

Gakumon-Ryoku and Japanese style of management - does our management style matter?¹

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Abstract : This paper highlights a new style of development learning, the so-called “Gakumon-ryoku”, and its application to the Japanese style of management. “Gakumon-ryoku” is the capability and commitment or (free-will) to awaken and share freedom (lifestyles) by learning and asking about our thoughts and feelings through the Value-Conscious Matrix (VC Matrix or simply VCM for short). This enlightens and vitalizes our thoughts and feelings, and can transform us by creating a new identity for us as Development of Co-creative Alive Beings, or D-CAB. This eye-opening experience was examined with the Japanese style of management (JM in short) and has brought us to become aware of the essence of JM spirit of TO BE ONE. To the question, “does our management style matter”, this paper has answered “Yes”, not because this is not economically or rationally efficient, but because it has been confined to it and has not been examined in the light of the JOY criterion including efficiency. What really matters is not whether or not to follow the Japanese style, but the fact that the quality of life, or Joyful or not matters in our management style. We learn that the Japanese style of management has both unique and universal features, and we, as human beings, can share its universal value of JOY of service.

Keywords: development learning, gakumon ryoku, capability, commitment, Japanese style of management, and joy of service.

1. Introduction

I would like to share with all of you a new style of development learning, the so-called “Gakumon-ryoku”, which has been practiced for some years now in Japan, India and USA (I published a book in Japanese

on the subject in 2007). Let us explore it by focusing on the Japanese style of management. To experience and acquire “Gakumon-ryoku” results in creating the sustainable mind, which provides a clue to finding solutions for business and lifetime success in an era of economic and social crises. This short

paper highlights the challenge of “Gakumon-ryoku” and its application to the Japanese style of management under the following headings:

- What is “Gakumon-ryoku”?
- Why is it important in Japan and in global society?
- “Gakumon-ryoku” as the development of capability and commitment (free-will)
- The application of “Gakumon-ryoku” to the Japanese style of management.
- The outcomes and implications of Gakumon-ryoku.

2. Conceptual Background: What is “Gakumon-ryoku”?

“Gakumon-ryoku” is the capability and commitment (or free-will) to awaken and share freedom (lifestyles) by learning and asking about our thoughts and feelings through the Value-Conscious Matrix VC Matrix or VCM. This enlightens and vitalizes our thoughts and feelings, and can transform us by creating a new identity for us as Development of Co-creative Alive Beings, or D-CAB.

D-CAB is carried out with the VC Matrix, which is the synergy space where sharing ideas and values are shared with mutual respect, without any violence, providing us with a common platform to gain the free-will in order to learn from others and to ask questions of ourselves. This development learning makes us aware of the hidden meanings and dangers in our lifestyles, and allows us to discover the Value to be shared, which can bring all of us real joy in life. It offers the gifts of problem-finding or awareness

capability and vitality in life.

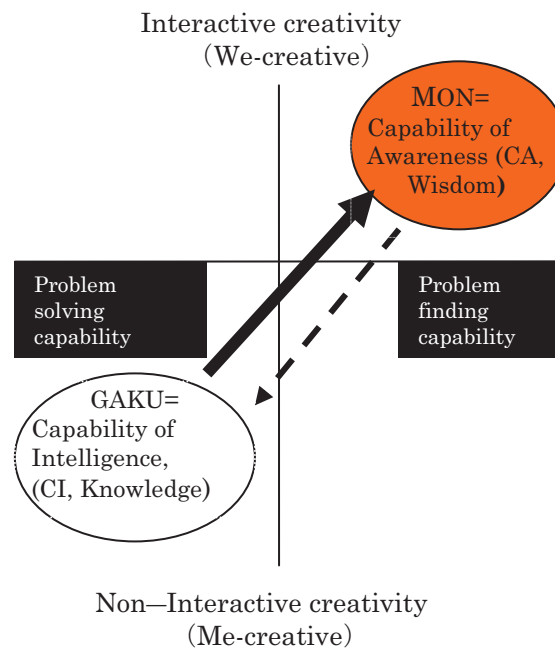
The Japanese term “Gakumon” is made up of two parts; ‘Gaku’ (or ‘Manabu’) means learning, and ‘mon’ (or ‘Tou’) means asking or inquiring. Higher educational institutions like universities have been established, in principle, to pursue “Gakumon”, the learning and inquiring that leads to Truth. But, as time has passed, they have virtually become “shell institutions” as described by A. Giddens (1999)². That is, the ‘mon’ part has been disappearing from places of learning. As a result, a system of Gaku-ryoku (a passive learning style, without the ‘mon’ part) in academic performance has become, by and large, overwhelmingly predominant in Japanese academic institutions. The conceptual difference between Gaku-ryoku (Capability of Intelligence, CI) and Mon-ryoku (Capability of Awareness, CA) in the VCM matrix is presented in **Figure 1**.

