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## JAPANESE MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES : HIDDEN LESSONS FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATORS

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### ABSTRACT

*Japan, a leading industrial country in the world, has adopted management techniques that are quite different from those of other countries in the world. These management practices include secure and lifetime employment for workers, consensus and participatory decision-making, group harmony, and group action. Others are relatively slow evaluation and promotion, more informal controls and less formalised measures, broader and non-specialised career paths, and greater concern for workers. This paper discusses key aspects of Japanese managerial practices. To achieve "productivity through people," educational administrators should adopt plausible aspects of Japanese management techniques in their work settings.*

### Introduction

Educational administrators face many challenges. The primary source of the challenge is change. The change may be due to the reforms in the system of

education. Any change in the system of education will put pressure on educational administrators. It will compel them to reassess their methods and goals as they strive to deal effectively with the competitive educational environment.

Educational administrators are managers of educational institutions. As such, they need good management techniques to carry out their tasks. This will enable them to gain a competitive edge in an increasingly complex educational environment. One important way by which educational administrators can gain competitive advantage is through innovation. How do educational administrators promote such innovation within the educational system? How do they accept their expanded roles and lead others in the quest for excellence? In what ways do they adapt the practices of successful businesses to their situation? Such are the exacting challenges that educational administrators face in the contemporary competitive educational environment. This paper

addresses some of these issues from the viewpoint of Japanese managerial practices.

### What is Management ?

Several definitions exist for management (Brech, 1975; Fulmer, 1983; Wehrich & Koontz, 1993). Perhaps, the most succinct definition of management was offered by Holt (1987). Holt defined management as the "art of getting things done through others" (p. 10). In other words, the manager co-ordinates the work of others to achieve goals that might not be achievable by an individual. This paper defines management in a different way. Management is the process of setting goals through the ten management functions by making effective use of human, financial, and material resources in a changing environment. The key elements in this definition include making conscious decisions to set and achieve meaningful goals, working with and through others, and executing the ten management functions. The rest are balancing a effectiveness and efficiency, getting the most out of limited resources, and operating in a changing environment.

### The Management Process

Aldrac and Stearns (1987), Barnard (1968), Bartol and Martin (1981), Brech (1975). Durker (1979), Fayol

(1949), and Wehrich and Kontz (1993) view the management process as a set of related activities and tasks. These activities and tasks include the following

*Planning* : choosing the purpose and objectives of the organisation and selecting the means to achieve them.

*Decision-making* : understanding and analysing problems and developing and choosing among alternative solutions.

*Directing (or Commanding)* : exercising central authority, giving instructions to subordinates to carry out tasks, guiding and supervising subordinates.

*Organising* : establishing a framework within which duties are to be performed.

*Co-ordinating* : making sure that all groups and persons work effectively and economically, in harmony towards the common objectives of the organisation.

*Staffing* : identifying human resource needs and filling the organisational structure and keeping it filled with competent people.

*Communication (or Reporting)* : conveying to employees technical knowledge, instructions, rules and information required to get the job done.

*Motivation* : urging individuals to pursue collective objectives by satisfying needs and meeting expectations with meaningful work and valued rewards.

*Leading* : acting as inspiring leaders by serving as role models and adapting managerial styles to the demands of the situation.

*Controlling* (or Budgeting) : setting standards, measuring performance, and correcting undesirable deviations.

Mintzberg (1980) proposed another method of examining the management process by introducing the idea of managerial roles. Mintzberg identified ten managerial roles which were divided into three major groups. These are interpersonal roles, informational roles, and decisional roles. First, among the interpersonal managerial roles, a manager performs a figurehead's role. The manager attends to activities of a ceremonial or legal nature. The manager also performs a leadership role by exercising authority within the organisation. Again, the manager acts as a liaison, co-ordinating various functions and subordinates.

Second, within informational roles, a manager can be a monitor, receiving and collecting data about the organisation. The manager can also be a spokesperson, providing

information about the organisation to outsiders. Further, the manager can be a disseminator, providing data within the organisation.

