

HRD in "Z" Type Companies

By ROBERT ANDERSON
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Japanese competitors win the battle for market share, customer loyalty and profit. American businesspeople realize they must fight back to keep from being driven out of business. The Japanese have manufacturing systems, organizational structures and a sense of "oneness" that allow them to manufacture products costing less than comparable products manufactured in America. Having identified the problem, progressive businesspeople now search for a solution.

One possible solution, suggested by William Ouchi (1981), calls for a major overhaul of most American organizations. The new organizations, "Z type companies," would be patterned after the typical Japanese company. Ouchi states quite em-

phatically, however, that rather than faithfully copy the Japanese system, we should use it as a model for developing organizations which will function efficiently in the United States. The model for Z type companies has been delineated, but some of the important organizational functions have only been mentioned in passing.

One such function, human resource development, has not been addressed sufficiently for

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HRD professionals to know what to anticipate if their companies convert to a Z type organization. The Z type structure will create a number of different training opportunities and requirements which should be contemplated

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before the transformation has progressed too far. Training in Z type companies will emphasize interpersonal relations, long-term development, participative relationships, ability to perform several jobs and individual patience and tolerance. The motto of the Z type HRD professional may well be "Develop the Whole Person."

The A and J models

After considerable examination of companies in the United States and Japan, Ouchi identified what he considers to be prototypical organizational models in both societies. The most significant features of the American (A) model and the Japanese (J) model identified by Ouchi (1981) are listed in Figure 1.

At this point, one might question why we don't simply replicate J type companies in the

Figure 1.

J	A
Japanese organization	American organization
Lifetime employment	Short-term employment
Slow evaluation and promotion	Rapid evaluation and promotion
Nonspecialized career paths	Specialized career paths
Implicit control mechanisms	Explicit control mechanisms
Collective decision making	Individual decision making
Collective responsibility	Individual responsibility
Holistic concern	Segmented concern

United States and eliminate the need to develop any new, uniquely American organizational form. Most experts agree that such duplication would ensure failure. It appears those Japanese-owned companies which operate in the United States, structured and managed in the traditional Japanese style, are no more pro-

ductive or efficient than their American competitors.

The Japanese management system may not travel well. It is successful in Japan because of traits and characteristics particular to the Japanese people. The Japanese have, through necessity, learned to get along with each other and function as cooperative, responsible team members. While they are industrious and ambitious, they do not try to advance their own career at the expense of their fellow workers. They are family- and group-oriented, and they respect order, authority and tradition.

These traits allow the individual Japanese worker to function well in an organization that emphasizes patience, lifetime employment and group decision making and responsibility. The workers are the key to the success of the Japanese system. Japanese success, according to Pascale (1978) can be attributed to "such practices as 'bottom-up' communication, extensive lateral communication across functional areas and a pronounced use of participative (or consensus) style decision making." If this system is not appropriate for the United States, then another organizational form must be developed.


If not J, then what?

If we accept the premise that strict adherence to the J style of management will not be beneficial in the United States, then we should develop an