This VCM, or Gakumon matrix, is formulated using two criteria; one is the “problem” cognitive criterion, and the other is the “creativity” cognitive criterion. In the “problem” cognitive criterion, there are different perceptions and expected capabilities between Gaku-ryoku or Capability of Intelligence (CI for short) and Mon-ryoku or Capability of Awareness (CA for short). CI presumes that problems are a priori given by others, and these are felt to be bad and hateful things, like Japanese term “mondaiji” or problem children, environmental problems, examination questions and so forth. CI is therefore expected to have a problem-solving capability in order to combat and solve such problems in an efficient and accurate fashion. On the other hand, CA is a problem-finding capability, where the assumption is that a problem is perceived not only as something bad or hateful, but also as something good or

loving. Therefore, CA is to awaken the 'problem' which is seen as the perceptual gap or

distance visualized in the Value-Conscious Matrix (VCM).

Figure1 Difference between Gaku-ryoku (Capability of Intelligence, CI) and Mon-ryoku (Capability of Awareness, CA) in the VC Matrix



Source: compiled from H.Oba (2007).

In the "creativity" cognitive criterion, CI is Me-creative, and expected to develop personal natural talents by oneself, whereas CA is We-creative, developing creativity through interacting and collaborating with others. CA is based on the idea that it is impossible for any individual person to live creatively without interacting with others. In an extreme case like, for instance, that of Robinson Crusoe, who drifted onto an uninhabited island, even he was not alone and could be creative in his living, because he could interact with the other, the God, Almighty.

Therefore, in this VC Matrix, CI is expected to have a problem-solving and Me-creative capability, whereas CA will have a problem-finding and We-creative capability. In other words, CI is a personal asset of mapping knowledge in one's brain, whereas CA is common asset of wisdom by mapping values to be shared among participants. CA should be more focused on considering ways of life, or lifestyles, because it not only generates the motivation to live by polishing reasoning and sensitivity, but also makes it possible to take action in a matrix way or

with compound eyes of thinking like the eyes of a dragonfly, a fish like a salmon knowing a direction in life, and a bird's-eye view.

3. Why is it important in Japan and in global society?

The idea and method of Gakumon-ryoku has been developed and given form through my practical experience of teaching at universities and government sponsored institutions over nearly twenty years (since 1991). In the process, I have found that the university students in Japan have, by and large, lost their mind and/or passion for raising questions in the classroom. In a society with expanding choices of freedom, they suffer from the so-called the "paradox of freedom", for where there is more freedom to choose, the more the young generation in Japan has become un-free. Their mind and/or passion for raising questions are now chained. Broadly speaking, four factors that explain this are identified below.

The first factor is the lack of understanding of the importance of asking "what?" and "why?" (the issue of being unaware of lost meanings). In other words, there are little need or desire to pose questions unless they make sense. Unfortunately, most students (and also business people) have put so emphasis on ingesting knowledge that they are unaware of how important it is to ask questions. Four reasons behind such behavior can be traced as follows. Firstly, the habit of unconsciously processing the inflow of information as given without asking questions has been perpetuated in the Japanese educational system. So, most Japanese are captured by a stereotyped view when they are still young. The university students whom I

have asked have, by and large, an image of the university as an institution for the study of specialized knowledge, but none of them so far has defined it as a place for practicing GAKUMON (learning from others and questioning oneself). The second reason is that there has been a strong tendency to depend on authorized persons or institutions such as experts or the mass media without questioning oneself. Thanks to the information revolution of the internet, people have become so busy clicking in order to search for information on the computer, that they are quite reluctant to examine what they find. The third reason is that stimuli and hints that make one aware of the importance of asking questions are lacking, which makes it quite difficult to have the guts to do so. The fourth reason is that the biased view or attitude of "Nothing concerns me" or "I am indifferent" makes "asking questions" seem nonsense or entirely meaningless.

