

An Eastern perspective on partnering

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Abstract Researchers have written extensively on the partnering approach in project procurement. Some emphasize it as a *process*, i.e. how it works in terms of the project structure, signing of agreements, etc., and others emphasize the *nature* of the partnering culture dimensions, i.e. how it works in terms of operating in trust and harmony. It is postulated that the Confucian concept of *self-cultivation* is central to the development of the values of trust and harmony. Western perspectives on the

partnering culture are relatively abundant in writing; the intention of this paper is to complement existing literature with an Eastern perspective to develop a behavioural model of partnering. This paper examines the partnering dimensions and postulates that an understanding of (1) the Eastern concept of *self* and self-cultivation, and (2) the central role of goal setting at strategic and project levels will enhance goal attainment in partnering.

Keywords behaviour, goal setting, partnering, self, trust

INTRODUCTION

According to the European Construction Institute (1997), partnering is a recognized method of improving communication mechanisms and technologies, responding to innovative construction projects, creating a less stressful working environment and reducing transaction costs resulting from uncertainty, competition and information asymmetry. In the last decade, numerous studies have been performed to examine partnering—a review of the partnering research can be found in Li *et al.* (2000). Amongst other alleged benefits, adoption of the partnering approach is believed to achieve a range of client objectives including equality, training and employment for local people and services for tenants (Davey *et al.* 1999). Its extension to relationships with subcontractors is alleged to help contractors to achieve more compliant bids, less confrontation and lower tendering costs (Mathews *et al.* 1996). However, recent caution to a number of fundamental issues, including the prescriptive nature of previous research and the need to adopt a pluralistic approach in defining partnering, is raised by Bresnen & Marshall (2000).

In the UK, partnering is increasingly being used for construction projects since the Latham (1994) report was published. Large companies are urged to be at the forefront of such changes to improve productivity and delivery (Egan 1998). Major construction companies and clients involved in partnering projects include NatWest Bank and Marks and Spencer (e.g. Bennett *et al.* 1996). Project partnering has been, arguably, used

by the Hong Kong government for some projects which have been carried out without consciously bearing the label of *partnering*. In this respect, the situation is similar to that which generated observations of the Japanese companies by the West, i.e. Japanese organizations adopted the ‘partnering’ approach without concern for its being so labelled by others. Partnering may be regarded as a term assigned to various phenomena of alliancing, including those originally observed in the ‘East’; hence, the elements of *partnering* must be examined more carefully to understand their sources, nature and operation.

Recent studies that investigate the key characteristics in partnering have covered the core aspects of synergy (Wood & McDermott 1999), commitment to attain common goals (Abudayyeh 1994; Crowley & Karim 1995) and trust (Munns 1995; Higginson 1998). Alternative perspectives, such as the lack in current research to explore the social and psychological aspects of partnering (Bresnen & Marshall 2000) and the possible encouragement of corporatism (Green 1999), are also developed. However, as Bresnen & Marshall (2000) have pointed out, the focus has remained at a largely prescriptive level and there is still a need for more systematic and in-depth research to examine the nature and efficacy of the partnering approach. A multi-faceted construct of the partnering concept, comprising both Eastern and Western perspectives of its *nature*, is postulated to provide the building blocks necessary in operating the partnering *process*. This paper examines perspectives of the Eastern culture (from the East and West viewpoints) and proposes that an

understanding of (1) the Eastern concept of *self* and self-cultivation and (2) the central role of goal setting at strategic and project levels will enhance goal attainment and, hence, project success through partnering.

PARTNERING: ITS NATURE AND PROCESS

Much of the success in the partnering approach has been attributed to national culture—in the case of the Japanese companies, for instance, the arrangements of the Big Six in the Japanese construction industry (Bennett *et al.* 1987). Womack *et al.* (1990) allude to the myth of the Western perspective that relationships between organizations in Japan operate on the basis of mutual trust in their detailed examination of lean production in the Japanese automotive industry. The Japanese culture is generally attributed to be a fundamental platform on which trust and commitment operate. However, there is a need to augment such attribution with analyses of the industrial and financial structures within which Japanese firms operate and the rationale for Japanese corporate behaviour. Japanese industry tends to be organized around *keiretsu* subsequent to a USA-dominated industrial restructuring in post-1945. Each *keiretsu* comprises a diversity of industrial and commercial, independent organizations, which are structurally linked by inter-organizational ownership of equity—such as would be outlawed by ‘anti-trust legislation’ in other countries, e.g. USA and UK. A member organization suffering problems (as in a sectoral, economic downturn) will receive assistance from other members and this situation is enhanced through the long-term perspective adopted by Japanese business. The relationships between members of a supply chain (preferably regarded as value provision chain) in Japan are characterized as ‘The relationship ... in Japan is *not* built primarily on trust, but on the mutual interdependence enshrined in the agreed-upon rules of the game’ (emphasis added) (Womack *et al.* 1990: 155). When rules of the game changed (as in the recent Asian financial crisis as well as the rapid upsurge of internet business opportunities), interdependencies of various institutions/organizations in *keiretsu* have evolved and changed. Their working relationships/mechanisms may have to move towards the Western mode while appropriateness of their characteristic *long-term* perspective is being threatened, e.g. financial institutions in various Asian countries under pressure to restructure (issues of *Asiaweek* in 1999—www.asiaweek.com).

