



Management in Chinese cultures

Organisational creativity

Jane Henry

Respect for authority is a key Chinese value. One effect of this is that it becomes quite natural for Chinese employees to accept the paternalism inherent in traditional Chinese firms that a Westerner might find more difficult to accept, but on the other hand, it does mean that Chinese employee may be rather more reluctant than a Western employee to challenge some of the ideas put forward by the boss, and to criticise these. Now from a Western perspective, we would expect that that would lead to less creativity and innovation in the firm.

BENDICK LEUNG (Factory Manager, Phillips, Hong Kong)

People tend to listen to elder people, or people at a higher level. They listen to their words, imitate what they are doing, try to learn from them. I think we just do it, I don't know why! So when a senior guy is talking, they just tend not to challenge their opinions, just keep silent and maybe after the discussion they will discuss this amongst themselves.

Geoffrey Bye

One of big differences is I found coming to Hong Kong and to work across Asia, is how to get the process of creativity underway in a Chinese environment. From a Western point of view, if I brought a team of people together for a brainstorming creative meeting, we'd have a free flow of ideas across the table, flying out, an ease of ideas, everybody trying to get their opinion in. Coming to Hong Kong and trying to operate that way in a Chinese environment with Chinese managers, my first instance of trying to do that I was met with stony silence. It was very, very difficult to try and get, in public, the views of the Chinese managers around the meeting table. I felt I'd failed in trying to get people to think creatively. What happened was after the meeting I was approached on a one by one basis with this multitude of ideas, creative so it's finding the route to creativity in the Chinese manager that is different.

Po Chung

When a certain question is asked we always say, "what kind of man is he?", "does he have hidden agenda?" If you have a hidden agenda, then the whole thing freezes up, because then they are either making you look good or glorifying you, you are not really working for the whole group. So I think that has something to do with it.

Li Dechang

The character of the Chinese worker is different from that of the Western workers. The Chinese are not so open. They don't like to express their true feelings. A manager should encourage them to open up. The younger generation are, of course, more open than their parents and more keen to express themselves.

Doc Du

With the right leader, whose directing, maybe you can concentrate resources in the right area and maybe for the type of businesses that Asia is competitive in, we are not at a stage where we need too many creative people, perhaps we can concentrate the limited resources on the creativity of a few individuals.

Allan Wong

Inherently both Chinese and Westerners are as creative. The Chinese people, because of Chinese tradition, you don't say a lot of things, because saying a lot of things, it usually counter productive. You have to make sure you say less, and you do more. That's the Chinese thinking, US people they very creative, very "out of the box" thinking and they always come up with different ideas. US companies and Western companies tend to be very structured system, individually they could be very creative, but somehow this can be lost in the structure somewhere. But, however, having said that, when companies grow to a certain size, then the Western system somehow takes over to be more creative, and there is a lot of companies in the US who have very good system of nurturing creativity and that actually what Asian companies need to learn.