

# BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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## INTRODUCTION

The period from 2000 to 2001 coincided with the turn of the century, and even among Japanese scholars in the field of business administration the opportunity arose to review past academic achievements and, further, to hammer out a new direction for the 21st century. Research originating in Japan that was original in addition to having a high level of practicality was also being aspired to. This review will not classify research into narrowly defined academic fields, but will attempt to arrange the trends seen in management studies circles as a whole into five broad categories.

The first category looks at “production management.” This goes beyond the bounds of simple product R & D, and as represented by Toyota production systems (TPS) and total quality control (TQC), the opportunity is arising for “integrated production systems” to be dispatched from Japan to the world, an area in which a number of postwar Japanese corporations can take pride internationally. Study results are being presented thick and fast by young researchers not only regarding the automobile industry, but also the computer industry.

A field of management research initiated in Japan named “transfirm organization theory” is covered in the second category. This theory starts out from the standpoint that organizations and companies are different concepts, and attempts to analyze management phenomena by interpreting an “organization” as a network or system that actually functions, whereas a “company” is seen as an institution with boundaries or partitions. In this way, by analyzing organizations transcending the boundaries of companies, topics that have previously been dealt with under strategy theory can now be included within the framework of organization theory.

The third category focuses on “organizational behavior models,” an area where study results are being seen in fields such as organizational learning theory and measurement of organizational culture. Regarding analysis using decision-making models and analysis of models using an agent-based simulator, progress is anticipated in the future.

As is represented by the boom in business model (or method) patents that arrived in Japan from 2000 to the beginning of 2001, the fourth category may be described as the “search for new business models.” Although this is an area that is not yet academically mature, social contributions by business scholars are anticipated regarding venture businesses and NPOs, in addition to financial methods and analyses.

The fifth category is concerned with an academic review of Japanese business administration. Included in this category is a review of the procedures and methodology used to make scientific estimations of the life span of corporations.

## I. PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT

With the period around 1990 forming a boundary, it is said that a shift took place in product R & D from a traditional approach to a new modern approach. Once a paradigm was established, the interest of numerous researchers from around the world was subsequently aroused, resulting in substantial study results [I-01]. In this current of the times, there is no doubt that “integrated production systems” of some postwar Japanese corporations, as represented by TPS and TQC, constituted one of the valuable intellectual properties that Japan was able to dispatch to the world during the latter half of the 20th century. In particular, the global competitiveness of products that contain an “adjustment model” design concept (architecture), where mutual adjustment in parts design is indispensable, as in automobiles for example, is generally alive and well at present early in the 21st century, and its significance as subject matter for international research remains high. Even in academic circles, reflecting good access to the subject of research, “production system research” is a field in which there is high international evaluation of achievements by Japanese researchers, including those working in the social sciences. In 2002, representative of these researchers, Fujimoto Takahiro received the Japan Academy Prize and Imperial Prize. Fujimoto Takahiro’s work [I-02] contains precisely the intent of a comprehensive survey of the research mentioned above. Making up two major volumes, it is written as a text

for technology and operations management, with Volume I covering production systems and Volume II covering production resources and technology management. In actual fact, this is a laborious work that sets out to provide a consistent elucidation of the “basic logic of production” by linking the daily on-site activities of Japanese manufacturing corporations, as represented by Toyota Motor Corporation, to corporate and industrial competitiveness.

Although a large number of biographies and works of fiction concerning Toyoda Kiichirō 豊田喜一郎 have already been published, the first biography to be officially compiled by Toyota Motor Corporation [I-03] was published during the period under review. But for some reason, an international center to systematically undertake theoretical and empirical research together with overseas releases in this field has not existed in the key country, that is, Japan. This situation has been detrimental to Japanese industrial competitiveness itself, as can be seen in recent years by the excessive pessimism in the industrial world and the deep-rooted survival of intercorporate and interindustry disparities in productivity. The fact that the front edge of “integrated production systems,” developed during the latter half of the 20th century, is to be found in Japanese corporations is still acknowledged today by the world’s experts. If a long-term on-going research base for “integrated production systems” were to be formed in Japan it would probably develop into a world leader in research bases of this type. This movement is beginning.

