

Management

The older generation of Mexican managers grew up and was trained in a highly protected environment in which the economic role of the state was paramount. Many of them may still work for large traditional companies that have yet to introduce modern administrative techniques or change their method of operations. Such companies may be slow to recognize that their environment is changing and that they must change with it.

There is, however, a younger generation of managers that is increasingly influencing the course of events. Many members of this generation have been trained outside Mexico at prestigious management schools. They are bright and energetic administrators who are well versed in the latest management techniques. It is not uncommon for them to put in long hours implementing some of the more innovative approaches to manufacturing, quality assurance and organizational development. Many of these managers are to be found in the large, innovative and sophisticated corporations that are at the leading edge of Mexico's economic transformation.

Mexico, like Canada, also benefits from a large and growing number of small-and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses include traditional family-owned food stands, small retail outlets and manufacturing operations. They also include a growing number of enterprises specializing in trade and commercial services, marketing and consulting. Many of these businesses are characterized by an entrepreneurial energy that reflect a traditional determination to survive adversity, as well as a contemporary recognition of the need to adapt to a more dynamic and competitive environment.

Management styles differ vastly in Canada and Mexico. A sensitivity to this disparity in methods of conducting business is necessary for a successful working relationship in Mexico. Canadian business people with experience in this market cite a number of management issues as critical elements:

- It often takes two or three times longer than anticipated to get things done. Patience and stamina are required virtues on the part of foreign business representatives.
- Mexican managers take a more paternalistic approach to management and problem-solving than do Canadians. One of the outcomes of this approach is that employees will remain silent about a manager's errors or omissions.

- Workplace hierarchies and traditions may make it difficult to encourage decision-making at lower levels.
- Mexican managers need special encouragement and training to instil a sense of responsibility for cost-efficiency in the operations they manage.
- Hiring is usually done through professional recruitment offices, through word of mouth and through family and other connections. Statistics point to a continuing shortage of middle management skills.
- Foreign companies that have set up operations in Mexico have found that it is tremendously important to put a Mexican face on the management of their enterprises.

The strength of Mexican managers lies in their ability to establish and maintain harmonious relations with both superiors and subordinates. Their weakness consists in the inability to make decisions and in an excessive reliance on those above them to do so. Generally, Mexican middle-managers concentrate on implementing decisions rather than planning. They tend to resolve conflicts by referring to authority and hierarchy rather than by establishing consensus.