

Local

U.S. could learn from Japanese management

Manufacturing firms in this country may improve productivity by studying the Japanese style of management rather than their technology, a management expert says.

Since the end of World War II, the Japanese have been able to build almost anything faster, cheaper and, lately it seems, better than Americans. One reason, suggests Dr. Don Hellriegel of Texas A&M's management department, is the Japanese attention to the human aspects of life in the workplace.

"I'm not suggesting that we adopt their management philosophies because the differences in their cultures and values would make that difficult," Hellriegel said. "But there are some important lessons we could learn from improving our management practices, which could result in major improvements in the quality of productions

and the morale of workers."

Hellriegel said while U.S. managers tend to highly rate value concepts of aggressiveness, individuality and conflict as measures of achievement, just the opposite is found for Japanese managers.

"There are fewer severe conflicts in Japanese society due to the underlying differences in values," said the management professor. "The overriding value in Japan is 'collectivism' — one that calls for mutual cooperation not only between individuals but also between groups working within firms towards common goals."

In contrast, the need for achievement in the U.S. is relatively individualistic, which promotes competition, he said. The differences in these two values presents differences in management processes and practices used.

"For most Japanese, the company is not only a place of work, but a sharing and caring group. It is a place where individuals are treated like members of a family," the management expert said.

"Japanese employees are often proud of their company's success and frequently identify themselves as members of a firm. There is an intense sense of group loyalty and shared obligations by Japanese workers."

Many Japanese organizations use a general pattern of management known as the "Nenko" system, which emphasizes lifelong employment with a particular firm, Hellriegel explained. An individual who joins an organization is expected to remain until retirement, which is normally at 55. Employers seldom fire or lay off employees, except in extreme emergencies.

The general pattern of lifelong commitment

leads to different work incentives and provides greater job security. This may be one of the reasons Japanese employees are more accepting of change, especially technological change, he said.

"The amount of compensation and opportunities for promotion are heavily based on seniority, as many employees strongly believe that competence increases automatically with seniority," Hellriegel said. "Performance assessments for determining promotability give heavy weight to criteria such as flexibility, group support and company loyalty."

Moreover, he said, long-term commitments to organizations encourage long-term employee development and training.

"Japanese managers see their companies and their employees as an extensions of their families

and employees expect them to show concern for personal affairs," Hellriegel said. "In America, business relationships are depersonalized, with emphasis on formal contracts. Employees generally resent organizational intrusion into personal affairs here."

In Japan, group decisions are emphasized, aimed at defining the questions needing attention rather than at deciding what should be done, he said. This process may be more time-consuming, but implementation tends to be quicker, since people are more convinced of the merits of what is being done and why.

Ideas often flow from the bottom up, said Hellriegel, rather than just from top down.

American workers often have a what's-in-it-for-me attitude, which sometimes presents problems in dealing with individuals, Hellriegel said.

A&M raises similar species of 'biblical' fish

Texas A&M scientists are raising a fish that — while it won't feed 5,000 people — holds promise as a food source for multitudes.

Tilapia, a striped, oval-bodied fish that resembles a sunfish and grows to about two pounds, is believed to be the same species spoken of in the Gospel of Matthew when Christ fed 5,000 followers from five loaves of bread and two fish.

Also known as Saint Peter's fish, Tilapia are native to the Middle East and Africa and provide a cheap source of protein.

"They are easy to grow, have excellent flavor, bring a good market price and eat things that most other fish wouldn't touch," said Dr. James T. Davis, a Texas A&M fisheries specialist studying the nutritional requirements of the fish for optimum growth.

Tilapia grows from marble-size to a pound in six months and reaches skillet-size in a Texas growing season. A new overwintering process developed by the Texas A&M researchers speeds up the growing cycle, helping to make Tilapia a potential major commercial fish-farming product in Texas.

"This industry isn't going to develop overnight," admits Davis, who also holds an appointment with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, part of the Texas A&M System.

"Tilapia has to be accepted by the public, and hopefully a low production cost will be an influencing factor."

Tilapia were introduced into Texas during the 1960s when they rapidly established in power plant cooling lakes and in portions of the Rio Grande Valley. Their primary advantage over other more conventional fishes is they are extremely hardy, said Davis, adding Tilapia are the second most cultured group of fishes in the world today, surpassed only by carp, "which don't enjoy a lot of popularity in some portions of the country."

Tilapia thrive in very hot, rich waters that would kill most other fishes. In Idaho, they are grown in geothermally-heated water, David said, and while they are pri-

marily utilized for food throughout the world, they also can be used for aquatic vegetation control.

