



1980

A head of his time: the management style of a head

Dan Waters

HK Institute of Vocational Education (Morrison Hill), Vocational Training Council

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Paper presented by D.D. Waters, J.P.,
Assistant Director of Education (Technical)
at the Seminar "Management in Education Today -
Module III" at the Technical Teachers' College
on 27th February 1980

"A Head of His Time"
(The Management Style of a Head)

Two Chinese Quotations

"The best soldier is not soldierly;
The best fighter is not ferocious;
The best conqueror does not take part in war;
The best employer of men keeps himself below them;
This is called the virtue of not contending;
This is called the ability of using men.

"The great rulers - the people do not notice their existence;
The lesser ones - they attach to and praise them;
The still lesser ones - they fear them;
The still lesser ones - they despise them."

Tao-Te-King, the Taoist scripture of China, 500-600 B.C.

1. The term "head"

1.1. First I must ask you all a question. "What do we mean in this paper by the term 'Head'?" I presume many of you will think immediately of a head of department in a technical institute or in a college of education. I would prefer to extend the field wider than that. I would rather assume we are talking about a head (principal) of an institute or a college, a head of a department or a head of a section. I also include not only the field of education but also "heads" in industry and commerce. In other words, my talk encompasses a wide range.

1.2. Am I qualified to give such a talk? Well, I suppose, like Dr. Joed, it depends what you mean by qualified. I can claim in my younger days, to have been the "head" on a building site. I was later the managing director of a building firm. I had experience of management in the army during the war, much of it in action. Later I was head of a department

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at the old Technical College and later still Principal of the Morrison Hill Technical Institute. You all know what my present position is.

1.3. I have also attended courses and have post-graduate qualifications in management although to my way of thinking management experience is more important than paper qualifications. After all, whether a person can do the job or not is the real test and the thing that matters.

2. Management style varies depending on job

2.1. Certainly a person's management style must vary, to a large degree, depending on the job he is undertaking. My management style when I was a war-time soldier, much of it in action handling men, was obviously vastly different to running a building site or again to running a technical institute. This goes without saying. As a soldier obviously, because of the time factor, one has to be autocratic, whereas when you are running a technical institute, with considerable powers of delegation to heads of departments, the style of management must be far more democratic.

2.2. So we agree then that, to a large extent, the style of management must vary depending upon the job in hand.

3. Management style varies with the individual

3.1. It should also vary, to a limited extent, depending upon the individual. I once worked for a principal in a technical college. He was extremely autocratic. He was certainly not liked but he was respected and he did have that important characteristic known as charisma. Later this officer retired and his job was taken over by his vice-principal. When the vice-principal became principal he tried to model his own management style on the only principal he had ever worked under. This was a failure. The new principal was a likeable and capable person and if he had tried to develop his own management style he would have been far more successful.

3.2. However, enough of that; can we, at this stage, try and look a little more deeply into management theory? It is intended that my paper, which is largely theoretical, is complemented by Mr. David Fun's paper which has a more practical approach.

4. Modern approach to leadership

4.1. Some management scholars, e.g. Douglas MacGregor, have classified styles of management into the following two main groups :

(a) The directive leader

Emphasises those relationships that get the job done.

Believes in increasing rationality, logicity and communications.

Believes in decreasing emotionality.

Believes in coercion, direction, control and systems of rewards and penalties which emphasise the importance of rationality and productivity. Has strong needs to lead, direct and control the fates of other people.

(b) The democratic leader

The directive leader has dropped out of favour and the group-centred or participative leader has come into favour.

He involves everyone in decision-making.

Does not keep people in the dark about future plans.

Members define own tasks and choose roles.

Leadership is a set of functions which is the property of the group and not of one individual.

4.2. A.H. Maslow wrote of a hierarchy of human needs (e.g. food, shelter, sex). He said the manager who understands their ascending order can more knowingly motivate employees.

4.3. Douglas MacGregor offered Theory X, which assumed that humans dislike work and must be coerced to put forth effort on the job; and Theory Y, which holds that work is natural and that people, if left alone, will

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exercise their own self-direction and control in advancing the work toward a goal.

