«Note»

Leadership and Communication in Higher Education Ad hoc Committees

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1. Introduction

Seen from the outside, Japan is often viewed as a country with hierarchy and stratification as some of the key structural principles for analysis. However, much like the "interactive theories" from Richmon and Allison (2003), classical theories of Japanese society prioritize the importance of relational and situational aspects in determining social structure (Breaden, 2013). While critics such as McVeigh (2002) see educational practices in Japan as no more than a simulation, others such as Kelly and Adachi (1993) suggest that coming to understand the sociocultural organization, the view of education, the power structures, and the codes of interaction can provide a clear way forward.

In the wake of the rampant expansion of globalization and the decline in national population demographics, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has once again instituted education reform plans. In examining policy, it is incumbent to take note of the binary notion often struck between traditional and more critical analytics. Carpenter, Diem, and Young (2014) distinguish between traditional policy analysis and critical policy analysis (CPA) strategies with the latter seen to "provide necessary insights into the social and discursive construction of educational policy solutions ... [and] how written policy vocabularies structure the evaluative expectations of educational leaders" (p. 1122). Far from relying on a consistent, traditional framework in a deliberate, linear process underpinned by rational assumptions, CPA provides a more critical frame suited to analyze emergent policies and systematized controls.

In the GLOBE study of 62 societies (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004 as cited in Northouse, 2016), the researchers clustered Japan in Confucian Asia along with Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, and South Korea. Countries in this cluster scored high on the cultural dimensions of performance orientation, institutional collectivism, and in-group collectivism. In terms of leadership profile, Table 1 shows that Confucian area countries identify a leader as self-protective, team oriented, and humane oriented. Northouse (2016) summarizes the GLOBE data and suggests this type of leader or communicator "does not invite others to be involved in goal setting or decision

Table 1 Desired leadership behaviors by culture clusters – Confucian Asia

Leadership profile for Confucian Asia	
Self-protective leadership	Team-oriented leadership
Humane-oriented leadership	Charismatic/Value-based leadership
Autonomous leadership	Participative leadership

(Northouse, 2016, p. 443)

making ... works and cares about others but who uses status and position to make independent decisions without the input of others” (p. 443). While this definition or theory may seem to be contrary to the notion of collectivism, anecdotal personal experience strongly supports the presence of such reality in practice. This paper examines the individual autonomy deferred to, over more participative forms leadership and communications, underpinned by the informal power structures present in ad hoc committees in higher education in Japan.

2. Problem of Practice

In an article in *The Atlantic* (Selingo, 2017), a compelling quotation from a Dean of Admissions at an American university shows the significant challenge that entry admissions present for students and other stakeholders. “The question is whether at 17, does a student really know what they want to study and how much does that impact their decision to engage with a college?”

More specifically, the problem of practice explores how decentralized decision making, guided largely by charismatic leadership, could be impeding progressive changes to student recruitment to better address the social, material, and organizational factors in the context of higher education institutions. Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (2013) define leadership as “a relational and ethical process of people together attempting to accomplish positive change” (p. xiii). This discursive and collaborative notion for co-creation aside, ad hoc committee leaders may retain power often ascribed to them as topic specialist leaders. This potential inequality in power relations can limit attempts toward innovation even in times of financial crises. As a result, committee members may be limited in the initiatives taken and decisions made to address relevant issues, such as entrance test formation. For foreign faculty working in Japan who are looking to make positive contributions within their scope, not only are they dealing with the obvious language and cross-cultural issues, but the higher education academy is also presently experiencing a time of “unprecedented multi-generational diversity” (Fitch & Van Brunt, 2016, p. 16). As such, the following analysis can be instructive to serve as a catalyst, to identify needs, and to inform further leadership and communication strategies for implementation.