In addition to the above, other study results are being successively presented by young researchers. Sugiyama Yasuo [I-04] discloses in his work that, in global standardization of product design in the automobile industry there are in fact few examples of realization according to the original concept, and that rather, the merits of globalization have been sought after in shared ownership of plant and equipment through flexible standardization. Takeda Yōko [I-05] provides an empirical analysis of the influence new-generation 3-D information technology has on product development processes. Apart from the case studies of six companies covered in this work, in an additional work [I-06] Takeda Yōko puts together interviews conducted around the same time at approximately twenty companies that have introduced 3-D information technology. The author maintains that either way, models designed with 3-D information technology have the power to initiate interdepartmental and inter-organizational communication because even nonprofessionals in technology can understand what kind of form these models take. In the Japanese

personal computer industry, a work by Ui Jong-hyun [I-07] describes the changes in architecture from desktop computers, which had entered a stable period as regards the market and technology, to laptop computers as a trajectory. He also sheds light on the fact that at the time resources from different departments within companies were used to develop new products.

However, there is a possibility for mistakes to be made through research design. Karube Masaru's work [I-08] maintains that, in the so-called HPC (high performance computer) industry, Japanese and US companies chose noticeably different approaches to upgrading performance. The reason for this lies in that, while attempts were being made in Japan to improve the operating speed of single CPUs (central processing unit) from the years 1987–1994, when venture companies started operating in the US, although the operating speed of their CPUs was inferior, because they could also be used for UNIX servers and personal computers, a price-cutting war was initiated through the parallel use of a low-cost general-use scalar-type CPUs, which in turn led to the renewed emergence of an approach based on parallelization, and this became dominant. It is difficult to believe, however, that there were barriers in the form of the US market or Japanese market for products such as HPC. If there were barriers, they were the result of government policy and regulations. In actual fact, the procurement of super computers at the time had already become a political issue, and in effect, the situation was such that Japanese super computers could not be exported to the US. Further, in places such as universities, super computer procurement controls existed such as those that had been imposed on Japan by the US mainly for the purpose of protecting Cray super computers. To ignore such significant environmental conditions and simply debate competitiveness in technological development and pricing is a mistake. On the other hand, to discuss R & D based on questionnaire surveys of individual companies, as has been done by Itō Yoshio [I-09], is inappropriate in the first place.

## II. TRANSFIRM ORGANIZATION THEORY

In business administration and economics to date, there has been an implicit assumption that a company and organization indicate the same thing, and numerous arguments have been built on the contrast seen in company versus market or organization versus market. However, if it is given that companies and organizations are different concepts, then it becomes possible to sort out and understand various

phenomena in a straightforward manner.

In actual fact, if one looks at the job site of corporate management today, for example, depending on the bank, the majority of female employees at the service counter are not permanent employees, and likewise, the ladies at the reception desk in a large number of corporate headquarter buildings are staff of temporary help business agencies. Computer technicians such as system engineers and operators working in computer rooms with strict security control are also in fact resident employees of computer companies. Among big size mass sales stores such as supermarkets there are even companies where, excluding the floor manager, the salespersons are all temporary help business staff, part-timers and people engaged in side jobs. There are also factories where most of the workers working on the factory production line have come from a number of subcontractors.

In all these cases, the reality is that they are without doubt functioning as one organization. However, in actual fact each organization is divided into several companies. In other words, a company and an organization are different concepts. There is a qualitative difference between the two in that the concept of an "organization" is a network or system that actually functions, whereas the concept of a "company" is in the first place a system with boundaries or barriers. Once the fact that a company and an organization are different concepts has been acknowledged, then our understanding and ability to come up with conceptional ideas will improve markedly. By reaching a higher level various truths will come into view. The spectacle of a number of companies functioning as one organization is now commonplace. This can be seen as the network of an organization transcending the boundaries of a company and widening the scope of activities, or the organization can be seen as a network that controls several companies. However, either way, what is important is that, regardless of whether our concerns lie within or outside the company, our interest should in the first place be in the activities undertaken by the organization. In other words, our interest should always be in the performance of the organization.

