



Leadership Styles in Japan

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Abstract A model for leadership types has emerged which shows that leaders generally concentrate on maintaining and improving relationships with other members of the team, or improving the quality of the group product. These leadership styles are respectively referred to as relationship- or task-leadership. The Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scale was developed by Fiedler (1971) to assess which kind of leader an individual was. This paper describes an administration of the LPC scale to students in a Japanese university context. Results show that in this context, students have a strong tendency towards relationship based leadership in which protecting the harmony of the group is prioritized. The implications of this finding for group work in the English language classroom are discussed.

Key words leadership, relationship, task, Least Preferred Coworker
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要旨 リーダーシップのタイプに関わる1つの考え方が現れている。リーダーが、主にチーム内の他のメンバーとの関係の改善に注力するか、それともグループのあげる成果の向上に注力するかを示すものである。これらのリーダーシップ・スタイルの前者はソーシャルリーダーシップ、後者はタスクリーダーシップと呼ばれている。Least Preferred Coworker スケールは、個々のリーダーがどのタイプであるかを見極めるため、Fiedler (1971) によって作成された。日本の大学において実施した、LPC スケールを使用した調査について述べる。その結果、調査を行った環境では、学生たちは、グループ内の協調を維持することを最優先する、人間関係ベースのリーダーシップを好む傾向を強く示している。

キーワード リーダーシップ、ソーシャル、タスク、Least Preferred Coworker (最も苦手なチームメート)

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1. Introduction

Research considering group dynamics has focused on a number of different areas (Forsyth, 2000), but perhaps one of the oldest and most studied paradigms is that of leadership. Leaders are important in most fields of human endeavor and in most groups, even when the role of official leader has not been assigned, an individual will take on a leadership role, guiding the group and taking control (Northouse, 2009). This is known as emergent leadership. The topic of leadership is equally relevant to the fields of business, economics, and education, and a great deal of research has been conducted focusing on who emerges as leader, different kinds of leadership styles, and the effect of leaders on the performance of the group. This paper is interested in the different kinds of potential leadership styles that may exist in a Japanese context. I begin by presenting a brief history of leadership research, before focusing on leadership types, and then presenting the findings of the current study which use the Least Preferred Coworker Scale (Fiedler, 1971a) to investigate the type of leaders that exist in a Japanese student population.

2. Leadership Research

2.1 A Brief History

Forsyth (2010) defined leadership as “the process by which an individual guides others in their collective pursuits, often by organizing, directing, coordinating, supporting, and motivating their efforts” (p.249). Leadership research is now over 100 years old and can be separated into two distinct categories. Some researchers are interested in the process by which individuals come to be leaders of groups and wield such great power and influence, while others are more interested in the impact of differences in leadership styles on the dynamics of the group and ultimately group performance. These two categories can be described respectively as emergent leadership and effective leadership. In this article I focus primarily on leadership types.

Research into emergent leaders has gone through several distinct phases. Initially researchers were convinced that some individuals were “born leaders” and the object of interest was determining which traits were common to leaders, what it was that made some people become leaders, and on key individual differences. After approximately 50 years of this style of inquiry the “trait” approach to leadership fell out of favor with several reviews of the literature claiming to show that there were no shared traits common to leaders (Fiedler, 1971b; Stogdill, 1974). Stogdill (1974) concluded that context determined who becomes a leader and as a result of this, interest in leadership research waned. Using new and more complex statistical procedures, Lord, de Vader, and Alliger (1986) conducted a meta-analysis of studies into leadership and were able to show that there was significant correlation between certain personality traits and emergence as leader. Subsequent studies have supported this idea, leading directly to a rise in the number of trait-based research projects (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

Current research into leadership generally acknowledges a role for both context and traits of individual leaders, and is defined as the interactional approach (Forsyth, 2010, p.255). It is the dynamic interaction of the leader and the context that determines how the group works together and the different roles that are assumed by members. Forsyth (2010) stated that “a leader’s behavior is a function both of the characteristics of the person and the characteristics of the group situation” (p.255), and he claims that this is the prevailing view among researchers in the field.

