Strategic identification commitment: A study of local public employees in the Oita Prefecture, Japan

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Abstract: Local public employees (LPEs) face a clash in their workplace commitments. The Law requires them to be committed to the community, but they are often positioned in hierarchical relationships within councils that require them first and foremost to show loyalty to elected councilors. In actual practice then to whom are they committed; the community or the councilors, and what is the nature of that commitment? To find an answer to these questions, we carried out a multi-focused study on the environment and attitudes of LPEs and the multiple bases of managerial commitment with which they must deal. A survey of senior LPEs in the municipalities of the Oita prefecture, Japan found that most LPEs demonstrate identification commitment to the community above others.

Keywords: Commitment, Local government, Japan, Identification, Compelled spontaneity.

Local Government in Japan

Japan is a unitary state with three administrative tiers: national level, regional level administered by prefectures, and local level administered by municipalities (Miyazaki, 2014); where prefectures and municipalities enjoy substantial local discretion in decision making (Reed 1982). Municipalities are primary level local entities that take charge of all local administration other than those tasks attributed to prefectures. Prefectures are the upper-level local public entities comprising municipalities. Although a prefecture is situated above the municipalities of which it is comprised, it cannot exercise hierarchical or authoritarian power over them. Both have different tasks, and both levels must cooperate on an equal standing as local entities. Nevertheless, municipalities are closest to the lives of citizen and take three forms: cities, towns, or villages (CLAIR, 2016).

This structure makes local government an indispensable element of the Country's post war constitutional democracy and this is enshrined in the Constitution of Japan of 1946. It was further strengthened by the promulgation of the Local Autonomy Law in 1947 (Local Governance, 2007a). On the surface, local governments carry more weight in Japan than the central government: the total funding for all local governments exceeds total funding for the central government. For example, the share of local government expenditures in Japan in 2012 was nearly 59% of total general government expenditure (Miyazaki, 2014). Their employment importance is seen in the fact that although the number of local public employees is steadily declining; it stood at 2,740,000 in in April 2015. Among them, 1,500,000 work for Prefectures and the rest work for Municipalities (CLAIR, 2016).

A local government consists of an executive branch and a legislature. The members of legislature, elected directly by the people for four years, determines budgets, enacts local legislation, and makes decisions based on its articulated policies. The executive branch implements the policies decided by the legislature, and includes governors, mayors, executive committees, and public employees. Local government in Japan is based on the presidential system, where governors, mayors, and councilors are directly elected for four years, and functions on the principle of a separation of powers and internal checks and balances to ensure democratic local administration. To assist them in actual execution, there are vice governors (deputy mayors for municipalities) and a chief accountant (treasurer for municipalities), and a large number of divisions, departments, and sections carrying out their respective assigned duties (Local Governance, 2007a; CLAIR, 2016).

Article 15 of the Constitution of Japan states: 'The people have the inalienable right to choose their public officials and to dismiss them. All public officials are servants of the whole community and not of any group thereof'. According to Article 30 of the Local Public Service Law, local public personnel are servants of the whole community and must work for the public interest. Employees of local governments in Japan are called 'local public employees' (LPE). Governors and mayors who are elected are called special public employees and are not subject to local public service law. In contrast, the regular public employees who are subject to the local public service law are initially recruited from among young graduates by a committee independent of the prefectural governors and municipal mayors, tested by entrance level competitive examinations and appointed for life (CLAIR, 2017).

Most local governments hold 'competitive civil service examinations' on the same day for recruitment into their organizations (Inatsugu, 2001). LPEs 'enjoy the same security of tenure and status as their national counterparts'. This practice contrast directly with the fixed term contract employment operating in many countries including the United Kingdom. Usually LPEs 'remain with the same local authority for their working lives' but at times there are movements of LPEs between the central government and the various tiers of local government (City Mayors Research, 2020). Regular public employees are required to comply with laws, implement lawful instructions, maintain confidentiality, and remain politically neutral (CLAIR, 2017). This study focuses on these regular public employees.

Local government reform

Currently there are 47 prefectures in Japan. As administrative units, they were created in the 8th century and their sizes and shapes have more or less remained the same since that time. However, the number of municipalities has steadily declined since Japan began modernizing her local government in 1888 as part of the Meiji restoration. In 1889, there were 70,000 municipalities. The latest reliable data shows that in 2016, there are 1718 municipalities (CLAIR, 2017) which is far behind the governmental target of reducing the number to 1000 municipalities (Suzuki and Ha, 2018). Nevertheless, the number of local public personnel has been reduced from 3,280,000 in 1994 to 2,740,000 in 2015 (CLAIR, 2017).

