

# Nothing Comes from Nothing: Can Innovation Exist Without Creative Employees? Japan's Case

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## INTRODUCTION

From the first year of negative economic growth in 1998 after the long economic growth, which was followed by the economic bubble, today's Japanese economy is described as part of "the lost 20 years" as its economy has stagnated (Matsumura, 2019). (Some journalists have argued that the economy is now reaching the "lost 30 years" (Omae 2018)). After some impatience by businesses about the Japanese government's various ineffectual economic stimuli, generating innovation has become more of a national project. Many governmental advocates have concluded that innovations in organizations are the key to invigorating the economy again. The allegations became more conspicuous after the Global Competitiveness Report showed a decrease in Japan's innovation rank from 14<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup>, the next year (2016) (World Economic Forum, 2016). Another indicator, the Global Innovation Index ranked Japan at 65<sup>th</sup> for innovation efficiency in 2016 (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2016). After the extensive report became available, government officials and academics convinced Japanese corporations that accelerating innovation is imperative to resurrect the Japanese economy (Yano, 2016; Japan Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2016, 2017; Japan Cabinet Office, 2018; 2019; Hashimoto, 2019).

For the business field, seeking innovation is not a new trend. Since creative efforts and corporate performances have been shown to be positively co-related (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Policastro & Gardner, 1999; Hirakimoto & Watada, 2012), various efforts have been tried in different fields, even in Japan. For example, in 2006, the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai), whose policy proposals have the leverage to influence government policy, issued documents called "Japan's Innovation Strategy." The main purpose of the documents is to show the Association' determination to

help corporations be creative by building an open, diverse, and attractive society to make innovation prosper (Keizai Doyukai, 2006). Nevertheless, the documents did not quiet the argument. The overwhelming media coverage that was demonizing Japan's lack of innovation as the source of economic stagnation accelerated the discourse on innovation in businesses out of frustration of not reaching its economic growth target (Nikkei, 1995, 2018; Nikkei Business Daily, 1998, 2019; Jackson & De-broux, 2008; Onishi, 2013; Saito, 2015; Iwato, 2019). Even the government campaigned to enhance the nation's innovation from educational to corporate sectors (Motohashi, 2004; Japan Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication of Japan, 2016).

Despite the national commitments to promote innovation to pull out of the economic downturn, Japan has not experienced any noticeable progress in innovation. The fact has accelerated the argument among researchers and the media that the Japanese way of management may be destroying the creativity of employees (Hayashi & Fukushima, 2003; Murayama, 2006; Yamawaki, 2006; Nikkei, 2019; Hashimoto, 2019). These claims are based on the premise that creative people exist in organizations, but management and its corporate culture is destroying them. This paper casts doubt on the premise. What if no creative people exist in corporations in the first place? This paper presents the following hypothesis:

- A. No innovation has existed in Japanese corporations for more than 20 years.
- B. If creative people were working in a corporation with cogent management, innovations would be seen.
- C. Hence, no creative people were working in the corporation in the first place.

To examine the above reasoning, this paper focuses on the selection process for personnel to understand the variety of employees that make up organiza-

tions. First, the hiring criteria of Japanese corporations (entrance) are compared to the firing cases (exit). By looking at both sides, we should see if corporations have a propensity to include or exclude particular employee types. These particular characteristics are then compared to the personal traits of creative people, as revealed by various research studies. By comparing the personal characteristics of employees at the entrance and exit of their employment, this paper will clarify whether or not Japanese corporations employ creative people. The defect of the Japanese management style has been the subject of the management research for a long time. Instead, I focus only on the recruitment criteria to see what kind of employee Japanese corporations are seeking. Then, by showing the rigid tendency of corporations toward specific employee characteristics, I hypothesize that the corporations' favoritism toward particular employees can lead to a lack of innovation among Japanese corporations.

## THE GROUNDS FOR GENERATION OF INNOVATION

Creativity is significant in changing the perspectives towards newly adapted ideas for problem-solving, new findings in science, movements in art, inventions, and social and economic improvements (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). For innovation, however, creativity is more than just significant; it is imperative. Many researchers agree that for making innovation happen, one's creativity is indispensable above all else (Woodman et al., 1993; Amabile et al., 1996; McCreedy, 2004; Hane, 2004; Hashimoto, 2004; Hayakawa, 2004).