The second factor is the lack of freedom to ask questions in the learning environment (at school or home, or in the workplace), since a built-in system of asking questions is largely missing in places of learning. Three main reasons for this should be pointed out. One is the atmosphere which makes it quite difficult to have a dialogue. Take, for instance, the example of a university lecture. It seems that there is a tacit understanding of there being a one-way direction of specialized knowledge from lecturer to students. In such an atmosphere, having a dialogue is out of the question! A real and genuine dialogue should involve neither the lecturer favoring students, nor students arrogantly saying "I am a customer as a tuition fees' payer". Instead, both should respect the other as human beings and have ears to listen carefully.

It is a pity this sort of genuine dialogue is missing in the real world of learning and the work place. The second reason is the resistance or hesitancy to ask or accept questions, which springs from a strongly fixed idea of a value judgment that accepts that the knowledge provided by a lecturer is good, and that posing questions about it is bad. The lecturer might be pleased to have students supporting his or her assertion, but feel displeasure when they ask critical questions. As a result, there is a lot of pressure not to ask questions in such a learning environment. The third reason is that specialized knowledge, including jargon, goes so far over the heads of the students that it is almost impossible for them to ask questions.

The third factor is the low social recognition of 'Mon' or the awareness of sharing ideas in Japan. Why is it low? Firstly, it is because Japanese society has heavily focused on 'Gaku' or knowledge capability, rather than on 'Mon' or asking/inquiring capability. There is no doubt that the so-called 'Hensachi kyoiku' or education based on focusing on the deviation from average performance scores has been very effective for the acquisition of specialized knowledge. But there is another hard reality which we should not ignore, namely that too much focus on acquiring specialized knowledge in education might have undermined our humanity and become the root cause of people suffering mental sickness. Under these circumstances, Reitaku University, where I have been teaching, has played an important role in society by focusing on "Chitoku Ittai" or 'unifying knowledge with virtue' since its foundation in 1935. Secondly, the importance of the awareness capability of sharing with others has had little social recognition, the

product of a social tendency that hates the critical attitude of asking questions. In knowledge-focus education, those who "Ganbaru" or do their best to study and become an honorable student are highly appreciated, while those express opinions or make objections to people in authority are considered awkward. The reasons behind this include the stress in Japanese culture on "Wa" or harmony, the virtue of following the rules. However, nowadays the knowledge-focus education, the "swallowing down" style of learning is being questioned and is under attack as lowering the Gaku-ryoku or Capability of Intelligence, since a lack of motivation to study has become quite prevalent. Also, it may not be effective in creating a good quality of life in a world of diversifying lifestyles and competitive business where performance-based evaluation is creating a stressful working life.

The fourth factor is the lack of a system or methodology of inducing awareness of free-will, finding real problems by free choice, and choosing the right direction. Without such a system or methodology, people are bound to feel less need or desire to pose questions. Compare this with cooking. If one wants to create a delicious dish, a recipe is indispensable. Likewise, even if you think posing the question, "Why?" is important, it is quite difficult to find a problem and analyze (cook) it without a methodology (recipe).

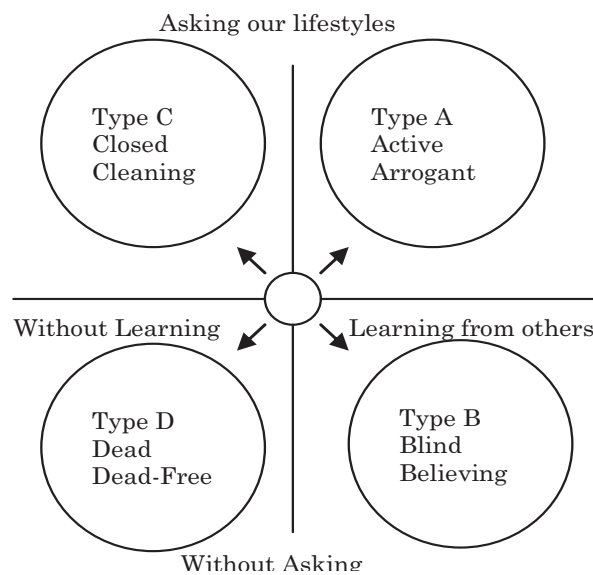
4. "Gakumon-ryoku" as development of capability and commitment (free-will)

What fruit is Gakumon-ryoku bearing? Or, what consequences are we bound to face unless we experience Gakumon. In other words, what is the difference between people who experience Gakumon-ryoku and

those who don't? Those who experience it not only realize the danger of freedom possessed at hand, but also enjoying the taste of

real freedom, which can provide a key to unlock the capacity to be joyful even in difficult and unpleasant situations.

Figure 2: Visualizing virtues and vices of lifestyles in the Value Conscious Matrix



Source: compiled from discussion based on VCM exercises.

