

# Management and Organizations in the Chinese Context

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## 10 Teamwork in China: Where Reality Challenges Theory and Practice<sup>1</sup>

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This chapter examines theoretical and conceptual issues concerning teamwork in China. We discuss the increasing importance of teamwork in China's business organizations and its relationship to the changing Chinese culture and economic environment. By placing teamwork in China in a cross-cultural context, we develop a conceptual model and associated propositions describing how individual attitudes and values influence teamwork.

Are Chinese people willing to work in teams? What factors will motivate or inhibit their doing so? These questions have become increasingly significant as China's management practices and employee relations are undergoing considerable changes at the end of the twentieth century. At the core of these transformations is the extent to which Chinese companies have absorbed and adopted Western management principles and practices. Since teamwork has been widely practised and found to be generally effective in Western companies, especially US companies, many Western companies hope to use teamwork in China. Motorola has taken a lead in introducing teamwork in China by putting 80 to 90 per cent of the employees at its Tianjin plant into teams; the plant also fielded four entries among the 24 finalist teams at the worldwide finals of Motorola's Total Customer Satisfaction (TCS) competition in 1998 (Sheridan, 1998). However, there is little evidence to show how well teams will be received in China, given its very different cultural traditions.

To fill this void in the literature, we have launched a teamwork study in United States-invested enterprises (USIEs) in China. This chapter presents the theoretical model for the study. We begin by discussing the increasing importance of teamwork for Chinese management and its