

TEAM DYNAMICS AND DIVERSITY

Japanese corporate experiences

LISBETH CLAUSEN

CHAPTER 9

Microsoft management team
—diversity as a strategic resource

Lisbeth Clausen

Team dynamics and diversity

Japanese corporate experiences



Lisbeth Clausen
Team dynamics and diversity
Japanese corporate experiences

1. edition 2015
The e-book edition is published in 2015
© CBS Press 2015

COVER: SL grafik (slgrafik.dk)

TYPESET: SL grafik

E-BOOK PRODUCTION: SL grafik

ISBN (PRINTED EDITION): 978-87-630-0323-0

ISBN (E-BOOK EDITION): 978-87-630-0339-1

CHAPTER 9 (E-BOOK EDITION) ISBN: 978-87-630-0355-1

CBS Press
Rosenørns Allé 9
1970 Frederiksberg C
info@samfundslitteratur.dk
www.cbspress.dk

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means
– graphic, electronic or mechanical including photocopying, recording, taping or
information storage or retrieval systems – without permission in writing from CBS Press.

PREFACE

Interview with His Excellency Seishi Suei, the Japanese Ambassador to Denmark, September 2014.

1. *How do you see the effect of more Japanese women in management positions?*

I understand that as of 2013 the proportion of female workers in administrative and managerial posts is 11.2% in Japan, much lower than that of other countries such as Germany (30%), Singapore (34%), the UK (34.5%), and Sweden (34.6%).

In the context of the Japan Revitalization Strategy, which was approved by the Abe administration in June 2013, I could say the expected direct effects are twofold: 1) it should bring various values and creativity to companies and 2) help in discovering talented women and attracting them to companies. Though I am not biased, I sometimes feel that women seem to have a different sensitivity from men and female executives could bring diversity to the decision-making process. When it comes to consumer products, they are often chosen by women, and female executives might develop new products and markets from their knowledge of consumer trends.

Creating an environment in which female executives can work while raising children and act as role models to younger women can generate other effects. Firstly, in Japan, female labor participation rates by age group show the so-called M-shaped curve. Many women stop working at the time of marriage, childbirth, and child rearing. By building up female participation, Japan will be able to get more of its needed human resources, especially talented and able women, for Japan's economy to grow sustainably. Seeing a female role model working in the higher-up positions, a woman might think that if she continues her work, one day she could become an executive and fulfill her life. Even if she had to quit her job for some reason, she could return to it. Secondly, an environment friendly to women is friendly to all humans, including men and foreign workers. Providing flexible working environments and enabling families to spend holidays together would also result in improving the competitiveness of Japanese companies by attracting talent from all over the world.

I would like to add two more things. Setting aside the necessity of a social system reform, we need to change the way men working under female executives think. As I see it, men are not used to working under female bosses, to flexible working hours, and to performance-oriented work. With more men working under female bosses and the progress of the reform of the social infrastructure, I expect that this problem will disappear, but we have to consciously address the challenges female executives will face.

Last but not least, by 2020 Japan is determined to bring about a society in which all

women can try to achieve their dreams at any life stage. One of the highest priority issues of the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, has consistently been to create a society in which women shine.

2. *The Japanese are known for being good at teamwork. How does that enable competitiveness?*

Being good at teamwork does not necessarily ensure competitiveness. Not all innovative goods have derived from Japanese companies. Teamwork—harmony of the team—is said to be valued in Japan. I think teamwork requires a sense of belonging, a sense of unity of the team’s workers, and sharing the same objectives. Teamwork is said to cause difficulties with creating breakthroughs and tackling unique situations. On the other hand, teamwork contributes greatly to activities associated with the work philosophy of continuous improvement (*kaizen*). When a team has a good and innovative leader and provides an appropriate motivation to work hard together towards a commonly shared end, then the team will, in my experience, draw out the maximum potential of each individual member and accomplish innovative work, which increases a company’s competitiveness.

I think that when a team is engaged in value creation, business planning, innovation, R&D, and so on, teamwork plays a lesser part than individual ability and aesthetic sense, which has much to do with results. However, when it comes to shop floor management, teamwork matters greatly, and I believe that good teamwork contributes to reducing unnecessary cost and to better quality. If you could divide the development of new products and services from production, teamwork would be suitable for increasing competitiveness in production processes.

3. *How do you think Japanese companies use foreign talent?*

First of all, let me tell you what the government of Japan thinks of utilizing foreign workers. The acceptance of skilled foreign workers is being actively considered from the standpoint of providing stimulus to the Japanese economy; however, the acceptance of unskilled workers needs to be considered with care, paying attention to national consensus. While the acceptance of foreign personnel in the mid- to long-term will be comprehensively examined, a clear set of solutions have now been prepared for the problems that have become obvious and require immediate attention, such as creating a program for training technical interns, allowing time-limited acceptance of foreign personnel in the construction sector, increasing flexibility for short-term domestic transfers of employees for overseas subsidiaries in the manufacturing sector, and so forth.

Japan faces a society with a declining population. In order for the Japanese economy to sustain growth and achieve fiscal consolidation, Japan needs to maintain its working population and to raise its productivity. One of the measures to improve productivity is enhancing corporate governance and reforming the mindset of corporate