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Servant Leadership
in the Context of Japanese Culture

Evert D. Osburn

Abstract

After an overview of servant leadership is provided, the results of a review of the literature on cross-cultural studies related to national cultural values and their effects on leadership styles are discussed, with particular focus on Japan. It was found that Japanese culture is one of large Power Distance (PDI), strong Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), low Individualism (IDV), and high Paternalism (PAT). It is argued that these four values in particular act as modifiers on organizational leadership paradigms, but that, with cultural contingencies properly taken into account, the servant leadership model is indeed amenable to the Japanese context. Finally, a call is made for empirical research to be conducted which, it is theorized, would lend support to the conclusion reached.

Servant Leadership in the Context of Japanese Culture

Since Greenleaf (1970/1991; 1977; Frick & Spears, 1996) laid the foundation for the theory of servant leadership, top leadership theorists have come to recognize the merit of the concept (e.g., Peck & Senge in Spears, 1995; Blanchard & Kouzes in Spears, 1998; Covey, DePree, & Bennis in Spears & Lawrence, 2002). Servant leadership, labelled "Theory S" by Stone and Winston (Stone, 2002), has proven to be effective in the American business environment (e.g., Southwest Airlines, which Habecker (2000, August) calls "a great example of servant leadership").

However, herein lies a potential criticism of servant leadership, viz.,

though arguably based upon universal principles, in both articulated theory and in documented practice it is regarded by some as largely an "American" theory of leadership. Frick and Spears (1996) write, "In many ways, it [servant leadership] is a thoroughly American philosophy, based on a deep and high vision, tested by pragmatic results. . . . Yet at the same time, servant leadership contains some elements of Eastern thought, with an emphasis on reflection" (p. 2).

Of course, it is the first part of this statement in particular which may raise alarms in some circles. If servant leadership is truly "a thoroughly American philosophy," can it be applied universally to a cross-cultural environment? Indeed, Hofstede (1993) argues that "there are no such things as universal management theories" (paragraph 7), stating unequivocally that "generally accepted U.S. theories might not apply, or only very partially apply, outside the borders of their country of origin" (Hofstede, 2001, p. 374). Hofstede's conclusion in this regard is reinforced by a number of other scholars of cross-cultural studies (e.g., Tollgerdt-Anderson, 1993; Newman & Nollen, 1996; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996; Brodbeck, Frese, Akerblom et al., 2000; Glick, 2001).

On the other hand, some researchers contend that there are leadership theories which are universal (cf. Everett, Stening, & Longton, 1982; Bass, 1996). In fact, Schuster (2002) posits that servant leadership in particular is what is needed in the new, globalized economy, and McGee-Cooper and Looper (2001) imply that servant leadership may be especially well-suited to a consensus society like Japan's.

In view of the apparent contradictions regarding the applicability of "American" theories like Theory S in cross-cultural settings, it appears that intercultural research on the subject is sorely needed. The study which follows is a preliminary attempt to determine whether or not servant leadership is an applicable concept in the case of the non-western culture that is Japan's. The specific focus is on the question, Does Japanese culture act as a modifier on the functional attributes of servant leadership, and if so, how?

In the effort that follows, a brief overview of servant leadership and its functional attributes is provided. Focus then turns to a review of the pertinent literature on national cultures and leadership, with particular

emphasis on Japanese culture. How Japanese culture may affect servant leadership and its functional attributes is subsequently discussed, concluding with a proposal for empirical research on the subject then being offered.

Servant Leadership and the Functional Attributes Thereof

Perhaps the greatest singular statement on what servant leadership entails, and the one that started it all, is that of Greenleaf in 1970:

> The servant-leader is servant first. . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . The leader-first and servant-first are two extreme types. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived? [emphases in original] (Greenleaf, 1970/1991, p. 7; 1977, pp. 13-14)

According to this statement, the marks of the servant leader are primarily the desire to serve first, the desire to meet people's higher order needs, and the desire to contribute to society. Spears (1995) has identified ten characteristics of the prototypical servant-leader in Greenleaf's (1970/1991; 1977; Spears, 1996) writings. Servant leaders display 1) receptive listening; 2) empathetic listening; 3) healing; 4) awareness; 5) persuasion; 6) conceptualization; 7) foresight; 8) stewardship; 9) commitment to the growth of people; and 10) a desire to build community (Spears, 1995, pp. 4-7; cf. Lee & Zemke, 1993).

Of course, one may readily observe that both the fundamental desires of servant leaders to serve, meet people's highest needs, and contribute to society and the characteristics of the ideal servant-leaders are founded upon

his or her basic values. Tucker, Stone, Russell, and Franz (n.d.) emphasize this, asserting, "Values are the core elements of servant leadership; they are the independent variables that actuate servant leader behavior" (p. 7). Since servant leadership emerges from values and beliefs (cf. Greenleaf, 1977; Russell, 2000; Russell, 2001), it is a values-based leadership paradigm (cf. Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999;), a fact which is of profound importance to the subject of this paper.

Indeed, Gannon (2001) states that "the most interesting feature of culture is that it triggers unconscious values leading to action" (p. 18). Since values function as "the criteria of desirability" and for "selection in action" (Williams, 1979, pp. 15-16), it follows that differences in national cultural values could well result in variance of leadership paradigms and/or the practical application thereof within certain national cultures.

That being said, it has been argued that the four components of trans-formational leadership, viz., individualized consideration, intellectual stimu-lation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence (cf. Bass, 1985; Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass, Waldman, Avolio, & Bebb, 1997; Bass, 1998; Avolio and Bass, 2002), are transferable cross-culturally. Bass (1997) contends, "There is universality in the transac-tional-transformational leadership paradigm" (p. 130), and he asserts that "whatever the country, when people think about leadership, their prototypes and ideals are transformational" (p. 135; cf. Sosa-Fey, 2001). Since servant leadership is itself transformational leadership (Farling, n.d.; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999), it follows that Theory S may be universal as well.

