

An Investigation into the Application of Humanistic Approach: a Case-study undertaken in a Chinese Company

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ABSTRACT

Chinese human resource managers are looking for new ways to manage workforce because of increasing employee turnover. The humanistic management approach may be useful for Chinese managers and companies. However, few qualitative studies have explored the views of Chinese enterprises towards humanistic management approach. The research aims to investigate the perspectives and experiences of managers on the introduction of humanistic management approach into a Chinese Company in-depth. Semi-structured Interviews were conducted with two managers participated in work for a technology company known for its people-oriented management. The results demonstrated that The implementation of people-oriented management in the research company is mainly reflected in the corporate culture and employee welfare. Its main advantages include co-development and freedom of expression. However, the underlying concerns of the humanistic approach lie in low motivated employees and unfairness. These factors should be considered in the development of humanistic management approach to increase the applicability from Chinese companies.

KEYWORDS

Humanistic management approach; Chinese company; Human resource development

1. INTRODUCTION

Management has experienced tremendous development over the past decades. Dinsmore and Cabanis-Brewin [1] stated that human resource management is not limited to any certain industry, but also focuses on work history and experience, which links all professions. According to Zeng [2], the progress of globalization allows Chinese managers to gain managerial knowledge from the western management. With the acceptance of western business principles, Chinese companies started to adopt and assimilate Humanistic Management Theory into their managerial practices [3]. However, there are a variety of differences in the social, institutional and cultural contexts, causing different management model [4]. Thus, the humanistic management model of Chinese companies tends to be different from their western counterparts.

Drawing from other literature and personal reflection, Melé [5] was the first to create a Humanistic Model including seven dimensions: wholeness, comprehensive knowledge, human dignity, development, common good, transcendence, stewardship-sustainability. This model will be selected as the original humanistic management theory in this study. Recently, humanistic management has drawn more attention of employees, organizations and academics. Shore, Barksdale and Shore [6] stated that humanistic management focuses on employee benefits in a broad way. With better welfares, employees will be more committed to their organization. This research can also help managers to observe employee satisfaction and adjust the management model. According to Melé [7], organisations adopting humanistic management are more likely to achieve higher employee

satisfaction. However, different social and cultural contexts make it necessary for the management in China to adjust their model when adopting and assimilating western management models, rather than slavishly copy western business principles [8]. As for academics, there should not be only one definition for a management model. Taking this research as an example, the expectations of the humanistic management model in the Chinese organisational environment are different from the Western organisations. Therefore, humanistic management model should be adjusted in accordance with the organisation context. This provides a new inspiration for future management academics. In the future, a human management definition that suits the Chinese management model can be proposed and created.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research will focus on four questions:

- A. In what ways does Forrttunie apply Humanistic Management model?
- B. What are the differences between the Humanistic Management model in China and the original Humanistic Management theory?
- C. Does the original Humanistic Management theory need amending for the Chinese context, if so how?

3. METHODS

3.1. Design

Semi-structured interview was undertaken with two managers in the investigated company respectively to explore experiences in-depth. This research took constructionism ontology and interpretivism epistemology to research design and interpretation, which conducted qualitative research method and strengthened the depth of the study.

3.2. Ethics

This research was conducted in accordance with Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research [9] from British Educational Research Association (BERA). All procedures involving human patients were approved by the University of Huddersfield Ethics Committee (2012/208). This research was committed to the participants in the survey, while informed written consent was obtained electronically from each manager before the semi-structured interview.

3.3. Participants

With regard to semi-structured interview, two managers were invited and participated into the study. Manager A, the manager of the Human Resources Department, is proficient in Chinese and Western management theory. Manager B is general manager. Manager A was selected to collect relevant information and opinions from management professionals, while Manager B was invited to collect perspectives from a more holistic perception and management. A purposive sample was used by inviting participants via email. However, It is a convenience sample because the company is known to the researcher [10].

3.4. Setting

The investigated company focuses on high-tech security system development with 15-year successful operation, and is also a listed company known for its humanistic management model.

3.5. Procedures

One-on-one Semi-structured interviews with the managers were conducted after questionnaire recollection and analysis, which facilitated the amendment of interview questions and tailoring its order. The interviews were conducted by video-conference and recorded in audio, and lasted 55 min on average.

3.6. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted on interview transcripts. The transcripts were coded and they generated themes [11].

4. FINDINGS

Three themes and six subthemes were identified. (1). The implementation of humanistic management in the investigated company (2). The pros of humanistic management in the investigated company (3). The concerns regarding humanistic management in the investigated company

4.1. The Implementation of Humanistic Management in the Investigated Company

According to two managers, the company provided a series of benefits for employees including medical insurance, unemployment insurance, endowment insurance, work-related injury insurance, maternity insurance, supplementary commercial insurance, and housing provident fund stipulated by the law. In addition, monthly transportation subsidies are also provided for employees. Apart from that, the company provides employees with paid annual leave, but temporary employees cannot obtain these benefits.

