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Japanese Management: cultural challenges and coping strategies.

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"No theory, no plan, no system of government can assure the success of an enterprise. Only people can do that."

Akio Morita, co-founder of Sony.

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Content

Introduction and objectives.....	9
Literature review	11
1. Origins of the Japanese Management	11
1.1. The Japanese society.....	12
1.1.1. Religions	12
1.1.2. Groups & obligations.....	13
1.1.3. Japanese value system.....	17
1.2. History of the Japanese Management	20
1.2.1. Rice farming village in pre-modern Japan.	20
1.2.2. Scientific Management	21
1.2.3. Human Resources Management	23
1.2.4. 1990s.....	24
1.2.5. The Japanese Management nowadays	25
2. Specificities of the Japanese Management.....	26
2.1. Link employee-company.....	26
2.1.2. Loyalty to the organization	30
2.1.3. Life employment.....	31
2.2. The Japanese Manager	34
2.3. Decision making process.....	36
2.4. Gender equality at work.....	38
2.5. Enterprise unionism	41
3. Issues frequently encountered by foreigners when dealing with the Japanese Management	43
3.1. Communication	43
3.2. Importance of seniority.	46
3.3. Negotiation	47
Practical part	49
4. Problematic and research question	49
5. Methodology.....	51
Interview guide	53
6. Results and analysis	55
6.1. First management assignment in Japan.....	55
6.2. Decision making process.....	58

6.3. Enterprise unionism	60
6.4. Communication	61
6.5. Confrontation.....	63
6.6. Team motivation.....	64
6.7. Gender equality at work	65
6.8. After-work drink.....	67
6.9. Link employee-company.....	68
6.10. Other characteristics of a successful manager in Japan.....	69
7. Discussion	71
Conclusion	75
Bibliography and references	77
Appendix.....	83

Introduction and objectives

Japan, a country with a rich culture and very old traditions, faced many difficulties in its economic development, but was able to become a world economic superpower. Many of Japan's success were attributed to a distinct management style which became known as the Japanese management and continue to be recognized worldwide as a model of efficiency. However, because of the specificities of this management, many foreign managers face difficulties when working in Japan or doing business with Japanese companies.

In this thesis, I would like to focus on the cultural challenges foreigners face when dealing with the Japanese management. I will also try to give recommendations, hints and tips to cope with those challenges. There is no magic recipe to something as complex as working in a different cultural environment. But I believe there are concrete hints for a smoother day-to-day interaction. I hope that a manager on his/her way to Japan reading this thesis could be better aware of (to start with), have a better understanding of (hopefully) and (ideally) be better prepared to deal with the specificities and key issues he/she is going to face.

In order to do so, the origins of the Japanese management and its cultural aspects will be described. I will also explain the main characteristics of the Japanese society which have most influenced the Japanese management and see how and why each characteristic shaped it. I will then examine the history and evolution of the Japanese Management throughout five important points.

The following step will be an overview of the main specificities of the Japanese management: the link between the employee and his/her company, the characteristics of the Japanese manager, the decision making process, the gender equality at work and the enterprise unionism. I will try to understand how and why each of these topics makes the Japanese management so particular. The first part of this thesis will end by analyzing the main issues encountered by foreigners when dealing with the Japanese management.

The second part of my work will be a qualitative survey conducted with Japanese and expatriate managers working in Japan. The goal will be to further analyze the thematic from a practical point of view by interviewing managers who are directly concerned by it. My global research question will be: what are the differences in terms of management style in between Japanese and non-Japanese managers working in Japan? The last point of my thesis will be a conclusion summarizing the most important findings from my work.

Literature review

1. Origins of the Japanese Management

There are two different theories on the origin of the Japanese management (Firkola, 2006; Lazaridi, 2012).

According to the first one, history and culture don't have a lot of influence on the Japanese management and most of its characteristics were developed during the past sixty years. It is thus in the postwar period that the Japanese management we know today was developed.

The second theory argues that theory and culture shaped the Japanese management: the practices of today are considered as the outcome of a long process which evolved throughout the years based on the values and culture of the Japanese society.

Throughout my readings, I came across many more authors agreeing with the second theory than with the first one. Moreover, as I will explain later, that is also what seems the most logical for me. This is why I will cover the history of the Japanese management before describing its core characteristics.

First and foremost, I will describe the Japanese society with some of its characteristics and values. It is indeed an understatement to say that the Japanese society often seems very "strange" from a foreigner's point of view. I firmly believe that a good understanding of Japanese management practices is not possible without first understanding the main characteristics of the Japanese society. I do not pretend to be exhaustive and to explain every aspects of the Japanese society. I will however deal with the characteristics that, after my readings, seemed relevant to me in order to understand the origins of the Japanese management. Afterwards, I will go throughout some important elements of the Japanese management history.

1.1. The Japanese society

1.1.1. Religions

Shintoism and Buddhism are the main religions in Japan. Many Japanese follow a meld of those two religions, which could be quite difficult to understand for a Westerner who is used to monotheistic religions (Facts about Japan, 2014). According to the agency for cultural affairs in Japan (2005), there were 107 million adherents to Shintoism (84% of the population) and 91 million of Buddhism adherents (71% of the population).

Shintoism is born in Japan and has begun to be structured in the 14th century (Nippon.fr, 2007). According to the Shintoism, each element from the nature corresponds to a divinity, to a spirit (“Kami”). Shintoism is built on a set of beliefs on the harmony between human and nature (Capsule Inc.net, n.a.). The concept of “kata” which is “the right way of doing things” comes from Shinto. This concept is still present in many Japanese’s life (Jetro, 1999).

Buddhism comes from India and was imported in Japan by the intermediary of China in the 6th century (Nippon.fr, 2007). Buddhism aims to the quest of awareness, kindness and wisdom throughout a path of practices, such as meditation, and spiritual development (The Buddhist center, n.a.).

The philosophy of **Confucianism** has considerably influenced Japan since its introduction in the year 285 (Japan guide, 2002). Despite the fact that this doctrine is not taught anymore in Japan. It is still well present in Japanese mind (Nippon.fr, 2007).

According to Vaszkun and Tsuitsui (2012, p.2), Confucianism “provides a world-view and a coherent set of values for social administration and social interactions rooted in a profound sense of (and respect for) hierarchy as well as a broad commitment to education, hard work, and harmonious relationships. [...] Confucianism shaped the development of Japanese business institutions more than any other systems of thought. Confucianism still affects Japanese business performances today through its core values of harmony, hierarchy, benevolence, loyalty, and learning”. Confucianism also argues that workers contribute to the national interest and to the state’s global prosperity (Lazaridi, 2012).

1.1.2. *Groups & obligations*

One of the key features of the Japanese society is the fact of **belonging to a group**. Indeed, the Japanese will almost always describe their social status by referring to a particular structure (group, company...) rather than by explaining their own role (Nakane, 1974, Jetro, 1999). That is to say, when a Japanese introduces himself, he will usually put emphasis on the organization he works for rather than on the position he has in it. At work, it seems that people exist in the eyes of each other's thanks to and through their membership to a group rather than by their own individual personality.

As a consequence, when one meets a new person in an important meeting, the best things one can do is having someone escorting him and personally introduce him to the new person. When one can't do that, it is good to go prepared with references and names of people who are known by each other. Indeed, in Japan, the personal network is even more important than in the Western countries (Lojac, 2011). Modesty is also a very respected quality in Japanese culture where "successful people defer the recognition of their individual performance and cite the group as the source of it" (Japan Management, 2014a).

In Japan, in private as well as in business life, **collectivity** is highly valued. Collectivism could be explained as follows: "individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Enhert and Claes, 2014b, p.6). In that respect, I could say that the Japanese society is one of the most collectivist societies in the world (Grainger and Miyamoto, 2003; Victor, 2011; Goulvestre, 2011; Lazaridi, 2012,). In their book, Kaji and al. (1999, p. 51), even say that "Japanese would not really care if they win or lose, as long as they were acting at unison. Aiming for the same goal is of supreme importance".

The **harmony inside the group** is also really important and groups should remain relatively stable. It is important for everybody to avoid uncomfortable situation or somebody to lose face. The Japanese will always try to search for consensus which will protect them against a humiliation towards the group, considered as the worst thing that could happen (Béland and al., 2009). Harmony is of course the most desired condition in most companies but it is particularly true in Japanese companies where, without this harmony, people can't work effectively (Stewart, Mendenhall, 1993). Jetro (1999, p.5) goes even further stating that "an individual who disagrees too strongly or insists on maintaining a different opinion disrupts the harmony of group consensus and may be thought to be immature."

On the other hand, someone who considers the good of the group before speaking or acting is considered as a person with character and maturity. Westerners sometimes interpret this tendency to conform as weakness or a lack of imagination but in Japan, a person who speaks out regardless of what the rest of the group thinks makes him or herself look ridiculous and loses credibility. As pointed out by Patricia Gercik (1992), in Japan, harmony in a situation often takes precedence over other considerations. One therefore needs to be diplomatic and make efforts in order to maintain this harmony.

Trust in the group is a matter of reliability, commitment and sincerity. It is determined by the willingness to systematically identify oneself with the goals of the group. One slowly builds the backbone of relationships through working together and granting favors to each other, before being accepted into the group. Those granting favors imply obligations which will be covered later on. These social skills combined with the ability to facilitate a discussion or ease tensions within the group, are highly valued skills in Japan (Gercik, 1992).

As I will develop later on, Japanese are known to be hard worker and to spend a lot of time at work. A consequence of this is that many groups are created at work. In Japan, work friendships are often integrated into the private life. It is thus frequent to keep in touch and to meet with colleagues after the working time. However, as explained by Jetro (1999, p.6), “there is an increasing number of people in the younger generation who value individualism and prefer to keep some distance between their private lives and their work and employers.”

In day-to-day life, as pointed out by Kaji and al (1999), most of the Japanese belong to a number of overlapping circles. Each of these circles functions like an exclusive members-only club and members do activities with other members from the group. Inside those circles, everyone has more or less the same understanding and the same attitudes. And while there are many differences in the circles (number, sizes, complexity ...) that each Japanese may belong to, there are also some commonalities. For example, it seems that for a middle-aged Japanese male, the circles which he belongs to are his family, his company, the alumni association of the school he attended, and perhaps a sports club. He will treat these entities with an extreme devotion when called for: duties and expectations towards the group members (Goulvestre, 2011). People from a group know each other very well. Japanese depend a lot from their colleagues and expect a lot from them. Indeed, individuals behave with strict devotion for anyone inside their own circles.

However, group members show little interest or sense of responsibility for what lies outside that sphere. One study showed that Japanese were less willing than people in any other countries to risk their own safety to prevent a crime or injustice being done to someone they don't know personally (Horseley, Buckley, 1992).

“Uchi” (being on the inside) and “soto” (being on the outside) refer to the perception Japanese have of **in-groups and out-groups** (Kaji and al., 1999). Of course, all societies have norms dictating how individuals belong or not to different groups. However, a difference between Japan and many other societies is the strong rigidity of the boundaries between groups. Indeed, it is much more difficult to move between in-group and out-group status in Japanese organizations (Stewart and Mendenhall, 1993).

The fact that an individual, group, or organization is defined and recognized as inside or outside of the group explains in a large part the flexibility and fairness one can expect regarding the **repayment of obligations**. In general, Japanese believe one can expect much more flexibility, understanding, and flexibility in interactions with in-group individuals. In the same way, one can expect in-group individuals to recognize and honor obligations they have towards each other inside the group. On the other hand, the same level of confidence cannot be placed in out-group individuals. What Japanese really aim to in interpersonal relationships is a situation in which the obligations are minimized and where the flexibility to fulfill those obligations is maximized. Stewart and Mendenhall (1993) go even further and say that in terms of obligations; we can say that few societies have rules as complicated, strict, and burdensome as the rules in Japan.

“Giri” is another important concept to understand Japanese society; giri is the moral force that pushes Japanese to enter in the socially expected reciprocal activities. It is also often translated in Western culture as a “burden of obligation” (EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation, 2015). If parties don't fulfill these expectations, it will result in a loss of trust and support, not only from the party engaged in the activity, but also from any observers. It is thus very important to remember every favor, no matter how small or insignificant they are, in order to calculate the appropriate reciprocation (Stewart and Mendenhall, 1993). In their paper, Stewart and Mendenhall (1993, p.3) explain this need for reciprocity through a funny example:

“The Japanese confectionery industry saw that importing the concept of Valentine’s Day could greatly increase candy sales, especially chocolate. The industry began a collective effort to promote Valentine’s Day and the sale of chocolate candy. It turned out that most of the chocolate was being purchased by women and given to men. Knowing that gifts received must be returned in Japan, these candy makers then launched a second holiday a few days after Valentine’s Day, which they called White Day. They billed White Day as the day men could (and by obligation had to) buy chocolate and give it to all those from whom they received chocolate on Valentine’s Day. The chocolate given back on White Day is commonly referred to as giri choco, (duty chocolate). Young, single, and popular male managers usually dread this time each year because they may receive Valentine’s Day chocolate from ten to fifteen young “office ladies,” all of whom must be given back chocolate on White Day. For a Japanese businessman, the total chocolate purchases for White Day can exceed a hundred dollars.”

“The Japanese regard individuality as evidence of immaturity, and autonomy as the freedom to comply with one’s obligations and duties.”

W.M.

*Fox Japanese Management:
Tradition under Strain*

1.1.3. *Japanese value system*

In this part, I will describe some values of the Japanese society which seem relevant to me in order to better understand the Japanese management.

As explained earlier, the flexibility of obligation depends on the group one is in. I can also say that the context also has an important impact on those obligations. As we can see on the table below, Japanese are described as **high-context people**: indirect communication has a lot of importance and the behavior of Japanese strongly depends upon the situation and its circumstances. Non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, eyes movement and tone of voice are even more important than the actual words that are communicated.

This explains why during the first days/weeks in a Japanese company, one will be expected to soak up the atmosphere and get the feeling of the place. Indeed, Japanese place a high importance on intuitive understanding and on getting familiar with situations (Jetro, 1999). Japanese is a culture where knowing the context is critical to evaluating and reacting to situations, which could be quite challenging if one is not used to it. (March, 1992).

High / low context culture countries.

Countries	High context, implicit cultures	Low context, explicit cultures
German speaking		****
Scandinavian		****
United States		***
France	*	*
England	**	
Middle East	***	
China	***	
Japan	****	

Enhert and Claes, 2014a, p.50

The Japanese are thus trained throughout their lives to read each other's minds. The quintessence of mutual understanding is to be found in the word "yoroshiku": this short word usually conveys the following meaning: "You have understood what I want you to do. I have understood that you have understood what I want you to do. Therefore I leave it up to you to finish the task and I expect it to be done in the way I want it to be done. And I thank you for understanding me and agreeing to take the trouble to do the task". (Kaji and al., 1999, pp. 9-10). Moreover, emotions and especially negative ones are not openly expressed in Japan. There is indeed an indirect and private way to discuss and resolve difference in order to avoid public debate, confrontation or losing face.

The Japanese therefore have a **style of communication** that often seems particular for foreigners, especially when it comes to express the emotions or intentions. Later in this paper, I will come back on what makes the communication so challenging for foreigners. Yasushi Haga, a sociolinguistic Professor has listed eight characteristics defining the communication style of a typical Japanese person (Kawaguchi, 2012, pp. 136-137):

- 1) "Tries to sense the mood of others.
- 2) In a relation, does not try to persuade but to first build personal trust.
- 3) Expresses concerns for others and reads the atmosphere of the situation.
- 4) Is honest.
- 5) Keeps ego aside: places a high value on humility and is averse to over self-promotion.
- 6) Puts a lot of importance on self-cultivation.
- 7) Goes with the flow: tries to maintain the status quo instead of fighting the elements.
- 8) Trusts others to do what is needed or right. "

Japanese are also well known for being structured and organized (Horsley and Buckley, 1990). Order and **discipline** take indeed a particular importance in a country such as Japan where space is extremely limited. It is thus not a surprise that Japanese people developed behaviors of rigor and discipline which helped them to live in harmony in a place where the population density is one of the most important of the world.

A thing that often struck in foreigners' mind is the **extreme politeness** of the Japanese. It is maybe due to the fact that the language and the culture make it almost impossible to be rude (Kaji and al, 1999). Bowing is one of the aspects of this politeness. For the Japanese, bowing has a great importance; it is the sign of a good education. Like for many other things, Japanese have defined ways to bow in the right way. Bowing is actually done in a way that respects hierarchy and positions of people in society (e.g.. angle for bowing and even how many times one person should bow versus another is done in a way to show agreement and respect of the hierarchy). This is again something that may look strange, if not hermetic, for foreigners for whom “shaking hands” is the norm. That being said, foreigners are not expected to perfectly know how to bow.

Japanese bowing when meeting.



Huffington Post, 2015

An important relation to mention is the one with alcohol. Indeed, in Japan, once alcohol gets into the picture (e.g. when Japanese have an **after-work drink**), social conventions are put aside: the things Japanese say under the influence of alcohol have to be kept secret and should not be mentioned afterwards. No colleague can be a true colleague until a bottle has been shared. Thanks to this, they build up mutual trust and friendship link. It is also a moment where links can be rebuild, for instance after a tough discussion at work. Things are said in an informal atmosphere and it is a way to relax and to escape from the work pressure. There is even a special term dealing with that: “nomunication”, a combination of the Japanese word for drinking (“nomimasu”) and the English word “communication” (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 1997). For this cause and for the group cohesion, Japanese will tolerate many things which would not be tolerated at work. Providing that everybody will turn up bright and on time at work the next morning. (March, 1992; Kaji and al., 1999).

1.2. History of the Japanese Management

1.2.1. *Rice farming village in pre-modern Japan.*

The period from 1603 to 1860 is known as the Edo period: it started with the beginning of Shogun and Edo (Tokyo today) becoming the capital of Japan. It is important to know that during this period, Japan was largely isolated from the rest of the world by its leaders in order for them to maintain political stability and to prevent foreign influences. This period will end with the opening of the country to trade with foreign countries (mainly the United States) in 1854.

Many business historians believe that the rice farming villages are the **foundation of the behavior and values of modern Japanese firms** (Firkola, 2006). Values such as lifelong membership, collectivism and age based roles were characteristics shared by those communities.

During the Edo period, mobility was really low. As a consequence, when someone was born in a village, the chances were high that he would stay in this village during all of his life. Moreover, the belongings of all the villagers were shared and villagers were used to consider the needs of their community before their own. Villagers were also dependent of their village for all their needs, including for housing. In this context, the best way to ensure prosperity for oneself was to dedicate his entire life to the prosperity of his village (Firkola, 2006). This collectivist aspect of the rice farming village was really important. These values of equality and of group belonging are still very present in the Japanese companies of today (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

Another key characteristic was the seniority principle. Indeed, roles in the village were function of the age and experience. The eldest male of the community was the chief, responsible for most of the decisions and the youngest had to learn watching the seniors.

According to Firkola (2006), Japanese business organization adapted those practices during the modernization of Japan and many modern companies share the same value than the rice farming village. Indeed, lifelong employment, collectivism and age based role were the predecessors of traditional Japanese management practices (Firkola, 2006). According to Chie Nakane (1974), it is in its past that the modern Japan found the sources of its extraordinary success and it is the utilization in modern goals of old relationship habits that gave to Japanese such a capacity of collective achievement.