2.2 Types of Leader

Research has shown that leaders can generally be classified in terms of their focus on people and relationships within the group, or their focus on the task that the group is attempting to complete. The first is known as task-leadership and the second as relationship- or social-leadership (Forsyth 2010). A task-focused leader will clearly define roles and objectives for members, and work to ensure that the group is able to efficiently achieve their goal to a high standard. Conversely, a relationship-focused leader will concentrate on the relations between members of the group, giving encouragement, support, and attempting to reduce conflict.

Fiedler (1971b) developed his contingency theory which suggests that the effectiveness of each style of leadership will depend on the characteristics of the group context, and also the leadership style.

Fiedler (1971a) developed the Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) scale in order to measure whether people are more interested in the task or the social aspects of working with others, and thus to determine their leadership style. Respondents are asked to consider a person whom they have worked with from their own experience, and whom they would least like to work with again. They then have to rate this person on a variety of adjectives. An example question is *pleasant* to *unpleasant*, and the respondent must use an eight point scale to rate the person (See Appendix A for the English version and Appendix B for the Japanese translation). Low scores indicate task-focused leaders, while high scores indicate relationship focused leaders.

Although some studies have been conducted to test the validity of the scale with positive results supporting the assumptions of the questionnaire (Rice, 1978), the LPC has not been used in a Japanese context. Research has shown that the two dimensions of task- and relationship-leadership exist in countries outside of the United States (Ekvall & Arvonen, 2006), but none of the countries considered in their study were from Asia, and therefore the applicability of the distinction in a Japanese context remains unknown. Generally leadership types are confined to these two, and the success of a leader is deemed to be an interaction of the style of the leader and the context of the group (Fiedler, 1971a, 1971b, 1978).

2.3 Leadership in Japan

Azuma (1984) discusses the differences in psychology between the West and Japan, and when discussing leadership in small groups states that “Many of the studies into small group leadership conducted in Japan failed to replicate American results” (p.52). This suggests that the concepts of leadership may be somewhat different, and the way in which group processes operate may also not follow Western patterns. This means that the body of literature available on leadership may be of limited relevance in the current context. Spicer & Fukushima (2007) state that

there has been a relative scarcity of research on leadership in Japan and believe that many of the concepts have been derived in Western contexts and therefore may be of limited relevance. Dorfman et al., (1997) compared six kinds of leadership behavior in the West and Asia, focusing specifically on Japan. They found that overall attitudes and perceptions of leadership showed commonality, with supportive and charismatic behavior, and contingent reward being shared across all of the six countries in the study. Directive and participative behavior, and contingent punishment all showed cultural specificity. They argue that with leadership there are areas of commonality and areas of difference.

Rao, Hashimoto, and Rao, (1997) compared America and Japan focusing on the ways in which managers seek to influence workers. They administered the Profile of Organizational Influence (POIS/M), to 150 managers in a large company in Tokyo. This measure was originally developed and used in an American context and is designed to measure the use of strategies by managers to influence their subordinates. The Japanese managers were asked to state how often they used the strategies, and also asked to list any strategies that they used which were not on the original questionnaire. Qualitative and quantitative analysis were used. Factor analysis was used to compare results found in previous studies in American contexts with the current responses from Japanese managers. Content analysis was used to analyze the additional strategies listed by the Japanese managers.

Results of the factor analysis showed that for the three strategies of assertiveness, appeals to higher authority, and sanctions, the factor loading was similar to that seen in previous studies conducted in America, indicating that these three strategies are common to both contexts. Content analysis of additional strategies showed that they could be described by the strategies of reason, friendliness, assertiveness, and coalition, which are found in the POIS measure. The researchers found that there were a number of strategies that were unique to a Japanese context. Japanese managers called on the firm's authority to influence workers, and focus on subordinate's career development within the company. They also use more subtle methods of communication, and socialize with workers in attempts to influence them.

2.4 Least Preferred Coworker Scale

The Least Preferred Coworker Scale was used to determine the type of leaders in the current study. The original questionnaire (Appendix A) was translated into Japanese (Appendix B) by a professional translator and then checked by two native speakers of Japanese who were familiar with the current research project. The Japanese version was used in this study. It should be noted that this questionnaire has not previously been used in a Japanese context.