The West has adopted the partnering approach with basically two common forms: project partnering, where the parties come together for the duration of a particular project, and strategic partnering, where the parties develop a longer term relationship over a series of projects for which contracts are usually negotiated. Project partnering is recommended for public clients who must use market testing to comply with procurement regulations (such as those in the European Community), normally through the competitive tendering process (Loraine 1994), to ensure visible public accountability. However, it is asserted that the full benefits can be realized only through strategic partnering, as relationships develop, learning progresses, trust and commonality of interests are fostered. Therefore, partnering has to be conceptualized to include a wide range of behaviour, attitudes, values, practices, tools and techniques (Bresnen & Marshall 2000).

As it is difficult to distinguish between partnering as a distinctive practice and as a managerial rhetoric and the use of partnering methods per se does not necessarily lead to effective outcomes (see Bresnen & Marshall 2000), partnering must be examined from the perspectives of its *process* and its *nature*. The *process* is a structural description of the partnering arrangement, i.e. the equity stake between the partners, the power structure, the organizational structure (of the partnering arrangement) and the procurement path of the project, etc. Possible examples of early partnering projects in Hong Kong are the Housing Authority’s ‘Private Sector Participation Scheme’ (PSPS), where private developers are invited by the government to participate in the development of public housing estates. The estates are then available for sale or rental, as the case may be, and the private developer is allowed to take an equity stake in the development. Another example in Hong Kong is the development of the Convention and Exhibition Centre phase 1. The Trade Development Council of the government jointly developed the piece of land with a private developer, where the private developer had the hotel development rights above the Convention Centre (Moss 1994). (While not all these projects may have partnering arrangement through the extensive supply chain from client to suppliers, mostly the contractors and the developer organizations belong to the same holding company.) Examples in the UK are the Heathrow Airport/Paddington Station rail link project (Thatcher 1997) and the Beefeater Restaurants (Tulip 1997).

The *nature* of the partnering arrangement is understood through an examination of the characteristics of partnering (the partnering culture). These characteris-

tics include (see Bennett *et al.* 1996; Li *et al.* 2000) conflict resolution, trust, common goals (or shared vision), mutual benefits (or equity), commitment and respect. Hence, a partnering arrangement may exist with or without formal organizational structure and contract. Subcontracting arrangements in the 1960s in Hong Kong worked on the basis of informal contracts in a lot of instances. Trust between the main and subcontractors was immense. This was akin to the observations of the Japanese construction industry as reported in Bennett *et al.* (1987) which attributed the observed phenomena to the ‘Confucian culture in the East’.

Hence, the *process* element of partnering merely provides the mechanistic framework for its operation—such as format description of how negotiation takes place, when to sign preliminary agreements, what goes into the agreement, etc., the *nature*, of which, dictates the organic fluidity/dynamism of ‘how to make it work’. This paper postulates that the two major philosophies, Confucianism and Taoism, in (generic) Eastern culture underpin group behaviour in partnering observed in Japan (and the Eastern societies from which partnering was derived) and examines the threads of these cultural traits in those societies. The potential for transfer to the West is demonstrated in the theorizing of a behavioural model.

EASTERN CULTURE — FROM AN EASTERN PERSPECTIVE

The teachings of Confucius, which are based on Taoism, have inspired many people through millenniums. Confucius referred to *Tao* in his *Doctrine of the Mean* (see Sinolingua 1996). The understanding and cultivating of the *self* are central to these teachings, which is akin to the study of psychology where the individual is the central object. The nucleus of self is then extended to groups, society and nation. The example given in *The Great Learning* (see Sinolingua 1996: 33) by Confucius is that if one cannot manage the family unit, how can one manage the state? In a similar context, if one cannot practise loyalty, trust and benevolence at home (with life partners and offspring), how can one do so in project organizations (given they are temporary units)?

