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Management and culture under development

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Abbreviations

IBM International Business Machines

PNG Papua New Guinea

The role of culture in shaping work behaviour has been the focus of scholarly commentary since the European industrial revolution. Recent research in the context of globalisation has focused on cross-cultural management and the variety of work attitudes exhibited by employees from culturally diverse backgrounds. Hofstede's seminal work in this area established a role for 'national culture' as a major determinant of workplace behaviour. While this has been the subject of academic criticism for its reductionism, it has provided a conceptualisation of the relationship between work organisation and culture which has been broadly influential in management circles.

In nations in which governments are pursuing policies intended to encourage accelerated economic growth many echoes can be heard of both the industrialisation and the cross-cultural management discourses. In these contemporary situations of 'development', a characteristic of workplace behaviour is the conflict in assumptions and attitudes between the organisational cultures informing management actions and the social cultures which workers carry with them from their non-work environments. This article considers the constraints culturally conditioned attitudes create for the management of work organisations in a number of 'developing' countries.

The changes in the nature of work brought about by the advent of industrial production in Europe were mirrored in attitudinal changes, with direct impacts on work motivation and the task of management. A simplistic way of

conceptualising these changes is to think of the pre-industrial era as one in which the work of individuals was determined by their social status. Under industrialism the opposite tendency is evident with work itself becoming a major determinant of the position of individuals in society. In pre-industrial Europe those of greater social status saw both the material necessity and personal motivation to work as sure signs of inferior status. The aristocrat looked down on the dedicated Puritan economic activity of the middle class traders and tradesmen, and glorified the cult of the amateur over the role of the professional in fields ranging from sport to politics (Moore 1973:488–90). Work attitudes for wage employees, however, were determined by neither of these sets of constraints. For most, it was simply a matter of necessity, with the extrinsic value of wages being the sole motivation. Under industrial production 'work design excluded for all but a minority of skilled men the possibility of intrinsic meanings, and the struggle for survival absorbed too much energy to allow aspirations in that direction' (Fox 1980:163).

Thus the new form of production created a need for new forms of organisational management, not only because of the need to organise an increasingly complex system of production with more people working more intensively, but also because of the character of work relationships and the nature of work motivation under the new forms of production. Contemporary studies of worker discontent locate it in two main sources—employment insecurity and lack of control over the job (Frenkel and Coolican 1984:138). Both of these increased

dramatically with the development of market oriented forms of production. Simultaneously, labour became a commodity to be bought and sold in a market in which employers had the stronger position because of their ability to provide or withhold the employment workers needed to earn a livelihood and gain social status (Keenoy 1985:89–95). In these changed circumstances of increased insecurity, in which the aim of production was to use the skills of employees to create profit, management filled the central task of motivating workers, without which the aims of entrepreneurial economic activity could not be realised (Whitfield 1987:8–10).

The problem for management in this endeavour was and remains that economic necessity may of itself be an insufficient motivator of employees, particularly where quality work is required. Intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors will play a role. The dichotomy this establishes may be seen in the historical opposition of economic and religious ways of thinking about work. In the example of industrialising Europe, the orthodox Christian approach to work, derived from the New Testament writers, saw it as a means by which an individual 'satisfies his or her God-given role in the order of Creation' (Gordon 1994:25). So the thirteenth century saint Thomas Aquinas could conclude that 'to live well is to work well' (*summa theologicae* I-II, q.57, a.5). The contrast between this ideological tradition, in which work is an essential part of individuals' living out their createdness, and the actual jobs of the 'dark satanic mills' of industrialising Europe could hardly be greater.

Some parallels with contemporary societies undergoing accelerated economic development are evident in this European history. For instance, the conclusions of Western anthropologists regarding the nature of work in more recently non-industrial societies stress that the individual's role in work was determined by their status in society (Applebaum 1984:3–12). Where this has been the case, market oriented economic activity will clearly bring about major changes, with consequent social tensions as individuals and communities attempt to cope with the changes in attitude demanded by new approaches to work. Nor is Christianity by any means the only source of traditional ideology to emphasise the difference between that work which is an outpouring of an individual's essential self and the job which is undertaken as a means of livelihood. The Hindu imprecation to 'know therefore what is work and also know what is wrong work' (*The Bhagavad Gita* 1962:62) carries the same implication that work is properly more than just a means of survival. The Taoist tradition is even more explicit in urging its followers not to take their jobs too seriously—'just do your job then let go' so as to concentrate on the real work of self-fulfilment (*Tao Te Ching* 1988:24).