The study set out to determine if the participants in the study showed preference for task- or relationship-leadership based on their responses to the Least Preferred Coworker Scale. In the next section I will briefly describe the participants in the current study before presenting the results.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The participants in the study were 78 students (55 male and 23 female students) enrolled in a first year compulsory English communication course of a science department at a high level private university in Western Japan. Age ranges were from 18 to 22, at the start of the study, with 77 first year students and one student who was repeating the course and in his fourth year. All of the participants were native speakers of Japanese. The three classes were majoring in biology, chemistry, and physics. Students could be considered lower intermediate in terms of English proficiency, with average TOEIC scores of 390. Motivation for the English class was quite low, with many students expressing a dislike of English. However students were motivated to pass the class and attendance was high.

3.2 Administration

The Least Preferred Coworker Scale was given to the students online using the website Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), and therefore I was able to ensure that there were no missing responses. The students were given a detailed explanation in Japanese and were asked to read the instructions. They were then

given approximately 10 minutes to complete the Japanese version of the scale (see Appendix B). All of the students were able to complete the measure in well under the allotted time.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Scores for Least Preferred Coworker

When interpreting the results of the LPC scale, Fiedler (1971a) considers scores greater than 73 to indicate relationship-based leaders, scores from 65–72 to indicate those without a strong natural inclination for either kind of leadership, and scores of 64 or less to indicate people who have a task-orientated approach to leadership. The descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1 below, and indicate that although the LPC had a normal distribution, the mean was high, indicating a strong preference for relationship-based leadership among this particular group of students. Figure 1 shows the results for the LPC in this context. Although 78

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Least Preferred Coworker Scale (LPC)

	Least Preferred Coworker Scale
<i>Mean</i>	75.87
<i>Standard Error</i>	.91
95% CI Lower Bound	74.05
95% CI Upper Bound	77.69
<i>Standard Deviation</i>	8.06
Skewness	-.10
SES	.27
Kurtosis	.00
SEK	.54

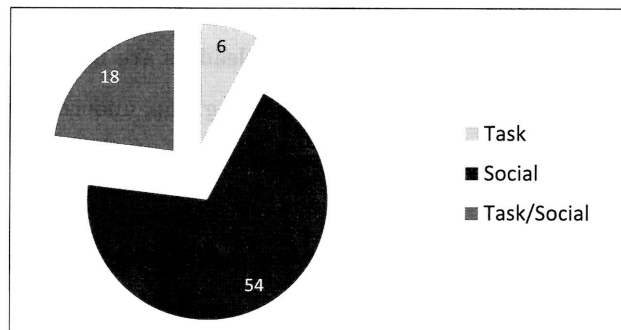


Figure 1. Results of the Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) Scale

students completed the LPC questionnaire, only six received scores below 64, with a further 18 students scoring in the range 65–72, indicating that they are capable of both kinds of leadership. According to the guidelines given by Fiedler (1971a) this suggests that this group of students show a strong inclination towards a relationship focused style of leadership.

4.2 Interpretation of the Results for Leadership Types

The results of the LPC suggest that in this context students are primarily focused on relationships and harmony within the group, and that task completion is not a priority for these students. The fact that only a very small minority of students could be classified as task-based leaders illustrates this clearly. There are several possible interpretations of this.

There is a possibility that in a Japanese context, group harmony takes on added importance. A strong principle at work in Japanese society is that of *awaseru* (fitting in with your surroundings), as outlined in the Japanese proverb, *deru kui wa utareru* (the nail that sticks out gets hit). As stated by Markus and Kitayama (1991, p.229) “self-assertion is not viewed as being authentic, but instead as being immature”. This means that in the English classroom, which served as the context for this study, tasks which are designed to spark lively and heated debate in English may be of limited effectiveness, where maintaining a peaceful work group seems to be of greater importance. One common problem noted when attempting to have students engage in discussion in English in Japan is that students do not really become involved in discussion and are happy to go with the majority decision within the group. Perhaps these results go some way to explaining why students have a tendency not to focus on tasks. If the leaders are not driven to focus on tasks then they will influence other members of the group, undermining any attempt to focus on product. Leaders may be encouraging agreement and therefore limiting discussion.

Although the Least Preferred Coworker measure is designed to be applicable as a general measure of leadership type, it was administered in the context of the English language classroom, and it is possible that this influenced students' responses.