Innovation is comprised of the changes in processes and the production of ideas and things that are turned into something that is economically valuable (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Feist, 1999; Shimizu, 2019). Nevertheless, creativity needs to occur in the right environment to reach the level of innovation, because it can easily be influenced by its surroundings, including culture, management styles, and team members (Pierce & Delbecq, 1976; Amabile, 1988, 1998; Swailes, 2000; Day et al., 2001; Sethi et al., 2002; Santanen et al., 2004; Mclean, 2005; Tuori & Vilen, 2011; Coleman, 2013; Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Lovric & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2018; Pan et al., 2018; Bogers et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2019; Shao et al., 2019; Vasconcellos et al., 2019). Other researchers have concluded that an organization's creativity and ability to innovate depends on management (Watson, Jr., 1965; Nik-

kei Business Daily, 1998; Woodman et al., 1993; Amabile et al., 1996; Caniels & Rietzschel, 2013), organizational settings (Amabile, 1998; Williams & Yang, 1999; Guo et al., 2017), and culture (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Aman et al., 2018). In other words, creativity can easily be destroyed by the environment. In a corporation, for example, the teammates and the managerial people may lack the tolerance to foster creative ideas at an embryonic stage, which could hinder the progress of creativity (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Koh & Leung, 2019; Mueller et al., 2012; Wang & Nickerson, 2017; Berg, 2019). Understandably, creative individuals may be unable to express their possibly innovative and novel ideas to group members, which can permit the creative idea to be ignored (Elfenbein et al., 2010; Baer, 2012; Gurbuz et al., 2016).

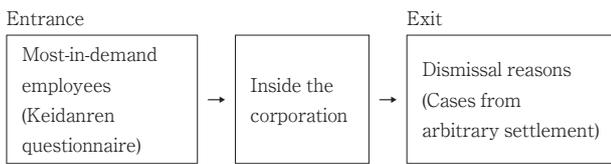
In this way, the managerial approach for leading creativity into innovation has become one of the central subjects among practitioners and researchers since the 1990s (Christensen, 1997; Eisenberg, 1999; Business Week, 2005; Simonton, 2010; O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2016; Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017; Luring & Klitmoller, 2017; Lu et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2017; Xu et al., 2019). For creativity to reach the light of day, the place in which the creative people are working needs to embrace the work with open-mindedness. Other areas can then allow the creative outputs to thrive, and eventually, innovation will be realized (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Martindale, 1999; Policastro & Gardner, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Williams & Yaung, 1999; Baer, 2012; Argote & Miron-Spector, 2011). In general, a domain that can embrace creativity is a requirement for innovation.

However, the approach only from its surroundings for innovation is only appropriate if there were creative people in an organization as a premise. Many studies show that the mere presence of creativity does not necessarily lead to innovation. Nevertheless, without creative people, there is no possibility for innovation. Thus, this paper casts doubt on the premise of creativity management research: what if there are no creative people in an organization in the first place?

## METHOD AND MATERIALS

To understand whether or not Japanese corporations are sufficiently tolerant to maintain creative people on staff, this paper analyzes data for both the hiring and firing processes.

FIGURE 1  
Overall Scheme for the Research



**Entrance**

At the entrance side, this paper uses the results from the questionnaire conducted by the leading federation of Japanese corporations, Keidanren (Japan Business Federation), a comprehensive economic organization with 1,412 members (as of April 1, 2019). The member companies are representative of Japan, and the federation includes most of the publicly listed corporations with assets above 100 million Japanese yen (Japan Business Federation, 2019).

In 2004, during the economic downturn, Keidanren began an annual questionnaire asking its member corporations about the process and criteria used to recruit new college graduates. The data has been available from fiscal year 2004 to 2018. (The Japanese fiscal year starts on April 1 and ends on March 31.) In the questionnaire, respondents are asked about their employee qualities that are most in-demand. The questionnaire contains from 20 to 26 items, depending on the year, and each member company can write their own answers if they wish. Member companies choose five of the most likely, in-demand characteristics for recruitment. The following list shows the Japanese corporations' choice of most in-demand characteristics for their employees (in alphabetical order).

Communication capability	Name of the college
Cooperative	Number of licenses
Creativity	Others
Empathy	Overseas experience
Expertness	Potential capacity
Flexibility	Problem-solver
Foreign language skills	Responsible
GPA	Sense of ethics
Have general knowledge	Subject in college
Honest	Tolerant in high stress
Initiative	Trustworthy
Internship	Vocational pride for the field
Leadership	Volunteer/Club activities
Logical	Willingness to take on new challenges

In this paper, the above list of characteristics is re-organized to show the interannual results. By doing so, the corporations' tendencies in the hiring process will be revealed.