Yet, Bass (1996) equivocates in another work, "the [transactional-trans-formational] model is universal to a considerable degree although there are some situations which can be specified in which universality breaks down" (p. 737). He continues, "Universality breaks down for the constructs of the model in some strong, unusual, highly unique cultures such as Japan" (p. 752). It is argued in this paper that the unique cultural contingencies being referred to in Japan's case are rooted in basic national cultural values, and that these in turn do affect all leadership paradigms to a certain degree, including transformational and servant leadership.

As servant leadership is a values-based paradigm, one would naturally expect national cultural values to have an affect on it and the method and

manner in which it is implemented cross-culturally. This would necessarily extend to the functional attributes of servant leadership, which have been identified as 1) vision; 2) credibility; 3) trust; 4) service; 5) modeling; 6) pioneering; 7) appreciation of others; and 8) empowerment (Russell, 2001; cf. Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999).

For example, if efficiency and short-term profit are part and parcel of business leadership's vision within a certain culture, then servant leadership may not be applicable or may at least require considerable adaptation. This is the implication of Giampetro-Meyer, Brown, Browne, and Kubasek (1998), who assert, "If global competitiveness requires short-run efficiency, servant leaders will hinder corporate financial success" (paragraph 24) as "servant leadership clashes with efficiency" (paragraph 29).

If it may be tentatively concluded that servant leadership is values based, that national cultural values do affect leadership styles, and that, therefore, the functional attributes of servant leadership are affected in some manner by national culture, what remains to be explored is specifically how leadership styles, servant leadership in particular, are influenced by the operative cultures. It is to this issue that attention is now focused.

National Cultural Values and Their Relevance to Leadership Styles

Osland and Bird (2000) note in their synthesis of the comparative culture literature that a total of 22 dimensions of national cultural values have been identified and utilized by researchers up to this point in cross-cultural studies. These are summarized in bi-polar fashion below.

- Subjugation to vs. master of nature
- Past vs. future time orientation
- Being vs. doing
- Hierarchical vs. individualistic relationships
- Private vs. public space
- Evil vs. good human nature
- Changeable vs. unchangeable human nature
- Monochronic vs. polychronic time

- High-context vs. low-context language
- Low vs. high uncertainly avoidance
- Low vs. high power distance
- Short-term vs. long-term orientation
- Individualism vs. collectivism
- Masculinity vs. femininity
- Universalism vs. particularism
- Neutral vs. emotional
- Diffuse vs. specific
- Achievement vs. ascription
- Individual vs. organization
- Inner- vs. outer-directed
- Individual competition vs. group-organization collusion
- Reductive analyzing vs. integrated synthesizing (adapted from Osland & Bird, 2000, Table 1)

While acknowledging that the bi-polar approach is somewhat limited, as there are "middle ground orientations among cultures (e.g., subjugation to, harmony with, and mastery of nature; past, present, and future time emphases), it remains a useful method by which to compare diverse cultures, particularly those which are at the extremes. For purposes of clarity, however, it has been determined to concentrate upon those cultural factors which are deemed by the writer to be most influential in the area of leadership theory.

Key National Cultural Values

Osland and Bird (2000) acknowledge that the work of Geert Hofstede (1980/2001; 1984; 1997) represents a major step forward in the field of inter-cultural studies, noting that "hundreds of studies have used one or more of Hofstede's dimensions to explore similarities and differences across cultures regarding numerous aspects of business and management" (paragraph 27). Hofstede's 1968 and 1972 survey of over 116,000 managers and employees at a multinational corporation, IBM, in 40 countries, focused upon work-related values, described as "broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over

others" (Hofstede, 1980/2001, p. 5). The four-dimensional model developed as a result of his research which could best account for the cross-cultural differences in work-related values discovered is as follows:

1) Power Distance (PDI) — the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.
2) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) — the extent to which the members of the culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations.
3) Individualism/Collectivism (IDV) — societies in which ties between individuals are loose as opposed to those in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which offer lifetime protection in return for unquestioning loyalty.
4) Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) — the desirability of assertive behavior as opposed to modest behavior. (updated definitions from Hofstede, 1997, pp. 28, 113, 51-52, & 80, respectively)

After expanding the research to include 50 countries and three regions (East Africa, West Africa, and Arab-speaking countries) on six continents, the above dimensions of culture were validated, with some countries aggregated into one similar culture cluster, while others congregated into very different clusters (Hofstede, 1983a).

Concerning Hofstede's category of Masculinity/Femininity (MAS), Adler (1997) feels justified in changing the title to that of "Career Success and Quality of Life," arguing that "the original dimension does not correspond with contemporary understandings of masculinity and femininity," while the new title more accurately reflects the underlying meaning of what Hofstede originally intended (pp. 55, 64). A closer inspection of Hofstede's full description of the MAS dimension has led the author to agree that Adler's change does in fact adequately represent what Hofstede intended, but the MAS descriptor will nonetheless be retained for the sake of simplicity.

In 1988 Hofstede and Bond added a fifth dimension as a result of a 22-country Chinese Value Survey that was conducted in East Asia (in Gannon, 2001). This category, termed "Confucian Dynamism," reflects the tendency

of the people of East Asian countries to place importance on the Confucian values of persistence, hierarchical ordering of relationships, thrift, and the engendering of a sense of shame. Hofstede (1997) describes this dimension as a "Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation" (LTO) on life, with long-term oriented cultures being dynamic and focused on the future, while short-term oriented cultures tend to be more static and concentrated on the past and present.

Regarding the original four broad dimensions identified, Hofstede and Bond (1984) conducted a validation study based on the Rokeach Value Survey (1979), concluding that "because of the large number of countries covered, it [the Hofstede model] can serve as a useful anchoring framework for showing synergy among cross-cultural studies" (p. 420). Hoppe's (1990) validation study of Hofstede's work provides further evidence of the accuracy of the original survey (noted in Hofstede, 1997, pp. 97, 256-257).

