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General Motors and Toyota: Comparison of American and Japanese Managerial Cultures

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GENERAL MOTORS AND TOYOTA: COMPARISON OF AMERICAN AND JAPANESE MANAGERIAL CULTURES

by

Seiko Yomogita

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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In the automobile industry, American culture and Japanese culture impact each other to support economic growth in both countries as one part of globalization. In American companies, religious factors, individualism, and American immigrant history manifest as characteristics of American management styles. In contrast, in Japanese companies, Asian community-based ideology, household concepts, and family kinship manifest as characteristics of Japanese management styles. These differences appear in the relationships between employees and employers, job security, quality control of products, responsibilities of line workers, loyalty of all employees to the company, impact of wearing uniforms, functions of unions, and minority managements.

My thesis is beneficial to understanding both American culture and Japanese culture for the people who are eager to improve their perspectives. I hope my thesis will make a contribution to the study of American values and Japanese values.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the impact that American and Japanese cultures have on their respective managerial styles. By managerial styles, I mean the organizational culture, or "the values, norms, and patterns of actions that characterize social relationships within a formal organization" that guides how personnel are managed within a company (Marshall, 1998, p. 470). My hypothesis is that cultural differences lead to differences in managerial styles.

My reasons for choosing to study this topic stem from my personal experiences. I am an international student from Japan. I purchased a United States manufactured automobile, and I quickly noticed that it was of lower quality than any Japanese car I had ever driven. As a result, I began to notice
differences in the quality of other products produced by
Japanese companies and American companies. I also heard
numerous conversations by others alluding to these
differences. As a result, I became interested in looking at
how the managerial styles of American and Japanese companies
might impact on the quality of the goods they produce. When
I thought more about this topic, I realized that the concept
of quality is really complex, difficult to define, and value
laden. Therefore, I decided to explore how the differences
in American and Japanese culture led to differences in their
respective managerial styles.

The approach of my study is consistent with what is
described as the "Weberian Tradition" of historical
interpretive analyses. This tradition is:

concerned with both individuality and generality. The
unification was accomplished through the development and
utilization of general concepts (what we later will call "ideal
types") in the study of particular individuals, events, or
societies. These general concepts are to be used to "to identify
and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from the of the other” (Ritzer, 1996, p. 111-112).

I will be discussing the cultures of the United States and Japan as ideal types. In this sense, I am comparing broad generalized constructions of each culture and identifying how these generalized constructs influence the managerial cultures of each country.

The organizations I decided to compare are General Motors Corporation (GM) and Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota). I chose these companies in part because the car I mentioned above was produced by GM and the more reliable car I replaced it with was manufactured by Toyota. Furthermore, Toyota’s management system is considered exemplary and is studied and imitated by other Japanese companies and in the United States. GM management style is the example of efficient production system.

In order to answer my research question, I relied
primarily on analysis of secondary sources, complemented by conducting interviews with line workers and a manager at GM’s Grand Rapids plant in Michigan, and attending an informational seminar at a Toyota plant in George Town, Kentucky. Interestingly enough, while Toyota presents itself as an “open,” accessible company, I was denied access to individual line workers and managers. In doing so, I found that cultural factors impact management styles at GM and Toyota.

I will discuss each company separately and compare them. I will examine the cultural factors that may impact managerial styles and then describe how these factors actually impacted the styles. I will then compare the two and discuss culture clash between American values and Japanese values.
I chose to study General Motors (GM) for two reasons. The first reason is associated with my personal experiences. When I came to the United States, I bought a GM car. However, I immediately regretted that I had bought this car. As most of my friends had warned me, the GM car was not reliable at all. There was always something wrong with the engine or the power windows or the defroster. Needless to say, I became sick of having to take my car to the mechanic every month. While I realize that my car might have been in very bad shape because of its previous owners, I came to agree with the common Japanese belief that American cars are not as “good” as Japanese cars. Although my thesis does not focus on the
quality of products, as I mentioned in the introduction, this was my first reason for choosing to study GM. The second reason I chose GM is the fact that it is the number one automaker in the US (Money.CNN.com).

