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A Note to Management on Traditional Filipino Values in Business Enterprises

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*A Note to Management on Traditional Filipino Values in Business Enterprises: the Lumber Company as a Case Study**

The fast-rising junior executive in large Manila corporations tends to visualize himself as the model of the modern Filipino. To him the *tao* in the barrio represents the traditional Filipino, chained to a life of trudging behind a slow-moving carabao. Yet even our energetic executive will have to admit that he too clings to traditional behavior. And with good reason. Selective adherence to familiar patterns and valued ways of thought helps him maintain his sanity in a rapidly changing society.

The extent to which individuals cling to old ways differs in degree however as one goes from isolated barrio to bustling city. Whether or not the executive favors a particular set of values, it is to his advantage to understand the ways in which these values affect the work of his employees, and ultimately his business enterprise. To see the practical importance of this knowledge, consider a hypothetical lumber company whose activities range from logging to the production of finished goods.

One might analyze the values of the company in the same manner that economists speak of three sectors in their analysis of a society. There is the *primary* sector, encompassing those persons who make a living through the basic occupations of farming, fishing, lumbering, herding, and mining; the *secondary* sector, which includes individuals directly involved in manufacturing enterprises; and finally the *tertiary*, or service sector, with occupations ranging from banker to barber. Applying these classifications now to the lumber company's divisions, we can make logging constitute, equivalently, the primary sector; plywood and special products manufacturing, the secondary; and administrative-sales, the tertiary sector. While a common value pattern may run through the various sectors of a company, more intensive investigation will also reveal significant differences in stress and content in the component parts.

A closer scrutiny of the logging sector might elicit the query, "What tensions does a logger experience in cutting down trees and hauling them to the mill?" If he is a man who was reared in the immediate vicinity of the forest, the conflict between his adherence to animistic beliefs and the performance of new tasks may subject him to constant strain. He sees the immediate environment as crowded

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with spirit beings who inhabit trees, rocks, and springs. Irascible creatures that they are, they can harm a human being who irks them by disturbing their home, or irritates them by failing to make amends with expected food offerings. Staying on the good side of these spirits entails remaining in harmony with nature, not disturbing it in any way for one's own ends. This is part of the rural Filipino's personalistic worldview, an orientation which is to him perfectly compatible with Christianity.

Some of the more sophisticated Filipinos will impatiently scoff at these beliefs as mere superstitions, worthy only of being eradicated. Others will be a bit more discerning and realize the important functions of a belief in this kind of orderly universe, where less evil befalls those who take the *anitos* into account. For one thing, the traditional worldview provides a secure link with the past and the comfort of a familiar, meaningful way of life in an unstable world.

The logger living in dread of imminent spirit punishment is a man who will approach his task with less than admirable enthusiasm. Conversely, loggers reared in *poblaciones* or cities are less likely to be troubled by this type of animistic belief, hence less worried while working and ultimately more efficient on the job. While the urban Filipino also values keeping in harmony with nature, his expression of this orientation does not emerge in the placating of spirits. Cutting down even the largest trees places no great mental strain upon him.

Turning now to the plywood processing mill, we might delineate some of the mill worker's particular goals and the means he takes to attain them. The assembly line personnel of rural origin will show the imprint of their birthplace in a reluctance to innovate and a preoccupation with the present rather than the future. In a peasant subsistence economy the overwhelming majority of community residents eke out a living, surviving largely because of their ties with the few wealthier families in the *barrio* or *poblacion*. This favored few must by custom share its surplus with poorer relatives, *compadres*, tenants, or political followers. So precarious is the existence of the *tao* that he cannot afford to experiment on a new variety of rice or even try applying fertilizers to the crop. The margin of risk is simply too great. If the gamble fails, he will be destitute. Only to those with a little surplus income each year is the alternative of innovation really available.

When one lives at this low level of subsistence, his inadequate resources further jeopardized by an increasing population, and by typhoons, floods, or other unexplainable whims of nature, he tends to develop a present-time orientation. He cannot look beyond tomorrow to the more distant future because circumstances force him to deal with the immediate problem of the next meal. The child reared in this environment will tend to mirror the short-sighted view as he

gets older, since he has rarely had the opportunity of facing a real experience requiring long-range planning.

How does this present-time orientation affect our mill worker, and perhaps our logger as well? Living in terms of the very immediate future has some bearing on the rapid turnover of personnel in many industries, particularly those located in the rural hinterlands. When the mill worker or the logger believes he has earned enough money to see him through the next harvest, or to buy some long coveted item like a transistor radio for his family, a sewing machine for his wife, or a "Texas" rooster for himself, then he may feel no need to go beyond the acquired sum. He collects his hard-earned wages and returns home until various pressures force him once again to seek a job. Before condemning this "irrational" behavior, this "lack of foresight," the harried mill manager might reflect on his own ability to plan ahead so that tools, machinery parts, and supplies needed in the manufacturing process are on hand when needed.

