

MAPPING MANAGEMENT STYLES IN EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

JOHN PURCELL
Templeton College, Oxford

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to clarify the meaning of management style in employee relations and go beyond the limitations of the frames of reference debate, two dimensions of style are identified. *Individualism* refers to the extent to which personnel policies are focused on the rights and capabilities of individual workers. *Collectivism* concerns the extent to which management policy is directed towards inhibiting or encouraging the development of collective representation by employees and allowing employees a collective voice in management decision-making. Style is a deliberate choice linked to business policy. Organizations may choose to focus on one or both aspects. Not all firms have a distinctive preferred management style. Survey evidence is analysed and a number of unresolved issues raised which need to be tackled if management style is to become a useful concept in the study of strategic choice in the management of industrial and employee relations.

INTRODUCTION

Most students of industrial relations can readily identify well-known companies and contrast the differences between them in their employment policies and practices. Companies like IBM, Ford and ICI are frequently quoted as examples of diversity which cannot be explained wholly by reference to structural variables such as size, product markets and technology. Within the constraints of these factors, it is argued, senior managers in companies (or more likely large companies), can exercise a degree of choice in the way they treat their employees. The choices made and the underlying rationale is often described as management style. There is, however, little agreement on what is meant by the term, how style can be analysed and categorized, whether 'style' is synonymous with behaviour and whether it is the same as, or linked to management strategy. Does every organization have a managerial style by virtue of the need to employ people, or is the concept restricted only to those organizations where senior managers have taken strategic, considered decisions on the way employees are to be treated?

The purpose of this article is to explore the contours of management style by reference to two key dimensions and to raise certain problems concerned with classification and the units of analysis. Some data is presented drawn from the management philosophy statements collected in 1985^[1] as part of a large survey of 107 multi-plant private sector enterprises, 97 divisions within these companies and 176 establishments owned by these firms. As a word of warning, it is necessary to note that the term management style is imprecise and often confuses rather than clarifies. A great deal more research is required both in refining models and testing them, but this cannot be done until the basic parameters are identified.

THE MEANING OF MANAGEMENT STYLE

Many writers have sought to distinguish between different types or patterns in industrial relations among dimensions of conflict-co-operation. An important analytical distinction must be drawn, however, between classifications of the outcome of the interaction of management and labour and the attitudes, beliefs, or frames of reference of the parties, most notably management, in determining the style that they wish to pursue. Clearly, frames of reference are influenced in varying degrees by the historical experience of managing employees in the firm and by wider social and political values. If management style exists at all beyond historically determined reactive gestures implicit in the interaction of management and labour, we have to allow for an element of choice which might be more or less constrained. Thus the study of management style is not primarily an analysis of outcomes but of originating philosophies and policies which influence action.

Management style is different from management attitudes. We cannot make the assumption that attitudes necessarily translate into action or behaviour. A good example here is the work of Poole and his colleagues (1982) who posed generalized statements in their attitude survey of managers about, among other things, the role and power of trade unions. We know from this that most managers are – or were at the time of the survey – distrustful of trade unions and the role they played but we do not know what, if any, policies or preferences they had on how unionized employees should be, or were, managed in their own firms. Similarly, the existence of certain structures, for example of negotiation and consultation cannot be taken, as MacInnes (1985) has shown, to indicate the widespread adoption of a pluralist frame of reference. Our concern is in part with how management chooses to respond to the existence of structures of collective bargaining, whether to oppose or support them. If a preference exists (and there is no reason why it should) it must be, to a degree at least, translated into policy or determined behaviour for us to be able to say that the company has a distinctive management style. It is not necessary for such policies *always* to lead to the desired outcome, and indeed given power relations

between management and labour (the labour process problem of double contract) we might expect there to be a frequent shortfall between aspiration and outcome. We must also allow for management style to be periodically redefined in the light of changing needs and experience. In some firms underlying approaches might be radically altered as a new coalition of managers – or owners (for example after privatization of nationalized industries) come to power.