Research Methodology

Most of the information in the following discussion resulted from an extensive review of literature about American culture, GM and its managerial style. In addition, I also conducted interviews at GM’s Grand Rapid, Michigan plant. Nearly all of these interviews were with line workers, while one was with a manager. I conducted the interviews of the line workers while they were working, so I did not have enough time to ask them all of the questions I had planned to ask them. I could still get most of my questions answered, especially since all of the workers were very willing to answer my questions. I asked the line workers about their opinion
of working for GM and its management style. As for the manager, I asked him about GM’s management system.

Outline of this Chapter

As mentioned in the introduction, I will describe the main features of American culture and then discuss how these features impacted GM’s managerial style. I found three major American values: capitalism, individualism, and equality. After briefly describing each of these values and the impact it has on American culture, I will discuss the cultural factors that contributed to American’s adoption of these values. Then I will describe how each of these values impact GM and its management style.
Main Features of American Culture

Capitalism

America is a capitalist country. Capitalism values profit, or the bottom line. In a capitalist system, individuals and companies that provide a certain service compete with one another, struggling to control the market. As Lipset (1996) states, “Actors seek to win as much as they can and will ride roughshod over opponents if possible” (p. 225). As a result, competition is strongly valued and instilled in Americans from childhood. Efficiency is also valued because it is believed that a more efficient system, one that does “more for less” or produces more at a lower cost, will bring more profit. This desire for efficiency has filtered into other aspects of American society. Convinced that “time is money,” Americans wish for every aspect of society, from dining to entertainment to education, to be as efficient as possible (Ritzer, 1996).
One of the possible reasons for capitalism's rise in the US that has been put forward is the prevalence of Protestant religions in this country. Max Weber, an early German sociologist, was the first person to make this contention. In his book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* which is still studied today, Weber (1930) claimed that some of the core values of Protestantism, namely the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and asceticism, contributed to the rise of capitalism. According to the doctrine of predestination, people were destined at birth to go to either Heaven or Hell. Even so, they could receive an indication that they were selected for salvation if they were successful. Additionally, the Protestant emphasis on asceticism prohibited Protestant businessmen from spending the money they earned “self-indulgently” (Hamilton, 1996, p.51). As a result of these two beliefs, Protestant businessmen focused on making money and then reinvesting that
money in their businesses. These actions made them very successful, which meant that other businessmen had to follow suit or be left behind. As a result, capitalism, with its emphasis on competition and profit, flourished in the US.

The Protestant ethic has also left its mark on American society. Americans are encouraged to succeed and to see success as a sign of their worth. Furthermore, hardworking individuals are seen as moral, while “lazy” people are viewed as immoral and undeserving.

**Individualism**

Another core value in American culture is individualism. In this ideology, the individual and his or her interests, rights, autonomy, and freedom are valued and emphasized (Marshall, 1998, p. 304; Lipset, 1996, p. 218). Individuals are socialized to believe that their wants, needs, and opinions are valid and important. Furthermore, individuals believe they have rights that cannot be infringed and that
they can only be held responsible for their own actions.

The American emphasis on individualism is the result of several other cultural forces. It is supported in part by the cultural value I previously discussed: capitalism. As Bell (1996) states, "The institutional source of the rise of individualism was the claim of private enterprise, not birthright, as the basis for position and privilege in society" (p. 286). In other words, capitalism’s focus on competition fostered individualism. After all, anyone could invent an efficient method of producing some good or service and reinvest their profit into their business. As a result, anyone could be seen as a competitor. Since anyone could succeed, regardless of their background or the groups they belonged to, capitalism supported individualism.

Protestantism also contributed to the rise of individualism in the United States. Bell (1996) contends that this occurred because:
Against the authority of the church as the custodian of sacraments and the medium of salvation, the Reformation placed the individual and his conscience as the source of judgment (p. 286).

Furthermore, Protestantism focuses on and values individuals' relationships with God and interpretations of the Bible. Therefore, Protestantism also supported individualism and helped it flourish in American society.