By doing the exercises in the Gakumon matrix or Value-Conscious matrix (VCM), we come to realize the existence of fundamental questions; where we are from, who we are, and where we are heading. In other words, as indicated in Figure 2, we do need to be aware of the importance and danger of any type, since in real life, we can be anywhere, exposed to any type in this matrix world. Type A, that of "learning from others and asking yourself" would be an Active person, but there would be a risk of Arrogance. If so, this requires the virtue of modesty. On the contrary, Type D, the opposite of Type A, someone "without learning and without asking" would be the Dead, suffering indifference, burn-out, and so forth. But, this mind-set of

a broken mind and heart would turn out to be the Dead-free, allowing one to refresh and remake one's thoughts and emotions once they are dead. Type B, someone "learning from others but without asking oneself" turns out to be a Blind person ingesting knowledge, addicted, but would have a golden chance to gain belief or faith for the Truth, Almighty. On the other hand, Type C, the opposite of Type B, is someone "asking oneself but without learning from others", possessed of a mind-set of being Closed or making a Cliff between oneself and others. But such a one would have much scope for Cleaning or Cleansing one's thoughts and emotions.

Showing our ideas or opinions in the VC Matrix is important, like sharing light

with other participants who are altogether in the darkness. But what is of most and ultimate importance is to join this Matrix and move around within it (meaning that our thoughts and feelings are flexible). This action allows us to discover the values of being humble (A type), faithful (B type), cleansing (C type) and dead for selfishness (D type) by forsaking all vices by our free-will, such as being arrogant (A type), blind or addicted (B type), of a closed mind-set (C type) and dead for indifference (D type). Those eye-opening exercises, therefore, would be pointless unless we interact with others. So, Gakumon-ryoku can be never acquired by self examination in any of these exercises, because real innovation begins with dialogue with the other(s). The Gakumon matrix allows us to find a common platform on which we are capable of finding out the answer to the fundamental question of what we have lost in our lifestyles and why.

The rules of the VC Matrix (freedom and responsibility) are as follows:

Rule 1: Do play catch, NOT dodge ball, meaning respecting different ideas and feelings, NO VIOLENCE, please! (The FREE-WILL of each one of participants is respected and protected)

Rule 2: GIVE and show your ideas and feelings by using a magnet and GIVE UP or forsake them once they are in the VC Matrix.

Rule 3: Check the meaning of the ball for which we are playing catch, and FIND OUT the variety of its meaning.

Rule 4: Make sure the fruits one bears are common goods, not private ones, since they are the outcomes of teamwork. Not ME fruits, but OUR FRUITS.

5. The application of “Gakumon-ryoku” to Japanese style of management

The idea and method of Gakumon-ryoku and VCM have been applied so far to all kinds of ongoing and urgent issues in order to open our eyes to the sharing of values for enlightening our mind-set. Let us have this eye-opening experience with the Japanese style of management (JM in short) and become aware of the essence of JM spirit. To date I have carried out VCM practices on Japanese style of management in various learning organizations. From my experiences, I would like to highlight something practiced at the Association for Overseas Technical Scholarship, AOTS. AOTS was established in 1959 with the support of the present-day Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI)³. I have been teaching foreign trainees at AOTS Tokyo and Yokohama training centers for over ten years (since 1998) using the method of Gakumon or VC Matrix. Before the VCM exercise focusing on JM (at the beginning of every lecture):

In the case of the AOTS training program, the foreign trainees are obviously bound to focus on the bright side (strength) of JM since the training as such is meant to reveal this, and the individualistic approach is taken irrespective of what ideas other participants have in mind about JM. As a result, we face a one-sided transfer of knowledge from lecturer to trainees without views being shared among them. Moreover, it is difficult for all participants to get the total picture of JM without finding whether different elements to be considered to be good & bad, and felt as loving & hating in VCM.