1.2.2. *Scientific Management*

Scientific management, also known as Taylorism, had a strong influence on the Japanese production system in its formative stages. We could say that the scientific management with approaches such as linear programming, decision sciences, mathematical models... was one of the only revolutionary changes the Japanese management faced. And even if the scientific management principles changed over the decades, the same fundamental approach remained unchanged in the twentieth century. (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

Compared to other countries, Japan was relatively late regarding industrialization and mass-production; the first commercial contacts with the Westerners started in 1854 with the Kanagawa treaty which opened some Japanese harbors to trading with the United States. Until then, the Japanese market was too small to consume the domestic production and was anyway closed to any trading with foreign companies (Edo period). Thanks to export, Japan extended its market and gained access to new technologies (Inman and Victor, 2002). As soon as the conditions were in place, that is to say the adoption of Western production technologies and the adequacy of market size (thanks to export, increasing of standard living and purchase power...), the advance of the scientific management was relatively rapid.

We could say that in the 1950s/1960s, almost all of American's management methods were imported. This allowed Japanese corporate groups to minimize significant investments, expenditures and risks like those associated to R&D. Instead of this, they focused their efforts into improving quality to the highest possible level and eliminating wastes as much as possible. Indeed, the American's practices were not merely adopted: they were considerably modified in order to be perfectly efficient in Japan. Quality control is a good example of modification of an American method by the Japanese management. In USA, workers were asked to implement procedures explained in a manual provided by the top management. Japan transformed them in the Total Quality Control (TQC) which was based on measures obtained by discussions between managers and shop-floor employees. In the TQC, the worker was responsible for the well-being of the procedures (Dobi and Bugár, 2008). By doing so, workers moved from a status of doers to a status of owners of their day-to-day processes.

In 1954, Japan established the Japan Productivity Center (JPC). This is a very tangible example of the great Japanese interest for management.

Just after he visited USA and Europe in 1956, the chairman of the JPC said that “efforts to raise productivity should be made using Japan’s own practices as the base, and incorporating American ideas (efficiency) and European attitudes (humanity)” (Dobi and Bugár, 2008). Through this statement, we can understand that the goal of the JPC was not to mimic USA or Europe’s management practices but rather to adapt them to the Japan particular situation.

The effectiveness of this approach is probably best illustrated by the car industry: in 1950, the Japanese made a total of 1600 cars; in 1980 they made 11 million, which was more than the USA. As stated by Horsley and Buckley (1990), “it was a shock for Detroit and a triumph for Toyota, Nissan and the other Japanese makers”. It was also a landmark in industrial history, and it demonstrated quite convincingly Japan’s strengths in “mass + quality” production: the effective management of money, men and machines. The car industry can be considered as a good example of Japan rewriting the basic lessons of mass production.

When looking at the history of Japanese management, it is important to keep in mind that the “Japanese way” of managing is not a one-way convergence to the “Western model”. Actually, the learning was a two way process: Japanese companies learned the best Western management practices and Westerns companies learned the Japanese human resource development, the Japanese lean production, etc... Therefore, we should talk of a **hybridization of the Western and Japanese models** (Dobi and Bugár, 2008). In her paper, Lazaridi, (p. 29, 2012), talks along the same lines: “It is interesting to note that Japanese management greatly differs from American and European management, despite the Japanese importing much of their method from America in the immediate post-war period. A synergy was developed which reflected Japan's native culture, national values, traditions and psychology, and consequently created a method of management suited to the Japanese mentality and cultural norms”.

The Japanese success story shows that massive R&D efforts and abundant natural resources are not necessary for a sustainable industrial development. Indeed, “by building competence in adapting existing product designs and speeding up the processes, the Japanese were able to manufacture products with superior quality at competitive prices, giving them a distinct advantage in world markets.” (Inman and Victor, 2002).

1.2.3. *Human Resources Management*

After the Second World War, American introduced some HR ideas in Japanese firms with the help of some Japanese scholars. Due to its substantial efficiency gains and its positive impact on labor relation, this new management philosophy was really appreciated in Japan. This is why Japanese firms decided to implement certain HR practices such as suggestion system and attitude surveys (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

That being said, Japanese firms already had adopted corporate welfare practices at the very start of the industrialization process: paternalistic practices such as provision of welfare facilities by employers, familial corporate ideologies, personnel policies which emphasize job security and worker loyalty... Moreover, several laws ensuring the social security system, old age pensions, unemployment benefits, accident compensation and a minimum wage were passed relatively early in Japan, beginning in the 1920s (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

We could say that the important collectivist heritage of Japan enabled its organizations to emphasize the labor and production management practices. Indeed, as I explained earlier, group performance is a key thing in the Japanese society. Therefore, American HR practices seemed more a **common sense** rather than a revolutionary innovation for the Japanese management (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

In the mid-1980s, Japanese companies' consistent growth and the constant improvement of their international competitiveness drew the attention of the world business community (Dobi and Bugár, 2008).

1.2.4. 1990s

Since the beginning of the 1990s, a lot of **pressure** were put under Japanese companies for transformation. There were many reasons for that such as the fact that the traditional business system seemed to be less and less suitable to meet the demands of a top-ranked economy; sustaining growth was difficult to obtain after the bursting of Japan's "bubble economy", the increase of the national debt and of the unemployment rate... (Estienne, 2002).

In their paper, Dobi and Bugár (p. 205, 2008) make the following statement: "The failure of Japanese enterprises in the late 1980s and the early 1990s – the other so-called bubble economy – cannot always be attributed to faults in the basic Japanese management system itself, but the 'mistaken approaches' of some firms as they confronted 'global standards' such as growth in the size of the firms, strategies of unrelated diversification, overseas investment, and financial operations, which had not been customary for Japanese industrial enterprises. In other words, during the bubble economy, Japanese enterprises had attempted to emulate the very different American type of organizational capabilities rather than enhancing their own organizational strengths."

It is quite paradoxical to note that it is the same globalization that had spread Japanese management methods all over the world that seemed to question the foundations of these traditional techniques in Japan itself (Vaszkun and Tsuitsui, 2012).

1.2.5. *The Japanese Management nowadays*

Recent years showed that circumstances have changed; Japanese economy is **evolving** to a service and knowledge-intensive industry. Japan is now struggling to remain a leader in that new economy and has to deal with intense competition from the others nations as well as quick changes in business practices.

Many methods used by Japanese companies during history now seem to be out of the time. Indeed, nowadays in Japan, there is for instance a profusion of flexible contracts and performance-based evaluations (Keizer and al., 2012), which are the opposite of life employment and seniority based wages that are, as I will develop later, typical characteristics of the Japanese management. We also assist in the weakening of unions and in an increase of individualistic behaviors, especially by the younger generations. We can thus ask ourselves how traditional management practices will adapt in those times of changes. A recent sign of this change and adaptation is the nomination of a non-Japanese president at the head of Takeda, the oldest and biggest Japanese pharmaceutical company. It is indeed the first time since Takeda foundation in 1781 that the president is not Japanese. Moreover, most of the executives are now Westerners (Takeda Pharmaceutical Company, 2015).

According to Vaszkun and Tsuitsui in their 2012 paper, “The question today is whether people in Japan would rather live in a more protected economy, where employment is stable, group members can look out for each other, and relatively weak employees and economic sectors can be carried by more competitive ones, or whether they would prefer a more liberal, market-oriented economy, which, due to harsh global competition, may lead to unprecedented instability, insecurity, and social polarization. For sure, this question is very complex and there are no clear-cut answers, although it seems clear that, within this new context, solutions are unlikely to come from the central authorities and the elites of government and business. In the end, the only good answers will be given by society itself.”

The future of Japanese management is thus uncertain, but what remain sure is that a deep understanding of the past will be essential to understand recent events and predict further changes.

2. Specificities of the Japanese Management

In this second part, I will deal with the main aspects that make Japanese management so particular for foreigners.

2.1. Link employee-company

In Japan, a corporate group's reputation is based on its history, its market share, and finally its attitude towards employees. New recruits will first seek after firms with the best reputation. Companies recognize that the employee is of vital importance for their competitive advantage, they even consider them as their most valuable property (Lazaridi, 2012).

It is important to note that employees are generally not hired for specific positions but rather for their individual's intelligence, educational background and personal attitudes (US Library of Congress, n.a.). After joining the company, the new employee is indoctrinated in **the corporate philosophy**. The various induction courses will imbue the employee with the corporate culture, its way of working, the adequate behavior to have, etc. The emphasis is thus not put on any specific skills but rather on how does the company behave and how to behave accordingly. As a consequence, during this period, the new employee's principal mission will be to fit into the corporate family (Firkola, 2006).

The determination of salaries is also specific in Japan. In Western countries, salary is based on what is required by the job itself, on the position the person is hired for, whereas in Japan, salary is mainly determined by the education, the length of employment and the competence of the person (Ohsawa, 1993). This system is called the **seniority based wage** and is defined by the Japan Ministry of Labor (JMOL) as "a system or practice which emphasizes number of years of service or age and educational background in determining pay and promotion" (Ornatowski, 1998). The seniority based wage was a key feature of the Japanese management; it values long-serving, commitment to the company and experienced employees. On the other hand, it tends to penalize people changing from employers.

That being said, this system was the source of several criticisms during the last decades and many companies replaced it by merit-based ("seika-shugi") system (Grainger and Miyamoto, 2003). Indeed, this system was no longer sustainable in case of economic stagnation and ageing workforce, i.e. two major challenges which Japan is now facing.

Therefore, many Japanese companies now choose to sacrifice seniority based wages for “**job ability-based wages**” (shokuno-kyu) in order to preserve lifelong or at least long-term employment (Morris and al., 2006). Yet in 1998, many unions indicated that they would not be opposed to a shift to a merit based wage system (Dalton and Benson, 2002). Besides its theoretical merits, the performance based wage system is difficult to apply in practice because it requires the introduction of its own instruments for assessing performance. We can thus see in Lazaridi’s paper (2012, p.32) that “according to the General Survey on Working Conditions (2010), 45.1% of Japanese private organizations have introduced a performance-based system but only 23% of those organizations have confirmed that their performance assessments are good, the remaining ones reporting that they encounter difficulties in assessing employees as employees are dissatisfied with the organizational evaluation of their performance and do not accept the process”.

Japanese aging population is also of course an important source of motivation for the companies to replace the seniority based wage which considerably increases the labor cost. Another factor is the attitudes of younger employees which do not want a system that does not reward high achievement fast enough (Ornatowski, 1998). Those students put more emphasis on challenges and personal development than on slow career moves, even if it is combined with job security. As a consequence, many top students prefer to work for foreign-owned companies. This is seen as a real problem for Japanese companies which lose many potential talents (Dalton and Benson, 2002).

In her book, Chie Nakane (1974) underlines the importance of the **emotional connection** in between the worker and his organization. Indeed, the relation between the company and its employees go well beyond the contract and the Japanese company constitutes a social group organized on the familial model (Lazaridi, 2012). It is also referred to as a paternalistic company culture (Béland and al., 2009; Grainger and Miyamoto, 2003). Domingo (2003) goes even beyond and says that “Japanese loyalty to their company is so strong that it transcends family ties”. Each organization creates a culture that supports this relationship (Ohsawa, 1993). It is fair to say that more than the Westerners, Japanese management integrates work with the personal lives and employees tend to identify themselves to the organization they work for. All their attention and energy are focused on the company and their future is directly linked with the organization’s one. Japanese usually are really attached to their company and are available to help any other member of the firm when needed (Hellriegel and al., 1989; Anderson, 2009; Debroux, 2014).

A key aspect of this emotional connection is the Japanese implication in the daily life of his company. This implication could, among others, be traduced throughout the Kaizen method. As we can see on the picture below, Kaizen could be traduced by “continuous improvement”; it is the name of a quality management method consisting in simple, concrete, daily and cheap improvements. Kaizen is a step-by-step approach, by opposition to more brutal reforms. However, it is first and foremost a mindset which requires the involvement of all the participants. Indeed, they are asked to think and propose improvement on their workplace. As a consequence and unlike innovation, Kaizen does not require significant financial investment but rather employee’s commitment, motivation and common sense (Wikipédia, 2014a). It aims to standardize the process, involve the employees, and improve the quality, the production and the working conditions (Randriamasy, 2014).

Kanji traduction of Kaizen.



Kaizen institute, 2013

Employees are also encouraged to make suggestions throughout quality control circles, composed on a voluntary basis by some employees (anyone from the president to an ordinary worker). All groups’ members will attend training on problem solving. The people in the circles often meet them after work and during 1 hour. During those meetings, employees have the possibility to express their opinion/ideas about the quality of production, the effective use of resources, how to improve processes... The topics for discussion can be very broad since quality control covers every stage of the production (Inman and Victor, 2002; Lazaridi, 2012). In fact, group members select, through consensus, problems they will try to address. Suggestions are then examined by subject matter experts. A suggestion system applicable to each and every employee at an individual point of view also exists. Of course, failure to accept a suggestion requires management to offer valuable feed-back in order to ensure the continuing success of the quality circles (CiteHR, n.a).

Another element of the family atmosphere created in some Japanese companies is due to what we can call “**Japanese clubbiness**” which is part of the paternalistic atmosphere in some firms (March, 1992). According to this clubbiness, once you are member of a work group in a company, you will often be expected to spend your lunch and some of your evenings with your colleagues in order to become like a family. Foreign workers in Japan are also expected to enter in this kind of relationship. Refusing would be considered by your colleagues as rude and even insulting.

2.1.2. Loyalty to the organization

Both employers and employees have high expectations of each other's performance. They trust each other and loyalty responds to loyalty. Companies ensure jobs for life and a steady rise up the corporate ladder. In return, employees offer diligence, self-sacrifice and hard-working (Kaji and al., 1999). According to EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (2015, p.34), "regardless of their position in an organization it is common to find employees with a level of servitude and formality that for Western values would border on excessive".

This loyalty also means that the employees have to accept and contribute to the smooth functioning of the group they belong to. As said before, harmony is highly valued and the group strives to preserve the outward manifestation of consensus. Individuals are rarely singled out of a group for praise or blame (Ben and al., 2013). However, the firm will not hesitate to fire an employee whose attitude moral and intellectual do not suit to the company, even if he/she is a very good worker. A candidate with a more individualistic tendency will thus seduce Japanese recruiters with more difficulties (Béland and al., 2009).

Another aspect of this company devotion is that employees will place a great importance on the company well-being and will not hesitate to make additional personal efforts. Indeed, Japanese workers are usually said to be hard worker. The full-time employees work some 2000 hours per year, which is 400 hours longer than their counterparts in Germany of France for instance (Ogura, 2012). According to the Japanese Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry's 2013 statistics, 8.8% of full-time employees worked more than 60 hours per week, which means more than 80 hours of monthly **overtime** (The Japan Time, 2014). The issue is that working for long periods under stressful work condition can lead to health problem. There is even a Japanese word: "karoshi", which means "death from overwork" or "occupational sudden death" (Chelala, 2013). According to the official figures, 400 persons died each year from stroke, heart attack or suicide attributed to overwork. This is thus a national problematic and the government passed law in 2014 in order to address this phenomenon (Carney, 2015).

2.1.3. *Life employment*

Life employment (“shushin koyo”) is the idea according to which an employee will remain into the same organization during all of his career. Once recruited, the company will indeed take care of the employee during his entire career (March, 1992; CiteHR, n.a). Practically speaking, the young graduate is recruited during his last year of high school/university and is supposed to stay within the same organization until retirement. Except for the top management members who are not expected to retire at any specific age (Drucker, 1971; US Library of Congress, n.a.).

As explained by Philippe Debroux (p. 319, 2014), “In Japan, the norm of lifetime employment was never enshrined in any law but its principle was backed by the state through legal doctrine and court precedents that protected permanent employees, at least in major companies, against arbitrary action by owners and managers. The permanent employees were seen to be dependent on their employers and faced strong incentives to act in accordance with the long-term interests of the company, lest they would lose their employment status and fall into the category of the unprotected workforce. Therefore, management was in command and had authority to manage employees’ career and working conditions. However, there was to some extent an effective balance of power based on the prospect of the state intervention.”

It must be noted that lifelong employment was not applicable to all Japanese firms; it was adopted essentially by leading companies. Moreover, in these companies, lifelong employment only applies for core employees; temporary workers, subcontractors, seasonal workers, part-timers, and dispatched employees did not have access to this system (Ornatowski, 1998).

According to a survey of Tokyo Stock Exchange-listed companies (Ornatowski, 1998), the Japanese were clearly in favor of the lifelong employment but were against the seniority based wage (which confirm what was described earlier).

Their responses were as follows:

- “76 % of respondents said that the lifetime employment system should be maintained to the extent possible but seniority-based pay should be abolished.
- 12% responded that both lifetime employment and seniority-based pay should be abolished.
- 6.3% said that both lifetime employment and the seniority system should be maintained.”

As explained by Fikorla in his book (2006, p. 123), “many companies still believe that the merits of lifetime employment out-weight the demerits. The merits mentioned by these companies include maintaining worker loyalty, long-term investment in employee education and having a stable workforce. The demerits included talented workers finding the system unfair, the difficulty in making speedy adjustment to its labor force and the prospect of an aging workforce over the long term”.

Nowadays, some Japanese think that life employment is no longer viable as an economic model and start to lay off workers. (Keio University, 2007). We can indeed observe that the number of lifelong employment has decreased since the 1960th; however, it now seems to remain constant. We can thus assume that many companies and workers still value this practice and that a low mobility between the companies still seems to be the tendency: a person who worked for at least 3 different companies is considered as a pretty mobile profile (Anderson, 2009; Bechet, 2011; Aghabachian, 2013). Of course, changes are occurring, they are however more limited to seniority based pay and lifelong employment seems to remain more or less intact in most large companies.

One solution some companies used to decrease the number of lifelong employment during the recession of the 1990s was to encourage early retirement. Another option was the approach called “Shukko”: it consists in lending these employees to subsidiaries or subcontractors where they would have a more prestigious title but a smaller salary. Then, when the conditions would be improved, these workers would probably return to their previous position (CiteHR, n.a). As we can see on the table below, they are several reasons for which companies use the Shukko method.

Reasons for which companies use the Shukko method.

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Assistance to recipient companies	41.0
2. Reduction of workforce	29.8
3. No promotion opportunity	16.8
4. Response to reduced sales	8.1
5. Employee training	1.2
6. Others	3.1

Grainger and Miyamoto 2003, p. 108

Shukko is thus mainly used by companies in order to provide help and assistance to recipient companies (41%). The reduction of workforce is the second most important reason with almost 30%. It permits to reduce the staff number without having to layoff. Since 1989, this method has been widely used by the Japanese companies to maintain the integrity of their relational approach to human resource management. In fact, Japanese companies try to avoid layoffs because of its negative impact on the companies in terms of image, employees moral and on new recruitments. Layoffs can address short term cost problems but are often not a solution for long term issues (Ornatowski, 1998).

We can thus say that press reports predicting the ends of lifelong employment are premature since a majority of companies still have plans to retain it. The system continues indeed to have numerous benefices such as employee loyalty, motivation, long term training... Moreover, its drawbacks in terms of fixed labor cost seem manageable since this system has never been applied to all employees and there are some mechanisms such as early retirement and transfer of selected employees to decrease this rigidity. Therefore, this system seems flexible enough to adjust to current environmental changes. In short: continuing evolution rather than a radical revolution seems to be the future of the lifelong employment system (Ornatowski, 1998; Dalton and Benson, 2002; Morris and al., 2006; Lazaridi, 2012; Keizer and al., 2012).

