As we have proposed and concluded in Chapter 6, there is probably more to say about further lines of research in management thinking than a normative theoretical conclusion. Writing this book, and the process the authors went through in doing so, brought out typical situations where ‘West meets East’. For example: (1) the Westerners in our team (See Chapter 1 Appendix) sought a general framework and, if possible, a well worked-out plan, whereas the Asians felt comfortable with a general guideline directing their attention towards a specific final objective but sometimes ambiguous sub-objectives; and, (2) therefore, process-based Asian thinking was seen as chaotic or lacking in purposefulness by the Westerners, and precision and the emphasis on planning and following models by the Westerners were viewed as rigid and inflexible. Deduction and induction did, however, provide creative tensions that served as catalysts for further examination.

With the intention of understanding some of the differences between East and West, specifically regarding management phenomena, we identified the origin of such differences in the different philosophical backgrounds, giving rise to epistemological and cognitive thought processes which are eventually reflected as different cultures between these two cultural blocs in our living world. More concretely, we posit it as a penchant to tend either towards inductive or deductive thinking, which is the central theme of this book.

The literature was conscientiously reviewed in search of relevant information on philosophy in general and epistemology in particular, as well as on cognitive psychology and cross-cultural management studies to determine current knowledge about these differences and facilitate further understanding of the differences in approaching inductive or deductive decision-making processes by Westerners and Asians.

We also undertook a search for real-life examples, illustrating with eight cases written on entrepreneurs and ‘actors’ from both the West and Asia. The examples that we chose are not limited to specialists in management, but also include military and medical professionals in order to provide a wider set of
Conclusions and Discussions

141

exemplars. Industry-wise, they cover areas such as IT, banking, distribution, the military and health. Geographically, they are evenly divided between Asia and the West. In addition, we believe that they are also relatively evenly divided between what we would term ‘inductive’ vs. ‘deductive’ approaches to management. Essentially, the cases selected offer a richness of information and facilitate thought-provoking analyses by our readers.

To further strengthen our research, we approach the issue quantitatively by conducting a survey on the different cognition processes between Westerners and Asians, adopting and modifying several studies conducted by linguistic psychologists in the US and Japan (see Annex 1). We centred on the individuation of objects by respondents, based on the assumption that the individuation process is a method that can be used to distinguish between inductive and deductive thinkers.

Induction and deduction

The central topic of this book addresses inductive and deductive thinking in management, based on a series of observed phenomena in diverse management decision-making situations. Our objective has been to highlight some patterns we find interesting through this research process, and encourage further reflection on the differences in epistemological thought processes in managerial decision-making by Westerners and Asians. Our aim was to improve understanding of different management practices based on different philosophies, epistemologies, cognitions and cultures. Hopefully, this improved understanding would foster better management theory development by integrating the best of both.

In relation to the philosophies underpinning the view of inductive and deductive management we have defined in Chapter 1, as well as the literature review chapters and the case analysis and theoretical frameworks proposed in Chapter 6, we can conclude that Asian managers have a tendency inductively to process information in such a way that they pursue a highly abstractive idea for their decision-making processes and to guide their actions. Meanwhile, Western managers tend to apply established patterns, approaches and categories to deliberate on their decisions and strategy implementation, as is typical of the deductive Western approach used to teach most MBA programmes.

As we will further discuss later in this chapter, we do not propose a generalized rule. On some occasions, decisions made by Asians do not fit the plausible rational behaviour outcome predicted by business models, business dicta and accepted wisdom. However, on other occasions, Asians do apply learning-from-Westerners business models to systematically approach certain managerial issues, such as in the case of Hua Wei, where Western consultants were invited to implement different systems in various areas. The success of MBA programmes in Asia is also changing this pattern. Neither are all Asians completely inductive thinkers, nor are