The public sector in most countries has been reformed starting from the late 1970s, based on neo-liberal ideas that called for reducing its size and introducing performance contracts for the management. They were introduced in the UK government by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and in the USA by President Ronald Regan (Harvey, 2005). Despite stiff resistance from the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (Christensen, 1998), the Koizumi and Abe administrations in Japan followed suit (Hashimoto, 2014) and that led to curtailing the size of government and its expenditure, the privatization of public corporations, especially the Japan National Railways, the reform of subsidy schemes such as the public pension, health scheme and rice subsidy, the reduction in the number of public servants and public corporations, and the selling off shares in public corporations (Elliot, 1996). However, the intention to carryout administrative reforms introducing a 'neoliberal and business enterprise approach to the provision of public services' are a far cry from implementation (Takao, 2004, p. 243).

Neo-liberalism in the form of managerialism also influenced the hiring of local level public servants in such English-speaking countries as Australia (Haidar & Spooner, 2009) and New Zealand (Haidar, Reid & Spooner, 2011), where they were appointed based on time-limited contracts. Because of the stiff resistance from Japanese public servants, human resource management in the public sector including the local public service systems in Japan meant that personnel departments could maintain the status quo where public servants are recruited straight out of universities and appointed for life (Terada, 2019). Comparing organizational changes in three cities one each in the USA, UK and Japan, McCann et. al. (2005) report that the reform in the Japanese city was quite conservative, retaining its hierarchical structure and rigid promotion system but reducing the number of employees, introducing performance related pay and bonuses, and coming under pressure to outsource the provision of local government services. Japan has also reduced the number of municipalities, but this process began in 1889 long time before the advent of managerialism (Rausch, 2006; Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2009; Sasaki, 2014).

Studies of Japanese Local Government

There are very few publications in English on Japanese public administration (Suzuki and Ha, 2018) and the studies that do exist focus on issues other than managerial commitment. Recent research on local government in Japan has concentrated on various aspects of municipal mergers. Miyazaki (2014) focused on the reasons behind municipal mergers, Suzuki and Ha (2018) focused on impact of municipal mergers on local legislative performance, and Rausch (2006) focused on the evolutionary process of municipal mergers. Rausch (2014) discusses the conflict between efficiency gains through mergers and the loss of local participation in local government affairs. Elsewhere, Schmidt (2009) focused on the impact of reform on citizen participation in local government, and Otsuka et. al. (2014) reports on the influence of decentralization and regional integration on the cost efficiency of local government in Japan. Miyazaki (2014) reports that efficiency is one of the main motivators of local government mergers in Japan.

A range of other issues have also been studied in addition to local government mergers. Kanbayashi (2015) focuses on discrimination faced by female non-regular public employees, Yokoyama (2008) focuses on the evaluation of local government policies and programs. Takao, (2004: 259) reports that local governments in Japan are 'better able to integrate the use of ICTs for public input and information dissemination in the policy process than the national government'. Jain (2004) assesses whether Japanese local political leadership is transactional or transformational. Yamamoto and Noguchi (2013) focus on the influence of central government on the partial movement of Japanese local government from cash based to accrual accounting. Kohsaka (2001) considers the feasibility of applying the Geographic Information System (GIS) methodology for urban planning in Japanese local government, while Schellong (2008) claims (based on two case studies) that local government by connecting communities through electronic social media can help in managing disaster. Finally, Bochel and Bochel (2005) explore factors that affect female formal participation in Japanese local government.

Recent studies of central government have also focused on topics other than commitment. For example, Yamamoto (2008) focuses on the creation of implementation agencies removed from direct control by the government by what he calls 'agentification'. Hori (2003) focuses on such reform efforts as 'agentification', privatization, and introduction of performance-based evaluation systems. Mizutani and Uranishi (2010) explore the determinants of privatization in Japan. Jung et. al. (2001) report on changes in the central government structure in Japan and Korea informed by the philosophy of new public management. Kaneko (2006) reports on the reforms of Japanese government to promote research and development in the public sector. Kim (2010) reported on the factors that influence public trust in governments in Japan and Korea. Finally, Norton (2007) argues that public sector reform in Japan must align with the interests of its employees.