3. Analysis

3.1 Social context

The changing demographic following the peak of the post-war baby bump is a key social factor impacting higher education reform. Since over 90% of university entrants in Japan are 18-year olds (Goodman, 2005), trends in this segment of the population are highly relevant for the planning and long-term sustainability of higher education institutions. Table 2 shows a 31.2% decline in the population of 18-year olds over the period from 1992 to 2004, with a further drop to under 1.2 million having occurred by 2012 (−42.3%). This decline coincided with a 32% increase in the number of 4-year degree granting institutions (from 523 to 710). While it is evident that a greater percentage of the population of 18-year olds sought seats in 4-year institutions, Goodman notes that higher ranked universities continued to fill their spots while applicants for mid- to lower-tier institutes plummeted, effectively “widening [the] gap between the haves and the have-nots” (Befu, 2010, p. 189). In a context where 80% of operating budgets come from tuition fees (Kinmonth, 2005), this suggests a dire situation for various faculties in several institutions unable to meet their registration targets even after department-level overhauls or simple renaming. Under these pressures, in addition to recruiting, retention, graduation, and employment rates, streamlining to facilitate successful entry via various tests, interviews, or recommendations is a key consideration.

Japan has long had a private education market for the formal stages of pre-K-12 and higher education, as well as after school study programs for test preparation (e.g., college entrance tests, standardized tests, and certifications), tutoring in most school subjects (e.g., Kumon), and the hobby market for language study or cultural pursuits (e.g., tea ceremony and flower arranging). In higher education, the private industry is significant and virtually necessary with approximately 80% of students enrolled in private institutions (Breaden, 2013) owing to the limited number of seats in public

Table 2 Demographics of 18-year old population and university institutions (in Japan)

Year	*18-year olds (N)*	*Number of four-year universities*			*% of N*	*% of N*	*Number of two-year colleges*	
		National	**Public**	**Private**			**Public**	**Private**
1992	2,050,000	98	41	384	37%	23%	65	476
2004	1,410,000	88	77	545	49%	9.6%	(a)	

Note.[(a)] Over 50 converted to or were absorbed by their 4-year institution (Goodman, 2005) education. With such demand, the claims of neoliberalism from the academy in Western cultures seem to ring somewhat dull in a context like Japan. Brown (2015) defines neoliberalism as “enacting an ensemble of economic policies in accord with [the] root principle of affirming free markets” (p. 28) and sees the depreciation of liberal arts education for the masses as a retreat from “the promise of upward socioeconomic mobility, of emancipation from being born to one’s position in a class-stratified social order” (p. 190). The social model of education in Japan is built up to be a meritocracy (McVeigh, 2006) under the principle of performance-based equal access for all. The simple notion is that each student should be able to attain the threshold level needed to enter the next educational opportunity based on the merits of their effort. The reality is, however, one of imbalance, inequality, and what Cave (2014) calls the “disparity society.” Befu (2010, p. 189) points to this “educational bifurcation” in the Japanese context where the gap is widening, resulting in issues of access, with evidence of a positive correlation between parental education achievement and the investment made in the children’s education. Such investments can impact on the performance on high stakes tests which serve as the primary gatekeeper to enter higher education further dividing those educationally privileged learners and those less fortunate. It is well recognized that the economic advantage held by some affords the opportunity for additional cram school study, tutoring, overseas travel, and even paying the high rates for multiple exam attempts (cf. Wright, 2011 on similar American meritocracy which “made it reasonable for children who enjoyed the privilege of a comfortable home, a language-rich environment ..., and superior schools to test well and succeed in all things academic” p. 328). Furthermore, in the last decade, the decline in population has created a buyer’s market where each individual seeking higher education may find a seat (Kinmonth, 2005). The education-examination system (McVeigh, 2002) has brought about low motivation in learners, cursory or surface level *parareal* knowledge, and a sense that the purpose of schooling is to endure through examination hell. This in turn compromises attempts for rigor and even the need for innovation in the various gatekeeping test instruments and interviews for entry into universities.

3.2 The context of higher education

While effectively an oversimplification, for the purposes of this paper, the higher education context in Japan can be divided along the simple binary of public and private institutions. However, of note is that in 2002, the Japanese Association of National Universities approved the transition of public institutions of higher education into independent administrative corporations with greater independence over matters previously handled by the state, such as personnel and distribution of budgeted funds along with more power for institutional management and education placed with the

Table 3 Government subsidy for operating costs of private universities

FY	1970	1975	1980	1985	1989	1993
*Amount	132	1,007	2,605	2,438.5	2,486.5	2,655.5
FY	1998	2003	2008	2009	2010	2011
*Amount	2,950.5	3,197.5	3,248.7	3,217.8	3,221.8	3,209.2

*Unit = 100 million yen (MEXT, 2012, p. 9)

university presidents (Okada, 2005). With such responsibility comes greater accountability for these previously state-funded institutions now in competition with each other for operating capital and students with private entities under the commercialization of higher education in Japan.