Chinese (and other Asian) families teach their children to share and sacrifice for each other. One is expected to ‘sacrifice’ self-interest for the good of a higher order, e.g. the older sibling giving up his/her own opportunity for higher education to earn money for the younger ones’ schooling. Western families may

emphasize individuals’ rights, whereas the concept of collective ownership is familiar in the East. Self-cultivation starts with the belief that it is something right and just to pursue and calls for the person’s acceptance of the concept of the *negligible self*. Rights-based teachings, on the other hand, encourage self-centred perspectives. ‘The way of the great learning is to rid oneself of selfish desires and develop further one’s inherent virtues. One should not only develop his own inherent virtues further, but should encourage all persons to do so also. Only then is it possible to reach the acme of perfection’ (Confucius, cited in Sinolingua 1996: 5). Hence, the observation of close-knittedness in Eastern family ties—the learning and practising of trust and harmony are expanded from family units to society.

The emphasis from the Confucian teachings is that loyalty, respect, trust and benevolence cannot be achieved through mere verbal indoctrination, but from serious self-cultivation, thereby setting examples to others. One learns better from outcomes and examples. Hence, one learns from parents (on what can/not be done), the leaders (in organizations about the norms and values in organization culture) and others (in society about what is acceptable as societal norms). However, ‘a man cannot educate his family (or subordinates) if he has not cultivated himself well’ (parenthesis by authors) (Confucius, cited in Sinolingua 1996: 32).

Thus, self-cultivation is at the centre of these Eastern teachings (Fig. 1), and *jing* is the core. *Jing* means nature or essence and it is regarded as *Dao* (or *Tao*) (see *Tao Te Ching* 1985: 108), ‘like *Dao*, the essence of man is calm and pure in its original state, and only becomes clouded and restless through contact with the objects that cause desires and emotions ... This original pure essence dwells in man.’

The conceptual model in Fig. 1 encapsulates (from an Eastern, Confucian base) the major characteristics of partnering where *jing* (benevolence, sincerity and integrity) provides the platform from which one develops the negligible self. Thus, it leads to acquisition of values such as self-sacrifice for the common good, respect for others and self-examination. Confucian teachings do not advocate a reward-led behaviour–performance–outcome (B–P–O) cycle (Liu & Walker 1998), i.e. it is not through the ‘carrot’ of increased earnings/productivity/bonus/sense of pride that people are motivated towards such behaviours. Instead, these teachings rely on the pursuit of self-cultivation (or self-development) to become the ‘noble’ person.

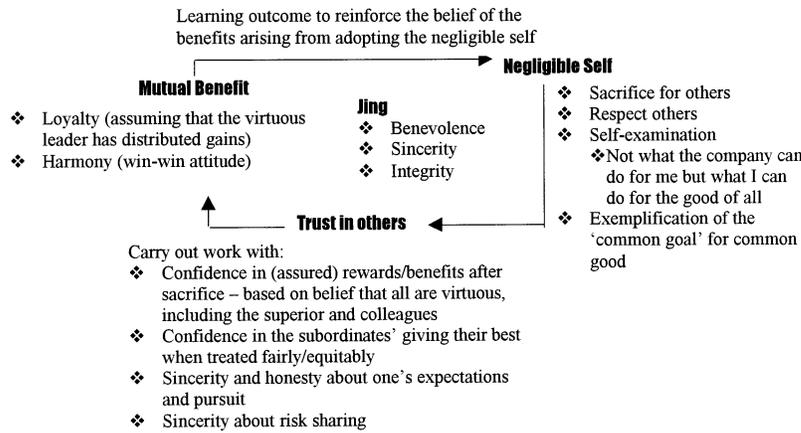


Figure 1 Partnering model: Eastern perspective.