Pragmatic, reactive responses to labour problems cannot be classified as management style. Style implies the existence of a distinctive set of guiding principles, written or otherwise, which set parameters to and signposts for management action in the way employees are treated and particular events handled. Management style is therefore akin to business policy and its strategic derivatives. Indeed management style is one of those aspects of wider business policy which 'state in broad terms both what may and may not be done... [and] ...are more often made as a result of moral, political, aesthetic or personal considerations than as a result of logical or scientific analysis, and are usually made by the owners or the directors of a company rather than by executives at the lower or middle levels' (Argenti, 1976, p. 63). Not all firms have a business policy defined in the sense of a mission or guiding purpose and many of those which have say nothing about the management of employees, seeing such matters as an operational responsibility of middle management. Indeed, in the extensive literature on business policy and corporate strategy it is extremely rare to find any reference to employees, personnel management or human resource strategy. Thus the study of management style in employee or labour relations is not to be confused with analysis of management practices in each and every firm. It is restricted to those enterprises which, for whatever reason, but often related to the unique contribution of the founding fathers of the firm (Purcell and Sisson, 1983, p. 117) have a guiding set of principles which delineate the boundaries and direction of acceptable management action in dealing with employees.

THE DIMENSIONS OF MANAGEMENT STYLE

Fox's use of unitary and pluralist frames of reference had a major influence in initiating the debate on the approach taken by management in industrial relations (1966, 1974) but the concepts are narrower than those implicitly suggested by management style and have a number of limitations. Firstly, wide variations can be found within the unitary frame between those firms which are essentially exploitive of labour and those which emphasize the value of loyalty and commitment. Similarly, pluralism needs to be sub-divided between those maintaining highly structured, often antagonistic, formal relations with employees through their trade unions and those which emphasize dialogue, understanding and co-operation between management and organized labour.

Secondly, and more importantly, the very terms unitarist and pluralist do not seem useful as a means of articulating the complexity of management styles since they are, by definition, mutually exclusive. Thirdly, it is often unclear in the way the terms have been used subsequently whether they related to management's beliefs and policies toward trade unions or, in addition, cover direct relations with employees.

In practice, as well as theory, firms can have broad policies or guiding principles toward both the attention to be given to employees and their individual and group needs, and in regard to trade unions and other types of collective labour organization. Such policies are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Thus two dimensions of management style need to be identified which we might term individualism and collectivism.

Individualism

This refers to the extent to which the firm gives credence to the feelings and sentiments of each employee and seeks to develop and encourage each employee's capacity and role at work. Firms which have individualistically centred policies are thus expected to emphasize employees as a resource (often expressed in the cliché 'our most important resource') and be concerned with developing and nurturing each person's talents and worth. We might expect to find strong features of internal labour markets with careful selection at restricted points of entry, internal training schemes, promotion ladders and extensive welfare provisions, including relatively high pay. Payment systems might emphasize merit elements and make use of appraisal and assessment techniques designed to distinguish the contribution of each employee in anything from 'attitudes to attributes', as one firm puts it. The line manager's role in managing people is likely to be emphasized, irrespective of whether the manager is in a production, sales, finance or a personnel position. Attitude surveys may well be used regularly since such organizations are keen to assess the efficacy of their policies. Communication systems are likely to be extensive and developed through a variety of media from newspapers and videos to the personal contact between the manager, the individual and small groups of employees. A typical quote from the 1985 survey reflecting aspects of this style is:

Our company's paramount concerns are recruitment, development, pay and safety of employees. We aim to recruit above average employees who expect to make an above average contribution. We invest time in their development and we very much promote from within the company (corporate level manager).

Another respondent at corporate level said:

We are quite unusual, operating as leaders of teams. We believe very much in individuals; we trust everybody. We work on the premise that every person

needs to have the opportunity for self management. Hence, the manager's role is very much as leader of the group.

The contrast may be seen by a quote from an unusually frank establishment manager who described his company's philosophy as: 'a bit ruthless – not very caring: people are just numbers'. A corporate personnel executive, when asked what the firm's policy or philosophy was towards the place of employees, said: 'There is very tight fiscal control. We ensure that the lowest cost produces (*sic*) and we look at the cost of using manpower.'

The term 'manpower' is instructive. Firms which do not emphasize individualism tend to see employees as a commodity ('just numbers') resonant of the nineteenth-century distinction between the master and his hands. The commodity status view of labour, typical of neo-classical economists, gives little priority to security of employment and, at its logical extreme, would emphasize spot contracting as the means for determining labour price – sometimes seen in seasonal or casual labour (see Willman, 1983, pp. 117–35). The external labour market is emphasized and managerial policy tends to focus on overt control, discipline and the priority of profit in the sense of surplus value. Clearly there is a wide range of options between the two extreme positions described here and one area for further work is the development of operational categories along a scale of high or low individualism.