2.2. The Japanese Manager

The feeling that a manager has toward his subordinates is translated in Japanese by the work “onjo-shugi”, which means “**paternalism**” (Lazaridi, 2012). The manager will try to involve, encourage and challenge his team members by providing an environment where they can contribute harmoniously to the group’s goal (Béland and al., 2009; Anderson, 2009). Morita (1987, p.137) goes further and states that “the most important mission for a Japanese manager is to develop a healthy family like feeling within the corporation, a feeling that employees and managers share the same fate”. The manager is expected to be accessible and willing to share his knowledge with the group, give advices, guidance and overall showing genuine concern for its team members development as business people and as well as human being (March, 1992). According to Micklethwait and Wooldridge (1997), “The art of leadership [in Japan] is to divine the will of the group, not to electrify the organization with charisma”.

The more powerful and influential the boss will be, the more he will take care of his subordinates’ welfare, and the more they will be devoted to him. In Japan, managers will first try to find the equilibrium (in terms of competence, character, team spirit...) with their teams before trying to obtain results for the stakeholders (Béland and al., 2009; Goulvestre, 2011). In return, the Japanese manager will expect from his team members to keep him fully informed of project developments, to reach certain quality results, to respect deadlines, to meet commitments and to not question his decisions. In other words, the manager expects his team not to disappoint him. Otherwise, it would results in a loss of face for the manager and in shame for the team. This reciprocity in relationship is the base of Japanese management and effective team work (Jetro, 1999; Worldbusinessculture, 2013).

More than any others countries, one can’t isolate the manager from the group; he is totally integrated into it. Indeed, the manager is deeply involved in the group work and the communication process is very rich (Zone, 2003). Japanese are bottom-up managers; which means they have many contacts with front-line operations (Domingo, 2003).

In the Japanese society, the essential quality of the manager is thus to be able to understand his team and to win their esteem. A manager can be an expert and technically very competent but without first gaining the esteem of his subordinates, he will not be able to achieve much and he will not get much from his team either. Therefore, the effectiveness of a group of people depends of the abilities of the chief to win the group’s respect.

Hierarchy is really important in Japan where Japanese respect a lot the older people (Goulvestre, 2011; Aghabachian, 2013). In the Japanese system, managers are almost always older than their subordinates and therefore, Japanese employees will naturally respect them since they will be seen as more senior and therefore as more experienced persons. According to the EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation (2015, p.28), “young Japanese people are taught to respect older people and hierarchy, which subsequently helps them to fit seamlessly into the working team.” Considering promotion in Japan is often based on seniority, the oldest in a group will almost systematically take the leader position (March, 1992).

The Japanese system of promotion is often compared to an escalator: once you are in, everybody rises at the same speed, regardless of individual performance or merits. An important criterion for promotion is thus seniority which is simply determined by the year the employee joined the company. Therefore, career progression is highly predictable (March, 1992; Stewart and Mendenhall, 1993; US Library of Congress, n.a.). That being said, that system which was the *modus operandi* for several decades has also progressively evolved towards a promotion system taking more and more into account individual merit and performance (Pudelko, 2006).

In Japan, each person knows his position and will not try to modify his status: it could negatively impact the equilibrium and the harmony inside the company. This idea probably comes from the Confucianism which describes the natural order of human relations as hierarchical; the respect for elders is also a key aspect of this philosophy (Jetro, 1999; Béland and al., 2009; Lazaridi, 2012; CiteHR, n.a.). Japanese knows that his personal success is linked to the group success (Bechet 2011).

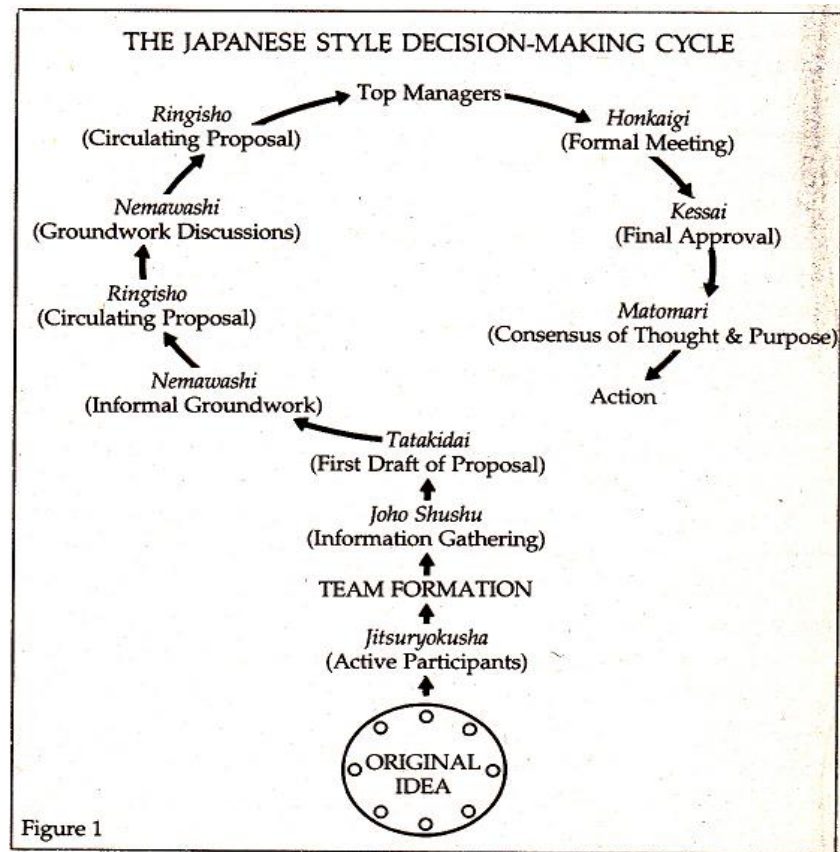
The Japanese manager also has to be a **consensus builder** (US Library of Congress, n.a.) as I will explain in the next section.

2.3. Decision making process

Instead of being imposed what to do by their managers, employees are invited to express their opinion (Nakane, 1974). The objectives of the company are known by all and decisions are taken with **consensus**. The strength of this approach is obviously that those who will be involved in the implementation of decisions have been actively involved in defining them (Worldbusinessculture, 2013). The decision process is thus based on collectivity and on consensus. The harmony is vital and conflicts are avoided as much as possible. Such participative behavior leads to higher level of productivity (Drucker, 1971; Slocum and Woodman, 1989; Jetro, 1999; Zone, 2003; Hellriegel and al., 1989; Domingo, 2003; Lazaridi, 2012; Japan Management, n.a). Moreover, when a group takes a decision, the responsibility of this decision is shared by all the members of the group and not only by the manager. This has of course a positive influence on the manager's stress (Béland and al., 2009; Lazaridi, 2012).

Another characteristic is that before taking a decision, the long term is examined. Japanese manager are more likely than their counterparts to make decision in relation with company goals and strategy rather than on daily activities. Another point is that, according to Ludwig and al (2011, p.1), "top executives at Japanese companies value the scale of domestic operations, emphasizing revenue and growth over profitability. The Japanese press shares these preferences, and it often gives favorable coverage to companies that meet or exceed revenue targets. In comparison, MNCs tend to focus more on contribution margins than on revenue growth."

The decision by consensus system or "ringi system" is one of the most important features of Japanese management. "Rin" means submitting a proposal and requesting a decision and "gi" denotes deliberations and actual decisions. [...] The decision will be made by top management based on the comments from people involved in the process. The purpose of this roundabout way of making decisions is to eliminate dissension conflicts and disagreement by giving to employees a chance to change a decision before it is actually made" (CiteHR, n.a, p.3). Of course, unilateral decisions by directors or senior managers occur from time to time, but they are uncommon. Most decisions are the outcome of a process of discussion involving several employees.



March, 1992, p.159

The graphic above illustrates a typical Japanese decision-making process: at the start of the process, the first four steps are about collecting information within the team and making a first draft of the idea. This proposal and its implication are then discussed with several people who have interests in the area and/or who could be affected by its implementation. This process may be repeated several times until consensus is reached. Then, top managers make the final decisions.

According to Anderson (2009), disadvantages of this decision making process are “too many participants, too many meetings, and many participants simply are too detached from the proposal to offer any value to the process. Participants make their proposals slowly and cautiously so as not to upset one another, thus, decisions are not made expeditiously.” Moreover, some participants even don’t express their opinion to preserve the harmony.

That being said, once the consensus is reached, implementing the decision is considerably more efficient and faster since the employees are already committed to the project (Béland and al., 2009). It also permits people to cross-check one another’s ideas (March, 1992; Dobi and Bugár, 2008).

2.4. Gender equality at work

In most Asian countries, up to the twenty-first century, women were not considered as equal to males. At work, they were considered as a workforce of secondary importance, not really worth of a significant investment in training (Debroux, 2014). Japan is not an exception to this situation and it was not easy for women university graduates to find suitable job opportunities.

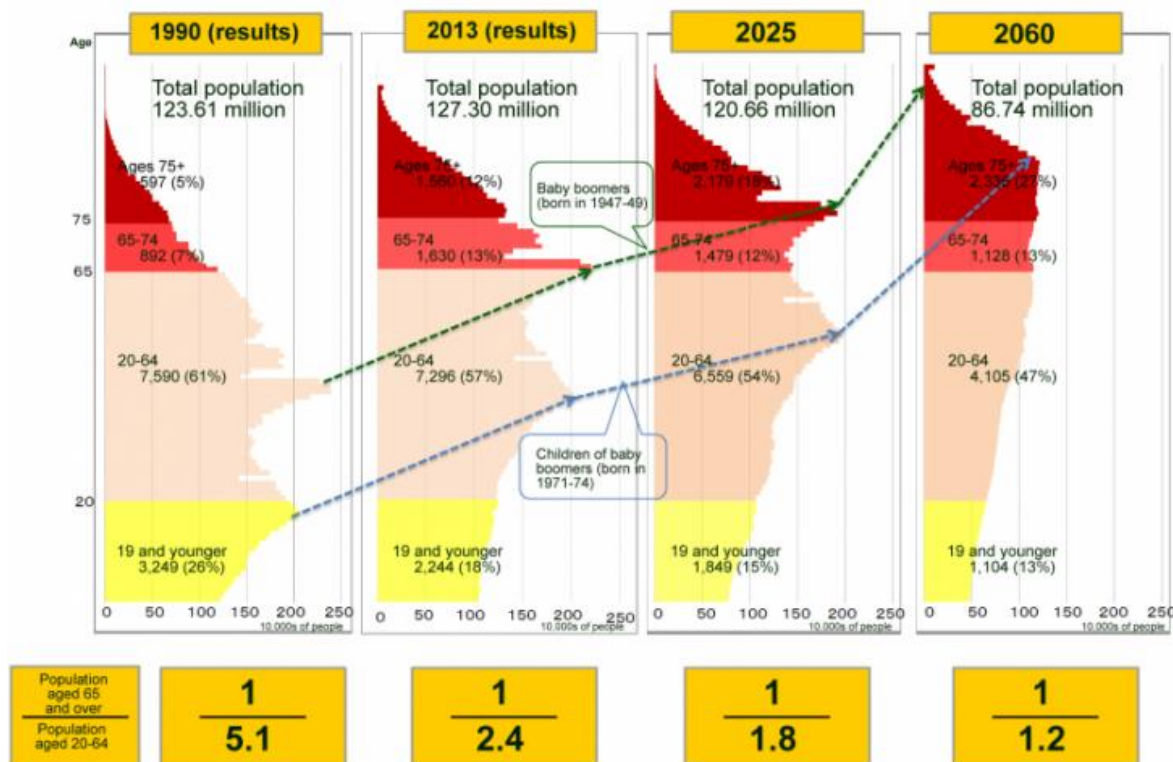
Nowadays, more and more people think that diversity within organizations and societies is a more sustainable method in order to improve long term success. However, most people in Japan still consider that the strength of its economy comes from homogeneity and uniformity (Debroux, 2014). It may explain why in the Japanese society, what could be perceived by Europeans as **discrimination**, is often thought to make good business sense in Japan (March, 1992; Goulvestre, 2011). And even in case of obvious discrimination, lawsuits remain rare due to collective aversion for litigation. As a consequence, Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the United Nations Development Program's 'gender empowerment measure', an index of female participation in the economy and politics of a country (Fackler, 2007). The man-woman equality does rarely exist in Japanese companies and women potential is not optimally utilized in Japan (Taylor and Napier, 1996).

Another example illustrating this situation comes from what happens very often when a woman is about to have a baby: she resigns with the blessing of her employer while her husband will continue to work (Drucker, 1971; Hellriegel and al., 1989; Horsley and Buckley, 1990; Ecommerce 2001; Aghabachian, 2013). Indeed, according to Fackler's interview in 2007, "Japanese work customs make it **almost impossible for women to have both a family and a career**".

Debroux (2014, p.324) elaborates further on this theme: "Work-life-balance policies started to be adopted in Japanese organizations during the past decade but these do not yet pervade the business culture. [...] Overall, it appears that most Japanese companies are likely to continue to stick to a pattern of long working hours and short holidays which place great strain on the employees and their family relationships. Not only do such systems maintain the underutilization of women's talents but they discourage work habits that would offer a more balanced life-style for all employees".

Several reports (FMI, McKinsey...) have estimated that women working for companies could bring another 0.25% to Japan growth (Fackler, 2007). Japan has to address this problem, not only for this its potential positive impact on its growth but also to increase its birthrate which is incredibly low. Indeed, according to The Economist (2007), “it was reported that in 2006 Japan’s birth rate was 1.32 and has been below 2.1 since the 1970s. A birthrate of at least 2.1 is required to successfully maintain the size of the current population.” The article described that the OECD (the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) has proven that there is a positive correlation between fertility and female employment. The following graph shows the age pyramid pressure and the low birth rate in Japan since 1990, with prediction until 2060. We can also see that the number of working people is decreasing while the number of retired people is increasing. This is thus a national problematic.

Evolution of the age pyramid in Japan.



Komine T. (2014).

If an effort is made to support females work ambitions and family desires, women will be more willing and likely to have children without having to sacrifice their career in the process. Japanese officials are not taking this information lightly: during his last year in office, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2002-2007) promoted legislation fostering “financial support for families with young children and an expansion of child-care facilities” (Wikipédia, 2014b). Current Prime Minister, Abe Shinzo, also made of it one of his main priorities.

Things are slowly moving: in 1985, women held just 6.6 percent of all management jobs in Japanese companies and government, according to the International Labor Organization, a United Nations agency. By 2005, that number had risen to 10.1 percent. By contrast, women held 42.5 percent of managerial jobs in the United States in 2005. (Fackler, 2007).

2.5. Enterprise unionism

In Japan, the unions often include all the employees except the part-time employees, middle and top managers. The registration to the union is indeed often compulsory for all full time employees (Lazaridi, 2012; US Library of Congress, n.a.; Keizer and al., 2012; Firkola, 2006). Enterprise unions are single company union, as opposed to trade unions.

Unions are intermediaries between the organization and its employees. Management and Union meet to discuss the rights of employees, company's future strategy, salary increases... According to Lazaridi (2012, p.32), "Unions build a constructive relationship with the management of the organization because they care about its development, profitability and growth. Enterprise unions realize that the flourishing of the organization increases employees' well-being."

Again, like for anything else, every issue is resolved through harmony and cooperation (Keizer and al., 2012). As a consequence, strikes are rare and usually of very limited duration (US Library of Congress, n.a.). Moreover, in many cases, strikes is simply done by having workers wearing a band on their arms while the work would being done as usual to avoid damaging the health of the company and its image.

Unions consider themselves as deeply linked to the companies; there is no "confrontation atmosphere" such as in certain Western organizations. Unions are ready to do sacrifices when needed and management is ready to make the workers benefits from the company's good results. We can thus see that there is mutual respect between management and unions (Béland and al., 2009; Firkola, 2006)

For unions like for other areas, the situation is not frozen but has also evolved over the last years. Nowadays, according to a survey (Lazaridi, 2012), interest in union activities among the members of enterprise unions is decreasing, leading to a reduction in union activities.

3. Issues frequently encountered by foreigners when dealing with the Japanese Management

In this part, I will deal with the main problems that foreigners usually face when they deal with the Japanese management.

3.1. Communication

Cultural differences often make the communication difficult. For example, a key specificity of communication in Japan is the use of silence. During a negotiation, Japanese silences could be interpreted as a sign of disinterest. This could also, according to March (1992), lead to misperception, when the absence of response is taken as positive endorsement. Communication is also more difficult due to other characteristics such as giving a vague response, e.g. “perhaps” or “it’s possible” rather than giving an explicit “yes”, “no”, or “I don’t know”; saying that something is “difficult” when what is really meant is “it is impossible”. Indeed, the Japanese desire to maintain relationships by avoiding confrontation often leads them to give ambiguous responses (Jetro, 1999).

In Western society, such communication style is not accepted and is perceived as confusing or even offensive to others (Gercik, 1992). However, from the Japanese perspective, silence is a very common and appropriate response (Stewart and Mendenhall, 1993). Japanese tend to start the negotiation with general principles and respond to proposals only after having discussed it with their bosses. Americans, for instance, prefer to have concrete proposals, answers and decisions at the negotiation table, even at the beginning of the process (Stewart and Mendenhall, 1993; Gercik, 1992). This issue could thus contribute to an ineffective communication and as a consequence to unsatisfactory human relations (March, 1992).

According to Jetro (1999, p.30), “a common non-Japanese reaction to silence is to try to explain more about one's own opinion or situation. Additional words can, however, actually make the situation more uncomfortable for the Japanese. Therefore, a good strategy when you observe silence or averted eyes is to mirror that behavior and wait for the Japanese person to form a response.” The most important is to avoid systematic negative interpretations of silence and to try to figure out what the other person is feeling or trying to communicate to you. Don’t forget that Japanese value silence, they also have the saying: “silence is golden.”

As explained earlier, the high context Japanese culture has also some consequences on foreigners. I think for instance about Japanese subordinates failing to check their understanding of instruction from a foreigner boss, or foreigners subordinates asking too many questions to their Japanese boss. This could lead to a lot of confusion and discomfort. As a consequence, it is often better to seek clear understanding at the outset than to create misunderstanding and as a consequence poor results. (March, 1992; Worldbusinessculture, 2013).

Another important source of misunderstanding is the **language**. The Japanese language is rated as one of the world's hardest to master. Reading and writing Japanese with fluency requires the combined use of two sets of around 120 phonetic symbols: hiragana and katakana (one for depicting things ethnically and the other one used for words imported from foreign languages). In addition to that, a minimum of 2000 Chinese characters (kanji) will be needed. Any educated Japanese will know between 5000 and 8000 different characters, some of which are made up of over 30 brushstrokes and each stroke must be written in the exact order (Kaji and al., 1999).

Example of Japanese Kanji.

夢	風	火	水	心	勇	美
Dream	Wind	Fire	Water	Heart	Courage	Beauty
雨	雪	宝	金	花	星	死
Rain	Snow	Treasure	Gold	Flower	Star	Death
猫	犬	日	月	愛	秋	夏
Cat	Dog	Sun	Moon	Love	Autumn	Summer
考	強	空	朝	夜	冬	春
Think	Strength	Sky	Morning	Night	Winter	Spring

Faicchi (2014).

Nowadays, an important part of the discussions, correspondence, meetings are done in English. However, Japanese are known for having difficulties with the English. This can be quite problematic at work because many Japanese do not have much confidence in their English speaking ability and therefore choose to remain silent (Jetro, 1999).