The political structure of the US also supported individualism. After all, America is a democracy. Furthermore, individual rights and freedoms figure prominently in America's earliest governmental documents. For example, the Declaration of Independence protects against British rule, and the Constitution has prominent lists of individual rights. The Constitution also allows all citizens to vote, and it later expands the definition of citizen to include women and racial minorities, essentially including everyone in the political process. Finally, democracy
supports debate between people, which indicates that individual views are important and valued (Bell, 1993, p. 335). In all these ways, democracy served as another factor that supported individualism as an American way of life.

America’s status as a nation of immigrants also supported individualism. Many of the people who immigrated to America did so because of the freedoms America offered, be they economic, religious, or political (Hansen, 1940, p. 81). The immigrants yearned for these freedoms and would fight to gain and maintain them. Therefore, individualism was valued which ensured it survived.

America’s image as a frontier nation also supported individualism. Particularly in its infancy and even today, America is perceived as an unexplored land, filled with opportunities and the perfect place to make one’s individual fortune (Vidich, 1995). Furthermore, the frontier is a “rough and tumble” place where “only the strong survive.” As
a result, only the individuals who looked out for and took care of themselves could succeed. Therefore, Americans had another reason to value individualism.

As this discussion demonstrates, there were various factors that led to individualism becoming a major part of American culture. In fact, the large number of factors implies that individualism is a very central part of American culture.

Equality

Another central value in American culture is equality. According to Bell (1996), there are three kinds of equality that Americans value: “Equality of conditions, equality of means, and equality of outcomes” (p. 262). Equality of conditions is “equality before the law, equality of movement in public places, the principle of one man, one vote the cluster of liberties which we call political and civil rights” (Bell, 1996, p. 263). By equality of means, Bell means that
all people have equal access to the structures and institutions that are needed or used for mobility, such as education. In other words, everyone has equal access to the means of securing unequal social outcomes. Equality of opportunity is the core meaning of equality in "individualized" Western countries. Essentially, it means that each person has the same opportunities. To put it another way, everyone should be treated equally in any given situation.

Equality's roots lie in the politics and political history of the US. One of the causes of the American Revolution was the perceived differences in the rights and opportunities of the colonists compared to British citizens and the treatment of the colonists by the British government (Wilson and DiIulio, Jr., 1998). Therefore, equality was of great importance to the founding fathers, in no small part because they wished to avoid the inequality they suffered
under their previous government. As the Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." These values continued to be important to Americans. America’s role as a nation of immigrants also supported equality because many of these immigrants came to the US to get away from the discrimination they faced in their homelands (Takaki, 1993). As this brief discussion shows, America’s history led to the valuation of equality in American society.
Impact of American Culture on GM Management Style

Capitalism

Since GM is a business in a capitalistic society, it is not surprising that capitalism has impacted GM and its management style. Capitalism’s impact on GM is rather obvious. After all, one of GM’s former chief executive officers states that the company’s primary goal was to make a profit (Sloan, Jr., 1963, p. 64), which it pursued by reducing production costs, providing “desirable” products, and offering incentives, such as installment payment plans (Sloan, Jr., 1963, p. 150-152, 159, 167; Kiley, D; AutoASCII2; Wenzel, K).

The values of capitalism also impact how GM managed its workers. For example, workers must operate under a strict schedule in order to ensure that production is maximized (Milkman, 1997). Workers must also be prepared to put in overtime without any warning (Milkman, 1997). This practice
undoubtedly exists in order to meet any deadlines or 
production goals or to simply increase productivity and profit. 
GM gives managers complete authority over the workers, in 
hopes of creating an efficient work environment (Milkman, 
1997). Several of the line workers I interviewed told me that 
they never made any suggestions because it was not “their job.” 
Finally, company heads and managers can lay off workers or 
etire factories if they are not productive or do not produce 

enough. 

Individualism 

Individualism has also impacted GM’s management style. 
Workers believe that they have certain rights, including the 
right to wear whatever they want to work. In fact, this belief 
is so ingrained in and taken for granted by the line workers 
I interviewed that they were confused that I had even asked 
the question. Therefore, GM’s management and managerial 
style could not alter or take away these rights.
Even so, there are some aspects of GM’s managerial style that contradict individualism. As mentioned above, workers are closely supervised and scheduled, and supervisors appear to have total control over them (Milkman, 1997).