The belief in the ultimate better-self is the incentive that propels the behaviour. '... a gentleman (the noble person) holds the principle of putting himself in the place of others. I will not treat my subordinates with the attitude that I would hate for my superiors to treat me. I will not serve my superior with the attitude with which I would hate my subordinates to serve me. ... This is what is called putting oneself in the place of others' (parenthesis by authors) (Confucius, cited in Sinolingua 1996: 44–45). From then on, one sees the negligible self and the synergistic whole. The interdependencies of units are realized through trust in each others' actions. Trust is manifested as the ability to carry out work with confidence of gaining rewards/benefits after sacrifice—based on belief that all participants are virtuous beings; confidence of others' giving their best when treated equitably; and sincerity about one's expectations, pursuit and risk sharing. This is thought to be possible through possessing the pure *jing*. Mutual benefit will come forth as a result of operating the synergistic whole through mutual adjustment and continuous learning to develop the *self* (Fig. 2). Mutual adjustment is mentioned in project management literature (e.g. Walker 1996: 111), especially in the case of reciprocal interdependency of subsystems. Hence, mutual adjustment may take place first by understanding things from the other's perspectives, otherwise, the them/us syndrome may perpetuate.

Feedback, which is the mechanism by which one learns, is important. However, receptivity to feedback varies among people and, hence, between organizations and their ability to learn. An individual often prefers 'positive' feedback (e.g. in the form of praise) than 'negative' feedback (e.g. in the form of criticism—albeit constructive criticism). The degree of truth or objectivity inherent in the feedback information does not necessarily dictate the degree of receptiv-

ity. If one does not pursue self-cultivation, receptivity sees no improvement. The individual's raw self with his/her inborn wisdom (level) becomes the foundation on which the ultimate noble leader is to be made. As such, one ends up with the question: is the *noble* leader born or bred? If bred, how? Self-development and training in human resources management (HRM) are advocated in the West, self-cultivation (of the inner self) is the counterpart component in the East.

One might have experienced that self-examination can be unpleasant, i.e. to come face to face with one's shortcomings and be receptive to 'negative' feedback. Western perspectives in HRM emphasize making the personnel feel good about the working environment, the sentience of belonging to the organization, etc. and, therefore, invest in the development of their skills and talents—training and education are termed 'self-development' of the human capital. The other end of a bi-polar view in self-development (the self-cultivation aspect) is for these 'virtuous' individuals to examine if they have been giving the organization the 'pounds of flesh' that it deserves. While acknowledging these two views constitute reciprocal interdependency, it is still interesting to note where an individual/organization would choose to begin the cycle (i.e. expect others to

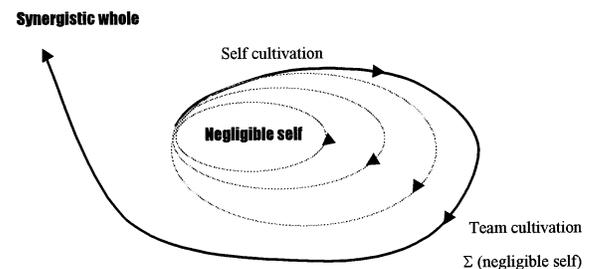


Figure 2 Learning spiral.

be good to you first or reach out to be good to others first).

The common pointers of Eastern culture in terms of large power distance, respect for superiors, care for the subordinates, adherence to group sentience, etc. (e.g. Hofstede 1991) may be seen as products of this self-cultivation. Group sentience is particularly referent to the concept of the negligible self—this comes from (the now eroding) Eastern societal values which emphasize that the self is a small division of the whole, but the sum of which will give a synergistic whole. Through decades of ‘East meets West’ and globalization of commerce and trade, values are merged and redefined (e.g. see issues of *Asiaweek* in 1999—www.asiaweek.com on the post-Asian crisis). Cultural boundaries become increasingly fuzzy and are subject to reshaping constantly. Before one praises the Eastern phenomena of partnering values, one should first look at the recent Asian crisis. Prior to the crisis, Eastern values were praised by the West as the force behind the development of the dragon economies; at post-crisis, the same (but reinterpreted) values are blamed for causing ‘incompetence’ in the financial infrastructure. Cross-cultural studies are complex (preferably a team of researchers from different cultural backgrounds must be assembled) and interpretation is like ‘a rainbow of many colours’—the fact is that colours merge but, depending on the operation of the prismatic eyes, different colours may emerge. Through *jing*, one perceives the truth.

EASTERN CULTURE—FROM A WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

The Western perspective of Eastern culture tends to characterize it as collectivist, large power distance, masculine and long-term; uncertainty avoidance yields diverse results (Hofstede 1991). In conducting business activities (see accounts of cultural influences on the conduct of activities given in Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 1997), Westerners focus on the attributes of the potential deal, Easterners focus on the attributes of the people involved initially, in order to evaluate the desirability of dealing with those people. First, the individuals are scrutinized, then as representatives of the organization and, finally, the technicalities of the subject material of the deal. Further, ‘business’ tends to accompany the individual rather than being the province of the organization (as in the West), through which individuals pass in a more-or-less transitory way. Thus, personal integrity is the

primary consideration in Eastern business whilst Western business emphasizes legal formalities, in the form of contracts, as ‘enforcement assurance agents’.

