PROJECT LEADERSHIP STYLES IN CHINA

ANITA M. M. LIU AND FANG ZHAOYANG

Department of Real Estate and Construction, The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong SAR.

Abstract
China has undergone major changes in recent years regarding the development of its socio-economic infrastructure for implementing project procurement. These changes include the recent enactment of laws governing construction contracts and tendering, and the introduction of a project supervision system. This system dictates the status of the project leader (supervisor), and provides the framework in which the roles and functions of various project participants can be described. The supervisory styles of such project leaders are examined in this paper according to P-M leadership theory, which assumes that leadership affects motivational arousal directly through a combination of pressure and support.

Keywords
Leadership styles; P-M leadership; Project procurement

INTRODUCTION

The Chinese construction industry has become more vibrant since the advent of China’s open-door policy. Statistics show that the turnover of the construction industry rose from 34.7 billion RMB in 1980 to 1246.3 billion RMB in 1997 (China Capital Investment Statistical Yearbook 1998). By 1997, there were almost 96000 construction organisations that provided 28 million job opportunities. These construction organisations were variously state-owned, collective-owned, private companies, or joint venture companies, and operated in civil and building works, mining, and other aspects of engineering such as metallurgy, chemicals, hydraulics, and hydroelectricity, railway, roads and highways, communication, and ports and harbours, etc.

China’s transition from a planned to a market economy calls for major adjustments in its socio-economic systems. Such changes may be especially pronounced in the behavioural sub-systems of various organisations. In a non-democratic socio-political environment, the power (and authority) held by superiors may be seen as more absolute, and obedience is given more readily. The nature of this social system - underpinned by the national culture - may affect the supervisory styles adopted by project leaders in the construction industry. It is worthwhile to investigate these supervisory styles as they are developing with (and hence may modify) the transition of China’s socio-economic structure.

This paper examines procurement approaches in China, the roles of government authorities and enterprises, and the supervisory styles of project participants in the construction industry as posited in the P-M leadership theory developed by Misumi (1985).