



Towards the 21st Century

by
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Now that the World Cup is over, and Brazil has won, we might ask ourselves what lessons we can draw from all the excitement. Actually the world cup reminded me of three useful lessons for business or government:

- Strategy
- Intense Competition
- Striving for Excellence

My friends all told me how much they enjoyed observing the different strategies employed by each team - especially the winners! For instance, Brazil adopted a defensive strategy aimed at making sure they did not lose games due to weaknesses in defence. These tactical game plans or strategies are just as relevant in business and government. So if we were watching closely, the World Cup tournament should have taught us much that is useful.

Another interesting lesson we can draw from the World Cup concerns the advantages of open competition. If Adam Smith had lived long enough to see the 1994 tournament he would have enjoyed seeing his philosophy of competition being put to good use to produce an excellent standard of play which was greatly enjoyed by all the spectators. And this is basically my last point on this subject: the level of excellence displayed in these games is something we must strive for in business also, where there are so many products and services on the market that if yours are not good enough or even the best, you may not be able to find enough room to survive.

Oh well, after having a good time for the past month, let's get back to basics. This week's column marks the beginning of some discussions on the subject of what we might call "Issues Relating to the Management of Human Resources."

When I first started work on the Post Project, naturally enough a lot of my friends said they would support me. In contemporary terms, we might call this an alliance. My good friend Ron Endley was among the many well wishers who sent their ideas to me. Ron and I first met about 3-4 years ago when he was managing director of Swedish Motors Corporation. Later we worked together as a team of consultants for some companies in Thailand. While I am an economist, Ron can be described as a management expert. At the present time, besides operating a consultancy business, Ron also runs his own business in the field of environmental products, which is something of a pioneering exercise; difficult but fun. He is not like so many Thai business people who are so crazy about making money, rather he is what I would call a man who is happy to see good ideas put into effect.

It was Ron's suggestion to examine some of the differences and similarities between leaders and managers. I picked up on this idea because, although I had thought about it from time to time, I had never actually written these thoughts down before. As luck would have it only last week I was able to discuss the topic in Hong Kong with another good friend of mine, Dr. Thomas Leung of the Hay management group. He told me that right now the hot topic of discussion in Hong Kong is the leadership succession in North Korea. Anything related to this subject is talked about as if it were a matter of life and death. Dr. Thomas told me that while Kim Il-Sung had been a great leader of the country who earned the people's respect by fighting in wars and so forth, his son, Kim Jong-Il, was cast in a different mould. So I guess that whether in politics or in business the first basic rule of leadership is that you must have "acceptability", or what we call baramee in Thai. Dr. Thomas rather pessimistically wondered how long the young Kim might last and how much damage would be done to the world during his time in office.

In last week's edition of my monthly television program we investigated the topic of "Re-engineering". Therefore it seems relevant this week to point out that anybody looking to effectively re-engineer their organisation will first and foremost have to be a good leader who enjoys the full support of the management.

I particularly like the point Ron made about how leaders must be capable of managing change. Of course, most of us could do with making some changes, particularly in the public sector. I think it should be emphasised just how important it is for leaders to be able to cope with change in order that they can both conceive effective strategies and then implement them.

It is perhaps regrettable therefore that in our society we do not allow leaders enough time to gain sufficient experience and remain in positions of responsibility long enough to implement changes. In fact the system in Thailand tends to prevent strong, decisive people rising into positions of leadership. I am sure that the emergence of decisive leaders such as Mr. Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Mohamad Mahathir would not be possible in the Thai context.

Finally, let us keep it in mind that we need both leaders and managers who can work together, because nothing is guaranteed. Even given the present strength of our economy, it would be foolish to feel over confident. We must remember that in today's world things tend to happen quite suddenly and we have to be ready to adapt equally rapidly. Leaders are needed in all walks of life who are capable of looking at the long term and are prepared to make the changes necessary to benefit from whatever the prevailing conditions turn out to be.

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Comparing Leadership between the Region



Source - Dr. F.W. DWORCZAK, AIT