In addition to administrative reform, the relationship between politicians and public servants is another area that has received substantial attention. Tanaka (2018) makes a critical assessment of the consequences of the politicization of senior public service appointments as part of the recent reform. Aoki (2015) explores the dominance of public employees over the governmental process. Tsuneki (2012) discusses the role of Japanese public employees in Japan's economic development. Sugimori (2007) reports on the ways Japanese public employees have occupied political leadership positions at the end of WWII. Kim (2016) claims, based on a study of pension reform policy in Japan, that Japanese public employees dominate policy formulation. Terada (2019) also explores the powerful role public employees play in Japanese public policy process.

Additionally, Park (2010) reports on budget reforms in the central government in the initial years of this century, Nakamura (2012) studied the pace of promotion among public employees in the central government, and Alarid and Wang (1997) report on the impact of Japanese culture on the management and operational methods of the Japanese police.

Managerial Commitment

In contrast to the public sector, there are quite a few studies on the commitment of Japanese managers in the private sector. In one of the earliest studies of commitment of Japanese manufacturing workers, Lincoln and Kalleberg (1985, p. 746), using Porter's commitment scale, found that 'Japanese respondents are less satisfied and less committed to their work'. In support, Cole (1979) reports 'Japanese employees have unusually strong identification with the company, but not necessarily high job satisfaction or strong commitment to the performance of specific job tasks' (In Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1985, p. 738). Cole et. al. (1993) add that behaviorally, however, Japanese workers are more committed to their employers, demonstrated through low absenteeism and low quit rates.

In an earlier study of 3735 employees in the Japanese manufacturing industry Loscocco and Kalleberg (1988), with a focus on the impact of age differences on work commitment, found that Japanese men in the 41-50 age range show a stronger commitment to work while the youngest and oldest Japanese women show stronger commitment to work as opposed to family responsibilities.

In a study of 203 employees working in various companies in Japan, based on the organizational commitment (OC) scale developed for their study, Tao et. al. (1998) found the organizational climate, role clarity, organizational tenure, and supervisory behavior significantly contributed to higher levels of organizational commitment. Among these, the authors note that the organizational climate defined as relationships among colleagues in organizations contributed most to organizational commitment. As the authors say: 'This result suggests the importance of human relationships in the workplace for employees' commitment toward their companies' (Tao et. al. 1998, p. 203).

Yamada et. al. (2005, p. 187-188) studied the factors that contributed to levels of commitment of older employees to their work. Based on a nationwide survey with responses from 995 male managers, this study found that higher employment security, greater support from supervisors and colleagues, lower job demands, higher levels of skill application in workplaces, lower levels of 'perceived ageism' in workplaces and more employer sponsored programs for older employees, and higher salaries had a significant and direct relationship to higher organizational commitment'.

Kojima (2015), based on his ethnographic study, argues that part time workers in Japan, demonstrate very high levels of commitment to their work not because of absences of choice but to win honor because they are not as socially honored as full-time workers.

Yanagizawa and Furukawa (2016) compared goal commitment between line personnel and staff personnel in a factory that manufactured drugs for Japanese privately owned business corporations. While the work of line personnel was production; the staff personnel assisted line personnel in their work by providing planning and material support. In their survey of 152 employees, they found that line personnel showed higher goal commitment than staff personnel.

Sweet et. al. (2016) in a global study of 9210 employees working in 11 countries for 7 multinational companies found that contrary to common assumptions gender differences in identification with career are quite little except in China and Japan where men and women show modest differences in their commitment to careers.

Conceptual framework

Commitment involves 'some form of psychological bond' (Buchanan 1974, p. 533). The most dominant framework used to study commitment is a uni-focal one focusing on the organization (see Meyer and Allen, 1991). Others adopt a multi-focal commitment (MFC) approach enabling the comparison of commitment to one focus relative to another and identification of the dominant foci of commitment of employees (Reichers, 1985; Zaccaro and Dobbins, 1989).

Bases of commitment

O'Reilly and Chatman (1986) following Kelman (1958), identify three bases of managerial commitment: compliance; identification; and internalization. Compliance occurs when attitudes and behaviors are adopted not because of shared beliefs but rather to gain specific rewards (O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). In compliance, managers are committed to a person or group because they expect to 'gain specific rewards or approval and avoid specific punishments or disapproval' (Kelman, 1958, p. 53; see also Kelman, 1961).