However, it must be pointed out that Fernandez, Carlson, Stepina, and Nicholson (1997) observe that more than three decades have passed since Hofstede's original data was collected and that there may very well have been major worldwide environmental changes resulting in shifts in the national cultural classifications. Their study of nine countries on four continents indicated that "there have been significant shifts in value classifications in some countries since Hofstede conducted his first comprehensive study" (Fernandez et al., 1997, paragraph 31). Additional criticisms of Hofstede's original study are that it involved only one organization (IBM), did not include many women (Nicholson & Stepina, 1998), and discounted the variety of individuals within a given society (Harvey, 1997).

Furthermore, Yeh and Lawrence (1995) contend that the concept of Confucian dynamism appears to have been an attempt to explain the phenomenal economic growth of the East Asian countries in the late 1980s, yet "factors other than culture clearly matter" (e.g., stable political environments and market-oriented policies) (paragraphs 26, 28). This is but a reminder of the danger of cultural determinism that cross-cultural researchers must be aware of.

The response to the argument of Fernandez et al. (1997) is that, though there may well have been changes in the value classifications of certain nations in Hofstede's original work, the classifications themselves remain

valid. Furthermore, the overall impact of Hofstede's work must be acknowledged. Though the dimension of Confucian dynamism does appear to be problematic, as noted earlier, Hofstede's original four dimensions have been referred to by numerous scholars (e.g., Jaeger, 1986; Francis, 1991; Shane, 1992; Furnham, Bond, Heaven et al., 1993; Bigoness & Blakely, 1996; Adler, 1997; Hatch, 1997). Jackson and Schuler (1995) note that Hofstede's is the most widely known framework for comparing national cultures and that his original four dimensions are considered as valid by most available research.

Hofstede found highly significant differences in the attitudes and behaviors of managers and employees in different countries, and it appears that these differences do not change over time, or at least do so very slowly (cf. Hofstede, 1983a, p. 71). In fact, national culture was found to explain more of the differences in work-related values and attitudes than did profession, position, age, or gender, accounting for 50 percent of the differences in employees' attitudes and behavior overall (cf. Adler, 1997, pp. 47, 61).

Thus, it seems that Hofstede's four original dimensions of Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), and Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) (i.e. "Career Success/Quality of Life") remain highly useful categorizations of important national values.

Of course, Hofstede was not conducting his studies in a vacuum, Ronen and Kraut (1977) being other prominent scholars whose early work has contributed significantly to the research on national values (cf. Ronen & Shenkar, 1985). Other examples include Laurent's (1983) study, conducted in the late 1970s, which indicated that there are significant differences between task-oriented (e.g., American) and relationship-oriented (e.g., Latin American) cultures regarding managerial styles, with there being very little agreement across national borders on the nature of the managerial role.

Furthermore, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) identified the following five basic cultural dimensions:

1) Universalism vs. particularism (rules vs. relationships)
2) Communitarianism vs. individualism (the group vs. the individual)
3) Neutral vs. emotional (the range of feelings expressed)
4) Diffuse vs. specific (the range of involvement)

5) Achievement vs. ascription (how status is accorded) (p. 29)

One will note that these, the Hofstede dimensions, and other cultural dimensions discovered by a variety of scholars were summarized earlier in the reference to Osland and Bird (2000). The dimensions outlined by Hofstede, Laurent, and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are simply considered to be the most important of those delineated, with prominence to be given in this study to Hofstede's time-proven four dimensions, plus one other that has not been mentioned as of yet, namely, paternalism.

In their study of 752 managers and engineering personnel at multinational companies in Mexico and Taiwan utilizing Hofstede's four dimensions, Dorfman and Howell (1988) assert, "Research from the cross-cultural leadership literature suggested the importance of 'Paternalism' as an additional cultural dimension" (p. 131), which prompted them to add it as a fifth dimension in the study.

Paternalism (PAT) refers to the degree to which authoritarian leadership is accepted within a culture. It is generally "the extent to which it is appropriate for mangers to take personal interest in the private lives of workers" (Fernandez et al., 1997). In a paternalistic work environment, managers are expected to take a personal interest in employees' lives, provide for their needs, and generally take care of them in return for their labor and devotion (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). In a point which will be returned to later, it as been observed that Japan is the prime example of a paternalistic culture, with at least some organizations providing lifetime employment, housing, recreational facilities, and shrines at which to worship, along with age-grade lockstep promotions and salary increases, all with the expectation of complete loyalty and devotion to the company (Farmer & Richman, 1965, noted in Bass, 1990, p. 790).

In summary, there have been a number of national cultural dimensions that have been identified in the past three decades. However, this researcher is in agreement with Sosa-Fey (2001) that the five primary dimensions that are time-tested and of greatest relevance to transformational and, by extension, servant leadership, are those of Power Distance (PDI), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), Masculinity/Femininity (MAS), and Paternalism (PAT).

National Cultural Values as Related to Leadership Styles

Schein (1994) posits that "any definition of 'good' leadership usually reflects the historical, social, or cultural context in which the analysis is conducted" (p. 107). Hofstede (1984) points out that there is a close relationship between leadership and "subordinateship," concluding, "If leadership is only a complement to subordinateship, a key to leadership is the type of subordinate expectations we are likely to find in a country" (p. 258; cf. Hofstede, 1980/2001, pp. 82, 388). Therefore, he found that the national cultural power distance (PDI) relationship between the leaders and the led is a crucial factor in determining what will or will not be perceived as effective leadership in a given cultural environment (cf. Sadler & Hofstede, 1976).

Regarding cross-cultural leadership in particular, Grove and Hallowell (1994) note the importance of cultural influences on managerial behavior (cf. Tollgerdt-Anderson, 1993; Lachman, Nedd, and Hinings, 1994; Bakhtari, 1995; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996; Yamaguchi, 1999; Brodbeck et al., 2000; Pasa, 2000). Bigoness and Blakely (1996) posit that cross-national managerial values do indeed differ, and Kanungo and Wright (1983) maintain that managerial job attitudes, such as the type of job outcomes being sought, vary significantly from one culture to another.

In fact, as early as 1975 Negandhi concluded that there was already convergence on the general findings on cross-cultural management, these being. . .

