論文

Manga and Diversity Management in Japan
Understanding the Socio-Business Context for the Development of a Research Framework

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In recent years, an increasing number of manga-creation companies in Japan have been producing manga focused on diversity for clients, including companies, government agencies, and other organizations. However, there is still limited understanding of the role these companies play in shaping diversity messaging (narratives) as part of their clients' diversity management strategies. To address this gap, this paper—the first in a series—aims to establish a research framework for studying how manga is used in diversity management. This paper specifically examines how governmental and corporate entities respond to diversity in the context of a perceived workforce crisis driven by a declining labor population.

The analysis reveals that the Japanese government ultimately prioritizes economic performance over social equity in response to such crises. This approach often contrasts with government rhetoric on the importance of diversity, sending mixed messages to companies. For companies without proactive diversity initiatives, the usual response is to mimic the actions of others (a mimetic isomorphic process) when they lack solutions of their own. The paper concludes by suggesting methods for exploring alternative perspectives and mindsets on diversity.

Keywords: social crisis, diversity management, economic performance, social equality, mindset

1. Introduction

Over the past several years, the number of companies specializing in creating manga for businesses, government agencies, and other organizations has steadily grown, with many focusing on diversity-related themes. To create such manga, these companies typically conduct fact-finding missions to design realistic scenarios that form the basis of the stories crafted jointly with the manga artists[1]. Client companies use this manga in various diversity-related educational initiatives, ranging from general communication of corporate diversity policies to training programs targeting new recruits[2]. In doing so, manga-creation companies play an integral role in developing educational and promotional materials that shape diversity messages conveyed to stakeholders.

For instance, on the website of JOBcomi Co., Ltd (https://jobcomi.com), there is a

cyber portfolio[3] of work done for some of its clients in advertising/promotion, education and training manuals, recruitment, public relations, and other areas of corporate operations. The cyber portfolio lists an example of manga produced for the Japanese civil engineering and construction consultancy company, CTI Engineering Co., Ltd[4]. The manga produced is used to communicate to CTI Engineering employees the company's stance regarding diversity development over three major themes: communication, work style, and *ikubosu*-style leadership[5].

Looking at the websites of manga-creation companies provides only limited insight into the role these companies play in developing diversity messaging as part of their clients' diversity management efforts. Furthermore, it remains unclear how this manga is utilized in diversity-related activities, such as awareness, education, or training, and to what extent its effectiveness in conveying diversity messages to employees is evaluated. To gain meaningful insights through research, a clear framework is essential to guide the discovery process.

However, it is first necessary to understand the context within which the dynamics of pursuing diversity activities and initiatives unfold. As Japan confronts the challenges of a shrinking workforce, this moment presents an opportunity to examine the approaches to diversity in this context. What have been the initial responses to this perceived crisis, and how have these responses evolved? What are the mindsets and dynamics driving these responses? Finally, how should these mindsets be evaluated from a diversity perspective? These are the key questions explored in this paper, the first part of a series in the development of a research framework to study the role of manga in diversity management initiatives in Japan.

2. Perceptions of a Social Crisis

Throughout the past three decades, Japan has faced a number of social and related economic issues that have raised the importance of diversity for companies. The issue that has garnered the most attention as of 2024 stems from recent statistics, which show that the number of workers companies can draw upon is dwindling. This has been brought about by a combination of the aging Japanese population and a declining birth rate. The World Economic Forum (Fleming 2019), using data from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (Japan) (2020), reported that Japan's working-age population was 65.3 million in 2017. This number is expected to shrink to 60.82 million by 2025 and further decline to 52.45 million by 2040—a drop of nearly 20%.

Projections of Japan's declining birth rate drew significant attention from both politicians and business leaders. Concerned about its far-reaching effects on society, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made the issue a central focus of his policies in 2023. Speaking to lawmakers, he warned, "Japan is standing on the verge of whether we can continue to function as a society. … Focusing attention on policies regarding children and child-rearing is an issue that cannot wait and cannot be postponed" (Wright 2023:para. 7-8). Kishida's decisive stance reflected the urgency of tackling the demographic crisis head-on.

The independent think tank Recruit Works Institute released a study into what the

shrinking workforce means for Japanese society from a business perspective. The report titled "Future Predictions 2040 in Japan: The Dawn of the Limited-Labor Supply Society" raised the alarm that a limited labor supply will lead to businesses unable to provide what it calls "lifestyle maintenance services"[6]. These services "… include delivering items we order and disposing of our trash, as well as disaster recovery, removing snow from our roads, childcare services, long-term care services, and more. We benefit from these services on a daily basis, each and every one of them born from the labor of irreplaceable individuals" (Works Future Predictions 20XX Project 2023:2). The report notes that, even in 2023, Japan was already facing a shortage of workers in a number of industries including transportation and logistics, healthcare, social support services and hospitality, and manufacturing.