The translation could also be problematic. Actually in Japan, there is no direct way of saying “yes” or “no”, at least not in the way the words are understood in the West. As pointed out by Kaji and al. (1999) in their book specifically devoted to foreigners, “hai” is most usually translated as “yes” but actually means something like “I heard you and I understood you, and I am now thinking of my response”. It is however too often taken by non-Japanese to mean “yes” when in fact, the implication can be quite opposite. Indeed, “Yes” in Japan can mean anything from “I’m listening to you,” to “I understand what you’re saying” to “I understand what you’re saying, but don’t agree with you.” (Jetro, 1999).

Another example is the word “problem”. Indeed, the nuance of this word in English is stronger than the Japanese word “monдай” which means something that needs looking at further, whereas “problem” means more like something that is going to be difficult. This could be a source of irritation during conversation and negotiation since many words and phrases do not have exact equivalents in the other language (March 1992). In addition, translation considerably slows down the negotiation process, especially if it is done sequentially (Hellriegel and al., 1989).

Learning some basic Japanese could be really useful for a foreigner. Indeed, it could make all the difference if one is able to express gratitude, apologizes, pronounce people’s name correctly and even make simple conversations. Moreover, it gives an idea about how hard Japanese have to learn English to be able to deal with foreigners. (Lojac, 2011).

Regarding the communication, I think that culture is like a prism transforming the message as it goes from the sender to the receiver. Being aware of its existence is the first and fundamental step. However, I believe the successful managers will be those who make special efforts to go beyond the awareness and use multiple ways to overcome the filters created by the cultural specificities they come from.

3.2. Importance of seniority.

As explained earlier, for the Japanese, the hierarchical structure based on the age and on the number of years in the company is the most significant guide in order to evaluate the value of the person (Victor, 2011). We thus see that personal competence is less important and it can be another source of frustration for foreigners (young and others) not used to this type of system (Nakane, 1974).

Here is an example from Jetro (1999, p.6) where seniority could generate problem for foreigners: “In negotiations between two companies, the Japanese expect each side to send people of the same age and position who literally sit across from each other during the discussions. Such expectations based on hierarchy can make it difficult for Japanese to negotiate as equals, or with someone who is younger or older.”

3.3. Negotiation

As explained earlier, negotiation with Japanese takes time and foreigners could feel frustrated during the process (Drucker, 1971). Indeed, Japanese will ask for frequent and lengthy meetings whereas Americans for instance, request few and short meetings. In a high-context group oriented culture such as the Japanese one, meetings also serve to establish a shared context and group cohesiveness. Meetings are thus sometimes also called for the official announcement of decisions which have already been made through consensus building (Jetro, 1999). In the process of arriving to a decision, appropriate information is transmitted to the appropriate quarters in the appropriate order. Those who must be consulted will be consulted, those who need to be convincing will be convinced and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy. Any steps missed, any short-cut or people approached in the wrong order would doom the whole venture. By the time you arrive at a meeting, so much information will have been shared that the outcome could sometimes already be predicted (Kaji and al., 1999).

In addition, Japanese are considered as uncertainty avoiders. As a consequence, before working with a person, they will ask a lot of questions in order to know whose this person is, his ways of working... to have all the possible warranties that one is a reliable person (Goulvestre, 2011). That being said, according to Gercik (1992, p.2), “when a relationship is initiated by Japanese, the situation can be somewhat different. Often, there has been a great deal of study and internal discussion before the approach is made, and foreigners are often amazed by the speed with which deals are concluded”.

Pushing for quick decision will be considered as irritating for the Japanese and could kill the whole venture. It is thus important to demonstrate patience and commitment throughout all the process. Another point, according to the Centre for Industrial Cooperation (2015, p.33), is that “Japanese are always extremely well-prepared for business meetings and they expect the very same from you”.

If one needs to manage meetings with Japanese, some things can be done to allow Japanese to participate comfortably and actively (Jetro, 1999, p.19), such as:

- “Send an agenda and necessary written materials well in advance.
- Clarify objectives and expectations before the meeting and again at the beginning of the meeting.
- In meetings, clearly state that the objective of the meeting is to share opinions; check beforehand to ensure that hierarchical relationships will not prevent people from opening up.
- Confirm agreements and next steps at the end of the meeting (in writing on a flip chart, if possible).
- Confirm meeting results in writing after the meeting (by e-mail, fax, etc.).”

According to the Centre for Industrial Cooperation (2015, p.33), “A business relationship that would do the job in other countries is simply not enough in Japan. Business meetings in Japan are extremely tough. It is not enough to have a brilliant, cost effective product, a good sales team and technical support. The Japanese expect a long-term relationship. That also means constant and long-term investments not only to your product or services, but also an investment into the relationship. A lot of companies leave this market because they cannot adapt to these conditions.” Spending time (in a formal and informal way) **building relationships** as well as looking for key people having the power and experience to make decision within the Japanese group is thus also a key matter in a negotiation process (Jetro, 1999). Treating the business relationship as a personal contract rather than as a legal one could help in this goal. The advice would thus be to go beyond work relationship and to try to get to the people. For instance, go to a bar with colleagues after the work.

Another important matter in Japan is the **time notion**. If one wants to avoid problem, it is necessary to carefully respect it in anything one would do with the Japanese. For instance, when one has a meeting, it is appreciated to be 10-15min in advance. Of course, delay is considered as non-professional. Punctuality is a key feature in Japan and when, in a meeting, there is a 10 min break, be sure that after those 10 minutes, all the Japanese will be back in the room. (Goulvestre, 2011).

Practical part

4. Problematic and research question

The main characteristics of the Japanese management were explained in the theoretical section. In this empirical part, I would like to further analyze it from a practical point of view by interviewing foreign managers who are directly concerned by this thematic. I will also interview Japanese managers in order to see this matter from both angles. The main objective of my empirical work will be to answer to this global research question:

What are the differences in terms of management style in between Japanese and non-Japanese managers working in Japan?

The term “management style” is very broad since it refers to all the methods a manager use when running a company, business, etc. (Business Dictionary, 2015). This is why I need to explain more specifically which part of the management style I am going to address. I think it is relevant to analyze it throughout the main specificities and issues identified in the theoretical part. Indeed, according to my readings, those characteristics are the backbone of the Japanese management. Of course, I will let the possibility to the interviewed managers to develop others topics they may find relevant in order to be sure to not miss any relevant information concerning my research question.

Besides the above main research question, I also would like to sense the general feeling of the interviewed managers working and living in Japan (especially in regards to their relationship with colleagues, company) as well as the cultural challenge it could create for them. The goal will again be to compare the answers from Japanese and expatriate managers.

5. Methodology

I will use a qualitative method with face to face interview of around one hour per interview. I think it is an adequate method to obtain relevant results from the field and from managers directly concerned by this thematic.

The idea is to use an interview guide which is built on the main specificities and issues identified in the theoretical part. Those thematics are indeed the most relevant I identified after my readings. The interview guide will have 14 questions. For a 60 minutes interview, it means around 5 minutes for each question. I think it is an appropriate time to give to the manager the opportunity to express his/her opinion without time pressure. The first question should make the interviewee feel comfortable, therefore he/she should speak freely (for the same reason, I will not disclose the name of the interviewed managers). This is why I choose the question: “Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?” The last question should give the possibility to the manager to develop any other topic he/she find relevant. Therefore the last question will be: “Would you like to add something that seems important to you?”. All the questions should be open ones. Indeed, I aim at not influencing the responses of the interviews and I believe it is important to let the manager develop his/her answer in the way he/she wants. During the interview, I will use a recorder in order to perfectly and accurately transcribe the whole interview.

The interview guide will be the same for all the interviewed managers, except one question which we delete from the interview for Japanese manager, i.e. “Japanese are often described as high-context person, which mean that indirect/nonverbal communication has a lot of importance. How does it affect you manager’s work? ”. This question is obviously not relevant for interviewing a Japanese manager.

Of course, I need to conduct those interviews with managers from the same level and who could be considered into a comparison. This is why I will choose five managers currently working in the pharmaceutical industry in Japan. Those managers should have between 40 and 55 years old with at least 10 years of experience as a manager in Japan (senior manager level) and should currently work with a majority of Japanese colleagues. In the case of foreign expatriate managers, I will only choose European managers. I will also choose both women and men.

In the table below, I summarized the main characteristics of the interviewed managers.

Main characteristics of the interviewed managers.

Manager	1	2	3	4	5
Genre	Man	Woman	Man	Man	Woman
Nationality	Japanese	Japanese	French	Belgian	British
Firms	Sanofi	Sanofi	Sanofi	Servier	Sanofi

1: Working at Sanofi since 1994, just after graduating University. 7 years of MR (Medical Representative) experiences and then 14 as manager (senior).

2: Working in a hospital as pharmacist during several years after University graduation and then joined a pharmaceutical company. Working at Sanofi since 2003 (12 years) as senior manager.

3: Working in several companies after University graduation (6 years in Japan). Working at Sanofi since 2011 (4 years) as senior manager.

4: Working in Japan since 25 years. Working at Servier since 2003 (12 years) as senior manager.

5: Working in the Pharmaceutical industry for over 20 years. Working at Sanofi since 2003 (12 years) as senior manager.

I mainly choose managers from the company I did my internship: Sanofi. Being new to the pharmaceutical world and just arrived in Japan, I did not have the time of gradually building a network which would be sufficiently broad to give me access to managers in many different companies. Getting in touch and getting time from contact colleagues and managers who usually have a pretty packed agenda was in itself quite a challenge. I also selected them because of their different profiles.

I would like to present the results topic by topic, following the interview guide on the next two pages. For each topic, I will compare the answers from the Japanese and foreign managers in order to identify the differences and similarities in terms of management style and to get an answer to my global research question.

Interview guide

Previous experience.

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?
2. About your **first management assignment** in Japan.
 - What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...
 - Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?
 - From a cultural point of view, what were the most important things you learned during the first weeks?

Present.

3. In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.
 - What is your opinion about that?
 - How does it affect your manager's work?
4. What is the **union** role in your company?
 - As a manager, what are your relations with the union?
 - In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?
5. Japanese are often described as **high-context** person, which mean that indirect/nonverbal communication has a lot of importance.
 - How does it affect your manager's work?
6. Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.
 - How does it affect your manager's work?
7. How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?
8. In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.
 - What is your opinion about that?
 - Did you already face some discrimination cases?

9. Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.
 - Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?
10. Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?
11. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with Japanese and which seemed challenging for you?
12. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?
13. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?
14. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

6. Results and analysis

6.1. First management assignment in Japan

The expatriate first impressions are really interesting because they come directly from the very first contrast in between the socio-cultural background of each expatriate and the behavioral responses they get in the new working environment.

Politeness, openness and accessibility are the first impression that expatriates often mention when talking about Japanese. They were indeed positively surprised of the welcoming attitude Japanese people have.

This impression of openness and politeness is probably linked to the harmony that is of paramount importance for the Japanese. Indeed, without this harmony, people can't work effectively. This may be true everywhere but it takes a special importance in Japan, where people make considerable efforts in order to maintain smooth working relationships. As mentioned earlier, cohesion of the group is more important than individual wishes and that requires efforts from all. One therefore needs to be really polite and diplomatic when working in Japan. Any behaviors which would go against such values would quickly lead to isolation and exclusion from the group.

The **work commitment** Japanese people have, in comparison to Europe, also impressed the expatriate managers. They explained that whatever the position people have in a company, they are committed to what they do. People are proud of doing their job and try to continuously improve themselves. According to the expatriate managers I interviewed, they found it to be a great characteristic of Japanese people. However, this commitment could also be a source of pressure as it implies long working hours and the presence at some events after work or during the weekends.

Regarding this work commitment, I note that it goes beyond the life at work. Indeed, it also applies in the Japanese society where people always try to do their utmost when doing a particular task. Managers often cite it as a source of motivation and to explain why it is a pleasure to work with Japanese. However, it has also a downside: Japanese will expect the same commitment from their expatriate colleagues and this means an important involvement and presence at work. I will come back on this later on.

On the less positive side, expatriate managers often mentioned that there are very **few people working proactively** or taking initiatives by themselves. One of the managers (2/04/2015 interview, question 11) gives a specific example:

“It was this Friday in a tele conversation. I was faced with a team not taking responsibility and leadership of managing the team by themselves and they completely deferral to me. I asked for one of them to send an email to the group to explain why we would cancel the meeting on Monday. The comment back was: how can we do that? That is something that you must do. I said I do not understand why I have to do that and they said because you are the regional person. So I pushed back and I said please can somebody step up and take on a leadership? It didn’t happen. At the end I had to do it. That happens daily: deferral of responsibility to a senior person. I think it is easier sometimes to do it yourself because it really takes time to sit down and to say: I don’t think I am the right person to do it. Taking initiative, ownership, responsibility and taking an opportunity within the team to lead and become a leader. That is what I mean by step up. There were five people in the room and the answer was just silence. In Westerns countries, someone would have says: ok it is fine I would do that. That was a real example and there are many others examples of that kind. It is difficult to take them outside of their comfort zone or of their job description to take on responsibility outside of the scope of their job. It is an opportunity to grow, to demonstrate leadership, and I don’t observe that.”

One of the Japanese managers (09/03/2015, question 12) makes the assumption that this lack of proactivity and self-initiative is probably linked to the education:

“Particularly education system is completely different from Western countries. For instance, Japanese student never have the opportunity to learn in a firm like in an internship. It might take longer time to learn how to conduct and perform a project. It might take a longer time compared to Western people. Japanese attitude is really a step by step one, gradually try to understand. It is different for Westerners, even at 30-40 years old, many young executive lead the company but in japan no. Presidents mostly are around 60 years old. The way to operate the company is a bit different. Of course there are recent changes but older people still have more chance to lead the firm and to be assigned as executive. In terms of speed of promotion, it is a bit different from Western society. Some younger Japanese people recently have the chance to learn at business school in the US and they have the chance to get some entrepreneurship session but most of Japanese do not have knowledge of what are a manager and management. In the Japanese education system we do not have the entrepreneurship

idea, never. Such idea/attitude comes from the Western society and particularly US. In Japan no, it is totally different, we don't have entrepreneurship mind. So if I were to promote to president at young age 35 I would be feared."

This supports the fact that Japanese workers are not used to take initiative. However, the situation is changing, mainly due to the younger generation who tend to be more independent and maybe more influenced by the Western style.

6.2. Decision making process

Regarding the decision making process, all the managers agreed that the Japanese system of making decision by consensus tends to take more time than Westerner one. Indeed, having the support and understanding of many people is time and energy consuming. One expatriate manager (2/04/2015 interview, question 3) makes the following comment:

“This is very slow and also for small decision that I believe we could make very quickly in the moment. You have to bring people together, have a half hour or an hour meeting and sometimes the decision is not even made at the end of that. My observation is that the RACI model of responsibility, accountability, consulted and informed is not implemented in Japan. This model allows to make faster decision and to determine who should be in the room at the time of the decision making and who should be consulted before. That is a really common way of working in Westerns countries. So here in Japan, many people that maybe do not need to are involved in the decision process.”

They however state that, in the long term, it is not necessarily more time consuming than other decision making systems because once the project is implemented, there will probably be less issues than in a classical top down process. Indeed, since people contributed to the decision process, they will naturally more easily engage and participative to the implementation process. The execution could thus be very quick. Managers also agree that this system enables the gathering of broad and diverse opinion of the stakeholders, very valuable input from different angles, different level of experience and different functional areas. This process is more participative than a classical top down one. From a motivational and empowerment view point, it is therefore probably better to go throughout the consensus.

One of the expatriate managers (24/03/2015 question 2) explains a typical Japanese concept related to this decision making process:

“Newamashi means when you transplant a tree from one place to another. You need to cut the little roots, of course you need to keep the main one and wrap the roots so that it makes a big ball. Then it can be unroot without any roots attached to the ground so I mean it will be a smooth unroot of the tree to be transplanted in other place. This image is actually telling us, and it is typical Japanese expression, that you will cut and eliminate all the possible difficulties that you may find when dealing with a given project. This process sometimes is time taking that is for sure but once the tree has been transplanted it is pretty easy and the things are moving rather smooth.”

An issue frequently mentioned by both expatriate and Japanese managers is linked to the **hierarchy**. Sometimes, even if people are brought together for reaching consensus, the opinion of the most senior person in the room would be the final decision. As a manager, one has to be aware of that and not to share his opinion too early. Otherwise, the more junior persons will not provide their honest feedback and will follow the most senior person. One of the expatriate managers (2/04/2015, question 5) makes this comment:

“The difficulty is how you can open the conversation to understand what the issue truly is and to be able to create the environment where the truth can really be talked about.”

It is thus interesting to sometimes have a face to face meeting in order to sense a person's true opinion. It is a very hierarchical society and people are always taking care to not offend others. One of the interviewed managers (24/03/2015, question 5) makes this statement:

“I do not trust only the meeting itself. Also sometimes it is good to have the opinion of people that are not necessarily directly involved. So it is up to you to validate, by different ways and to be creative about that, if the project and the opinion that people officially have on it fully reflect the adherence of the majority.”

Japanese managers give a lot of importance to the fact that each person should have the opportunity to give his opinion for a decision. Even if it is sometimes difficult to manage, it is essential for them. This is why a good manager has to be able to create the adequate environment for people to express their true opinion. Moreover, he has to be a consensus builder able to manage opinions which are different or even contradictory.

Japanese managers then explain that the selection of right team members is an important condition for this decision process to work well. One of the managers (09/03/2015 question 2) makes this statement:

“In order to bring good atmosphere in the team we always have to select appropriate person, team members.”

We thus see that managers agree that, although this system takes time and involve many persons, it has advantages on the long term such as the decision quality, people empowerment and speed of implementation. All managers also agree to say that the key issues are hierarchy and team selection.

6.3. Enterprise unionism

None of the interviewed managers have had experience of interacting with the union. They never experienced any strike in Japan neither. They agree that unions are overall relatively quiet compared with European ones. The **methods of action** of Japanese unions **are different**; here again, the approach is much more collaborative with the management. Thanks to a closer relationship with managers, unions have a stronger influence without having to make use of strike. Their abilities to be able to come to a resolution are higher. Moreover, when there are strikes, it does not affect the work: people are showing their unhappiness but they are not necessary blocking people from working. As I explained in the theoretical part, employees will for instance bear a band attached to their arm to show that they are on strike but they will come to work in most of the cases.

In Japan, the union is always linked to a particular company and is part of the organization. As a consequence, if there is a strike, it will be a corporate linked strike. In case of major disagreement in between employees and management, there will be a discussion between the union and the management of this specific company to find a compromise. Japanese managers insist on the fact that unions periodically negotiate with the management team. It may take a long time but at the end, both parties always meet each other and reach agreement.

We can see in this part that, even if the workers go on strike, they will not put in danger the wellbeing of the organization. This shows how much the Japanese respect the organization they work for. The collaborative attitude of the unions with the management is also directly linked with the willingness to maintain harmony and smooth work relation which, as I said, are keys for the Japanese.

The fact that none of the interviewed managers have had experience of interacting with the union supports what was explained in the theoretical part: the interest in union activities among the members of enterprise unions is decreasing, leading to a reduction in union activities.

6.4. Communication

The first issue mentioned by both expatriate and Japanese managers is the **English language**. Indeed, most of Japanese people have relatively good reading knowledge but spoken English could be an issue. One of the reasons is that people are very often afraid to make mistakes. In the interviewed manager's opinion, this is due to the Japanese desire of perfection. This is a characteristic of the Japanese people and so they tend to not practice a lot. During a meeting, it is thus important to not overestimate the ability of the audience to understand the message. That is one of the reasons why the manager will need to ask indirect questions to make sure that the content of the communication has been well understood. This is key, even if people give the impression that everything is fine during the meeting.