- There is no one way of doing things.
- There is no universal applicability of either authoritarian or participative-democratic management styles.
- More objective measures are brought to bear on managerial decisions in the developed countries.
- There are similarities and differences among managers around the world, with cultural factors being "the most important influencing variables." (pp. 334-335)

Offermann and Hellmann's (1997) important study of 425 mid-level managers of multinational corporations in 39 diverse national cultures reached a similar conclusion. In their analysis of leadership behaviors in the areas of communication, control, delegation, approachability, and team building, they found "significant support for the impact of cultural values on power distance [PDI] and uncertainty avoidance [UAI]" (p. 348). They conclude,

> Indeed, most leadership theories have been created by and for persons from low-PDI, low-UAI, high-IDV [Individualism] cultures (particularly the United States). We must determine the generalizability of U.S.-based leadership approaches to other types of cultures, with the hope of developing a more globally relevant understanding of leadership behavior. (p. 350)

As alluded to earlier, Hofstede (1980/2001) is in full agreement, stating unequivocally that "generally accepted U.S. theories (e.g., Maslow, Vroom, Likert, Herzberg) might not apply, or only very partially apply, outside the borders of their country of origin" (p. 374). He goes on to say that U.S. theories of participative management in particular are unlikely to apply in countries high on the PDI scale (p. 389), as both PDI and UAI affect the concept of empowerment (one of the functional attributes of servant leadership). Swierczek (1991) concurs with this assertion, observing that participative leadership is acceptable in small PDI/high IDV countries like the U.S., but directive leadership is preferred in high PDI/low IDV (i.e. collectivistic) nations (noted in Glick, 2001, p. 53).

Newman and Nollen's (1996) study of 18 European and Asian countries, conducted in 1988-1989, assert that the idea of "one size fits all" management theories "is now being supplanted with the knowledge that managerial attitudes, values, behaviors, and efficacy differ across national cultures" (p.754; cf. Merritt, 2000). Their research, which utilized all five of Hofstede's dimensions of culture, found that Power Distance (PDI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), and Long-term/Short-term Orientation (LOI) all had a profound influence upon the effectiveness of managerial practices within a given culture, leading them to conclude, "The differences between cultures

limit the transferability of management practices from one to another" (p. 770).

In fact, according to Hofstede (1980/2001), one may expect the following to be true of leadership in relation to his four dimensions of national cultural values.

1) Power Distance (PDI) — Subordinates in high PDI cultures (e.g., Japanese) prefer authoritative, autocratic, hierarchical, paternalistic leadership, whereas those in low PDI cultures (e.g., American) prefer consultative, decentralized, democratic leadership (pp. 107-108).

2) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) — Subordinates in high UAI countries (e.g., Japan) have strong loyalty to the employer. Top managers are to be involved in operations, with the power of their leadership being dependent upon their ability to control uncertainties. A hierarchical control role is appealing in high UAI nations. Conversely, subordinates in low UAI nations (e.g., America) have weak loyalty to the employer, expect top managers to be involved in strategy development, and tolerate ambiguity to a degree. A transformational leader role is appealing in low UAI countries (pp. 169-170).

3) Individualism/Collectivism (IDV) — In low IDV, collectivist cultures (e.g., Japanese) subordinates act in the interest of the "in-group." They tend towards particularism, collective decision-making is the rule, and the manager is the overseer of groups. Leadership is seen as inseparable from the context. However, in high IDV, individualistic cultures (e.g., American) subordinates act in their own economic interests. There is a tendency towards universalism, individual decision-making is preferred, and the manager is seen as the manager of individuals. Leadership is seen as the property of the leader (pp. 244-245).

4) Masculinity/Femininity (MAS) — High MAS countries (e.g., Japan) tend to have organizational subordinates who live to work, with career placed above family and few women in management. At the other end of the spectrum, low MAS nations (e.g., America) tend to have organizational subordinates who work to live, attempt to place

family above career, and have more female managers (p. 318).

As alluded to earlier, Offermann and Hellmann (1997) posit that PDI and UAI are the two most important of Hofstede's four original dimensions of national culture as far as leadership is concerned. Hofstede (1983b) himself claims that "the most relevant dimensions for leadership are Individualism [IDV] and Power Distance [PDI]" (p. 85). Newman and Nollen (1996) concur with Hofstede, as do Bockner and Hesketh (1994) and Glick (2001), the latter of whom adds Paternalism (PAT) to the list of critical cultural factors which most influence leadership-subordinate relationships and effectiveness (cf. Dorfman & Howell, 1988).

To summarize, the preponderance of the literature supports the notion that if there are any universal leadership theories, they will almost certainly be affected by the national cultural values of the countries in which they are being applied. Four dimensions of values appear to be especially important in this regard: Power Distance (PDI), Individualism/Collectivism (IDV), Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), and Paternalism (PAT). The discussion now turns to the role of these values in Japanese culture and how leadership is affected by them.

Japanese Cultural Values and Their Relevance to Servant Leadership

It has been argued thus far that servant leadership, or Theory S, is values based and that, as such, the national cultural values of a given country may have a profound effect upon the applicability and implementation of the theory in a cross-cultural environment. On the one hand, Schuster (2002) posits that servant leadership is the premier leadership paradigm in the current era of globalization, both because of its inclusiveness and because it is "a kind of organizing principle for the human spirit, a kind of DNA for the soul" (pp. 333-334), its moral underpinnings giving it a holistic and universal "healing power" as a model of leadership (pp. 344-347).

Yet, on the other hand, there is almost no literature on Theory S from a cross-cultural perspective, and scholars such as Hofstede (1993) remain adamant that there simply are no universal management theories. Morden

(1995) concurs, contending, "It is becoming increasingly unrealistic to take an ethnocentric and 'universalistic' view toward the principles and practice of management as they are applied in other countries and other cultures" (p. 20). He instead argues for "polycentricity," or the acceptance and use of cultural diversity, as the key to cross-cultural management, concluding as such that contingency approaches are best.

While less obdurate than Hofstede and Morden on this point, Gibson and Marcoulides (1995) nevertheless hold that researchers simply are not sure as to whether or not there is a certain leadership style that is universal. At the very least, then, one may conclude that there is a huge question mark in the literature concerning the universality of any one leadership paradigm.

