



## JAPANESE MANAGEMENT AND ITS PRACTICE IN COMPANY BRANCH BASED IN SLOVAKIA

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**Abstract.** Japan is currently one of the most economically developed countries. The economy in Japan has a very high growth rate. In the traditional Japanese industrial firm is used the so-called Japanese management system. This management system has proved very successful and it uses the management practices that are fundamentally different from other industrially developed countries. The article defines individual elements, principles and practices of Japanese management system. It compares the Japanese management with the management of other advanced countries, such as USA. On this basis the article describes the application of Japanese management system, particularly the system KAIZEN, in the company SONY Slovakia. Company SONY Slovakia was founded as the first plant of SONY in Eastern Europe and it applies advanced Japanese management.

**Keywords:** Japanese management, KAIZEN, company, employees.

**JEL classification:** M12, M21.

### 1. Introduction

Japan as one of the most industrialized countries has adopted management practices that are fundamentally different from the practices of other industrialized countries of the Western world (Stokes 2000).

Japanese management system takes account of two facts:

1. Japanese management style is often understood as uniform and the only management system that is currently applied in the Japanese industrial companies. We can not speak of the only management system, because each company uses such management that is most suited to it.
2. Signs of the Japanese management system are immediately bound to system, which is implemented in traditional Japanese industrial company.

The most significant personalities who influenced Japanese management are Americans Peter F. Drucker, William E. Deming, Joseph M. Juran.

The aim of this paper is to clarify the principles of Japanese management, compare it with other management systems of developed countries like the American management and Chinese management. The article analyzes the current management system of SONY Slovakia and finally it proposes measures to further development of the management system by focusing on system improvement KAIZEN.

### 2. Japanese management system

The current Japanese management consists of the following elements (Imai 1986):

1. Lifelong employment relationship,
2. RINGI system,
3. The principle of seniority,
4. KAIZEN.

#### 2.1. Lifelong employment relationship

If an employee wants to get lifelong employment relationship in Japanese management, he shall take up employment in the company immediately after leaving school. It does not obtain an employee who already comes with the practice from another company (Synek 2007). Lifelong employment relationship is mainly applied in large enterprises.

Benefits for the employer:

- The stability of the workforce;
- Years of experience and technical development for workers in this field.

Employee benefits:

- The guarantee of employment until retirement - social security;
- The preference for career progression.

In terms of Japanese management it is rare for a higher position took someone from outside. In comparison with Europe it is unnatural for the Japanese to change their employment within different companies (Sakikawa 2010; Boladovič 2011).

## 2.2. RINGI system

RINGI is a Japanese decision-making system, but it is also a management philosophy. It is characterized as a bottom-up management system or a system based on consensus. Japanese authors maintain that this system is highly democratic practice of the management. The term RINGI consists of two words: RIN, which means submit a proposal to superior and obtain his consent, GI means thinking and decision making.

The principle of RINGI is a document circulation system from the bottom up, which aims to seek approval or disapproval of the proposal. An employee who has a good idea fills a separate written document (is referred to as the RING-ŠO). In this document he describes the problem and proposes solutions. For getting approval it is necessary the circulation of the document. The document shall be handed to the next higher supervisor with a request to consider the proposal and pass it on. Then document circulates among employees who will be affected by the final decision. It will also require them the cooperation in the implementation of the proposal. Every supervisor will evaluate the proposal and attach his objections and suggestions. He confirms approval or disapproval with his signature. The document finally gets to top management. If the president expresses its consent, a decision is taken. Approved decision is then returned in the form of directives to the original proposer.

Characteristics of RINGI system:

- The proposal is based on the lowest level of management;
- The decision making is dispersed, not decentralized;
- It shall apply the consensus and collective decision-making;
- Top management approves the decision;
- All employees are responsible for the success or failure of the proposal.

Advantages of RINGI:

- Demonstration of democratic managerial practice;
- Support initiatives of employees;
- Possibility of new ideas in the lowest level of management;
- Strong collective orientation inspires the individuals to the achievement of collective goals;
- The possibility of a comprehensive assessment of the proposals;
- The certainty that the proposal shall take place after the general approval.