A linguistic exercise might equally be used to demonstrate the point. 'Job' is a relatively new word in English owing its immediate origins to the Middle English *gobbe* (lump) and the subsequent, but now obsolete, usage *jobbe* (piece). The term 'job work' was originally used precisely to differentiate a discrete piece of work from the more general and, in the thinking of the

day, more genuine work of life. This is reflected in Samuel Johnson's definition of 'job' as 'petty piddling work; a piece of chance work' (Johnson 1963:22). The difference may also be seen in some current usages with reference to the 'great work' of particularly creative or influential people standing in stark contrast to the 'it's just a job' attitude of 'ordinary' workers. There is a considerable literature investigating this dichotomy.¹ The point here is merely to note that, at certain points in the histories of human societies, those which have organised their economies on the basis of markets have commodified labour. In these societies, work became a creature of the market and financial considerations became primary. In this sense, work lost its direct relationship with the broader issues of life. In the more recent history of industrialism the emergence of employee motivation as a key management concern is an indicator of the extent of this loss. The management commentators who have focused attention on personal achievement and self-actualisation in work as basic human needs are also pointing to the absence of such broadly satisfying aspects in many—perhaps most—areas of employment.

In many situations of 'development', accelerated economic growth and rapid social change add a level of complexity to this general managerial dilemma. This may be seen in the disparity between the attitudes and behaviour expected of employees in the workplace and those which are normal in their non-work environments.

In general, work behaviour is clearly conditioned by a variety of socially sanctioned attitudes that might be regarded

as the product of particular 'cultures'. An understanding of this impact of culture on work may be seen as a necessary step to understanding the way work is managed in particular organisational and social environments. In the particular context of 'development', this often means that the culture of work organisations is at variance with the broader cultures influential in employees' lives. As one Filipino commentator on management practices has put it, 'we have cut our teeth on structural and systematic concepts from the West, yet beneath the Western veneer these have constructed we are, deep within, Asian in our values and feelings' (Ortigas 1994:6). For scholars and managers seeking to understand work behaviour in situations of accelerated economic and social development this dichotomy is deeply significant. The issue can be illustrated by reference to the implications it has for the motivation of employees.

The general problem of motivation is that the variety of individual employee's aims will translate into varying degrees of commitment to the goals of the organisations in which they are employed. Since many of these personal aims are the product of cultural mores, an understanding of the impact of social culture on work is also required if we are to appreciate the task of management in maximising the contributions of individuals to organisational goals. So cultural impacts on work may also be seen as having twin sources. The first is in the community at large and is seen in the attitudes people bring to work. The second is in the work organisation itself, where culture is a product of rules and

control mechanisms but also of the vertical and horizontal interactions between members of the organisation.

In developed market economies acculturation to work is strong. With social attitudes generally supportive of work organisation it may become quite difficult to separate social from work culture or to identify any discrete impacts of culture on work. Nonetheless, cultural stereotypes are regularly produced by management commentators in explanation of social and organisational behaviour. So, of Europeans they tell us that

the Belgians [are] inclined to be pragmatic, the Danes to be indulgent, the English conservative, the French elitist, the Germans orderly, the Greeks patriarchal, the Irish loquacious, the Italians dependent, the Dutch reserved, the Portuguese resilient, the Spanish fatalistic [and so on] (Hickson 1993:250).

Americans are seen to be ambitious individualists for whom market and intra-organisational competition is second nature (DuBrin 1989:261–66; Alston 1985:69–100). The white settler societies of Australia and New Zealand, on the other hand, have been characterised as less dedicated to work and more to leisure with a particular penchant for the ‘long weekend’. By contrast, Japanese culture is seen to have achieved a rare symbiosis between individual need and organisational demand in which primacy is given to group loyalty and personal relationships, with generalists rather than specialists being favoured as managers (Robbins 1993:326–6,340; Nanto 1988:7) and continuous training and improvement being

both an organisational and a personal aim (Hanada and Yoshikawa 1991:378).

The most influential model for conceptualising the role of culture within management discourse has been that established by Hofstede’s seminal study of attitudes of IBM employees in 40 countries (1980). Hofstede identified four key dimensions of national culture impacting on attitudes to work organisation. These were power-distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity–femininity. His analysis was broadened by a subsequent study involving respondents from 53 countries (Hofstede 1993). While Japan, Singapore and Taiwan were included, along with the settler societies of North America and Australasia, the nations covered were industrialised or European, in various senses, or both. Nonetheless, the breadth and depth of these studies have led to their being widely seen as authoritative. Hofstede’s conclusion was that, in each of these key dimensions, national culture had a greater influence on attitudes than gender, age, occupation or organisational status. A brief overview of Hofstede’s four dimensions will allow some general comments on their applicability to work organisations in nations pursuing accelerated economic development.