Over the past four decades, the higher education market in Japan has seen significant growth in the number of private institutions with the government funding received having plateaued over the last 15 years, as shown in Table 3. In Japan, based on 2011 survey data, there were over 1,200 universities and colleges with private universities representing about 80% of the institutions which catered to about 80% of the 3.22 million students registered in higher education (MEXT, 2012). However, in the 20-year period between 1990 and 2010, government statistics show that the population of 18-year olds in Japan fell by nearly 40% from just over 2 million to around 1.2 million (Statistics Bureau, 2014). Inversely, the number of students registering in 4-year post-secondary institutions over the same time frame rose by about 15% – 540,000 to 620,000 (MEXT, 2016). This demographic trend shows accessibility to university seats has risen from about 25% to 50%.

This flood of private institutions and the marketization of higher education in Japan have created a buyer's market with a shift from mass education to a universal higher education system (Breaden, 2013) where each individual wanting a seat can find one. As described by MacKinnon (2014), "universities can be distinguished according to class" (p. 7), where such classifications can promote differentiation and change from a status quo bias of path dependency to a more sustainable existence operationalized through strategic policy initiatives. In the face of increasing competition, Kinmonth (2005) identified three strategies employed by institutions: (a) lowering costs, (b) cultivating new markets for non-traditional students, and (c) trying new recruiting strategies. For lower-tier Japanese institutions struggling to meet their student quota, Laurence (2016) identified three ways to increase recruitment: (a) make the school aesthetically more attractive, (b) recruit a wider variety of non-traditional students, or (c) use admissions, graduation rates, and job placement data. This range of modern social and institutional factors inevitably impacts upon the leadership strategies needed for recruiting students and decisions over the materials used to do so.

3.3 Material context

Since the first US College Entrance Examination Board exam in 1901, institutions have been concerned about complexity and the time taken to read and grade test instruments (Wright, 2011). This concern has led to efficiency being one of the key criteria seen in the design of large-scale assessments for college entry, be they standardized tests or institutional versions. Much of that neo-liberalist, instrumental efficiency is taken up with what is easy to both administer and grade. However, in the case of Japanese university entrance tests (often developed in-house by ad hoc committees), personal experience has shown that in targeting a shrinking demographic, what is easy to test is also an overriding factor. However, owing largely to the absence of speaking opportunities in their high school lessons and to the cachet of social capital that speaking a foreign language carries, university students have often favored their oral communication courses. Evidence of such can be seen in internal documents, such as course evaluations and class surveys, where ratings for speaking classes routinely track ahead of reading or writing and grammar or test preparation courses. Nevertheless, this priority ranking for speaking is not borne out in the most common entrance exam formats which rely on multiple choice or short answer translation questions (Cave, 2014). These methods, therefore, lack face validity over what the learners understand it means to be able to actually use a foreign language. Such testing approaches do however nominate a more objective scoring outcome, and one that high school students may feel more confidence (or at least feign diligence) in attempting to tackle as evidence of their learning or level.

Drawing from a study of teacher narratives, Tsukada (2010) postulates a 4-quadrant typology of high schools in Japan (p. 71) which focus more or less along the axes of:

— (1) an orientation to life guidance vs (2) a college entrance exam orientation

— (3) more freedom for the learner vs (4) more control by the school

The most elite schools understood students would access extra study from cram schools, so while they had a college entrance exam orientation, they also offered their learners more freedom (2,3). Traditional schools focused on securing college entrance for their students through a means of greater control (2,4). Lower-ranked schools offered more freedom while being more focused on life guidance (1,3), and newer established high schools straddled the life guidance and college exam orientation continuum yet under the guise of greater control (1,4) and (2,4).

In profiling student targets, certain Admission Policies disclosed by higher education institutes in Japan may be highly promotional in nature, focusing mostly on wants and interests, which surely cannot be tested. Under the financial crisis, such discourse does, however, create a convenient loophole to accommodate anyone who may apply by virtue of other *test* methods. These are often subjective, albeit wrapped into measurements or evaluations that appear to be objective. While material factors are highly relevant for any problem in practice, it is individuals who make the decisions, and therefore, the broader organizational context within Japan must be explored closely.