In identification, managers are committed to a ‘satisfying self-defining relationship to another person or a group’ (Kelman, 1958, p. 53). In identifying with a group in formal organizations, managers do not sacrifice their ‘basic sense of identity or the stability of their self-concept’ and such identification remains ‘limited to “professional identity”’ (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). In identification, managers are committed to ‘meeting expectations of others for their own role performance’ (Kelman, 1961, p. 65). Managers identify because they may feel proud to be a part of a group, respecting its values and accomplishments without adopting them as his or her own ‘family’ (O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986).

In internalization, managers are committed to values and they internalize the values of a group if these are congruent with theirs (Kelman, 1958, p. 53; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Managers demonstrate internalized commitment when they engage in organizations acts that are ‘inherently conducive to the maximization of his [her] own values’ (Kelman, 1961, p. 65). Simply stated, compliance refers to commitment to rewards, identification refers to commitment to people and internalization refers to commitment to values. The bases of commitment are conceptually pure types and actual managerial commitment can be a mixture of more than one type (Kelman, 1961, p. 66).

Table 1. Foci and bases of commitment

Foci of commitment	To the community	To the councilors
Bases of commitment	Internalization	Internalization
Bases of commitment	Identification	Identification
Bases of commitment	Compliance	Compliance

Data collection

There are 18 municipalities in the Oita prefecture. Questionnaires were sent to 17 of them. We could not send questionnaires to Himeshima Village which is a small island in Higashikunisaki district because we could not find the organization chart of the municipality on their website neither could we find any form of contact. We collected the addresses of the municipalities from their websites.

In conducting research on management in Japan, one faces language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of first-hand information (Alarid and Wang, 1997). In order to overcome some of the barriers, we took support from one of the APU professors who was a former high level official in Oita local government. Being requested by the APU professor, a top level official of the Oita Prefecture office informed the directors of the General Affairs Departments of all the municipalities in the Oita prefecture of the project. We then sent the questionnaires to these directors who in turn distributed them to the senior executives of the municipalities. These Senior executives were officials who worked directly with councilors. The General Affairs Departments are responsible for personnel and finance functions of local government.

Questionnaires were sent to 373 senior executives, and we received 245 responses, giving a 65.7% response rate. A sizeable majority remained undecided in expressing their views about commitment. This could be because a stream of studies has found that the Japanese are very reticent and disclose significantly less about their inner experiences (Asai and Barnlund, 1998). As a result, Japanese managers are extremely sensitive in expressing their views. For example, the Japan Times in 2012 reported: ‘Fifty-five former and current Osaka Municipal Government bureaucrats jointly sued the city for ¥18.15 million, alleging that a questionnaire they were ordered to fill out on their political and labor union activities caused them mental distress’.

Questionnaire items

Questions on commitment are adapted from Becker, Randall, and Riegel (1995) and Balfour and Wechsler (1990). The items in the questionnaire were adapted by substituting the words ‘community and councilor’ for ‘organisation’. Quite a few other researchers have followed the same procedure (See Aranya, Pollock and Amernic 1981; Meyer, Allen, and Smith 1993; Zaccaro and Dobbins 1989; Becker et al. 1996). Following this, the original English questionnaire was translated into Japanese by the Japanese co-author who completed doctoral studies in the USA and is fluent in English and was checked by the Japanese speaking university research office manager to assess whether it made sense to people who are not familiar with formal business languages. The questionnaire was then back translated into English to check for consistency with the original

Table 2. Municipalities and the number questionnaires distributed

Oita	45	Beppu	36	Nakatsu	36
Saiki	37	Usuki	19	Tsukumi	13
Bungotakada	14	Kitsuki	19	Usa	24
Yufu	21	Kunisaki	17	Hita	30
Taketa	15	Bungo-ono	13	Hiji	15
Kokonoe	19	Kusu	10		

Table 3. Demographic background of respondents (percentages)

Age	Over 50	41-50	31-40	20-30
	94	3	3	0
Gender	Male	Female		
	96	4		
Highest level of education	Other	Graduate	Undergraduate	Non-graduate
	22	2	61	14
Experience as a councillor	Over 20 years	16-20 years	11-15 years	Less than 10 years
	94	3	0	3

Findings

The study used a five-point Likert type scale to collect data about the commitment of Oita prefecture LPEs. The findings are presented below.

