

On Three Characteristics of the Chinese Style Management Held by Zeng Shiqiang

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Abstract. Professor Zeng Shiqiang is thought of as the best-known and the most admired expert in management studies and practice in China. This paper is to analyze and discuss the three characteristics of the Chinese style management held by Professor Zeng Shiqiang. Among other management principles, Prof. Zeng argues that the Chinese style management has three major characteristics: people oriented, like-minded people working together, making reasoning adjustments in order to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, with people as the key to the success of the administration. These three characteristics make great contribution for the success of the Chinese style management, and are also reflected the philosophy of inter-subjectivity, which can also be used in other fields such as the educational activity, and help us have a better understanding of modern inter-subjectivity education.

Introduction

Professor Zeng Sjiqiang argues that the Chinese style management has three major characteristics: people oriented, like-minded people working together, making reasoning adjustments in order to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, which make great contribution for the success of the Chinese style management.^[1]

The top principle of Chinese style management is people-oriented, with the aid of the combination of two other rules, one is that of having like-minded people working together and the other the emphasis of the reasonable adjustments based upon the constantly changing circumstances. Besides, Chinese style management is closely related with Chinese ethics, which regards the staff's integrity as the essential element in bringing about the effective management.

People-oriented management style should be regarded as the foregrounding feature of the Chinese administration. Chinese administration advocates the concept that people are the key to the success of the administration, and only by taking people-oriented principle can people have the things done well. Chinese style management, in short, is the human-based management.

Besides, Chinese administration insists on the principle of like-minded people working together. In this way, people can have a good co-operation with each other under the guidance of the consensus, thus making greater contributions to the enterprise.

Another foregrounding characteristic of Chinese management is its "mobility", which is reflected in making adjustments and modification in a more reasonable fashion according to constantly changing practical circumstances.

Professor Zeng Shiqiang is thought of as the best-known and the most admired expert in management studies and practice in China. This paper is to analyze and discuss the three characteristics of the Chinese style management held by Prof. Zeng in order to make the people not only in China but in the world have a better understanding of Prof. Zeng's idea about how to succeed in the Chinese management.

An Analysis of People-oriented Management Style

People-oriented: The Foregrounding Feature of the Chinese Administration

Different from work-oriented management style taken by western administration, Chinese administration has so far adhered to the people-oriented management style. In addition to the work analysis which bears something in common with work-oriented management style, in Chinese administration, position planning and department division, to Prof. Zeng, often take into account some of the human factors, more specifically, creating a position by taking account of human characteristics, this type of people-oriented management style should be regarded as the foregrounding feature of the Chinese administration.

Prof. Zeng explains that Chinese people believe in the human effort, thinking all things, no matter important or trifle, big or small, can be done well by human beings. Therefore, management should take people as the key factor, namely people-oriented. At the start, the strategy of “all people working together” is usually taken, in which there is neither work division nor concrete position setting in order to discover an individual person’s unique capacity. Then, based upon the individual person’s distinguished capacity, a preliminary organization is set up. Supposing there are two men who are both considered suitable for the position of the supervisor, then the organization can be divided into two departments, in the same way, if three, then the three departments. Therefore, the organization is allowed to make certain adjustments so as to accommodate to the changing situation where people-oriented management strategy plays an important role.

Then what kind of people does the company need in the people-oriented management? Because the division of labor is not clear, the supervisor and staff tend to find like-minded partners to work together. For in this way they can stand in others’ shoes and easily develop mutual cooperation and harmony, thus easy to arrive at a consensus over the issue raised in the company.

In Short, Chinese management takes the “people-oriented” as the main feature, which has people with the same consensus gathered together to work for the same goal. That’s why Chinese management highlights the idea of “no-cooperation among people without the same ideological concepts”. In order to deal with the constant changing situation and avoid failure, it is quite common for Chinese people to choose working with like-minded partners together, and embark on the business after having a thorough and reasonable discussion among them.

Like-minded People Working together Led by a Powerful Leader

As mentioned above, people-oriented management must have like-minded people working together, since making reasonable changes depends on people, because it is people who can think and judge before taking action. Only when people are of one mind, can they establish an agreement in essentials while differing in minor points. This can be regarded as the foundation for making reasonable changes to everybody’s satisfaction.

