Managerial effectiveness and the style of management in the Middle East: An empirical analysis

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This study aims at examining the site managers' effectiveness with relation to their managerial style when managing multi-cultural work forces in the Middle East. Data were obtained from 79 site managers working with 41 international and 38 local organizations in six Middle Eastern countries. These are: Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Libya, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait. Managerial effectiveness was found to be related to the style of site managers. The successful site manager is one who recognizes and understands cultural differences of his subordinates and combines both leadership dimensions, task and employee orientation.

Keywords: Effectiveness, style, work forces, site managers, cultural differences, construction projects, Middle East.

Introduction

Work forces in the Middle East are frequently drawn from Third World countries, e.g. India, Pakistan, Egypt, Turkey, Philippines, Thailand, etc. This work force is commonly called third country nationals or TCNs. The cultural diversity within such work groups may well be staggering and rarely recognized in adequate depth by management. The inability to cope with a myriad of differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, and languages can undoubtedly reduce site managers' effectiveness. This problem can be alleviated if a suitable managerial style is practised.

Dealing with multi-ethnic work groups is a very sensitive subject due to this very combination of cultural, educational, technological, and political variations. Such differences tend to create a working condition which requires a well-trained site manager who can adapt his style and cope with unexpected problems.

A comprehensive review of the literature carried out by Bresnen *et al.* (1986) reveals that there are relatively very few studies dealing with the leader orientation of construction site managers and its relation to effectiveness; and even fewer such studies have considered closely this issue in complex organizations which involve several cultures.

This paper gives a brief review of the literature relating to the concept of managerial style, differences and similarities in leadership style across cultures, and the effectiveness of site managers. The primary objective is to report some findings of an empirical study conducted to explore the association between site managers' style and their effectiveness when managing multi-cultural work forces in the Middle East.

Background to the study

Managerial style

The concept of leadership or management style dimensions have been labelled differently, though these differences are of a very minor nature; in other words, the concept of 'consideration' is like the concept of 'people orientation', and the idea of 'initiating structure' is identical to 'task orientation'. Therefore, both concepts can be considered synonymous. For the purpose of this paper, the expressions of task and employee orientation are used, which can be defined as follows: 'task oriented managers' are those who are mainly concerned with planning, organizing work, control, efficiency, and productivity, whereas 'employee oriented managers' are those who give priority to the management work of internal relationships among the work group members and themselves and to an understanding of cultural differences of their subordinates.

There is a considerable number of researchers who supported the hi-hi paradigm. A high-high leader is one who combines both high employee and high task orientation; this phenomenon of leadership behaviour is called a hi-hi paradigm (Halpin, 1957; Keeler and Andrews, 1963; Cunningham, 1964; Kerr *et al.*, 1974; Larson *et al.*, 1976). These scholars believed that there is a positive association between leaders who are high in both employee and task orientation and subordinates' satisfaction and performance. Blake and Mouton (1964) stated that optimality can be achieved by combining concern for people and concern for task. Fleishman and Simmons (1970) concluded that leaders who combine both dimensions are likely to optimize the effectiveness of supervisors, hence the subordinates' performance. Lansley *et al.* (1974) supported the hi-hi concept, and concluded that successful construction companies are characterized by a high task/high people orientation. Stogdill (1974) reported that several leadership studies advocated the hi-hi paradigm.

On the other hand, several researchers found that the agreement concerning the hi-hi paradigm is not universal, and a number of exceptions to the general rule that a hi-hi leadership style is the most effective have been identified (Hunt and Liebscher, 1973). People orientation has been found, occasionally, to have a negative correlation with high management level (Fleishman, Harris and Burtt, 1955; Graen *et al.*, 1972); and task orientation associated negatively with subordinates' satisfaction and turnover (Fleishman and Harris, 1962) and it may adversely affect performance (Cummins, 1971, 1972). Fleishman (1953) reported that what is effective leadership in one situation may be ineffective in another. Larson *et al.* (1976) and Nystrom (1978) did not give support to the hi-hi leader paradigm.

Anderson (1983) has examined in his empirical research the effectiveness of various leadership behaviours in relation to the cultural composition of the work group in New Zealand. He concluded that the cultural composition of the work group did not alter the effectiveness of the various leadership behaviours. Bresnen *et al.* (1986) indicated that an emphasis on relationships in site managers' leader orientation is more likely to enhance project performance than an emphasis on task. However, it must be repeated that very few of these authors examined the specific situation covered by this study.