Disadvantages of RINGI:

- The system is low operating and requires a lot of time, it is also lengthy;
- It supports bureaucracy in the management;
- It is not possible to analyse the decision;
- It may be significantly applied the impact of informal groups;
- Individuals express just their consent, decides top management;
- It is not defined the responsibility for taking decisions;
- It is not possible to measure individual performance according to the standards;
- There is no formal review mechanism to assess the fulfilment of the decision.

RINGI system evolves, which leads to its modifications. These are rather partial changes, no fundamental changes in the principles of the system (Imai 2004; Košturiak 2006).

## 2.3. The principle of seniority

Japanese tradition, namely the remuneration in companies closely related to the age of the employee. If in the past was not clear detailed description of the work, so it was not possible to apply performance-based remuneration. In this case it began to be used the principle of seniority. The seniority in the Japanese company was founded on the basis of respect for older employees. The amount of pay is determined on the basis of education, number of years worked and age. Therefore, employees in Japanese companies are educated also at older age (Petříková 2007).

## 2.4. KAIZEN

According to the Japanese management the key to the success is precisely KAIZEN. The word KAIZEN is used in Japan for improvement due to Professor Masaaki Imai, who popularized it (Coimbra 2013).

KAIZEN is composed of two words: KAI, namely change and ZEN, namely good, better. Thus, KAIZEN means change for the better.

KAIZEN is simple and straightforward. It means the continuous improvement, which incorporates supervisors and also ordinary employees. KAIZEN philosophy assumes that our way of life needs the continuing improvement. KAIZEN is the most important program for good management. The continuous improvement is ensured by involving all employees, therefore concerns every member of the company. Everyone takes the change as commonplace (Kováč, Kováčová 2006).



Fig. 1. KAIZEN (source: self-processed)

KAIZEN is the umbrella concept that covers most of the uniquely Japanese management practices that have helped Japanese companies start from zero in the 1950s to become world class competitors in the 1980s. The graphic illustration below conveys the idea (Imai 1986; Imai 2007).



Fig. 2. KAIZEN umbrella (source: IMAI, 1986)

KAIZEN requires a mindset that is oriented to the procedure (process). It is based on the recognition that the management that wants to do business and make a profit shall satisfy the customer's demands. Main issue is to increase the quality and improve production planning, and also reduce costs.

Japanese employees submit annually several hundreds improvement ideas for the company. Of these, 87% were implemented.

As previously discussed, in every company, the improvement is provided by all employees, not just by individuals. KAIZEN is focused mainly on employees and their performance, because especially employees with management form the value of the company. (Bauer 2012)

The main objective of KAIZEN is to eliminate the shortcomings that managers in Japan called 3MU (Jackson 2013).

3MU are three Japanese words that mean what the company shall to get rid to be successful:

- MURI – surpluses, overloading;
- MUDA – losses, wasting;
- MURA – unevenness, deviations.

Principles of KAIZEN (Hrašková 2012):

- Two management tasks - creating and maintaining standards and of course their further improvement;
- KAIZEN is for everyone, not only for the management of the company. Therefore, the process of improving is open to all employees;
- Due to the participation of employees on new solutions is viewed a considerable motivation for the employee. If is the result of the positive improvements, it also brings financial evaluation;
- Even a small improvement in company requires a lot of work, time and attention, it is the same with the KAIZEN process;
- Before is the improvements implemented, it shall be analysed and it is necessary to indicate positives and negatives of the new process;
- KAIZEN is a company activity from the bottom, but also requires support from the top;
- Support is focused mainly on activities that can be implemented quickly and they do not require much investment.

As regards the application of KAIZEN in the company, it plays a major role in the production, but also in technological planning, production planning, in improving the technological processes, work organization also logistics. Other processes in which it intervenes are sales, marketing, human resources, internal audit (Košturiak 2010).

Examples of improvement in the process of KAIZEN:

Production:

- Placement of machinery and equipment;
- Placement of tools;
- The change of the position or design of different stands, racks, boxes, panels;
- The correct positioning of logistics routes;
- Brands placement.

Planning and preparation for production:

- The planning of orders into production;
- The work organization;
- The simplification of technological processes and its visualization.

Business:

- The business planning and procedures;
- The order processing and reclamation;
- The procedures for inspection and evaluation.