4.4. Lao Tzu, if he were writing management textbooks today, might have said : Keep people simple and ignorant and do nothing. In point of fact, Lao Tzu, the great Chinese sage, did his writing 2,400 years ago, but what he had to say in the Tao Teh Ching, the book of Tao, comes close to that.

5. Theory X and Theory Y

5.1. Getting back to Theory X and Theory Y. This is the title often given to the two different styles of leadership detailed above. Theory X applies to directive leadership whereas Theory Y applies to participatory or democratic leadership.

5.2. To the unthinking world and in certain areas such as the armed forces, the fire services and where discipline and immediate action is required then Theory X is the normal style of management. Theory Y is used in the "thinking world" where there is a certain amount of delegation to staff and where they have some say in management procedures.

5.3. Generally speaking, committed people prefer Theory X and uncommitted people prefer Theory Y. The latter can only be used in certain circumstances and it is certainly not intended to be a panacea.

6. Merits and demerits

6.1. Recently the group-centred democratic concept has come under as much fire as the directive concept previously, largely for the following reasons :

- (a) "Democratic leadership" as practised has not been positive enough. It has been virtually laissez-faire leadership. The fact that a group is participating in deciding its future only places on a leader a series of very subtle tasks. He still has the responsibility of seeing that the group achieves meaningful

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goals. His task is harder not easier. There is virtually no frustration to compare with being a member of a group that goes around in circles.

- (b) Individual needs have been emphasised but organisational requirements have been ascribed less importance. You cannot treat a work-group as if it were a stamp-collectors' club in which the needs of members take virtual precedence over everything else.
- (c) There is a basic contradiction between authoritarian organisational structures on the one hand, and workgroups which attempt to diagnose their own problems and devise their own solutions, on the other. Nevertheless in many places, the two have been supposed to be able to co-exist.
- (d) "Democratic" leadership makes certain assumptions about human motivation. It postulates an ideal type who is highly motivated, who wants full self-actualisation (self-realisation) and who is willing to be responsible for his own behaviour not only as an individual but also as a group. However, the frustration, failure, short-time perspective and conflicts produced in the healthy individual by organisational experience leads inevitably to adaptive behaviour. (To put this in the language of psychodynamic therapy, when the self-concept is threatened, defence mechanisms come into play to ward off threat). Foremost among this adaptive behaviour is apathy and disinterest towards the organisation and its goals. And where people feel like this, the group-centred leadership approach is hardly likely to succeed. Such people have learned to be dependent, submissive, passive and subordinate to the leader. Their attitude is that the leader is paid to take on the responsibility. ("My job is to teach and his job is to run the department;")

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(We have a tendency to want to make idealistic assumptions about people. Directive leaders assume that their staff do not want to identify themselves with organisations and wish to lose themselves in submission to a greater entity. Whereas democratic leaders assume that their staff are mature individuals who are highly motivated towards self-actualisation. (The Organisation Man)).

- (e) Research has shown that middle managers under a directive leader can show evidence of high morale. They can learn to be dependent, passive and subordinate and by means of ventilating their feelings informally to teach others and by use of defence mechanisms to distort and suppress threatening feelings; they achieve high levels of productivity and come to positively like the situation.
- (f) The difficulties involved in implementing 'participative- leadership' have not been pointed out to would-be practitioners. It is a fact that in many situations, employees resent the opportunity to become more autonomous. An experience like this, for which one has not been prepared, can lead to rapid disillusionment with the whole concept. This has happened in many cases. The initial reaction from subordinates that one is either weak or a creator of confusion, or both may have to be accepted for years before it changes. Colleagues can often be far more resistant than subordinates.
- (g) The concept has also been undermined by 'woolly thinking'. Practitioners of the method have imagined themselves to be genuinely participative when in fact they have been either manipulating the group to accept their own ideas or have been simply consulting prior to making the decisions themselves. The group's ability to see this has led to natural resistance based on the belief that so-called 'participation' is a confidence trick.