**Exit**

To examine the data at the exit side, this paper looks at the cases of labor-management disputes. Because every case is highly confidential, detailed background information is not readily available. Nevertheless, in 2012, an incorporated government administrative agency, the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (JILPT), released some information about the employment termination cases, including some dialogue from both sides (i.e., the company and an employee). The dialogues were coded using the grounded theory approach (GTA) to see if categorization can reveal management's preferences for their employees.

The JILPT precisely gathers raw data from the labor-dispute-arbitrary department under the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare of Japan. The data includes dialogues, either a corporation / arbiter, or an employee / arbiter, or both. The JILPT accessed 1,144 of the total number of cases 8,457 nationally. For the purpose of this paper, I sorted out some cases from the 1,144, using the following criteria for the case description:

- a) contains detailed dialogue from both sides,
- b) shows that the dispute is not due to the employee's physical problems (age, disability, illness, etc.),
- c) is not due to the corporation's financial difficulties,
- d) is with a Japanese employee,
- e) is with a full-time employee.

After applying the criteria, 124 cases remained. Of the 124 cases, all involved actions taken by employees who were not satisfied with the employer's rationalization for their job termination. Therefore, the dialogues contained the employers' motives for the final decision to terminate the employee and their dissatisfaction with the employee and their general expectations. In scrutinizing the dialogues, the GTA was used to categorize each dialogue before it was labeled. From the final labeling, the employers' perspectives about their employees can be seen. Since the raw data was written in Japanese, I used both Japanese and English GTA textbooks for coding (Saiki-Craighill, 2015; Saldana, 2016). The coding was performed in Japanese, and only the final labeling was translated into English by the researcher.

**Personal Traits of Creativity**

The only consensus researchers have reached about the characteristics of creativity is its complicatedness. Creativity can be defined as the ability to generate not only a novel, original and adaptive act, idea and product, but also any change in the process of problem-solution and strategy, from individual to business and social levels (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Feist, 1999; Martindale, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Simonton, 2010; Hirakimoto & Watada, 2012). Although some researchers have reached a consensus on the definition, the method of measuring individual creativity is still an open question (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Feist, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999; Plucker & Renzull, 1999; Policastro & Gardner, 1999). To further complicate the measuring of creativity, even highly creative people do not generate creativity on their own and creativity requires sociocultural and interpersonal interactions (Csikszentmihaly, 1996; Williams & Yang, 1999; Policastro & Gardner, 1999). Thus, the environment that surrounds creative people exerts a significant influence. Moreover, the characteristics of creative people cannot easily be generalized (Gruber & Wallace, 1999). Still, researchers have mentioned a number of traits and tendencies that appear regularly among creative people (Puccio & Grivas, 2009).

Psychologist Dr. Gregory J. Feist (1999) argued that certain personality dispositions are relatively correlated to creative achievement in art and science. Although admitting that his research does not reflect outside influences, the traits and personality of creative people do matter, if not from causality, then in terms of on creative outcomes (pp. 273, 289-290). Feist (1999) summarized the consistent personality traits of creative people from various creativity research literature, especially in the arts and sciences (p. 273). The following list shows the personality traits associated with scientifically creative people (Feist, 1999, pp. 280-282):

Although Feist (1999) described personality traits of those in both the arts and sciences, for the purpose of this research, only the personality traits connected to scientific creativity are considered. Feist (1999) indicated artists as “painters, sculptors, cinematographers, photographers, architects, writers, poets, musicians, singers, dancers, [and] actors” (p. 275). In contrast, scientists included “professionals and students in natural science, biological science, social science, engineering, invention, or math” (p. 279). With regards to this research, which examines the types of employees sought by Japanese organizations, the classification of artistically creative peo-

achievement oriented
aloof
ambitious
argumentative
arrogant
asocial
assertive
curious
dominant
driven
emotionally invested in intellectual work
flexible in thought
had more initiative
hostile
independent
intelligent
introverted
less affiliative
less likely to judge self and others
non-conforming
open to experience
rebellious
relatively happy
self-confident
self-sufficient
sensitive
unconventional thought process

(From Feist’s 1999 list)

ple is not usually part of the general job-hunting market.