However, recent attention has been given to relational contracting (e.g. Alsagoff & McDermott 1994) in which Western organizations devote attention to the importance of relationships between the individuals concerned to secure high performance on projects—the essential noted by Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (1966) and, anecdotally, operated on all construction projects *at least until things go sufficiently wrong to necessitate shelter behind the formal, legal contract*. Indeed, Western history documents that, prior to the industrial revolution and the consequent widespread division of labour, etc., contracts, essentially, operated on the basis of understood and unquestioningly accepted obligations and reciprocation. Thus, the historic concept of contracts mirrors the Eastern concepts of how to conduct business affairs.

The perspectives of the forces of transaction costs (Williamson 1979) lend force to the drive to determine alternative ways of conducting business activities such that legal and/or overt threats are obsolete but positive motivational drives operate. Further, the role of normal and permitted business structures and activities varies—largely reflecting the societies from which they have evolved (as outlined above). Deming (1986), a major influencer of Japan’s business redevelopment, emphasized the critical importance of *people* in a system—in reality, as the sole active factor. The perspective is manifested in the lean production philosophy and practices (notably Toyota), including into the marketing arena (Womack *et al.* 1990). There is striking congruence between the concepts of holistic lean supply and relationship marketing (Gronroos 1991).

Thus, when examining the activities in detail, the cultural boundary distinguishing Eastern and Western approaches and behaviours is diminishing. However, it is essential that cultural factors still be recognized because systems analysis emphasizes boundary conditions—location, permeability and boundary effect—that the presence of a boundary influences what is transmitted across it. Thus, whilst the relationships between different groups (organizations, etc.) on a project in the West may be analogous to physical bonding, the relationships in the East may be in the stronger and more permanent form of chemical bonding. Hence, the perspectives on interdependencies are different, as are the rationales for and consequent actions/behaviours.

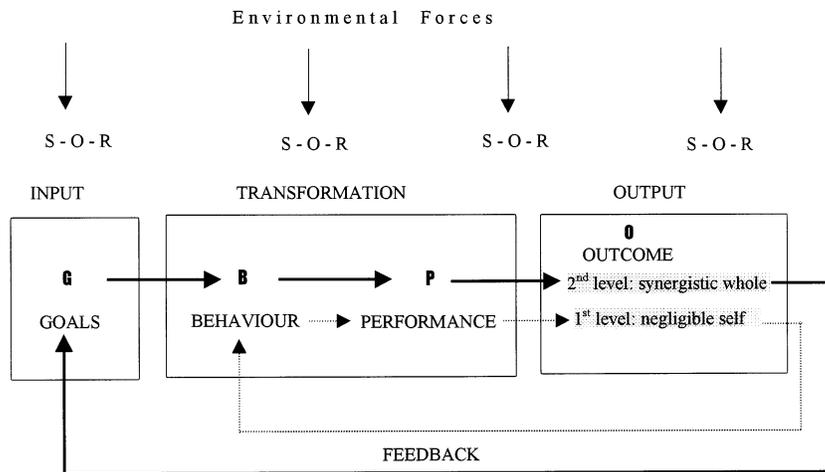


Figure 3 Partnering model: the behavioural approach.

S - O - R : Stimulus - organism (/ organisation) - response

— Behavioural cycle in team cultivation
 Behavioural cycle in self cultivation

THE BEHAVIOURAL MODEL

While the partnering model (Fig. 1) is developed from an Eastern base, its interpretation can be made from a Western paradigm through the notion of acts leading to products and subsequently leading to outcome. See Naylor *et al.* (1980) on the psychological paradigm, Liu & Walker (1998) on its application in project management.

The model in Fig. 3 is explained in a behavioural approach: an organization's behaviours are goal-directed (as distinct from an individual's reflex actions), hence, goals direct an organization's behaviour (B) towards performance (P) leading to the outcome (O)—goal attainment. Environmental forces cause stimuli (S) to the organization (O) and provoke responses (R), i.e. the S-O-R paradigm in behavioural studies founded in the Cartesian concept—see Naylor *et al.* (1980). The individuals/organizations will perceive, judge and evaluate the stimuli to set goals for their B-P-O cycle.