Paternalism is a third variant of individualism. Some 20 per cent of the 303 respondents in the 1985 survey used words such as enlightened, benevolent, charitable, caring, humane, paternal, family and welfare to describe their policies. A typical quote is:

Benevolent paternalism. There is a caring feeling. We should take care of our staff. This a family company who have expanded and we do not find it natural to be structured (corporate level manager);

or an establishment manager who said:

The company has generated a caring, paternalistic attitude. It listens to employees. It is tolerant of the employees within the constraints of successful business.

The Oxford Dictionary definition of paternalism is revealing: 'limiting the freedom of the subject by well meant regulations'. Companies with a paternalist approach do not appear to place emphasis on employee development and career progression and other attributes of individualism, nor are they dismissive of a sense of social responsibility toward their staff. Notions of caring, humanity and welfare are emphasized as a means of legitimizing managerial authority and the subordinate position of lower level employees who are given few, if any, expectations of the possibility of changing their work roles and 'natural'

place in the hierarchy. The corollary of paternalism is the deferential worker. Paternalist styles thus fall somewhere between high individualism, with its emphasis on employee development, and low individualism concerned with labour control treating employees as a commodity to be exploited in the pursuit of profit. Figure 1 illustrates these ideas.

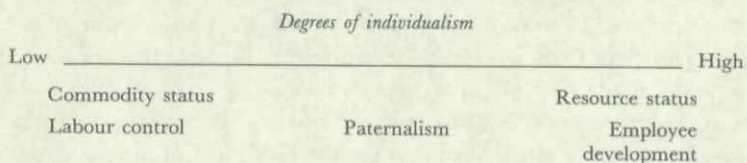


Figure 1. Management styles and degrees of individualism

Collectivism

The second dimension of management style concerns the extent to which the organization recognizes the right of employees to have a say in those aspects of management decision-making which concern them. We could assess this in a number of ways. One possibility is to use a test of trade union recognition for the determination of pay and conditions through collective bargaining. We would distinguish unionized from non-union firms. This is not of itself sufficient, however, since in so doing we make assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the firm and the union and exclude organizations where employees participate in decision-making through non-union structures. A focus on industrial democracy might be more helpful since it would allow for a variety of methods by which managers become to a greater or lesser extent accountable for their actions to employees, and where staff have some say in decision-making. The problem here is that there is no agreed definition of industrial democracy and we are frequently warned of 'pseudo participation' as Pateman (1970) put it. The use of the phrase 'to have a say in' draws attention to Hirschmann's (1970) (and latterly Freedman and Medoff's 1984) emphasis on voice mechanisms, but here again there is such a variety of types of voice systems that, apart from non-union, non-participative, no-voice organizations, we cannot progress in differentiating between types or degrees of voice systems.

The nub of the problem is that it is necessary to identify two aspects of collectivism. On the one hand, we can identify the existence of employee participation structures and determine the levels in the firm at which they operate. On the other, we need to assess the approach of management in operating these joint structures. Do they seek to minimize or oppose them or actively co-operate with them?

The critical feature of the first aspect of collectivism is the existence of democratic structures representing employees. Thus we may ask to what extent employees have the right to elect some of their number to represent their interests and articulate their views in dialogue with management. In short,

do employees have their own collective organization as an alternative authority structure or interest group? Firms with recognized employee collectives include those where trade unions and collective bargaining exists and organizations with works or company councils along the lines of the West German model. It might well include elected employee trustees on pension funds, collective consultation mechanisms and worker directors, whether they are union based or not. Some firms may have collective representation at all levels of the enterprise from the board room to the workplace, while others restrict collectivism to the local level, preferring to operate a highly decentralized strategy. The degree of collectivism must therefore be incorporated in assessments of this aspect of style. We cannot, of course, say that the existence of collective organization necessarily derives from management policy or style. In many cases unions have fought to be recognized against management's wishes and labour law is important in some countries in imposing requirements on firms to deal with work councils or recognize trade unions. Given the existence of collective employee organizations, management can however choose the extent to which they legitimize, *de facto*, the collective and joint structures of negotiation and consultation.