Hofstede saw his power-distance dimension as being about ‘human inequality’ (Hofstede 1980:92), in which ‘power-distance represents the extent to which the less powerful people in a culture accept and expect that power is distributed unequally’ (Hofstede 1993:2). His original argument was that the extent to which

culture legitimises power differentials between individuals impacts on actions and structures across much of national life (Hofstede 1980:92–93). The results of this in employment are that, in high power-distance cultures, ‘subordinates accept superiors as different kinds of people’ (Pugh 1993:88) and ‘employees...expect managers to lead, and they become uncomfortable with the delegation of discretionary decisions’ (Adler 1991:151 [REF?]). While in low power-distance cultures ‘superiors and subordinates consider each other to be colleagues and [agree that]...inequality in society should be minimised’ (Pugh 1993:88).

Once again a particular problem is evident in those situations in which employees bring to the workplace a different set of attitudes to those sanctioned or assumed in the culture of the work organisation itself. In terms of human equality, an obvious arena for such a clash is in the competing claims of management and social hierarchy. Market oriented work organisation tends to endorse differentials in wealth, status and ‘ability’ based on market values. This is, however, by no means the only way in which societies have conceptualised hierarchy. Of particular relevance to nations pursuing accelerated economic growth are the perceptions of social status and ‘moral economy’ brought to work organisations by employees from rural areas. A useful illustration of the potential impact of these is provided in Scott’s work on the nature of peasant social attitudes in southeast Asian nations. His conclusion is that, in these situations, values are derived from economic necessity and

emphasise the safety factors of horizontal cooperation and vertical patronage, rather than personal competition and initiative (Scott 1976).

In the context of ‘developing’ economies, Hofstede’s second dimension for measuring cultural impacts on work, ‘uncertainty avoidance’, also has a particular resonance. This arises from the fact that the innovation and risk-taking that are an integral part of market oriented management may not be reflected in the social attitudes that employees bring to work. Even in Hofstede’s sample of European and industrialised Asian nations a considerable variety was evident with Greece and Japan showing high uncertainty avoidance and the United States standing at the opposite end of the spectrum. The impacts on work behaviour can be seen in relation to motivational factors. So,

employees in high uncertainty avoidance countries tend to consider job security and life-time employment more important than holding a very interesting or challenging job (Adler 1991:153).

The truth in many ‘developing’ countries is that holding any job is an enormous achievement in itself and individuals may well be prepared to accept both low wages and lack of employment security to gain an income.

Hofstede’s individualism dimension ‘describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity which prevails in a given society’ (Hofstede 1980:213). The distinction here is between individualist and collectivist approaches. The individualist ethic is ‘highly right-

conscious...knowing full-well where one's self-interests lie' (Chen 1995:28–29), whereas the collectivist approach 'is characterised by a tighter social framework' with emphasis on family or clan loyalty (Pugh 1993:89). In the former, the ideal type of person is a leader, while in the latter she/he is a good member of the group. In management terms, an individualist culture requires explicit control within organisations, whereas a collectivist culture provides that control via social pressure so that the organisation itself may rely on this implicit control to manage its members (Adler 1991:47).

Given that few 'developing' countries exhibit the individualism of market oriented societies, this dimension provides another potential point of conflict between organisational culture owing much to 'Western' ideas and social culture arising from within a particular national context. The 'confucian dynamism' (Hofstede and Bond 1988) observed by foreigners in Asian nations provides a case in point. So, however, does the more general observation that in non-European nations 'motivation to succeed at work often derives from family pride and family needs' rather than individualist motives (Bedi 1991:10).

This dichotomy is also evident in Hofstede's final dimension 'masculinity–femininity', with the 'masculine' values defined in terms of ambition, assertiveness and strength (Hofstede 1993:3). In such cultures 'performance is what counts...money and material standards are important...big and fast are beautiful' (Pugh 1993:89). By contrast 'in feminine cultures, men and women are both expected to be non-competitive, modest, concerned with

relationships and to sympathise with whatever is small and weak' (Hofstede 1993:3) so that it is 'the quality of life that matters, people and the environment are important [and] service provides motivation' (Pugh 1993:89).

A major difficulty with Hofstede's approach is that it involves a high degree of generalisation. Characteristics which are established as dominant in a particular nation are taken to apply generally. The failure to take into account non-national differences elevates normative values to the point where others become invisible. This may be particularly damaging for management in respect of gender differences, especially where female workers constitute a large part of the workforce. Despite these analytical shortcomings, however, the broad acceptance of the views represented by Hofstede and his followers is evidence of how seriously the cultural stereotype is taken in management discourse. In practice, many managerial techniques assume a shared, or at least an overlapping, set of values between employees and employers derived from a common national culture supportive of work.

The point is that this becomes a particular issue where the culture of work organisations represents a marked departure from the social cultures surrounding them. This is typically the case in the work organisations of nations undergoing rapid economic change where newly introduced forms of organisation operate within well established social cultures which have developed in response to quite different rationalities (Pinches and Lakha 1987). The

difficulties this poses for the creation of a capable workforce willing to partner capital in the tasks of economic development are legion. At its most simplistic, they are seen in employees' poor levels of motivation and low labour productivity. On the managerial side, non-market rationalities may be seen in nepotism, status consciousness and other forms of what Westerners typically see as 'corruption' which also undermine the effectiveness of organisations.