For some sectors of industry and regions in Japan, the shrinking workforce is not an issue for the future; the consequences are occurring right now. A December 2024 newspaper article in the Asahi Shimbun[7] highlighted the struggles that a "worker crunch" has for a manufacturer in regional Japan. The Kashiki Seishi factory that produces disinfectant goods and toilet sanitary products in Ino, Kochi Prefecture, is turning to automation as a partial solution to counter the lack of workers. The factory has three machines but one is not used because the factory is unable to secure enough employees to run and maintain it. The factory needs to use all three machines to cover expenses and stay in business.

The initial reactions from the government and business sectors highlight the perception that the shrinking workforce poses a critical challenge to Japanese society. For the government, the urgency of the situation is evident in its prioritization of this issue as a central focus of governance. From a business perspective, the concern lies in how workforce shortages could fundamentally impact companies' ability to deliver and maintain services. For companies already struggling with a lack of available workers, it has become a matter of daily survival. Examining the responses from both the government and businesses during this time of perceived crisis is crucial to understanding the implications for diversity management.

3. Understanding the Governmental Response

Kishida's government saw the strain a drop in birthrates would have on Japan's social, health, and economic systems and called for immediate action through a policy Kishida dubbed 'new capitalism'[8]. Nagase explains that "… 'new capitalism' emphasizes human capital investment and the increased role of women in the economy, as well as the increased role of men in family care". (Nagase 2024:1)

At a broader level, the approach used in the Japanese government's 'new capitalism' policy involves major reforms to social structures that put women who work at a disadvantage and attempt to encourage men to take time off from work to share child-rearing responsibilities. This latest policy is a push for social reform that involves a shift from a breadwinner-housewife model to an earner-and-carer model (Nagase 2024). Considering the attitudes found in Japanese society, particularly the persistent male-breadwinner model of thinking (Ishiguro 2022), the tacit values embedded in the

Japanese policy of 'new capitalism' inevitably place the burden on women.

Research highlights how deeply the male-breadwinner model continues to influence work and lifestyle decisions, even in recent times. A 2024 study by Sekijima and Abe (2024) examined the choices wives make when their husbands are required to relocate to a different region—known in Japanese as "*tenkin*"—which often necessitates a change in residence. Essentially, the decisions were about co-residence and what to do for employment. The study found a significant difference in decision-making between couples who have a child or not. For the couple with children, there was greater likelihood that the wife would either give up on finding a new job after relocation or not relocate and live with the husband at all. The reason given for choosing not to work involved:

> … time constraints due to household chores and childcare may in itself become a reason why wives are forced to leave work after migration. That is because the migration to a new place of residence may impose an additional household chores burden. If a change in the circumstances, such as increased inconvenience for household chores and childcare due to locational factors, causes an additional burden for a couple with a young child and if the wife bears the additional burden, the wife may be forced to leave work so that she can concentrate on household chores and childcare. (Sekijima and Abe 2024:16)

The government and businesses in Japan are, as a matter of fact, grappling with the complexities of gender issues, particularly those rooted in systemic discrimination against women within social and corporate structures. The persistence of male-breadwinner ideology has, in many cases, inadvertently allowed such discrimination to continue, perpetuated by government policies and corporate practices. Examining how Japanese government officials and corporate managers have addressed women's issues thus far can provide valuable insights into the problematic areas that need attention and the shifts in thinking required to foster meaningful change through diversity management.

Past governments have sought to promote the advancement of women in the workplace through various policy initiatives presented under different catchy titles. One of the most notable of these, widely recognized by academics and business experts globally, was 'womenomics'[9], a key component of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's government's broader economic strategy known as 'Abenomics'. Although the policy had all the language of bringing about gender equality in Japan, critics who traced the underlying political strategies and thinking offer a very different take.

According to Takeda (2018) "womenomics", was developed by investment bank strategists, to promote increasing women's participation in the workforce as a strategy to boost national economic growth. In the process of tabling and passing the policies before government, the policies went through a process of critical feedback from opposition parties and academic experts. However, because of the strong traditionalist leanings of Prime Minister Abe, the policy had strong undertones of the "productivist paradigm". The term 'productivist paradigm' was coined by Holliday (2000) and

describes a characteristic feature of social policy in East Asia. It emphasizes the prioritization of economic growth and productivity over welfare provision or social equality. As the guiding mindset for Abe's womenomics, the policy was a tool to support and enhance economic objectives over the promotion of gender equality itself. Chasanah succinctly describes womenomics as merely a "… token policy aimed at addressing labor shortages" (Charanah 2024:4). This situation can be aptly described as 'old wine in new bottles,' as the government appears to have defaulted—perhaps unintentionally—to a conventional yet ineffective approach to addressing diversity issues.