Prof. Zeng claims that no matter how big the enterprise is, the administrative level is only composed of a few leading figures, whose responsibility is to lead the enterprise to survive the competition by relying on the whole staff. ^{[2][3][4]} The famous prime minister of Tang Dynasty Wei Zheng once said: “If one gentleman is highly thought of and respected, all the gentlemen would willingly serve for the royal court, thus all the villains would be driven away; if the evildoers dominate the state and keep the state affairs under their control, gentlemen would get excluded from the power of the royal court, and the loyal and honest people would be framed and get hurt. Isn’t it inevitable for such country to be destroyed?” ^[5] Therefore, what is most important for the management of an organization is to have a united team composed of loyal and honest people with the common goal cherished in mind, working together to make contributions for the enterprise’s success. If it is made up of a gathering of crowds who have their own axe to grind and bear different interest pursuit, they would scatter once with any sign of trouble, and the organization would dissolve.

At the beginning of the venture, the organization may only have a few like-minded people working together, who share the common goal and follow the same path. When the organization expands, it

attracts more and more people to join it by its organizational culture. Pro. Zeng thinks that in fact it is the organizational culture that brings about the thriving and success. ^[6]Organizational culture can be understood as a kind of belief and also a management strategy, which can be further illustrated by the following well-known stories in ancient times.

The story of *The Oath of the Peach Garden* is a fictional event in the historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. This event is set at the end of the Eastern Han dynasty around the time of the Yellow Turban Rebellion in the 180s. Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei took an oath of fraternity in a ceremony in the Peach Garden, and became sworn brothers from then on. Their goal in taking the oath was to protect the Han Empire from the Yellow Turban rebels. The oath bound the three men, who would later play important roles in the establishment of the state of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period. The Peach Garden Brotherhood of Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei creates the best organization pattern, whose organization culture has been cultivated by three of them, and attracted many talents of the time to participate in their cause. Finally they founded Shu Han, ranking top three of the ancient China of the time, which can be regarded as the rich fruit borne by the like-minded people working together with the help of the flexible strategy based upon the constantly changing situation. ^[7]

However, from the story of paying three visits to Kongming, people would find that Guanyu and Zhuangfei did not agree with Liubei on this issue at the beginning by holding different opinions. For Liu Bei, Kong Ming is an unusual and remarkable talent at policy making, and will surely help him to seize the power of the world and achieve the social stability at last. For Guan Yu, Kong Ming only enjoys undeserved fame in name, but not in reality. For Zhang Fei, Kong Ming is even regarded as an uneducated ordinary person. It can be seen that on some occasions it is quite common and normal for leaders and his men not to understand each other. Liu Bei successfully persuades his two brothers to change their opinions about Kongming, and stops them from doing any unreasonable things just in time. At last, Liu Bei succeeded in his quest of the great talent. Prof. Zeng concludes that there must be an influential and powerful policy-maker in the organization, which is essential and absolutely necessary in having the reasonable policy and decisions successfully made and smoothly implemented. Supposing all the members of the organization vie with each other in voicing their own different opinions in a chaotic way, supposing tomorrow's decision reverses today's verdict, then everything would be in a mess for lack of the real power and the last say in the organization to lead the whole business. Therefore, an influential decision maker with powerful authority is indispensable in the organization. Different from Liu Bei, Cao Cao makes every decision by himself, and under no circumstances would he authorize others to do it. Even the people he trusts only play the role of reliable assistants rather than decision makers. Cao Cao's individualistic heroism and Liu Bei's Group participation style represent the different ways of tackling the changing situations, or different different organization culture if dealt with from the perspective of organization. To the general public, Liu Bei is seemingly neither wise nor brave, but good at making use of talents, which shows his true wisdom and talent.

Prof. Zeng suggests that in the people-oriented Chinese management, the company members are of a family, so the concerted effort can create the really unified power in realizing the purpose to bring peace and harmony to people. However, it is inevitable that people's individuality can create differences. As a good leader, he should respect individual differences and try to bring out the harmony through compromising strategy, which can help reconcile contradictions, resolve conflicts, assimilate differences and bridge them. A tune cannot be created by repeating a single key, only when individual differences are recognized, respected and tolerated, can an organic and harmonious whole be yielded to have the conflicts kept in a considerable degree, and to prevent tiny problems rolling into large ones, then no chance to maintain the long-term and favorable cooperation of the organization!