In studies of the British industrial revolution, the process of cultural change involved in altering patterns of work behaviour has been well documented (Thompson 1991). As has been noted above, the economic development from feudal to market oriented production was accompanied by changes in work culture. In this process, culture was both a tool of change and of resistance to it over a period of centuries (Thompson 1983:101-6). A major difference in the experience of those nations attempting a contemporary move to market oriented production is that the speed with which the process is being pursued leaves little room for gradual changes in culture. So there is typically a conflict between cultural attitudes in society at large and those required within work organisations. In one sense the entire evolution of management thought can be seen as a search for conceptual frameworks to assist organisations' adaptation to internal and external contingencies (Wren 1987:390). Yet the challenge posed by cultural attitudes at variance with organisational need remains largely unanswered, and management theorists continue to bemoan the lack of 'substantive cross-cultural theories of work

behaviour and attitudes' (Cambell et al. 1993:1) to assist in addressing the practical problems this causes for management. Meanwhile, practitioners seeking better ways of managing employees in situations of economic development report that there are often major cultural gaps between the work organisation and its employees, with the former being driven by imperatives of market rationality and managerial control while the latter seem, to many managers at least, to be mired in traditional attitudes which often undermine both managerial authority and workplace productivity (McGavin 1996).

Management commentary on culture has historically been more concerned with organisational culture understood as 'the company way of doing things or its philosophy, style or spirit...transmitted by a process of socialisation' (Blunt 1986:115). In the last decade, however, a noticeable change has occurred. One aspect of this is seen in the unease expressed in relation to the inherent biases towards a management viewpoint arising in some of the more narrowly based studies of organisational culture. Not only did such studies run the danger of replicating this bias but they may also be seen to have contributed to its perpetuation. The necessity for 'social culture' to become part of organisational analysis can be seen in contemporary arguments for 'broadening the definition of culture to specifically include the operational environment and ambient society' (Allaire and Firsiroti 1994:209).

This 'social culture', however, may include a bewildering variety of sub-cultures depending on the basis of identification,

with gender, ethnicity, language, religion, caste, class, and region playing obvious roles. It may nonetheless be possible to identify broader cultural characteristics that do impinge upon work within a particular community. One such generalisation noted above and emphasised by many commentators from 'developing' countries concerns the extent of collectivism in non-Western cultures, which stands in sharp contrast to much 'modern' management practice based on an individualism characteristic of US and other 'Western' nations but much less powerful outside of these cultural contexts (Jocano 1990:2; Vente and Chen 1980).

To illustrate the point, a brief attempt is made here to identify some of those culturally engendered attitudes which have posed problems for the management of labour in a handful of nations undergoing processes of rapid economic development.² While this is unsatisfactory to the extent that these are complex phenomena which are here reduced to almost school textbook simplicity, it does serve the purpose of indicating in a more concrete manner some of the perimeters of the impact of social culture on work in at least a handful of nations.

Indonesia

Kerukunan (harmony) and *nrimo* (submissiveness) are two typically Javanese concepts, which have been seen as impacting on work behaviour. While there are many other cultures within Indonesia, the influence of attitudes rooted in traditional Javanese practices seem particularly determinative of work attitudes

in larger organisations and especially in the public sector, where Javanese dominance of political power translates into prominence at most levels of organisational leadership. As one non-Javanese Indonesian informant put it 'in the Department we all act like Javanese'.

The concept of *kerukunan* encapsulates the necessity of acting in a way conducive to the maintenance of society through unity. This is not so much a positive striving for unity as an active avoidance of actions that will disturb harmony—regardless of the individual's 'real' feelings. So a proposition may be rejected by answering 'yes' rather than 'no', because such an answer does not disturb harmony, with the 'real' picture not being clear until action is required. In the practical management environment it may therefore be quite inappropriate for managers to speak directly. So, when giving orders or correcting subordinates, managers may require a more subtle approach; for instance, reminding the person to consider—'what if we do it this way...' (Geertz 1961:146).

Nrimo involves accepting everything without protest. It is not so much a position of apathy as a rational response that avoids excessive pain or useless challenge. This has a considerable ideological history in which acceptance is seen as an active response which breaks the 'diabolic' cycle of fear for the future and regret for the past (Bonnett 1994). For work behaviour, the problems this poses arise from the view that wealth is illusory and not worth striving for (Hardjowiroyo 1983), overlaid with an Islamic view that hard work is not efficacious because everything is

determined by God. The effects on employee motivation have been noted as including lack of assertiveness (Sunyoto 1995:120), low labour turnover, high levels of cooperation, little need for achievement, strong need for social affiliation, and lack of initiative (Taruna 1987:43). Additional organisational consequences were said by informants to include poor workplace communication and a reliance on personal status rather than logical argument in decisionmaking processes.