While answering this question is far beyond the scope of this paper, the focus from this point forward is upon one particular non-western country, Japan, and whether or not servant leadership is applicable to the unique culture of that country. *In fact, it will be argued that Japanese culture acts as a modifier upon certain functional attributes of servant leadership, but that the paradigm in general is indeed appropriate in the Japanese context.* Fundamental to this argument are the values which are prevalent in Japanese society, a subject which must now be addressed.

Fundamental Japanese Cultural Values

Hofstede (1980/2001, 1984, 1997) characterizes Japanese culture as one of large Power Distance (PDI), strong Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), low Individualism (IDV) (therefore, collectivist; cf. Triandis, 1995), high Masculinity (MAS) (="Career Success Oriented), and high Long-term Orientation (LTO). Conversely, American culture is characterized by small PDI, weak UAI, high IDV (most individualistic in the world; Hofstede, 1980/2001, p. 215), medium-level MAS, and low LTO. As can be seen, the American and Japanese cultures are considerably different on all dimensions of these five categories of national work-related values (cf. Hofstede, 1993). The same is true of the sixth key cultural dimension of Paternalism (PAT), with Japan regarded as the most paternalistic of all societies, the United States being at the other end of the spectrum (cf. Bass, 1990). Perhaps this is why Takeo Fujisawa, one of the founders of the Honda Motor Company,

once commented that "Japanese and American management are identical to 95% and differ in all important aspects" (cited in Bjerke, 1999, p. 190), the "all important aspects" stemming from fundamental differences in core values.

In fact, in comparing Japanese and American leadership styles, major dissimilarities have been noted in the following areas:

- Communication style (Ben-Dasan [pseudonym for Yamamoto], 1970/1972; Hayashi, 1988; Matsumoto, 1988; Kitao & Kitao, 1989; Kobayashi, 1996/1997; Damanpour, 1998)
- Decision-making style (Kume, 1985; Hunt & Targett, 1995; Taplin, 1995; Adler, 1997; Dodd, 1998; Ala & Cordeiro, 1999)
- Negotiating style (Adler, 1997)
- Conflict resolution (Condon, 1984; cf. Morris, Williams, Leung et al., 1998)
- Organizational culture (Schwind & Peterson, 1985; Dodd, 1998)
- Time orientation (Condon, 1984; Ford & Honeycutt, Jr., 1992)

In short, it appears that there are major differences between Japan and the United States in both fundamental values and in leadership practices, which would tend to lead one to doubt whether "American" leadership theories, of which it has been said that servant leadership is one (Frick & Spears, 1996), would be applicable in Japan without significant changes first being made

However, Everett, Stening, and Longtons' (1982) study of 365 U.S., British, and Japanese managers in 34 multinational companies in Singapore (21 companies of which were Japanese), found that there was "strong support for a shared managerial culture" (p. 159) with evidence that positive (i.e., functional) attributes emphasizing harmonious interpersonal relationships were effective in each setting. They concluded, "It may be, then, that the forces of convergence have been successful in determining some universality in what are regarded as desirable characteristics in any large corporation, irrespective of its national origin" (p. 161).

This is in alignment with Podsakoff and his associates' research, which demonstrated that "certain aspects of effective leadership are culture-free" (e.g., contingent reward and punishment) (noted in Hui & Luk, 1997, p. 385).

Indeed, Misumi argues that his Performance-Maintenance (P-M) theory of leadership, originally developed in Japan in 1966, is applicable to all cultures (noted in Hui & Luk, 1997; cf. Misumi, 1985; Misumi & Peterson, 1985).

Furthermore, it must be noted that even national cultural values are at times fluid and subject to change. Although generally relatively stable, Nicholson and Stepinas' (1998) study of over 3,000 business professionals in the U.S., China, and Venezuela found that values "are not immune to the impact of societal forces" (p. 35; cf. Williams, Jr., 1979; Fujino & Shaw, 2002).

Specifically regarding Japan, Schwind & Peterson (1985) noted that changes in values were taking place, particularly in the area of personal and group orientation (cf. Triandis, 1995; Fujino & Shaw, 2002). Recent research done in nine countries, including the U.S. and Japan, has shown that there have been some shifts in country rankings since the time of Hofstede's work (c. 1970), with Japan moving towards a smaller PDI and weaker UAI (i.e., more in the direction of U.S. culture) (Fernandez et al., 1997).

Thus, it is maintained herein that servant leadership is applicable to Japan, in spite of the fact that there are obvious differences in general leadership styles between the United States and Japan and that some may attempt to exclude it on the basis that Theory S is an "American" leadership theory. This is true even if one accepts the categorization noted earlier of Japanese culture being one of large PDI, strong UAI, low IDV, high MAS, high LTO, and high PAT.

What remains to be seen is precisely how these values manifest themselves in a Japanese leadership context. Selecting what was referred to earlier as the four most important of these to leadership theory in a cross-cultural context (PDI, UAI, IDV, and PAT), this writer will now attempt to show the relationship of these Japanese cultural values to what is perceived as effective leadership in Japan, with analysis then provided which will indicate that servant leadership is apropos to that country in a modified form.

Japanese Cultural Values and Leadership

It should be noted from the outset that empirical research specifically focused on the topic of Japanese national cultural values and leadership is scarce. In fact, Godkin and Endohs' (1995) survey of 10,217 journal articles

published between 1981 and 1990 found that only 266 (2.6%) focused on Japan, leading them to conclude that there are "gaps" in the empirical Japan-focused management literature (paragraph 9). In particular, they state, "Personality, quality circles, organizational culture, and national culture were not approached empirically" (paragraph 23).

Keys, Denton, and Miller (1994) allude to further problems in this area. Although recognizing that the cultural homogeneity of Japanese society makes cultural forces even stronger than in more pluralistic societies, they assert that, when it comes to the empirical research of management that is done in such an environment, "a multitude of research design and measurement problems plague attempts to conceptualize Japanese management practices" (paragraph 88).

