

On Plan-Making and Plan-Execution for the Qualified Decision-maker ---An Important Viewpoint Held by Zeng Shiqiang

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Abstract. This paper discusses and analyzes Professor Zeng Shiqiang's viewpoint on plan-making and plan-execution and how to become a qualified policy-maker in the Chinese management. First of all, the paper discusses the how to make a successful plan, and how to implement the plan smoothly. Then the paper makes a detailed explanation of the important role the policy and decision-makers play in plan-making and plan-execution, and the important quality a successful manager should possess in the management process from the perspective of Chinese ancient philosophical viewpoints with the help of historical stories from *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*. The principles of the Chinese management are considered to be very insightful for teachers to follow in order to do a more satisfying teaching job.

Introduction

This paper focuses on Professor's Zeng Shiqiang's concept on how to make plans and how to execute them for an enterprise in an effective and reasonable management manner. Chinese management pays attention to making reasonable policy, which has set the organization a very clear goal and objectives. With them in mind, the executives have to make specific and practicable plans in order to successfully handle the work and create the expected future. Generally, managing by goals or objectives is called Management by Objectives (MBO for short), or Management by Results (MBR for short) since it can be measured by results as well. From setting up goal and objectives, planning and scheduling to fulfilling tasks effectively, the whole process needs to be actively participated by a large number of managerial staff. From this angle, this management can be also known as Management by Participation.

This paper discusses and analyzes Professor Zeng Shiqiang's viewpoint on reasonable plan-making and successful plan-execution and how to become a qualified policy-maker in the Chinese management. The important position policy makers and executives occupies both in making the satisfying plan and in implementing or modifying the plan is also given a detailed explanation, including the self-awareness and moderate attitude they have to hold to bring more wisdom and discernment to the policy and decision making and implement. The principles of the Chinese management are considered to be very insightful for teachers to follow in order to do a more satisfying teaching job.

Making the Plan Successfully and Implementing the Plan Smoothly

Making the Plan Successfully

It is apparent that making a reasonable plan plays a very important way for the success of a enterprise. To Prof. Zeng^[1], the function of planning is to make preparations for the future in a logical and systematical way in order to reduce the waste in the manpower and material resources, improve the performance of the enterprise, and increase its efficiency. Chinese people are accustomed to making preparations for rainy days, and would take every possible event that might happen in the future into

careful consideration, so making reasonable and sophisticated plans plays a significant role in Chinese management. In short, a well-thought-out plan helps bring about a bright future for an enterprise.

Prof. Zeng makes an classification of the plan, which is carried out from the following perspectives: 1) In terms of the characteristic, plans can be classified into major plans and secondary plans, flexible plans and fixed plans, written plans and unwritten plans and so on; 2) In terms of the time span, plans can be classified into short-term plans within one year, medium-term plan of three to five years, and long-term plan of over 10 years and so on. 3) In terms of the organization, plans can be classified into individual plans, department plans and group plans and so on. 4) In terms of the nature, plans can be classified into personnel plans, marketing plans, production plans, financial plans and so on. 5) In terms of the function, plans can be classified into objectives, policies, procedures and methods and so on. First and foremost, be sure to adhere to the agreed goals set by the organization.

Prof. Zeng argues that the policies and plans of the enterprise have to be righteous and transparent, otherwise, both the managers and employees would have a sense of frustration of different degrees, even if profits have been made. ^[2]The reason can be explained in the following way.

First, Chinese people generally believe that making money is by no means the sole purpose for an enterprise. If the enterprise has a righteous and clearly illustrated goal or objective, the more money people make, the greater sense of achievement people may get; but if the enterprise merely aims at making money, the more money people make, the more easily people would have a sense of bewilderment, because earning money itself can only satisfy an individual's material desire, Chinese people also seek to achieve nonmaterial or spiritual goals. What kind of contributions will they make for fulfilling the company goals with the money they have earned? Without a righteous and transparent objective in mind, it's quite natural for them to feel confused. So when making a policy, the policy-maker must watch out for this possible negative effect by voicing the goals and objectives frankly and clearly.