(i) Goals

Goals direct performance via three main mechanisms (Locke *et al.* 1981): by directing attention and mobilizing effort (*behaviour*), prolonging effort over time (*commitment*) and *motivating* the individual to develop relevant strategies for goal attainment. The partners translate the environmental stimuli into mutual goals. Input into the project partnering system includes vari-

ous types of resources such as human, capital, managerial and technological.

The formulation of mutual goals takes place at the inception stage of project or strategic partnering at which the organizations decide to engage in certain business activities. As project procurement proceeds, further sub-goals, formulated as targets, are set to monitor the partnering process. These are done in line with the further breaking down of the partnering system into sub-systems at various levels of operations down the supply chain. Each sub-system (e.g. Operating Sub-system) entails its own goal setting where goals can be further modified, expanded, adjusted and developed under the S-O-R mechanism.

(ii) S-O-R (stimulus-organism-response)

The S-O-R mechanism constantly acts upon the partnering organization so that they may have to revise/adjust/refine mutual goals as a continuous response to the environment over a longer time frame.

(iii) Behaviour-to-performance

The B-P-O cycle integrates both goal theory, which emphasizes the effects of goal setting (Bandura 1986; Locke & Latham 1990), and expectancy theory which emphasizes expectancy, values and valences as motivating factors towards behaviour (Atkinson 1964; Vroom 1964).

Transformation of the various input resources takes place in the project realization stage as project procurement activities/behaviours are performed. There are two dimensions to behaviour, amplitude (or effort) and direction. The two dimensions of behaviour depict how much effort is put into the act and where effort is placed. The desired project performance is produced by the appropriate aggregate amount of individuals' effort spent in the intended direction over time and tasks.

In the Eastern model in Fig. 1, an individual learns to cultivate the negligible self (O) by performing trusting behaviours (B-P). Feedback (as learning outcome to reinforce the belief of the benefits arising from adopting the negligible self) will enhance further self-cultivation. Performance is influenced by other extrinsic factors such as peer pressure (Bandura 1986) which is exerted by the others (when they all act in their negligible selves) on the individual to make him/her remain on course in pursuit of self-cultivation. Such aggregate outcome of the team members' self-cultivation constitutes the synergistic whole.

(iv) Outcome

The output from the project partnering system is based on the Vroom (1964) expectancy theory which advocates two levels of outcomes, first level and second level (instrumentality). *The instrumentality of an outcome (being the negligible self) is concerned with the extent to which the individual expects that outcome to lead to other outcomes (attaining the synergistic whole).*

According to Vroom (1964), expectancy is a probability estimate with values ranging from 0 to 1 and instrumentality relates to a correlation (between outcomes), hence varying from -1 to 1. Vroom's expectancy theory simply is:

the force (or motivation) to perform act i is equal to the product of the expectancy that act i will be followed by outcome j and the valence of outcome j .

$$F_i = f_i \left[\sum_{j=1}^n (E_{ij} V_j) \right] \quad (i = n + 1, \dots, m)$$

$f_i > 0$; $i \cap j = \Phi$, Φ is the null set

where

F_i = force to perform act i

E_{ij} = strength of expectancy ($0 \leq E_{ij} \leq 1$) that act i will be followed by outcome j

V_j = valence of outcome j

In this behavioural model (Fig. 3), first level outcome is the resultant negligible self from the individual's B-P-O cycle. This first level outcome gains valence provided that it causes a second level outcome (a synergistic whole). First level outcome (e.g. a particular level of attainment in self-cultivation) is considered as a function of the expectation that certain efforts will lead to the level of attainment (efforts in trusting others lead to a certain level of mutual benefit) and the valence of that attainment level.

$$V_j = f_j \left[\sum_{k=1}^n (V_k I_{jk}) \right] \quad (j = 1, \dots, n)$$

$$f_j > 0; I_{jj} = 0$$

where

V_j = the valence of outcome j

I_{jk} = the cognized instrumentality ($-1 \leq I_{jk} \leq 1$) of outcome j for the attainment of outcome k

The valence of being the negligible self depends on how much benefit may come forth from becoming a synergistic whole.

(v) Feedback

Knowledge of results (feedback) allows the tracking of progress in relation to the goal (Locke & Latham 1990: 259). As Carver & Scheier (1981) point out, 'a typical aspect of human behaviour is self-regulation. Exactly what is perceived and how reality is constructed is defined by the "attentional focus": the things in ourselves and in our environment on which we focus our attention. This focus is also decisive for what is stored in our memory and what is reproduced from it.' This process of storing and reproducing information can best be described as a cybernetic B-P-O cycle: the behaviour is continuously tuned to one standard by means of negative feedback (Thierry & Koopman-Iwema 1984).