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- (h) The 'non-directive' approach or the 'group-centred' approach have become cults. They have become regarded as panaceas to be applied indiscriminately regardless of circumstances. Why has the 'democratic leader' concept failed so often?
- (i) Leadership insights which are guides for diagnosis have been implemented as 'absolute principles of behaviour'.
 - (ii) Organisational life has more dimensions to it than the dimension of personal needs. It follows that, say, the non-directive approach which originated in therapeutic situations between counsellor and client cannot be applied without addition to an organisational situation, so that the leader of a workgroup is still the leader. He needs to be highly skilled in handling group processes so that joint decision-making actually takes place. He is not doing this if he simply presides over an ineffectual talking-shop.
 - (iii) People tend so hard to be something (e.g. participative, democratic) that they lose their capacity to observe or learn. Or again, they emphasise what they must not do, at the expense of what they ought to do.

7. The management grid

7.1. A significant and practical contribution to more effective management practices and organisational development is the "managerial grid". This was created and developed by U.S. industrial psychologists, Doctors Robert R. Blake and Jane S. Mouton. The managerial grid is based on massive, practical research into the behavioural sciences in the industrial setting.

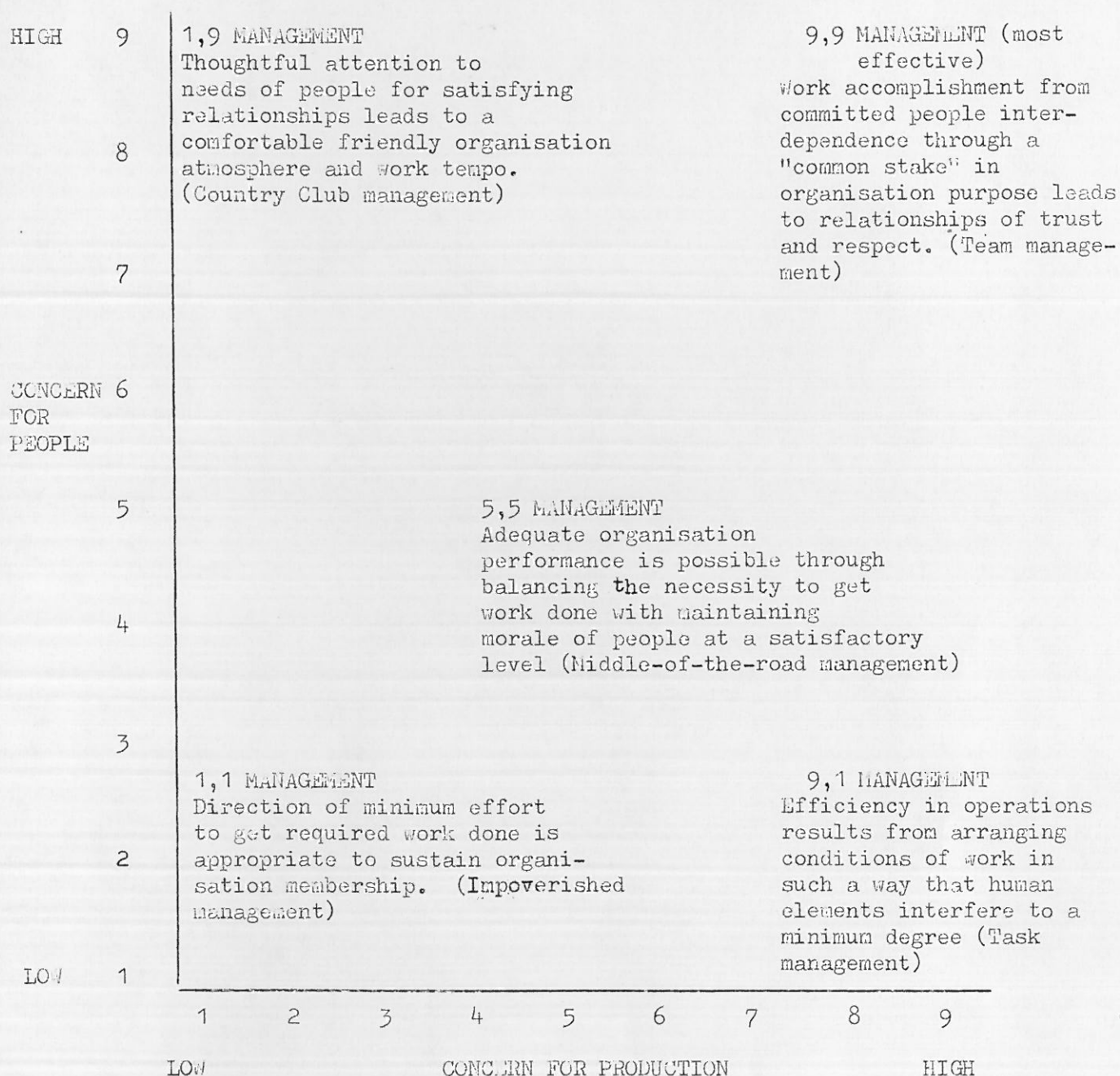
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7.2. What they have come up with is a tested science of management theory using systematic principles which can be taught and which may then be applied in the day-to-day situation.