3.4 Organizational context

In addition to the social meritocracy and material "examocracy" (McVeigh, 2006, p. 163) presented by the Japanese context, the organizational context for ad hoc committees is one largely driven by seniority. Typical for change management and to prompt innovation, senior leaders have to sense a need for change or perceive a crisis. Alternatively, Japanese (largely) male leaders may only experience a "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler, 1999 as cited in Blackmore, 2013, p. 147) when reflecting on their position of dominance in order to better understand how they are perceived and how they represent particular forms of leadership that may *other* some differences or distinctions such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, or first language. Many disciplines in higher education "constitute epistemic communities with different histories, cultures and degrees of coherence, permanence and public recognition" (Henkel, 2015, p. 165–166) all impacting upon the identity development internally and the externalized perspective adopted by others. In a mixed, but dominant culture setting, for committee members positioned as a minority in Japan, working collaboratively to build credibility to then potentially exert influence, is key. In relation to reform, Breaden (2013) points out that very few studies have investigated university administration in Japan, as opposed to academia. He suggests that the literature points to a "lack of 'hybrids' – individuals with both the academic and administrative expertise to interpret new agendas and direct organisational change" (p. 5). As such, further analysis is clearly an issue culturally and ideologically for anyone seeking to innovate within their institution with the individuals therein.

In practice, and from a Western hegemony, it seems plausible to believe, as Eacott (2013) proposes, that "the explanatory power of the theoretically infused narrative of educational administration is far less seductive than the everyday language employed in descriptions of 'what works'" (p. 93). Examining the practice of critical policy analysis, Barbour (2011) sees hegemony as a social condition with a distinction between the binaries of political (state) society and civil (private) society. State power and dominance are said to be exercised for the benefit of dominant interests with legally enforced discipline or coercive power over non-consenting subordinate or resisting groups. However, in a Japanese institution guided by Confucian ideology and situated within in a cultural-value driven context (Maringe, Foskett, & Woodfield, 2013), the draw is strong toward maintaining small 'c' cultural integration and the status quo in the administrative function of committees. McVeigh (2006) labels this phenomenon, that is, when an organization strives to sustain its structure by focusing on the means not the end and concentrates on form over content, "bureaucratic fetishism" (p. 61). This "administrative *immobilism* [emphasis added]" (McVeigh, 2002), in Japanese organizations with a closed system and a structure-to-structure orientation caters to the convenience of administrative functions while quite potentially hindering the real mission of improving the opportunities for learning – if in fact the actual intended mission.

The prevalence of seniority-based leadership, the concomitant lack of awareness or discomfort over any unmet potential, and the orientation to stay the course identified briefly here, in addition to the social and material factors covered earlier, help situate implications for leadership.

4. Discussion of Leadership Implications

Together with the contextual factors analyzed in the previous section, leadership and followership are both relevant in modern democracies as followers challenge even "implied hierarchies" (Kellerman, 2012, p. 26) with their growing ascribed power and influence. In the "power cube" from Gaventa (2006), the entrance test internal to any one institution in Japan would be seen as a *closed space* at the *local level*. How leadership and communication is manifested in control over implementation via *invisible power*, or at best *hidden power* would seem to run counter to the notion from Gronn (2010, p. 412) that egalitarianism trumps hierarchy. However, similar to the atomistic view of distributed leadership from Gronn, "influence is not concentrated in or monopolised by just one person, but instead is dispersed or shared around, so that there are a number of sources of influence" (p. 417). While in a collectivist context, one might see this as a pure form of participative leadership (Richmon & Allison, 2003), the autonomous professionalism and power structures at hand in higher education committees can operate very independently without the apparent need for consensus or joint approval. Kelly and Adachi (1993) describe this phenomenon not as a hierarchy, but rather as a pyramid with the top lopped off leaving many competing factions and unseen factors. It is under these conditions that a powerful, charismatic leader may not be the most suitable leadership style to bring about needed changes. Rather there should be an increase in the number of leaders with the potential for more democratic leadership and collegial engagement in decision-making. This distributed leadership implies "a different power relationship within the school, where the distinctions between leaders and followers tend to blur ... [having] implications for division of labor within a school, ... [and opening] up the possibility of all teachers becoming leaders at various times" (Gronn, 2010, p. 333). However, this extended participation provides no guarantee of effective control. In their study on the effects of leadership style on intercultural group communication, Aritz and Walker