4. The Nature of the Business Responses

Discussions about 'diversity' in business have, for the most part, been solely focused on the groups of people that have been traditionally underrepresented in the workplace. In speaking about the recent labor crisis, The Recruit Works Institute pointed out in their report "… whenever the labor shortage in Japan is discussed, three solutions invariably surface: senior citizens, women, and foreign citizens" (Works Future Predictions 20XX Project 2023:33). The go-to, default position for companies is to focus on minority groups such as women and workers from overseas, which is nothing new.

A committee set up by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (雇用の分野における女性活躍推進に関する検討会 2024) released a report on the 8th of August, 2024, on the advancement of women's participation in the workplace. Expert members of the study group pointed to slower-than-projected advancement of women in companies and proposed newer measures to counter this. Over the past two decades, corporate diversity initiatives have consistently emphasized the inclusion and advancement of women. However, as the committee points out, despite this long-standing focus, there has been little measurable progress in achieving meaningful improvement or substantial outcomes for women. Experts, managers, and women themselves all agree that this issue must be addressed. The real concern lies in how this advancement is pursued and implemented.

When companies in Japan started to establish their first Diversity Development Offices (DDO) in the early 2000s, the focus was on women. It is how the DDOs came to be widespread and focused on women that is of particular interest. On the 15th of October, 2004, Carlos Ghosn announced the establishment of a DDO in Nissan. The first step for the Office was "… to increase the participation of female employees in the company's decision-making"[10]. Over the following couple of years, many other large Japanese companies also established DDOs in what could be seen as a mimetic isomorphic process (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Ghosn's style of management was seen as one to imitate because of his success in bringing Nissan from over 2 trillion yen of debt to full profitability within just a couple of years[11].

However, as is the case with imitating a competitor's core competency (Prahalad and Hamel 1990), simply copying the way another company sets up and operates a DDO without fully understanding the unique state of the organization does not necessarily lead to success. Companies that are astute and aware of the nature of

diversity issues that are particular to their organization are normally proactive in their approach to diversity management. Companies that attempt to imitate are more often than not reactive, which can result in the introduction of practices that offer no advantage or are even detrimental to their organization. People in these companies imitate because they usually want to realize the same success as the company they have set out to imitate. In other words, it is the mindset towards diversity management that is of most importance. It is in trying to change this mindset that the Recruit Works Institute refers to when they point out that the default, go-to solution focuses only on minority groups.

5. In Search of a New Diversity Mindset

   The attempt to change the mindset about how to approach issues of minorities in the workplace led to the birth of the concept of diversity management in the United States. Comparing the experience that shaped the approach to diversity management in the United States with that in Japan provides insight into how to move forward.
   The widely recognized founder of the diversity movement in the United States, R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.[12], writing about the context in which his concept of diversity management was born, observed:

> When we ask how we're doing on race relations, we inadvertently put our finger on what's wrong with the question and with the attitude that underlies affirmative action. So long as racial and gender equality is something we grant to minorities and women, there will be no racial and gender equality. What we must do is create an environment where no one is advantaged or disadvantaged, an environment where "we" is everyone. What the traditional approach to diversity did was to create a cycle of crisis, action, relaxation, and disappointment that companies repeated over and over again without ever achieving more than the barest particle of what they were after. (Thomas 1990:109)

   Thomas is referring to the continued heated debate at the time in the United States over affirmative action and civil rights laws first enacted at the beginning of the 1960s. The law came about because of the Civil Rights Movement (Leonard 1990). The Civil Rights Movement is a term used to describe events in US history commencing in the mid-1950s, in which African-Americans sought "… political equality and the betterment of social and economic conditions" (Button 1989:3). Thomas wanted to get beyond the stalemate that came from trying the same approach to handling issues that arose in race relations within companies. The approach to diversity was creating a crisis-action-relaxation-disappointment cycle that managers were not able to overcome.
   A similar dynamic is unfolding in how the government addresses gender issues in the Japanese workplace. The latest "crisis" in this recurring cycle is the threat posed by a declining workforce population to the sustainability of Japanese society. The "action" is the government's push for a 'new capitalism' policy supposedly aiming to increase

women's participation in the Japanese workplace. Companies that imitate diversity practices without understanding what they are imitating often default to the only 'diversity management' they know but do not fully understand. However, the discussion thus far has suggested, the policies are fraught with problems. For companies who only imitate diversity practices not aware of what they are really imitating, they default to the only "diversity management" they know but don't understand properly. This perpetuates a cycle that results in little or no improvement. A fresh, more thoughtful approach to diversity management is urgently needed.