Thus, the second aspect of collectivism concerns the degree of legitimacy afforded to the collective by management and thereby the extent to which it is accepted or opposed. Many scholars have sought to distinguish between co-operative relations and those marked by conflict or coercion. The essential ingredient is the degree of legitimacy afforded by management to the employee collective, as Walton and McKersie (1965, p. 189) noted in their elaboration of the attitudinal components of the relationship pattern. In their schema, conflict is marked by a denial of legitimacy; containment-aggression by grudging acknowledgement, accommodation by acceptance of the *status quo* and co-operation by complete legitimacy. Legitimacy is closely associated with trust and that in turn is related to the extent to which the relationship is relatively open and co-operative allowing for the full flow of information, or is marked by adversarial behaviour, for example excessive reliance on rules as a defence mechanism for coping with conflict. Thus we distinguish between constitutional and consultative (or co-operative) approaches. I have defined the constitutional approach in an earlier article (1986) as where:

Unions have been recognized for some time and accepted as inevitable. Employee relations policies centre on the need for stability, control and the institutionalization of conflict. Management prerogatives are defended through highly specific collective agreements and careful attention is paid to the administration of agreements at the point of production. The importance of management control is emphasized with the aim of minimizing or neutralizing union constraints on both operational and strategic management.

In contrast, the consultative (or co-operative) approach is defined as where:

Unions (or other employee collective organizations) are recognized. The attempt is made to build 'constructive' relationships with these employee organizations and incorporate them into the organizational fabric. Broad ranging discussions are held with extensive information provided on a whole range of decisions and plans including aspects of strategic management.

An illustration of a collectivist style drawn for the 1985 survey is given by a corporate level manager:

We operate through trade unions. We encourage union membership. There is a highly participative structure, still paternal but recognizing the legitimacy of unions.

The interconnection between these two dimensions of style is likely to be complex and we would expect emphasis to be placed on one or the other in certain periods. Thus it is widely argued that in Britain and the USA there is currently a move to emphasize individualism, seen in the shift to human resource management, the growth in merit pay, assessment systems and greater attention paid to recruitment, selection and internal training schemes linked to flexibility. This is associated with an interest in non-union companies which have distinctive employee development or sophisticated human relations policies such as IBM and Hewlett-Packard (Foulkes, 1981). The view is widely held that the adoption of such a style inevitably implies a move away from collectivism in those companies with trade unions or other employee organizations or a positive avoidance of trade unions. There is no particular reason why this should be so and, as will be indicated later, there is little evidence that this is occurring. A number of firms are anxious to preserve trade union organization and high membership, as illustrated by the comment of one senior manager that 'if trade unions did not exist I would have to invent them'. Some firms may choose, if they can, to have no collectivist system and believe that this is essential for the pursuit of individualism, but other companies, for example Japanese firms, often choose to have aspects of both employee development and co-operative collectivism. Thus the interconnections of the two dimensions of style can be represented diagrammatically, see figure 2.

THE EVIDENCE FOR MANAGERIAL STYLE

What evidence is there to support the contention that there are two dimensions to management style and that organizations can and do operate along both dimensions?

Deaton (1985) used data drawn from the first Workplace Industrial Relations Survey in 1980 (WIRS 1) to cluster data around the styles identified by Purcell and Sisson (1983). The results were disappointing but the choice of measures