Although these students were science majors and in science generally the product of group work is very important, the majority of tasks which the students engaged in during English communication class were very low-stakes, potentially undermining their importance in the minds of the students. As the teacher, I constantly emphasized the importance of process rather than product, further limiting the degree of importance likely to be placed on achieving the successful conclusion of tasks. These factors may have led students to be heavily focused on maintaining a positive group atmosphere, which in itself is very important when attempting to engage in prolonged discussion in a foreign language.

Another possible explanation of the results is that the students interpretation of the items differs from those in other cultures, and therefore the boundaries by which classification of leader type are made need to be revised for a Japanese context. As mentioned previously, the LPC was designed for an American context, and has not previously been tested in a Japanese context, although research does exist showing some universality in the concepts of leadership (Bass, 1997; Dorfman et al., 1997). The items were translated for the purpose of the current study, and although they were checked by a native-speaker familiar with this research, there is the possibility that items do not function in the same way as their English language equivalents. The LPC has not been used in Japan prior to the current study and therefore its applicability in this context is questionable. Further research including observation is needed to determine whether the results of the survey are supported by demonstrated leadership behavior.

5. Conclusion

Leadership is an important aspect of group dynamics, and emergent leaders are present in business, in sports, and even in the foreign language classroom (Leeming & Cunningham, 2012). Research has shown that leaders show preference in focusing either on the task, or on maintaining the positive atmosphere for the group, and the Least Preferred Coworker scale was designed to measure this preference. Results of the current study indicate that students in this context have a clear tendency

towards relations-based leadership, with task-focused leaders very much in the minority. It is possible that culturally Japanese leaders have a tendency to focus on group relations, although this preference may be confined to this context, where group product is not considered to be of importance, and motivation is generally quite low. Further research is needed to determine if the results of this study are applicable to other contexts within Japan, and to determine the validity of the Least Preferred Coworker scale for assessing leadership styles in Japan.

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APPENDIX A

LEAST PREFERRED COWORKER SCALE (ENGLISH VERSION)

Instructions

Think of all the different people with whom you have ever worked ... in jobs, in social clubs, in student projects, or whatever. Next think of the *one person* with whom you could work least well, that is, the person with whom you had the most difficulty getting a job done. This is the one person (a peer, boss, or subordinate) with whom you would least want to work. Describe this person by circling numbers at the appropriate points on each of the following pairs of bipolar adjectives. Work rapidly. There are no right or wrong answers.

Pleasant	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Unpleasant
Friendly	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Unfriendly
Rejecting	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Accepting
Tense	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Relaxed
Distant	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Close
Cold	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Warm
Supportive	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Hostile
Boring	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Interesting
Quarrelsome	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Harmonious
Gloomy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Cheerful
Open	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Guarded
Backbiting	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Loyal
Untrustworthy	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Trustworthy
Considerate	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Inconsiderate
Nasty	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Nice
Agreeable	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Disagreeable
Insincere	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	Sincere
Kind	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	Unkind

APPENDIX B

LEAST PREFERRED COWORKER SCALE (JAPANESE VERSION)

いちばん苦手なチームメート

質問

あなたがこれまでに一緒に何かを行ったことのある人々について考えてください。この「何か」は、仕事、社交的な集まり、授業でのクラスメートとの共同作業、その他何でもかまいません。次に、その中であなたが最も協力しにくかった（一緒に何かを達成することが最も困難であった）1人の人物について考えてください。つまり、あなたが何かを行うときに、最もチームメート（仲間や上司、部下など）になってほしくない人、ということです。そして、この人物の特徴を、下に示す両極端の性質の間の、あてはまる場所の数字を丸で囲むことで教えてください。考え込まずに、できるだけ急いで教えてください。この質問には、正しい答えや間違った答えはありません。

一緒にいると楽しい	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	一緒にいると不愉快
友好的	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	友好的でない
包容力がない	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	包容力がある
緊張している	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	リラックスしている
よそよそしい	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	親密な
冷たい	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	温かい
協力的	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	敵対的
面白みがない	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	面白みがある
議論好き	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	協調的
性格が暗い	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	性格が明るい
率直な	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	自分の考えをはっきり言わない
陰口を言う	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	誠実な
信頼できない	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	信頼できる
思いやりがある	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	思いやりがない
意地悪な	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	感じが良くて魅力的
人当たりが良い	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	人当たりが悪い
誠意がない	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8	誠意がある
親切的な	8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1	不親切的な