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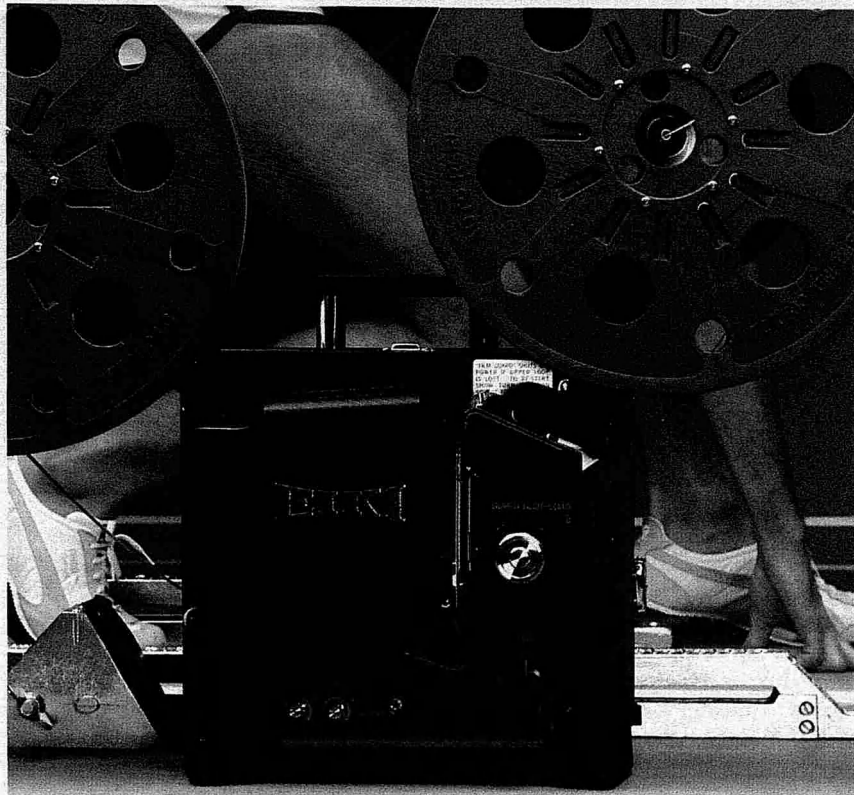
American system that will make us competitive again. The proposed organizational form to accomplish this is the Z type organization. This amalgam of A and J will, according to Ouchi and Jaeger (1978), have the following characteristics:

- Long-term employment;
- Consensual decision making;
- Individual responsibility;
- Slow evaluation and promotion;
- Implicit informal control, with explicit formalized measures;
- Moderately specialized career path;
- Holistic concern, including family.

The Z type organization emphasizes lifetime, or at least long-term, employment which necessitates an employee commitment to the firm and a reciprocal company commitment to the workers. The employee is expected to be patient and tolerant, and workers need to believe that they all benefit when their group is successful. Z type companies will be competitive only if employees, through substantial training and development efforts, accept the validity of the system and are willing to make the requisite changes.

For a complete explanation of factors involved in changing from A to Z, the reader is referred to William Ouchi's book, *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*. The major requirements for change are commitment, cooperation, understanding and training. All members of the company must make a commitment to accept the philosophy and principles of the new organization. Every employee should dedicate himself or herself to the task for making the new system successful. A considerable level of cooperation among all employees is also necessary for success. Management and union cooperation should also be encouraged.

Training and development as well as understanding the system are intricately intertwined in the change process. Once top management accepts the Z type



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structure, they should assign the responsibility of explaining the structure and the system to HRD professionals. In addition to informing employees of the intricacies and operations of the new system, HRD specialists should also develop new training programs and methods to enable

employees to achieve company goals and objectives.

New training directions

In Z type companies, many of the standard training topics and methods will be deemphasized or completely eliminated. It will not be acceptable, for example, to

simply provide an employee with skills which limit him or her to one specialized job. Nor will it be appropriate for HRD specialists to unilaterally determine training needs and prescribe training methods. Replacing the traditional superior-subordinate relationships will be a new coalition or partnership of trainers and trainees.

What will replace the tried-and-true training subjects and methods? Who will determine what should be taught and who should be trained? How will new training methods and skills be developed? Finally, who will train? First, let us propose some broad training and development topics or goals which will be acceptable in a Z type company:

- *Interpersonal skills.* Learning to deal with customers, colleagues, suppliers and co-workers will be of paramount importance

in Z companies. In the past, there has been little emphasis on training programs which teach people how to get along with each other constructively. We did not believe that active cooperation or mutual support were necessary to achieve goals in A type companies. Training programs emphasized competitiveness, aggressiveness and assertiveness. Programs showing an individual how to acquire and use power were more popular than those which developed team spirit or "esprit-de-corps."