A work fully incorporating this viewpoint on the nature of an organization is that edited by Takahashi Nobuo [II-01]. In this work organization theory based on this view of an organization begins to be referred to as "transfirm organization theory." In English *chōkigyō* 超企業 translates into "transfirm," which is a coined word, but stated in another way means "multifirms" "transcending the boundary of a firm." When one comes to think about it, organizations or organized

activities must have existed before the dawn of history, or rather, before humankind came into existence. But the history of the system known as a “company” is said to be about one thousand years at the most since its “invention.” It is hardly possible that a company and an organization derive from the same concept.

The above-mentioned work takes up about twenty themes from recent topics in the field of business administration. Customer satisfaction, transactions between affiliated enterprises, inter-organization theory, evolution of cooperation, competition as dialogue, de facto standards, strategic alliance, architecture, information stickiness, and clusters, for example, are topics that until now would have been more likely to come under strategy theory, but in fact, each and every one of these topics is sustained by a view of the world according to “transfirm organization theory,” and can be dealt with within the framework of organization theory. A Korean edition of this work (translated by Lee Youngsun 李龍善) was published by Nanam (Seoul) in 2002.

Motivated by the content of [II-01], journal *Soshiki Kagaku* 組織科学 (Organizational Science) [II-02] has put together a special feature on alliances and outsourcing. Further, authors who contributed to [II-01] have continued to develop their studies from a perspective based on “transfirm organization theory.” Sugiyama Yasuo [II-03] maintains that, in product development, the key to transferring and developing knowledge emerging in places separated by borders and geographically far is “information stickiness.” Miyazaki Masaya [II-04] uses content analysis, a method originally developed to analyze the content of newspapers and magazines in the field of communication research, to undertake a case study of the ink-jet printer industry. By analyzing news releases for new products, Miyazaki is able to portray shifts and competitive strategy of the product concepts of various companies as a trajectory, and shows how the respective companies are aware of each other as a reference point for competitiveness.

In addition, among studies concerning competitive strategy published during the period under review, there were numerous works that shared a similar worldview based on the ideas of the “transfirm organization theory.” For example, not only is there the work regarding de facto standards edited by Shintaku Junjirō, Konomi Yoshinobu and Shibata Takashi [II-05], but in another work edited by Shintaku Junjirō and Asaba Shigeru [II-06], research undertaken during the 1990s is summed up concerning the three themes of competitive strategy from a resourced-based view, strategy in a market in which network externality functions, and distribution strategy. Further, a work edited

by Udagawa Masaru, Kikkawa Takeo and Shintaku Junjirō [II-07] examine in what kind of patterns the phases of homogeneous competition and differentiating competition can be observed in Japanese industry, and categorizes long-term competition patterns.

Progressing further, the trend toward looking at a single industry as a network deepened during this period. For example, in relation to the global automobile industry, Fujimoto Takahiro [II-08] undertakes a critical study of “global oligopoly hypotheses” such as “only six to ten companies in the world will be able to survive,” or “only companies producing over 4 million automobiles will be able to make the cut,” making clear there are no conclusive economic or business administration-based grounds for these hypotheses. To the contrary, Fujimoto determines that a graded multilayered, multipolar network has formed in the global automobile industry. Further, “architecture” is in the first place the basic design concept regarding how an “artificial system” such as a product should be construed and designed. Having stated their view that “architecture” is a basic element relating to how the system “should be cut and divided” and how the component parts “should be connected” following division, Fujimoto Takahiro, Takeishi Akira and Aoshima Yaichi [II-09] develop this idea further and begin to consider a rethinking of industrial organization from the viewpoint of “architecture.” Yasuda Yuki [II-10] looks at network analysis from the standpoint of “analyzing from the network,” and in the midst of these trends this is a tool for analysis that can be expected to gain in importance in the future.