It appears that individualism has impacted GM management styles, though not consistently. It may be that the impact of capitalism on GM’s management style is the cause of this inconsistency. After all, capitalism encourages efficiency, and GM’s attempts to have efficiency, such as closely supervising workers, does not encourage individualism.

**Equality**

At first glance, equality does not seem to have impacted GM’s management style. After all, workers are not part of the decision making process. In fact, it seems as if GM only expects managers to solve problems and use critical thinking skills (Green and Seymour, 1991).
Although GM’s managerial style does not seem to support equality (or individualism, as mentioned above), the workers still appear to value these values. Furthermore, they have taken actions that bring these values into GM’s managerial style. They do this through forming unions to attain their objectives and fight for their values (Milkman, 1997, p. 49). As Lipset (1996) states, “The American unionists have pressed to secure as much from management as their strength permits” (p. 225). According to my interviews, line workers believe they have a right to unionize, and they count on getting support from and winning their struggles with management by using unions.

Unfortunately, the use of unions has created an adversarial and distrusting relationship between the workers and management. It appears that GM has become aware of this relationship and is trying to improve its relationship with its workers, however. The manager I interviewed stated that
the number of layoffs has decreased in the last several decades because GM believes that instilling loyalty in its workers will increase the quality of the products.

Summary

GM’s managerial style is impacted by three major American values. The first capitalism, which encourages managerial practices that increase profit and efficiency. The second and third are individualism and equality, both of which encourage workers to establish and maintain what they perceive as their rights. Ironically, capitalism appears to “kill” individualism and equality, in that pursuing profit and efficiency reduce the worker’s perceived level of the qualities.
CHAPTER III

TOYOTA MOTOR CORPORATION

The Reasons I Chose Toyota

I chose to analyze the Toyota Motor Corporation (Toyota) for two reasons. The first is that I replaced my unreliable GM car with a far more reliable Toyota car. The difference in quality that I perceived between the two cars, which I heard echoed by other people, led me to choose to study Toyota. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I chose Toyota because it is a role model for car manufacturers in Japan. In Japan, Toyota’s share of the market is about 40 percent (AutoASCII24). Furthermore, as Joseph J. Fucini and Suzy Fucini (1990) note, the Toyota Production System, Toyota’s management system, has been adopted by other Japanese automobile industries, including Madza, Nissan, and Honda.
As a result, this management style could be the principle style in Japan.

Research Methods

Most of information presented in this chapter resulted from an extensive review of the literature on Japanese culture (as well as my own experiences) and Toyota and its managerial style. In addition, I also attended an informational seminar at Toyota’s plant in George Town, Kentucky. In addition to attending the seminars, I also obtained information about Toyota from the seminar.

Outline of this Chapter

As mentioned in the introduction, I will describe the main features of Japanese culture and then discuss how these features impacted Toyota’s managerial style. I found two major aspects of Japanese society that shape many values in
that country: Confucianism and ie. I will begin by briefly
describing these features and their impact on Japanese culture.
I will then describe how both of these features impacted Toyota
and it's management style.

Cultural values

Confucianism

Much of Japanese culture is shaped by the philosophy
or ideology of Confucianism. This ideology stems from the
teachings of Confucius (551-479 B.C.), who was a well-known
Chinese philosopher. According to Chai (1973), Confucius
"studiously shunned all questions that enter into ontological
subtleties or concern the supernatural," focusing instead on
"man and the 'duties which are proper to the people'" (p. 33).
Confucianism was the dominant ideology in Japan in the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the government
designated it as the official educational philosophy
(Tominaga, 1989, p.142), and it continues to impact Japanese culture today. I will now discuss how it has done so.

Confucian thought can be summed up in the following passage:

Confucius constantly emphasizes that the relationship between ruler and subject is actually just one of many relationships that affect every choice a person makes. Every human being lives within a web of overlapping relationships - family, friends, village, country - and has specific responsibilities as a member of each group. The wise human being is the one who recognizes his position...within each group and meets the responsibilities that come with it. If each person does what is expected, then all of his various groups will thrive (Reid, 1990, p.109).