7.3. At the lower left hand corner of the grid (see Figure One) is the 1,1 style. This has minimum concern for both production and people. Effective production is unobtainable because people are lazy, apathetic, indifferent and conflict must occur. In the upper left hand corner is the 1,9 style which embodies maximum concern for people but minimum for production. Here we have "cradle to grave" type management with low conflict, low creativity and high commitment. With 1,9 good fellowship and relations come first and production is incidental. A typical example is "Roundtrees", a firm in the U.K. In the lower right hand corner is 9,1.

This style has a maximum concern for production and a minimum concern for human relationships. With 9,1 planning, control and direction of the work of subordinates is the most important. In the upper right hand corner is the 9,9 style, which has a maximum concern for both production and human relationships. This is the perfect establishment. It obviously has high conflict, high creativity and high commitment but such an organisation never really exists in practice. In the centre is 5,5 which is the "middle-of-the-road" style.

7.4. Each of these five managerial styles defines a definite but different set of assumptions regarding how individuals orient themselves in management situations that involve people. All of these theories (and variations) are found in actual practice, to some degree, in concrete situations in government organisations, in industry and in educational institutions.

THE MANAGEMENT GRID (Blake)Figure One

7.5. If we can liken Blake's Grid to the teaching situation then the 1,9 type teacher, who is a strict disciplinarian - gets the message over and has high "production" whereas the 9,1 teacher "coddles" his students along in a "nice" manner but he does not get good examination results and his lectures are dull. Most teachers are 5,5, i.e. middle of the road. A 1,9 type principal is concerned with output of students and how his institution can be more efficient. In turn the 1,1 type leader blames the principal for this and for his lack of concern with pupils.

7.6. Five good reasons "why?"

Blake lists several purposes of such scientifically approached organisation development :

- (a) To replace common-sense based, or the "hunch" type of management assumptions, with systematic management concepts that increase individual involvement, commitment, and creativity toward sound problem-solving.
- (b) To replace unproductive thought patterns within each individual with mental attitudes that result in a better identification of problems and novel solutions.
- (c) To replace interpersonal and intergroup blockages that prevent effective discussions with interpersonal openness and candid communications that can sustain sound deliberation and insure effective problem-solving between individuals and groups.
- (d) To replace organisation traditions, precedents, and past practices which stifle productive effort and creative thinking with standards and values that promote efforts of excellence and innovation.
- (e) To resolve problems preventing attainment of organisational competence by :-
 - (i) defining what the problems are
 - (ii) designing solution to them; and
 - (iii) insuring their elimination by executing the plan(s).

Another type of managerial grid is shown at Figure Two.