**Comparing the Three Components**

By reorganizing the data for the three components (entrance, exit, and creative people), indicating the characteristics of the people, a comparison can be made of their similarities and differences. For the comparison, base characteristics are used from the Japanese corporations’ most in-demand human resource characteristics. From the comparisons, the aim is to determine whether or not Japanese corporations prefer or avoid certain types of individuals as employees and whether or not creative people are left within the organization.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Entrance: Rigid Desire for the Same Type of Employee with little Interest for Creative People**

Table 1 shows the responses to the question about the most in-demand traits for employees. The data

Fiscal Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Communication capability	68.3	75	75.1	81.7	79.5	76.6	81.6	80.2	82.6	86.6	82.8	85.6	87	83	82	82.4
Willingness to take on new challenges	58	56.6	52.9	53.7	49.4	51.5	48.4	50.2	54.5	54.8	52.9	54	46	51.6	51.7	48.9
Initiative	45.7	50.4	52.5	49.6	51.6	55.2	60.6	62.1	60.3	64.9	61.1	60.1	63.8	61.8	60.7	64.3
Cooperative	41.5	45.4	48.7	53	53	56.1	50.3	55	49.8	51.8	48.2	46.3	49.1	49.5	47	47
Honest	37.9	34.3	39.1	36.1	42.4	40	38.9	36.3	34.2	41	40.3	44.4	43.8	44.8	44.2	43.4
Responsible	37.8	33.9	37.7	31.7	33	36.6	32.9	26.9	24.8	27.6	28.1	27.4	24.2	24.5	23.3	22.1
Potential capacity	32.2	28.7	30.6	30.1	28.9	24.8	25.6	23.8	25.9	21.3	22.4	20.8	14.6	11	11.6	13.5
Creativity	28.2	20.6	21.3	17.3	18.1	16.1	14.5	14	11.8	13.8	12.6	14.2	12.1	11.5	12.1	11.1
Logical	24.5	23.1	21.1	22	23.4	26.2	21.2	25.6	25.4	19.9	23.7	27.2	23.6	22.7	22.4	23.6
Leadership	18	19.1	16.1	14.8	12.8	15.2	16.3	14.6	16.1	17.7	18.8	20.5	16.6	14.6	15.4	17.1
Expertness	16.4	15.6	10.7	13.4	13.5	10.3	19.2	21.7	13	10.8	13.1	10.7	9.9	12.1	13.6	12
Vocational pride for the field	16.4	23.4	19.6	17.4	18.6	13.8	16.6	16.3	16.1	16.1	14.7	14.1				
Trustworthy	15.7	14	16.3	15.8	14.7	15.4	13.7	11.9	12.7	11.6	12.3	12.5	14.3	12.8	12.8	10.9
Have general knowledge	8.8	7.8	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.9	13.5	7.9	8.9	7.2	6.8	8	7.4	5.9	6.6	6.5
GPA	7.6	6.6	6.2	5.1	3.9	6.7	5.4	5.4	7.6	5.7	6.2	4.8	4.5	4.4	4.2	4.4
Foreign language skills	6.4	5.7	5.9	3	4.4	3.7	2.6	6	6.9	5.7	7	5.4	3.2	5.9	6.6	6.2
Empathy	5.7	5.4	4.8	4.6	4.1	3	1	1.3	2.2	1.4	1.9	2.3				
A sense of ethics	2.7	2.2	2.3	2.1	3.2	3	4.1	4	4.3	2.5	2.5	3				
Volunteer/Club activities	2.5	2.5	3.5	2.1	2.2	2.5	0.8	1.5		2.5	2.7	1.8				
the number of licenses	1.5	2.5	0.9	0.4			0.5	1.3	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.4				
Subject in college	1.2	3.2	2	1.2	1	0.9	0.8	1	3.8	0.5	0.8	0.5				
Others	5.1	3.8	3.6	4.9	3.4	3.7	4.1	3.7	5.4	4.7	3.6	2.5	5.1	3.5	4	3.9
The name of the college		0.9	1.1	0.7	0.7	1.4	3.9	3.7		3	3.5	3				
Flexibility				14.8	18.8	19.5	15.8	13.3	19.2	15.4	16.1	16.8	14.7	13.3	12.7	15
Overseas experience										0.7	0.8	0.4	0.6	1.1	1.1	0.5
Internship												0.3				
Tolerant in high stress													35.5	33.3	34.5	35.2
Problem-solver													19.7	19.2	20.6	19.8
the number of companies who answered/the total of member companies	699/ 2095	775/ 2087	728/ 2039	602/ 1338	602/ 1334	455/ 1309	425/ 1283	545/ 1274	582/ 1285	583/ 1301	660/ 1310	790/ 1331	709/ 1339	553/ 1339	N/A	597/ 1376
Answered ratio	33%	37%	36%	45%	45%	35%	33%	43%	45%	45%	50%	59%	53%	41%		43%

TABLE 1 : Overall Results of the Keidanren

shows the percentage of corporations that have chosen specific characteristics. The year indicated is for April 1 in the year that the newly hired college graduates began working.