This short passage describes the many values Confucianism brought to Japanese society. Hierarchy is a central feature of Confucianism. Furthermore, respect is a central element of Confucian thought. Japanese people are supposed to respect people with higher social status. This would include elders, teachers, employers, governmental leaders, parents, and husbands (for wives) (Reid, 1999). As
part of this respect, a person would not disagree with a
superior, nor would he or she not discuss something his or
her superior does not agree with (Abe, 1998). Responsibility
is another major Confucian value. Japanese people are taught
to take their responsibilities seriously. The most extreme
element of this is that Japanese warriors (samurai) could only
lose a battle by dying or committing "Hara-kiri," which is
committing suicide by disembowelment (Abe, 1998). Finally,
Confucianism values harmony, which it claims can only exist
in a hierarchical society, and discourages individual
excellence because it could disrupt this harmony (Abe, 1998).
The powerful in Japan supported Confucianism because it helped
to maintain, support, legitimate the political system,
particularly any form of autocratic rule (Chai, 1973).

**Household (Ie)**

Another central feature of Japanese culture is the value
placed on *Ie*, or household. While related to and possibly
derived from Confucianism, which does value and emphasize respect for family, ie has not been limited to the family over the course of history. When ie was institutionalized by the Civil Code of 1898, it did refer to family units headed by a male, typically the eldest son (Kaneko, 1995). When this institutionalization ended after WWII (Kaneko, 1995), however, the concept of ie continued in another form. As Chie Nakane (1970), the most famous Japanese sociologist contends, ie became "any social group constructed on the basis of an established frame of residence and often of management organization" (Nakane, 1970, p. 5). Nakane also argues that ie continues because businesses create similar bonds. After all,

employer and employee are bound as one by fate in conditions which produce a tie between man and man often as firm and close as that between husband and wife. (Nakane, 1970, p.14).

According to Nakane (1970), it is "the human
relationships within this household group are thought of as more important than all other human relationships” (p. 5). As a result, people are deeply engrossed in the activities and concerns of the other members of their ie (Nakane, 1970). Additionally, harmony within the ie is highly valued. It is ideal that all members of the household have the same view on an issue, and this view is the view of the head of the household (Nakane, 1970). Indeed, ie is hierarchical (Nakane, 1970). It is expected that people respect and are submissive to the head of the ie, avoiding any opposition and committing themselves to the head’s ideas, even if they disagree (Nakane, 1970). At the same time, the “head” of the ie has sympathy for the other members, including their views and opinions in his decision making (Nakane, 1970). Furthermore, the heads want to instill “happy relations among the men,” and some employers allow their workers to run the company (Nakane, 1970, p. 69). Similarly, it is common for ies to have group meetings,
in which the opinions of all members are valued (Nakane, 1970). The reason given for this respect is that it is believed that all members of the ie are in the same boat and no one deserves to be left behind. Finally, the "head" of the household is responsible for the welfare of the other members (Nakane, 1970, p. 8, 131).

Impact of Japanese Culture on Managerial Styles

Confucianism

Confucianism has impacted Toyota’s management style. To start, managers have a great responsibility to the company and their workers, and they are expected to fulfill their responsibilities. All managers, especially top-level managers, must have a strong and visible commitment to the company, participating directly in implementing the system and instructing their subordinates to do likewise (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998). Managers are also responsible for
cultivating capable leaders and for providing employees with necessary practical skills (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998).

Workers also have a responsibility to fulfill. At Toyota factories, all line workers are placed in teams of four, one of whom is the team leader. The team leader is responsible for the team and must take responsibility for their mistakes (Nakazawa and Akaike, 2000).

Ie has also impacted Toyota’s management style. First and foremost, workers identify themselves as employees of Toyota, indicating that Toyota is (at the very least) part of their ie (Nakane, 1970). Workers and managers treat each other as family, even though there is a hierarchy. Furthermore, workers are expected to wear uniforms as a sign of respect for and loyalty to the company (Nakazawa and Akaike, 2000).