Prof. Zeng raises many insightful suggestions about how to settle differences and realize harmony in a compromise and modesty manner, such as making expedient self-adjustment for reaching the common goal; being careful not to do or to say anything that will hurt the organization's harmony;

taking a humble peaceful attitude to treat everything and people; never employ unscrupulous divisive tactics to get a promotion to avoid vicious competition; always taking time out to reflect oneself to see if any mistakes have been made; taking consideration of saving “face” while telling the right from wrong; carrying on the conversion ponder; being willing to accept reasonable unfairness; trying to build staff consensus by means of understanding; putting emphasis on before-after-meeting communication, etc.. In a word, adopt humanized management to realize harmony and bring peace to all staff.

Making Rational Adjustments Based upon Changing Circumstance

To Prof. Zeng, another foregrounding characteristic of Chinese management is its “mobility”, which can also be reflected in the organization structure^{[1][2][5]}. Look at the following example. As you walk into a company and ask a consultant: “Do you have an organization chart?” To be sure, the answer must be positive “yes”. But when you ask them to let you have a look, they will give you one, and then remind you simultaneously: “This is an old one, and the new one is now under duplication.” Why such answer? Because organization transformation and personnel change are quite common.

To Prof. Zeng, that everything has to be done under schedule is only an elegant speech.^{[1][2][5]} In fact, changing is bound to occur in actual circumstances even after the plan is settled, so the plan-executor has to carry out the plan in a changing manner in order to deal with its ever-occurring changing situation. Take personnel changes as the example, an inevitable change in the Chinese management soil. It is a fact that Chinese enterprises often have a rapid turnover of staff, since even to like-minded people, spectacular differences may occur both in their goal and in their opinions. In that case, Chinese people would throw an excuse like “Each has his own ideal,” and then leave the work. Personnel dynamics, also called the personnel flow rate, in the Chinese style organizations, is much more common than that in Japan, and less than the United States. The phenomenon of the job changing can be taken as an example to account for the fact that Chinese people value more about staff’s “versatility” than “professional”. The Chinese tend to admire the versatile people, because they are thought to be more flexible and qualified when dealing with the work changing, which, of course, is a necessity in creating a prosperous business.

Here is another explanation for personal change. Once the chief leader of a business company is replaced by a new one, all things would change in the wake of it, including the company institution, organization structure and personnel. To avoid being resisted or criticized, the chief leaders would promise that they are going to strictly follow the established rules of the predecessor on the job. However, most new leaders are inclined to make great changes in order to stand out their leading status, revealing the fact that new broom sweeps clean. Chinese people don’t care about changing, as long as the change does not bring about any negative effect on them. In fact, Chinese people like changing, which can be looked upon as one of their most salient features, and also reflected in the Chinese management.

It is true that everything is in the changing process, including the plan, which is to undergo constant modifications and adjustments, however, in the direction of more reasonable condition. When the plan is made, the person who is responsible to execute it would move his head to think about how to carry it out in a flexible way by making some improvements based upon the constantly changing circumstances. The actual circumstance changing will certainly lead to corresponding flexible adjustments and modification in management, which, in fact, constitutes the foundation of the success of Chinese style management. However, the Chinese style management advocates “reasonable change”, and if changing is based upon reasoning, then it is an appropriate changing.

The Chinese prefer to tread a middle course, and believe that both “changing” and “stabilization” exists simultaneously in a complementary manner.^[8] In other words, there is a dialectical relation between “changing” and “stability” in that “Changing” dwells in “stability”, in the same way, “stability” also dwells in “changing”, which entirely matches the “golden mean” that Chinese people have desired for steering a middle course in order to obtain a reasonable degree and ideal condition. So there is no fixed model, as long as changing is rational, whatever type of change is acceptable for the Chinese. That can be thought of as the basic trait of Chinese management. One

thing that has to be emphasized is that every change must be based upon reasoning rather than upon passion or arbitrariness.

Prof. Zeng regards the reasonable change according to constantly changing situation as the highest wisdom of Chinese management and makes a further explanation from the following three perspectives.