Manager also agrees on the fact that Japanese are usually **less extraverted** than Westerners, managers thus have to adapt their management style. One of the expatriate managers (24/03/2015, question 5) gives his opinion about it:

“We in Europe are very extraverts, we need to show that we are proactive, we want to do things, we need to do things, to show ourselves, to be seen, appreciated, fight for our own opinions... So it is very important to be visible I would say, in the management in Europe. And I think also our education system is promoting more and more this. So in Japan it is the contrary. The group prevails above the individual and even there are some exceptions to this, I think it is still very much applied in Japan.”

Japanese managers also mentioned the fact that working with Japanese is not always easy because Japanese do not always give clear answers. For them, Westerners tend to give more clearly and direct answer than Japanese people.

All managers I interviewed agree to say that there are a lot of non-said in the Japanese culture. The **body language** is for instance a key concern. One of the expatriate managers (2/04/2015, question 5) explains it in those terms:

“I have become very used to the body language in Japan. For instance in Japan the eyes contact is less present but I tend to watch the body position and to read it. So I think for me, my nonverbal abilities to read the situation have considerably increased here in Japan.”

The expatriate managers all agree on the fact that it is also **important to not get paralyzed** by those communication aspects. Of course, one will make mistakes and little by little will learn how to manage that. One of the interviewed managers (13/03/2015, questions 5 and 14) makes this comment:

“I would say it is also important as a foreigner working in Japan to not to get too caught up in making sure to understand nonverbal and verbal communication. Not become to the point where you are completely paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake. And that is something I had trouble with during my first job here: “I don’t want to be too direct, I don’t want conflict, the way I say yes is important...” I mean it can limit your ability to act and that is not the point. The point is to understand the rules and then go beyond, make a decision, act and move forward. Otherwise you are totally trapped by this perception you do not understand.”

The different interviews therefore support the fact that Japanese tend to be high-context persons, which means that indirect/nonverbal communication has a lot of importance. This will thus require a certain sense of interpretation from foreign managers to be able to have the right reading of the situation. The expatriate manager’s advice to not get paralyzed by such communication characteristics illustrates how strongly this topic could handicap manager’s abilities to act and how it is important to step it up.

6.5. Confrontation

Regarding the conflict management, both expatriate and Japanese managers state that the ways conflicts are expressed in Japan are different than in Westerns culture. Conflicts are indeed less direct/ open and **more respectful** in Japan. One of the interviewed Japanese managers (10/03/2015, question 5) explains it throughout this concept:

“In Japanese we call it “wa”, which means “Japanese style” and also “good relationship”. It is the same Kanji for both significations. Develop “wa” means develop good team work and good relationship. Japanese respect “wa”. When there are conflicts with Japanese in a team, you need to carefully manage it with the right approach, a lot of respect and to listen a lot. So maybe it takes more time.”

An expatriate manager states that this fear of direct confrontation could lead to people being less proactive to make changes or look for new opportunities. It could thus paralyze the change. It has to be carefully managed.

We see here again that maintaining the harmony should be one of the main areas of attention when dealing with Japanese colleagues. Saying that respect in daily interaction when handling a conflict is important is an understatement. It is nothing but one of the key cornerstones of any successful business relationship in Japan. Foreigners used to more direct way will thus have to make efforts if they want to build successful and sustainable relation partnerships with Japanese.

6.6. Team motivation

All interviewed managers try to **delegate and empower** people as one way to motivate their teams. That being said, expatriate manager tend to insist more on encouraging their team members to become future leaders. One of the interviewed managers (2/04/2015, question 7) makes this comment:

“What I have really done in Japan is to really explain why we are trying to do something and what the goal is. The reason I do that is because I feel that people implement very well what I ask but they never design it by themselves. So my approach it to have really intimate discussion about how do you think we can achieve that, so very open questions. I have to do that in a very tight way with a small group of people because if we do that with a large group of people, you will only have silence as answer.”

This supports the first impression of lack of entrepreneurship that expatriate managers have regarding their Japanese colleagues. Although situation is evolving gradually, the interviews (both with Japanese and expatriate managers) pointed out that expatriate managers tend to be more entrepreneurs in the way they work; this is a key difference in between Japanese and Western management style.

6.7. Gender equality at work

Both expatriate and Japanese managers agree on the fact that there are **fewer women in the workforce** in Japan than in the western countries, especially in top management positions. An expatriate manager (24/03/2015, question 8) makes this comment:

“I think foreign companies have been really quick to understand and to use this unfortunate situation in Japan. Because there are a lot of young women willing to work and who are highly qualified. So many young ladies in Japan are proud to take risk, to go to study abroad and to come back. The young boys are a little bit spoiled and this is also a treat of the culture in Japan but also in Asia. Having a boy is usually seen as better happiness than having a girl. In some countries, this fact is really exacerbated. Women in Japan have been fast to go oversee, to discover other countries and when they go back to Japanese organization, they are discriminated. Most of the top management is still very old although they are scrapping the seniority system for a meritocracy one. You have some exceptions, some companies that are more open to give equal opportunities to men and women but there is still a long way to go and a lot of improvement to make. Even sometimes, when you have women in top position, at similar responsibility, they will be given lower revenue than men. But even in Europe, still today let's look in Belgium or in France, these countries are claiming equality, I would be surprised if we look at the revenue for the same position, I don't believe it is always the equality.”

Having said that, it is also fair to recognize that, according to several managers, the situation is now **changing**. In the past, women willing to have a career often had to sacrifice their family life. Nowadays, there are more and more women in the workforce pursuing their careers while still insisting to have a good balance with private life, having children, etc.... Japanese managers however insist on the fact that Japan needs time to change.

A Japanese woman manager (10/03/2015, question 7) makes this comment:

“I was surprised in the past when I heard about foreign female coming back to work after the child birth, only one or two month after they left. Usually Japanese female takes other intervals, around 1 year. So that is the difference. Because until the baby growth to certain age, the female mother often have to take care of the baby by herself because sometimes there is a lack of nursing care facilities. That is another dimension of the problem and that is a national issue. It is linked with the Japanese decreasing population; maybe it is part of the reason for the decreasing of the birthrate.”

Managers also agree on the fact that it is a social and **country responsibility** to support infrastructure for working women having a baby. However, companies also have a role to play. An expatriate manager (24/03/2015, question 8) makes this comment:

“Here in my company, we allow every women having a kid to have a part time job until they kids arrived to primary school. Usually 2-3 years are given by the law, so we go beyond that because we believe that we have to contribute to that at our level. It also goes for man because parents can choose.”

The expatriate woman I interviewed speaks of self-discrimination to explain the low number of women climbing the career ladder. This comment reflects how the western mentality differs from the Japanese one. Indeed, for many westerners, if a woman doesn't climb the career ladder, it is because of her own choice and not because of external elements.

6.8. After-work drink

All the interviewed managers have already participated to such event and most of them **frequently do it**. It takes place between colleagues as well as between commercial partners. It can take various forms and shapes, i.e. from a one-to-one basis up to a big group with all the team members. The most important aspect is to be out of the work setting and outside the workplace. One of the expatriate managers (13/03/2015, question 9) makes this comment:

“My observation is that it is still true today and people are inhibited when they go drinking and it is a good way to understand what my team is thinking and it is also a good way to connect with other departments where I can get inside of what people of others departments are thinking or what they are observing about my team. So it is very a rich way to find a little bit more than what openly stated. Typically I do it once a week on average.”

A Japanese manager (09/03/2015, question 8) adds:

“If you have the chance to meet and talk with colleagues or partners with alcohol, we can easily ear from them sensitive topics. So yes, it is sometimes a useful management tool.”

And another (10/03/2015, question 8):

“It is a very effective mean to know people, talk frankly and listen to “hone” [real idea, opinion] of the person. So people easily talk about the “hone” with drinks. It is very relax and close communication, “nomunication”. It is very effective for team building for instance.”

“Nomunication” by definition is at evening time so it may create an issue for working women having kids. This is why one of the expatriate managers allowed his managers to use that “nomunication” system also at lunch time, which is more comfortable for women having a baby. Alcohol is of course not compulsory, particularly if it happens during the lunch time.

However, all the managers notice that “nomunication” has been **decreasing** throughout the years, particularly among the younger generations who often prefer to come back home rather than spending additional time with their colleagues. An expatriate manager (2/04/2015, question 9) gives a limitation of this system: the language. It could indeed be difficult to sense person real opinion with the language barrier.

“I think the limitation is that I don’t speak fluent Japanese. So how can you really converse with people whom you need to have a very honest open discussion? I socialize with my expats colleagues but in terms of the people that you really want to talk to, if you have a language barrier, then you are not going to solve the issue.”

6.9. Link employee-company

Both expatriates and Japanese managers agree on the fact that the strength of the link binding employee and the company depends on the number of years one has been in the company.

Even if all the interviewed managers share the values of their present company, they do not pretend to stick to it and are open for external opportunities. Another strong particularity of Japan which is worth to mention here is the life-time guarantee of employment. According to the managers I interviewed, it seems to be still largely the case today, although it has been impacted by the economic crisis.

According to the interviews, it seems that a characteristic of Japanese employees is to be **fully committed to their job** and company. An expatriate manager (24/03/2015, question 2) makes this comment:

“Maybe this is also something typical from Japanese culture. Generally speaking, people view the wellbeing of the organization first and there is the notion that the company need to be successful. To tell you how far it can go, if sometimes the organization goes throughout bad times, you can see in Japan a company asking for an effort from everyone, from the top to the bottom. For instance maybe this year we will not have salary increase, or maybe we will have no bonuses, and the organization will accept that. More easily than it would be in France or in Belgium where people would go in strikes. Maybe people will strike but they will still coming to work and contribute to the achievement of the objectives, to be sure that the company goes well through the hard time that the company is facing. This is something that I found quite unique in Japan and this is probably linked to the culture. Japan was what I called a village culture.”

As I explained before, people in a company will thus be fully devoted to it and place a great importance on the company well-being. As a consequence, Japanese employee will not hesitate to make additional personal efforts which, as we saw in the theoretical part, often lead them to do overtime.

6.10. Other characteristics of a successful manager in Japan

Expatriate managers insist on the importance to **introduce you in the right way**: one has to learn how to exchange business card and to bow slightly when meeting people. The introduction is indeed very important. It is also key to be extremely well prepared when meeting a partner because this will help to build credibility for future contacts.

Any formal meeting with a new person would not start without the well-oiled **exchange of business cards**. One of the main aims of the exchange of business-cards (“meishi”) is to help the parties to fix the exact relationship in the mind of both (Horseley and Buckley, 1992). This exchange is thus fundamentally critical for the rest of the interaction and will shape it. Any miss-doing of the “meishi” exchange process will make any subsequent meeting and collaboration difficult. There are therefore do’s and don’ts for this process. First, the higher level people exchange cards first (Jetro, 1999). The correct way of doing it is to hold the card with two hands and to receive it with two hands. The card has to be handed over on the right way so that people to whom you give your card are able to read it directly (Nakane, 1974). One also has to bow. The process is showed in the next picture. When one has got the person’s card in hands, it is advised not to play with the card, write on it, throw it away on the table, pile them up all, etc... The card is considered to be an extension of the person. Any wrong doing with the cards would be perceived as a lack of respect towards the person (Goulvestre, 2011).

Japanese way to exchange business card.



Inside Asia Travel, 2013

One expatriate manager (2/04/2015, questions 7 and 13) also insists on the importance to **find to right person to work with**:

“I try to understand my team and to find individuals I can work with one by one and through them; I am starting to influence the rest of the group. So I try to find people that are flexible, open minds and with them, try to influence others. That is for me the key of success in Japan: find the key influencers, find the nugget. Because there are some really forward thinking people within the organization and they are not always empowered to really reach their potential. That is why I try to find them to work with them.”

Japanese managers also mentioned the fact that a manager should appreciate his team members and be able to combine their skills. They thus again insist on the consensus builder ability that the manager has to have. Indirectly, they again mention the selection of appropriate members to suit to the team.

Those two points are again linked to the group dynamic. Indeed, if one wants to start to have an influence on the group, one needs the support of as many members of the group as possible. Without that, it would be very difficult to have a lasting impact on this group. The need of the key persons traduces the research of support inside the group.

One of the first advice expatriate managers give is to **listen, observe and not to be judgmental**. An expatriate manager (24/03/2015, question 13) gives this general advice:

“The first thing I do when I have to go to another country is to meet everybody in my team, try to understand who they are, what they have been doing in order to know them. Then I will probably visit few CEOs who are already working on that particular country and listen what has already been experienced. It is always useful to look at the most recent expertise since things are continuously changing. So you can listen and learn a lot. You need to meet and discuss with people to identify what are the specific characteristic of the culture. You need to identify the right way to interact with people.”

Expatriate managers then mention good listening skills, communication aptitude, desire to connect person-to-person with the team, transparence and responsibility. Japanese managers insist on the ability to make a trustful relation, to take responsibility for his decision and to have abilities to build things and to involve people. Japanese managers finally insist on the unicity of the Japanese culture, the importance to know it and to respect it.

7. Discussion

This empirical work contributed to my thesis at several levels. In this part, I will underline the main aspects of this contribution. Afterwards, I would like to see the limitations of the work provided and the remaining questions for any eventual future research.

I first explained that the **work commitment** is really important in Japan. The implication in the daily life of the company is a key characteristic of Japan. Employees will place a great importance on the company well-being and will not hesitate to make additional personal efforts which often lead them to do overtime. I described that this commitment could be a source of pressure for both managers and employees as it also implies long working hours and the presence at some events after work or during the weekends.

I discovered that the Japanese employees could **lack of proactivity** and that they tend to take less initiatives than their Western counterparts. According to the managers I interviewed, that it is probably linked to the absence of entrepreneurship spirit in the education system. That being said, the situation is changing, mainly due to the younger generation who tends to be more independent and maybe more influenced by the Western style (for instance by doing abroad part of their studies). I can directly link it with the comment that expatriate managers tend to insist more on encouraging their team members to become future leaders.

The characteristics of the **decision making process** are mostly the same that the ones I found out in the theoretical part. That is to say, most decisions are the outcome of an extended process of discussion involving several employees. Even if unilateral decisions by directors or senior managers occur from time to time, they are uncommon. I noticed that Japanese managers insist a lot on the qualities people need in order to make this decision making process work, by the selection of team members. Indeed, the consensus builder ability of the manager, his ability to create the adequate environment for people to express their true opinion as well as the character of the team members are all keys aspects in Japan. This goes along with the fact that, for Japanese, the harmony of the group is of supreme importance.

Besides that, we can assume that there are certain situations where this decision making system works well and others where it does not. For instance, in times of crises, extraordinary losses or competitors coming very aggressively into the market, there is an urgent need for major decisions and that decision process could then be not so effective. This is thus something that needs to be assessed by the person in charge.

I explained that the **communication** could be a tricky issue, especially knowing the importance of body language and the difficulties related to the English language. I discovered that the lack of clear answer could also be an issue for the Japanese. Communication in Japan thus appears to rely more heavily on indirect and non-verbal communication than in Western countries. Anybody who would come to Japan and expect to communicate and interact in a manner totally identical to his home country would pretty quickly found himself misunderstood, frustrated, isolated and unable to achieve much. The awareness of the differences is a first step, and then efforts to adjust his own communication style are needed to optimize mutual understanding. The general comment was to not be paralyzed by those communication issues because it could strongly handicap manager's abilities to act.

Regarding **the gender equality**, Japan is still late in terms of equal job opportunities and even if it is changing, the ratio of female manager remains low. Foreign companies took advantages of this situation to hire highly qualified and motivated women into their workforce. Interviewed managers insist on the role of the country which should provide a bigger support to women having babies. It is indeed often difficult for women to have both a family and a career. The change is likely to accelerate due to the age pyramid pressure and the low birth rate in Japan. As I explained in the theoretical part, this fact is a national problematic that the government has been trying to address.

The **after work drink** is still well present in Japan. Indeed, a thing that Japanese particularly appreciate is meeting in a bar with friends. It is a moment where they can relax and speak of any subject they want, without any fear of being rejected for their opinion since the things Japanese say under the influence of alcohol have to be kept secret and should not be mentioned afterwards.

At work, it is used as a building team tool as well as a mean to discuss particular issues or to have people's real opinions. This system is now adapting to the changes of the workforce competition, especially to younger and women coming in the workforce. For instance, by using that "nomunication" system also at lunch time and without alcohol, which is more comfortable for women having a baby.

There are of course **limitations** in the way I built the interview guides. I would like to shortly explain what I see as possible limitation and then see what could be the additional questions for a further work on my topic.

According to me, the principal limitation of this practical part is the number of managers interviewed: five managers. This number is relatively low and does not allow me to draw general conclusions. I had to do a compromise in between feasibility and relevance. As a consequence, I could have missed some important aspects of the Japanese management. Indeed, getting to understand cultural-related managerial differences is pretty broad and complex and can certainly not be grasped within a limited number of interviews. However, none of the interviewed managers ever mentioned any additional characteristics he/she found to be relevant concerning my thematic. I therefore think that those guides were a good way to obtain relevant results and were good tools to capture most of the important aspects coming from the daily life of the managers.

I also decided to choose only European expatriate managers; for **future research** it could be interesting to compare the results with non-European expatriate managers. Another point could be to compare the answers in between the different European countries to analyze if there are differences in function of the countries. Besides that, the interviewed managers all work in French companies; it could be interesting to see if the results are different with managers working in others firms. A remaining question could also be: are the results the same when the Japanese management takes place overseas? In such a case indeed I can make the hypothesis that this overseas management would be much more influenced by external factors than in Japan.

Last but not least, I think that another limitation could be the decision to choose only managers coming from the pharmaceutical industry. It is indeed difficult to extrapolate their answers for all the managers. In the future, it could be could be interesting to compare the answers with managers coming from others industries.

There are thus several limitations to the methodology I used to build the practical part. That being said, in the context of this 6 months internship, with all the opportunities it created but also constraints and limitations inherent to it, I believe that this method was adequate: it allowed me to have empirical insights on my thematic and to answer my global research questions.

Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was twofold: first to understand the cultural challenges that foreigners face when dealing with the Japanese management, secondly, to help a manager on his/her way to Japan to be better aware of potential challenges he/she might face and provide concrete hints for a smoother day-to-day interaction.

In the first part, I explained that the origins of the Japanese management are to be found in both its history and the Japanese society specificities. I identified the three main characteristics of the Japanese society having the most influenced the Japanese management: religions, groups & obligations and the value system. I then observed that the history of the Japanese management is the result from of a long and constantly evolving hybridization between the Western and the Japanese model.

The next step was an overview of the main specificities of the Japanese management. I described the strong link between the employee and its company that lead to a real work commitment and to life employment still in many cases. I identified the key characteristics of a Japanese manager to be paternalist, honest and consensus builder, which is also the main specificity of the decision making process. I discovered that despite a slow evolution, gender discrimination is still well present in Japan; this is also a national issue.

I ended the first part of my thesis explaining that communication, importance of seniority and negotiation were the main issues encountered by foreigners when dealing with the Japanese management.

The last part of my work was a qualitative study around the question: what are the differences in terms of management style in between Japanese and non-Japanese managers working in Japan? Amongst other things, I explained that the work commitment could be the source of an important pressure for managers. I discovered that expatriate managers tend to insist more on encouraging their team members to become future leaders than their Japanese colleagues. I then noticed that Japanese managers insist a lot on the qualities needed by people in order to make the decision making process work, by the selection of team members.