This is not to say that valid empirical research involving Japanese values and leadership has not been done, as some of these studies have already been referred to in this paper. However, it is believed that Japanese-authored literature relating to the subject of leadership must supplement what is available in the western literature in order to gain a clearer understanding of the issue. This dual approach, then, is the method chosen for what follows.

Paternalism (PAT).

It has already been observed that Japan's work culture is highly paternalistic (cf. Farmer & Richman, 1965, in Bass, 1990). In a paternalistic work environment, managers are expected to take a personal interest in the lives of their subordinates, provide for their needs, and generally simply take care of them, with obedience and loyalty expected in return (cf. Dorfman & Howell, 1988).

The eminent sociologist Chie Nakane (1970), in her classic work on the subject of Japanese society, confirms the importance of paternalism to leadership in Japan. She states, "The emotional sympathy felt by the leader towards his subordinate is expressed in the term *onjo-shuji*, or 'paternalism,' and always presupposes a sympathetic appreciation of his men" (p. 65). This means that "the most significant factor in the exercise of [Japanese] leadership is the personal ties between the leader and his immediate subordinates" (p. 64).

What this results in is the development of an *oyabun-kobun* ("patron-

follower") relationship between leader and led. "In fact," Nakane (1970) notes, "the Japanese language has no term for the word 'leadership;' to express the concept one has to fall back on terms describing the *oyabun-kobun* relationship" (p. 69) in which the leader is expected to be thoroughly involved in the group, almost to the point of losing his personal identity (cf. Hasegawa, 1998; Bjerke, 1999). Actual ability on the job, therefore, is not the key to Japanese leadership; rather, the secret lies in the leader's ability to charm and direct the talent at his disposal with his personality and in the ability to synthesize the group.

Thus, benevolence is the key to leading (Nitobe, 1905/1969), along with the ability to understand and attract talented subordinates (Nakane, 1970). This means, of course, that leaders must be sincere, fair, patient in listening to subordinates' opinions, hardworking, self-sacrificing, and consensus-creators (Ben-Dasan [pseudonym for Yamamoto], 1970/1972; Morris, 1975; Sakaiya, 1991/1993).

The flip-side of all this is that subordinates of effective leaders in Japan may reach a point of *amae*, or dependence, upon the leader. Followers become dependent upon the leader's benevolence, kindness, and goodwill, to the point where they may be angered by a leader who fails to live up to the expectations of *amae* (Doi, 1973; Bass, 1990).

Individualism/Collectivism (IDV).

One will note the use of the words "consensus" and "group" in the preceding description of paternalism. Hofstede (1980/2001) asserted that Japanese society is one of low IDV, which is to say that it is highly collectivistic (cf. Sai, 1995). The fundamental assumption of collectivism is relatedness, versus rationality and reason in individualism, so that the welfare and harmony of the group takes precedence over principle in a collectivist culture (Triandis, 1995; Kim, Triandis, Kagitcibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1997). Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1997) concur, asserting that "East Asian cultures, given the choice, are relationship oriented, rather than principle or contract oriented" (p. 181).

Furthermore, collectivist cultures often simply assume that individuals are members of one or more "in-groups" from which they cannot become detached (Vitell, Nwachukwu, & Barnes, 1993, p. 755). Consequently, people

in such a framework tend to distinguish between "in-groups" and "out-groups" within the culture (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996), resulting in a people-oriented culture that is at the same time high context and exclusive, much cultural content simply being taken for granted by "in-group" members (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

Group-orientation in general in Japan has led to an emphasis on *wa* ("harmony"), which is to be preserved at all costs within the "in-group." Thus, Japanese tend to emphasize formality, indirectness of expression, *haragei* (literally, "belly language," meaning understanding others without the need for verbal expression; cf. Matsumoto, 1984/1988), and passive resignation rather than assertive, confrontational behavior (Kitao & Kitao, 1989). Within such a context, charismatic leadership is that which increases group cohesiveness through the utilization of culturally acceptable behaviors such as those described here (Hui & Luk, 1997).

In relation to this, Nakane (1970) observes that one of the essential points to grasp concerning the leader-subordinate relationship is that the entire group essentially becomes one functional body so that "one of the most important features of the leader-subordinate relationship in Japan [is that] the leader is a part of the group organization" (p. 69). Thus, leaders remain responsible not only for their "in-group," but for the larger organizational entity as well.

From the subordinates' perspective, collectivism in the Japanese context means not necessarily that individuals will conform with the group in all instances, but that commitment is made to the group with the expectation of future benefits. This notwithstanding, priority tends to be given to the collective self over the private self, particularly when the two come into conflict (Yamaguchi, 1994, as noted in Kim et al., 1997).

Furthermore, since members of a collectivist culture are expected to respect authority and age and to display loyalty to the in-group, subordinates are expected to conform to the directives of a paternalistic leader (Schermerhorn & Bond, 1997). Since there is the expectation in Japan for a good leader to express holistic concern for his (seldom "her," unfortunately) charges, the result is often an implicit, informal control, with the leader using group reinforcement and responsibility as a powerful motivator (Damanpour, 1998, Table 7).

Uncertainty avoidance (UAI).

The emphasis on group harmony, consensus-building, and avoidance of overt conflict permeates society in general (cf. Hasegawa, 1938/1965; Christopher, 1983; Reischauer, 1988), and it may be inferred that these are reasons why Japanese culture is considered to be strong in UAI (Hofstede, 1980/2001). The decision-making process in a typical organization illustrates why this is the case.

Japanese consensus-style decision-making is expressed through *nemawashi*, a horticultural term which literally means "root binding" in the process of separating and binding plant roots to prevent damage during transplanting (Ala & Cordeiro, 1999; Hunt & Targett, 1995). In an organizational context, *nemawashi* essentially means approaching "players" privately and getting their consent before the official decision-making meeting is held. If *nemawashi* is done properly, consensus will have been built and the decision actually made beforehand, so the formal meeting on the subject is actually only *tatemae* ("for display").