### III. MODELLING OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

In the field of organizational learning theory, even based on international standards, innovative studies with a high degree of originality appeared during the review period. Andō Fumie [III-01], having analyzed data from a questionnaire conducted among approximately one thousand employees from eight Japanese corporations, advocates the new concept of an “intraorganizational map.” The relationship between questions considered to represent “organizational culture suited to learning” and questions considered to represent “active organizational learning” is spurious, and this study demonstrates that the formation of an “intraorganizational map” is of prime importance for active learning. Further, in applying this model to employees hired during the bubble economy period, an issue actually confronting corporations, the data reveals that the reason for the low level of

learning activity among employees hired during the bubble period does not lie with problems in the organizational culture, but can be attributed to the bubble-period employees having failed for some reason to form an “intraorganizational map.”

Further, Andō Fumie [III-01], not only arranges organizational learning theory neatly into the March’s System, Hedberg’s System and Argyris’s System for the first time based on differences in issues of concern and premises for the discussion, but also, based on “social science citation index” data, makes clear the fact that not much borrowing has taken place among the three systems and that they show a tendency to be cut off from each other. As a review of the theoretical genealogy of organizational learning theory, this is a work of high standard. Motivated by this study, Takahashi Nobuo [III-02] puts into order basic research regarding sealed progress functions, or learning curves, from the experience curves of PPM (product portfolio management) onwards, and regarding questions such as (a) why learning curves become log-linear models, or (b) how discrepancies arise in the progress rates, he arranges basic research on learning curves, coming to a well-defined conclusion.

Of the four indexes used in Hofstede’s national culture, Fujita Hideki [III-03] re-creates the computation methods regarding the individualism index and masculinity index, which have not been clarified to date, and based on survey data taken at the Japanese multinational corporations of NEC, Fujitsu and Toshiba, computes the four indexes. This is the first supplementary test in the world of Hofstede’s research, which, since its publication in 1980, has become known as a representative study in international comparison of organizational culture, and as such Fujita’s work is groundbreaking. In addition, Fujita makes a comparison with Hofstede’s IBM data and points out instability and questions regarding the factor analysis Hofstede used in creating his indexes.

Incidentally, in the field of business administration, analysis of organizational behavior is only natural. For example, Hayashi Shinji [III-04] undertakes an extensive review of literature on organizational psychology, while Inaba Motokichi [III-05] discusses the dynamics of contemporary corporations. However, researchers who base their work on game theory or decision theory, or who attempt to carry out their studies while embracing the progress made in these fields are a small minority. A work by Matsubara Nozomu [III-06] is the same long seller published in 1977 put out this time with the first major revisions in almost a quarter-century. It is substantial in its coverage of game

theory in extensive form and collective decision making, and thus notably illustrative of the progress made in scholarship over the last quarter-century concerning decision making. However, it is unfortunate that a large number of business scholars draw a line between these fields and one even receives the impression that they are locking themselves into their own particular field.

Herbert A. Simon, who was a prominent figure in modern organization theory and a recipient of the Nobel Prize for Economics and Turing Prize, died in 2001. What is barely grasped by business scholars is the fact that when Simon created modern organization theory, at the same time as he criticized game theory and statistical decision theory, he was actually under their strong and direct influence. However, several attempts in the field of decision-making theory were made at the turn of the century. For example, the journal *Operations Research* オペレーションズ・リサーチ has put together a feature [III-07] welcoming business scholars in their lineup of writers, and attempts to review management organization theory according to operations research (OR) specialists or persons with OR knowledge from the perspective of what forms the structure of management organization theory, that is, decision theory and game theory, or from behind, as it were.

