

## A Brief History Of Management

By Andrew Leach, MBA

Did you know the study of management has been around for at least 2500 years? In this article, I will briefly discuss the history of management and, as usual, will offer a First Nations perspective on this important topic.

About 2500 years ago, a Chinese general named Sun Tzu, wrote an astounding piece of work "The Art of War." In his book, Sun Tzu acknowledged the need for inter-organizational communications, hierarchy and staff planning.

A little later, between 400-360 BC, Socrates and Aristotle, two Greek philosophers, wrote about the principles of management and the nature of executive power.

In the Middle East, around 1300 AD, ibn Taymiyyah outlined an approach to administration using the scientific method in "The Principles of Religious Government."

In North America, for thousands of years, First Nations and Native Americans used management principles and concepts in many areas, including forestry, fisheries, land use and government. For example, the Potlatch system required a complex set of management tools, including planning, organizing, monitoring, and regulating.

Because First Nations had oral cultures, our management principles were passed down from generation to generation orally and through socialization, using ceremonies, for example.

Later, in 1532, Machiavelli, an Italian, wrote "The Prince," a bold piece of work that discussed the practical use of power. The term "Machiavellian" is used today to describe a ruthless way to get and keep power.

In the 1700s, the Industrial Revolution started. With the explosion of industry, came a wave of new management writers, mostly from Europe and the United States. The basis for their works is largely rooted in ancient Western thinking. Generally speaking, Western thought assumes we can control the world through reasoning and science. This is known as the "classic" management view.

By the 1900s, people started seeing the limitations of classic management thinking. Management based solely on reasoning and science was missing a critical ingredient: the human factor. Thus, by the 1950s, management concepts like Maslow's hierarchy of basic human needs were popping up.



Andrew Leach is from the St'at'imc Nation (Lillooet, BC) and has a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). He also operates a successful management consulting business, and welcomes feedback to his articles.

[andrew@andrewleach.com](mailto:andrew@andrewleach.com) | 604.868.4004  
[www.andrewleach.com](http://www.andrewleach.com)

Suite 200-100 Park Royal,  
West Vancouver, BC, Canada V7T 1A2

By the 1980s, Americans started examining Japan's approach to management. Japan is a fascinating case study in "how to build an economy." After being totally devastated by World War II, Japan recovered and quickly grew into a leading industrial power. By the late 1980s, 53 of the top 100 companies in the world were Japanese.

The Americans learned very quickly that Japanese management had a different way of working. Specifically, the Japanese emphasize teamwork and employee development, and give workers an environment to do quality work.

Since the 1980s, many North American companies have tried to incorporate various Japanese management principles. However, one challenge to this approach is that Japanese and Western cultures are, in many respects, fundamentally different. The 1980s movie Gung-Ho dramatized the challenges of blending Eastern and Western cultures into a single company.

In comparing Eastern, Western and Native American thought, it is clear that Eastern concepts are much more compatible with First Nations principles. For example, Eastern principles emphasize the importance of relationships and the interconnectedness of all things.

Interestingly, many of today's leading Western writers are pushing for a more non-Western approach to management. For example, in his bestseller "The Fifth Discipline," Peter Senge advocates for a complete change in Western managerial thinking. He calls this new worldview systems thinking, which sounds like a First Nations concept, if you ask me!

There are other signs that Western companies are trying to become more holistic. Hot topics in management today include concepts like 360-degree feedback, servant-leadership, social capital, and spirituality in the workforce. I believe the rising interest in these kinds of topics signifies that the West wants a more meaningful approach to work and management.

Fitting many Western management concepts into First Nations organizations is like "trying to fit a square peg into a round hole." In examining the history of management, three things are apparent:

1. All cultures have developed their own management principles based on their own worldview.
2. The First Nations worldview is fundamentally different than the Western worldview.
3. First Nations today need to develop their own explicit management principles, consistent with their own worldview.



Andrew Leach is from the St'at'imc Nation (Lillooet, BC) and has a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA). He also operates a successful management consulting business, and welcomes feedback to his articles.

[andrew@andrewleach.com](mailto:andrew@andrewleach.com) | 604.868.4004  
[www.andrewleach.com](http://www.andrewleach.com)

Suite 200-100 Park Royal,  
West Vancouver, BC, Canada V7T 1A2