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The Managerial Grid (Reddin)

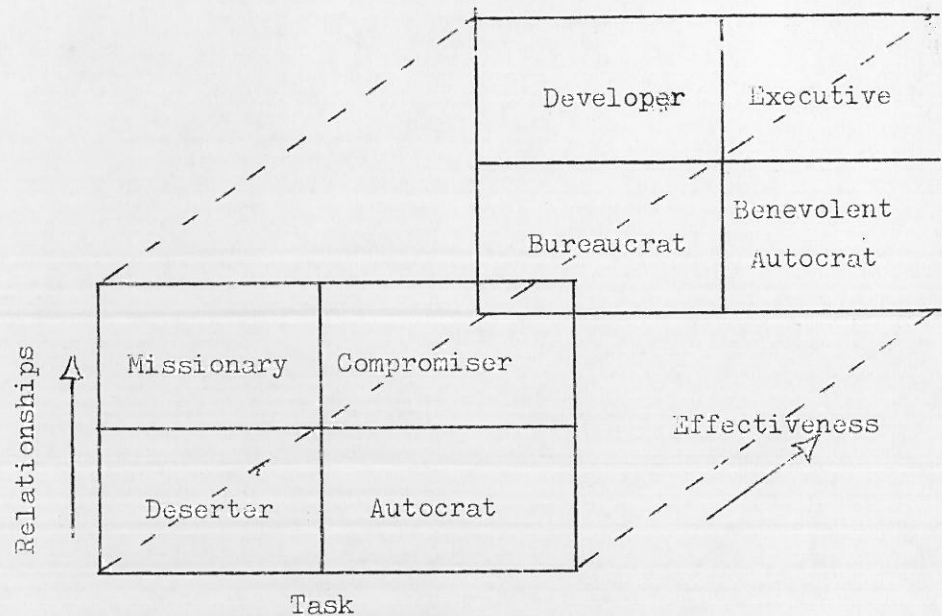


Figure Two

(a) Ineffective

- (i) Deserter - lack of interest with bad effects on moral
- (ii) Autocrat - no concern for human relations, little confidence in others
- (iii) Missionary - puts relationships first
- (iv) Compromiser - pressures and influences decisions, incapable or unwilling to make ^{sound} ~~second~~ decision

(b) Limited effectiveness

- (i) Bureaucrat - follows rules, not interested in tasks or relationships
- (ii) Developer - effective in relationships

(c) Effective

- Benevolent autocrat - implicit trust in own ability induces obedience without resentment

(d) Very effective

- Executive - maximise the effects of others, sets high standards recognises the differences of individuals

8. Bridging the East/West cultural gap

8.1. Several hypotheses have been put forward over the years to show that cultural difference may affect organisation structure and managerial functions and that people from different cultures think in different ways.

8.2. When a person begins to work with people from another culture, a whole new set of behaviour different from what he or she is used to will start to prevail. The meaning of this set of behaviour may seem at times, obvious, but often upon reflection, the first glimmer of understanding may prove false in the end. Some local and expatriate staff may, I suggest, experience some degree of cultural conflict at some time in their work environment. This will apply especially to Europeans when they first come to work in Hong Kong.

8.3. It can be argued that people are very much the same no matter where they are from and therefore what needs to be done is to discover what the differences are and how the differences stand between people communicating with each other.

8.4. Perhaps at this stage we should give some passing thought to the phenomenon of the Chinese businessman (manager) and the secret of his undoubted success in the modern industrial world.

8.5. Why has Chinese 'pragmatism' lead, over many years, to the control of so much trade and industry in Asia? Why is it that the Chinese form of business is predominantly the small-scale, owner-dominated enterprise, with a reputation for flexibility and a capacity for survival? In such a firm there is a notable legacy of the clan spirit and such a traditional Chinese family business, by definition, is closed to the outsider. Its primary strength is its adaptability and the simplicity of the decision-making process. With one man very clearly in charge this is made relatively easy. In turn the workers are looked after in a paternalistic manner and there is something of the personal touch in relations up and down the hierarchy.

8.6. There is evidence that modern Chinese managers in Hong Kong share similar traditional values as well as management weaknesses and strengths with their Japanese counterparts. Their attitude and behaviour are often influenced by the thoughts found in Confucianism, and both groups emphasise group harmony and human relations.

