

Relations industrielles Industrial Relations



Michael WHITE, Malcolm TREVOR : *Under Japanese Management. The Experience of British Workers*. London, Heinemann, 1983, 162 pp., ISBN 0-435-83935-7

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Volume 39, numéro 2, 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/050039ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/050039ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Département des relations industrielles de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0034-379X (imprimé)

1703-8138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Matejko, A. J. (1984). Compte rendu de [Michael WHITE, Malcolm TREVOR : *Under Japanese Management. The Experience of British Workers*. London, Heinemann, 1983, 162 pp., ISBN 0-435-83935-7]. *Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations*, 39(2), 395–396. <https://doi.org/10.7202/050039ar>

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Under Japanese Management. The Experience of British Workers, by Michael White and Malcolm Trevor, London, Heinemann, 1983, 162 pp., ISBN 0-435-83935-7

Can Japanese management work in a British or European context? Will British workers and employees accept the Japanese work ethic? This first major survey of the UK Japanese firms based on six case studies provides an answer to these questions.

There was a substantial difference between the Japanese-owned manufacturing companies and the financial subsidiaries. In both cases only some elements of the Japanese management practice were implemented. «The keynote of Japanese personnel management in Britain has been a piecemeal pragmatism rather than any attempt to introduce a comprehensive Japanese system of employment» (p. 124). Local people hired by Japanese were always very carefully selected. In order to avoid the false expectations of promotion, in the case of financial companies there was a definite tendency to avoid any over-qualified personnel.

In the studies here reported neither unusually beneficial employment practices nor exceptional levels of employee satisfaction could be identified. The advantage appeared in something different than creating particularly happy and contented workers or generating particularly strong feelings among workers that human relations in the company are being given high priority (p. 127). The working practices of Japanese management based on an organized or orderly approach, an emphasis on detail, an over-riding priority attached to quality, and a punctilious sense of discipline appeared as the basic asset appreciated by blue collar workers. The effect depended on the ensemble and not on this or that practices in isolation. The Japanese style of management based on personal good example coming from the top down the whole hierarchy was highly appreciated by British workers even when it imposed upon them high demands. «The need for fulfillment

through commitment to work is not moribund, as so many commentators have for long assumed; it is merely waiting to be called into play» (p. 130).

It is significant that the British white collar workers in the financial subsidiaries reacted negatively to the same style which was welcomed by the British blue collar workers in the manufacturing companies. It seems that the first ones are just less open to the high work ethic. «Employees sometimes expressed puzzlement about the Japanese emphasis on certain particulars, and did not see them as part of a whole style of work (...). British white-collar workers have a different, and more instrumental outlook to work than British blue-collar workers. This instrumental outlook may in some cases take a form of preoccupation with material rewards, in others with career progression» (p. 130). The Japanese firms gain acceptance and support for their methods of management only among people ready to appreciate the full commitment to work. In the manufacturing firms «reactions to management were more favourable the greater the Japanese influence and presence » (p. 131).

The leadership by example seems to be the main asset of Japanese companies in the U.K. A sense of equality was also appreciated, especially by the blue collar workers. «What impressed workers was not the patronizing graces of egalitarianism but the fact that management evidently shared the same objectives, tasks and disciplines as themselves (...). The conditions under which workers will see management as highly rational and effective were amply satisfied (...). Japanese-style working practices and Japanese-style management are part and parcel of one concerted system to achieve effective production. It is on those simple terms that both win the support of the British workers» (p. 132).

It is not easy to apply the Japanese experience to the developing western countries if taking into consideration that «behind the deceptive simplicity of specific Japanese-style

working practices, there is an elusive unity of method» (p. 135). The Japanese system demands a heavy involvement of management in daily details and the western supervisors are unprepared to it. A comprehensive and detailed expertise in the design and control of production is taken for granted in the case of any Japanese manager. A close contact with day-to-day operations is expected even at the highest levels of management.

There is an obvious need to revitalize the notion of detailed practical exercise combined with general managerial knowledge and experience, reconcile managerial delegation with the management by detail, make management strong not by power but by expertise. The whole system has to be task-oriented and leadership is mainly a problem of implementing it in practice. The performance of work-groups can be affected much more by the design, planning and control of work than by an exterior process of motivation. Much that is now taught to managers under the rubric of motivation, leadership and the behavioural sciences, could perhaps be profitably replaced by new topics in the design and operation of production systems (p. 139).

A shared outlook and discipline bring together within the Japanese system supervisors and subordinates, generalists and narrow specialists, people representing various disciplines and different educational levels. This is exactly what seems to be much missing in the modern western world. The career path based only on individual achievement is in the basic disagreement with team work. It seems necessary to question several traditional assumptions in order to become really open to absorb and digest several useful aspects of the Japanese style of management.

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Abolition and After the Paper Box Wages Council, by C. Craig, J. Rubery, R. Tarling and F. Wilkinson, Research Paper no 12, Department of Employment, London, June 1980, 98 pp.

Since the Conservative Government under Margaret Thatcher was elected in May 1979 one of its strategies in the field of industrial relations has been the steady reduction in the number of bodies and mechanisms affecting the determination of pay levels and conditions in the United Kingdom. Example of this policy include the abolition of the Comparability Commission which attempted to evaluate public sector wage claims in relation to levels in the private sector, the winding up of the Civil Service Pay Review Board and the repeal of both Schedule 11 of the 1975 Employment Protection Act and of the Fair Wages Resolution, both of which provided a statutory procedure for comparability claims by trade unions and employers associations in certain situations.

In the context of such a policy it is not surprising that some Governmental eyes have turned to the system of Wages Councils and in particular to the possibility of its abolition. Thus, when asked in December 1982 in the House of Commons whether the system would be retained the Secretary of state for Employment replied succinctly.

«I can give ... no such undertaking.»

In the light of such a background the Research Paper commissioned by the Department of Employment from the Cambridge team of Craig et al. has a particular interest for students of economics and industrial relations as it analyses the situation in one former Wages Council industry (Paper Box) three years after the relevant Council was abolished.

The Paper starts with a brief chronicle of the system of Wages Councils, a system of tripartite bodies charged with the setting of minimum wage rates and conditions in industries where collective bargaining has been difficult to establish voluntarily. They comment