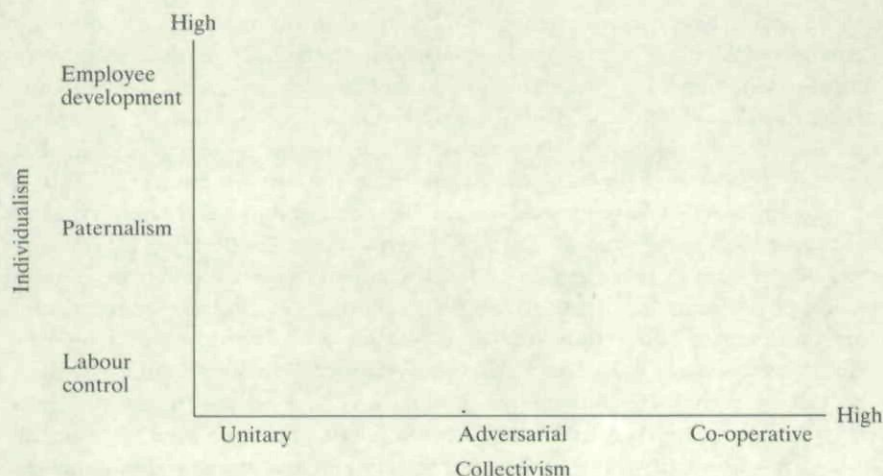


Figure 2. The interconnections between individualism and collectivism

such as types of payment system, use of clocking on, and presence of a specialist personnel manager, among others, do not seem adequate proxies for any particular style and the survey was not designed to be used in identifying styles. More recently, Edwards completed a survey of senior plant executives in the manufacturing sector (1985 and this issue). He did not explicitly seek to analyse style but two points emerge from the survey which are relevant. First, he noted that many of the respondents used the term 'involvement' to signify the essence of their broad philosophy or policy and that this term was used to signify 'a desire to achieve a positive degree of commitment to the goals of the enterprise; achieving the co-operation of workers *as individuals* was more important than getting detailed industrial relations procedures right' (1985, p. 8) (emphasis added). This is confirmed by case study research carried out in three projects by the Oxford Institute of Employee Relations at Templeton College in the mid-1980s (Purcell and Undy, 1986). A similar move to commitment strategies and styles based on individuals is noted in America by Walton (1985). Second, according to the Edwards survey and confirmed by case studies and earlier work by Batstone (1984), such a move is not associated with the withdrawal of union recognition or collective bargaining rights and shop steward activities. Research into the labour practices of Japanese companies in Britain has emphasized their distinctive approach of combining union recognition with an emphasis on employee development and commitment (Reitsperger, 1984), a clear instance of carefully considered management style linked to business policy for competitive advantage. We are thus on safe ground in asserting that management styles operate along the two dimensions and that action in one area, toward individualism for example, is not necessarily associated with changes in the collectivism scale.

The 1985 survey asked managers at various levels whether the company has an overall policy or philosophy concerning the management of employees and if so whether it is written down and given to the employees. Respondents are then asked 'How would you describe the policy?' Such an open ended question should provide some clues as to the essence of the policy, in that we expect managers to mention the most important or dominant feature of their approach. Whole statements can be coded and a word analysis undertaken, noting the frequency of use of certain words. In the 1985 survey well over 80 per cent of managers at all levels claimed to have a policy or general philosophy. Some 60 per cent of enterprise and divisional managers who said there was a policy indicated that the policy was written and a quarter said it was given to employees. Table I shows the word frequency and statement analysis at each level. Statements and individual words were divided into eight categories derived from the data itself, not predetermined. A number of features are worthy of note. Most of the statements related to relationships or styles concerning individual employees and only 2.5 per cent emphasize relations with trade unions or collectives *per se*. However, the same survey found that many firms had fairly extensive aspects of collectivism. Ninety per cent recognized trade unions for collective bargaining in the manual worker category, three quarters recognized non-manual unions and just over half had a consultative committee covering the whole of the enterprise for one or more category of employee. Two thirds had employee representatives as trustees for the pension fund. Secondly, there was a fairly even spread of responses between those firms emphasizing more resource-based policies of employee development and involvement, those focusing on paternalism and communication and firms who chose to describe their policies in terms of contractual relations or control and performance criteria. Thirdly, it is possible for the first time to compare responses at the corporate level with those of the divisional and establishment managers in the same enterprise. 'Involvement' is a word frequently used at enterprise level but overall statement analysis shows this to be the area where the word is often subsumed in more dominant sentiments of paternalism, communication or contractual relations especially at the establishment level. Direct comparison of responses in the same firm, where this is possible, show that philosophy statements only coincide in 17 per cent of cases. If employee development (or high individualism) is mentioned at corporate level it is the least likely to be listed at establishment level once trade union statements have been excluded. It would appear that the progressive or proactive rhetoric of corporate headquarters seen in the categories of employee development and involvement are the least likely to be recognized at the establishment. This is likely to be because they are the hardest to translate into action, whereas aspects of paternalism or contractual relations are descriptions, rather than styles, of management action at the level where employees are located.