Table 2 is a re-organized version of Table 1. Rankings are shown on the left side of the table (from 1 to 15), and the year when work started is shown at the top horizontal line (from 2004 to 2019). The percentage under each item shows the ratio of most in-demand characteristics for the employees. The numbers of companies who

answered the questionnaire are shown next to n.

Although some fluctuation can be seen in TABLE 2, the top 5 characteristics have not changed for 15 years. Interestingly, *communication skills* are at the all-time top ranking. Similarly, *honest* has been at the 5<sup>th</sup> highest all time ranking, and *willingness to take on new challenges*, *initiative*, and *cooperative* have been within the top 5 rankings with no change. Corporations thus seem to be looking for employees who have those skills, and they tend to fail to hire those employees, or they

TABLE 2 : The Top 15 Items

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	communicatio in capability															
%	68.3	75	75.1	81.7	81.6	80.2	82.6	86.6	82.8	85.6	82.8	82.8	85.6	87	83	82
2	willingness to take on new challenges															
%	45.7	50.4	52.9	53	53.7	53	56.1	60.6	62.1	64.9	61.1	61.1	60.1	63.8	61.8	60.7
3	initiative	initiative	initiative	cooperative	cooperative	cooperative	cooperative	cooperative	cooperative	initiative	initiative	initiative	cooperative	initiative	initiative	initiative
%	45.7	50.4	52.9	53	53.7	53	56.1	60.6	62.1	64.9	61.1	61.1	60.1	63.8	61.8	60.7
4	cooperative															
%	45.7	50.4	52.9	53	53.7	53	56.1	60.6	62.1	64.9	61.1	61.1	60.1	63.8	61.8	60.7
5	honest															
%	41.5	45.4	48.7	49.6	49.6	49.4	51.5	48.4	50.2	49.8	48.2	48.2	46.3	49.5	47	47
6	responsible															
%	37.8	33.9	37.7	31.7	31.7	33	36.6	32.9	26.9	25.9	27.6	28.1	27.4	35.5	33.3	34.5
7	potential capacity															
%	32.2	28.7	30.6	30.1	28.9	28.9	26.2	25.6	25.6	25.4	21.3	23.7	27.2	24.2	24.5	23.3
8	creativity	creativity	creativity	logical												
%	28.2	23.4	21.3	22	21.2	23.4	24.8	21.2	23.8	24.8	19.9	22.4	20.8	23.6	22.7	22.4
9	logical	logical	logical	flexible												
%	24.5	23.1	21.1	17.4	17.4	18.8	19.5	19.2	21.7	19.2	17.7	18.8	20.5	19.7	19.2	20.6
10	leadership	creativity														
%	18	20.6	19.6	17.3	18.6	16.1	16.1	16.6	16.3	16.1	16.1	16.1	16.8	16.6	14.6	15.4
11	expertness	leadership	trustworthy	trustworthy	trustworthy	trustworthy	trustworthy	leadership								
%	16.4	10.1	16.3	15.8	16.3	18.1	15.4	16.3	14.6	16.1	15.4	14.7	14.2	14.7	13.3	13.6
12	potential pride for the field	expertness	leadership	leadership	leadership	leadership	flexible	creativity	expertness	creativity	expertness	expertness	potential pride for the field	potential pride for the field	trustworthy	potential pride for the field
%	16.4	15.6	16.1	14.8	14.8	14.7	15.2	15.8	14	13	13.8	13.1	14.1	14.6	12.8	12.8
13	trustworthy	trustworthy	expertness	expertness	expertness	expertness	creativity	flexible	trustworthy	trustworthy	creativity	trustworthy	trustworthy	expertness	expertness	expertness
%	15.7	14	10.7	14.8	14.8	13.5	13.8	14.5	13.3	12.7	11.6	12.6	12.5	14.3	12.1	12.7
14	have general knowledge	have general knowledge	have general knowledge	expertness	leadership	expertness	trustworthy	trustworthy	creativity	expertness	trustworthy	expertness	creativity	creativity	creativity	creativity
%	8.8	7.8	6.6	13.4	13.4	12.8	10.3	13.7	11.9	11.8	10.8	12.3	10.7	12.1	11.3	12.1
15	GPA	GPA	GPA	have general knowledge	language skill	have general knowledge	expertness	potential capacity	trustworthy							
%	7.6	6.6	6.2	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.9	7.9	8.9	8.9	7.2	7	8	9.9	11	10.9

continuously need employees with those skills. In any case, the top 5 benchmarks for the last 15 years remaining without change suggests that the corporations have no intention to change the work environment by hiring different types of employees.