There are Japanese managers who have insights into the origins of these mindsets and the types of thinking that could shift perspectives to a different paradigm. Yayoi Masuda, Head of Human Resources for the Asia-Pacific region in the headquarters of NIKE, said in an interview with The Recruit Works Institute:

> 「日本企業における「日本人が主流」という意識は、少数派を受け入れて「あげる」という発想の罠に陥らせる。会議に参加させて「あげよう」、情報をオープンにして「あげよう」、活躍のステージを作って「あげよう」……その仕組み自体は必要だが、その視点では、ユニークさという価値を発揮する基盤はできにくい。

> 「ここで重要になるのが、インクルージョンという発想です。私の定義で言えばインクルージョンは"How I Feel"。たとえ彼、彼女が少数派であっても『自分はこの組織に居場所がある』という感覚が抱けるかどうか。その感覚を持てたとき、初めて『ここでユニークな価値を発揮してもいいんだ』と思えます」。」（増田、入倉 2009：39）

An interpretation of what Masuda is saying would be:

> Because of the unconscious, unquestioned assumptions of the majority of employees based on a Japanese way of thinking/outlook, a condescending pattern of thinking occurs towards minorities. This thinking is what Masuda refers to "あげる" (*ageru* = giving). 'Giving' the opportunity to attend meetings, 'giving' access to information, the opportunity to achieve success achieved by 'giving' conditions to make this happen. This sort of mechanism, although necessary, fails to build the foundation that realizes the value that comes from uniqueness. What is most important is the thinking or perspective that comes from inclusion. Here Matsuda proposes a "how-I-feel" definition for inclusion. For example, it is essential for even minority employees to feel a sense of "居場所" (*ibasho[13]*) in the organization. "With this sort of feeling, employees can for the first time think that 'it is okay to express (my) own uniqueness here in this company'".

Masuda is unpacking what *ibasho* means in the context of the workplace. *Ibasho* is a complex Japanese concept that, for brevity, can be described as a "place" where one feels psychologically at ease and can act and be who they really are. It is a concept that

warrants deep consideration in a separate paper, as it illustrates what a Japanese perspective on diversity can contribute to the understanding of diversity management, thereby advancing the concept further.

6. Conclusion

The Recruit Works report provides some insight into what the institute's team sees as the real mindset needed. The report states, "… the major premise is to change Japanese society to an environment where anyone can flourish at their best" (Works Future Predictions 20XX Project 2023:33). This is not a statement that is meant to stand on its own. It is used to summarize the practical, hands-on actions and is based on extensive research in the field.

In his seminal book "Beyond race and gender: unleashing the power of your total work force by managing diversity" Thomas says the following:

> The notion of Beyond Race and Gender does not call for ignoring race and gender factors, but for recognizing that they are part of a larger, even more complex, picture and that sustainable progress with these issues in corporations will have to be based on the managerial perspective. Further, the notion does not call for abandoning the traditional affirmative action perspective grounded in motives of legal, moral, and social responsibility, but rather for the expansion of this perspective. (Thomas:xv).

Thomas' was encouraging managers to move *beyond* a mindset focused exclusively on minority groups. He was not calling for the issues and problems faced by minority groups to be disregarded. In fact, as the above quote indicates, Thomas believed that the efforts in affirmative action needed to be expanded. He saw the solution in broadening the focus to the larger corporate "picture". Managers need to shift their mindset to focus on the broader organizational context within which minorities work, rather than focusing solely on the minorities themselves.

As demonstrated in this paper, this is precisely the mindset that Japan needs at this time. By examining the models and approaches to diversity management developed by Thomas and his peers[14], while using Japan's social context as a backdrop, we may uncover the approaches we are searching for. In the process, we could also gain new insights that contribute to the ongoing evolution of diversity management models. This will be the focus of the next paper in this series as we develop a framework to study the use of manga as part of a company's diversity efforts.

