

Keary Harper Newsletter Spring 2011

Take it on Trust – greetings from Shanghai

China now looms large in our national consciousness: many British businesses have operations there or are exporting to China. Nearly all our electronics and much else in our shops are made in China. But how much do we really know about Chinese managers and leaders? We, and our sister company WorldWork Ltd, were recently invited to present to the China-British Business Council (CBBC) in London. Through the *International Profiler*, WorldWork has built up a substantial database across organisations as diverse as the European Central Bank and Shell in over 100 countries, including mainland China.

For example, Chinese managers tend to have a stronger inner purpose and focus on goals than the Brits, which may account for their ability to get things done despite the sometimes chaotic local environment. They are also more likely to expose their intentions when communicating: perhaps they are naive or may be the Brits are poker players?

The Chinese managers are also more sensitive to context: in other words they spend more time working out where the lines of power lie.

The Brits score higher in a number of areas which may reflect a longer tradition of having an 'open' country and trading relationships. Apart from having a higher spirit of adventure, they tend to be more accepting of strangers, welcome new thinking and are keen to create alternatives. They also appear to listen more actively and be more aware of the effect they are having on others.

What happens when China meets Britain? More precisely, how do Chinese and British managers start to establish an effective working relationship? We acted a brief role play for the CBBC and Feng Wang (Eric from our office) played the part of the Chinese manager in a new joint venture. Our audience confirmed what the data was telling us i.e. that the Chi-

nese will want to take time to build trust *before* getting down to business. Whereas, the Brits will tend to be too quick with the social side and try to do business before trust really exists. This is just one example of how critical it is to understand and adjust to other business cultures.

We now frequently build *international competences* into our coaching programmes – the senior people we work with really need to be fluent and sensitive in working across many cultures. The *International Profiler* zeroes in on just these skills and attitudes.



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