Also included among the writers contributing to the above-mentioned feature are Kuwashima Ken’ichi and Takahashi Nobuo, and in yet another work [III-08], they attempt to analyze actual instances of research and development of new pharmaceuticals in the Japanese pharmaceutical industry by using decision-making models that can be broadly categorized into three systems: 1) a simple, rational decision-making model based on decision theory and game theory, 2) an organizational decision-making model based on limited rationality grounded in modern organization theory, and 3) an ambiguous decision-making model based on the garbage can model. Both modern organization theory models and garbage can models are a type of problem-solving model, and since, in the research areas of innovation management and technology management, treating the process of R & D and product development as a problem-solving process is now becoming the common approach, there is a high degree of affinity with these models. Further, going beyond the simple introduction to agent-based simulation seen in [III-09], a work by Kuwashima Ken’ichi and Takahashi Nobuo [III-10] takes up Merck of the United States as a case example of success in global R & D, and making comparisons with Japan’s pharmaceutical companies, clarifies the important role played by the gatekeeper, who possesses a broad knowledge basis and strong

communication skills. Kuwashima and Takahashi also apply this concept more generally with a model analysis using a multi-agent model agent-based simulator.

#### IV. SEARCHING FOR NEW BUSINESS MODELS

The period from 2000 to the beginning of 2001 saw a boom in business model patents. And very much appropriate to the word boom, in the space of one year dozens of books about business model patents were published. Of these publications, there were some works that simply took advantage of the boom and had nothing to do with business model patents [IV-01]. However, among these works, Henry Kōda [IV-02], and Shibata Hidetoshi and Ihara Tomohito [IV-03] provide information on business model patents in a systematic manner at a relatively early stage in the boom. Further, Kokuryō Jirō, who brought the term “business model” into general use, has compiled topics on network communities as represented by the development of Linux, putting out a work together with Sasaki Yūichi and Kitagawa Satoshi [IV-04].

Moreover, in an environment marked by the boom in venture businesses and the sharp increase in SOHOs (small office, home office), although there was a considerable amount of groundless anticipation and expectation placed on the venture businesses [IV-05] and creation of new businesses [IV-06], a work by Ōta Hajime [IV-07] makes a favorable impression in that the author endeavors to record the real picture of venture businesses as matter-of-factly as possible. Further, as a pioneer in having actually practiced business incubation in Japan for the past ten-odd years, Hoshino Satoshi’s work [IV-08] puts in order his failures and experiences to date, and is worth consideration.

In regard to NPOs, Tao Masao [IV-09, 10] sets forth a long-awaited theory, developing a generalization that organizations in areas such as health care and welfare differ from companies in that they are supported by professionalism and volunteerism. However, as Tanimoto Kanji points out [IV-11], does this type of generalization hold true even in an age when the boundaries between NPOs and companies are in the process of disappearing? Is it not simply that the espoused work motivation theory is failing, or that it is still at an early stage of development? The fact of the matter is that because we are indefinitely bound by the theory of extrinsic motivation based on extrinsic reward, it is simply that it becomes impossible to provide an explanation without bringing up volunteerism, and the concept that motivation at

a company has to be explained based on the theory of extrinsic motivation because a wage is being drawn is already a mistake in itself. Even within a company it is possible to provide an explanation based on the theory of intrinsic motivation, and it should be noted that this is not inconsistent with volunteerism.

Further, the inflow of American-style management techniques under the name of “reform” was characteristic of the period under review. Yoneyama Masaki [IV-12] discusses impairment accounting. Accounting for impairment assets is an accounting procedure used to decrease the book value under specific conditions so as to reflect collectibility when there is no prospect of recovering an investment due to a decline in profitability. The author discusses depreciation processing using the American FASB (Financial Accounting Standard Board) standard as a frame of reference, which in an instance such as this deals with the fair appraised value (market value) of a money claim as a new acquisition cost, and goes on to reexamine the meaning and need for this practice. Yamauchi Masanori [IV-13] also comments on the American method of turning real estate into a financial product. A work edited by Usui Akira [IV-14] is originally a discussion of the American method of management, but also analyzes the economic effect of mergers and acquisitions (M&A) in the case of Japanese companies from various points of view.