If the foregoing analysis has any validity, one might propose the hypothesis that the poblacion—or city-raised worker (who has grown up in the framework of a largely cash economy) will be less likely to contribute to high labor turnover than his strictly rural counterpart. The subsistence mentality will not have affected him to such a significant degree, and he will have committed himself both physically and mentally to the pattern of working steadily for wages.

Another step further in the production process is the special products division beset by the problem of quality control. How can its manager make sure that his men finish a product so that it meets the high standards of the company without his having to check every item personally? In a culture where goals are seen as attainable through judicious contacts and smooth interpersonal relations, emphasis is laid on process rather than product. One must be thorough in seeing to it that he is in good standing among his circle of acquaintances, among *people* and not *things*. Thus the skill and pride of craftsmanship become secondary in this struggle for recognition as a good-natured fellow and a loyal friend. The Filipino reared in this traditional pattern of personalism so important in the rural areas is never really taught the need for individual self-discipline in the performance of a task, or perseverance and thoroughness in relation to fashioning material objects. Little wonder that in the manufacture of an item requiring a high level of quality, many fail to make the adjustments required of them by an insistent, quality-conscious manager.

One might go on to reflect on cultural differences in male and female roles in Filipino society. It is not a coincidence that many factory owners prefer to hire women for the more tedious jobs requiring painstaking care and thoroughness. The Filipina is taught from childhood that these are essential qualities in her role as help-

mate to a husband whose main task is to be sociable, thereby cementing alliance bonds and ensuring economic security *Pakikisama*, or getting along well with a group, and belonging to *barkada*, or closely knit ingroups, are distinctly male attributes; women participate in a *barkada*'s activities indirectly, as a result of their attachments to specific male members. (The all-female *barkada* exists, especially among school girls, but lacks the tight solidarity and commitment so greatly esteemed by its male counterpart.)

As social beings we learn to develop the qualities for which we are rewarded. Filipino men thus concentrate on *pakikisama* and Filipino women on steadfast endurance. Consequently, the male worker whose supervisor judges him in terms of the quality of his output instead of the flair with which he produces it becomes a victim of two conflicting standards.

Even the administrative-sales staff members lodged in the beauty and air-conditioned comfort of the Manila office respond to traditional patterns of behavior. The trait of personalism characterizes the urban resident, too, as seen in a common group pattern, that of the strong leader with his personally loyal band of followers. He may be seen in the sales conscious supervisor organizing a coterie of employees whose loyalty he measures by its high production rate. Spurred by competition, his men toil so that *their* group under *their* leader will succeed. While production increases, the arrangement may also backfire when the same supervisor is transferred, resigns, or after some real or imagined insult, decides to organize a labor union. Since the group's efficiency was oneman oriented, the formerly tight unit breaks up because its focal point is gone and the unifying bond broken. His slight becomes their slight and they rise up in collective indignation. By using traditional ways of organizing people into personalized ingroups for effective action, the supervisor may actually discourage the concept of allegiance to a more impersonal entity, such as the community, the political party platform, or indeed the corporation.

So the Manila worker also experiences the tension of attempting to reconcile his dual allegiance to the traditional and the new. If he recognizes this ambivalence in himself, then perhaps he can afford to be more sympathetic and patient with those in the other sectors, and they with him. He may not so readily accept the assumption that Manila is the center of wisdom. Projecting his own goals on others whose occupational, educational, and social backgrounds differ vastly from his will become a matter for greater reflection. Since policy is generally made in Manila, it is his responsibility to base it on a realistic appraisal of differential motivations. Achieving this understanding of employee behavior will help curb his impatience at the failures of other to respond his way.

To review now, I have tried to emphasize that a business corporation, like a society, lends itself to anthropological analysis. Just as every society has sectors, each with its specific goals and means incorporated into a larger whole, so too may a company's divisions be considered in this framework. The significance of understanding the working of the smaller units is clear, for a breakdown in any of the parts, the loggers, millers, craftsmen, white-collar clerks, and managers, contributes to a breakdown of the whole.

Effective communication among the sectors goes far toward promoting mutual respect and good will. But in the long run social science research conducted by qualified specialists will bring more significant results. Surely where a progressive lumber company unhesitatingly devotes its funds and efforts to experimenting, for example, on thermal insulation, or the fire-retarding qualities, stability, bending properties, strength-weight ratios, and proper finishes best for certain types of wood, one would expect a similar desire to know more about the workers themselves. While behavioral research is far more difficult than is strictly technological research, it must be undertaken if we are to gain an insight into the most complex factor in the entire manufacturing process, the human being, and more specifically, the Filipino.

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