

The Way of the Sword: Japanese Way of Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a status that has always been one of the most wanted, most powerful positions; its prestige is unquestionable, however the immensely high responsibility factor is inseparable from the person who is labeled as a leader. Any mistake that a leader makes has a cumulative impact, affecting each and every person whom the leader is responsible of. The situation of the market and the economy are directly related to how severe the aftermath may be for the leader and his people. In prospering situations the affect of a mistake is relatively lower then in hard economic, market situations. The situations, in other words outside influences, such as the market situation or the economic conditions in the countries of operation, are autonomous factors that the leader has no manipulative power on.

The core and the greatest tool that a leader possesses is himself; his character, and qualities. A leader is obliged to be worthy of respect for his adherents, no matter how diverse their beliefs or backgrounds may be. Above all, leadership requires calmness and decisiveness, which are emotional qualities, under any circumstance. One thing that a leader can not afford to be is unbalanced. The effective boss is the type of leader that allows communication with his adherents, which requires him/her to be extroverted, and agreeable. This also builds up the amount of mutual trust that he arouses. Once it's evident that he/she is fully aware of the facts that he/she should constantly inform and listen to others and empathize with others, it is inevitable for him to arouse such feelings in his followers. The knowledge that he/she possesses, along with the intelligence to use that knowledge, allows him to teach others. Whilst a leader is a mentor, he/she should also acknowledge that he/she should also be the pupil at times. This will be a factor that will suggest togetherness within the organization, proving him/her to be open to new ideas and experiences. The level of knowledge of the outside world, whether through intuition or awareness, or through both, that a leader has should be high enough to allow strategic insight. He/she should have the ability to identify both opportunities and threats, and should even be able to predict possible situations. The leader should communicate both the threats and the goals with the clearest language possible with his/her employees, this will enable him/her to achieve a complete understanding within the firm of the short-term or long-term future. If one is without energy, the strategic insights become useless. The existence of a constant alertness to commit is vital in the good manager equation. If the insight and the energy exist at the same time, an air of unity and reliability will be secured within the organization.

II. PARTICIPATIVE ORGANIZATION

The manager may have the authority in its most absolute form, but one should keep in mind the representative and cumulative power that the personnel have within an organization. In order to have control the manager is supposed to know the source of this power and its practice. The source of this power is clearly the result of popularity among those who are managed. An example of this power's exercise would be a strike that is decided by the managed.

In an organization where one sees a participative form of management, acceptance is the keyword. In order for the jobs to be carried out the workers are to agree to undergo the requirements of their work and take full responsibility of the output of their work. The manager, in this case, is expected to cooperate with the laborers and clear their way to their assigned goals. The goals should be clearly defined in this case and the satisfaction that the workers get must be ensured in order to achieve a constant level of quality in their outputs. All levels of management participate in the decision making process, adopting the organization's goals as their own. It's the upper management's duty to guarantee that employees realize their goals and the responsibilities that come along with them. In Japan the greatest fear is loosing face; instead of prioritizing the economical dependency, the workers tend to focus on their image. The success of this type of organization lies in setting the boundaries participation of the members of the organization in the decision making process and balancing the power between the management and the workers effectively and efficiently.

III. AUTHORITARIAN ORGANIZATION

Looking back in the history of mankind, authority has always played a major role in the lives of human beings. The power of divinity, nature, kings, aristocracy and so on has forced people into obedience and into accepting the authorities of these certain bodies. In business the authority is given to those who possess the power of ownership of the means of production, which in other words is the ownership of one or the few over a source of wealth that the lives of many depend on. Orders in this type of organizations are of descending nature, making their way from the top down in the chain of command. The manager under these circumstances does not take into consideration many aspects concerning how the work is done, the emphasis is on the work being done regardless of the path that workers follow to do it. Therefore, the manager agrees to have less responsibilities and stronger demands. 'Dependency' in this case is the key word; the workers being aware of the punishment of dismissal, which in other words is unemployment, see the level of threat that the authority figure has on them and the economic impact that the punishment will have. The unemployment level is directly related to the extent of fear of authority, as one rises the other does as well. From an authoritarian perspective in order to achieve an effective and efficient amount of production, with a certain quality, the threat level should either remain high or increase, and there should be absolute dependency coming from the workers. Dictatorial organizations function remarkably under situations of external threat. Since there is no tolerance for mistakes, people tend to avoid making any decisions. Trust diminishes, leaving its place to blame that constantly travels within the members of the organization.

IV. THE JAPANESE WAY

A. Way of Life

Japanese have distinct ways when in comparison to other nations of the orient. They are much wealthier, and portray a highly harmonious societal picture. Every Japanese individual has common traits which are the pride they embed, prosperity they achieve, the hard-working characteristic, and the selflessness they have. These are values that are dated back to the concepts of their centuries old traditions. Mainly the sources of these traditional values are religions and philosophies that the nation has adopted throughout centuries. The teachings of Shinto, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have woven into their way of life and all together these have emphasized on harmonious relations among the members of the society and on belonging in a family and a family.

Japanese have a tendency to exercise any philosophy or belief that they believe may contribute to the well-being of the society at large. Any system that may be suitable for a given situation is welcome and will be amalgamated into their way of life in the most harmonious way. A very effective example for this is that Japanese may choose to exercise both Shinto and Buddhism at the same time, and in reality this is the case in most individuals. The occidental ways have pulled the curiosity of the Japanese by the success that it brought into the lives of the westerners. The scientific, cause and effect view of the world seemed to have had a positive impact on the society at large. As a result to the above equation they decided to add the Western ingredient. This need was mainly felt due to the fear of becoming obsolete as a culture and being swallowed by the dynamic world. The "gaijin", as they call foreigners, his way of life, and their admiration of the "gaijin" does not change the fact that they are foreigners. Japanese have a tendency to avoid close contact with foreigners. They perceive the "gaijin" with an odd combination of feelings, they fear them but at the same time they appreciate them.