If we extend the observations to the top 10 traits, we can see that the three items with the most fluctuations are *potential capacity*, *creativity*, and *leadership*. Although *potential capacity* has been among the top 10 until 2015, it fell from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> after 2016. *Creativity* has been out of the top 10 since 2010 and has remained at 14 since 2016. Although *leadership* came back into the top 10 after 2012, it has remained below the other two traits. Since 2016, new items have emerged in the top 10: *tolerant in high stress* at 6<sup>th</sup> and *problem solver* at 9<sup>th</sup>.

Except for the few items mentioned above, no significant fluctuations have been seen with regards to the choices of the corporations. While the primary purpose for using the Keidanren data is to compare the creative characteristics, the hiring criteria on their own show the corporations' lack of interest in creative employees over time. *Creativity* started at the 8<sup>th</sup> ranking in 2004, and was at the 14<sup>th</sup> position from 2016 onwards. It has never been above the 8<sup>th</sup> ranking for the past 15 years, which implies that the once national consensus for the urgent need for innovations might now be only superficial. Alternatively, the significance of creativity for innovation has not been well acknowledged by Japanese corporations.

**Exit: Who is to be Dismissed?**

TABLE 3 shows the characteristics of employees from the labor-dispute-arbitrary documents that were labelled as being intolerable by the corporations.

The nature of a dialogue, with variety of tones and manners for describing disputes with their employees was revealed in the research. The middle columns are the properties that were chosen by the researcher. Since each company may express their situation in a unique way, some of the dialogues may not contain properties chosen by the researcher. That is why the sum of numbers in the right-hand column does not equal 124.

The situations in the management-employees disputes tended to be diverse, depending on the corporations' circumstances and business fields. Nevertheless, 34 of the corporations (27.4% of the 124 corporations) described dismissing employees who were *self-centered*, *too assertive*, *critical*, and *difficulty in rapport*. About

TABLE 3  
The Final Labeling and Frequencies of the Characteristics of Dismissed Employees

Excerpts from the dialogue between an organization and an arbiter. (Original data is in Japanese. Below is the author's translation.)	Frequency (out of 124)	
The employees' attitude and characteristics that led the organizations to make a final lay-off decision: the organizations' perspective	self-centered	34
	too assertive	34
	critical	34
	difficulty in rapport	34
	antisocial behavior	23
	defiant behavior	22
	steamroller	16
	untrustworthy	16
	strong personality (obstinate, self-centered)	5
	poor attitude to work	4

TABLE 4

Excerpts from the dialogue between an organization and an arbiter. (Original data is in Japanese. Below is the researcher's translation.)	Frequency (out of 124)	
The organizations' demands for employees	ability to adapt to the workplace	33
	humility	22
	cooperative	20
	morale to work	12
	have positive impact on the work place	10
	loyal to the company	9
	communication skills	8
	obedient	5
	observance of company rules	2
	cheerful	1
	rational	1
	The organizations' demands on employees in general	respect harmony
understanding of the dominant-subservient relationship		5
knowing/ understanding tacit rules		3
self-discipline		3
high job performance		2
high problem-solving ability		2
no-troublemaker		2
courteous attitude		2
making positive atmosphere	1	

18% of the companies explained that the employees were *antisocial* and had *defiant behavior*.

Table 4 is a selection of the corporations' demands for employees. Excerpts are shown from the dia-

logues where companies commented about their preferences for employees. Again, some organizations explicitly described the many characteristics they want, and some did not. Therefore, the frequency does not match up to the number of companies that are chosen.

From the employer-arbiter dialogues, ideal employee characteristics emerged, as summarized in TABLE 4. The top frequency ranking was *the ability to adapt to the workplace* (desired by 26.6% of all corporations). Employers, by implication, would view the dismissed employees as being unable to fit into the company environment. In particular, the word “*ability*” suggests that adaptability to the workplace is an ability, not an adjustment. To “adapt” to the workplace (not to a job), employees would need to make an effort if they do not have the ability, and employees who do not make the effort, would not be needed. The characteristics in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place rankings (*the lack of humility* and *cooperative manners*) can support the above interpretation. Employers might have expected employees to make an effort to adapt to the environment, but they did not. The employers might consider the employees to lack both humility and cooperative manners. These three characteristics make up 60% of all of the employers’ expectations for the dismissed employees. In addition, employer expectations such as *loyal to the company*, *obedient*, and *understanding of the dominant-subservient relationship* indicate that employers expect their employees to listen to the employers’ instructions without asking a question. These three characteristics comprise 19 out of the total of 124 (15%).