The Philippines

Pakikisama (togetherness) is a central concept of Filipino social life, most literally translated as 'to accompany or go along with' (Lynch 1964:8-9), and reflects a desire for smooth interpersonal relationships. It results in an avoidance of conflict and in communication which involves extravagant praise, metaphor rather than frankness, smiling and not losing one's temper (Guthrie 1968:63). *Pakikisama* has similar implications to the Javanese attitudes mentioned above, particularly in respect of yielding to the will of a leader despite one's own ideas (Andres 1981:17). It leads to a 'constrained conformity' in which, while silence is not consent (Jocano 1990:3-4), there are severe limitations placed on the exercise of individual initiative.

At a more subtle level, the effort to ensure harmony might result in behaviour which is incomprehensible outside the Filipino value system. So, for instance, to laugh when a fellow worker makes a mistake, far from showing a lack of sympathy, 'is actually helping the person assuage the pain of embarrassment by putting the mistake in a

humorous context' (Jocano 1990:4). On the other hand, efforts to curb anti-social attitudes may result in not allowing privacy and in talking issues through where someone is out of line (Andres 1981:45). The latter in particular has been seen as having positive implications for cooperative working relations, while the former is seen in the high regard accorded leaders who are approachable and are able to win the confidence of a team through demonstrating their concern for the welfare of its members (Jocano 1990:56).

The familiarism and personalism which affects employees has also been noted as impacting on the practices of Filipino managers. Recruitment in particular is affected so that 'jobs are advertised but in the final decision...it could be a friend, the region-mate, the *Kompadre*...or the family referral who is given the job' (Aganon 1994:31). Similarly, managerial evaluation of employee performance may appear to have more to do with personal relationships than with 'objective' criteria. In fact, in this cultural setting the distinction familiar in 'Western' thinking between personal (subjective) and professional (objective) judgement is much less clear.

To put it another way, in an individualist cultural setting, where the aphorism 'don't take it personally' is a cultural norm, the Filipino stress on personalised relationships would make no sense. Here, however, to act in any other way would make no sense because personal relationships have priority. So Filipino commentators seeking to explain the motives of their compatriots' behaviour have concluded that 'Filipinos tend to be personal in all their dealings thus actions

and messages are given personal interpretations which affect business and working relationships' (Gapuz and Lozada 1990:3). This makes criticism of performance a difficult task as any criticism is likely to be perceived as a real personal insult (Jocano 1992:22), while a positive evaluation of performance may well be interpreted in terms of personal affection rather than professional judgement (Cruz 1990:51).

The collectivism at the heart of *pakikisama* is also seen in concepts of *damayan* (involvement) and *bayanihan* (cooperation) which bring people together to accomplish tasks requiring group action. Where management is able to build on this through teamwork and competition between teams it has been seen as having positive effects on productivity (de Leon 1987:33–34). Equally, however, it may operate to limit the significance of work in the lives of individuals who draw their confidence from their standing in their group of friends or *barkada* (Jocano 1990:25) rather than from their contribution to the objectives of work organisations.

The social sanction operating in the Filipino sense of shame, *hiya*, is also seen as having a direct limiting effect on the capacity of managers where collective pressure makes 'avoiding personal affronts which could put a person in a socially unacceptable position' imperative (de Leon 1987:29). This has been observed as leading to a style of organisational communication in which euphemism and 'double talk' are common (Roces and Roces 1992:40 [1993??]) and where persuasion is preferred over argument which may offend personal

sensibilities (Jocano 1992:11). So in a situation, for instance, in which managers are called on to provide feedback on employees' performance the type of opinion expressed publicly may focus primarily on maintaining self-esteem and inter-personal relations rather than on organisational objectives (Roces and Roces 1992:40).

The dynamic nature of culture, however, ensures that other interpretations are also possible. One of particular interest in this context is the attempt to locate religious significance in the traditional cultural concepts (Gorospe 1966). Here *bayanihan* becomes not only cooperation but also community spirit. So the reciprocity of *utang na loob*, the 'debt of gratitude' (Jocano 1992:3–7) which forges 'a strong sense of personal and emotional obligation' (Roces and Roces 1992:41 [1993?]; de Leon 1987:29) may be seen as a negative in Western commentary and management literature. Gorospe, however, presents it as a manifestation of Christian thoughtfulness for others. Similarly the fatalism of *bahala na*, again often seen as having a demotivating effect on individuals, becomes valuable as a trust in God.