Differences and similarities in leadership style across cultures

Hundal (1971) concluded from his research, that although the leadership principles are universal, the methods and procedure by which they are adapted to each culture and work

location decide their success and failure. Gonzales and McMillan (1961) stated that management practice in multi-national organizations is culturally bound, and must be closely associated to the influx of technology moderated by cultural norms of behaviour (Starbuck, 1976). Schein (1985) lent more support to the impact of cultural factors on the leadership process when he reported that culture and leadership practice cannot be separated. He added that the majority of leaders are influenced by their cultural background.

Whyte and Williams (1963) concluded from their survey that there is common satisfaction and agreement between US and Peruvian workers regarding a supervisor who understands the needs and the problems of his workers, and who is interested in improving their skills by training. On the other hand, they found that for the Peruvian workers there was a positive correlation between closeness of supervision and general satisfaction with the supervisor. The Peruvian workers expressed their preference and satisfaction to a supervisor who gives them instruction and observes their progress rather than one who offers general supervision and leaves the workers on their own most of the time. This is exactly the opposite of the US workers' preference.

Hofstede (1980, 1984) found distinct differences across countries towards the perception and preference for the leadership style. He reported that participative management approaches which were suggested by American theories and are applicable in the United States were found not appropriate to all countries. Another study has been conducted by Maier and Hoffman (1962) in which they compared British and American managers, and found that the British managers seemed more accustomed to an authoritarian style than their American counterparts. This suggests that, although countries can be categorized into distinct groups, such as Western, Mideastern, Asian, etc. (Hofstede, 1980), differences do exist within each group itself. On the other hand, Heller and Porter (1966) concluded from their study that the operational practices of English and American managers are very similar; this does not support Maier and Hoffman's results.

Negandhi (1983) concluded from his research that culture has an influence on employee morale and interpersonal relationships. Negandhi reported that there were variations in management practices and methods between the United States subsidiaries in developing countries and the local organizations. The leadership style in the US subsidiaries was found to be democratic, whereas in the local firms it was an autocratic style. Having said that, Negandhi pointed out that several management practices, e.g. planning and decision making, are not influenced by cultural diversity, but are contingent upon technological and market conditions. Negandhi lent support to the belief that management styles vary among cultures, tending to refer such variation to technological and economic discrepancies rather than cultural differences.

Haire *et al.* (1966) reported that there were many similarities in managerial attitudes and motivations among managers in all countries. Thiagarajan and Deep (1969) concluded from their survey that all managers preferred democratic supervision irrespective of the cultural differences. This result seems to be consistent with Haire *et al.*'s result. Al-Jafary and Hollingsworth (1983) found that managers in the Gulf region operated within a management system that was consultative, as did their American counterparts.

Effectiveness of site managers .

It is generally accepted that the effectiveness of construction site managers is a vital component in the success of construction projects. Anderson (1983) defined managers'

effectiveness as their ability to supervise and manage subordinates. Likert (1967) referred to several aspects which managerical effectiveness should include: team building, goal emphasis and help with work. Laufer and Jenkins (1982) suggested that management has a direct and indirect impact on the level of productivity. First, a direct impact which can be utilized by planning and controlling construction activities, and secondly an indirect impact which can be achieved through a good interrelationship between managers and their subordinates that may raise the motivation of work forces.

It has been found that the need for corrective action with consequent delays of projects is generally attributable to ineffective managerial practice on construction projects (Borcherding and Garner, 1981; Borcherding and Oglesby, 1975). Some writers (Rabbat and Harris, 1982; Maloney, 1982; Imbert, 1987) suggest that cultural heterogeneity of work forces in the Middle East has a considerable impact on supervisors' effectiveness, adding that supervisors should understand the cultural differences of their subordinates in order to be effective in their managerial process.

For the purpose of this research, the effectiveness of site managers can be defined as follows: effectiveness of site managers is their overall contribution to the achieved level of a work force's productivity in construction projects.