Supplying and purchase:

- The selection and evaluation of suppliers;
- The planning and execution of logistics input;
- The preliminary capacity planning in production.

### 3. Japanese managers

Manager in a Japanese company is theoretically top position as an employee can achieve.

Japanese managers in industrial companies have three common characteristics:

- a) Education - Japanese managers are graduates of prominent state universities;
- b) Their work experiences are almost the same;
- c) They belong to the same age category.

For the top management are largely used training courses, that are beneficial to their working growth in the company.

The course lasts for eight weeks and the lectures are divided into three groups:

- Organization of companies;
- Company goals;
- Inspection.

The reason for this course is the Japanese approach to decision making, which is time consuming.

Japanese managers are in many ways contributed on developing new systems for the production and management:

- JUST IN TIME (it helps reduce storage costs),
- KANBAN (it is used in managing manufacturing processes),
- KAIZEN (improvement).

### 4. Comparison of Japanese management with management in USA and China

As already mentioned, the Japanese management style is quite different from the management style in other industrialized countries (Tomek 2007).

The following tables compare Japanese management with management in the USA and China, according to the individual functions of management – planning, organizing, staffing, leading and controlling.

**Table 1.** Comparison of planning in Japan, USA and China (source: Wehrich, Koontz 1993)

Japanese management	American management	Chinese management
Long-term orientation	Primarily short-term orientation	Long-term and short-term orientation (5-year plan and annual plan)
Collective decision-making (ring) with consensus	Individual decision-making	Decision-making by committees. At the top often individual
Involvement of many people in preparing and making the decision	Involvement of a few people in making and “selling: the decision to people with divergent values	Top-down-participation at lower levels
Decision flow from bottom-to-top and back	Decisions are initiated at the top and flow down	Top-down-initiated at the top
Slow decision-making; fast implementation of the decision	Fast decision-making; slow implementation requiring compromise, often resulting in suboptimal decision	Slow decision-making / slow implementation. (Now changing)

**Table 2.** Comparison of organizing in Japan, USA and China (source: Wehrich, Koontz, 1993)

Japanese management	American management	Chinese management
Collective responsibility and accountability	Individual responsibility and accountability	Collective and individual responsibility
Ambiguity of decision responsibility	Clarity and specificity of decision responsibility	Attempts to introduce the “factory responsibility system”
Informal organization structure	Formal bureaucratic organizational structure	Formal bureaucratic organization structure
Well-known common organization culture and philosophy; competitive spirit toward other enterprises	Lack of common organization culture; identification with profession rather than with company	Identification with the company but no competitive spirit

**Table 3.** Comparison of staffing in Japan, USA and China (source: Weihrich, Koontz 1993)

Japanese management	American management	Chinese management
Young people hired out of school; hardly any mobility of people among companies	People hired out of schools and from other companies; frequent company changes	Most hired from school, fewer from other companies
Slow promotion through the ranks	Rapid advancement highly desired and demanded	Slow promotion, but regular salary increase
Loyalty to the company	Loyalty to the profession	Lack of loyalty to both company and profession
Very infrequent formal performance evaluations for new (young) employees	Frequent performance evaluation for new employees	Infrequent performance review (usually once a year)
Appraisal of long-term performance	Appraisal of short-term results	5-year plan, otherwise short-term targets
Training and development considered a long-term investment	Promotions based primarily on individual performance	Promotions are supposed to be based on performance, potential ability, and education. But family ties and good relations with top managers are important
Lifetime employment common in large companies	Training and development undertaken with hesitation (employee may go to another firm)	Training programs available. State exam administered for managers
	Job insecurity prevails	

#### 4.1. The company SONY Slovakia

SONY Slovakia in Trnava (Trnava Technology Center) was founded in 1996 as the first brand in Eastern Europe. Since then, production has grown to the following products – PCB, TV tuners, colour TVs from Sony, services of PlayStation and colour TVs.

Due to the change in the situation on the market since 2006, production orientation is focused on the production of LCD TVs. Therefore production department of CTV television component ceased their activities in December 2005 and the actual production of CTV in May 2006.