First of all, the emphasis of reasonable changes does not mean pursuing thoroughly novel changes blindly. *The book of changes* tells us that 80% of changing turns out badly, by comparison, only 20% have achieved satisfying results. We are always saying that “More often than not things don’t work out the way you thought they would.” That is to say, changes will occur in our lives inevitably, however, in most cases the result is not as good as people have expected, especially for those blind and arbitrary changes. What should be really advocated is to pay the focus on reasonable changing instead of changing at random. In fact, only the reasonable changing strategy can help a company realize its overall goal of the management and achieve perfection.

Secondly, reasonable changes have to be carried out by following “coping with shifting events by sticking to a fundamental policy of unchanging or stability”. Only standing in the solid and stable position to think about the possibility of the dynamic change is it possible to have a reasonable change. Supposing a company is running well under the guidance of existing rules and regulations, then why still making changes? If insisting on doing so, then it must be an irrational change. Therefore, only under such a circumstance that the company does not really work well in the framework of existing rules and regulations, will the company have to make corresponding changes. In this condition, it’s easier to be changing in the right and reasonable direction. In conclusion, think carefully before managers decide whether to make changes or not, including which parts of the work need changing and which parts needn’t, above all, how to make smart and effective changes by assessing the situation earnestly and seriously.

Thirdly, reasoning change emphasizes the nature of change: reasoning. So first try to ascertain whether it is justified in the option of changing. The critical difficulty for this problem lies in the fact that different people hold different opinions about it. What’s more, the criterion of reasoning would be changing with time and space, which requires people to move their heads and think profoundly whether they have got ample justification for taking the strategy of change.

Strictly speaking, being reasonable change seems to contain a considerable degree of contradiction. However, for Prof. Zeng, this world is full of contradictions, such as “Yin” and “Yang”(According to Taoism, yin should always exists as the complementary of yang). Prof. Zeng argues that it has to be noticed that it is just this contradictions that help to build up healthy reasoning.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed and discussed the three characteristics of the Chinese style management held by Professor Zeng Shiqiang. Among other management principles, Prof. Zeng argues that the Chinese style management has three major characteristics: people oriented, like-minded people working together, making reasoning adjustments in order to adapt to constantly changing circumstances, with people as the key to the success of the administration. These three characteristics make great contribution for the success of the Chinese style management.

Through the detailed analysis and illustrations, it can be found that Chinese style management is in fact people are the key to the success of the administration. The most important principle of Chinese style management is people-oriented, with the help of the two other principles: having like-minded people working together and making reasonable adjustments according to the constantly changing circumstances. All these three principles above are always taking “people” as the center, which helps account for the fact that people are always superior in the Chinese management soil.

Second, like-minded people cherishing the same ideals, following the same path and working together for the common goal constitute the foundation for an organization to make a reasonable reaction to the ever-changing situations, which constitute a kind of rational and healthy organizational culture. Only by attaching great importance on ethics and building up a kind of

consensus, can people find out a balancing point of the reasonable reaction, when encountering unexpected changes. The story of The Peach Garden Brotherhood of Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei helps explain what the best organization pattern is, whose organization culture cultivated by three of them attracted many talents of the time to join in their cause, founding Shu Han, which can be looked upon as the rich fruit borne by the like-minded people working together. It is inevitable that people's individuality can create differences, the influential and powerful policy-maker in the organization is essential in having the reasonable policy successfully made and smoothly implemented. Prof. Zeng makes some practical suggestions which are of great help and significance in having the conflicts kept in a considerable degree, and preventing small problems turning to large ones.

Third, Prof. Zeng regards the reasonable change according to constantly changing situation as the highest wisdom of Chinese management, but in the Chinese style management every change must be based upon reasoning rather than upon passion or arbitrariness. What's more, both "changing" and "stabilization" exists simultaneously in a complementary manner, which entirely matches the "golden mean". There is no fixed model, as long as changing is rational, whatever type of change is acceptable for the Chinese.

The three major characteristics of the Chinese style management held by Professor Zeng Shiqiang are also reflected the philosophy of inter-subjectivity, which can also be used in other fields such as the educational activity, and help us have a better understanding of modern inter-subjectivity education, namely the healthy interaction between teachers and students, which is considered to possess the same philosophical concept with Zeng's management principle through its two-way or multi-directional interaction between teachers and students.

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