The fish grow well when cultured with other popular commercial pond fishes, such as channel catfish and buffalo fish. At Texas A&M, they are grown with freshwater shrimp.

"Tilapia are much less expensive to raise than other commercial stocking fish and they can be held under very heavy populations which makes them especially attractive for bait houses," he said.

In Taiwan, 1979 production under intensively managed conditions netted 28,000 tons, an in-

crease of 300 percent over the previous decade.

"They produce good gains when fed fertilizers and crude food-stuffs," said Davis. "Those fed grain and protein crops readily available in Texas are a delight to the taste buds of gourmet chefs."

Tilapia can also live off organic wastes like chicken and cow manure, Davis added.

While fish fed manure cannot be used for human consumption, he explained, they make excellent animal feed.



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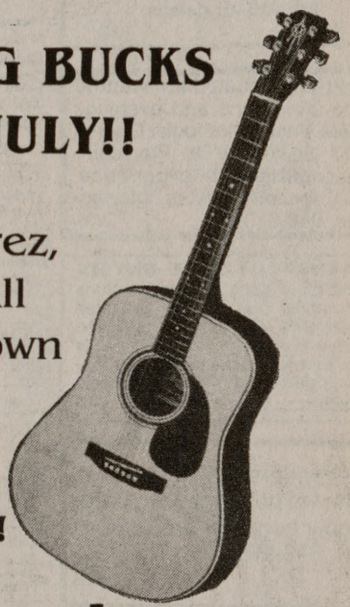
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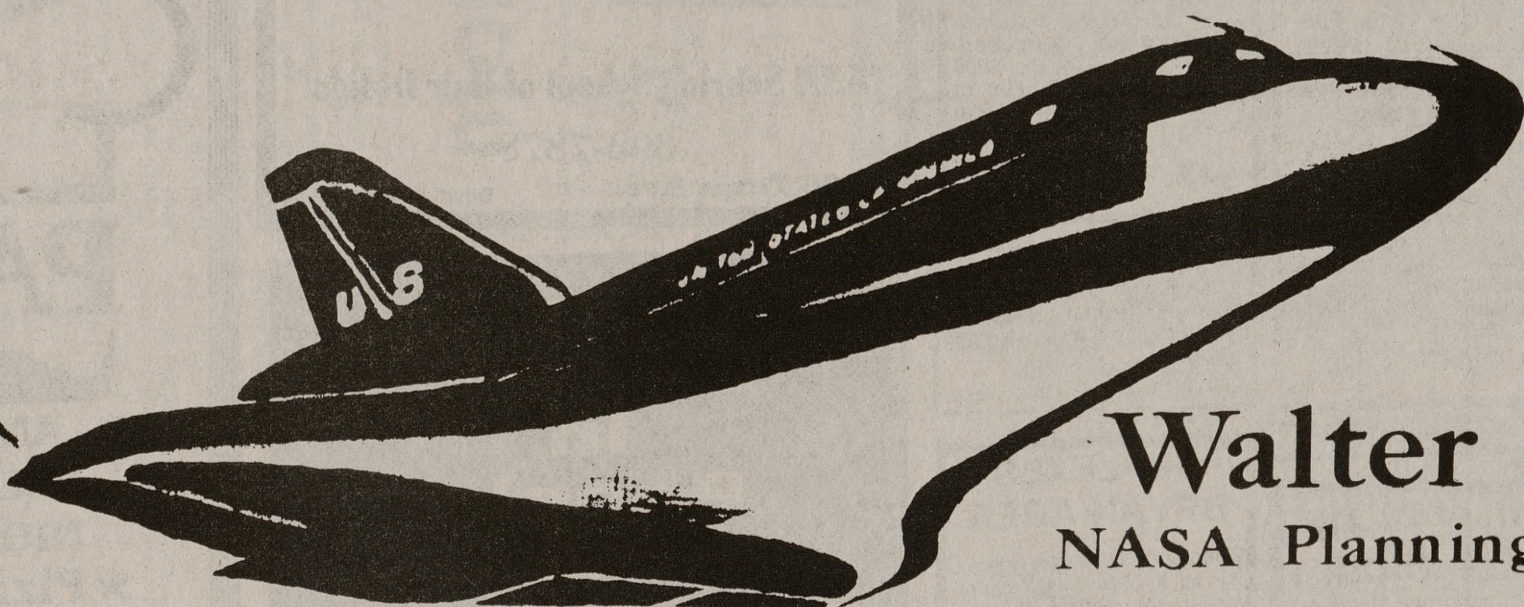
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