This brief review of the literature reveals that there is a lack of information and empirical data with respect to construction managers' style, managers' effectiveness and the relation between both variables in a complex organization where more than one culture is involved in the project in the Middle East. The purpose of this paper is to address this issue, and to offer some basis for improving managerial performance within such a situation.
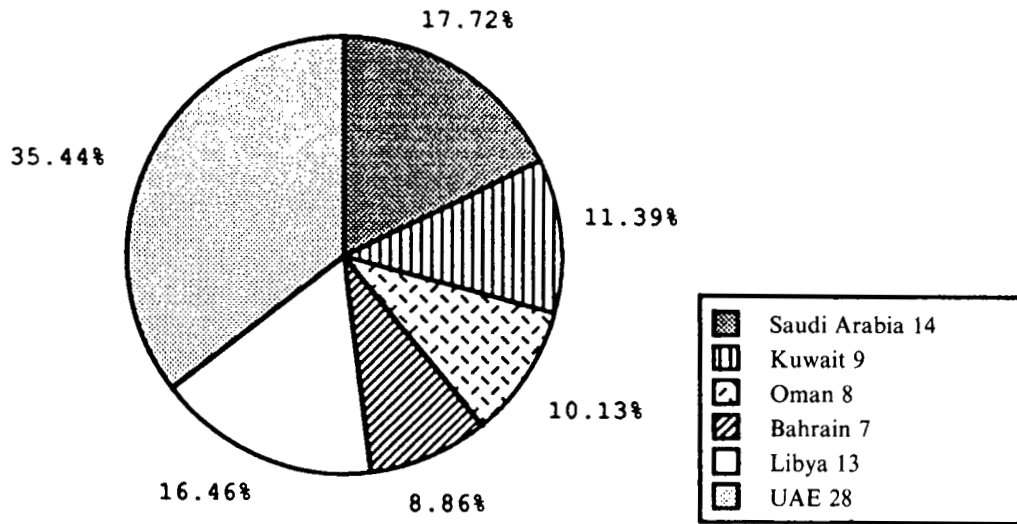
The empirical work

Methodology

The sample consisted of 79 construction site managers (site managers are considered as individuals who are in charge of running and directing construction projects towards the achievement of a set of goals through their subordinates) of 62 construction firms which acted as main contractors. The subjects for this study were drawn from six Middle Eastern countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Libya and United Arab Emirates (Fig. 1). Forty-seven projects were being undertaken by international construction firms and 32 projects by local construction organizations (Fig. 2). The focus was upon medium- and large-sized contracts.

The criteria for the selection of site managers and contractors was basically contingent upon several factors; namely, the construction site must contain a work force composed of several cultures; accessibility; and willingness to cooperate. Construction companies' names and addresses were obtained from several sources, namely publications and organizations which include: *Engineering News Record*'s annual list of the top 250 international contractors, Kompass Directory of registered firms in the UK, Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), Middle East Association and through the supervisor's and researcher's personal contact.

Data in this study were obtained by means of questionnaires which were distributed in December 1987 to construction site managers in the Middle East. Figure 3 illustrates the nationalities of construction managers who participated in the research survey. A total of 180

17.72%

35.44%

11.39%

	Saudi Arabia 14
	Kuwait 9
	Oman 8
	Bahrain 7
	Libya 13
	UAE 28

10.13%

16.46%   8.86%

Based on 79 construction projects

Fig. 1. The locations of construction projects.

40.51%

59.49%

| | International 47 |
| | Local 32 |
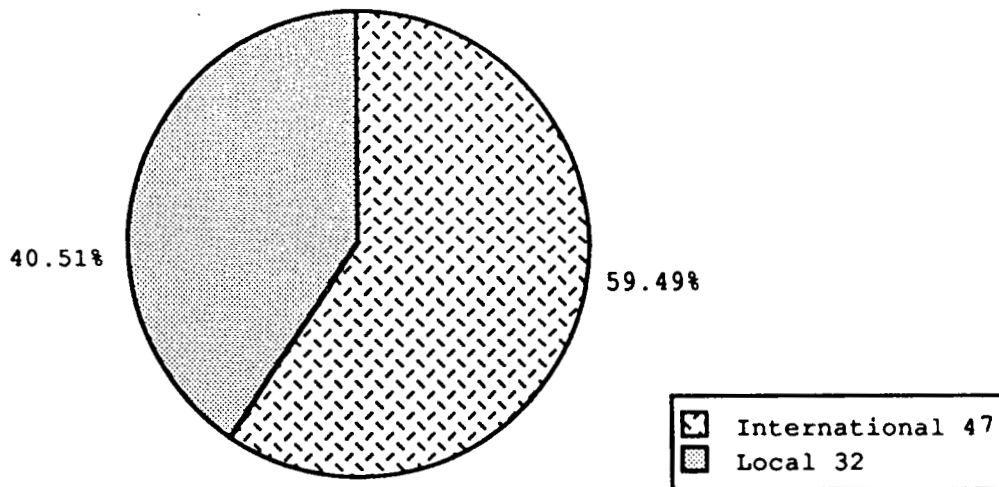
Based on 79 worksites