(2012) found that "a more inclusive and cooperative leadership style produces a more inclusive style of group communication characterized by a more balanced contribution in a group whose team members are from individualist and collectivist cultures" (p. 145). In the discourse of distributive leadership, Blackmore (2013) sees the need for alignment between school leadership and its focus on clear educational goals, planning curriculum, and evaluating teachers and teaching framed as "the instrumentalism of the management discourse of outcomes-focused education systems" (p. 143). This notion also resonates as a potential way forward in addressing the problem of practice.

Assessment or testing is often looked at primarily as outcome measures from instruction. However, the alternative conceptualization for curriculum leadership from English and Steffy (2011) which includes: (a) social and cultural differences, (b) critical thinking, and (c) the school as an active agent for social change (p. 303) can help to further define the problem of practice. While data-driven institutions may be viewed negatively (see Browne & Rayner, 2015), a distinction may be made for data-informed decisions from action research to address specific problems on test question types drawing from: corpus studies and vocabulary frequency tables, Rasch analysis into suitability of fit from past exam questions, and a scan of test items from competing institutions.

5. Summary of Further Analysis

The tendency for education is to conservatively reproduce the patterns of social life currently in existence. However, education also has a "transformative function" (Carr & Kemmis, 2009, p. 75) which serves to equip the next generation of youth with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for ongoing participation in and contributions to society. Given the Japanese Ministry of Education's strategic push "to cultivate Japanese with English abilities," (MEXT, 2012) there exists a more functional target for not only practical language instruction and learning but also a more utilitarian and career-related focus for course contents. To capitalize on this demand, individuals with industry experience and knowledge may be hired and asked to teach in tertiary institutions as fulltime professors or part-time adjuncts. As critical elements of executing the underpinning identity of a program, curriculum development and course delivery are however often conducted in very decentralized contexts demanding and expecting a great deal of autonomy at the chalkface from the instructors in their own individual courses.

Action research involves creating and negotiating the appropriate conditions for the discussion around and implementation of strategic intervention for transformations. Action research in the educational context is a "form of personal learning for social benefit" (McNiff, 2000, p. 236), an opportunity to foster a learning society driven by values. It is therefore critical that action research be sup-

Table 4　Ways action research can be supported in organizations

1. Develop personal management skills	Attitudes and reflection guide action and behaviors
2. Develop an invitational ethic	Focus on the inclusive nature of the work
3. Be strategic	Find ways to move things in specific directions
4. Aim for systemic development	Address all levels at the same time
5. Involve senior management	Ultimately support and approval are needed
6. Embed action research within organizational development processes	Locate and work within the existing processes
7. Develop systemic in-service provisions	Formal and informal learning should be valued
8. Develop the research base of professional knowledge	High caliber work overcomes cynicism
9. Exhibit the courage to care	Get the relationships right & outcomes follow along

(adapted from McNiff, 2000)

ported in organizations. See Table 4 for a list of ways organizations can support active inquiry.

Thus while examining the education policies and guidelines proposed by the Japanese Ministry of Education, the de facto curricular content from the mandated textbooks, and the scale and scope of the entrance tests from competing institutions all have merit, there is more to consider. As a change agent, understanding the gap in performance is critical both to chart outcomes and to initially target a point of entry into the discussion of driving innovation. Hand in hand goes the ability to build credibility to enact change, such as the leadership capabilities and configuration of role sets presented by Gronn (2010). Additionally, in addressing a problem of practice in a cross-cultural setting, resisting stereotypes and avoiding jumping to surface level conclusions can be paramount as Eacott (2013) relays “the lack of attention to the situatedness and specificity of contexts leads to a privileging of the directly observable features of practice rather than the underlying generative principles” (p. 98).

In summary, these problems of practice present themselves across the three critical phases for the business of private higher education in Japan: recruiting and intake, teaching and development, and the output of graduation toward employment. For a learning leader to contribute toward enacting change in the dynamic context of higher education, they must demonstrate leadership capabilities along the cognitive, ethical, and emotional dimensions while recognizing the interplay between the social, material, and organizational elements in their institutional settings and the people that make up those institutions.

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