Toyota also has a couple managerial practices that
clearly reflect ie. One of these is “just-in-time” manufacturing. Under this management system, all employees who work for or provide materials for Toyota are treated as equals, all of whom must do their part and fulfill their responsibilities (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998). Nakane (1970) refers to these relationships as keiretsu. As a result, Toyota claims this system allows any employee from any company to design and manage their own work (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998). Furthermore, it brings workers and managers together to improve productivity, the quality of the products, and their shared working environment (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998). Finally, Toyota often transfers its leaders to the companies that supply it (Nakane, 1970).

Second, Toyota regularly has “functional meetings.” These meetings, which are attended by all department heads, are used to make decisions about the company (Monden, 1993, p. 53). In these meetings, all sides are brought together
to make decisions, which Toyota contends enhances communication and relations (Monden, 1993). Finally, all members are expected to make comments (Monden, 1993).

A third practice is Kaizen. Translated as “improvement,” it is the practice of having all employees provide suggestions for making small improvements in the production system. It has existed in some form since the beginning of Toyota (Toyota Motor Corporation, 1998). It results from Toyota’s desire to reduce costs because of various factors, including the high appreciation of the yen, the diversification of demand, and intense competition. It also creates harmony between workers and management because it gives them an opportunity to meet other people who contribute to the same system (Nakazawa and Akaike, 2000).

Finally, there is the practice of lifetime employment. Lifetime employment is “the system under which a person who enters employment at a company is guaranteed to hold a job
there for life, regardless of changing markets or other economic circumstances" (Reid, 1990, p.185). This practice resulted from the belief that Japanese companies hire not only a laborer, but also his life, which means the companies intend to take care of his life, like a family member would (Nakane, 1970).

An example of lifetime employment that Reid (1990) provides is that Toyota once decided to produce a new model in a factory that had just closed so that recently unemployed workers would have a job. Another example of lifetime employment is mado-gīwa zoku, "window sitters." Under this system, older businessmen, who tend to work less, are placed as junior executives in smaller subsidiary companies or as door-to-door salesmen (Reid, 1999). While the sources mentioned above are discussing various businesses in Japan, a Toyota businessman I met on a plane told me that Toyota does practice "window sitting." Reid (1999) believes that the
The window-sitter system is still better than downsizing because window sitters can still earn some income, even though it is lower than others. Abe (1998) contends that this system mistreats workers, however.

Summary

Toyota’s management style has been impacted by two major Japanese cultural features: Confucianism and the concept of ie. Both of these features have encouraged a management style in which both workers and managers have responsibilities, and workers are included in the decision-making process. Furthermore, all Toyota employees, as well as the employees that supply Toyota, are treated as family (keiretsu). Finally, both features encourage loyalty to Toyota.
CHAPTER IV

COMPARISON OF GM AND TOYOTA

Introduction

In this chapter, I will compare the results from the last two chapters, focusing on how the different cultures resulted in different managerial styles. I will then discuss Toyota’s plant in George Town, Kentucky. This plant, which uses Toyota’s managerial style in the US, should provide an interesting case study in how a company operating in a foreign nation would be perceived by the “natives” and how it would have to modify its managerial style to be accepted by native workers.

Research Methods

Some of the information in this section comes from
the secondary sources, interviews, and seminars I used in the previous two sections. Additionally, the manager I interviewed at GM had once worked for Toyota. He provided an excellent resource for information comparing the two companies. Another resource I used for this chapter was the seminar I attended at Toyota’s George Town, Kentucky plant. Some of the information I obtained in this seminar addressed using Toyota’s management system in the US. Furthermore, I was able to listen to a question-and-answer session with three line workers and the plant, and I was able to have more informal conversations with managers and line workers. I will use the information I obtained from all of these sources to discuss Toyota’s Kentucky plant.

Comparison of GM and Toyota

The main difference between the managerial styles of GM and Toyota is the role of workers in that system. In GM,
workers are not part of the decision making process. At Toyota, however, line workers are encouraged and expected to help the company make decisions. The reason for this difference appears to be the different cultures of the US and Japan. The US is a capitalist culture, and its emphasis on efficiency and profit lead it to create managerial styles that control workers. On the other hand, a major cultural feature of Japan is the concept of ie, which helps to create a management style in which all members are welcome to participate.