Fig. 2. Categories of construction projects.

questionnaires were distributed, of which 79 (44%) were returned completed. Those who did not return the questionnaire were contacted by reminder letters. Some recipients did not reply at all to these reminders, others claimed that because the required information was confidential, they did not fill in the questionnaire, and the rest insisted that their completed

22.78%   25.32%

3.80%

3.80%

3.80%

3.80%   15.19%

7.59%

13.92%

	British 20
	Jordanian 12
	Indian 11
	Palestinian 6
	Turkish 3
	Egyptian 3
	Lebanese 3
	Sudanese 3
	Other 18
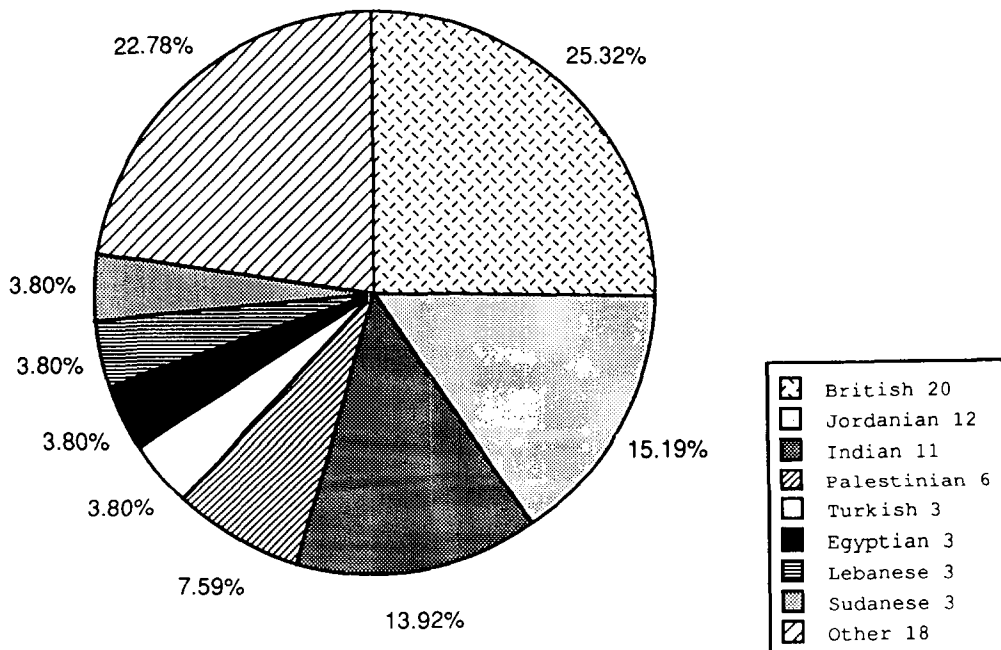
Based on 79 Observations

Fig. 3. The nationalities of construction site managers.

questionnaires had been posted. Having said that, the returns were encouraging, as a 44% response can be considered excellent for this type of sample, and sufficient to carry out statistical tests.

Site managers' style was measured using 14 statements which were rated on a 5-point scale, labelled from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). These 14 items were composed of 7 (a, b, e, f, k, l, n) which referred to task oriented managers' style, and the other 7 statements (c, d, g, h, i, j, m) referred to employee oriented managers' style. The statements were mixed, but would be identified into groups at the analysis stage. It was hoped that such an approach would avoid any possible bias, and reflect the real orientation of construction site managers (see Question 1, Appendix A). Some of the statements were developed from Whyte and Williams (1963) and also from Anderson (1983), and the other statements were derived from a pilot study.