Once a decision is thus made at a lower level, it is still not official until it has passed up the chain of command in the form of a *ringisho* ("formal document") that requires the personal *hanko* ("seal") of each middle- and high-level manager who might be concerned with the matter. In practice, this process is often quite inefficient, but it preserves group harmony and is a means of avoiding uncertainty and, therefore, potential conflict (cf. Misumi, 1984 in Bass, 1990; Bjerke, 1999).

According to Offermann and Hellmann (1997), in managerial practice strong UAI of this type results in more leader control and less delegation, as little can be done without formal approval from higher level managers. On the other hand, lower level leaders and subordinates have the ability to take initiatives through the *ringisho* procedure, making it somewhat difficult for the process to be stopped without good reason.

Power distance (PDI).

In a large PDI society such as Japan's, there is a tendency of subordinates within an organization to readily accept that power is distributed very unequally (Hofstede, 1980/2001; 1997). In practice, this results in a strong

consciousness of rank and of the importance of assuming one's proper role. In Benedict's (1946/1974) classic work, she observes that the Japanese people's "reliance upon order and hierarchy and our [American] faith in freedom and equality are poles apart" (p. 43).

Thus, vertical relationships are what link individual members even within the "in-group," and groups with other groups, which in composite constitute an entire system of ranking. This consciousness of rank is of great significance to the Japanese and plays an important part in the maintenance of social order (cf. *Keys to the Japanese heart and soul*, 1996). Nakane (1970) remarks that "the vertical personal relationship is more dynamic in character that the horizontal relationship. Protection is repaid ("reciprocity" being another key to Japanese relationships; cf. Benedict, 1946/1974) with dependence, affection, and loyalty" (p. 64), and, one might add, sometimes "endurance" in the sense of "patient restraint" (cf. van Wolferen, 1989). Vertical relationships often extend to those between leader and subordinate, elder and junior, parent and child, and even *oya-gaisha* ("parent company") and *ko-gaisha* ("child company") (cf. *Keys to the Japanese heart and soul*, 1996).

In summation, it can be seen from the brief discussion above that the high PAT, low IDV, strong UAI, and large PDI of core Japanese values have profound repercussions on society as a whole and upon leadership in particular. Some of the effects upon leadership in organizations are outlined below.

Effects of Japanese Cultural Values on Organizational Leadership

As Offermann and Hellmann (1997) make explicit, it is important to not view any one cultural value in isolation, but instead to attempt to describe the effects of all four simultaneously. One result of the interworking of the four values described above is that Japanese managers attach great significance to organizational goals, such that moral considerations are given less priority than advancement of the "in-group," i.e., the organization (Davis & Rasool, 1988). High productivity, growth, organizational stability, and leadership in the organization's field of industry are given top priority, and

since involved workers are seen as the key to increased productivity, it follows that managers would be expected to properly fulfill their *oyabun-kobun* roles.

As such, Japanese leaders are often expected to keep a low profile, operating as facilitators who work for the well-being of their subordinates. In fact, Yang (1977) observes that Japanese leadership is organic, with emphasis on human relations, the seniority system, and low turnover, with the role of top management to maintain harmony and create a favorable atmosphere in which the organization can operate in society. In contrast to typical American system-type management, he argues, organic-type Japanese managers are facilitators and social leaders who emphasize group strength and human relations, free-form command (though not without hierarchy), management by consensus, and centralization, with the leader rather than the system expected to adapt to change (Yang, 1977, p. 25; cf. Schein, 1981; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983).

Expanding upon this, Bjerke (1999) provides a profile of typical Japanese managers, as follows:

- They are loyal and subordinated to their companies, to which they identify closely.
- They are formal in behavior but pragmatic in intent.
- They belong to a family-type culture, even at work.
- They are dedicated to their roles and are particularly committed to their colleagues and co-workers ["in-group"].
- They have extended views of themselves as links in social webs.
- They are highly rank-conscious but operate more as coaches and facilitators than captains.
- They stress compromise, harmony, and consensus more than speed.
- They are process-oriented and emphasize quality in a wide sense.
- They take a long-term approach towards promotion, preferring job stability to taking risks.
- They are intuitive rather than logical thinkers, with an emphasis on experience. (pp. 194-196)

Perhaps the phrase "interlocking relationships" best describes the

Japanese approach to both leader and subordinate behavior. As such, the best leader is one who achieves consensus through consultation, is sensitive to others' feelings, is not forceful or domineering, and whose major qualifications as a leader is not competence alone but warmth of personality and the ability to inspire confidence (Reischauer, 1988).

One may recognize similarities between certain aspects of Theory S and what is considered to be effective Japanese leadership. Indeed, it is the contention of this paper that the two are compatible, as is shown in the following discussion.

Japanese Cultural Values and Servant Leadership

It was mentioned earlier that servant leadership is considered to be transformational (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999). Indeed, there is compatibility between the Four I's of transformational leadership (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence; cf. Avolio, Waldman, & Yammarino, 1991) and the characteristics of servant leaders: receptive listening, empathetic listening, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and a desire to build community (Spears, 1995). Of course, these in turn are in line with the eight functional attributes of servant leadership: 1) vision; 2) credibility; 3) trust; 4) service; 5) modeling; 6) pioneering; 7) appreciation of others; and 8) empowerment (Russell, 2001; cf. Tucker, Stone, Russell, & Franz, n.d.; Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999).

In a significant statement regarding cultural contingencies and the transformational leadership concept of individualized consideration, Bass (1997) remarks,

> Japanese executives [tend] to be much more transformational than transactional. . . . because such consideration is expected from one's superiors as a matter of course, although it remains unspoken. . . . The mutual obligation between the leaders and the followers in collectivistic cultures facilitates the transformational leaders' individualized consideration. (p. 136)

In other words, instead of Japanese culture impeding transformational leadership behaviors, it in fact naturally enhances them in some respects. What is of critical importance here, though, is that the *manner* in which transformation is effected by leadership is contingent upon the particular culture. Bass (1997) confirms this, asserting that "transformational leadership may be autocratic and directive or democratic and participative" (p. 136), depending upon what subordinates expect of transformational leaders.

