Viewpoint

A note with respect to Gregory and Lau's paper 'Logical soft systems modelling for information source analysis—the case of Hong Kong Telecom'

Our comments refer to a point mentioned on page 133—'Lau produced models in English but discussed these with his colleagues in Cantonese—there is no reason to believe that the meaning of the models were in any way compromised'. This is indeed a fair point and we would not wish to oppose it absolutely, yet in interviews held in Hong Kong last Summer one of us (Leung, who is Cantonese) found that his respondents would offer more, both in quantity and in depth, when discussing in their native Cantonese language than when talking in English.¹ Perhaps they found some 'falseness' in the Cantonese to Cantonese rapport when using English as the medium for discussion and exchange of data.

We agree that there is a great difficulty in the Cantonese expressing themselves, other than verbally in Cantonese, since their spoken language is a form of patois-Mandarin which defies ideogrammatic notation. Therefore the respondents are forced into formal Mandarin (which they may not be able to write clearly) or to the English language, with which they may be uneasy in terms of its own nuances. A similar effect was noted by Kidd and Teramoto² when interviewing Japanese CEOs in the UK and in Europe: at some point in the interview the CEOs would revert to Japanese to discuss more clearly with Kidd's co-researcher, Teramoto. Their natural language, Japanese, providing a much richer medium than English even though the Japanese expatriates had a good command of Kidd's natural language—English. However this point may relate to the 'insider/outsider' effect discussed below.

We may thus understand there are strong differences that relate to an 'insider/outsider'. This effect becomes very clear when noting the culture-bias in accounting disclosure. The familial Chinese do not see any reason to disclose this form of 'internal' data to an outsider. After all, the accountant is a member of the family, is trusted (has *guanxi*, see Lou³), and so, 'why worry'? Of course, this attitude does not bode well for the harmony in multinational enterprises when one partner may be naturally much more transparent.

Finally we would agree wholeheartedly with their note on 'truth' and its relation to the paradigms of behavior

learned by the actors—be they Chinese or, for the sake of argument, from the UK. What they skirt in discussion is the effect of Confucianism on the Oriental which gives a strong internalised acceptance of 'li' or the governing laws. The Chinese 'way' (but it is widespread throughout the Orient) is based on a Confucian system which emphasises the primacy of societal harmony demanding an observation of laws or 'li', even the State, and therefore a subjugation of the needs of an individual (as understood by a Westerner). In contrast, the Western view emphasises civil and political rights and thus the role of the individual, following, for instance, Jean Jacques Rousseau's 'The Social Contract' written in 1762 leading to a strong sense of the rights of the individual and a reliance on the rule of the law and the democratic process. And therefore their apparent ability to sense externalised rules to apply them in models such as SSM. These two oppositions yield quite different approaches to the development of a 'rich picture' and an SSM model (as the UK management scientist would know it). It would suggest to us that SSM really might not work correctly in the non-confrontationalist Orient, notwithstanding the findings by Gregory and Lau that their logico-linguistic model works. As they say—further research is needed.

References

- 1 Leung KW (1998). How corporations have fared when their core business is impacted by Internet. Unpublished MBA dissertation. Aston Business School, Birmingham, UK.
- 2 Kidd JB and Teramoto Y (1995). The learning organisation: the case of the Japanese regional headquarters in Europe. *Mgmt Int Rev* 2: 39–56.
- 3 Lou Y (1997). Guanxi: Principles, philosophies and implications. *Human Sys Mgmt* 9: 1–9.

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A reply to Kidd and Leung

Kidd and Leung say that Lau and myself skirted the issue of the effects of Confucianism in our paper 'Logical Soft Systems Modelling'. This is certainly true. The paper was primarily a case study, it covered a lot of ground, it was very