**Are Creative People Employed in the Organization?**

From the results of the Keidanren questionnaire and the labeling from the JILPT, this section examines how the characteristics fit with the traits for creativity. For convenience, the characteristics of creative people from Feist’s 1999 list are assigned numbers.

First, this paper scrutinized whether or not corporations are interested in searching for creative people in their recruitment. To make the comparison easier, the characteristics that Japanese corporations require for their new employees are used for the evaluation. Table 5 shows the allocation of the numbers from Feist’s list to see how they match with the in-demand characteristics. Although six characteristics can be categorized in the top 5 most needed features (*achievement oriented*, *assertive*, *initiative*, *open to experience*, *happy* (2), self-

Numbered List of Creative Characteristics from Feist’s 1999 list

Creative People	
1	achievement oriented
2	aloof
3	ambitious
4	argumentative
5	arrogant
6	asocial
7	assertive
8	curious
9	dominant
10	driven
11	emotionally invested in intellectual work
12	flexible in thought
13	had more initiative
14	hostile
15	independent
16	intelligent
17	introverted
18	less affiliative
19	less likely to judge self and others
20	non-conforming
21	open to experience
22	rebellious
23	relatively happy
24	self-confident
25	self-sufficient
26	sensitive
27	unconventional thought process

confident), ten traits can be categorized as opposite to those wanted by the corporations (*aloof* (2), *argumentative*, *arrogant* (2), *asocial* (2), *dominant* (2), *hostile*, *introverted*, *less affiliative* (2), *non-conforming* (2), *rebellious* (2)). This could suggest that the job-hunting criteria is used to avoid most of the characteristics of creative people.

Second, this paper compared the creative traits with the exit side data (Table 6). The characteristics that were labeled from the labor-management dispute documents are on the left-hand column. The results are more significant than those for entrance.

Most of the employees’ unwanted behaviors corresponded to traits of creative people. Each characteristic indicated by the corporations except trustworthiness

TABLE 5 : Entrance

In-demand at entrance	The average order (from the most in-demand to least in-demand) over 15 years.	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity traits that may apply to the in-demand characteristics)	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity traits that may conflict with the in-demand characteristics)
communication capability	1	7, 23	2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22
initiative	3	13, 24	
willingness to take on new challenges	3	1, 21	
cooperative	4	23	2, 5, 6, 9, 17, 18, 20, 22
honest	5		
tolerant in high stress	6	11	26
responsible	6		
logical	8	16	
potential capacity	8	12, 10	
problem-solver	9	1	
vocational pride for the field	11	8, 10, 11	
leadership	11		
creativity	12		
expertness	13	10, 11	
trustworthiness	13		
flexible	14	12	
common knowledge	15	16	
GPA's	17		
oversea experience	18	21	
foreign language skills	18	21	

are also characteristics of creative people (*aloof* (4), *argumentative*, *arrogant* (5), *asocial* (2), *assertive*, *dominant* (5), *hostile* (4), *introverted*, *less affiliative*, *non-conforming* (3), *rebellious* (5), and *unconventional thought process* (2)). None of the creative characteristics can compensate for their unacceptable behaviors.

The most significant characteristics were revealed in the employers' dialogues when they spoke about the kind of employees they wanted in general. The creative characteristics that were most in demand (*achievement oriented* (2), *ambitious*, *assertive*, *curious*, *driven* (2), *emotionally invested in intellectual work* (2), *independent*, *intelligent* (2), *happy* (4), and *self-sufficient*), were outnumbered by the opposite characteristics (*aloof* (3), *argumentative* (4), *arrogant* (4), *asocial* (6), *assertive*, *dominant* (5), *hostile* (5), *less affiliative* (4), *non-conforming* (7), *rebellious* (8), *self-confident*, and *unconventional thought process* (2)).

## THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The above assessment suggests three reasons for Japanese corporations having difficulty being innovative for more than 20 years.

First, from examining 15 years of the Keidanren questionnaire, one of the most significant results is the corporations' rigid criteria for recruitment. Without exploring the reasons for the corporations being unable to change their criteria, the persistent measures for recruitment can explain their stubborn attitude for this critical decision-making process.

Second, the corporations did not see a vital relationship between personnel and innovations. Because only the people within an organization can stimulate innovation, when a corporation hires the same type of employee year after year, novel and useful creative ideas hardly develop.