Lastly, in a decision-making managerial role, the manager can be an entrepreneur, exploiting new opportunities and introducing change. The manager can also be a disturbance handler, taking corrective action when the organisation faces unexpected difficulties. Besides, a manager can be a resource allocator, directing organisational effort towards specific activities. Yet still, a manager can be a negotiator, representing the organisation in bargaining and negotiations.

What do educational administrators do? In other words, what are the managerial roles of educational administrators? Educational administrators plan and take decisions. They set educational goals and develop strategies to reach the goals. They take decisions on materials, monetary, and human resources. Again, they plan the programme of learning and teaching, and resolve conflict between the staff, learners, and schools.

Educational administrators also organise. For example, they buy items for the school and allocate limited resources of all types. Also, they organise routine matters and learners' activities and assign tasks to staff

and learners. Besides, they establish an organisational structure and procedures for accomplishing educational goals.

Educational administrators are guides and bosses. They tell subordinates what to do and watch over them to make sure that they do it. Thus, they issue directives or give commands. For instance, they give assignments to staff and learners, explain routines, clarify educational policies, and initiate action on educational issues

Another managerial role of educational administrators is co-ordination. Educational administrators get things done through others. They delegate duties to staff and learners and co-ordinate effectively how staff and learners carry out their delegated duties. Also, they co-ordinate the use of funds, facilities, and equipment possessed by the school. They also establish contacts with outsiders.

Motivation and leading are central to the work of educational administrators. Educational administrators encourage harmony needed to assure effective performance and attainment of the goals of the school. Also, they entertain officials from the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, and other agencies. Again, they oversee official school functions and other public events. Finally, they influence other staffs who share in the education of the learners

Educational administrators define the personnel requirements for each job. Thus, they perform staffing duties. They recruit, select, train, and develop teachers and office workers. Again, they admit learners. Furthermore, they place teachers, office workers, and learners where they will be most effective. They also compensate staff.

Communication (or reporting) is an important element in the work of educational administrators. Educational administrators receive information about the operations of the school. Also, they provide feedback on the performance of the school. Again, they pass information about the school to stakeholders such as parents and officials from the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, and West African Examinations Council. Finally, they transmit information to staff and learners about educational matters.

Educational administrators must conduct checks to see that work goes on according to plan.

Controlling (or budgeting) is therefore a key managerial role of educational administrators. The administrators establish clear performance standards for staff and learners and monitor their performance compared with standards. Also, they measure results against objectives and plans. Finally, they control indiscipline in the schools and offices.

### What is Japanese Management?

Japanese management refers to those managerial practices that have helped Japanese companies to excel in the world market. Japanese management is based on Theory Z (Ouchi, 1981). The key features of Japanese management are :

1. Lifetime employment for permanent workers;
2. Promotion of workers from within the organisation;
3. Mandatory retirement of permanent workers at age 55;
4. Employment of many temporary workers, mostly women
5. High degree of mutual trust and loyalty between management and employees;
6. Non-specialised career paths with long job rotation as a central feature of career development;
7. Collective decision-making;
8. Long-term performance appraisal, usually ten years after initial employment.
9. Encouragement of collective responsibility for the success of the organisation, and cooperative effort rather than individual achievement;
10. Support for industrial life by a highly competitive educational environment;
11. Financing of large firms by major banks and supported by a host of satellite firms. (Cole, 1990)

### Japanese Management in Practice

Theory Z combines human relations ideas and scientific management techniques. This has provided distinctive characteristics for Japanese businesses within the management process. These characteristics are summarised as follows:

- *Planning and Decision-Making* : The Japanese have long-term orientation in planning. Emphasis is on decentralised and collective decision-making with consensus. Also, many people are involved in decision-making but top management has the final authority for making decisions. Because many people take part in decision-making, the process is usually slow but implementation is fast. Critical decisions flow from top to bottom while non-critical decisions flow from the lower-level to top management. Finally,

in decision-making, there is a great deal of collaboration between the decision-makers and a recognition of mutual dependence.