A surprising similarity between GM and Toyota’s management styles is that neither support individualism, even though this quality is valued in American society. Toyota’s management system, impacted by Confucianism and ie’s value of responsibility, expect loyalty and respect from workers. GM’s adoption of the American value of capitalism, discussed above, also discourages individualism. The actions that GM’s managers take to increase profit not only keep workers out
of the decision making process, they also prevent them from expressing their individualism. Thus, both Toyota and GM have managerial styles that do not support individualism. This is particularly surprising since individualism is valued in American society.

Toyota’s Kentucky Plant

My focus in this part of my thesis is on how American workers perceived Toyota’s management system and if Toyota had to alter its system to “placate” its American workers. Three line workers attended the informational seminar at the Kentucky plant to answer any questions the attendants might have. All of them said they liked working at Toyota, especially because of the high wages and the Kaizen system. One of the workers had also worked at GM, and he said he preferred working at Toyota. It would seem that Americans support Toyota’s management system.
The GM manager I interviewed indicated that this was not entirely true, however. He told me that one of the problems at Toyota is that some people do not want to get involved in the system. As a result, they end up leaving Toyota. It seems that not all Americans support Toyota’s management system. As a result, I am suspicious that the line workers at the seminar were selected because they said what Toyota wanted us to hear.

Some of the secondary sources I read support the manager’s claim. For example, Nakazawa and Akaike (2000) discuss how American workers in a Toyota plant resisted the management’s attempts to instill loyalty in the following passage:

One day, the Japanese employers suggested that the American workers wear the uniforms and caps voluntarily, but most of them did not wear the uniforms and caps. Then, Japanese employers recommended that they wear the uniforms and the caps as a sign of loyalty. The American workers did not appreciate being forced to wear the uniforms and the caps by the Japanese employers (p.72).
It seems that the American value of individualism led the American workers to resist any attempt by the Japanese management to encourage loyalty.

Although Americans appear to resist some aspects of Toyota’s management system, they appear to have no problems with other aspects. For example, Toyota’s Kentucky plant has implemented Kaizen. All line workers are supposed to provide suggestions at least twice a month. If their Kaizen helps increase efficiency and/or the quality of the product, they are awarded a prize of $100. According to the managers at the informational seminar, all employees generally receive from $1000 to $2000 a year because of Kaizen. It seems that American workers have no problems with this aspect of Toyota’s management style. In fact, the American values of individualism and equality (not to mention the desire for profit) would seem to lead them to embrace such a system.

From what I heard at the informational seminar, Toyota
also practices lifetime employment, but only if the worker has the necessary skills. It seems to me that this style would also be accepted by the Americans. After all, it provides them with job security, but only if they can prove they deserve it.

Although Americans appear to have accepted some aspects of Toyota’s management style, Toyota has not accepted an aspect of GM’s management style. Workers for GM rely on unions to attain their needs, but Toyota does not allow unions in many of its plants (Fucini and Fucini, 1990). The Kentucky plant is an exception to this, but the Toyota managers at the seminar were proud that the American workers had never gone on strike. It appears that one central aspect of GM’s management style has not been accepted by Toyota.

In conclusion, it seems to me that there was not much culture clash when Toyota opened up plants in the US. While the workers did not accept some aspects of Toyota’s management
system, they accepted many of them. Furthermore, some of these features ironically seem to better match American values than GM’s managerial style.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

As the following chapters demonstrate, the cultures of Japan and the US impacted their respective managerial cultures. GM’s managerial style is impacted by capitalism, individualism and equality. Toyota’s management style has been impacted by Confucianism and the concept of $i_e$.

It is interesting to see how aspects of a culture can impact on how companies within that culture manage their workers. I also think it was interesting that, in the case of GM, the values seemed to “fight” with one another. Finally, I thought it was interesting that Toyota could “transplant” its management system into the US so thoroughly and receive so little resistance. I thought it is ironic that Capitalism seems to kill individualism and equality even though those
three aspects are supposed to be the most American values.