We laughed at films of Japanese workers doing calisthenics at their work place or singing the company song. And we could not understand why people who worked together would socialize with each after work and even take vacations together. No longer should we be amused or puzzled; we should

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strive to instill these attitudes and feelings in modern workers. We need training programs which will encourage an open and healthy sense of comradery on and off the job.

- *Company loyalty.* We emphasize the need for lifetime or at least long-term employment with the concomitant need for company loyalty. Rarely have training programs been developed to convince employees

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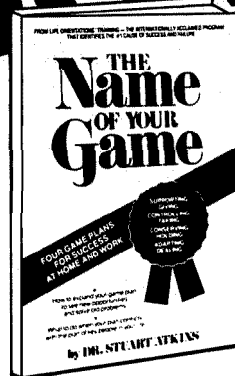
For Z companies to be successful, we need development programs which encourage a sense of company pride and loyalty in employees. We hasten to point out that company loyalty is a two-way street, and programs which develop a sense of loyalty to the employees are also needed. If people learn to accept their employment with a Z company as a long-term proposition, they will be ready for and open to more meaningful kinds of training programs.

- *Team-building.* There are several worthwhile but underused team-building training programs in existence. The thrust of these programs is to teach cooperation, mutual support and the substitution of group goals for individual objectives. Since one of the basic building blocks of Z type companies is employee participation in all facets of organizational activities, it is imperative that team-building receive more training emphasis.

Programs teaching employees that all members share group gains and benefits need to be developed. The zero-sum game mentality prevailing in many A type companies must be dispelled. Employees should realize that short-term individual sacrifices may be necessary to ensure harmonious long-term group relations. The cooperative attitude needed for effective teamwork will help achieve company objectives and should make the organization more productive.

- *Decision making.* In an article discussing management development in well-managed organizations, Lester Digman (1978) indicates that only top-level executives receive any

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training in effective decision making practices. This is probably true in not-so-well managed companies also, but it cannot be true in a Z company, if the organization is to be successful. In Z companies, decision making should occur at all levels of the organization and decisions should

represent the consensus of the participants.

HRD specialists should avoid the naive assumption that all workers want to actively participate in decision making and that a consensual system can quickly be put in place. Employees should be taught to

participate and to accept responsibility for decisions. They should be made aware of rewards and penalties associated with decisions. This whole process requires time and patience on the part of the trainer and trainee.

• *Performance evaluation and promotion.* In our society, people admire winners and barely

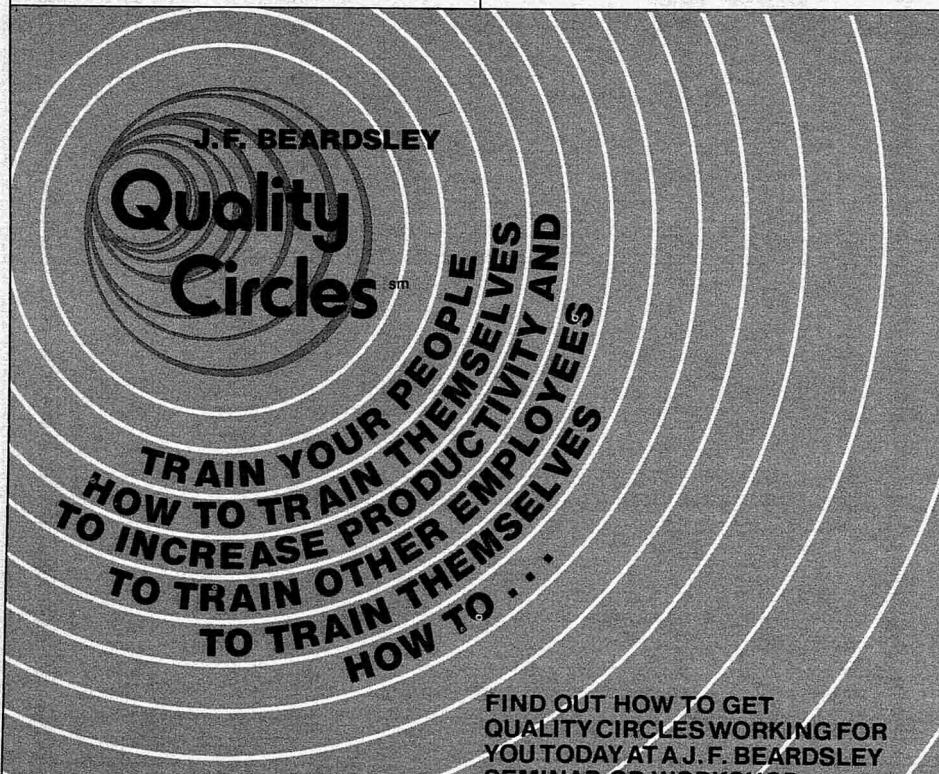
tolerate losers. The best managers are those who successfully identify the "up-and-comers," or young employees who are on "fast tracks," even if the "track" leads through a number of different companies. In order to identify employees with considerable potential, managers must evaluate perfor-