Second, do not make the policy or decision along the will of your boss and ignore its rationality and feasibility. It can be understood that the policy/decision-makers have to get permission and support from the boss or top-leader before implementing it, but it does not mean that they need to cater to the boss or top-leader's tastes to get on, because it would hinder the policy/decision-makers in making rational and feasible policies or decisions. The best way, in my opinion, is to have a good communication and a detailed discussion with the boss or top-leader in advance so as to talk them into supporting the policy or the plan you have made. Otherwise, if the boss or top-leader realizes that you are trying to tempt him to approve an irrational decision, he would be very angry and even lose his confidence in you. Then, in the later work even if you put forward some reasonable plans, the boss or leader may refuse to accept them.

Third, do not deceive your superior with fake evidence or false information. The plan should have a variety of favorable conditions skillfully combined together so as to make a deep impression on employees' heart. However, it is not allowed to exaggerate the plan's advantageous conditions with fake evidence or unreal information. To avoid this, the most advisable method is to initiatively communicate with relevant colleagues for checking the verity of these conditions, and then clearly mark each of them on cards in order to raw up realistic contingency plans through comparison and analysis of these conditions.

Fourth, do not have all the ideas housed into one plan. Original ideas are undeniably demanded for making a good plan, but it is unwise to include all of them into one plan, which will only bring about too much complexity. So it is best to simplify the objectives and abandon irrelevant ideas in order to work out a practical scheme.

Fifth, make alternative plans. A plan cannot be put into practice before it is reported to the higher up and gets recognized and approved by leaders after a discussion in the meeting. For some creative plans, due to their unique and exquisite nature, it is often easier to incur doubt from superiors and colleagues, and thus vulnerable to criticism and negation from them. Therefore, it is better to propose Plan A, Plan B and Plan C simultaneously, making others think that it is they

themselves who can make a choice for the last decision rather than only the planner. In this way it would be easier for the plan to get approved.

Implementing the Plan Smoothly

However, if the approved plan fails to be smoothly implemented, just like a baby who died before his birth, the approved plan has no difference from the unapproved one. To avoid this, Prof. Zeng puts forward the three tips for reference.

First, communicate with corresponding colleagues and get them involved in making a plan. In this way, they will have a sense of participation, and would be willing to give their assistance rather than hinder and damage the execution of the plan. If there are some people who hold different opinions, be patient to explain the plan to them rather than give up the plan or bust into anger which would only escalate disputes.

Second, take advantage of every opportunity to have the proposed plan tested in practice to see if it does work. In fact, the more loyal the employees are to the enterprise, the more frank they would tell what they think about the proposed plan. As for the leaders, they should take an open-minded attitude towards various different yet valuable opinions and suggestions, which will not only help improve and perfect the plan but also get more people show concern to the plan. In this way, the plan can be implemented more smoothly and successfully.

Third, give credit to the colleagues and fault to yourselves in implementing the plan, which is critical to a guarantee of the success of the business plan. Imagine how annoyed the colleagues would be if all faults are blamed on them, and all credit is given to you. Besides, when the plan goes through a rough patch during execution, it's best to find out its root cause and make some corresponding and necessary modifications or amendment. Since the practical situation has changed from the drafting plan to discussing the plan, and down to its execution, so while sticking to the goal and the essence of scheme, it is necessary to make corresponding adjustments according to the changing situation. If the executive refuses to make any modifications in the implementing process, the plan is likely to be terminated, just like stillbirth in mother's womb.

