

Some Peculiarities of the Japanese Management’s Model

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Abstract

The Japanese management is to a significant extent, a reflection of the country’s cultural peculiarities. The article intends to review some of the specific elements of the Japanese management system, which, on the one hand, underlie the performance Japanese companies, and on the other hand, differentiate it from the management systems practiced in other countries.

Key words: culture, team, kaizen, Japan, management

J.E.L. classification: M10, M14

1. Introduction

The so-called "Japanese miracle" manifested in the early 1970’s, aroused a real and widespread interest in the management of Japanese enterprises. Thus, regarding the fast development, the economic success that Japan has achieved, the specialists highlight three points of view, each of them being solidly argued (Burduş, 2017, p.233):

- the first point of view is based on the “cultural argument” and it supports the idea of the country’s uniqueness and the fact that the same managerial practices used in other parts of the world will not lead to similar results. Japanese culture it is homogenous and the cultural peculiarities influence significantly influence the managerial practices;
- the second point of view is based on the “the super-human’s theory” in Japan. He created some important values, based on his desire to excel, to surpass himself, to be, simply, the best;
- in the context of the third point of view, which is the most widespread, it is considered that the application of the management’s principles it is characterized by a flawless adaptability to this country’s cultural, economic and social realities.

2. Theoretical background

The Japanese management it is characterized by a set of behaviors, of which the following elements stand out (Zait, p.263):

- an efficient manager, in Japan mostly relies on the ability to understand its subordinates, employees. The manager is aware that he is not working with robots, but with unique people, with different abilities, skills and needs;
- the manager must be interested in reducing the number of conflict situations and of the tension among the employees, even if, it is well known that every time people work in a group there are or could emerge certain conflicts;
- the managers must allow to their subordinates - perceived as a fundamental part of the enterprise, to show and express their loyalty.

A specific aspect of the Japanese’ enterprise management it is represented by the fact that “the human resources are the enterprise’s most important resources” (Toma, 2004, p.66). The soul and the organization’s performance is built by people, which are loyal to the company's performance, to its future and for whom, the efficiency and the work excellency is a desideratum. The aversion that Japan has developed toward the idea of “failure” it is due to the lack of natural resources and space. Under these circumstances, the efficiency and the work excellency represent an objective necessity

(Moldoveanu, 2015, p.429), and the "quality" of workers represent the main concern in the Japanese companies. Thus, Japanese managers main concerne is bringing into the company with the best employees and also continuous training of the employees (Iamandi, 2020, p.69). It is known that the employees should be treated as a major strategic investment, that the human capital it is considered to be an investment chapter for the organization's further development. But, at the same time, the human resources' investments are also with a high level of risk and any resignation from the organization by the employee's own choice, it represents an lost investment. However (Burduş, 2017b, p.286), unlike the western organizations, in Japanese organizations the staff mobility is low. However, many experts believe that mobility will increase.

The Japanese consider that the teamwork it is more importance than the individual. The spirit of cooperation and collaboration it is rooted in the history of many Japanese companies. In fact, the Japanese work and play in groups, being focused on the group and it seems that the group is a source of happiness. The family is the origin of this feeling of collective behavior and as P. Varley shows "any rejection or non-compliance phenomenon to it raises for the Japanese the most serious problems related to its role in society as a whole." (Varley, 2017 , p.382). Psychologically, the vast majority of Japanese do not have a single family, but two. To the classic family it is attached the other one, the one represented by the community created inside the organization and in which the employees integrate. For the Japanese, both families are of great importance and describe a balanced universe, in which their lives unfold (Herciu, 2007, p.118). The team has become today, due to increasing complexity and change, the functional unity of many organizations around the world. Instead of employees to be responsible for segregate tasks, were set groups in which individuals combine their efforts, knowledge and skills to achieve the common goals. In order for organizations to be innovative also the teams must have this quality, being easily adaptable and especially creative. Among the many advantages of this forms of association, we emphasize the following:

- the global result of the teamwork exceeds the amount of individual contributions;
- increasing the decisions' performance through the results of cooperation;
- continuous improvement of the activity, but also the motivation as a result of the team work performance;
- decrease the working time;
- better adaptation to the customers' requirements and the effects of change;
- in many situations, innovation and creativity in general, occurs more easily inside the teams;
- specialists are trained faster and better inside the teams etc.

One of the most important Japanese management's concepts it is Kaizen. The Kaizen concept explains why, in Japan, nothing can remain static for too long. Kaizen is a process and in the same time, an aspect of everyday life, and its complex purpose exceeds the limits of simple improvement of productivity. (Butnaru, 2014, p.75) Therefore, positive change must be approached as a continuous process and any progress matters, no matter how small.