Feedback applies not just to the individual (self-cultivation) but also to the partnering organizations (team cultivation) in the sense that resource allocation and future demands on the organizations are affected by the degree to which outcomes meet their mutual goals. From a learning standpoint, feedback helps the individuals/organizations to develop trust. From a motivational standpoint, feedback, if positive, builds self-efficacy and, if negative, pinpoints the need to improve by revealing a discrepancy between the goal and present performance. The needs and values may also be gradually changed as a consequence of outcomes received. For instance, if the individual has never experienced benefit from any outcome, s/he may

gradually lose that desire to achieve self-cultivation/team cultivation, i.e. the outcome is neither sought nor valued (Porter *et al.* 1975).

PARTNERING—A MATTER OF GOAL SETTING

In the behavioural model (Fig. 3), partnering is interpreted as forming a team with mutual goal(s), creating group synergy, fostering cooperation through commitment (by sharing risks to overcome conflict towards mutual trust and benefit—see Fig. 1) and reinvents itself through cycles of G–B–P–O.

Synergy is important and a partnering relationship is mostly recommended where the management teams of all parties involved display a fundamental commitment to partnering and where companies share a common culture (Smircich 1985). Project commitment, however, is goal-dependent (Liu 1999). Goal commitment has many conceptual definitions (for review, see Tubbs and Dahl 1991). A committed person is thought to adopt a specific performance goal and to persist in attempts to reach it even through difficulties. Integrating this with motivation theories regarding task engagement, effort expenditure and persistence (Atkinson 1964; Campbell & Pritchard 1976; Steers & Porter 1991), goal commitment represents an individuals' judgement which entails the individual choosing a goal and then maintaining that choice over time. To achieve goal consensus then becomes a primary objective among the organizations in the partnering arrangement. How often are we clear about our project goals? Profit, while important as a project goal, has been examined in a number of instances to demonstrate that it is 'long-term normal profit' and not short-term project-based profit that has more effect on business decisions. As goals are categorized into, for instance, strategic goals and operative goals, consensus and communication of goals have to be achieved both horizontally across and vertically down the organization.

However, the project organization is portrayed as a shifting multi-goal coalition dependent on the power structure prevailing at the time (Newcombe 1994). The continuously shifting power structure of most construction projects leads to changing goals and hierarchies, with their impositions on following participants, detracting from committed behaviours and hence, performance. Shifts in goals can occur without a conscious decision on the part of organization members—i.e. as a reaction to the external or internal pressures without a conscious reference to where the

organization is going. Organizational goals change for three major reasons (Hall 1972): (1) direct pressure from external forces leading to a deflection from the original goals, (2) pressure from internal sources leading the organization to emphasize different activities than those originally intended, and (3) changed environmental and technological demands leading the organization to redefine its goal.

If the concept of goals is not used, organizational behaviour becomes a random occurrence, subject to whatever pressures and forces exist at any point in time. Georgopoulos & Tannenbaum (1957) argue that measures of effectiveness must be based on organizational means and ends, rather than relying on externally derived criteria. Diversity of goals, and hence directed actions, generates disparate performances whilst congruence of goals yields focused performance, i.e. synergy (cf. the Eastern synergistic whole). Goal setting for projects is a core issue such that until mutual project goals are established appropriately and communicated, synergistic performances, success and satisfaction will remain impaired.

Partnering research emphasizes goal commitment (Crowley & Karim 1995), trust (Munns 1995) and mutual goals (Thompson & Sanders 1998) and suggests that the presence of these tends to lead to near conflict-free collaboration. Commitment is present when goals are specific and clear (Locke & Latham 1990). Goals, whether strategic or project-based, must then be communicated with specificity and clarity in mind. Conflict, on the other hand, is argued to be present in all situations. Harback *et al.* (1994) have identified that conflict between internal (relationship between various departments of the company) and external (relationship with other parties) partners is one unresolved pitfall in partnering.

Conflict-free is only an ideal to be pursued, i.e. conflict is better managed (not necessarily avoided) to provide positive results—provided they are properly managed. From a Western perspective, one way to resolve conflict may be *empowerment*, the delegation of authority and responsibility to the lowest possible level in the organization where problems originate. The purpose is to allow problems to be resolved early before developing into conflict or disputes where collective accountability has to be acquired.