In this study, the criteria of an effective manager was based on a broad indicator of managerial effectiveness, e.g. ability to plan, organize and schedule work; ability to get on well with people; willingness to listen and elicit others' suggestions and opinions; ability to be tactful and diplomatic; enthusiasm for work; understanding cultural variation within the work force; ability to cope with stress and deal with uncertainty; and leadership abilities. These key factors were provided in a form of a question (see Question 2, Appendix A), to clarify what is meant by effectiveness before managers decided whether their effectiveness decreases or increases when managing a multi-cultural work force in a construction project. The respondents were then asked to rank the most important characteristics of site managers' effectiveness according to their perceptions.

This was followed by asking the respondents whether their effectiveness was influenced by the cultural diversity of work forces involved in construction projects. The answers to this question were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (decreases significantly) to 5 (increases significantly) (see Question 3, Appendix A). This question was followed by another asking the respondents for the reasons for their answers. Indirect measurement was also employed by relating the effectiveness of managers to the variation of site managers' numbers (span of control) in construction projects. It should be noted that the measure of managerial effectiveness used is a broad one. There are, however, several methods of measuring managerial effectiveness, for instance: by performance evaluation which can be either taken from the company personal files or by using a general manager's evaluation or subordinates' evaluation. The data were analysed using cluster analysis, cross-tabular analysis and a Kruskal–Wallis one-way analysis of variance test that is available in a SAS package.

Results

The site managers' styles have been classified into four categories according to the cluster analysis which places individuals with similar perceptions into groups; each of which includes managers who tend to be similar to each other in some feature, and dissimilar to respondents in other clusters. These four clusters are: high task/low employee; low task/low employee; low task/high employee; and high task/high employee oriented (Table 1).

Table 1. Classification of site managers' style

Cluster	Managers' style	Number in sample	Percentage of sample
1	High task/low employee	14	17.72
2	Low task/low employee	24	30.38
3	Low task/high employee	19	24.05
4	High task/high employee	22	27.85

It appears from the results that the four qualities which were considered most important in making an effective site manager were: ability to plan, high technical ability, enthusiasm for work, and ability to get on well with people (see Table 2). Other qualities that have been added by the respondents are: leadership ability and building a good working team. However, most respondents stated that although they had identified the four most important characteristics of effective site managers, they believed that all nine statements in the questionnaire were equally important.

The results indicated that 55% of site managers perceived that their effectiveness decreases when managing multi-cultural work forces in construction projects. Precisely, 5% of the subjects thought that their effectiveness decreases significantly, and 49% indicated that their effectiveness decreases slightly (Table 3).

Besides, 35% of the respondents believed that their effectiveness is not affected by the cultural composition of their work forces. In other words, their effectiveness is the same whether they manage a group drawn from one or more cultures. On the other hand, 10% of the subjects considered that their effectiveness increases. Specifically, 7% of site managers

Table 2. Characteristics of managers' effectiveness

	Mean value	Priority
Ability to plan	1.22	1
High technical ability	2.32	2
Ability to get on well with people	2.75	4
Willingness to listen to others	3.28	8
Ability to be tactful	3.26	7
Enthusiasm for work	2.65	3
Understanding cultural variations	3.33	9
Ability to cope with stress	3.21	6
Understanding work forces' languages	3.00	5

Table 3. Site managers' perceptions regarding their effectiveness variations

Effectiveness	Frequency of site managers	Percentage in sample
Decreases significantly	4	5.1
Decreases slightly	39	49.5
No change	28	35.4
Increases slightly	6	7.6
Increases significantly	2	2.5

Note: Sample size = 79.

thought that their effectiveness increases slightly, and 3% of the respondents believed that their effectiveness increases significantly.

Several reasons were given which influenced the site managers' effectiveness. Among them, the difficulty of communicating with work forces because of no common language was considered to be the main critical factor contributing to a decrease in effectiveness. Others included differences in values and attitudes among cultures involved in a project; differences in customs or traditions; and time lost in sorting out disputes between workers.

Looking at the frequency of site managers who agreed that the number of site managers needs to be increased when managing a multi-ethnic work force, one can observe that 68% of the respondents agreed (Table 4). Twenty-nine per cent of the respondents thought that the number of supervisors needed does not change whether working with multi-cultural work forces or only with one culture; 3% of the respondents thought that the number of site managers decreases. The results in Table 4 give some weight to the findings presented in Table 3, that is, the majority of site managers believe that their effectiveness decreases, therefore the number of site managers should increase to balance the decrease of effectiveness.

