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## Management and leadership

Two years ago I interviewed Joseph Juran, the management writer, at his home in Connecticut about his role in the Japanese quality movement. Mr Juran, now 97, retained a sharp memory for detail. Asked why he and fellow quality guru W. Edwards Deming could not get an audience for their ideas in the US and Europe during the 1960s and 1970s, he blamed an over-arching concentration on sales, among top management.

In the early 1960s he visited Rolls-Royce Aero-Engines in the UK to deliver a management training course. While touring the factory, he noticed high levels of waste - procedures and work that could be cut out of the system. He told Sir Denning Pearson, the chief executive, that the company would make big inroads into its production costs if managers devoted as much time and energy to reducing this waste as they did to the design, manufacture and sale of engines.

The company ignored his advice. "Reducing costs in the factories was seen as a form of dry drudgery that wouldn't interest top managers. I was dealing here with a caste system and the samurai at the top were the people able to identify sales," said Mr Juran.

The UK, he said, had lost "a huge opportunity". The extent of this loss became apparent in the 1980s, when carmakers began to compare their productivity rates. In May 1980, for example, Ford compared the labour needed to produce its Transit van in the UK with that needed to build a Toyota Hiace van. The total man days needed were 12.5 for the British van, compared with 2.4 for the Japanese van.

In spite of the introduction of Japanese-style lean management systems into many UK factories in the meantime, it is tempting to ask afresh whether the caste system has changed to any great degree. The question was raised this week by Professor David Ashton, former director of the Centre for Labour Market Studies at Leicester University and co-author of a new report from the International Labour Organisation\*. The report champions the use of various human resources practices that, when bundled together, it says, can significantly improve production rates.

Prof Ashton says evidence from numerous studies has left him in no doubt that well managed HR techniques (or "high-performance work practices", as the new jargon has it) can make a big difference to corporate performance. But in too many cases in the past, says Prof Ashton, they have been used only in a piecemeal way. Some managements have experimented with ideas such as self-directed teams, quality circles and multi-skilling, he said, only to fall back into their old "command and control" habits.

The research reflects some of the criticism that emerged only two weeks ago in a report from the Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership . The report highlighted perceived inadequacies in the quality of management and leadership in UK organisations\*\*.

Although part of its criticism was aimed at business schools, the report directed some stinging comments at government support for entrepreneurs, which had failed, it said, to answer their real needs.

"The confusing plethora of government-funded initiatives for small firms, estimated by the Treasury to cost over Pounds 600m, appears to be driven by government agenda and funding rather than by direct demand from entrepreneurs themselves."

The government has yet to respond but, given its interest in improving the quality of leadership and management in UK companies, it seems likely that it will broadly support many of the council's recommendations.

Where the government may find difficulty, however, is in the area of leadership development. The big problem with leadership is finding a definition that suits different circumstances. There is no shortage of suggestions. The business book industry has been in overdrive supplying leadership titles in the past two or three years. Take your pick from *Maximum Leadership* , *The Future of Leadership* , *Coaching for Leadership* , *The Leadership Crash Course*, *The Way of the Leader*, *The Contrarian's Guide to Leadership* , *Leading Quietly and What Leaders Really Do*. This spring we have had *Alpha Leadership* , *Primal Leadership* , *Leadership on the Line* and *Grow Your Own Leader*.

This is just a sample of the titles choking my bookshelves. With so many people out front, you wonder who's bringing up the rear.

It is clear from a skim through these titles that there are many different opinions on what constitutes leadership . Even the CEML's report falls into the trap of outlining a long list of leadership and management competences that leaves little to chance.

Most leadership books tend to focus on chief executives rather than the qualities of leadership that may be visible at any level of an organisation. Another drawback with much of the literature is that it gives no context for the leadership and still relies on the language of generalship. Leaders devise grand strategies that are passed down to the troops through subordinates. They do not make cups of tea for their colleagues.

Edward Brech, a British management writer, remembers a time in the early 20th century when the people who ran businesses believed they were born to the job. Mr Brech, now 92, has just completed a five-volume compendium detailing the history of the UK management movement\*\*\*. It does not make for bedtime reading but it does provide an important historical archive of British management development, charting the first hesitant attempts to establish management as a teachable discipline.

"When Frederick Taylor outlined his ideas on scientific management to an engineering conference in Birmingham in 1910," he writes, "the chairman was disappointed because he wanted (Taylor) to talk about steel-making techniques. The management of work was not regarded as important at that time."

That attitude at least has changed. But managers need to change again. Today there appears to be a need for a more collaborative breed of manager, comfortable across a range of functions. How can we describe this management style? What about "Renaissance leadership ?" That might make a title for a book.

*\*Supporting Workplace Learning for High-Performance Working, David Ashton and Johnny Sung, ILO, Pounds 12.95, e-mail: [mailto:ipu@ilo-london.org.uk](mailto:mailto:ipu@ilo-london.org.uk) \*\* Managers and Leaders: Raising Our Game, CEML, [www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org](http://www.managementandleadershipcouncil.org) \*\*\* The Evolution of Modern Management, E.F.L. Brech, Thoemmes Press, Pounds 295, [www.thoemmes.com](http://www.thoemmes.com)*

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