The consequences of Filipino culture for work organisation have been summarised by foreign observers in terms of low levels of trust, the need for close supervision, central decisionmaking and the avoidance of conflict (Richards 1993:362). For Filipino commentators, however, the factors which appear so negative to an outsider have positive value. Jocano, for example, argues that the implications of cultural familiarism are simply that work relationships rather

than work functions are of primary importance in the Philippines cultural setting. He concludes that

[e]ffective management is a function of the congruence of the modern and professional management used in the corporation and the *elements of culture* in the environment in which the corporation operates...[while] within the corporation, effective management is a function of the fit in the perceptions and expectations managers and workers have of each other (Jocano 1990:15).

Thailand

Western commentary on Thai organisational behaviour has focused firmly on the role of social status in determining work relationships and roles (Siffin 1966:240). This is particularly so in respect of the public sector, where a lack of bottom up communication has been noted as limiting the usefulness of information available to managers (Haas 1979:30), while employees' grievances of fester as unarticulated sources of demotivation (Shor 1962).

More recent work has focused on the role of seniority in decisionmaking. This is seen as limiting the extent of accountability because there is no requirement for decisions to be logical or open to debate (Redding 1993:223). The decisions of senior officials are accepted as correct because they are the decisions of senior officials. Added to this absolute authority is the fact that work relationships are more reflective of personal than of organisational realities so that the employee and the manager never stand in a purely professional relationship (Redding 1993:226).

In discussions with Thai managers several overlapping factors, located in cultural attitudes, emerge as constraints to organisational reform. The first is seniority. Schregle has argued that what actually happens in Asian work organisations in general is that family style relationships are reproduced with the manager in the role of parent and the employees in the role of children (Schregle 1982:131). While not wishing to retreat to this level of reductionism it certainly seems true that in Thai work organisations, as informants put it, 'docility is more prized than ability' and 'submission to power is highly valued for the achievement of career advancement', while 'innovation involves fear of reprisal'.

A second factor is that the legitimacy of organisational authority is strengthened by strong national sentiment regarding monarchical forms of governance (Sutton 1962:9). Informants explain this in terms of the high regard in which Thais hold their current monarch and the historical status of monarchy in having successfully protected Thais from the costs of political insecurity so evident in neighbouring nations. One result evident in Thai commentary is that submission to authority is seen as a prized personal characteristic (Ruktham 1981:23). This may be reinforced by a Buddhist religious attitude in which organisational superiors, like the King himself, are seen as beings who have reached a higher level of consciousness through the process of life and re-birth (Vachirakajorn 1988:89).

At one level this legitimises the creation of highly centralised organisational structures which impede information flow and stifle initiative (Haas 1979:31). One

result, from a 'development' standpoint, is that district officers responsible for the implementation of development policies have little real power and must rely on their personal relationships with senior headquarters officials to advance the cause of 'their' districts (Haas 1979:46). So the 'development' imperatives of decentralisation face an additional hurdle in the cultural imperatives towards centralised hierarchical control.

The organisational results of these approaches to authority are said to include the fact that lower status employees cannot communicate effectively with their superiors because of the distance between them, while the senior bureaucrats officiate 'like feudal landlords' whose rights to exercise authority need not be related to performance or subject to accountability (Ruktham 1981:104). On one side of the work relations equation this might result in managers being unwilling to openly criticise employees because of the breach of the personal relationship this would entail (Ruktham 1981:120). On the other hand, employees are seen as fearful of expressing non-conformity and therefore reluctant to make their views known (Pugh 1993:93). The implications in terms of communication, including performance evaluation and feedback, are obvious and captured by one Thai manager's inquiry, 'what communication?'

A third constraint, often remarked by foreign observers, is nepotism. Ruktham's example of the university management in which a new chancellor's friends were gradually appointed to all senior positions may not seem remarkable to academics

internationally. What may seem more remarkable is his observation that this trend extended to 'scholarly' criticism with the relationship of an author or seminar presenter to the chancellor becoming a factor in the scrutiny to which the work was subjected (Ruktham 1981:15). Perhaps, as those who adopt Hofstede's approach have argued, in a 'feminine' society in which the personal relationship is always more important than the organisational objective, this is inevitable (Schermerhorn et al. 1997). Haas has a more pragmatic interpretation of Thai bureaucratic nepotism, arguing that reciprocity cannot be guaranteed with strangers and that favouritism ensures a positive return only when the parties are brought within the same organisational environment (Haas 1979:29).

Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea (PNG), a nation of enormous ethnic diversity with literally hundreds of languages and 'cultures', those social concepts which are common seem to gain increased strength, especially in urban areas where the subtleties of local culture may be less significant. *Wantok* is one of these. It refers literally to those who speak the same language. It is used throughout Melanesia to identify the primary loyalty of the individual to clan, language group and region. In terms of work attitudes there are many implications of this cultural orientation. Its positive aspect may be seen in a PNG scholar's definition of it as 'mutual support and co-operation within mutually acceptable rules of social and economic behaviour' (Warakai 1989:45). Foreign observers, on the other hand, have seen

wantokism as involving invidious responsibilities, noting particularly the plight of employed Papua New Guineans who are obliged to give their time and resources to unemployed relatives as a major disincentive to work at all (Monsell-Davis 1993:8).