**Table 4.** Comparison of leading in Japan, USA and China (source: Weihrich, Koontz 1993)

Japanese management	American management	Chinese management
Leader acting as social facilitator and group member	Leader acts as decision-maker and head of group	Leader as the head of the group (committees)
Paternalistic style	Directive style (strong, firm, determined)	Directive. Parent-child relations (in TA terms)
Common values facilitating cooperation	Often divergent values; individualism sometimes hinders cooperation	Common values. Emphasis on harmony
Avoidance of confrontation, sometimes leading to ambiguities; emphasis on harmony	Face-to-face confrontation common; emphasis on clarity	Avoidance of confrontation
Bottom-up communication	Communication primarily top-down	Communication top-down

**Table 5.** Comparison of controlling in Japan, USA and China (source: Weihrich, Koontz 1993)

Japanese management	American management	Chinese management
Control by peers	Control by superior	Control by group leader (superior)
Control focus on group performance	Control focus on individual performance	Primary control by groups-but also by individuals
Saving face	Fix blame	Try to save face
Extensive use of quality control circles	Limited use of quality control circles	Limited use of quality control

The volume of production in the company is affected by the sale of products on the market. Therefore, the company is working seasonally.

Due to the great sales production in Trnava, the company SONY Slovakia decided to open a larger hall for the production of LCD TVs. The factory obtained primacy in terms of several criteria:

- It has become one of the largest SONY factories;
- It is the largest technology center in the world for the production of LCD TV BRAVIA that uses the latest technology and high-tech.

Production in Nitra belongs to the largest SONY factories in the world at all due to their capacity and the number of employees. It employs a team of young people, which are characterized by hard work and flexibility. These are the necessary conditions for success of the company. Annual production is 4 million pieces of TVs. On the Slovak market is intended 4% and the rest 96% is exported to the European market.

#### 4.2. The organizational structure and levels of management in Japanese industrial company

Status of industrial firms in Japan provides Commercial Code (Ghertman 1996).

The Japanese company distinguishes three levels of management:

1. Top management;
2. Middle management ;
3. Lower management.

Top management consists of the Board of Directors, which are responsible for the management of the company. These include the company president, vice president, CEO, directors of larger organizational units such as divisions, directors of two or three departments and heads of units.

Middle manager in classical organizational structure is the head of unit. Head of unit in the Japanese company maintains the collectivism in the company. This is the highest position that can achieve a person without university education. For graduates this feature means start to the top management.

Lower management includes leaders of the section and subsections and they provide the basic level of management (Košturiak 2010).

#### 4.3. Personal management

Personnel management includes activities aimed at working with people.

Management activities are divided into the following groups (Štrach 2009): recruitment of staff; choice and location; education; the remuneration system.

Japanese companies prefer candidates who have completed the study, whether at the high school or university. School graduates are preferred by reason of the age remuneration system. School graduates have the lowest earnings, thus the company reduces payroll costs. The company can not obtain all staff after school graduation.

There are three groups of job seekers (Martin, Osterling 2007):

- Graduates of primary schools and high schools;
- University graduates;

– Workers from other companies.

Decisive criteria for acceptance to a Japanese company are:

- Candidate's character adjectives;
- The attitude to the company;
- Skills and knowledge;
- The ambition.

When choosing and location for the position in the company, the emphasis is placed on the age and ability of the worker.

It can be said that the functions of lower heads are filled automatically. All who were chosen at the lower position after leading 1–2 years become leading subsection or section leader. The education is very important in the allocation of functions. The Japanese company is known that women are not placed on leadership positions. Managerial positions are reserved for men. Also, this position can not carry workers who changed employers. From this perspective, also in terms of remuneration the change of employer is the big disadvantage in Japan.

Training of employees includes vocational training and improvement of employees after the commencement of employment (Maurer 2005)

There are two basic forms of education for leaders:

- External courses that are focused on improve governance, development of industrial relations, development of relations with foreign partners;
- Internal courses – these are dominant in Japanese firms.

In Japan, we describe the remuneration system as age-oriented. In addition to the monthly salary the company pays twice a year rewards - bonuses. The amount of remunerations is in the range from 1 to 3 months' salary and depends on the economic situation in which the company is currently located (Rolková 2013).

All these parts of personnel management occur in the company SONY Slovakia.