Table I. Analysis of policy/philosophy statements towards the management of employees*

Key words emphasis on:	Establishment manager		Divisional manager		Enterprise manager	
	Word frequency	Statement analysis	Word frequency	Statement analysis	Word frequency	Statement analysis
<i>Employee development</i>						
Individual, personal development, employee ability potential	17.4	9.7	21.5	16.0	20.4	17.7
<i>Involvement</i>						
Participation, involvement open style, democratic, co-operative, team work	24.2	10.3	24.1	16.0	33.8	24.1
<i>Paternalism</i>						
Enlightened, benevolent, charitable, welfare, caring, humane, paternal, family, happy, asset	28.3	26.9	19.3	14.8	16.3	10.1
<i>Communication</i>						
Communicate, inform, tell, keep in touch	12.4	11.7	12.8	9.9	11.3	7.6
<i>Contractual relations</i>						
Fair, reasonable, good money, high pay, good industrial relations, good working environment, employment security/continuity, keep to agreements, follow legislation, minimize 'them and us'	17.3	21.9	14.1	18.5	26.4	19.0
<i>Control/performance</i>						
Firmness, discipline, cost, effective, productivity, manpower, strong management, performance	11.7	8.9	18.0	17.3	16.3	7.6
<i>Support for trade unions</i>						
Recognition, encourage membership, negotiate	2.1	2.1	2.7	2.5	6.3	3.8
Other unclassified	8.3	8.2	2.6	4.9	12.6	10.1
Total %	121.7	99.7	115.1	99.9	143.4	100
N	145		78		80	

* Word frequency scores each time any key word is used. Totals therefore add to more than 100 per cent.

Statement analysis is a judgement of the dominant tone of the statement often giving preference to first words used or weighting of sentiments.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The 1985 survey was not designed to measure or assess management style but focused on management practices. The dimensions of individualism and collectivism may well be useful in classifying aspects of management practice and this can be applied to all firms. Style, it has been argued, is an extra dimension linked to wider business policy and, at the least, relates to guiding principles which infuse management behaviour in dealing with employees collectively and/or individually. That 80 per cent of respondents felt their organization had 'an overall policy or philosophy toward the management of employees', as the questionnaire put it, might lead us to suppose that most large firms (the survey focused on enterprises with over 1000 employees) had a conscious style. Unfortunately, as Marsh noted (1982) most 'style' statements are set at the level of generalized banality, and, as indicated earlier, there was relatively little agreement in the words used to describe the style at the top and bottom of the organization. If we are to continue to use the term management style as meaning something different from a categorization of management practices we need to be clear on the unit of analysis, the type of employees covered by the 'style' policy and to differentiate it from day to day strategies and tactics.

The assumption is nearly always made that management style concerns the whole of the enterprise. The popularity of the corporate culture debate has led to a view that corporations must have a 'culture' (by which is usually meant style) rather than leave local management to determine their own approach in the light of circumstances and their own beliefs. However, in the 1985 survey 31 per cent of the 87 per cent of divisional managers who claimed there was an overall policy or philosophy said it was a divisional policy while 69 per cent said it derived from the enterprise as a whole. Tests in the same survey of the degree of autonomy of establishment managers in determining aspects of personnel and industrial relations policy indicated that most were fairly tightly controlled and monitored by corporate and/or divisional headquarters. However, Edwards found that the top managers in the establishments he surveyed often believed they had a high degree of autonomy (1985, p. 5) and case study research in two companies has shown the difficulty of imposing corporate personnel policies on subsidiary companies and divisions given different traditions and market pressures (Purcell and Gray, 1986). The growth of conglomerate, diversified companies and the trend towards decentralization is likely to exacerbate the problem. It is quite possible for a division of a large company to have a distinctive management style in the proper meaning of the term, often derived from its history and previous ownership. Long established factories or workplaces might similarly be known for a distinctive approach which could be different from other parts of the enterprise. Thus while management style is most likely to be set at corporate level it could in some firms be determined at intermediate and local levels.