In fact, executives play a significant role either in implementing or modifying the plan. To be more specific, Prof. Zeng thinks that if executives are competent and have a good comprehension of the objective of the policy, they will definitely achieve satisfying accomplishments by adhering to the fundamental principles of the plan, and by making corresponding modifications based upon the constantly changing circumstances.^[3]

Towards the Great Policy and Decision-maker

Towards the Importance of Great Decision-maker

As an old saying goes, "Easy to build an army, but hard to get an excellent General". The key to success of the enterprise lies in the quality of the decision maker rather than the personnel number of an organization. No wonder Chinese people are always saying that the general manager plays a dominant role in successfully running a company. Prof. Zeng illustrates his viewpoint by referring to the historical stories from *Romance of Three Kingdoms*.^[2] *Romance of Three Kingdoms*, written by Luo Guanzhong, is a historical novel set in the turbulent years towards the end of the Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period in Chinese history, starting in 169 AD and ending with the reunification of the land in 280 AD. The story is about Liu Bei, a warlord in the late Eastern Han dynasty who founded the state of Shu Han in the Three Kingdoms period and became its first ruler. To find a competent military strategist, he paid three visits to Zhu Gelang, the most accomplished strategist of his era. By virtue of the persistence, Liu finally got Zhu to participate into his camp. And then Zhu Gelang [1] In the Three Kingdoms period, in order to invite Zhuge Liang who was very knowledgeable and capable for assistance in statecraft, Liu Bei visited three times the thatched cottage where Zhuge Liang lived. Impressed by Liu Bei's sincerity, Zhuge Liang finally agreed to help Liu Bei with all his heart, and made great achievements in both the military and political

spheres.led the army and marched into Xichuan, the central and western part of Sichuan province, and successfully took over it, helping Liu Bei become the ruler of one third of China. Through this story, it can be seen that the great achievement of Liu owes a lot to his right choice of the great policy maker, Zhu Gelian, who was famous for his extraordinary talents and wisdom. Zhu Gelian was cautious and prudent in making every choice in his life, but made a wrong decision by choosing Ma Su as the decision maker in Jieting battle. As a result, Jieting was lost, which exerted a detrimental effect on the whole situation. In view of such severe influence, Zhu punished himself for choosing the wrong man to lead the battle. From the story, Prof. Zeng wants to prove how important the policy and decision makers are, for the correct strategy from a superb policy maker and reasonable decision from a decision maker often matter life and death of an enterprise.

The outstanding nature of the policy and decision maker rests with their great wisdom and discernment. “Wisdom” refers to “knowing how to solve problems”, and “discernment” means “the ability to see the truth and relevant virtues”, the combination of which constitutes the concept of Dao. Mengzi stated in his *Theory of Nature* that, “All things are parts of Tao; one thing a part of all things; and what we see is just a part of one thing. Therefore, it is naive for somebody to claim that he is knowledgeable.”^[4] Obviously, Dao is the truly great wisdom which requires policy-makers looking at problem from all sides and taking all factors into consideration when making decisions.

Holding Self-awaring and Moderate Attitude

Great policy makers in all ages have shared one character in common - “self-awareness”, namely being aware of their limited knowledge and capability. Therefore, they are thirsty for talents in different fields, and always have numerous outstanding elites in every aspect around them. Different from these enlightened policy makers, however, are those who consider themselves knowledgeable and tend to be self-willed, which often ends in cutting their own throat.

Prof. Zeng illustrates the meaning with the historical story. During the period of Chu-Han Contention there were two men, Xiang Yu and Liu Bang who struggled fiercely to become the Emperor. Xiang Yu was very arrogant, for since he was a child he had comprehensively studied military books, and had a good mastery of martial arts. He thought of himself as invincible, and wherever he went and proclaimed himself “King of West Chu state”. He made any kind of decisions, including important ones, only by himself, without consulting his subordinates. Because of his willful stubbornness and arbitrary arrogance, many eminent military talents were not willing to continue following him and left him one after another, which finally led to his “Waterloo” at the Battle of Gaixia. After being defeated by Liu Bang, Xiang Yu had to commit suicide by cutting his throat. Different from Xiang Yu, Liu Bang was very modest and tolerant. He often said, “In devising strategies of the battle, I am behind Zi Fang; in the logistics support capacity, I am not as good as Xiao He; in leading millions of soldiers to fight against the enemies, I’m not a match to Han Xin”. Because of his modesty, Liu Bang had got a lot of able men to help him, and at last defeated Xiang Yu and became the king of Han Dynasty.

