact among employees. The benefit was to "personalize" the particular company.

Perhaps a more direct vehicle for providing acceptance and appreciation is the Japanese policy of supporting spans of control at the supervisory level. This practice resulted in twice as much contact between workers and their foremen as in American companies, measured by employees per first-line supervisor (30.1 versus 13.5). The supervisors in Japanese-managed companies more often worked alongside the subordinates, engaged in personal counseling more extensively, and permitted more interaction among workers than the American companies did.[11]

What was the outcome? The evidence is sufficiently mixed to gratify both skeptics and advocates. There was no difference in production; the average output per unit of labor was about the same. Moreover, the Japanese companies experienced somewhat higher levels of tardiness and absenteeism. In respect to job satisfaction, the results were more favorable for Japanese-managed businesses in the United States. Their managers and workers expressed much more satisfaction with their jobs than did their counterparts in American companies.

Why bother, it might be asked, if the result has no impact on the bottom line? By Eastern standards the bottom line misses the point. It was Socrates (not an Eastern philosopher) who observed that "man is the measure of all things." Eastern perspective brings his meaning into fuller view. To the Eastern mind, it is "man," not the "bottom line," that is the ultimate measure of all things. He is not the source of all things, as some who view man in total command of his destiny might proclaim. Nor is he the objectified contributor to all things, as some organizations appear to presume in weighing his contributions against their costs.

A Japanese, while concerned with the bottom line, is not single-minded about it as many Westerners are. Rather, he proceeds with a dual awareness—that there is a second ledger in which "success" is debited or credited in terms of his contribution to the quality of relationships that ensue. So the professional manager defines his role not only as one who accomplishes certain organizational tasks but also as an essential intermediary in the social fabric.

Are Feathers More Effective Than Sledgehammers?

This discussion has utilized Eastern ideas as a metaphor for exploring the process of management. One central theme is that it is not just particular notions—such as ambiguity or implied recognition—that can be helpful but the cultural context underlying these notions as well. I have tried to suggest that a combination of culture, words, philosophy, and values provides each of us with a particular outlook. The Eastern outlook is adopted not because it is “best” but because it sheds a different light on certain aspects of management. The Eastern perspective provides not so much a new set of tools (for, as I have noted repeatedly, many skilled American managers use these tools) but rather legitimacy for using these tools in some situations where they are appropriate.

From the Eastern vantage point, process is where managers live. This vantage point dwells on the chemistry of human relationships, as well as on the mechanics of human accomplishment, and it provides a way of thinking that assigns a particular value to human needs as well as to systems and economic requirements. Appreciation of the underpinnings of this outlook is fundamental to the thrust of this article. For if they are bounded by our traditional set of Western assumptions, many of the ideas here become empty techniques.

Management assumptions act as fences—keeping some things in and other things out of our awareness. As we have seen, there are many fences, not of wood but shaped by our words, values, and management ideology. I submit that a nontrivial set of management problems might be better understood if viewed from the other side of our Western fence. Undoubtedly, a very high degree of personal development is necessary to embrace both of these outlooks, to know when each is appropriate and to acquire the skills which each requires.

This suggests a cautionary note for the Western manager: in addition to approaching things purposively, defining problems crisply, and identifying his objectives explicitly (which are desirable but not necessarily sufficient traits to manage all problems skillfully), he may also wish to bear in mind that our Western world view diminishes our sensitivity and skill in managing certain kinds of problems. Such insight may enable us to avoid using sledgehammers when feathers will do. Eastern ideas provide a metaphor for the acquisition of such skill. "Truth lurks in metaphors."[12]

1. For a detailed report of these findings see my article, "Communications and Decision Making Across Cultures: Japanese and American Comparisons," *Administrative Science Quarterly,* in press.

2. Witter Bynner, *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1944), p. 30.

3. Frank Gibney, "The Japanese and Their Language," *Encounter,* March 1975, p. 33.

4. G. McLean Preston and Katherine Jillson, "The Manager and Self-Respect," *AMA Survey Report* (New York: AMACOM, 1975).

5. Bynner, *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu,* p. 74.

6. Bynner, *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu,* pp. 28 and 38.

7. For a discussion of the myths versus the realities of management behavior and leadership, see Leonard Sayles, *Managerial Behavior* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), especially pp. 41-45; also see Henry Mintzberg, "The Manager's Job: Folklore and Fact," HBR July-August 1975, p. 49.

8. Anthony G. Athos, "Choice and Decision," unpublished working paper, 1973.

9. For a discussion of this "flowing" phenomenon in a Western context, see James D. Thompson, *Organizations in Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 149.

10. Jay Hall, "What Makes a Manager Good, Bad, or Average?" *Psychology Today,* August 1976, p. 52.

11. Richard Tanner Pascale and Mary Ann Maguire, "The Company and the Worker: Japanese and American Comparisons," Graduate School of Business, Stanford University, 1977.

12. Anthony G. Athos, "Satan Is Left-Handed," *Association of Humanistic Psychology Newsletter,* December 1975.

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