Reference to Table 5 discloses that the probability associated with the occurrence under the null hypothesis is $P < 0.006$. It can be concluded that the style of site managers and their effectiveness are unlikely to be independent. In other words, there is a strong association between site managers' style and their effectiveness. This means that as managers try to

Table 4. Variation in number of site managers in
multi-cultural projects

Number of site managers	Frequency of respondents	Percentage in sample
No change	23	29.1
Number increases	54	68.4
Number decreases	2	2.5

Note: Sample size = 79.

combine the characteristics of both management style dimensions (employee and task orientation), it is very likely that their effectiveness increases when managing multi-cultural work teams.

Discussion

In looking at the results described above, there would appear to be a decrease in the effectiveness of most site managers in this sample when managing a multi-cultural work group. This indeed would be consistent with behavioural and psychological research which indicated that the cultural diversity of subordinates would generate poor communication and most probably intensify the difficulty of the managers' task as they proceed in managing labour and attempt to create an effective task strategy for the work team.

The present research findings also seem to support Rabbat and Harris's (1982) conclusion which referred to the effect of cultural elements on the effectiveness of managers who worked in international firms in the Middle East. Our results, however, are not congruent with Anderson's finding (1983) in which he concluded that culturally heterogeneous work groups did not alter the effectiveness of leaders; in other words, the degree of cultural heterogeneity of work teams was not related to their managers' effectiveness.

A possible interpretation can be offered for the differences between the present and Anderson's results, i.e. differences in research location and type of sample as Anderson's research was carried out in New Zealand in the manufacturing industry, whereas the present research was conducted in the Middle East in the construction industry. Indeed, the distinctive nature of construction work as temporary organizations may have a bearing on the results. Secondly, the nature and composition of work groups in the Middle East is different from its counterparts in New Zealand. That is to say, most work forces in the Middle East are imported from various countries temporarily for a specific project and they may be fired after the completion of the job. On the other hand, work groups in New Zealand are most probably immigrant and living permanently there, which would not normally impose unexpected problems to managers who are educated and work in New Zealand.

The results also indicate that there is a strong positive association between both the style of managers and their effectiveness. In particular, the results indicate that most effective managers tend to be high in both task and employee orientation. In other words, an effective manager is one who is equally concerned with technical aspects of management, e.g. planning, control, quality, cost and productivity; and simultaneously is concerned with human aspects, e.g. welfare, mutual trust, respect for subordinates' ideas and considering their feelings, and understanding the cultural differences of the work forces.

Model 1 (Fig. 4) illustrates diagrammatically the relationship between management style

Table 5. Association between managers' style and their
effectiveness (Wilcoxon scores – rank sums)

| Style	Sum of scores	Expected under ho	Mean score	St. dev. under ho
1	464.50	560.00	33.25	71.16
2	751.00	960.00	31.29	85.71
3	811.50	760.00	42.71	79.65
4	1132.0	880.00	51.45	83.54

Note: Sample size = 79
Degree of freedom = 3
Chi-Sq. = 12.47
Significance of Kruskal–Wallis test = 0.006.

and managers' effectiveness. This model highlights the four suggested managerial styles which site managers in this sample at present practise in the Middle East, and shows the most appropriate style for the environment which can lead to an increase in managerial effectiveness.
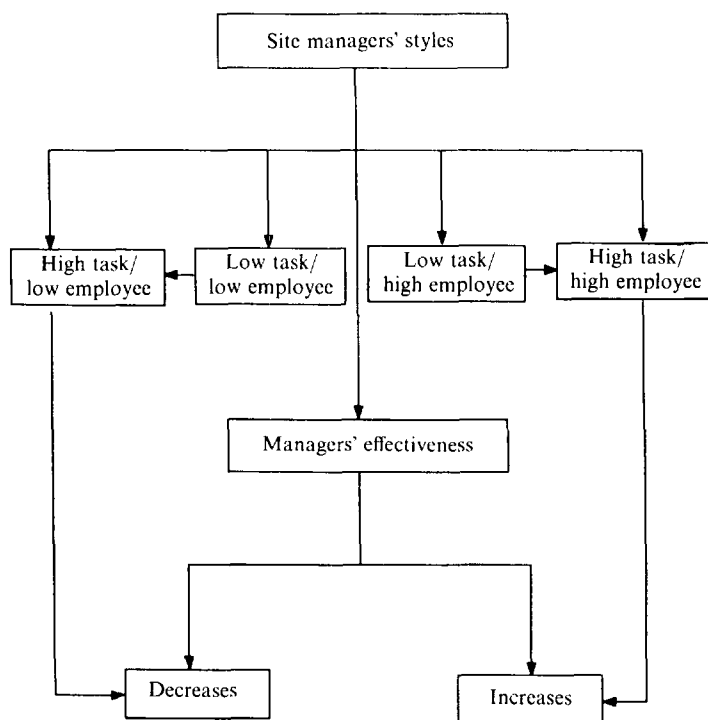
MODEL 1 :

