



## Management Behaviour

We turn our attention to cross-cultural research conducted by André Laurent and his colleagues towards organisational power differing across cultures. André is Emeritus Professor of Organisational Behaviour at INSEAD.

Lauret examined the attitudes of managers in nine European countries (Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and France) and the United States. He focused on four parameters; perceptions of the organisation as political systems, authority systems, role formulation systems, and hierarchical relationship systems. Further work (Adler, Campbell and Laurent) collected data from the People's Republic of China, Indonesia and Japan, thus enabling comparisons to be made with Asian Pacific countries.

Laurent saw management as a process by which managers expressed their cultural values in explicit management decisions. Considerable variances were found across the different national groups examined. For instance, they perceived the political significance of managerial status very differently. In response to the statement, "through their professional activity, managers play an important role in society," the percentages in agreement were as follows:

Denmark	32%
United Kingdom	40%
Netherlands	45%
Germany	46%
Sweden	54%
USA	52%
Switzerland	65%
Italy	74%
France	76%

In France and Italy, therefore, the manager is very conscious of his/ her social influence. But Danish and British managers enjoy less social power and are less able to carry their organisational status into other activities. The British manager who is also a member of the local football club may find himself playing under the captaincy of his works foreman; his French and Italian equivalents would be most unlikely to accept this situation. French and Italian managers think of authority as the property of the individual office-holder.

### Hierarchy

Cultures that value hierarchical structuring as a means of maintaining social cohesion impose severe restrictions on communication flow. This affects what information is communicated, how it is communicated and to whom. In response to the statement "In order to have efficient work relationships, it is often necessary to by-pass the hierarchical line", the national groups responded thus in disagreement:

Sweden	22%
United Kingdom	31%
USA	32%

Denmark	37%
Netherlands	39%
Switzerland	41%
Belgium	42%
France	42%
Germany	46%
Italy	75%
People's Republic of China	66%

Where non-hierarchical communication is tolerated and encouraged, the individual does not need to seek permission from superior levels in order to by-pass the hierarchical line and information can be channelled quickly around the organisation. But there may also be disadvantages. It may not be easy to distinguish "official" and "unofficial" information, and the superior may feel his/her authority compromised. On the other hand, where by-passing is sanctioned and all communication has to be routed up and down the hierarchy, the process may be slower. Access to information is restricted. On the other hand, the status of the information communicated and the authority of the individual and of his/ her superiors and subordinates is far less ambiguous.

The cross-cultural implication is that mixed culture workforces might be easily drawn into conflict. For example, in the interests of efficiency and speed, Swedish employees working in a typical Italian company naturally attempt to by-pass hierarchical lines and make direct contact with information sources located elsewhere in the organisation. But their Italian boss perceives their lack of respect for hierarchical lines of behaviour as insubordinate and threatening to the structure. And Italian workers in a Swedish firm are censured for lack of motivation and initiative when they refuse to approach an information source in some other unit.

Italians value security of knowing precisely the rights and limits of their authority. They know who communicates with whom and on what topics, and how these communications are handled. Hence the Italian organisation tends to be pyramidal, with clearly differentiated hierarchical ranks and power centres. The Swedish organisation, on the other hand may have a number of power centres.

### **The Manager as "expert" versus the manager as "facilitator"**

Laurent asked managers to respond to the statement "It is important for a manager to have at hand precise answers to most of the questions that his subordinates may raise about their work". The Asian Pacific managers agreed with this statement far more strongly than did their Western colleagues:

Sweden	10%
Netherlands	17%
USA	18%
Denmark	23%
United kingdom	27%
Switzerland	38%
Belgium	44%
Germany	46%
France	53%
Italy	66%
Indonesia	73%
People's Republic of China	74%
Japan	78%

The Asian Pacific managers think the manager should be a specialist able to provide convincing answers to technical questions. And subordinates cannot challenge these without incurring social sanctions. Hence subordinates value advice from their manager above that given by peers, whatever its quality. Furthermore, they may restrict questions to topics on which they know that the manager is technically competent to answer. The manager who cannot answer subordinates questions loses status. Because the unity of the group depends on the managers maintaining his/ her hierarchical position, his/ her loss of status would endanger the security and stability of the entire group, and so also the interests of its individual members. Thus it is in the subordinates interest to maintain the managers status.

This means that the technical efficiency of the organisation is heavily dependent on the efficiency and professionalism of its superior. But even a technically inefficient superior is accepted as long as he/she satisfies the groups aspirations in other ways and works for its harmony.