Furthermore, regarding railway management, an area that has not been the subject of much research by business scholars to date, Takahashi Nobuo [IV-15] makes an analysis in the form of a type of business model from the viewpoint of financing schemes for construction. The reason for the significance of financing schemes lies in the fact that both railway construction and railway management are basically engaged in a contest with interest rates, and firstly, fund-raising schemes must be approached resourcefully; there is a need to compress the interest-bearing debt as far as possible, which without fail swells during the period up to commencement of operations, by raising funds as far as possible with subsidies, non-interest-bearing public loans, and internal reserves, and by investing these funds as early as possible while delaying the investment of funds with interest-bearing liabilities as long as possible. And secondly, the author develops his point that the time frame from starting construction to commencement of operations must be compressed as far as possible since there is no revenue until operations commence.

## V. ACADEMIC REAPPRAISAL OF JAPANESE BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

In terms of reappraising Japanese business administration, the work bearing the greatest fruits during the period under review would be that of Shimizu Takashi [V-01]. Among Japanese business scholars, a large number accepted with shock the “thirty-year company life span hypothesis” or claims that even top-ranking companies have a life span without putting these assertions to any kind of scientific test. By contrast, in an area where business administration had not even attempted to provide answers fair and square until now, Shimizu takes up the concept of the “life span” of companies or organizations head-on, producing a high-caliber study that examines this subject logically and scientifically. As a result, his work demonstrates that a company life span of thirty years is clearly an underestimation, and that “the estimated average listed period of time for listed companies far exceeds one hundred years.” Further, looking at the substantiated results of advanced research, although it cannot be said that mergers have a positive effect in terms of profitability or growth potential, concerning the remaining issue of why mergers are undertaken, Shimizu pinpoints the fact that mergers are effective in prolonging life spans. At the same time, in examining case examples of individual mergers, this work also shows that although the phenomenon of life spans increasing through mergers can be seen among Japanese corporations, these are mergers between companies belonging to the same industry, and so the increase in life span cannot be attributed to diversification. In other words, facts negate the unfounded myth that diversification is necessary for the continued existence of companies.

Further, a work by Leslie Hannah and Wada Kazuo [V-02] is noteworthy for its sharp criticism of the international comparisons introduced in A.D. Chandler’s *Scale and Scope*. Originally an English manuscript prepared by Hannah for which there was no publishing opportunity, it has been published in Japanese following the addition of one chapter and reediting by Wada, and it is worth noting also for the fact there are presently no prospects for its publication in English.

In addition to this, a style of business administration research unique to Japan that follows the school of C.I. Barnard is going strong. Isomura Kazuhito [V-03] reinterprets Barnard’s *The Functions of the Executive* from the perspective of how organizations are formed and survive from within a network of relationships formed by people. Although difficult to grasp, Tsujimura Hirokazu’s work [V-04] attempts to reinterpret this from the standpoint of executive talent

development. Despite diverging from Barnard, the approach seen in works by Enta Yūji [V-05] and Hioki Kōichirō [V-06], which attempt to connect business administration with a wider academic field, or the approach used by Numagami Tsuyoshi [V-07], which attempts to discuss the methodology of business research, are also research styles unique to Japan.

Moreover, although not written by business scholars, there are some other noteworthy works. Matsubara Ryūichirō [V-08] claims that the reason for sluggish consumption in Japan lies in that while, on the one hand, the Japanese economy has matured and goods required on a daily basis are easily obtainable at convenience stores and luxury goods at specialty shops or by mail order, on the other hand, there is a strange ennui that cannot be attributed simply to the recession and that the appeal of shopping at department stores experienced by consumers in the past has been lost. Yamashita Hiroshi [V-09] attempts to construct a model to support the correction of assessment trends by evaluation personnel when considering the reliability of assessment data for employee evaluation. Further, Yamashita Hiroshi and Kaneko Shōichi [V-10] comment on management systems from the perspective of management engineering. A work by Satō Hiroki, Fujimura Hiroyuki and Yashiro Atsushi [V-11] is useful in that it compiles and organizes data and company case studies considered informative for the study of human resources and personnel management. However, instances of data for which the source or research methods are not clear can be found here and there.

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