Fig. 4. The relationship between managers' styles and their effectiveness.

Although the result seems to be obvious, it brings to light an important concept which has not so far been empirically recognized or examined in the construction management field when several cultures are involved in one project. The finding provides an indication of the kind of managerial style which is likely to be more effective in a multi-cultural setting than others.

The present findings lend weight to Blake and Mouton's (1964) postulation, that is, the category of high task/high relations is the most effective style as managers build a cohesive and responsive work team. The results also lend support to Lansley *et al.*'s (1974) finding that the most successful companies are the ones with a high task/high people orientation. The results also lend partial support to Bresnen *et al.*'s (1986) finding that emphasis on relationships is more likely to prove effective.

A possible interpretation for the present results is that managers need to be friendly, accessible, and understanding of their subordinates' personalities and requirements as differences in culture may impose more sensitivity on the type of relationship and communication with all employees on a project; this logical argument is in line with behavioural science. In addition, managers also have to be task oriented in order to have control over the process of the work in order to achieve the company target. However, it is worth recording that our findings are not congruent with several scholars, among them Larson and Nystrom.

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Appendix A

1. To what extent would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

	Strongly agree 1	Agree 2	Undecided 3	Disagree 4	Strongly disagree 5
a. I try to practise close supervision to reduce unexpected errors.	1	2	3	4	5
b. I try to put emphasis in getting out a lot of work.	1	2	3	4	5
c. I try to be as friendly and approachable to my subordinates as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
d. I try to hold meetings for discussing work force problems.	1	2	3	4	5
e. I try to use threats and punishments to encourage good work.	1	2	3	4	5
f. I try to insist work force come to work exactly on time.	1	2	3	4	5
g. I try to make my subordinates as satisfied as possible with their work.	1	2	3	4	5
h. I try to encourage good work through my friendship with my employees.	1	2	3	4	5
i. I try to be as fair and equal as I can in my dealings with subordinates.	1	2	3	4	5
j. I encourage subordinates to feel that they can come to me with their personal problems.	1	2	3	4	5
k. I expect subordinates to follow instructions without debate.	1	2	3	4	5
l. I try to keep a close eye on my subordinates' work, to make sure that they understand the instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
m. I allow subordinates to adopt work methods as they see fit, to get the job done.	1	2	3	4	5

n. I have little tolerance of   1   2   3   4   5
   subordinates who question
   instructions or deviate from
   instructions.

2. From the following list would you *rank* what you see as *the four most important qualities* that make an effective site manager?

a. Ability to plan, organize and schedule work	1	2	3	4
b. High technical ability	1	2	3	4
c. Ability to get on well with people	1	2	3	4
d. Willingness to listen to and elicit others' suggestions, and opinions	1	2	3	4
e. Ability to be tactful and diplomatic	1	2	3	4
f. Enthusiasm for the work	1	2	3	4
g. Understanding cultural variation within the work force	1	2	3	4
h. Ability to cope with stress and deal with uncertainty	1	2	3	4
i. Understanding the work force languages (e.g. English, Arabic, French)	1	2	3	4
j. Other (please specify)				
....	1	2	3	4
....	1	2	3	4
....	1	2	3	4

3. Do you think that your effectiveness changes when managing a multi-cultural work team?

(Please tick for 'yes')

1. Decreases significantly   ☐
2. Decreases slightly   ☐
3. No change   ☐
4. Increases slightly   ☐
5. Increases significantly   ☐