Wantokism has also been seen as operating within organisations with detrimental impacts on decisionmaking, control and communication. Amongst the behaviours reported by informants are the tendency to favour *wantoks* in appointments and promotions and the strength of informal work groups based around regionalism which have been seen as limiting managerial control. For workers' organisations this latter phenomenon has been an effective counter-balance to employer authority in organisations in which workers are largely from the same region. For managers, however, it can be a nightmare, with several reporting the need to develop forms of communication which take the reality of such informal work groups into account. These mechanisms range from having work group leaders who 'represent' a given group for purposes of communicating with managers to having separate communication with each of several regional groupings within an organisation's workforce.

In respect of 'favouritism', *tambus* (literally in-laws) may be even more problematic than *wantoks*. In Papua New Guinea, *tambus* are not 'just the in-laws' as Europeans might say. Marriage is a major means of bringing clans into harmony and of establishing economic and political links.

A Melanesian's *tambus* have an importance as partners and allies for life. Furthermore, the respect paid them is traditionally seen as ensuring the numbers and health of children, essential to the economic well being of the community and particularly its older members, whose physical well-being is often dependent upon the next generation of labour. The obligation to employ their *tambus* and show them the traditional respect creates a conflict of interest for managers which is rarely resolved by subordinating this customary order of necessity to the demands of organisational objectives (Ramoi 1986:88).

The continued viability of subsistence economic activity and the strength of the social relations that go with it are beyond the scope of this paper but clearly they cause a variety of problems for the management of Melanesian employees in the form of disincentives to work, poor motivation in work and low levels of organisational commitment. The bottom line for many employees in this situation is not the need to satisfy a manager but the certainty 'that they can always go back home to the village or receive food and shelter from their urban kin' (Levine and Levine 1979:34).

Region-wide factors

Two possible general factors emerge from informants and the literature as cultural concepts impacting on work behaviour in all of the nations mentioned above. They revolve around the role of personal status and the attitudes to time which employees bring into the workplace from their cultural environments.

In each of the countries mentioned above it is notable that the normative concepts of personal status are quite different and often opposed to those influential in the market oriented democracies of the 'West'. In the Indonesian case it was noted that personal status was a determinative factor in decisionmaking to the extent that the merit of a viewpoint was considered less important than the status of the individual expressing it. Similarly, in Thailand, seniority was seen as a vital ingredient in determining workplace behaviour. The implications for management are not merely to be found in the lack of the individualist ethic upon which so much 'Western' management theory is predicated. It must also be recognised that some of the cultural underpinnings of non-Western behavioural norms are positively anti-individualist. This may be seen in both the Indonesian orientation to the primacy of social harmony and in the Thai assertion of submissiveness as a socially desirable characteristic.

The point here is that management theory and practice which presumes an individualistic market orientation will tend to locate the dynamics of the work relationships in organisational or occupational status. In the many situations of 'development' this may provide an inadequate understanding because relationships between individuals and the manner in which they are able to interact in the workplace are likely to be strongly influenced by their relative social status derived from non-work environments. As mentioned above, this may this pose a barrier to effective communication within a work organisation. It may also mean that the

social or 'personal' relationship supersedes the professional or organisational relationship in both work and broader social environments. In the case of the Philippines this is notable in the tendency to personalise relationships to the extent that 'neutral' communication and 'objective' judgement become quite difficult. In the more clannish social environment of Papua New Guinea the blood, marriage or regional relationship of individuals is similarly likely to supersede more transient considerations such as an employment relationship.

The point here is that, where organisational practices assume an individualist rationality in a context in which social cultures are ardently collectivist, pathologies are likely to emerge in both managerial and employee behaviour.

Perhaps the greatest cultural gap, however, between market-oriented organisations and employees from non-market cultures is seen in attitudes to time. In Papua New Guinea this is captured in the term '*maski*', which, depending on the speaker's inflection, can connote 'it doesn't matter', 'I don't care', or 'leave it until later'. It doesn't take much though to realise what a deeply non-market or even anti-market concept this is. Marx's identification of the commodification and exact control of time as central to the development of capitalism has served to focus scholarly attention on time as a vital factor in work organisation (Blyton et al. 1989:3). Just how important it is can be seen from the role the struggle over working time has played in the historical relations between management and employees internationally (Roediger and Foner 1989; Nyland 1989). Time is also, of

course, a deeply cultural construct. The fact that the basic unit of time in Madagascan society is 30 minutes and that this is the customary length of time it takes to cook rice is no coincidence (Thompson 1991:58).