#### 4.4. Employee motivation

The biggest motivation for employees is behavior of management (Švač 1997). This means that the manager does not work only for himself and for his ambitions, but is working with people and for people ( Bell 1995).

The SONY Slovakia is using these three theories of motivation:

- Job enrichment – every good worker can become the small manager. By increasing responsibility for worker the company examines to what activities he has the poten-

tial and to what he does not have. In this way it find out who has the managerial skills and in whom they should be further developed;

- Job enlargement – it means enhancing qualification. Employees like very much that qualification because it increase the possibility of their further application;
- Job rotation – it means a variation or rotation on workstation. In this case it is the fact that the employee knows the best positions and departments in the company.

Another effective motivation is good interpersonal relationships among employees. The important thing is to give space to express an opinion of employees and the possibility to co-decide about work (Mallaya 2007).

Company SONY Slovakia prepares for employees Children's Day, St. Nicholas Day, The Christmas party for the department and also Christmas party for the entire company. Employees have possibility to buy tickets to the theater, spa and fitness center, which the company reimburses. At times they can buy some products at significant discounts.

## 5. The proposal for system KAIZEN in the company SONY Slovakia

On the basis that the SONY Slovakia wants to become the best manufacturing plant, it is doing everything to make that happen. KAIZEN activities, cumulation of small forms of KAIZEN, searching useleses directly in production is necessary in the company. It is also necessary to increase the number of people using KAIZEN fullest.

In company the management is mainly devoted to the fact that employees have acquired the folowing knowledge and skills:

- Skill to find MUDA;
- Skill to remove MUDA;
- To acquire the spirit of KAIZEN (People who have the KAIZEN spirit can not ignore MUDU and they delete it even though it's not easy sometimes).

MUDA-DORI is the part of KAIZEN used in production. Completely and continuously MUDA-DORI is a principle used in SONY Slovakia.

MUDA-DORI means elimination of waste (MUDA – waste, DORI – eliminate).

The quote of MUDA-DORI is: “You are the ones who make things better, not those who make things happen, not those who look on how things happen, not those who do not know how things happen.”

Overproduction creates accumulated MUDA. To prevent overproduction should be used JUST IN TIME operation. JUST IN TIME is obtaining the necessary things in the necessary time and in the required quantity.

Another possibility of overproduction is, if it is not produced according to the “cycle time”. Cycle time is defined as the time required to producing one piece of the product. It is conditional on desired output and working time.

So what is Kaizen improvement in the company SONY Slovakia? For example, the improvement does not mean to buy the latest equipment, but the improvement means to remove unnecessary.

In the past, SONY Slovakia was oriented towards mass production, high consumption, high speed, everything was large, expensive, difficult.

Currently the company sells everything every day, it has flexible production based on customer requirements, resources, facilities, areas are smaller, lighter and cheaper.

The most important principle of KAIZEN in company:

- To embark on “Go” if you think it is right;
- To eliminate wasted – quality problems, excess equipment, excess workers (KATSU-JIN – KATSU – utilized, optimize, JIN – people, person), extra costs;
- Watching the Gemba – visit to production, physical on-site inspection;
- Finding MUDA;
- Watching KAIZEN result.

GEMBA is the next important word of Japanese management. It means “the real place”. It can be used in business process improvement contexts to refer to the place where value is added, such as a manufacturing area or a workshop. A related term, GEMBA KAIZEN is used in Japanese process improvement initiatives to mean continuous improvement on the shop floor, where production takes place (Imai 2012).

One KAIZEN may concern more GEMBA and more departments. Good relationships in the team are basis to achievement of good KAIZEN. Good relationships are beginning to greeting and with the initial acquainted.

It is necessary to use a MORAL (morality, it is a personal approach and behavior during GEMBA) and MORALE (motivation, positive thinking, determination, “GO” behavior) in the GEMBA.

Bad attitude in GEMBA, who never used management of the company SONY Slovakia, is:

- Not to say "good morning";
- Do not reply if someone greeted;
- Not picking up the piece of paper from the ground;

- Being late to meetings;
- Do not observe rules;
- Make no countermeasures if the mess or wasted;
- Not to have a determination to meet objectives.