It is considered that (Harley, 2020, p.14) the Kaizen philosophy can be perceived as a result of the confluence between East and West, to which is owed, to a great extent, the success achieved by Japanese companies, starting with the second half of the XX- th century. Thus, the method has its origins in the United States of America, during the Second World War, when occurred and were recorded some problems with the innovation and support of the effort of war which the organizations faced. A very strong accent (Harley, 2020, p.16) "was placed on the already existing workforce, which observed the work practices and suggested the improvement methods and means instead of being led by the supervisors." And while many American companies no longer needed to rely on continuous improvement programs once the war ended, they were adopted by the Japanese. Kaizen was the name that the Japanese gave to the new managerial technique of continuous improvement and that the Japanese companies adopted with great enthusiasm.

In the work "Kaizen: The Key to Japan's Competitive Success", Masaaki Imai highlights the idea that the kaizen method is the equivalent of the progressive attitude towards Japanese change and an extension of the Japanese cultural value system. He concludes that "the key difference between the way Americans understand change, on the one hand, and the Japanese, on the other, lies in the kaizen concept — a concept that is so natural and obvious for so many Japanese managers that many of

them do not realize that they applying it. So, kaizen is a way of life for the Japanese, at work, but also in the family.

Today, the Kaizen method is extremely popular all over the world and is an effective way to achieve success. The Kaizen philosophy "takes into consideration the improvement opportunities in all the organization's areas:

- costs;
- compliance with delivery deadlines;
- work safety;
- developing employees' skills;
- relationships with suppliers;
- development of new products;
- productivity;
- etc." (Ciobanu, 2009, p.14).

It should be noted that the vast majority of improvements come from the employees' knowledge and experience and are not made in big leaps. (Ciobanu, 2009, p.14).

We can say that managerial practices in Japan are overwhelmingly influenced by cultural peculiarities. Among Japan's main cultural values are amae, ie and oyabun-kobun.

Amoe is one of the values that influences the behavior of Japanese managers.

It refers to the desire to be able to count on the goodwill of others, to depend on the love and patience of others. Due to amoe behavior, Japanese managers develop warm relationships with employees, with less authority and less control (Zait, 2002, p.263). Thus, by generating a harmonious climate and consensus there is obtained a solid devotion of the group members.

Another Japanese cultural value is ie. According to this, the group interest it is a priority, and the individual should sacrifice his personal interest for the group's interest to which he belongs. At the level of Japanese organizations, it stands out "Specific way in which the leader of a company tries to determine the employees to meet certain objectives". (Isac *et al*, 2020, p.84).

Closely related to amoe, on the vertical of Japanese organizations, there is an interpersonal relationship specific to the Japanese culture called oyabun-kobun. The person high in the hierarchy is an oyabun. To this person are subordinated several kobuni, which he must treat them in the same way, without making any differences between them. The relationship also includes joint leisure activities. Due to this system of oyabun-kobun relations, but also due to tradition and social norms, the authority it is not questioned and therefore it is strongly respected in Japanese organizations.

We mention few features of the Japanese enterprises (Burduş, 2017a, p.1008):

- stress the importance of long-term results and low weight on short-term results;
- significant investments in order to obtain a long-term competitive position;
- the predominant selection criterion is survival and sustainable growth and only to a small extent, the profit.

As noted by some specialists (Firkola, 2006, p.128), "Japanese companies demonstrate that they can make necessary changes to deal with a changing economic environment while maintaining the stronger aspects of the traditional management system."

3. Research methodology

The article's research methodology has an analytical character mainly focused on the research of the specific and specialized literature concerning international comparative management, human resource management and management. The accomplishment of this work involved a bibliographic research consisting of books and articles, taking into account certain references of interest that were accessed and analyzed.

4. Findings

Japan is dominated by the culture of the community, and the attitude of the Japanese towards change is a progressive one.

Japanese companies value more the long-term success than the short-term pride, value the spirit of collaboration, and the Japanese's habit of saving the resources proved to be a good one.

The Japanese concept of the company is based on the community spirit. The Japanese perceive the company as a union of people, each person being a member of it. As Kenichi Ohmae points out in his work “The Strategist Intelligence: The Art of Business in Japan” (p.194), if asked which are their main responsibilities, many executives in Japan would answer that their work is about the employee’s well-being. The Japanese company starts with people and has confidence in the employees' abilities and potential and the Japanese managers never stop reminding executives that they need to be an inexhaustible source of improvement and innovation. In fact, for the typical Japanese, the company is the equivalent to the environment in which he spends most of his time, with the place where he meets his colleagues and even more than that, it means his second family.

Harmonizing the interests of each element of the company with its interests as a whole, through the management practices it is a common problem to all companies in the world, a problem which the Japanese companies were able to solve. The management practices have led to the conflicts of interest’s reduction, practically succeeding in converging all interests. Anyway, such a concordance is essential in order to achieve success.

5. Conclusions

The Japanese management model is, without any doubt, a source of education, a management model that has crystallized under the influence of culture and has demonstrated its success over time. The Japanese, on the other hand, have exported from their own culture, as their opinions and management style became known everywhere, and on the other hand, they took care to keep a solid set of local values, to which foreign loans were adapted and shaped.

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