In each of those cultures dealt with so briefly above, time has traditionally had a social rather than a market value. This, like so many other 'traditional' values, is subject to rapid change, especially in newly industrialised and urbanised environments. Beneath pragmatic accommodation to harsh realities, however, there may remain a set of attitudes that run counter to the needs of market driven economic activity. The possibility of this may be seen in as basic an area as language.

In Indonesian, for example, there is much less linguistic certainty about time than there is in English. The English distinction between 'possible' and 'probable' is simply not available. Time in Filipino culture is conceived as a succession of moments with no starting or end point (Andres 1981:125). In either case, whether something is done now or later is a matter of relatively minor consequence. Nor is there urgency about the completion of a piece of work. So Filipinos' describe their own work efforts as '*ningain cogan*'—like a grass fire, starting out full of vigour but dying down abruptly leaving the work unfinished (Schwenk 1989:17). Similarly, in Melanesia, concepts such as work time and work attendance have no equivalent in traditional society (McGavin 1991:222) and absenteeism attracts none of the opprobrium associated with it in market oriented cultures. So '*taim bilong wok*' (work time) remains quite different from '*taim bilong yumi*' (our own time), and throughout the region Pacific time is far from the exact

commodity assumed in market oriented work organisation.

Conclusion

The ambivalent impact of social culture on work organisation has been noted at several points in this article. It is clear that severe work attitude constraints are experienced by organisations located in social environments from which employees and managers alike bring non-market rationalities into the workplace. While there is no shortage of commentary pointing this out, the question of what to do about it remains.

On the one hand culture can clearly be a vehicle for expressing resistance to change. In the Philippines, for instance, cultural factors have been reported as strengthening informal work group consciousness in resistance to managerial initiatives. Torres' study of Quezon City garment workers found that work played a subordinate role as a means to the ends of personal life, and employees expressed anti-management sentiments using core cultural concepts arising from familial and communalistic values (Torres 1988:140). A similar culture of resistance was shown in Abueva's survey of middle-ranking public servants, in which the majority did not see work time as different from personal time and admitted to filling in time sheets dishonestly with no indication that this was seen as 'wrong' (Abueva 1970:148–49). More direct forms of resistance based on culturally accepted notions are evident in Papua New Guinea, where workers' organisations were formed specifically on the basis of groupings of *wantoks* and employees from the same region (Hess 1992:63).

On the other hand, Filipino commentators such as Jocano have called on managers to make use of culture in motivating and organising employees. This may sound attractive to managers and it has certainly been a lucrative source of consultancies as one of the longest running management fads. For serious commentary, however, it misses the point. The point is that the extent to which social culture is available for manipulation may be quite limited. Precisely because culture is not a personalised product it is difficult to see how it can be used in this way. While culturally conditioned concepts can be used in the language of management (or marketing!), it is difficult to identify scholarly commentary reporting broad success in using social culture to further organisational objectives except where those objectives already accorded with cultural mores.

The key to this puzzle may lie in the realisation that far from being 'irrational' and therefore easily changed or manipulated, the cultural norms which pose constraints to 'Western' style management also have a pragmatic face. So, for instance, the 'nepotism' of Thai managers who favour acquaintances is very practical simply because strangers are less likely to return a favour. Similarly, the favouring of *wantoks* or relatives in Papua New Guinea has a strong economically rational basis in the fact that they provide an individual's only real social security net. Until work environments offer similar levels of benefit it is unlikely that behaviour based on the need to maintain those relationships which have historically been effective will lessen. In short, work organisations in situations of

'development' often face serious competition as sources of both material and social status. Low wages, poor employment security and negligible job-related social security mean that this is likely to continue to be the case.

For practitioners and scholars the question remains one of how management practices so thoroughly rooted in the cultural exigencies of the market oriented democracies actually operate when they are transposed into situations of 'development'. One possibility is for managers to regard culture as farmers may regard the weather. In this metaphor culture can be regarded as vital to the way in which the enterprise is conducted and as constantly present but variable in impact. It can thus be accepted as a constraint which managers need to take into account but over which they have as little power as the farmer has over climatic conditions. Within this framework managers in situations of 'development' in particular would be seen as needing to orient their practices as much to local cultural conditions as possible within an awareness that those conditions are products of powerful forces which a work organisation cannot change and ought not challenge.

Notes

- ¹ Recent innovative work includes Sievers (1994) and Fox (1994).
- ² The factors chosen for comment here are those identified over the last five years by approximately 200 participants in management courses at the National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University, as representing major (and for management detrimental) impacts

on work behaviour in their organisations. These course participants have been middle and senior level managers of public sector organisations in a variety of nations pursuing goals of economic development. They are treated in this paper as 'informants' but cannot be individually identified. Where possible, their anecdotal evidence, gathered in open-ended group discussions and individual interviews, has been supplemented by reference to authoritative commentary.

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