But once the rules of VCM as presented above are made known and understandable to all of participants, they rush to express what

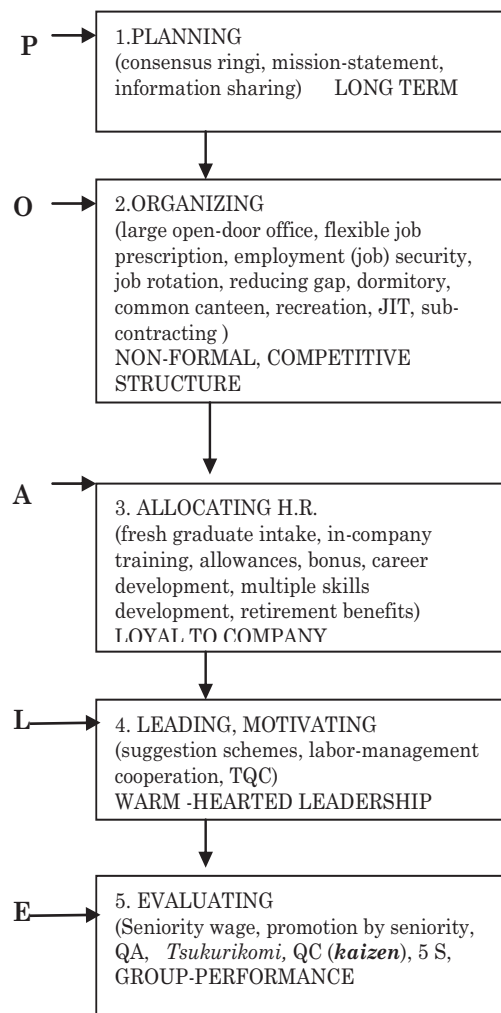
they really want to say freely and willingly. All participants have had different views on JM, which probably originated not only from different periods of work experience at JM, but also from their different cultural, social backgrounds. Also, we have found the problems in VCM took visible form when people became aware of the distance between the different views in VCM. Moreover, what we have gained by experiencing VCM is not only knowledge of the Japanese flavor in five elements of management, presented in Figure 3, but also an awareness and feeling of the universal nature and the essence of JM, namely, the spirit of TO BE ONE. This can provide us with the chance to choose a shared problem from alternative options. This enabled us to gain a feeling of 'TO BE ONE' in learning JM, though we have different views on it.

By exercising at VCM, we could not only learn and touch the core spirit of JM, but also ask ourselves about our stereotyped views on JM. The core spirit of JM is the sense of 'TO BE ONE', which is composed of three basic elements; egalitarianism, long-term orientation, and collectivism. This poses a further important question: Should be to test whether it is a universal value, like the salt of the earth for all mankind, by transplanting it to different cultural settings⁴ (Figure 3).

6. Conclusions and implications of Gakumon-ryoko

By recognizing the importance of Gakumon-ryoku and doing the exercises with the VC Matrix, this paper has provided us with an ample chance not only to be aware of hidden meanings and dangers, but also to

Figure 3: Japanese-style in five elements of management (POALE)



Sources: compiled from Oba(2010), AOTS(1993), Suzuki(1993), Saito (1990).

gain a hint about a sustainable mind-set. To the question, "does our management style matter", this paper has answered "Yes", not because this is not economically or rationally efficient, but because it has been confined to it and has not been examined in the light of the JOY criterion including efficiency. What really matters is not whether or not to follow the

Japanese style, but the fact that the quality of life, or Joyful or not matters in our management style. We learn that the Japanese style of management has both unique and universal features, and that we, as human beings, can share its universal value of JOY of service.

The discipline of Gakumon-ryoku, or D-CAB has been formed on the basis of

several disciplinary areas, such as behavioral economics, business ethics, human development, motivation theories, value theories, quality of life, life-style studies and so forth. Our task is therefore, to try to link theoretically the Gakumon-ryoku and those theories, which should be tackled as the matter of urgency in the near future⁵.

End Notes:

¹The latest attempt of this subject was presented as "Gakumon-ryoku That Has Changed the Business World" at the 22nd Annual Conference International Academy of Business Disciplines (IABD) Conference in Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S.A. on April 8th, 2010.

²They are institutions that have become inadequate to the tasks they are called upon to perform. See Giddens, Anthony (1999), p.19.

³AOTS's main purpose is to promote technical cooperation for the industrialization and development of developing countries and enhance mutual understanding and friendly relations between those countries and Japan. To date, AOTS has trained over 149,000 persons in Japan from 170 countries and regions. In addition, it has organized

various training programs outside Japan involving over 178,000 participants from developing countries. The activities of AOTS are financed by Japanese Government subsidy, company contributions, and other sources. See in detail, The AOTS Magazine, KENSHU and website; <http://www.aots.or.jp>

⁴For the concept and empirical testing of the mission sharing hypothesis of the Japanese style of management, see Oba (2009) and Oba (2010).

⁵For the theoretical and practical implications of Gakumon-ryoku, see Oba (2008), and forthcoming paper on "Is the so-called "Development Doctrine" Dead?—A paradigm shift towards Development of Co-creating Alive Beings".

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