I also liked that Japanese values at Toyota seems to be accepted by American workers even though the Toyota Production System was a little modified for American workers. Although American and Japanese cultures are entirely different, both countries established their management styles to compete with the market shares in Capitalism. I enjoyed studying management styles in the United States and Japan.
REFERENCES


http://www.themsj.com/main.cfm/section_id/61956/include/main.cfm/include/detail/storyid/180441.html

Consent of a Responsible Adult for General Motors

Western Michigan University
Department of: Sociology
Principal Investigator: Dr. Douglas Davidson
Student Investigator: Seiko Yomogita

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Comparisons of Management Styles between American and Japanese companies." This project is Seiko Yomogita's thesis project.

I will be asked to attend one hour private sessions with Seiko Yomogita on company time. I will be asked to meet Seiko Yomogita for these sessions at the GM Grand Rapids plant. The session will involve completing an interview. I will also provide general information about myself, such as my age, level of education, and employment status. The interviews will be audio taped. However, I can terminate the interviews questions if the questions cause anxiety.

The information obtained through this project may help American people and Japanese people gain a better understanding of each other's management systems/styles and culture. This information may also help Japanese and American automobile companies avoid cultural conflicts with workers. There are some conflicts with American workers for the Japanese companies; they have a difficult time understanding Japanese cultural values. I am going to compare those management styles/systems.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form. One potential risk of my participation in this project is that I may be upset by the content of the interview; however, Seiko Yomogita is prepared to provide crisis counseling should become significantly upset and he is prepared to make a referral if I need further counseling about this topic. I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to pursue it.

Here is the referral list.

Dr. Tom Collins
300 36th St. SW  Grand Rapids, MI 49548
TEL: 616-246-3190.
One way in which I may benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about my perception about the management styles/styles of Toyota and General Motors. The information obtained through this project may help American people and Japanese people gain a better understanding of each other's management systems and styles. This information may also help Japanese and American automobile companies avoid cultural conflicts with workers. There are some conflicts expressed by American workers who work for the Japanese companies: they have a difficult time with understanding Japanese cultural values. Studies is going to compare those management styles/systems.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Seiko Yomogita will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms and the audiotapes will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in Dr. Douglas Davidson's office.

I may refuse to participate or quit or refuse to answer any questions at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Seiko Yomogita at 616-387-7161 or Dr. Douglas Davidson at 616-387-5285. I may also contact the chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the vice president for research at 387-8298 with any concerns that I have.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. I should not sign this document if the corner does not have a stamped date and signature.

My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Signature

Consent obtained by:

Date

initials of researcher Date
Consent of a Responsible Adult for Toyota

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology
Principal Investigator: Dr. Douglas Davidson
Student Investigator: Seiko Yomogita

I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled "Comparisons of Management Styles between American and Japanese companies." This project is Seiko Yomogita's thesis project.

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Here is the referral list.

Dr. Ford Brewer
(502) 868-3854
1001 Cherry Blossom Way
Georgetown, KY. 40324
One way in which I may benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about my perception about the management styles/styles of Toyota and General Motors. The information obtained through this project may help American people and Japanese people gain a better understanding of each other's management systems and styles. This information may also help Japanese and American automobile companies avoid cultural conflicts with workers. There are some conflicts expressed by American workers who work for the Japanese companies: they have a difficult time with understanding Japanese cultural values. Studies is going to compare those management styles/systems.

All of the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. Neither my name nor any other identifying information will appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Seiko Yomogita will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms and the audiotapes will be retained for at least three years in a locked file in Dr. Douglas Davidson's office.

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My signature below indicates that I have read and/or had explained to me the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Signature
Consent obtained by:

Date

initials of researcher Date
Date: October 23, 2001

To: Douglas Davidson, Principal Investigator
    Seiko Yomogita, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Mary Lagerwey, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 01-08-13

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Comparison of Management Styles between American and Japanese Companies" has been provisionally approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. You may collect data from GM Grand Rapids plant, but do not collect data from the Toyota plant until the site approval letter from them is on file in the HSIRB office. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: October 23, 2002