A lesson can be drawn from the above story: being modest and aware of one’s own shortcomings and limitations can bring more wisdom and discernment to the policy and decision maker. As for the general manager or chief executive, he should be first of all open-minded and tolerant to different opinions. Only in this way can he make the universally satisfying policy and plan. If the general manager or the chief executive regards himself as competent and knowledgeable, he would probably refuse to have a detailed discussion with his colleagues when dealing with a problem. Instead of listening to their opinions carefully, he will directly have his own opinion spoken out. In this way, his employees would either keep silent or try to ingratiate him with similar opinions. Consequently, the general manager or the chief executive has to make the final decision by himself. Such a decision is inevitably one-sided and far from perfect for lacking a thorough group discussion or debating among the staff.

Taking a moderate attitude for the general manager and policy maker is very useful and effective in solving another problem in the management, namely sometimes department managers may tend to consider their own team’s interest first when proposing suggestions. Prof. Zeng thinks that to deal

with this condition, the general manager has to take all suggestions from different departments into consideration before making a rational decision, just as a conventional Chinese proverb says, “A great decision maker is always magnanimous and open-minded”. Concretely speaking, the general manager has to take a moderate attitude by pretending to know very little about the problem concerned, leaving everybody a chance to fully voice their views, then collecting their suggestions and analyzing them before arriving at the final decision. Once the decision is made, the general manager must guarantee its implementation. Although side adjustments are inevitable in carrying it out, the basic principles have to be adhered to without any hesitation and vacillation.

Prof. Zeng ^[5]concludes that the policy and plan maker is required to develop and possess great wisdom and discernment, but he may behave in a moderate and low-profile way at first, just as Han Feizi pointed out in his *The Way of Being a Ruler*, that if the policy and decision maker voices his opinion clearly before everyone has fully expressed their opinions, his colleagues and employees would probably say something he favors^[6]. Therefore, it can be regarded as an insightful suggestion for the policy and decision maker to pretend to be ignorant, and give chance for everyone to say first. Only in this way can the policy-maker attain the true and valuable information and insightful advice in order to have a better assessment of the whole situation. Simply put, holding a moderate attitude can help the policy and decision maker encourage others to talk first, and waits until all of them have aired their views freely without any restraint, then take all the opinions into consideration before reaching the final rational decision.

Conclusion

This paper discusses and analyzes Professor Zeng Shiqiang’s viewpoint on plan-making and plan-execution and how to become a qualified policy-maker in the Chinese management. Prof. Zeng argues that making a reasonable plan plays a very important way for the success of an enterprise in order to reduce the waste in the manpower and material resources, improve the performance of the enterprise, and increase its efficiency. Prof. Zeng makes a classification of the plan from the six perspectives, and believes that first and foremost is to adhere to the agreed goals set by the organization. Prof. Zeng also argues that the policies and plans of the enterprise have to be righteous and transparent so as not to have both the managers and employees feel frustrated and gives a detailed explanation.^{[2][7]}

However, the approved plan which fails to be smoothly implemented would be just like a baby who died before his birth. To avoid this, Prof. Zeng puts forward the three tips for reference for the manager to pay attention to.

In a word, policy makers and executives play a significant role either in making the satisfying plan and in implementing or modifying the plan, and holding self-awareness and moderate attitude can bring more wisdom and discernment to the policy and decision making, to which Prof. Zeng gives a detailed explanation by referring to the historical stories from the story of *The Romance of Three Kingdoms*.

The author of the paper claims that Prof. Zeng’s viewpoints on the principles of the Chinese management can also be very insightful for the teaching work, and can produce a very big enlightenment and provide the guidance for teachers to follow in order to do a more satisfying teaching job.

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