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# CHANCE, CHOICE, AND OPPORTUNITY: EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR MANAGEMENT

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin\*

## *Part 1*

### *Abstract*

*This account offers students and professionals, thoughts on useful strategies in management situations based on the author's life experiences. Since the majority of the readers of Management Dynamics come from India and Southeast Asia, the remarks are directed with them in mind but they could be applied elsewhere as well.*

*The author's career trajectory was not planned. Although 90 percent happened by chance, chance was not entirely random but led to choice and opportunity. 10 percent was devoted to strategic planning and preparation. Her expertise lies not in management studies but in the field of ethnomusicology, that is, a process for studying not only the music itself but also the study of music in its cultural context.*

*The essay is divided into three parts. Observations about the author's life experiences are illustrated in Part 1 consisting of a series of brief vignettes elucidating events that shaped her thinking. Taking place between the years 1890 and 2009, these events offer commentary about historical precedents and family influences, discriminatory practices, mentors, incidents of chance and opportunity, the politics of political correctness, gender issues, and new directions in research.*

## **FOREWORD**

*Quite unexpectedly, I received in the post a rather thick packet from Dr. Magoroh Maruyama, who is on the editorial board of the journal Management Dynamics. In his cover letter, he referred to me as an 'outbreeder' or one who does not always conform to societal expectations,*

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*inferring I may have encountered difficulties that needed resolution in order to achieve equanimity. What he perceived as my rather unusual background prompted him to write to me asking if I would consider contributing to this journal. Intrigued, he felt I could offer students and professionals my thoughts on useful strategies in management situations based on my life experiences. Dr. Maruyama communicated his interest to Professor Subrata Chakraborty, Juipuria Institute of Management in Lucknow, India who in turn asked me to submit an essay. As I am not versed in the field of management and its terminology, it took me a while to think about what I would write, how to write it, and for whom I would write it. Since the majority of the readers come from India and Southeast Asia, my remarks are directed with them in mind but they could be applied elsewhere as well.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

What prompted me to become an ethnomusicologist, university lecturer, author, editor, and Executive Director of a private music research institute that publishes books? To answer this question, one would need to refer to a statement made by Anthropologist Kenneth Gourlay who said of his field work in Nigeria: 10 percent lay in three fieldwork objectives—limit one’s fieldwork area, compile a list of different types of music with the aim of obtaining representative samples of each, and spend time doing in-depth research of and living among a selected group of people. The remaining 90 percent is due to luck or chance. His “best” recording of female songs among the Karimojong was entirely due to chance rather than any strategic plan to obtain female songs. (Kimberlin 1999: 19-20, 24, 32).

Like the case of Gourlay, my career trajectory also was not planned because 90 percent happened by chance. But chance is not entirely random since it can lead to choice and opportunity plus factoring in 10 percent for strategic planning and preparation. My expertise lies not in management studies with its accompanying theories and textbook knowledge but rather in the field of

ethnomusicology. I have a background in music, became a specialist in African music, and have authored over sixty articles and edited or co-edited eight books relating to comparative music studies, ethics, biography, intercultural music, traditional music and modern art music in Africa, and the impact of war on music.

This essay accompanied by commentary is divided into three parts. Observations about my life experiences are illustrated in Part 1 and Part 2. Using a loosely chronological autobiographical format and overlapping timeline, Part 1 is a series of brief vignettes elucidating events that shaped my thinking. Individual names and precise locations are omitted for privacy considerations and are not germane to this discussion. Part 2 is a revised version of a talk I originally presented to the Library of Congress Asian American Association in 2002 in Washington, D.C.<sup>1</sup> In contrast to Part 1; Part 2 provides place and institutional names when necessary. It is an account of my two-year tenure as a US Peace Corps Volunteer and subsequent visits to Ethiopia as a US election observer, Fulbright lecturer/researcher, and conferee. It focuses on circumstances in which I found myself and how I dealt with it as an outsider and as an American of Chinese descent living and working in Africa. I also allude to aspects of my Peace Corps experience in Part 1 as they pertain to issues not clarified in Part 2. And occasionally I make references about events occurring on dates not indicated within the specified timeframe for they were relevant to the discussion at hand. Part 3 is a list of twelve observations generated by my remarks made in Parts 1 and 2 that might prove useful in management discussions.

What follows illustrates realities as I perceived them, by what I experienced, how I felt, and what I was thinking at that time. I shall describe the choices I made that helped circumvent obstacles and generate opportunity.

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<sup>1</sup>*This celebratory anniversary was in honor of the founding of the US Peace Corps, postponed from the year before due to the September 11, 2001 attack, and took place in 2002 at their annual national conference at the same time as my talk, both in Washington, D.C. A copy of my original unpublished talk is currently housed in the Green Library's Special Collections, Stanford University, California, USA*