mance soon after a person is hired and quite frequently thereafter. Once potentially successful employees have been identified, they are rewarded for their performance. Too often the reward is a premature promotion which antagonizes the employee's co-workers and frequently leads to failure in the new position.

In Z companies, promotion will not come so rapidly; therefore, employees will not be under such pressure to impress their superiors. Training specialists will develop appraisal methods allowing managers to methodically evaluate performance. These methods will probably be quite subjective, and will rely primarily on a manager's personal observation and knowledge of his or her employees. Having developed new appraisal techniques, HRD specialists will instruct managers in using these more personalized evaluation forms.

When employees realize it may take several years to be promoted, they will probably be more amenable to varied training and development programs. Currently, people in A type companies are interested in "relevant" development programs, or those which give them "high visibility." If a program is not perceived as contributing directly and immediately to advancement or promotion, it is not considered necessary. This has led to an emphasis on short-term, skill-specific training programs which do not contribute to the development of the whole person. In Z companies, long-term programs which develop the whole person will be paramount.

• *Career development.* If the whole person is to be developed in Z companies, it will be necessary to create programs which offer a myriad of different experiences and opportunities. It will no longer be acceptable for an employee to become so specialized that he or she can function only in one specific department or job. Employees should be exposed to a number of different jobs requiring diverse skills. As Ouchi (1981) notes, recent research "strongly suggests



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that workers at all levels who continually face new jobs will be more vital, more productive and more satisfied with their work than those who stay in one job, even though the change in jobs do not include a promotion but are entirely lateral."

Planned job rotation will enable employees to develop skills and interests necessary for advancement. Employees will not become so specialized that they are unaware of or uninterested in the activities and responsibilities of other departments and functions. A non-specialized career path develops the whole person who will be more loyal to the company and more promotable in the long-run.

Much of the responsibility for developing effective job rotation programs will rest with HRD specialists. They will have to create individualized programs which expose employees to a variety of jobs and operations. The HRD expert will not only determine where an employee is

ty. The training department directly or indirectly perpetuates this relationship.

Most HRD specialists are more concerned with teaching courses emphasizing union avoidance or union decertification than with courses focusing on union-management conciliation and cooperation. In Z type companies, management will accept the existence and the legitimacy of unions and will seek ways to cooperatively improve productivity, job satisfaction and company loyalty. Once again, HRD specialists will be called upon to exercise their creativity to develop programs which encourage labor-management cooperation.

One such program developed in the United States, perfected in Japan and recently reintroduced in America is "quality control circles." The goal of QC circles is to facilitate joint labor-management problem-solving. Employees are encouraged to identify problems in their own

A non-specialized career path develops the whole person who will be more loyal to the company and more promotable in the long run.

transferred, but will also make sure the employee has a "real" job and is not treated as a transient. A well-developed job rotation program will be extremely beneficial to the Z company, as well as to the employee.

