



NORTH-HOLLAND

Cognitive Moral Development and Japanese Procurement Executives

Implications for Industrial Marketers

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With the importance of Japan to the world economy, and the attractiveness of Japanese corporations as buyers of U.S. industrial products, it is vital for industrial marketers to understand the ethical predispositions of Japanese purchasing executives. A ground-breaking sample of 222 purchasing executives from the largest Japanese corporations was obtained and assessed in terms of their cognitive moral development (CMD). The findings indicated: (1) the Japanese were more focused on the conven-

tional level than on the postconventional level of CMD, (2) older executives were less concerned with group harmonization, and (3) upper management focused less on mutually satisfying outcomes and group harmonization than middle or lower levels. Benchmarking against previous research involving Chinese and American business executives, this study found that the Japanese approach moral judgment differently from either of the other populations. In particular, the Japanese were more focused on stage 3 (interpersonal concordance) than the other samples, while they were less focused (along with the Americans) than the Chinese for stage 4 (law and duty to the social order). These differences were also seen for stage 5a (social contract) with the Japanese and Chinese scoring lower than the Americans and for 5b (intuitive humanism) with the Chinese scoring higher than the Japanese or the Americans. © 2000 Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt about the economic power of Japan (even in the wake of its recent economic difficulties) or its importance to the United States as a trading partner. In terms of 1995 Gross National Product, the United States and Japan ranked first and second in the world with totals of US\$6,658,785.8 million and US\$4,247,084.1 million, respectively [1]. At the micro level, this has led to a nearly “unquenchable” thirst for a better understanding of the mentality of the Japanese “business mind” [2]. Naturally, an important target market for U.S. industrial product marketers are the procurement executives of large Japanese companies. It seems logical that if, through this type of important basic research, American industrial marketers can better understand the “baseline” mentality of Japanese procurement professionals, they can ultimately increase their chances for a successful outcome.

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A recent focus of study pertaining to the “business mentality” of U.S. executives is Cognitive Moral Development or CMD [3]. However, while the study of CMD has a rich history in the Pacific Rim, only lately has it been directly applied in a business context [4]. A recent treatise on organizational ethics [5] stated “most experts agree that a person’s stage of moral development and personal moral philosophy play a role in how values and actions are shaped in the workplace” (p. 39). Shenkar and Ronen [6] have suggested that national cultural ethical norms provide a basic framework for cross-cultural marketing negotiations, and Sheng, Chang and French [7] have posited that one important factor underlying this process is CMD. Theoretically, it is reasonable to expect individuals who come from different levels of moral development to exhibit different business behaviors, which may be fueled by substantially differing perceptions of the decision situations as well as the ethicality of these situations [4]. If one individual approaches the buyer–seller relationship focused on personal gain (potentially at the expense of the group), while another approaches the same decision focused on the good of the company (potentially at the expense of the individual), there is potential for conflict. Therefore, the study of CMD may have an important bearing on the mental predispositions or expectations the parties to any negotiation bring with them to the table.

It is the purpose of this article to examine the Cognitive Moral Development of Japanese procurement executives from major Japanese corporations and benchmark the findings against samples from previous studies involving other cultures. In so doing, this study extends CMD research cross-culturally to an important aspect of the trading relationship between Japan and the United States, and contributes information toward the lack of knowledge regarding the mindset of Japanese executives.

CMD and International Marketing

Cognitive Moral Development (CMD) represents a large body of research which stems from the seminal work of Piaget [8] which focused on the moral development of children. Piaget posited that cognitive development occurs because human beings are active experiential interpreters. They develop general categories for the purpose of assimilation, and this then leads to the development of future expectations. His premise was that as children matured, their cognitive developmental processes became more complex. This work influenced Kohlberg’s [9] formation of a theory of moral development, which

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