This thesis does not pretend to be a comprehensive analysis of the subject it has tried to cover. It is only a step in that direction. It has been an eye opener to me and a great learning experience. I hope you have enjoyed the reading too.

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Appendix

1- Interview with an expatriate Manager – Man (13/03/2015).

Previous experience.

1. *Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?*

My name is X, I am the head of the X unit so I have responsibilities for the marketing strategies and tactical execution plans of four X products.

2. *About your **first management assignment** in Japan.*

- *What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...*
- *Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?*
- *From a cultural point of view, what were the most important things you learned during the first weeks?*

This is my second long term working experience in Japan. I previously worked for X in the Finance department. At that time, I was a manager with no staff. This time I have several teams and so my first impression when working with the teams was that it is a very different level of pressure, of commitment to work and about the perception of the commitment to work. A lot of that perception is about working hours, presence in meetings, being present at customer events, including on weekends and on evenings. So overall, there is a lot of pressure about being present. That was my perception during the first days.

From a decision making process, one of the first things is to have the support and understanding of as many people as you can. It is important to consult people, to make them feel that they are involved in the decision.

Present.

3. *In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

So I think it is a good system when it works well. When it works well, you have broad opinion of the stakeholders, very valuable input from different angles, different level of experience and from different functional areas. So at the end, when the decision is taken it is solid and then the execution could be very quick because everybody is on board.

When it doesn't work well, nobody can make a decision and everybody has a different opinion, go in different direction. What I have noticed is that there are certain situations where the system works well and others where the system not works as well. For instance in times of crises, extraordinary losses, competitors coming very aggressively into the market... There is a tendency to panic and that decision process could be not so effective.

It is time consuming, which I said in my first point, so the time pressure. But I think when it is done well, it can go quickly and the execution can go quickly as well. Rather than taking a quick decision and then realize that maybe it is not great and adapting and make new changes which is also a way to do it and if it works well it works well but in the end it is not necessarily more time consuming.

4. *What is the **union** role in your company?*

- *As a manager, what are your relations with the union?*
- *In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?*

I do not. So my perception is that unions are overall relatively quiet here in Japan compared with what you could expect in Europe. I have never experienced a strike in Japan. I think historically the method of action of unions is different in Japan than what you could expect in Europe and even in Europe there are differences in between the countries. However I think that the approach in Japan is much more collaborative and they work much more with management. More similar with what you can see on the German system for example. So I do not think strikes are the only tool that they have. They have maybe a closer relationship with management, they are maybe less aggressive. But yes you do not see massive strikes and when you do see strikes they do not affect the work. They are protesting their unhappiness but they are not necessary blocking people from working.

5. *Japanese are often described as **high-context** person, which mean that indirect communication has a lot of importance. Non-verbal elements such as facial expressions, eyes movement and tone of voice are even more important than the actual words that are communicated.*

- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

That is a good question. I think for me, being a foreigner working in Japan, it means that I have to learn a wide range of communication references and it is not just language it is also nonverbal as you said. It is difficult because even speaking the language; it is a very rich language with very rich vocabulary and very nuanced so getting understanding deeply the translation is a challenge. Then there is also the nonverbal, as you said the body language. That takes times to get used to and even after years in Japan, there are still many things of course I do not fully understand so it is a challenge. But I would say it is also important as a foreigner working in Japan that not to get too caught up in making sure to understand nonverbal and verbal communication. I mean it can limit your ability to act and that is not the point. The point is to understand most of it and then go beyond, make a decision, act and move forward. Otherwise you are totally trapped by this perception you do not understand.

6. *Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.*

- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

I am not sure that is true actually. I think there is a respectful conflict. Conflict is not necessarily something you do as openly as you can see on some Westerns cultures like the French culture. But you see a lot of conflicts in the office in working relationships. I see a lot of conflict, open conflict, people arguing and having different opinions. So I think the way it is expressed is different sometimes. And people will not have conflict about trivial things so people will not have conflict debating the weather which could be passionate in certain European culture. But here you do have conflicts and I see it everywhere. Moreover the higher you go in the management position, the more you see it.

7. *How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?*

My approach is to empower people, be sure not to ask them to execute small part of tasks, smaller part of a whole but to actually own what they do. So by owning what they do it means they have to think about what they are trying to do, what they need to do, how this fits into a larger context. And then you know it means that they have to be responsible. So if it is good it is good and they will receive praise and if it lacking then they need to be responsible for it.

8. *In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *Did you already face some discrimination cases?*

I think that it is a very common statement about Japan and when you look at the statistics it is true; there are fewer women in the workforce in Japan than you would have in the Western countries. There are also fewer women in management position than in the West but I think that the trend is changing and I think there is more and more women in the workforce, there is more and more women who pursue their careers, even with children. In the past, women who wished to reach the top often had to sacrifice their families; I mean getting married and having children. But today, you see more and more women having children and continuing their career. It is statistically still low but I think it is going to increase, the situation is changing. One thing I think is that in the past, if you look for instance in the bubble years, there was a very strong corporate culture, mostly men working together very early in the day, very late at night, going drinking at night, there was a pressure to drink and band with your colleagues every night. I am exaggerating but that was very much the culture and it was difficult for women to be in that environment, especially when they had children. But that is changing and also for men, which are not always interested by going drinking with their colleagues every day, so I think there is more and more balance between professional job and personal life.

9. *Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.*

- *Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?*

I already used it as a management tool, I agree. My observation is that it is still true today and people are inhibited when they go drinking and it is a good way to understand what my team is thinking and it is also a good way to connect with other departments where I can get inside of what people of other departments are thinking or what they are observing about my team. So it is very a rich way to find a little bit more than what openly stated. Typically I do it once a week on average.

10. Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?

So I think the answer will depend on whether you have been on the same company forever or if you changed job. My previous company was the company I joined after colleges and I worked for that company for closer to ten years. I really felt a connection in between the company and myself. Now I have changed job and I feel much less connection. I of course share the value of the company, I think it is a great place to work, very diverse set of individuals and it makes it a very rich working environment but my identification with the company is not as strong as when I was working for my previous company. I think the first company you work for has, in my experience and observing also people around, a very lasting influence on people. So if you work for at least five years in the first company after colleges that will have a lasting impact on you. If you change every year after the colleges then of course no. What you see in Japan is, and it is changing with a higher and higher turnover, that you see people who have been in the same company forever, from colleges, so for them the company fit much more to who they are. And they are also very important to the company because they are part of the corporate backbone.

11. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with Japanese and which seemed challenging for you?

I think the way I will take the question is that I worked with people where it was challenging and those people happened to be Japanese. So I cannot say I have had such experience of working situation because of the difficulty of the Japanese culture. Of course, as we discussed, there is rules and ways of speaking, interpreting and understanding that you need to learn but I do not see it necessarily as a difficulty. It is a challenge, it is something I want to overcome but it is not something I felt as a negative thing or a difficulty. I have worked with people who happened to be Japanese who were difficult people to work with. But you know, I have worked with people who happened to be American, French and where it was also difficult. So Japanese people are not especially tricky to work with.

*12. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?*

I wish I knew (laugh). I think listening is very important, listening to the team, to other teams, to stakeholders. Yeah listening is very important. I think a second skill is communicating broadly across the organization. I think it is not just in Japan but I think it is even more pronounced in Japan. There is many things but I am trying to find things that are specific to Japan for instance respect for me is a very important one but is that necessarily specific to Japan?

Maybe the last point is back to the previous questions of drinking. I think it is connecting on personal bases with the team. Do not stick only to job. It is not you are coming from 9 to 17 and then you live it is you are coming from 9 to 17 and then you go drinking with your colleagues and that will make the next day, a lot more productive.

*13. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?*

I think the first one is common sense. You are a visitor here and so you need to adapt your ways to local ways. So coming in and expecting people to think like you, explain things like you, speak like you... is arrogant. From my experience, I observe it is a frequent cause of failure in Japan. So it is important to listen, ask questions, understand and to not be judgmental. The Japanese way is the Japanese way, it is not better, it is not worse, it is just different. So I think you have to have that openness. I think the second advice is that it is important to adapt but not to get caught up by it too much. Not become to the point where you are completely paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake. And that is something I had trouble with during my first job here: I don't want to be too direct, I don't want conflict, the way I say yes is important... So you come to the point where you are paralyzed and it affected my abilities to perform. I think the point is to understand the rules and respect them but move forward and do what you have to do.

14. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

I think it is ok to have fun and to laugh. Maybe the initial perception, especially coming in a formal meeting is that people are very serious, but it is not true because they love to laugh! I mean it is true everywhere but especially here, people like to laugh, joke around, and criticize people... It is regular human being. At the end of the day, people in front of you are from different culture, different language, different history but they are human being so it is all the same.

2- Interview with an expatriate Manager – Man (24/03/2015).

Previous experience.

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?

My name is X, I am a Belgian citizen and I have been working in Japan for roughly 25 years. My background is agronomy engineer. I came in Japan with the scholarship of the Japanese government, the Monbusho, to study fish farming because it was the initial objective that I had. Then life takes you sometimes in place you have not foreseen and I landed in the 80s working for 5 Belgian companies in the field of biotechnology. Through this biology association, I came connected with X, a pharmaceutical company. I joined that company in the 80s; I worked for them roughly 15 years. 2 years in the international division in Belgium in Brussels and then I moved to Japan in early 80s. There we build up with the team the presence of X here in Japan. Thanks to that I have learned a lot of things about the industry and the way of doing business in Japan. After that I moved to China for 1 year where I worked as a GM. Before going to Japan I was VP for X where I occupied different functions: financial management control, reporting, business development, plant management, H&R, administration, licensing... The only area where I could not get inside and deep knowledge was operating marketing and sales. Then at the end of 2001 I moved to Shanghai to draw the strategic blue print for X and its future development in that country.

After that, in 2003, I decided to leave X and to join Servier which is my present company. Because I had the possibility in Servier to be exposed to operational marketing and sales which was, I believe, an area where I needed to get more inside and knowledge to be considered as a real GM in the pharmaceutical industry. So here in this company I am X since November 2007. The organization here is rather compact; we are 30 people, with basically 3 functions. One of the functions is bringing added value to our licensees, we are also offering some support in the field of international networking with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) in our respective therapeutic area, and we are also organizing some training for our partners. The second activity is related to the clinical development: we have here a small team which is in charge of developing clinically our product from phase 1 to sometimes phase 2. The main purpose here for X is not to sell by itself those products but to license out the products. And when you license out, the negotiation process takes time. So rather than to loose time, we are trying to add value before those assets are license out to prospective interested pharmaceutical companies. This basically are the two base functions.

A third one and which has become even more important for X as a group now is the Business Development, the license in activity. Like US, Europe, to some extent Korea and maybe China, Japan is one of the places in the world where you can identify a chemical entity which can bring added value and that can answers medical needs for the medical community. And X is of course interested to have access to such molecule, to such medicine. Of course we are not alone; everybody is actively worldwide involved in the search of such chemical entity. Simply because R&D is becoming tougher and tougher and it is very difficult for many pharmaceutical companies to be able to sustain growth by itself based on its own researches. You cannot anymore, with the advance of sciences, consider that you will be able alone to cover everything by yourself. So you have different ways: collaboration with academics institutions for instance. Another way of course is to have access to the portfolio of others companies which have been sometimes more innovative than you in certain fields. Open innovation. So these are the three areas in which X is working.

When I came in Japan, I was a little but surprised, also due to my past experiences of the strategic decision of X in japan. So for the last 5-6 years we have repeatedly discussed with our headquarter management the possibility to change our presence in Japan and to not only rely on the revenue coming from a license out products. In this country, a lot of promotional effort is required to cover the target which requires having sizeable salesforce. The cost of medical reps is not cheap so the fix cost of the organization is rather heavy. To be able to be independent and to control the sales of your own product, knowing that those products will have to be clinically developed, to some extent, locally, and you can not only do that with one product, that is something I learned when I was working at X, you need to have successive waves of products that will come in the right timing allowing the organization to sustain these fix cost. And this unfortunately was not possible to X due to the fact that the products that we had had been licensed.

Five years ago, we decided to put more efforts in the field of oncology because we saw a big opportunity. Why? Because in the field of oncology is really a special case. Patients are not going to general practitioner, they go to specialized hospitals. To cover the target, I mean the doctors of those institutions dealing with oncology field; you do not need to have a huge sales force. Hundred + specialized staff highly will be enough to cover it.

And also the promotion of the oncology product has nothing to do with the promotion of other products. You are not comparing the benefice of your product versus the competition. In Oncology you have to partner with the doctors and to look at what are the current states and treatments and see how well could your product fit in the therapeutic approach recommend by the doctor. And obviously very often, you deal with several products when you treat some tumors with cancer patient. So what is important is what you product is going to bring as a plus, what would be the synergy with other existing treatments, for the patient. So it is a different approach. To come back to the initial point, we saw there an opportunity because oncology products have generally a higher NHI price (National Health Insurance). And as the sales force is relatively limited, it is possible with few Oncology products to be self-sustaining. So we are going for the Oncology area to change the way we are acting and the way we will be present in Japan, we hope one day to be self-sufficient and independent, controlling everything to the development to the sales of this product. For the others therapeutic area, we will continue to maintain our strategy as of today which is the license out.

2. *About your **first management assignment** in Japan.*

- *What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...*
- *Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?*
- *From a cultural point of view, what were the most important things you learned during the first weeks?*

It is a difficult question in the sense that my first assignment was for 5 Belgian companies organized into biotechnology association so actually I was alone. I had some road map, some objectives that were assigned to me by these 5 Belgian companies plus academic support to be given to the University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve at this moment. So it is a little bit different than an assignment where you are representing a company and working with people. I was alone doing that for two years. Then I will come back to my next more corporate assignment which probably answers better your question. First a lot of my first impression where not with this job but rather when I came as a student, because I think it is the first contact with the country and the culture that is probably the most impressive.

To come back to this biotechnology association, what I found amazing is how open and accessible were the people. You know I was renting a 22 square meters, an apartment that was at the same time, for the first year my office. So sometimes you feel uncomfortable in terms of credibility. I mean is this young chap going to be someone reliable we can start discussing with? And actually I found a very open attitude from the companies I have been approaching explaining my settings and the mission that was assigned to me. It has been a great memory for me in the sense that people were relatively accessible although I was working alone. I learned also the importance of being extremely well prepared when you go to meet any company. So you should explain who you are, what is your organization, who you represent, who are these players into the Belgian market and this helps you a lot to build the credibility for future contacts. This is something that I learned regarding that first assignment I would say.

Regarding my first corporate assignment, in the beginning we were working with very few people so it was like a family. It was a pretty cool atmosphere. As the communication was not an issue, it was pretty smooth. When the organization is becoming bigger, communication can become an issue. But in term of working, the big difference I found, especially when I compare to Belgium and even more with French company, is that in Europe, as a manager you tend to fight for your own opinion, ideas you need to be more assertive, to show that you want to go to the top... and sometimes you are so much taken into that way of thinking that you do not listen very carefully to what people say. I would say that here in Japan when there is a project, people will sit together. We will first gather all the expertise needed around the table and then we will start exchanging and discussing. This process is probably time consuming compared to the way we take decision in Europe, which is more top down. I found the Japanese management more participative with the possibility of discussing all the issues. The process itself is time consuming but once the decision and the consensus has been achieved, the things move very fast.

Newamashi means when you transplant a tree from one place to another. You need to cut the little roots, of course you need to keep the main one and wrap the roots so that it makes a big ball. Then it can be unroot without any roots attached to the ground so I mean it will be a smooth unroot of the tree to be transplanted in other place. This image is actually telling us, and it is typical Japanese expression, that you will cut and eliminate all the possible difficulties that you may find when dealing with a given project. This process sometimes is time taking that is for sure but once the tree has been transplanted it is pretty easy and the things are moving rather smooth. So this is one of the things I have learned.

The issue also with the Japanese management is that, and it is probably cultural and it is also changing, but I think there are very few people that are moving proactively or taking initiatives by themselves. This fortunately as I have been witnessing in this organization, is changing, but 20 years ago it was not like that. You know Japanese society tend to be uniform; we say that we don't like those who are different. The acceptances of people who are out of the mold were limited 20 years ago. Foreign companies tried to bring into Japan they own foreign model. Of course sometimes it is clashing but out of it can result a very interesting management approach. So from a foreign perspective. I don't think that there are many differences. You see more and more young people in companies that are proactive. Maybe some of them have studied abroad. So I think things are changing. Sometimes not fast enough but I think management ways and methods are becoming more and more unified.

Maybe this is also something typical from Japanese culture. Generally speaking, people view the wellbeing of the organization first. Manager sometimes, in the US or even in some European countries, tends to be aggressive and aim at the top. Sometimes their own interest primes over the interest of the organizations. I think in Japan it is rather seldom to see that, in my own experience. On the contrary there is the notion that the company need to be successful. To tell you how far it can go, if sometimes the organization goes throughout bad times, you can see in Japan a company asking for an effort from everyone, from the top to the bottom. For instance maybe this year we will not have salary increase, or maybe we will have no bonuses, and the organization will accept that. More easily than it would be in France or in Belgium where people would go in strikes. Maybe people will strike but they will still coming to work and contribute to the achievement of the objectives, to be sure that the company goes well through the hard time that the company is facing. This is something that I found quite unique in Japan and this is probably linked to the culture. Japan was what I called a village culture.

Another thing that impressed me and that is still impressing me is whatever the position occupied by someone in the company, and it goes beyond the company, even in the society of Japan, people are committed to what they do. They have this pride, in a positive meaning, of doing their job well and to continuously improve themselves. This is something that we lose in Europe, did we have it I don't know but this is something we should be thinking of. Is it a characteristic that is purely acquired by the education, probably, this is also something which is enhancing though training.

When you go to shops and that you see the way you are greeted when you make purchases, the way your goods are packed... This is extraordinary I think and I don't know many countries where you can find that. Of course you can also find it in France for instance, when some artisans that are putting all their commitment dedications, pride and do good job... I think this is a fantastic characteristic of Japanese people.

Present.

3. In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.

- What is your opinion about that?
- How does it affect your manager's work?

Decision process is not always based on collectivity and consensus but mostly yes. I mean if you do only top down, it is possible: if ask someone of doing a task, saying you do this. They are different ways of doing top down. If you spend a little time to explain why you do top down, because for instance we are short of time and you have identified that a given person is probably the most suitable based on your knowledge of the person and the organization. But it is also important to explain why, what you are expecting from the request and why you give this particular request. Most of the time what we do is: we have a given project so we will sit with all the parties, we will give the main guides and saying this is what we want to achieve. We have certain timelines in front of us so how do we organize ourselves, who is doing what... So you share that you need to gather regularly to see the progress and you also need to make sure that all stakeholders are part of it. So yes you can have top down, and yes you can have no top down. It is a mix depending on the situation. I don't think that there is a particular recipe for that. If you do a simple top down, maybe you don't even need to gather all the people. You gather heads of the departments involved, even if there are some key persons in those departments who will play an important role implementing and working on that project. Top down it is easy, I mean you gather the 2 or 3 guys and you say do it.

I think the big advantage of doing consensus approach is when you start implementing, if everybody has been part of it, they appropriated the project to themselves so I mean it is part of their work. When you appropriate something to yourself, rather than being imposed, you are going to have a more participative and contributing attitude. And when implementation time will come, you know that you will be able to count on these people. Empowering the people and making them participate is also an extremely important element of motivation and to make them feel part of the project. I think this is very important if you want to have the greatest chance of success.

