**SCMP Article**

 **Can Carrie wow with style and substance?**

I realise that there was a lot of cynicism about last Sunday’s chief executive election. We all know that the “small circle” voting process does not have widespread credibility in the community.

However, as campaign director for the winning candidate, Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor, I can say that the run-up to the election involved a lot of hard work. Indeed, I think this was the case with all of the candidates’ campaigns.

It was clear to us that we had to reach out not only to the Election Committee, but also to the whole of Hong Kong. We needed to win over a majority – and preferably a sizable one – of the 1,194 votes of the Election Committee. Cynics may say that the 777 votes that Carrie eventually won were all automatic or handed to us on a plate, but this result involved a lot of effort. At the same time, we seriously wanted to get support from the seven million people of Hong Kong. This was also a challenge, and most public opinion polls showed Carrie coming second in the popularity ratings.

The 2½-month campaign was a learning curve for all of us.

In theory, it should not be too difficult to lobby for votes from just under 1,200 members of the Election Committee. In practice, it is impossible to address the committee as a single group.

It is a small body, so every individual vote counts. Yet the body is splintered into 38 subsectors, many of which are fairly narrow constituencies. Every candidate must visit all of them, listen to their concerns and give them reasons why they should back him or her.

This electorate is not simply split into two or three broad factions. Many of these groups have very specific positions on issues to do with their industries or professions. Quite a few have very detailed demands. In some cases, the demands are impossible to meet. And some are contradictory. For example, some business groups want the government to ease up on the importation of overseas workers, while labour groups are totally opposed to the very same thing.

Many pro-democrats obviously put a high priority on demands for constitutional reform. But some mainly pan-democratic groups also push their own professional or other interests. For example, teachers had specific – and I would say very real – concerns about their working conditions.

Our attempts to reach out to the broader community proved to be a very different sort of challenge. There are certain issues that we know concern the public as a whole. Probably the majority of Hong Kong people agree that we need to make progress on economic opportunities, the cost of housing, the education system or air quality.

All candidates understood this. I am fairly sure that Carrie’s policy proposals on these issues were at least as good as those of her rivals. But most of the public opinion polls showed that John Tsang Chun-wah achieved higher approval ratings.

Tsang had a relatively laid-back image, which obviously helped him from the beginning. He emphasised some vague but popular notions, such as putting Hong Kong first. Most of all, he came across as the underdog. The perception that Beijing officials favoured Carrie actually helped him.

The lesson here is that image counts for a lot. Substance alone is not enough.

Despite very hard work by her campaign, Carrie did not get the votes of important parts of the Election Committee, notably middle-class professional groups. And she did not succeed in winning over a majority in the public opinion polls, especially among the young.

It is impossible to be popular with absolutely everyone but, once in office, Carrie will need to move fast to win the confidence of at least some of the doubters. She will need to deliver in terms of competent, responsive governance and policies that serve the interests of the broad community. And she will need to unite a divided society and establish a more inclusive style of leadership.

I can understand why many people are sceptical. But I am personally sure Carrie will prove to the community that she deserves her victory.