The Japanese began building an industrialized nation. Manufacturing being the core of this move, today they are proud to be a nation which has been known as one of the most industrialized nations of the world for more than a century. Leisure time is not common in Japan. The Japanese, being among the countries that have the highest income per capita, spend little for pleasure and have very little leisure time due to their hardworking nature. In Japan it's mainly about work.

B. Individuals vs. Environments

Japanese are strikingly humanist. Whether it seems insincere or sincere they tend to live for the harmony of their society. Relationships between individuals are carried out harmoniously and the individual desires end up diminishing for a greater cause. They are,

always, members of a group; may it be a family, a company or a nation they always act with the spirit of teamwork. Being extremely competitive by culture, they perceive other groups mostly as their enemies or possible threats. The main purpose of working in teams is to surpass and to triumph over others. It is evident when one from the west observes the society in Japan that as citizens the whole Japanese nation has been trying to outdo the Western nations in economic success. This is merely an outcome of the management techniques, which have been exercised for over a century, that aim at developing and increasing the workers' competitive skills. The test of skills of the samurai of the 14th century in kendo, the way of the sword, suggests a somewhat similar sense of competition (Musashi 3). All resources are at the individual's service, both the pen and the sword, which is in contrast with the western belief of the pen being mightier than the sword (Musashi 3).

For the sake of teamwork, the inner desires of individuals in Japan are repressed and the aftermath of this usually is alcoholism or depression. The annual suicide rate in the country is as many as 30,000 people. This is a huge number, and indicates deep, inner problems among individuals. The actions that are against social norms are rarely tolerated and are mostly severely punished. The main source of punishment, oddly, is the individual himself/herself. Improvement of the society is believed to be achieved through the perfection of the self; therefore if the individual makes a mistake he/she not only disqualifies himself/herself but the society at large. In Japan the goal of an individual is to be one with his/her society, while in the west the point of concentration is to prove oneself unique.

C. Dignity

A very unique characteristic of the Japanese is their inability to say "no". This comes from the belief that refusal is a source of shame and loss of face for an individual in the society. Having face is a matter of honor in Japan and is one of the most important ingredients in the formation of an individual and his/her existence in the social and business life. Japanese work very hard to earn their personal dignity and work hard to keep it. Failing to meet any expectation, which includes saying "no", means a loss in one's dignity. Instead of directly saying "no" Japanese have devised other expressions that may not sound like a "no" to a westerner. Some examples of these substitutes may be as follows: inconvenient, under consideration, and any phrase that starts with a "yes" but is followed by a "but". In the business environment this causes confusion. An addition to this confusion is the fact that the Japanese have a tendency to tell a person what they think the person would like them to say, which is done with the purest of intentions but nonetheless may seem insincere to most westerners.

D. Women

Women, on paper, are given equal rights in Japan. But when one observes the issue from a traditional standpoint, women have certain traditional obligations to meet. They are expected to raise the children and devote themselves to them until they reach a certain age. The country's success is believed to pass through the education that the mother gives to her children. She is held responsible for any problem that may take place in her family, if anything goes astray men take little responsibility. Since women are responsible of many decisions concerning their families, decisions such as education, careers, budget and life style, she is not given the efficient space to exist in the business environment. In the social and business arena male superiority is very evident; women receive lower salaries than men do for the same work. It is very rare to see a woman in top management, which says a lot about the attitude towards women and the importance that is given to them in the business environment.

E. Japanese Business

Employees of middle-level and lower-level management begin the decision making process. This gives a lot of responsibility to the workers for they are expected to participate in the most vital element of the business cycle which is the decision making process. The process starts in lower-level management, ascends to middle management and from there passes on to the top. This slows down the process and the length varies but is mostly a long one. Evidently Japanese flow of information is first of ascending and then of descending nature, since the suggestions and ideas are offered to the top management, it is timely for them to be put in practice. This system allows top management to keep clear and close track of the internal situation of the organization. The decision making process gives immense

importance to middle-level managers. They embrace the senior executives with the workers in the organization. This requires them to be in constant contact with the both and to flow the information effectively and efficiently in order to achieve a fast circulation within the company.

The employees are granted with lifetime employment, a retirement program that is very effective in gaining the trust of the workers by the senior management. This is closely related to the success that the Japanese gained in the business arena, fascinating other nations. Their success is recognized with their ability to develop employee loyalty, improve productivity, and to constantly improve production quality.

All employees look up to top management. The executives are expected to help the workers concerning any obstacle that they may be faced with through their knowledge and assistance. They need to be encouraging, motivating leaders for they are perceived as role models by workers at all levels of the organization. The management is expected to introduce and clearly state the company's visions and should constantly emphasize the moral purpose, which is a very effective way of maintaining ethical actions in all levels of the organization.

V. CONCLUSION

Today this Japanese picture is in danger due to the effects of globalization on business environments. Recently the growth of Japanese businesses have slowed down remarkably and forced the executives to consider some other alternatives instead of their old ways; they do see that change is necessary. The competitive strength that they had can be rejuvenated through adjusting their business system to the global business system. Even though authoritarian system is strongly against their business understanding, the level of effectiveness it has in the decision making process can not be undermined. The participative way slows down that process immensely and therefore ebbs the dynamic circulation of decisions. The authoritarian way on the other hand is known for its efficiency in emergency situations. In the long run the authoritarian approach brings great losses such as an increasing level of unemployment and inflation, but in the short-term it works. The solution is in the exercise of a balanced management style which embeds both participative and authoritarian approaches.

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