Table 4. Commitment to the local community (percentages)

Internalization (INT) commitment	SDA	DA	Neutral	Agree	SA
INT1. If the values of the local community were different, I would not be as attached to it.	2	38	30	28	1
INT2. Since starting this job my personal values and those of the local community have become more similar.	0	15	51	33	0
INT3. The reason I prefer this local community to other groups is because of what they stand for, that is, their values.	1	14	51	29	5
INT4. My attachment to the local community is primarily based on the similarity of my values and those represented by the local community.	0	15	55	28	2
INT5. What this local community stands for is important to me.	0	4	19	67	9

Identification (ID) commitment	**SDA**	**DA**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**SA**
ID1. I feel a sense of ownership for the local community.	0	1	8	68	23
ID2. I am proud of the local community.	0	4	31	51	15
ID3. I 'talk up' the local community as a great group to work with.	0	5	48	39	7
ID4. When someone criticises the local community, it feels like a personal insult.	2	19	28	49	3
ID5. I am very interested in what others think about the local community.	0	7	32	55	5
ID6. When I talk about the local community, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	0	2	30	60	8
ID7. The community's success is my success.	1	7	36	50	7
ID8. When someone praises the local community, it feels like a personal compliment.	1	9	34	51	5

Compliance (COM) commitment	**SDA**	**DA**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**SA**
COM1. In order for me to get rewarded by the local community, it is necessary to express the right attitude.	1	12	36	48	4
COM2. My private views about the local community are different than those I express publicly.	0	29	46	25	0
COM3. How hard I work for the local community is directly linked to how much I am rewarded.	16	51	29	4	0
COM4. Unless the local community rewards me for it in some way, I see no reason to expend extra effort on behalf of the local community	29	57	11	3	0

Table 4 details the level of commitment of local public employees (LPE) to their communities. Their responses show that large majority are reticent in expressing their views on commitment. Areas where they express their views indicate that they identify with the community but neither do they comply, nor do they internalise the values of the community. Well over 50% of employees demonstrate support for all the items in the identification commitment. Interestingly, however, among the items in the internalised commitment, 76% say that what the community stands for is important to them. It is quite possible that they support this item because understanding what community stands for assists employees in performing their work better. A careful review of the responses to COM3 and COM4 show that a very large majority are repulsed by the idea of a transactional relations between the services they provide to the community and the rewards they receive in return. LPEs disagree with all the items in compliance commitment except COM1. Agreement of a simple majority to COM1 indicate that they, to maintain harmonious relationship in the workplace adopt an attitude to agree with the community.

Table 5. Commitment to the Councillors (percentages)

Internalization commitment	SDA	DA	Neutral	Agree	SA
INT1. If the values of the councillors were different, I would not be as attached to the community.	1	24	44	29	2
INT2. Since starting this job my personal values and those of the councillors have become closer.	2	16	58	24	0
INT3. The reason I prefer the councillors to other groups is because what they stand for, that is, their values.	1	11	59	27	2
INT4. My attachment to the councillors is primarily based on the similarity of my values to those represented by the local community.	2	16	62	19	0
INT5. What the councillors stand for is important to me.	2	16	62	19	0

Identification commitment	SDA	DA	Neutral	Agree	SA
ID1. I feel a sense of ownership for the councillors.	2	4	24	63	6
ID2. I am proud of the councillors.	3	3	37	49	7
ID3. I 'talk up' the councillors as a great group to work with.	3	5	32	52	8
ID4. When someone criticises the councillors, it feels like a personal insult.	2	21	48	28	2
ID5. I am very interested in what others think about the councillors.	2	13	52	31	2
ID6. When I talk about the councillors, I usually say "we" rather than "they".	3	22	50	24	1
ID7. The councillor's success is my success.	2	17	51	28	1
ID8. When someone praises the councillors, it feels like a personal compliment.	4	23	52	21	0

Compliance commitment	SDA	DA	Neutral	Agree	SA
COM1. For me to get rewarded by the councillors, it is necessary to express the right attitude.	5	32	43	18	1
COM2. My private views about the councillors are different than those I express publicly.	1	32	51	16	0
COM3. How hard I work for the councillors is directly linked to how much I am rewarded.	18	55	25	2	0
COM4. Unless the councillors reward me for it in some way, I see no reason to expend extra effort on behalf of the local community	25	56	17	2	0