Besides, both managers mentioned the implementation of humanistic management could be seen as part of corporate value and focused on employees' benefit. As manager A stated, 'Once a new employee enters our company, the culture and values of the company will be conveyed to each new employee in the form of professional induction training, which allows employees and the company to achieve a high degree of consistency in the value system, and also enables employees to implement the philosophy of the company.'

4.2. The Pros of Humanistic Management in the Investigated Company

As stated by Manager B, the employee-centered value of a company benefits both employees' personal progression and the company's general development. Manager A agreed with the common development and described it as a win-win situation.

In addition, Manager B stated the company provided the employees with an atmosphere and channels for free expression, 'our company attaches great importance to communicating with employees and encouraging them to freely express their ideas and opinions. For example, employees are provided with many communication opportunities, such as regular weekly meetings for exchanging work experiences and summaries during the week.'

4.3. The Concerns Regarding Humanistic Management in the Investigated Company

However, humanistic management was identified as potentially problematic when dealing with low-motivated employees, as over-humanistic management makes some employees even less willing to work and efficiency. Manager A took an example of leave. He said, due to the flexible management system, employees are free to ask for leave three times a month, which affects work efficiency. Some

employees do this every month. However, the company has no strict measures to manage these employees. It is unfair to the hard-working employees.

Besides, the further concern regarding humanistic management was unfairness.

The pursuit of Humanistic management is more personalized rather than a unified management. However, every single person is different. According to Manager A, when some employees take advantage of the system and rules to conduct lazy behavior, it means that other employees will have psychological imbalance. In this situation, this psychological gap is very likely to affect their work enthusiasm and work effectiveness. If this system is not adjusted in time, it will seriously affect the positive working atmosphere and work efficiency of employees inside the company. In the long term, it will further affect the development of the company and the realization of its goals.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Principle Findings

When asked directly about their views toward introducing humanistic management within the company, participants raised a number of positive attitudes. Both managers mentioned that the humanistic value benefits the development of both employees' personal progression and the company's management. According to Melé [12], the humanistic approach seeks benefits for better human ends.

In other words, corporate value can be seen as one of the important reflection of the application of humanistic approach within a company. Additionally,

The humanistic approach proposed by Melé [5] is considered as a personal community with a corporate culture that promotes individuality. This result is also consistent with Melé [12], who stated that a business organisation ought to be regarded as a community of employees, providing employees with a sense of common purpose by reinforcing a sense of belonging. For today's enterprises and managers, the main task is to guide people's behavior and create an environment where they can take the initiative, collaborate and learn. Stein [13] also mentioned that the concept of community has been increasingly introduced and applied to management and organization theories. The sense of unity among employees will be stronger in a one-person community.

Previous research has identified that it is very important for the company to emphasise on employee development when adopting a humanistic approach [12].

However, several concerns toward humanistic management were raised, including low-motivated employees and unfairness. An open and transparent promotion system within a company would help to guarantee the fairness of selection and reduce subjectivity to some extent. For the company, a fair and systematic selection mechanism and criteria would make it more possible to select employees who deserve a promotion opportunity [14].

A research conducted by Hasan [15] shows that the stronger employees feel that they are being treated unfairly, the lower their work commitment and organisational recognition. In addition, unfair treatment is very likely to increase the turnover rate of employees. In this case, the management should be more aware of the potential risks generated by unfair implement of internal benefits in practice

García-Izquierdo et al. [16] also opined that the fairness of promotion needs to be taken seriously, as it is closely related to employee satisfaction, employee enthusiasm and organisational justice

5.2. Limitations

There are several limitations to the present research that require consideration. First, the sample size may warrants caution in generalizability, as it was limited to two participants. However, in order to deepen research questions, smaller sample size even one participant is conducive to be sufficiently informative [17, 10]. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the research questions has been answered. However, this research was conducted in one company setting with convenient sampling. The results may not generalize to managers from other companies. Finally, the lack of triangulation raised the concern about quality of the study.

5.3. Implications

Findings of this research have implications for the development of humanistic management for Chinese companies. Humanistic management method may attract employees with similar values and provide them with a series of benefits. To some extent, it creates a more harmonious working environment. Humanistic management allows employees to express themselves freely and develop together with the enterprise At the same time, governance measures need to consider fairness.

6. SUMMARY

According to the research, the results answered all research questions. The study deeply explored how the investigated company introduced and implemented humanistic management approach, and how the managers view the positive and negative factors. Findings of this research have implications for the development of humanistic management for Chinese companies. Humanistic management method may attract employees with similar values and provide them with a series of benefits. It allows employees to express themselves freely and develop together with the enterprise. However, further governance measures need to consider fairness between the employees.

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