An exclusive focus on the enterprise as a whole is likely to understate degrees of collectivism since many structures are located in establishments and divisions and do not extend to the highest level. Policies toward individual employees are likely to vary according to the type of product and product markets, technology and skill level of the dominant group of staff. At the same time corporate headquarters frequently (but not always) seek to exert an influence either in directly determining style related policies or in establishing the parameters for acceptable action. The conclusion drawn is that researchers need to specify the unit they are concerned with in analysing style. If the focus is on corporations as a whole then there is a need to examine what goes on at lower levels to see how far general style policies rise above the level of rhetoric. If the focus is on the establishment, operating companies or divisions, the need is to determine how far practice derives from or is guided by corporate policy. If attempts are made to examine the extent to which business, social and economic contexts influence and impinge on style – the notion of constrained choice – then account needs to be taken of the homogeneity or heterogeneity of product and labour markets and technology. The more diversified the business in a product and geographical sense, and the more the organization is structured to service these markets, the more likely it is that a bifocal analysis of central and local operation is required.

It is also necessary to determine what categories of employee we are concerned with. This has rarely been made specific and the implicit assumption is that there is, say, a Ford style which covers all employees. This is hardly likely. Managers probably have careers as seen in management development policies. Such policies (themselves indicative of high individualism) are not likely to extend to assembly line workers while the position of technical and supervisory staff is not immediately obvious. Thus a firm may deliberately have a variety of management styles differentiated between broad occupational groups and their perceived value to the firm or may choose to develop a considered management style toward one group of employees while reacting pragmatically to the employment needs of other workers. This is seen clearly in the distinction between core and periphery employment patterns. A number of firms are trying to emphasize management style based on employee development, involvement or paternalism for core or permanent full-time employees, while a very different approach is applied to part-timers and short-term contract, temporary workers and sub-contractors' employees.

Finally, the notion of management style implies a long-run approach to the management of labour which influences each generation of managers in the firm in their treatment of employees. Some companies have long standing guideline policies concerning all or most categories of employee and seek conformity to these principles across all operating units. We conclude that management style in such organizations is a dominant force determining and directing their employment policies. The reverse might be true in other companies and it is often argued that pragmatism is the most prevalent practice

in British companies. That is to say, there is no preferred way of managing employees: as Marsh put it cynically 'there is nothing to manage or administer since all is improvisation' (1973, p. 171). In such companies experimentation with glossy new techniques (or more likely rediscovered old ones) such as team briefing, quality circles and merit payments may well occur but, like the seed on stony ground, have a short life because there is no underlying accepted standard of treatment for employees beyond pure short-run commercial logic. Thus the final criteria for examining management style must be the twin notions of ubiquity and continuity. If we say there is a certain management style in a given company or unit, we must be able to show that it is broadly continuous in time – it is capable of reproduction – and is more than the present whim of a few senior managers in one location. It must be related back to reasonably long-standing, firm specific expectations which mould management actions about the way employees are to be treated both as individuals and in collectivities.

CONCLUSION

I have argued that the seminal work of Fox in distinguishing between pluralist and unitary frames of reference provided a powerful impetus to the debate about management style but the mutually exclusive nature of these categories has limited further development. In their place I have suggested a focus on individualism – policies related to the individual employee – and collectivism – the extent to which groups of workers gain an independent voice and participate in management decision-making. Companies can, and do operate on both these dimensions of style and the need is to identify recognizable points along the two scales. I have suggested that high individualism is associated with extensive policies concerned with employee development while high collectivism is seen in extensive structures for employee participation and representation and where management willingly co-operates and supports such bodies. Analysis of management style along both dimensions must relate to both policy and practice and researchers must be clear as to the unit of analysis; whole companies or smaller divisions or operating units. Whatever the unit of analysis there must be explicit attempts to see if policies at the top of organizations are implanted at the operational level, while local analysis cannot ignore the role of higher level management. Our concern is primarily with the management of subordinate employees and an analytical distinction needs to be drawn between different broad occupational groups. Finally the notion of management style only makes sense if it can be shown to be firm-specific, ubiquitous and continuous.