Third, the corporations elude creative people at their entrance and exit. At recruitment, the corporations

TABLE 6 : Exit

Unacceptable behavior	Frequency	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity characteristics correspond to the unacceptable behavior)	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity characteristics DO NOT correspond to the unacceptable behavior)
self-centered	34	2, 5, 9, 14, 20, 22	
too assertive	34	4	
critical	34	7	
difficulty in rapport	34	2, 5, 6, 9, 17, 18, 20, 22	
antisocial behavior	23	2, 5, 6, 9, 14, 22, 27	
defiant behavior	22	14, 22	
steamroller	16	5, 9	
untrustworthy	16		
strong personality (obstinate, self-centered)	5	2, 5, 9, 14, 20, 22	
poor attitude to work	4	27	
In-demand at workplace	Frequency	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity traits that may apply to the in-demand characteristics)	From Feist's 1999 list (Creativity traits that may conflict with the in-demand characteristics)
ability to adapt to the work	33		27
humility	22		4, 5, 7, 24
cooperative	20		6, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22
morale to work	12	1, 3, 8, 10, 11	
have positive impact on the work place	10	23	2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 22
loyal to the company	9		20
communication skills	8	7, 23	2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22
respect harmony	6		6, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22
obedient	5		20, 22
understanding of the dominant-subservient relationship	5		6, 20, 22
knowing/ understanding tacit rules	3		27
self-discipline	3	15, 25	
observance of a company rules	2		22
high job performance	2	1, 10, 11	
high problem-solving ability	2	16	
no-troublemaker	2		2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 14, 18, 20, 22
courteous attitude	2		
cheerful	1	23	
rational	1	16	
making positive atmosphere	1	23	

appear to prefer the characteristics of non-creative people. At the exit, the corporations seem to abhor the characteristics of creative people. Establishing whether or not the corporations intentionally avoid creative people is beyond the scope of this paper; however, by preventing creative people from entering and staying within an organization, the corporations are providing few oppor-

tunities for creative people to work inside. Thus, the hypothesis is supported by the research:

- A. No innovation has existed in Japanese corporations for more than 20 years.
- B. If creative people were working in a corporation with cogent management, innovations would be seen.

C. Hence, no creative people were working in the corporation in the first place.

Ironically, the above three implications cannot change without creativity. Despite Japan's strong national encouragement for innovation, corporations are overly dependent on their previous experience and hinder their own chance to be innovative. Before lamenting the lack of innovation in Japan, it may be worthwhile to change the corporations' behavior, at least in making the most of human resources.

Changes in behavior are part of organizational learning. Changes in knowledge are the most difficult, because it comes from previous experiences that may have accumulated over many years (Argote & Miron-Spektor, 2011). Moreover, once the knowledge resides in the corporation's processes and values, it can become embedded in its culture, making it even more difficult to change (Christensen, 1997). The recruitment criteria used by Japanese corporations may have reached this point. Japanese corporations continue to repeat their previous experiences, making it more rigid and seemingly more honorable. Knowledge, however, is comprised of "facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education." An assumption, in contrast, is "a thing that is accepted as true or as certain to happen without proof" (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). The findings presented in this paper may help corporations to see that relying on repetitive recruitment criteria is based on assumptions and not knowledge. In addition, new knowledge that innovation requires creative people, and these people are being excluded from the organization, needs to be understood in the organization. This kind of approach may help Japanese corporations, in extensive depopulation and aging society, survive into the future.

### LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research is an evaluation of the existing data of Japanese corporations' recruitment preferences. Although the relationship between corporations' hiring tendencies and their aversion towards creative people is significant, the reason was not explored. For future research, interviewing members of corporate human resource departments may help to explain the reason for a scarcity of creative people by presenting their certain traits. Also, innovation was not foreign in Japan before the economic downturn in the 1990 s. Comparing the recruitment criteria in the time axis might find the reason as well. Furthermore, since the Japanese government's

engagement for the innovation generation has been eminent, the evaluation from the relationship between the government and private enterprises from the cultural perspectives might explain more to the corporate favoritism.

Besides, data for the exit side was not sufficient to produce an in-depth analysis. Interviewing each corporation and asking what makes a corporation dismiss its employees might help to reveal the trend in recruitment favoritism. Since understanding tendencies that may easily be overlooked, finding the cause, whether it is from any strategy or just the act of inertia, might lead to a new perspective for the research on organizational behavior.

### CONCLUSION

Despite the desperate need for innovation, many studies have primarily focused on the managerial tendencies of organizations. By pointing out to look into the origin of the matter, hopefully, this paper calls attention to practitioners and researchers that without creative people, the generation of innovations cannot be examined thoroughly. As we learn from the old Greek dictum, it might be worth looking into the saying, "nothing comes from nothing." Research to analyze why corporations act the way they act from the cultural perspectives extends the possibility to explain various consequences of various organizations.

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