LPE responses to commitment to councillors demonstrate that large number of them remain neutral. Like the commitment to their communities, a large majority of LPEs demonstrate very little internalised commitment and compliance commitment to the councillors. There are some differences though. In Table 4, a sizeable majority of LPEs agree with INT5 but in Table 5 they do not do so on INT5, which indicates that LPEs are more interested to know what the community stands for rather than what the councillors stand for. Table 4 shows that large majority of LPEs agree with all the items in identification commitment but their response to councillors is selective. In Table 5, the majority of LPEs agree with ID1, ID2, and ID3 but they do not agree with the rest of the items in the identification commitment to councillors. A careful examination of the responses to the items in identification makes it very clear that LPEs make a fine distinction between councillors as councillors and councillors as persons. These responses show that LPEs identify with the councillors when performing their jobs but when it comes to the question of councillors as people, LPEs want to maintain their distance. They prefer to maintain their individuality. Thus, LPE commitment to councillors is not total. LPEs refrain from sacrificing their personalities. As Table 6 shows, they do this even though they themselves consider councillors quite powerful in influencing the matter of employment.

Table 6. Councillor role concerning local public servant's employment relations (percentages)

In my experience, the councillor role concerning local public servant's	Influential	Not influential	Do not know
appointment is:	96	2	2
promotion is:	95	3	2
disciplinary action is:	87	9	4
remuneration is:	66	31	3
training and career development is:	73	22	5
performance evaluation is:	83	12	5

Discussion

A majority of the LPEs of the Oita Municipalities demonstrate identification commitment to the community while they are selective in identifying with the councilors. In stating their commitment to the community rather than to the councilors, council officers are fulfilling their constitutional requirements. In contrast to the pre-war Meiji constitution which required council officer to have loyalty to the emperor, the post war constitution requires that Japanese public servants are loyal to the larger community:

'The Constitution of Japan, Article 15, Paragraph 2 declares that all public officials are servants of the entire community and not of any special interest group thereof. The same doctrine is expressed in Article 30 of the Local Public Service Law, a fundamental law for the local public service system, which states that every member of the local public personnel, as a servant of the whole community, must attend to his or her duties in the interest of the public and exert his or her utmost effort in performing his or her duties' (Local Governance, 2007a).

The results of the study show that the LPEs prefer identification rather than compliance or internalized commitment. LPEs demonstrate commitment to people rather than to rewards or to values. Using their findings from the Japanese business sector in the 1980s, Lincoln and Kalleberg (1985) report that Japanese company employees demonstrate higher level of commitment to their companies but are reluctant to internalize the values of their companies. Lundberg and Peterson (1994, p. 1478), comparing the meaning of work among the local government managers in the USA and Japan, report that 'Japanese place more value on interpersonal relations than do US city respondents.' In support, Connor et.al. (2006) report that Japanese public sector managers emphasize social orientation rather than personal orientation. Japanese culture represents an enduring tradition where loyalty to a person embodied in the Japanese emperor is more important than loyalty to a set of abstract principles (Braibanti, 1950).

Similarly, Japanese multinational corporations emphasize the importance of personal relations in management. They maintain control over their subsidiaries by using expatriates and by instituting personalized hierarchy rather than setting up the form of impersonal rules-based control practiced by US corporations (Legewie, 2002). Japanese organizations make decisions by engaging in extensive discussions with their colleagues through a process known as *nemawashi,* relying less on objective data (Martinsons and Davison, 2007; Deresky, 2011) than opinions. Lifetime employment, one of the defining features of Japanese organizations including local governments, is also geared to foster long term relationships among employees as persons (Alarid and Wang, 1997).

LPEs are committed to the groups of people they work for and work with, but they prefer not to align their values with them and thus remain 'emotionally withdrawn' from the communities and the people they work with. This indicates that the LPEs provide importance to their relationships with group, but they prefer to remain private. In other words, LPEs identify with their workplaces and to the councilors to perform their work better.

Identification commitment of LPEs is instrumental to perform their work and is not an end in itself thus preferring instrumental rather than value rationality (Weber, 1978).

Similarly, Hazama (1996) claimed that attitudes of employees during the Japanese high growth period after WWII was 'not necessarily those of sense of belonging, love of company, or loyalty, but rather the interests of the company and its regular employees were in alignment, and the growth of the company was equated with the stability and improvement of regular employees' standards of living' (in Yamashita, 2019, p. 9). Yamashita (2019), based on a survey of large volume of literature published in Japanese, argues that Japanese workplaces represent places of 'compelled spontaneity' and questions whether Japanese workplaces could at all be called 'communities' because employees demonstrated little sense of belonging to their companies.