There is a danger in attributing all differences in the way employees are managed to the black box labelled 'management style'. It is worth remembering that the aim is not a comprehensive theory of management's dealings with

employees but rather an attempt to explain why some companies often appear to have a distinctive approach to the way they manage employees even after the influence of markets, technology and other environmental factors are taken into account. Once we recognize that modern companies are capable of making strategic business choices we must allow for preferences to exist in the way employees are managed, albeit in constrained circumstances, but we cannot assume that all companies have a management style. Style is closely associated with business policy. Not all firms have a long run business policy, and not all which do so include the way employees are to be rewarded, motivated and given voice as aspects of that policy. This appears to be changing. The fact that 'excellent' companies are reported to have a distinctive management style in their treatment of employees and that this is linked to competitive advantage (Peters and Waterman, 1982) is causing other companies to search for a distinctive style appropriate to their circumstances (see for example Willman and Winch, 1985). The 'new industrial relations', the growth of interest in human resource management, the move to decentralize and emphasize the role of line management and new approaches to personnel management are all indicative of this search for a management style linked to business policy. How many will succeed in developing and implanting an appropriate style is another matter.

NOTE

- [1] The survey was undertaken by administered questionnaire through a professional survey agency, Industrial Facts and Figures (IFF). It was designed, and is being analysed by, Paul Marginson, Paul Edwards and Keith Sisson at the University of Warwick; John Purcell at Templeton College, Oxford, and Rod Martin at Imperial College, London. A monograph will be published in 1988.

REFERENCES

- ARGENTI, A. J. A. A. (1976). 'Business policy'. In Kempner, T. (Ed.), *A Handbook of Management*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- BATSTONE, E. (1984). *Working Order*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- DEATON, D. (1985). 'Management style and large-scale survey evidence'. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 16, 2, 67-71.
- EDWARDS, P. K. (1985). 'Managing through the recession, II: the plant and the company'. *Employee Relations*, 7, 3, 4-8.
- FOULKES, F. K. (1981). 'How top non union companies manage employees'. *Harvard Business Review*, 59, September-October, 90-96.
- FOX, A. (1966). *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations*. Research Paper No. 3, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers' Associations. London: HMSO.
- FOX, A. (1974). *Beyond Contract*. London: Faber.

- FREEDMAN, R. B. and MEDOFF, J. L. (1984). *What do Unions do?*. New York: Basic Books.
- HILL, S. (1981). *Competition and Control at Work*. London: Heinemann.
- HIRSCHMAN, A. O. (1970). *Exit, Voice and Loyalty*. Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- MACINNES, J. (1985). 'Conjuring up consultation: the role and extent of joint consultation in post-war private manufacturing industry'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 23, 1, 93-113.
- MARSH, A. I. (1982). *Employee Relations Policy and Decision-Making*. Aldershot: Gower.
- MARSH, A. I. (1973). *Managers and Shop Stewards*. London: Institute of Personnel Management.
- PATEMAN, C. (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- PETERS, T. J. and WATERMAN, R. H. (1982). *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Harper and Row.
- POOLE, M., MANSFIELD, R., BLYTON, P. and FROST, P. (1982). 'Managerial attitudes and behaviour in industrial relations: evidence from a national survey'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 20, 3, 285-307.
- PURCELL, J. and SISSON, K. (1983). 'Strategies and practice in the management of industrial relations'. In Bain, G. S. (Ed.), *Industrial Relations in Britain*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- PURCELL, J., and GRAY, A. (1986). 'Corporate personnel departments and the management of industrial relations: two case studies in ambiguity'. *Journal of Management Studies*, 23, 2, 205-23.
- PURCELL, J. and UNDY, R. (1986). 'Research into the management of industrial relations at Templeton College, Oxford'. *Employee Relations*, 8, 5, 15-22.
- REITSPERGER, W. D. (1984). 'Japanese business strategy and British industrial relations'. In Wilpert, B. and Sorge, A. (Eds.), *Industrial Perspectives on Organizational Democracy*. Chichester: Wiley.
- WALTON, R. E. (1985). 'From control to commitment in the workplace'. *Harvard Business Review*, 63, 2, 76-84.
- WALTON, R. E. and MCKERSIE, R. B. (1965). *A Behavioral Theory of Labor Negotiation*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- WILLMAN, P. (1983). 'The organisational failures framework and industrial sociology'. In Francis, A., Turk, J. and Willman, P. (Eds.), *Power, Efficiency and Institutions*. London: Tavistock.
- WILLMAN, P. and WINCH, G. (1985). *Innovation and Management Control: Labour Relations at BL Cars*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Copyright of *Journal of Management Studies* is the property of Blackwell Publishing Limited and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.