This writer is of the conviction that the same may be said of servant leadership in a Japanese context. For example, effective persuasion on the part of a servant leader may well entail two quite different methods in America and Japan. Whereas the former culture emphasizes logic, reasoning, and charisma as means of persuading, the latter, as has been seen, values intuition and unspoken communication much more highly in this regard.

Now, it must be said that there are aspects of servant leadership that appear to be anathema to the Japanese. Greenleaf (1970) posited that servant leaders needed to "begin with the natural feeling that one wants to serve" (p. 7; 1977, p. 13), yet in a highly paternalistic, large power distance, hierarchical society like Japan's, with its emphasis upon vertical relationships, it is unlikely that a leader would consider himself to be a servant. However, and this is crucial, subordinates in such a culture followers do not expect leaders to have such an attitude and may, in fact, have difficulty in being dependent upon someone who had a "servant" outlook.

This being acknowledged, though, it is equally important to recall that, in effect, a good leader in Japan performs acts of service, having a holistic concern for his subordinates, taking care of them and their families, and having a self-sacrificing attitude towards those in his "in-group." As a benevolent facilitator working for the well-being of his subordinates, an effective leader in Japan naturally fulfills the role of servant in some respects, albeit subconsciously.

Similar to the discrepancy between American and Japanese concepts of service on the part of leaders is that regarding the effect of servant leaders helping those being served "become healthier, wiser, freer, more

autonomous, [and] more likely themselves to become servants" (Greenleaf, 1970, p. 7; 1977, pp. 13-14). In a highly paternalistic, collectivist culture in which the *oyabun-kobun* ("patron-follower") relationship is so strong, it has been seen that the tendency is for the follower to become dependent upon the leader, a condition which is both natural and expected by both parties.

Certainly an effective Japanese leader is one who assists his subordinates to become "healthier and wiser," but it is likely not to be the case that they become "freer, more autonomous, or servants themselves." The point here, of course, is that the subordinate in Japanese culture does not *want* to be free or autonomous, and s/he has already taken on the role of "servant" to the leader. In a real sense, being a good follower means being willing to give up a degree of freedom and autonomy in return for safety and security, the latter of which are fundamental to the Japanese way of thinking (cf. Lewis, 1993).

Concerning the servant leadership characteristics of receptive listening, empathetic listening, healing, awareness, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and desire to build community, it may be concluded from the preceding analysis of the effects of Japanese cultural values on leadership that effective leaders in Japan do exhibit these traits. As intuitive "coaches" who carefully listen to subordinates' opinions in an effort to build consensus and preserve group harmony, all the while being conscious of their responsibility to everyone in the group and the organization and its role in society, effective Japanese leaders exhibit seven of the characteristics typical of servant leaders as described by Greenleaf. A ninth, persuasion, is also part and parcel of being an effective leaders in Japan, yet it will be effected in the fashion mentioned above.

As such, only one of the ten characteristics of servant leaders, namely, conceptualization, appears to be a trait that is not emphasized in Japanese leadership. The stress on the leader's role as a facilitator emphasizing the maintenance of harmony and achievement of consensus on the part of the group, as well as a tendency to be process-oriented, does not lend itself well to the "dreaming of great dreams" (Spears, 1995, p. 6).

Of course, if effective Japanese leaders do indeed possess most of the transformational characteristics of servant leaders just described, it stands to reason that the same would be true of the functional attributes of servant

leadership. In fact, this writer contends that the most highly effective form of Japanese leadership does include six of the eight attributes: *credibility, trust, service* (only in the sense described above), *modeling, appreciation of others*, and *empowerment*, although the latter is only in regard to enabling subordinates to fulfill their duties as proscribed by the group.

For the same reason that conceptualization does not seem to be a critical factor in Japanese leadership, the functional attributes of vision and pioneering do not appear to be essential qualities for Japanese leaders to exhibit in order to be deemed effective, at least on a macro scale. On a micro scale, however, leaders fulfilling their paternalistic roles as "patrons" to the group must have the vision to keep it focused and moving in the right direction.

Conclusion

Though by no means an exhaustive analysis, it nevertheless is the conclusion of this paper that servant leadership does indeed "fit" in Japanese society. Even though Japan is characterized by high PAT, low IDV, strong UAI, and large PDI, all quite different from the cultural values of the United States, with few exceptions highly effective, transformational leadership in Japan exhibits the characteristics and functional attributes of servant leadership. This is in spite of the fact that the Christian worldview from which Greenleaf and many other proponents of servant leadership operated is quite distinct from the prevailing worldview of most Japanese, as even now only 0.8% of those claiming some religious affiliation are Christian ("Faith in land of complexity," 2002). This would argue for the assertion by Schuster (2002) that Theory S is inclusive because of its ability to function as an "organizing principle for the human spirit" (p. 334).

Of course, it must be admitted that this conclusion has been reached solely on the basis of the available literature. As alluded to earlier, the majority of research on Japanese leadership is not empirical and/or may contain conceptual flaws. Furthermore, there is a need for empirical research on servant leadership in general (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999). This is especially true of servant leadership in relation to Japan, as, to this writer's knowledge, virtually nothing has been done in this regard.

The author would like to propose, then, that an empirical study of servant leadership in the Japanese context be conducted. One suggestion is that Kouzes and Posners' (1997) *Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI): Self* be translated and utilized for this purpose. Russell (2000) found that the LPI effectively measures five of the functional attributes of servant leadership and that "the LPI is the best available instrument for measuring some aspects of servant leadership" (p. 76). Since the it has been used for cross-cultural research in the past and is both valid and reliable (Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Leong, 1995, as noted in Russell, 2000), the LPI is considered to be appropriate for this purpose.

Should such a study be conducted, on the basis of the research done for this paper, it is hypothesized that the conclusion would be that servant leadership, in somewhat modified form to fit the contingencies of Japanese culture, would be found to be an appropriate paradigm of highly effective leadership. Should such a conclusion indeed be reached concerning a culture as unique as Japan's, it would lend further credence to the contention that the paradigm of servant leadership is indeed universal.

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