• *Labor-management relations.* In A type companies, management is management, labor is labor and never the twain shall meet—unless the contract is about to expire. This philosophy polarizes labor and management to the extent that neither group attempts to constructively coexist with the other. The result is an adversarial system which ultimately contributes to organizational disharmony and decreasing productivi-

ties and to recommend ways of solving them. If QC circles are to function as intended, HRD specialists should train employees to trust and respect each other and management. Additionally, training programs should be created which teach employees the mechanics of identifying problems and reporting their solutions to management.

• *Communications.* Much of the success of the proposed Z type companies is predicated on effective communication both laterally and vertically. The vertical communication will be both top-down and bottom-up, requiring training programs directed at employees at all levels of the organization. We tend to take for

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granted the ability of workers to effectively communicate with each other, as well as with management. Yet it is a basic inability to accurately communicate which causes many intraorganizational problems and misunderstandings.

HRD specialists should create programs which teach basic communication processes to all employees. Everyone should use the same words, signs and symbols, and all employees should learn to encode and decode messages effectively. Additionally, employees at all levels of the Z company should be trained in the art of listening. Too often, we hear a person's words, but the message does not register.

• *Developing the whole person.* Very few organizations in the United States have provided development programs directed at general personal growth and enrichment. As a result, we have a labor force that loves Fridays and loathes Mondays. Generalized development programs might reduce the dread of the first day of the week.

Developing programs geared to the whole person will provide a considerable challenge to HRD specialists. In some cases, these specialists will have to accept the limitations of their own training departments and will seek assistance from external sources. The programs should be broad and varied. Employees should be exposed to the arts as well as to the overall functions of the organization. Employees should want to enthusiastically and actively participate. The program should create a healthy, positive organizational climate which induces employees to accept the concept of lifetime, or at least, long-term employment.

What training is needed?

We have proposed a number of training needs which should be addressed by HRD specialists in Z type companies. We do not, however, advocate an overnight change in training direction; this could result in a number of premature programs forced on

reluctant employees. Just as an A type organization cannot change instantly into a Z company, neither can a training department undergo immediate metamorphosis from A to Z. It will take time, effort and patience to develop a training philosophy compatible with the general goals of a Z type company.

To facilitate changes, HRD specialists should concentrate their initial efforts on the selection of non-controversial training subjects which can be presented to employees with only slight modification. Once employees realize the new training topics and techniques are not threatening or excessively difficult, additional changes in the overall program will be easier and quicker to make.

After employees learn it can be enjoyable and educational to participate in communication and team-building training programs, they should accept the more complex programs dealing with decision making and other subjects. Constructing a training program appropriate for a Z company should be gradual and completely explained to all employees. The new program will be more readily accepted if employees are encouraged to participate in its design and implementation.

Ultimately everyone in the organization at all levels will need to participate in the new training programs. Top-level managers should learn what training changes are contemplated and how the company will be affected. Other managers might benefit from decision making or career development programs. Most non-management employees should receive some training in all of the areas already mentioned. Even managers would benefit from some exposure to most of these areas.

Is it better to use internal or external trainers? This question is frequently asked by HRD specialists, but infrequently answered satisfactorily. In his study of training programs in well-managed organizations,

Digman (1978) found the use of external trainers frequently depended on the size of the company. Smaller companies tend to rely more on external trainers, while larger companies use external trainers only occasionally.

In Z type companies there will be a need for both internal and external trainers. The former will be responsible for company-oriented programs, while the latter will be needed for the more technical and specialized programs. Even in Z companies, however, outside trainers should not present programs which are incompatible with the company's overall training and development program.

Companies in increasing numbers will adopt Z type systems and structures, and HRD specialists in these companies will contribute significantly to a smooth transition. These specialists will have to identify, develop and conduct training programs enabling employees to change from an A type to a Z type mentality with little pain or discomfort. New training programs will focus on participation at all levels, company loyalty, career development and training the whole person. The success of Z type companies will depend to a large extent on the success of their HRD specialists.

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