<Endnotes>

[1] See for example, https://www.seiundo.co/manga

[2] Some examples can be found at https://tiewa.co.jp/comics

[3] For companies that offer paid services to other companies in Japan, it is common to find websites and various marketing brochures listing what is called 制作実績 (*seisaku jisseki)* or what could be termed in English as "portfolio of work". I have used the term "cyber portfolio" to note how companies such as JOBcomi feature their portfolio on their website. For example:

https://jobcomi.com/gallery/

[4] Refer to https://jobcomi.com/gallery/detail2_024.html

[5] *Ikubosu* (イクボス), as it is defined by the founding NPO, Fathering Japan, is "… 職場で共に働く部下・スタッフのワークライフバランス（仕事と生活の両立）を考え、部下のキャリアと人生を応援しながら、組織の業績も結果を出しつつ、自らも仕事と私生活を楽しむことができる上司（経営者・管理職）です" and translates as "… a manager (executive or supervisor) who considers the work-life balance (integration of work and personal life) of their subordinates and staff, supports their careers and lives, achieves organizational results, and also enjoys both their own work and personal life. (Translation mine).

[6] Specifically, The Recruit Works Institute suggests short-term solutions to help companies implement structural changes, aiming to reduce labor demand and increase the labor supply. The solutions involve four areas: (1) Mechanization and automation involves the use technology, including AI, to automate manual tasks to free employees up to perform more meaningful work. (2) 'Workish acts', which involve an activity outside of the primary job that may be beneficial to society. (3) Small jobs by senior citizens, where the demands of the job come with a limited burden, fit in with other life and community activities, and are financially viable. (4) 'Waste reform' for work or the reduction in needless duties at work.

[7] REUTERS. 2024, December 20. "Mind the labor gap: Worker crunch piles pressure on small-town Japan". *The Asahi Shimbun*. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15557990. Accessed on January 2, 2025.

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[9] The Government of Japan. 2014. "Womenomics Is Pushing Abenomics Forward: The Government of Japan" *JapanGov*. https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2014/summer2014/womenomics_is_pushing_abenomics_forward.html. Accessed on January 6, 2025.

[10] NISSAN Motor Corporation. 2004, October 14. "Nissan Establishes Diversity Development Office: First Objective Is to Increase Participation of Women in Decision-Making" NISSAN Global Newsroom. https://global.nissannews.com/en/releases/041015-02. Accessed on January 4, 2025.

[11] As can be seen in the number of bestsellers published in Japanese about Carlos Ghosn's management style at Nissan. For example, 日経ビジネス編．2000．『ゴーンが挑む 7 つの病：日産の企業改革』 東京：日経 BP 社．

[12] To appreciate the role Thomas had in establishing diversity management refer to following obituary: Wilkie, Dana. 2013, May 22. "Roosevelt Thomas Jr., Pioneer in Workplace Diversity, Dies: Former SHRM Board Member Was among First Thought Leaders on Diversity Management". SHRM/Workplace News & Trends/Inclusion & Diversity. Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/inclusion-diversity/roosevelt-thomas-jr-pioneer-workplace-diversity-dies. Accessed on July 23, 2024.

[13] 居場所 (*ibasho*) is a complex Japanese concept which, for brevity, can be thought of as a "place" where one can feel psychologically at ease and can act and be who they really are.

[14] A peer of Thomas who contributed to the development of a diversity management model, especially during the early stages of the 1990s, was Taylor Cox Jr. An example of his work is Cox, Taylor Jr. 2001. *Creating the Multicultural Organization: A Strategy for Capturing the Power of Diversity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

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日本におけるマンガとダイバーシティ経営
—研究枠組みのビジネス社会的背景—

ダレン・マクドナルド

　この数年間、日本企業、政府機関、NPO などでは、ダイバーシティをテーマとしたマンガが商業マンガ制作会社と共に開発・制作されている。しかし、ダイバーシティのナラティブ（マンガの内容・コンテンツ）の生成プロセスや対象読者、活用方法、関与主体の役割に関する研究はほとんど見られない。連載論文の第 1 回では、研究を行うための枠組みを開発するにあたり、企業や政府がダイバーシティに起因する課題にどのように対応し、その対応がどのような性質（マインドセット）を持つかに焦点を当てる。

　分析の結果、政府の対応には社会的公平性よりも経済的パフォーマンスを優先する傾向があることが明らかになった。このようなアプローチは、多様性の重要性を強調する政府のレトリックとしばしば対立し、企業に対して矛盾したメッセージを発信することになる。また、ダイバーシティへの積極性に欠ける企業は、解決策が明確でない場合、他企業の行動を模倣する（模倣的同形化プロセス）傾向がある。最後に、ダイバーシティに関する新たな視点を探るための方法論を検討する。

キーワード：社会的危機、ダイバーシティ経営、経済的成果、社会的平等、マインドセット