In MORALE it is also mentioned “GO” behavior. The following points show this kind of behavior in the company SONY Slovakia:

1. Consideration and discussing the same as sleeping;
2. If you decide that this is a good deal, then do it immediately;
3. If you decide that this is a bad deal, so stop doing it;
4. You can not know, what is good and what deal is bad, if you do nothing.

If any employees of SONY Slovakia make some of the bad approaches in the GEMBA they can not make KAIZEN activities and so they can not eliminate waste.

The definition of a good approach to Gemba: speak comprehensibly and racy; move cleverly; have clear objectives; be motivated; have enthusiasm; think positive; try to do things that seem unattainable.

Follow GEMBA is very important. If the SONY Slovakia has to survive among competitors it should be improved and grow every day. It is necessary to apply Gemba and do “5 Why”.

If any error is detected, it is necessary to ask “why” did it happen? It is not enough to ask one question. It is important to ask questions and reply with a few replies due to the error has not repeated in the future. Sometimes even a small error can cause a big problem, whether in the product manufacture or in the forthcoming material to the production.

Table 6 shows the use of the “5 why” in GEMBA for a particular situation in the company SONY Slovakia.

**Table 6.** “5 Why” in GEMBA (source: self-processed)

<b>1. Why</b> does the machine stop?	<b>1. Because</b> a fuse burned and the machine was overloaded.
<b>2. Why</b> is the machine overloaded?	<b>2. Because</b> the bearing was not sufficiently lubricated.
<b>3. Why</b> was the bearing not lubricated?	<b>3. Because</b> the oil pump lubricated insufficiently.
<b>4. Why</b> did the oil pump lubricate insufficiently?	<b>4. Because</b> the shaft was worn.
<b>5. Why</b> was the shaft worn?	<b>5. Because</b> the oil pump has not a filter so that the metal shavings caused by wear of the shaft.

The company also uses the rule KATSU-JIN (KATSU – use, optimize, JIN – people, person). KATSU-JIN does not mean dismissal of the employee it means the use of an employee to a different kind of operation.

The rule KATSU-JIN in the company SONY Slovakia means to take the best man from the line. This man then can be used in other processes, because he can learn quickly and then he is also proud of it. It is very important do not be negative towards application KATSU-JIN on the line.

The basis for KAIZEN and MUDA-DORI is also “5S”. The purpose of “5S” is to create a good environment for the detection of MUDA in GEMBA.

“5S” elements:

1. SEIRI (Sorting) – eliminate all unnecessary tools, parts.
2. SEITON (Straightening or setting in order to flow or streamlining) – arrange the work, workers, equipment, parts, and instructions in such a way that the work flows free of waste through the value added tasks with a division of labor necessary to meet demand.
3. SEISO (Shining) – clean the workspace and all equipment, and keep it clean, tidy and organized.
4. SEIKETSU (Standardise) – ensure uniform procedures and setups throughout the operation to promote interchangeability.
5. SHITSUKE (Sustain) – make it a way of life. This means commitment. Ensure disciplined adherence to rules and procedures of “5S” to prevent backsliding.

## 6. Conclusions

The company SONY Slovakia belongs to most advanced companies in the area of technology. Based on the strong competition it needs to focus on high-quality products and it needs to achieve the lowest market price. All of this can be achieved only through employees. The sustainable business growth of SONY in Europe is possible to achieve by the environment and culture in which people will be given maximum performance. They must feel strong, encouraged, inspired and motivated. Just enthusiasm, creativity and faith of each individual in the company give a huge chance for commercial superiority now and in the future. Any company can be good, but only the great company is listening employees and customers ideas and then it is subsequently implemented these ideas.

Especially in times of crisis, the company seeks to achieve cost reductions, more effective processes in the company and in certain branches also optimization of the workstation.



Such enthusiasm in the company SONY Slovakia is more than ever. It is very important that the leadership understood the employees view, their opinions and rate of their company loyalty. No company can be successful without their employees. On this basis, it is very important and substantial selection of good and educated people with a desire to work. Using them and of course modern technology company achieves fulfillment of strategic goals.

The essence of Japanese management is to follow and observe improvement of the company using the KAIZEN system. Due to these factors, SONY may become the best, most stable and highest quality producer in the world.

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