Management Information Systems in the Chinese Business Culture:
An Explanatory Theory

The sheer complexity and amount of access that we in the western society have, is astounding and something of which most of us take for granted. The ability to find legal information, information about the government and their doings and information about large conglomerates is something that is day to day doings for us. When we are unable to find what we need from these organisations, it creates a feeling of fear and mistrust with the company, something that any company looking at their triple bottom line doesn’t want to have to deal with. Life for the Chinese people, in their societies and businesses is completely different. Things are hidden, secrets are told and life of large organisations, and many jobs, lay in the hands of one man, or his auntie, or his cousin?

I will be reviewing the article: Management Information Systems in the Chinese business culture: An explanatory Theory. Within this review, I will be addressing and discussing such issues as the contrast of western and Chinese philosophies, Chinese business culture and the growing concern for individual and organisational knowledge as power, or a resource.

Contrary to what many may believe about the advancement of the Chinese culture, they refuse to place their life and work into the hands of information system. The Chinese have an abundance of large firms, they have the best of the latest technologies and IT support, and organisations that have infrastructure to support information system, so why don’t they take advantage of them? The Chinese have a culture all to themselves, and that is why they do not use things in IT that the western culture simply couldn’t do without.

When we look at the contrast of western and Chinese philosophies, we can see an extensive difference between the way both cultures work. The Western world is formal, they set rational objectives, whereas the Chinese culture encourages kinship rather rationalism. (Martinsons et al p.217). It is interesting to see how life philosophy can change the way that an organisation, or in the this example, the way a whole country can have its own way of thinking and its own way of doing things to the point that no other philosophy will fit. We can see the Western philosophy as being one of multiculturalism, and it seems from the ideas and views presented in this article, that the Chinese have a one nation approach to their culture and philosophy. As the world continues to be one ‘global village’, I can see that’s its going to become increasingly hard for the Chinese to work in with other cultures, if they have kept their own philosophy and culture so strong within themselves.

There are many factors of the Chinese business culture that took me by surprise. Factors that I have always believed would contribute the failure of a business not turn it into a thriving, flourishing success. The culture also includes the ancient beliefs of Confucianism. Confucianism is a social and moral philosophy based on the life and works of Kong Fu Ze (Martinsons et al p218). Confucianism is not something western people are able to just dismiss as being something that has carried the Chinese culture, and is not worth pursuing. We can see today from successful Chinese businesses that the philosophy of Confucianism is one that does indeed work for the Chinese. The Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy explains that the ethical system which relies on both
scholarships and speculative through to guide social behaviour. Confucius' social philosophy largely revolves around the concept of *ren*, “compassion” or “loving others.” is something that is totally alien to western business culture.

The broad Chinese business culture has many interesting differences when looking at information management and information systems with their organisations. Cultural values influence the processes which are used to transmit and interpret information. (Martinsons et al p219) Because of the emphasis on relationships and restricted flow of information to members of the organisation, information systems in the Chinese culture are not required. This is a big difference when comparing it to the western culture. The article selling issues to top management, we look at the movement of information back up the hierarchy and selling issues that middle management feel higher management should be taking seriously. In western culture, the movement of information and feedback back up the chain does occur in organisations. However, because of the emphasis put on respect for elders and the main manager or the in-group in the Chinese business culture, only the group of members at the top of the organisation that are privy to sensitive information, tend to take responsibility for most if not all of the business affairs. You would never come across any members of the organisation selling issues to top management, at risk of loosing their job from speaking out of turn. Messages that advocate radical change and or undermine social stability tend to be suppressed (Martinsons et al p222). This cultural value is one that stems from the Confucianism beliefs. It also stems from the Chinese belief that it is not possible to change your surroundings, so just live in them and make the best of the situation. Jeffery Riegel from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy explained that the Chinese can do little or nothing to alter our fated span of existence but we determine what we accomplish and what we are remembered for. Further explaining that they believe they can only do what is best for them, and nothing else can be changed.

I also found out that governments imposed free speech laws on the people and regulated information access. When I think of regulated information access, I think of censoring and the past. I think of things that people have worked so hard to overcome so we can express how we feel when we want and not be penalised for it. The Chinese culture have a fear of losing power if information was to get out, so not knowing any better, the Chinese people take this lack of information in their organisations and in their homes as the norm because information is not seen as a public commodity. Being an outsider it is amazing to understand that the Chinese don’t feel information is a public commodity. The Western view is that information is something that we can’t do without. Understanding that Western culture holds a scientific and quantitative approach to performing business, I can see how its hard to comprehend not having information at our fingertips.

Information in Chinese organisations, unlike western culture, is used as personal asset rather than an organisational resource. Because of the in-group tendances mentioned before, it can be said that information is a key source of power (Martinsons et al p222). To be seen as successful within a Chinese organisation, you must be part of the in-group within the organisation. This means that information will only be shared with people as a kind of initiation into the in-group. The in-group is how organisations control their power, they also control it by unequal access of information. If a member of the organisation is not part of the in-group, they will have no organisational knowledge.
These are rights that members of western organisations have and readily access within their organisations. The implications of having little to no understanding of what the business is doing or what the workers are working for, I would think, would have a negative effect on motivation for the members of the organisations. However, we can say that motivation is a self-centered approach to work. I don’t understand the greater meaning or good of what I’m doing, so I won’t bother doing it. Whereas the Chinese culture have the opposite system.

The Chinese business culture is one that is totally alien to members of Western organisations. The implications of such information restrictions for our society would be totally different to that of the Chinese. However, for the Chinese, business processes work well.
Reference List