'Culturalists' argue that the Japanese managers' commitment to their workplace is one of the manifestations of a 'general pattern of close alignment between persons and groups' (Lincoln and Kalleberg, 1985, p. 739). However, this cultural explanation may not be a strong one since Japan is not as group oriented as many other Asian countries are. The Hofstede Insights (2021a) reports that in the individualism- collectivism index, Japan scores only 54 while such Asian countries as South Korea scores 82, China, 80 and Indonesia, 86. People learn to be loyal to groups by being part of an extended family which is common in most east Asian countries except Japan. Younger family members except the eldest one leaves home to make their living and commit to their core families. Japanese show elements of both collectivism and individualism. 'They are more private and reserved than most other Asians' (Hofstede Insights, 2021b)

The claim that Japan straddles between collectivism and individualism is supported by a Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, survey of 10,000 people in 2016 which reports: 'A record 33.9 percent of Japanese people believe that individual interests should be given priority over the interests of the entire public' (Japan Times, 9 April 2016). In support, the 2017 Gallup poll found that only six percent of Japanese workers are 'highly engaged' while 'a whopping 71% are said to be "not engaged" and a further 23% are "actively disengaged"' (SoraNews24, 8 February 2020). The Japanese belong to a group but maintain their individuality. This is also reflected among companies in keiretsu (Alarid and Wang, 1997), a unique type of Japanese business group without centralized control where member companies operate largely independently with very little centralized control. 'Business groups are sets of legally separate firms bound together in persistent formal and/or informal ways. The level of binding is intermediate between, and should be contrasted to, two extremes that are not business groups: sets of firms linked merely by short-term strategic alliances, and those legally consolidated into a single entity' (Granovetter 2005, p. 429). It appears that LPEs in the municipalities of the Oita prefecture operate quite similar to individual companies in a keiretsu relationship, demonstrating preference for 'strategic collectivism and operational individualism' (Lincoln and Gerlach 2004, p. 14).

Yamagishi (1988) compared the tendencies of American and Japanese subjects in a group that contained free riders. A culturalist view would assume that the collectivistic Japanese would have stronger preferences than the individualist Americans to stay in the group given the existence of free riding on the part of other group members. The findings are quite the opposite. The author found that 'both American and Japanese subjects disliked staying in a group with free riders, as evidenced by the high level of exit responses among both groups in the low-cost condition. However, American subjects stayed in the group when the exit response was costly, whereas Japanese subjects were willing to pay extra for the exit option' (in Yamagishi et. al., 1998, p. 167).

In another study, Yamagishi et. al. (1998, p. 169) found that the Japanese work for the interest of groups consisting of strangers when there are mutual monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms while the American subjects 'voluntarily cooperated and contributed more to the welfare of the group'. The authors thus claim that 'the "collectivist" behavior—cooperation for the welfare of the group as a whole—among the Japanese subjects was maintained to a large extent by the system of mutual monitoring and sanctioning, rather than by their presumed "value system" according to which each individual place the group's welfare above his or her own self-interest' (Yamagishi et. al., 1998, p. 169; See also Chikudate and Alpaslan, 2018). 'It is informal mutual monitoring and sanctioning rather than internalized moral values that ensure that the Japanese will cooperate in achieving group goals. Cross-societal experiment shows that once opportunities for monitoring and sanctioning are removed, the Japanese are in fact less cooperative in achieving group goals than are Americans' (Yamagishi et. al., 1998, p. 190).

Lincoln and Kalleberg (1985, p. 739-740) argue that the organizational structures and employment system of Japanese firms elicit commitment from the workforce 'not through coercive or utilitarian but through normative, associative, and symbolic inducements' creating an 'enveloping enterprise community'. In support, Besser (1993, p. 878) explains that the behavioral commitment of Japanese managers is influenced by such external factors as 'norms, sanctions, and pressures of the small group, family, and community'. The requirements of these sanctioning mechanisms arise out of the fact that the Japanese are not inherently committed to a group. 'The Japanese often "prefer" to belong to groups and place group interests above their own individual interests not because they intrinsically like to do so' but as a matter of necessity, which is to cope with social uncertainty (Yamagishi et. al., 1998, p. 166).