The second point, of course this is maybe a drawback: yes it takes time. But probably, I don't know if some studies have been done on that but maybe looking at the long term, maybe you will have less issue once the project will be implemented to the organization. While if you have done a top down and that you have been unable to unroot some major difficulties or defect, this kind of things are going to pop up at the time of implementation. So which is better? From a motivational and empowerment view point, I think it is probably better to go throughout the consensus. But sometimes you have also time constraint. I don't believe there is a recipe. This is really something to be assessed by the person in charge at that time.

4. *What is the **union** role in your company?*

- *As a manager, what are your relations with the union?*
- *In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?*

Here we have no union. I think the fact we rarely see strikes in Japan is not linked to the union job. First, the concept of union is completely different of what we have, to my knowledge, in Europe. What I know from the unions is what I have seen for example when I was working in Belgium. It is that the union is the union for the industry itself, so for instance you may have a strike of all the railway people, police... It is a corporation of people that go on strike. While here in Japan, the union will be linked to a particular enterprise so if you have a strike, and I haven't heard about a strike, it would not affect all the companies. It will be a corporate linked strike. And when people strike, you will see them showing with a band attached to their arm that they are on strike so they are not very happy but they will probably come to work. So the point of importance here is that the union is linked to a given company, it is a part of the organization. So there will be a discussion between the union and this particular company management to find a compromise that will solve the issue. It is much more micro union so the approach is different.

In Europe for instance, let's say some the medical industry decide to go on strikes. Maybe several doctors or several institutions are not sharing the total industry strike claim, but, as they are part of it, they have to participate even if actually they are not really concerned. But as a sense of support they participate to it. So which is better? I leave it to you assessment.

5. *Japanese are often described as **high-context** person, which mean that indirect/nonverbal communication has a lot of importance.*

- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

I can tell you that when I was in charge in some countries of Asia like Sri-Lanka or Bangladesh, Pakistan, China or also European countries... The management, the way you deal, interact with people was different. Management is about doing tasks with people. A company is about people that are together doing a particular task, adding value on a service or on a product hoping to answer a demand of the society but also to generate enough revenue to be sustainable. That is the liberal system in which we are operating. You do that with human being so I think it is extremely important that you know how to interact with human being in a particular cultural context. For instance, I think than Korean people are much more extraverts and direct than Japanese people, and the two countries are separated just by few hundreds of kilometers but the culture is different. You need to understand first how to communicate and if there is some particular element that could affect your communication. We in Europe are very extraverts, we need to show that we are proactive, we want to do things, we need to do things, to show ourselves, to be seen, appreciated... So it is very important to be visible I would say, in the management in Europe. And I think also our education system is promoting more and more this. So in Japan it is the contrary. As we said the group prevails above the individual and even there are some exceptions to this, I think it is still very much applied in Japan.

The second points, indeed Japanese people are fewer extraverts so, knowing that, how does it affect my management? It will affect my management in the sense that if we discuss, give some instructions, orientation for a work... If you say to Japanese people let's do like this, they will say: hai, hai. In Europe, if I have to translate this means yes, yes. Or hai may means I understand what you said but I disagree with it so there are a lot of non-said in the Japanese culture. So that is also the reason why during the consensus you need to make sure that you have been understood. If you speak the language, it is probably easier because they will understand what you said. I mean first of all the language is an issue, lets never forget about that.

If you are a non-Japanese speaker and that you give your instructions, even in a consensus way, during meeting, don't forget that even if you have Japanese people able to understand English, we are not native English speaker. So even in this case, do not assume that your message has been fully perceived.

Moreover most of Japanese people have relatively good reading knowledge, but communication is another issue, and spoken English is another issue. I can tell you we are spending a lot of time and effort in our organization to improve it. Why is it difficult? Because again people are very often afraid to make mistakes, this is a trait of the Japanese people. Rather than to make mistakes I rather stay shy and do not make action. You have to teach people that mistakes is not something dramatic, you can learn from it. So by being shy, they tend to not practice a lot. The way which English is spoken in the Japanese system is far from being good. So do not overestimate the ability of your audience to understand.

Of course in a meeting, do not point a person saying, didn't you understand? It may be a little bit embarrassing or a shame in front of other people. There are different ways of doing that and usually what we tend to do is to ask indirect questions to make sure that the content of the communication has been well understood.

During the meeting, people may give the impression that everything is fine so when you are a project leader, I think it is good from time to time to go with your team outside the office and to do what we call nomunication. You may smile at this, so nomo mean drink and the rest stand for communication. Unfortunately, this is something that has been disappearing from Japanese companies and even foreign companies on the pretext that it is too costly. I disagree with that, I do it from time to time, and it doesn't necessarily need to be at night, you can also organize it during the day. Sometimes it is also interesting to have a face to face meeting because sometimes in front of colleagues, some person will not express their opinion. It is a very hierarchical society so people are always taking care of not offending and to save face so you need to deal with it. Of course you will make mistakes and little by little you will learn how to manage that.

So I do not trust only the meeting itself. Also sometimes it is good to have the opinion of people that are not necessarily directly involved. So it is up to you to validate, by different ways and to be creative about that, if the project and the opinion that people officially have on it fully reflect the adherence of the majority.

6. *Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.*

- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

Avoiding confrontation is not something that is purely Japanese. This is why it is good to sometimes have discussion outside the meeting. You have to feel it thanks to the time if there are some issues in a particular situation. And as we said, they are different ways of unrooting things. From the notion of face saving, confrontation is more particular to Japan. But anyway, if in a meeting in Europe, if you say something very tough and unpleasant to someone, you will have to bear the consequences of that. Maybe this person is not going to be any more cooperative with you because you make a frontal attack in front of everyone and nobody likes it. Of course a manager need sometimes to be tough but when I have something I think it is necessarily to tell someone in terms of its behavior, or major issue, I usually call the person in my office and we have what I call a for eyes meeting and I believe it is very constructive. If you do that in front of other parties you are going to have a negative impact. It doesn't mean that you cannot be directive. Sometimes you have to be. It is a question of communication. You need to be transparent and to put the persons in front of the issues. What are our/your/my responsibilities? Of course do not put yourself out of the picture; you are part of it as a manager. You are fully responsible for it so you need to stand by your people. From the moment people know that you empower them, trust them, give them responsibilities, that you will be on their side if something failed, people will respect you.

You don't need to have persons liking you, that is not the point. Of course we are human being and so emotion is important, fortunately, but in any group you will have people you like and you dislike. In term of work you have to overcome and to pass about that. You cannot make people feel that you like someone and that you dislike another one and that it affect the way you manage people, you have to be very careful about it. And the more you go up in the pyramid, the lonelier you will be. So you are not here to be like or dislike by people, you are here to fulfill a mission task, you have functions, responsibilities, you should be transparent so your objective and you should be clear to everyone. Maybe people will not like you but they will respect you and this is something that is very important.

So being directive doesn't mean that you need to be unrespect full and on the contrary, as long as you are transparent and clear in your communication and that the settings has been made clear for everyone, you will not have any major issue. If your management principles are explained and endorse by the group, then managing is a piece of cake in this country. They are serious people committed to their job.

When I was in Bangladesh, I needed to follow the people all the time. And this would change; it is because the economy is a little bit young. Depending on the culture and the environment, you need to adapt your management style.

7. *How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?*

As we said, to make people motivated and engaged, you have to make people understand that whoever and whatever their function in the company, each function has a goal. So no one is more important than another. It is a little bit easy to say that and people may not take you seriously but what I mean by this is that, and I often say it to my support, if you were not here, the organization couldn't function properly, you contribute to the success of the organization. Also of course, empowerment with responsibilities and duties. It is the same than the fish history: you can give the fish or you can give the fishing tool and teach how to fish. The role of the GM is also to be able to decline a vision of the organization and making it motivating. Here we also do a lot in terms of professional development. There is the personal and professional development. So professional development, for a given function you need to have some technical skills to be upgraded. A person can also learn other skills such as negotiation which is also a personal skill. I always say to my staff: should you lose your job tomorrow, what do you think is missing today for you to find another job. So you can do training for skills that fits and support your organization.

I can also return the question: what motivate me? Obviously it is the job content, one third of my life is my work so it should be interesting; I should have the feeling that I am learning contributed to something. Second, the environment, the working conditions are important. Then you have your remuneration package: we are not philanthropic; we have families... so we have to make sure that our remuneration package is competitive. The vision of the company is also important. If those elements are well balanced, you keep your people and their motivation.

So here we have put in place performance and yearly development review. So manager have to sit at least 3 a year with their staff to evaluate and check the objectives and situation in terms of performance and development of people. As a top manager, you often spend 1/3 of your time managing people. If you do that, you know your people and you don't have unexpected surprised.

8. *In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *Did you already face some discrimination cases?*

I am fully in agreement with your statement and this is a pity. Such a developed country is so late in terms of equal opportunity. Particularly in terms of top managerial position. I think the issue here in Japan is the attitude and I think foreign companies have been really quick to understand and to use this unfortunate situation in Japan. Because there are a lot of young women willing to work and who are highly qualified. You have to be careful when you look at foreign companies because sometimes, there are foreign companies that become even more Japanese than the Japanese one. So many young ladies in Japan are proud to take risk, to go to study abroad and to come back. The young boys are a little bit spoiled and this is also a trait of the culture in Japan but also in Asia. Having a boy is usually seen as better happiness than having a girl. In some countries, this fact is really exacerbated. Women in Japan have been fast to go overseas, to discover other countries and when they go back to Japanese organization, they are discriminated. Most of the top management is still very old although they are scrapping the seniority system for a meritocracy one. You have some exceptions, some companies that are more open to give equal opportunities to men and women but there is still a long way to go and a lot of improvement to make. Even sometimes, when you have women in top position, at similar responsibility, they will be given lower revenue than men.

One of the arguments very often used to these Japanese conservative companies is that when women will get their babies, they will leave. This is more a social and country responsibility to work on the development and supporting infrastructure for working women. There is still a long way to go. I can only say that it is a pity. Maybe thanks to the economic pressure due to the age pyramid of this country, it is going to change. We heard that from Abenomics but we want to see practical implementation.

It starts from school and from teaching. Here in Z, we allow every woman having a kid to have a part time job until they kids arrived to primary school. Usually 2-3 years are given by the law, so we go beyond that because we believe that we have to contribute to that at our level. It also goes for man because parents can choose.

But even in Europe, still today let's look in Belgium or in France, these countries are claiming equality, I would be surprised if we look at the revenue for the same position, I don't believe it is always the equality.

9. *Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.*

- *Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?*

In this company no because I think that after 25 years of experience, I can sense when there is an issue. But it happened a couple of time. Again it comes back to how transparent you are in your management and in the way you empower people. In my previous company, I used that a lot. What I do now is the following. Nomunication by definition is at evening time so it may create issue for working women who have their kids. What we decided to do is the following. I said to each manager that they could either use that nomunication system at night or even at lunch time. So I live this to their discretion and I know that sometimes they have lunch with their staff, particularly if it is female staff they prefer to do it during the lunch time. It could be used to put on the table some issues and it works. Our H&R manager is also really open and regularly does anonymous surveys so if there are some unroot issues we can tackle them. But the bigger the organization come maybe it is becoming more difficult to do.

In my previous company I did nomunication but at that time it was mostly men in the department I was working for, except in H&R and finance where we get a few ladies. Fortunately or unfortunately those ladies liked to drink a lot and they were already more advance in age so the kid was not an issue.

When you do it, you are out of the work setting; sometimes it is on a one to one basis, sometimes 3 or 4 people together to discuss a particular issue or project. They are free, they have a budget for that and they use it at their own discretion. Regarding alcohol, we are not kids, some people support it some other prefer not to drink, it is up to them. Also if the manager organizes that, people are smart and they know it is a chance to say what they want to say. But it is not the only communication channel by which someone having an issue can talk to his manager.

10. Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?

That is a good question. First of all, as I said, we are working with human being, with people. Of course there is emotion but you need to be careful that your emotions do not negatively impact the way you work. Obviously, by spending time with people you get to know them and you get to like your team. I think I have some emotional attachment to this organization because we went through sometimes difficult times. I won't say it is like a family because it is a little bit exaggerated but yes there is some emotional bond to people I am working with. Of course within the organization there are people probably feeling closer than others. So yes I like a lot my team and I am happy to see them developing and progressing. When you see your kids growing and acquiring new skills and becoming independent and you know you are part of it you are becoming happy, that is why I used the word family. It is not paternalistic, I am really happy to see them evolving. It is a positive attachment I have with them.

When we had the earthquake matter, the radioactivity issue was a big matter and the headquarter wanted to repatriate me immediately in France. I said no, this is my team. If you send me back it will be a one way ticket and I could not come back ever. What we did, we moved to the South of Japan for a given period of time. It is like in a boat, when the boat is sinking the captain is supposed to be the last one to leave. You cannot abandon your people; they have been standing by you. You may say yes but they were paid for that, there was no emotion. And that is why I say yes there is also emotional link. I would have been ashamed to let them and to come back after. Now I don't judge people who act differently because I think each situation is particular. I have an understanding of the Japanese situation as an expatriate with a long time experience in Japan. So I do not criticize people for whatever reason having young kids decided to protect their kids to move away from Japan. Again, when sometimes Japanese people tell me: you know such GM escaped with his family. I say come on, if it would have been you, being expatriate with your kids in Europe and having nuclear plant disaster, what would you have done? You don't know. Maybe even your government would have ordered you to come back.

This is why I gave my people the possibility to move to south with their family, of course in agreement with my headquarter. First I had to convince my hierarchy that it was out of the question I come back in Europe and in Japan later. I had also my son having health issue here and I believe there was a little bit of over-reaction on the European side. So they come back to me later and say, what about moving permanent staff to South. I say I also disagree with this; I have in this organization people that have part time contract. These people are contributing and have been contributing to what we are today. So, how do you want me to say to someone you are a lower grade people so you stay here and the other you can escape? This is out of the question; it is a take it or leaves it. Finally my headquarter agreed and we gave the choice to people, we didn't force them, to move for a couple of weeks with their family. We even made the definition of the family which was grandparents because sometimes you live with your grandparents, children... I mean blood linked. So some people moved. Not everybody but some of them did it. They will never it forget because they have been given the chance to protect their young kids. So there is link and when you go through tough time like this, even more. Regarding our headquarter; I am glade full they stood by mi side, trusted and support me. I developed unexpected emotional linked due to this particular situation.

Beside that I also understand and have no problem when my people decide to move and see other place. I am not naïve; I know that I can be replaced from one day to another so I try to disconnect this emotional tie because if you are too much attached, you can have unpleasant surprise. You should know that at the end you are a resource of the company.

11. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with Japanese and which seemed challenging for you?

I think negotiation in Japan is very challenging. In some of the negotiations I had, emotional factor was sometimes too much exacerbated. Like with the longtime partner when the emotion go up to the business when you re-negotiate a contract. It is part of the game but I think this is sometimes challenging.

*12. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?*

We already mentioned it but transparency, empowerment, responsible. Importance giving to regular discussion with your reporting people.

*13. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?*

Listen and observe. Everybody has some management principle, some ethics. I honestly believe in transparency, fairness and mutual respect. The first thing I do when I have to go to another country is to meet everybody in my team, try to understand who they are, what they have been doing in order to know them. Then I will probably visit few CEOs who are already working on that particular country and listen what has already been experienced. It is always useful to look at the most recent expertise since things are continuously changing. So you can listen and learn a lot. You need to meet and discuss with people to identify what are the specific characteristic of the culture. You need to identify the right way to interact with people.

14. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

I think we discuss already a lot. Maybe one thing, not only for Japan, I never believe that I have learned everything. Managing and life is an endless learning process so you need to keep an open attitude, an open intelligence. To be able to adapt you need to keep a flexible brain

3- Interview with an expatriate Manager – Woman (2/04/2015).

Previous experience.

1. *Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?*

My name is X and I am the head of X for the JPAC region. I have been at Sanofi for 5 years, I joined in 2010. I worked in the Pharmaceutical industry for over 20 years.

2. *About your **first management assignment** in Japan.*

- *What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...*
- *Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?*
- *From a cultural point of view, what were the most important things you learned during the first weeks?*

That is a difficult question and the reason I say that is that my first management assignment in Japan was not very organized and I didn't have any assistant so it was very difficult. That is a very important point, why didn't have had an assistant? The reason is that in Japan, ask somebody to do extra work is very difficult. What I mean by that is that the assistant was in a different department; I was in a newly created team. So the expectation was that the assistant would support me as an addition of her initial job. What actually happened is that she actually went back to union to pay her for some more money and it was a long process. In the meantime, I have asked for somebody else to help me with my work but that was very difficult. At the end I get help because the relationship I had felt sorry for me.

That is very interesting. In Japan, people have a job description, and that is the job they do. So the flexibility outside of the job description is difficult to manage. And that is a great example of it: this is my job, taking somebody else is expanding my responsibilities. That is very different from my experiences in others countries where people are much more collaborative and help people out to achieve their common goal.

How did I found the people? People were generally welcoming but there were some skepticism as being an expatriate in a regional role. You have to earn your true respect. Of course there is respect because you are in a regional role as a manager and people are very polite, but it is sometimes difficult to know what are their real feelings towards you. In the sense that I wasn't sure on what was really going on beside it.

From a cultural point of view, the first important things I learned was how to introduce myself, how to exchange business card, be polite, I learned to say hajimemashite and others Japanese welcoming words...The first impression is really important as well as to bow slightly when meeting people. The introduction is very important and also the way it is done is very important. I also in the first few weeks learned some very typical words. For example, muzukashi which means: it is difficult. But what it truly means is that it is probably not going to happen. So it is about understanding that the Japanese culture is not as direct as Australian or British culture for instance. So you need to know the second meaning of the actual words.

Present.

3. *In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

That decision making process is very slow. My observation is that change and moving forward is slow in Japan compared with others countries I have worked in. The point is about empowering to make decisions. It is linked to hierarchy and managers. Even if you bring people together for consensus, they will still behave as a referral deferral to the most senior person in the room. And if the most senior person in the room makes a statement of I do agree or I don't agree, then that would be the decision that is made. It is difficult for more junior people to provide their honest feedback because they will follow the most senior person, even if they didn't have the same opinion. It has to be managed very well. As a manager you have to be aware of that and not to share your opinion too early.

This is very slow and also for small decision that I believe we could make very quickly in the moment. You have to bring people together, have a half hour or an hour meeting and sometimes the decision is not even made at the end of that.

Also around the decision making, my observation would be that the RACI model of responsibility, accountability, consulted and informed is not implemented in Japan. This model allows you to make faster decision and to determine who should be in the room at the time of the decision making and who should be consulted before. That is a really common way of working in Westerns countries. So here in Japan, many people that maybe do not need to be involved in the decision process.

4. What is the **union** role in your company?

- As a manager, what are your relations with the union?
- In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?

Up to now I had no direct involvement with the union. I wasn't involved in any discussion with the union but as I explained to you, the manager of the assistant had to work with the union. I don't have any experience with the union.

In Europe, you see strikes because of the unions. I think that union in Japan has a stronger influence without having to strike. Their abilities to be able to come to resolution are higher. Also I think that in the culture, it is not correct to strike. Participants come together and reach a compromise.

5. Japanese are often described as **high-context** person, which mean that indirect/nonverbal communication has a lot of importance.

- How does it affect your manager's work?

I think now I know that what is said and what is thought is sometimes different. In a day, a team may agree in the meeting room that this is the right way to go, but still they haven't express their opinion and they continue to not agree with it. So it is slower to deliver the output. I have become very used to the body language in the last twelve months. I have a good sense for people. For instance in Japan the eyes contact is less present but I tend to watch the body position and to read it. So I think for me, my nonverbal abilities to read the situation have considerably increased in the last twelve months. The difficulty is how can you open the conversation to understand what is the truly issue and to be able to create the environment where the true can be really spoken about.