From an Eastern perspective, conflict can be managed through self-cultivation, although the advocacy of self-cultivation (which implies self-examination also), benevolence and other virtues is near ideal. As Confucius said, 'I am afraid the doctrine of the mean can never be practised' (Confucius, cited in Sinolingua

1996: 13) and 'I understand why the doctrine of the mean cannot be put into practice. Clever people, knowing it thoroughly, don't think it is practicable, while stupid people, unable to understand it, do not know how to practise it. I also know why the doctrine of the mean cannot be popularized. Talented people overdo it while unskilled people cannot do it.' (Confucius, cited in Sinolingua 1996: 11–12).

Since Confucius had noted that ultimate self-cultivation could not be practised (easily), mortals are back to the rights-domain, i.e. with the boundary of rights delineated (as in a written contract), the parties at least know the (written) rules of the game. When rights are not challenged, everything seemingly operates on trust and harmony. A violation of the rights implies conflict. When self-interest is in jeopardy, benevolence and trust are all irrelevant (depending on one's attainment level in becoming this *noble self*), 'I will not listen, compromise nor modify my views, be it East, West, North or South cultural-bound'. Confucian teachings make their contribution in pointing to the essence of conflict management—the essence of self—*jing*.

CONCLUSION

It is argued that the knowledge of the mechanisms of the partnering *process* and the behavioural dimensions of its *nature* are of equal importance—for the latter provides the platform on which the former operates. The focus of the *nature* of partnering in this paper resides in:

- The Confucian concept of self-cultivation and the synergistic whole,
- The behavioural paradigm of goal–behaviour–performance–outcome (G–B–P–O) cycle,
- The underpinning of one's behaviour by the Confucian teachings leading to a partnering culture through setting of mutual goals,
- The importance of realization of promised mutual benefits in sustaining the G–B–P–O learning/development cycle.

While it is alleged that partnering relationships can create harmony that can lead to increased returns for all parties (Hamza *et al.* 1999), the mechanisms for ensuring the alleged increased returns are not well investigated. Merely by employing a new/different formal framework (e.g. British Property Federation contract and system, New Engineering Contract) or operating system (e.g. Toyota using their successful Japanese methods, unamended, in USA) does not guarantee improvement—often the opposite. Such

problems are derived from inadequate appreciation of cultural issues and the consequent adaptations and preparations necessary to effect the desired changes.

From the perspectives of *process* and *nature* of partnering, the adoption of the partnering process should concentrate on the human issues—notably, management of conflict (through self-cultivation) and goal-setting yielding goals sufficiently attractive to all participants. The nature of partnering is up-kept by the focus on the creation and maintenance of an organizational culture conducive to developing and fostering harmonious relationships. Such relationships are founded upon congruent interests in outcomes (via performance) and do yield enhanced actual and perceived performances, thereby promoting project success.

Culture is manifested in behaviours, and behaviours are underpinned by values. Values are those motives that involve normative considerations of 'oughtness' and desirability, linked to an evaluative dimension of goodness and badness (Feather 1982: 87). Values serve as standards or criteria to guide behaviour/action. The importance-hierarchy of values to the *self* dictates one's behaviours. Self-leniency—'I can do it to others but others can't do the same to me'—often is quite predominant on that value scale (although one might not wish to admit). The suggestion of cultivating *self* then results in 'sanctification' of the value system, therefore, ultimately leading to behaviours and outcomes which include trust, mutual benefit, sincerity and benevolence. From a Confucian base, if the leader does so, others do so, eventually/strivingly this becomes the *culture*. On the other hand, the procurement practices which are contract-based, claims-based and blame-apportioned-based could be detrimental to the implementation and maintenance of a partnering culture.

What is the primary goal of an organization? Is it profit? What is the source of conflict? Protecting one's gain? It is argued that the partnering culture may enhance project performance subject to the mutual belief among the partners of (1) work assurance (assuring each other that we will work together for the synergistic whole) and (2) benefit assurance (assuring each other that gains will be distributed equitably). This is supported by research in goal setting theory: one means by which rewards influence behaviour is by affecting the degree of commitment to goals (Locke *et al.* 1988). Appropriate rewards, therefore, reduce goal conflict and produce commitment. Verbal indoctrination of trust (and other partnering elements) alone may not drive nor sustain business in the long-term.

Examples of such (trusting) behaviours and the observed benefits from these behaviours may induce individuals to continue their performance (self-cultivation). The emphasis of a physical structure to dictate the partnering process may miss the point in such holistic approach to goal attainment in partnering.

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