8.7. It goes without saying that Chinese have a flair for business. It also seems evident that their managerial methods are not the same as are found in the west. The contrast seems to be between the western sense of order and rationality and the Oriental sense of all-embracing contextual thinking in which options are always open, the view can change and sense or feel often takes over from calculation. It is art versus science and organisations in Hong Kong display varying distributions of the two depending on their history and present make-up.

8.8. Management theory is almost entirely western in origin, application, and indeed in applicability and yet, on the other hand, the Chinese population in Hong Kong, no matter how westernised, still carries with it traditional values.

8.9. Group consciousness is part of the Asian way of life. The extreme case is Japan where the unique 'life employment' system confers maximum psychological security on the individual but is diametrically opposed to western style mobility as a means of personal growth. From birth Japanese are oriented and educated to become members of a group, beginning with the family. The individual gives complete subservience to group needs, and the group takes responsibility for the individuals.

8.10. The veneration for age and status in the East is strongly supportive of autocratic styles of management. A multiplicity of cultural strains and systems of loyalty contribute to this Confucian philosophy. It is sometimes hard for those who have been conditioned by historical experience and are used to direction and control by the boss to accept participative style management.

8.11. The social norm in Asia is to avoid conflict by smoothing over the surface. Because of this emphasis on harmony, there is unconscious avoidance of spelling out explicitly where responsibility or accountability lies. This management style can best be characterised as "management by consensus". Similarly, in selling ideas, it is necessary to work behind the scenes. To sound-out, test-out and gently persuade. At a later stage, when the proposition is put forward it has really become a formality in that its consideration and adoption is largely "ceremonial".

8.12. The average European by comparison is straightforward, direct and tells it like it is whether you like to hear it or not; and often whether it offends or not. This may cause conflict. The Asian would see this as creating conditions for losing face, an outcome he would naturally work hard to avoid. The average Asian much prefers to keep conditions ambiguous rather than to allow for western style management to 'tell it like it is'.

8.13. To participate in the brand of intellectual and emotional "strip-tease" which goes under the name of "T" groups or sensitivity training is to risk losing face. Such training, I am convinced, would have limited value in Hong Kong at the present time.

8.14. Can and should the average Asian abandon lifelong habits of avoiding trouble, in order to initiate or enter into conflict? Creative conflict is related to the western cultural heritage which focuses on the individual. The westerner puts great stock in the human need for accomplishment, recognition and personal growth. In South-East Asia, as I said before, people are more group-oriented and security-motivated.

8.15. We now find that many Third-world countries are moving towards contemporary and international forms of management as part of their necessary social and economic transformation. A number of local officers in technical institutes have undertaken courses in management which are based on western methodology. There are also a number of Europeans working in technical institutes who have worked in Hong Kong for several years. It is only natural that working closely with their Chinese colleagues that some of the Asian ideas must have "rubbed off" and the Europeans have "absorbed" to some extent, Asian ways, either consciously or unconsciously. We thus have, to some degree, a blend of management styles in our technical institutes.

8.16. It has been said that this tiny city-port of five million people, namely Hong Kong, may well be the first place to develop the exportable 'ideal' management style owing to the prevailing socio-economic conditions and management characteristics which are unique here. In many ways I feel we have a blend of the two styles of management, namely East and West, in Hong Kong and, it has achieved a great deal. In this context I quote a passage from "A Short Cut to Rome"; a speech given by James Wu Man-hon at the Rotary Club of Hong Kong Island East on 19th January 1977. "No country (Hong Kong) has increased its domestic exports of industrial goods by more than ten fold in 16 years; no country has ever doubled its population in 25 years and still provided a continuously improving standard of living for its people."

9. Conclusions

9.1. There is no one predetermined and correct way to behave as a head. (We all have our preferences and my preference is for participative leadership, because I believe self-actualising motivation is present in everybody if it can be uncovered.) The choice of leadership pattern should be based on an accurate diagnosis of the reality of the situation. First diagnose what is the reality and then use the appropriate leadership pattern.

9.2. Factors in this decision include :

- (a) Self-awareness.
- (b) Awareness of others.
- (c) Characteristics of the organisation.
- (d) The external environment.

Leaders need to be considerate but also effective.

D.D. WATERS

Assistant Director of Education (Technical)