- *Organising:* Japanese businesses place emphasis on collective responsibility and accountability through conciliatory communication. Also emphasis is placed on informal organisational structure and democratic relationships based on trust rather than formal authority. There are common organisational structure and philosophy with emphasis on unit and harmony within the organisation. Finally, Japanese companies encourage competitive spirit towards other organisations.
- *Directing and Co-ordinating:* Japanese chief executives avoid face-to-face confrontation with their employees in order to maintain harmony. Co-operation in Japanese companies is facilitated by common values and team spirit. As a result, the managers place themselves in the place of the employees to get the work done. Also, workers and managers subordinate their self-interests to group and organisational interests.
- *Staffing:* Japanese companies hire their workers out of school and the workers hardly change

employers. In Japan, less emphasis is placed on specialisation but more emphasis is on flexibility and job rotation. This leads to broader career paths for workers since they are exposed to many work situations. Japanese companies also make heavy investment in the training and development of their employees. Again, there is slow and systematic advancement through the ranks. Loyal and harmonious behaviour, merit, seniority, and educational background are considered when the opportunity arises for promotion. While part-time employees are usually dismissed during periods of economic slowdown, permanent workers are guaranteed life-time employment. Instead of being laid off, permanent employees are transferred to other units that need additional help.

- *Motivation and Leading :* Companies in Japan show great concern for their employees. They provide them with housing, day care services, medical care, counselling, insurance, and subsidised loans among others. The managers act as social facilitators and group members. They create an environment of esprit de corp by associating themselves with workers both within and outside the work

environment. Japanese companies also give group rewards.

- *Communication* : Patterns of communication in Japanese businesses follow those of the decision-making. Thus, the flow of critical communication is top-down and bottom-up while non-critical communication is often bottom-up. Also Japanese managers place emphasis on face-to-face contact rather than memos. This promotes cordial relations between employers and employees and enables them to reconcile differences of opinion.
- *Controlling* : Control in Japan means placing emphasis on quality control and process control methods, not numbers. The control focuses on group performance. Peers at the shop-floor are allowed to measure individual performance rather than setting it against pre-determined standards. Also extensive use is made of quality circles by allowing employees to participate in decision-making and quality control. Members of the quality circles identify and solve problems unique to their work settings.

### **Implications for Educational Administration**

Educational institutions are like living organisms. They have the power to adapt to changes in the educational

environment. Educational administrators who are unable to adapt cannot withstand the fierce competition in the next century. Japanese management techniques therefore offer several lessons to educational administrators in the management of educational institutions. Some of these lessons include:

- \* Making large investments in staff and guaranteeing the security of staff through good and bad times.
- \* Providing opportunities for staff to get a variety of skills through varied non- specialised experiences such as job rotation between the classroom and office administration.
- \* Tying promotions to skills, contributions to the growth of the school or educational office, and the number of years spent on the job while providing opportunities for advancement for young employees.
- \* Supplementing objective analysis of facts by personal judgement and feelings about what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate.
- \* Using consensus to reach decisions and to accomplish smooth implementation of decisions.



- \* Encouraging group action in the discharge of duties but fixing ultimate responsibility for decisions with relevant individuals.
- \* Paying careful attention to employees' well-being from the time of recruitment to the time of retirement.
- \* Establishing cordial boss-subordinate relationships that encourage a degree of affinity for freedom and effective collaboration.

### Conclusion

Areas of differences exist when Japanese and non-Japanese managerial practices are compared. These differences are due to differences in culture. Japanese people are traditionally group-oriented, hard-working, and committed to their organisation. They seldom change employers. They are also homogeneous in terms of race and religion. In contrast, non-Japanese people, particularly those who share many cultural aspects of Americans and Europeans are highly mobile, achievement-oriented, and innovative. Adopting managerial practices based on Japanese principles may contrast with non-Japanese culture. However, educational administrators with non-Japanese

orientation can take advantage of the most important aspects of Japanese management. These aspects centre on consensus decision-making, organisational communications, harmonious role expectations for managers, quality circles, and a high level of worker participation. These means that educational administrators must "think quality, be competitive and treasure their employees' (Hasegawa, 1986: 156). They should therefore become strategic thinkers and planners that have a vision of what their schools and offices are and what they could be in an ideal world. Indeed, Japanese management practices must jolt educational administrators into action. These practices must guide the administrators in crafting strategies in terms of how to manage educational institutions, how to lead, how to use resources and how to design, deliver, and manage educational programmes and courses.

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