6. *Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.*

- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

I absolutely agree with that statement. I think that sometimes we do work that is of no value and we do not improve efficiency. Proactivity to make changes or to look for opportunities to make something different is not present because there is a fear of confrontation. Maybe people may feel fearful that they would be criticized by somebody and that it results in confrontation, so the conversation never happens. It paralyses the change, this is a great expression. It also paralyses problems solving, progression, business and everything because you never get to the true. You don't get to the true issues at a manager level. I think the issue is potentially discussed with colleagues but maybe not brought up to the manager. It is my observation in the workshops and in the works that I have done during last years.

7. *How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?*

I don't have a team, I work with people but they are not in my team. Well I do have a team but there are two vacuum positions. So I have a team of people that I influence but not to a direct management level. That is very difficult in Japan because even if I am in the management team, I am not their boss. So that line of command is not here.

How do I motivate people, how do I empower them? One of the things that I do is face to face discussion. What I have really done in Japan is to really explain why we are trying to do something and what the goal is. The reason I do that is because I feel that people implement very well what I ask but they never design it by themselves. So my approach it to have really intimate discussion about how do you think we can achieve that, so very open questions. I have to do that in a very tight way with a small group of people because if we do that with a large group of people, you will only have silence as answer. I try to find individuals that I can work with one by one and through them, I am starting to influence the rest of the group. So I try to find people that are open minds and with them, try to influence others. That is for me the key of success in Japan: find the gold, find the nugget. Because there are some really forward thinking people within the organization and they are not always empowered to really reach their potential. That is why I try to find them to work with them.

8. *In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *Did you already face some discrimination cases?*

I am surprised that it is the case right now. I think if you look to a period of time, it is true. However if you look today, does the data still say that? My opinion is that each year, it is changing. You could see that if you look at the demographics and the percentage of women and men. It has dramatically changed in the last ten years.

I haven't faced any discrimination cases personally but I have heard of an interesting situation in the sales team. A lady was asked by her manager to consider another job because she had commitments to family and that she was required to do some evenings work. She said: but I have to manage my family. The question back was: why can't your husband manage that? Because he has a job too. So it was quite interesting and I was shocked to hear that kind of conversation. People don't have to make a choice between having a family and work. Maybe historically the women have been the person in charge for the family and it was is very hard for them to balance both work and family. But I think that it is changing. What you may find is that younger people are making a choice to have or a family, or career and they maybe choose to not have a family, which is maybe the case if you look at the birth rate. In terms of discrimination in this company, I think we try very hard not to discriminate. However, the number of Japanese women in top management role is only one. In the next level down, we start to have a better balance of women but then, in terms of recruit of new staff, there is a very good balance of women and men. My comment would be that maybe women are limiting themselves and they are discriminating themselves. That is my observation, women are self-discriminated.

9. *Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.*

- *Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?*

No I haven't used it. I haven't necessary had the need. I have been invited once with people I work with. They invited me for my welcome diner and that was very nice. We had a very nice conversation.

I think the limitation is that I don't speak fluent Japanese. So how can you really converse with people whom you need to have a very honest open discussion? I socialize with my expats colleagues but in terms of the people that you really want to talk to, if you have a language barrier, then you are not going to solve the issue.

10. Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?

I am highly engaged with healthcare in terms of helping people achieve their life goal. It is something that is important to me and health is a part of that. If you are not healthy then you may be compromise to fill your life goal. I studied Biology at university so sciences medicines and health are a really motivations for me. I worked at others pharmaceutical companies, 4 in total. I am attached to this company because of its pipelines of products. This company has products for the all lifecycle of the family, and also for animals. That is unique and I am quite attached to that, not many companies can say that.

11. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with Japanese and which seemed challenging for you?

Every day is a challenge with Japanese people. First for the language because you can't have a real conversation if you don't have the language. A very specific example was this Friday in a tele conversation; it was not a great leadership moment for me. I was faced with a team not taking responsibility and leadership of managing the team by themselves and they completely deferral to me. The example was I asked for one of them to send an email to the group to explain why we would cancel the meeting on Monday. The comment back was: how can we do that? That is something that you must do. I said I do not understand why I have to do that and they said because you are the regional person. So I pushed back and I said please can somebody step up and take on a leadership? It didn't happen. At the end I had to do it. Why do I say that was not a great leadership moment? It is because it was easier for me to just do it rather than to coach somebody to do it. That happens daily: deferral of responsibility to a senior person. I think it is easier sometimes to do it yourself because it really takes time to sit down and to say: I don't think I am the right person to do it. Taking initiative, ownership, responsibility and taking an opportunity within the team to lead and become a leader. That is what I mean by step up. There were five people in the room and the answer was just silence. In Westerns countries, someone would have says: ok it is fine I would do that. That was a real example and there are many others examples of that kind. It is difficult to take them outside of their comfort zone or of their job description to take on responsibility outside of the scope of their job. It is an opportunity to grow, to demonstrate leadership, and I don't observe that.

*12. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?*

I don't think that the characteristic of a leader in Japan should be any different from the characteristics of a leader in any other country. The way that you may interact with people may be slightly different but in terms of a leader who is able to demonstrate quality of vision, to mobilize and motivate team, that is true everywhere. That is not necessary what I observe because in Japan you can just say to people: "do that" and they will do it with great results. But will you have engaged, motivated and efficient organization? No. And that is where I believe we are right now in Z: we tell people what to do; we don't engage, motivate and inspire people to take the initiative.

The leadership quality is not specific to Japan and I don't believe this is different leadership quality. Maybe I am completely wrong. That is maybe why we are not as successful as we could be.

*13. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?*

Which I have an exact example because a friend and colleagues found me and said that. So what advice? My first advice is to understand your team and also who are the key influencers in it, so know who are the key influencers and who are the nugget. Nuggets are innovative and flexible people also able to influence the team. So those are two different groups of persons. Also taking care when introducing you, being respectful of the way to dress and the way to behave as a woman in Asia. For example, in Western countries it is possible to wear sleepless clothes but here it is about covering yourself up.

Also be very mindful of what could be a direct question, which could be appropriate in other countries but could be offensive to the audience here in Japan. Also be very mindful about eyes contacts, it is not common in Japan so don't look too to the eyes in an insistent way.

14. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

My only thing is that being an expat is a fascinating experience. Also, after three years, I have actually set my expectations of what is possible to achieve. I say that because it is slow to make change in Japan. I think that change would happen but it doesn't happen fast and I don't think I found the secret to make it happen fast.

4- Interview with a Japanese Manager – Man (09/03/2015).

Previous experience.

1. *Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?*

I have been working for Sanofi in Japan, a Pharmaceutical company since 1994, just after graduating University. So I did not change of company over 20 years. When I joined this company I was working as a medical representative (reps) for 7 years. After 7 years of reps experiences, I was transferred to marketing department headquarter in Tokyo as product manager. I was mainly working to plan medical congress for 4 years. And then, 10 years ago I was transferred to my current job position in X.

2. *About your **first management assignment** in Japan.*

- *What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...*
- *Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?*

So in order to move forward with a project, it is always important for project manager to keep the team members with some goals and targets. He has to set it up. Of course, some team members bring some opposite opinion to the team, always. But we always have to keep in mind the team goal and objectives. It is a very important factor for the success of a project. In order to bring good atmosphere in the team we always have to select appropriate person, team members.

Present.

3. *In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

As you have already found out, a Japanese style is a bit different from Western style. In the decision making meeting, some participants might have good opinion in his or her mind. But sometimes they never show their opinion in the meeting. One of the reasons is he or she might be a modest person.

Of course recently, in the case of some younger people, their minds have been changing. However, in older style, if we have upper grade management in the meeting, the low level guy will not give their opinion to this manager.

The fact that each person has the opportunity to give his opinion for a decision is a nice thing I think. Maybe it depends on the attitude of the project manager or of other persons in the meeting.

4. What is the **union** role in your company?

- As a manager, what are your relations with the union?
- In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?

Periodically unions negotiate with the management team. Some industries, for instance public transport, sometimes go to strike. But in pharmaceutical industry we don't have much opportunity to see it because the salary level is much higher than in other industry. In the past, the salary level has been increasing. Most of the employees do not complain about their salary. So every year, union has the opportunity to negotiate for a potential salary increase for non-management, and do several negotiations with president and HR manager. Sometimes it takes long time. Of course at the end, unions are not 100 percent happy but they finally meet each other.

5. Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.

- How does it affect your manager's work?

Conflict itself, we are always facing in every decision making business. So sometimes we are required to do it even myself, even you. So conflict itself is not bad manner. So I think I do not deny the conflict in a discussion for a decision making process. Particularly French guys always they like to have conflict they never say yes.

6. How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?

I try to delegate important tasks to team members. I would like to my team members to get some successful experiences thought real project.

7. In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.

- What is your opinion about that?
- Did you already face some discrimination cases?

Around two or three decades ago actually in Japan, there was some discrimination in terms of gender. But over the last two or three decades, situation has completely changed. Actually in this pharmaceutical industry if you see the status of Medical reps, the number of women student hired is higher than man student.

So relatively recently, Japan situation has been improved I think. In X Japan, now our management team is focusing on diversity, I mean the company gives some equal opportunity to join the company. However unfortunately, after joining the company, promotions for women is not good, and does not worth man situation. As you can see easily, even in this company there are a lot of male managers but in the meantime the number of women female manager is quite small. So this is a key issue.

8. *Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.*

- *Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?*

Sure, of course. There is a special work for it in Japan, “nomunication” (drink in Japanese: nomimono and communication). Compare to the Westerner, Japanese people do not drink a lot of alcohol. If you have the chance to meet and talk with colleagues or partners with alcohol, we can easily ear from them sensitive topics. So yes, it is sometimes a useful management tool. Recently, younger people do not like to have opportunity to drink after working time. Particularly 20th years old. They prefer to come back home, it is a big issue in Japan, also for beer company (laugh).

9. *Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?*

Fortunately or unfortunately I actually did not have the opportunity to leave this company. Having said that, I do not stick to this company. My mission is to contribute to the Japanese society. By chance, my company gave me several chance and opportunity to contribute to Japan society by several projects. So fortunately I am still working for this company but I am not sticking to it.

10. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with foreign people and which seemed challenging for you?

As I mentioned before, particularly French guys, they are educated to have debate and they never say yes. Of course our goal is always common. Our goal is to grow our company. But in the process with Westerners it is not easy compared to Japanese. Maybe it is easier to do business with Japanese person, even if I am used to foreigner attitude. But even working with Japanese is not always easy because Japanese not always give clear answers. Westerners tend to give more clearly and direct answer than Japanese, it's a difference of culture I think.

*11. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?*

It might not be specific to Japan but trustful relation always we need to keep in our mind, never lie. When we cannot accept something we need to clearly say it. And of course successful manager need to make some quick decision. Take responsibility to its decision. But even in that case always we need to be able to answer to: why did you come to that conclusion? In order to explain it to your boss.

*12. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a foreign friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?*

I think a more effective and fast way is to know the Japanese culture itself. Particularly education system is completely different from Western countries. For instance, Japanese student never have the opportunity to learn in a firm like you now in your internship. It might take longer time to learn how to conduct and perform a project. It might take a longer time compared to Western people. Japanese attitude is really a step by step one, gradually try to understand. It is different for Westerners, even at 30-40 years old, many young executive lead the company but in Japan no. Presidents mostly are around 60 years old. The way to operate the company is a bit different. Of course there are recent changes but older people still have more chance to lead the firm and to be assigned as executive. In terms of speed of promotion, it is a bit different from Western society. Some younger Japanese people recently have the chance to learn at business school in the US and they have the chance to get some entrepreneurship session but most of Japanese do not have knowledge of what are a manager and management. Of course if one company operates within Japan it might be ok. Because it just manage Japanese employees.

Japanese population has been decreasing. We can see limit to do business to domestic so we have no choice but to expand our business, particularly to emergent countries such as south America, Asia and east Europe. In that case of course we have to manage foreign employees. In that case, management style should be change to Western style. But in the Japanese education system we do not have the entrepreneurship idea, never. Such idea/attitude comes from the Western society and particularly US. In Japan no, it is totally different, we don't have entrepreneurship mind. So if I were to promote to president at young age 35 I would be feared.

13. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

As you mentioned in previous questions, Japanese company situation has been changing. I strongly recommend you to study the case of Takeda. Takeda was a big successful pharmaceutical company in Japan but after patent expiration in the US, they faced with global operational change. Over the 200 years since the establishment of the company, never a Western guy has been assigned as a president. Most of the executive are now Westerner. It has totally changed. In order to do business permanently and not in Japan, we never stick to old Japanese style management. If you want to keep global the company itself, you need to adapt.

5- Interview with a Japanese Manager – Woman (10/03/2015).

Previous experience.

1. *Could you briefly introduce yourself and your job in the company?*

After I graduated from the University, I firstly worked in a hospital because I am a pharmacist. Then I joined a pharmaceutical company and I finally joined Sanofi in 2003 as a senior product manager. That is my first position in this company. In 2009 I move to my current position in X. That is my history in this company.

2. *About your **first management assignment** in Japan.*

- *What were the first few days of work like? Tasks, atmosphere...*
- *Were there things that surprised you about the way people thought or worked?*

The really first biggest topic for me was when I joined a pharmaceutical company because it is a completely different environment than the hospital one: offices, business... That is my first experience of big change. The second thing is in the first company I worked. The head of the marketing was a German guy and I took business trip to overseas for my first time. I met foreign colleagues, talk together, working together... That is the second biggest change of my work. The Japanese style is different from the other countries style because usually Japanese old style is top down and also in line with the age and seniority. That is the usual situation and also there is no diversification, only male. So very old fashion at that time. It is a bit different from foreign companies. In foreign companies there were not this separation and it was more flat organizations with more diversification.

Present.

3. *In Japan, the **decision process** is based on collectivity and consensus. Many employees will thus have a chance to give their opinion and that will be done with full respect of seniority and hierarchy.*

- *What is your opinion about that?*
- *How does it affect your manager's work?*

Sometimes it takes time but the consensus is really important and especially for my work. Our project cannot be completed only by ourselves so collaboration with other function is really important. We need input from the other and expertise, as well as the international expertise. That is very important to make a right decision. Sometimes it is a mess because of the different ideas and different opinions, and it takes time but it is essential.

4. What is the **union** role in your company?

- As a manager, what are your relations with the union?
- In Japan we rarely see strikes such as in Europe for instance; do you think it is linked to the Union's job?

Honestly I do not have any relation with the union. The union report is distributed by mail basis. In intern meeting, sometimes, someone from union raises his hand and ask question to managers. But in daily work I personally do not have contact and discussion with union.

In this company I never experienced any strike and nowadays strike is decreasing. In the past, when I was child, sometimes there were strike with some companies, for instance airplane and sometimes there were day off of the school because of strikes but nowadays, almost nothing. I don't hear about that.

5. Japanese are well known for their strong desire to maintain relationships by **avoiding confrontation**.

- How does it affect your manager's work?

I think personally that it is also important. In Japanese we call it "wa", which means "Japanese style" and also "good relationship". It is the same Kanji for both significations. Develop "wa" means develop good team work and good relationship. Japanese respect "wa". When there are conflicts with Japanese in a team, you need to carefully manage it with the right approach, a lot of respect and to listen a lot. So maybe it takes more time.

6. How do you do to **motivate** and engage people in your team?

Delegation to make leadership. I try to encourage my team members to become future leaders.

7. In my researches, I found out that in Japan, it is not easy for **women** university graduate to find suitable job opportunities. Japan is ranked as the most unequal among the world's rich countries, according to the UN index of female participation in the economy and politics.

- What is your opinion about that?
- Did you already face some discrimination cases?

Personally I don't have experience of gender discrimination. I know the situation is getting improved at the moment. So usually female university graduate work for some companies and get job opportunities. Bu it is different for the manager level and also for politicians. The ratio of female manager is lower because of the long traditional history. It cannot be suddenly changed. We need time to change, so change will gradually happen.

I don't think that for being a manager, women have to do more effort than men. To a certain position level, there is not difference between female and male but for top management; it is a little bit different I think. Also, before going to top management or middle class management, female face several events for instance the marriage and child birth. Therefore sometimes female have to stop and suspend the career development for a certain period. Maybe it is the same as other countries but I was surprised in the past when I heard about foreign female coming back to work after the child birth, only one or two month after they left. Usually Japanese female takes other intervals, around 1 year. So that is the difference. Because until the baby growth to certain age, the female mother often have to take care of the baby by herself because sometimes there is a lack of nursing care facilities. That is another dimension of the problem and that is a national issue. It is linked with the Japanese decreasing population; maybe it is part of the reason for the decreasing of the birthrate.

8. *Many papers explain that the **after-work drink** is a custom in Japan where things are said in an informal atmosphere.*

- *Did you already use this in order to solve problem, discussing an issue...?*

I don't use it as a tool but it is actually a very effective mean to know people, talk frankly and listen to "hone" (real idea, opinion) of the person. So people easily talk about the "hone" with drinks. It is very relax and close communication, "nomunication". Very effective for team building for instance. Every Friday my team's members and I go out together to lunch. Because in my team, everyone has different topic and different responsibilities so therefore, they usually work independently and not as a team. So therefore I intentionally provided such opportunity as a team.

9. *Which link do you feel between your company and yourself?*

My priority to stay in the company is the job itself, so how the job is enjoyable or exiting. So therefore if cannot find such excitement, maybe I will think about the opportunity outside of the company. Actually I moved from several companies so maybe I am an unusual case compared to the average Japanese person which often stays in the same company. That is historically due to the long life employment but the situation is now changing so many people are seeking outside opportunities. Therefore, change of job or company is not a rare case and that is getting usual. But before, it was long history of life long employment which is the traditional Japanese style. But at the moment, the employment is Westernized like the diet, lifestyle...

10. From a cultural point of view, do you have any examples of a situation in which you worked with foreign people and which seemed challenging for you?

Communication because of the language which is not Japanese. So it is often said Japanese doesn't talk a lot, just see the face and atmosphere. So there is a lot of indirect communication between Japanese. Also the very vague explanation in Japanese which is sometimes not conclusive. Just based on indirect communication maybe Japanese are thinking the same thing. In English, it is more direct communication and the word is very important. So it is not really a language matter but rather the communication matter maybe. And of course, less vocabulary in English than in Japanese for us.

*11. What are for you the **key characteristics** of a successful manager in Japan?*

Ideally maybe the person who has capabilities to build things such as team, business... And with a very positive and open mindset. He also needs to involve people. Finally he needs to have strong leadership.

*12. Based on your experience, what additional **advice** would you give to a foreign friend who is on his or her way to a foreign assignment in Japan?*

Firstly, please find the good things in Japan, culture, advantages, beauty, behavior, lifestyle, work style... I would like my friend to find out the good things in Japan as much as possible and become to like Japanese as colleagues but also as persons. As a manager, maybe do not apply the Western style in Japan to everything too quickly and rapidly. Maybe it is good to take time and also to respect the Japanese style at the same time.

13. Would you like to add something that seems important to you?

I told about everything that seems important to me. Maybe I could add that manager should like the team members. So people have both good and bad things. So some people are capable for certain things and some other people not. So you need to combine both. Sometimes, the manager focus on the not capable part but maybe it would be better and more respectful to think to the other part in order to make people growth and to motivate them.