Japan scores one of the highest levels i.e., 92 in Hofstede's uncertainty avoidance dimension of culture. 'This is often attributed to the fact that Japan is constantly threatened by natural disasters from earthquakes, tsunamis (this is a Japanese word used internationally), typhoons to volcano eruptions' (Hofstede Insights, 2021b). Yamagishi et. al. (1998, p. 166) claim that people may develop identification commitment to groups to reduce social uncertainty. In the Japanese group-based society 'the stable nature of social and organizational relationships reduces social uncertainty and provides security inside of such relationships. The risk however is that a Japanese who leave one such group may find it extremely difficult to join another group (Yamagishi et.al., 1998, p. 172). Loscocco and Kelleberg (1988, p. 349 - 350) argued that mid-career changes were difficult in Japan even if one finds a position because 'there is stigma attached to changing companies that late in life'.

Identification with a group is even more important for a public employee: 'When a worker is dismissed from private company, he or she can find another job, but it is impossible for a dismissed public employee to find another job in any government agency including local government' (Jung and Muto, 1995, p. 128). Instrumental use of identification commitment is further supported by Loscocco and Kelleberg (1988, p. 346) who report that 'younger Japanese employees place more importance on social relations at the workplace than the older ones' because 'getting along with co-workers is essential for career advancement in the firm'.

In Japan, where identifications with a group is almost an absolute necessity, nothing could be harshest than ostracizing a member. For a Japanese, 'ostracism is more dreaded than violence'. A Japanese 'is allergic to threats of ridicule and rejection, even when [s]he merely conjures them up in his [her] own mind' (Benedict, 1947, p. 288). Ostracism is a form of silent treatment that may include such behaviors as ignoring, exclusion, rejection, and shunning (Mao et. al. 2018) and works as a threat to potential deviants, punishes the actual ones, and thus ensures identification with the group.

Identification with group has been a necessity in Japanese agricultural practices (Jung & Muto, 1995; Alarid and Wang, 1997) where deviants are punished with ostracism. For example, in 1952, in a small village at the base of Mt. Fuji, Satsuki Ishikawa, a middle school student wrote to the Asahi newspaper about electoral fraud in local government elections. 'The police arrested the village leaders, but the community responded by ostracizing the Ishikawa family'. In the pre-mechanized 1950s, transplanting rice required community assistance. When the time arrived to transplant the Ishikawa fields, no one came to help (Ramseyer and Rasmusen, 2020, p. 02). This reaction is widespread in all spheres of society. One of the most important qualities of public personnel is to establish and maintain personal relationships with their seniors and juniors. 'A person who violates this basic norm is likely to have poor reputation with others and experience diminished respect from friends all of which may jeopardize future relationships' (Jun & Muto, 1995).

A corporate version of this ostracism is practiced in companies called 'Oidashi beya'. It is a form of ostracism that works as threat to potential 'deviants', punishes actual ones, and ensures that everyone identifies with the group. One organization implemented this practice where the employee:

'was ordered not to answer the phone, not to carry a business card, and to look for a division within the company that would accept her. Her annual pay was cut by ¥2 million. Her department name was changed to the Operations Support Center, although nothing really changed. She found herself left off the guest list for company celebration and farewell parties and was denied access to the company's intranet. Tasks assigned to her and others in the department included topping up supplies, making photocopies, cleaning up cardboard boxes in the company library and checking for missing tiles and dirty spots on the ceiling in the offices on each floor (Okunuki, 2013).

Japanese organizations are groups where employment opportunities are almost completely closed to strangers. The people who want to be 'emancipated' from the confines of their own groups and join another thus cannot expect any 'positive outcome' and are 'unrealistically optimistic' to expect any sort of 'benign treatment' (Yamagishi et. al., 1998, p. 190).

Concluding comments

This study reports that LPEs in the Oita Prefecture of Japan demonstrate strategic identification commitment to the community they administer but prefer not to align their own internal values with those of the community. They prefer to remain private and 'emotionally withdrawn'. We argue that this identification commitment is not completely voluntary but results from many organizational and extra organizational pressures. The LPEs of the Oita municipality are, unfortunately perhaps, not alone. We show that several national levels studies of the Japanese population and findings from the private business sector support the attitudes to employees expressed by the Oita LPEs. Is it possible that the widespread celebration of diversity has motivated identification commitment leading to the 'irretrievable' decline of commitment to a set of values embodied in the term '*Enlightenment*' as Weber (1992) argued in the 1930s, or is there a need to develop new conceptual categories to understand the Japanese public service and private businesses different types of commitment to their employees?

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