HORENSO IMPLEMENTATION
AT A JAPANESE VIRTUAL ASSISTANT STARTUP COMPANY

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ABSTRACT

With globalization and cultural exchange becoming more widespread, it is common for a country's culture to be applied in other parts of the world. So is the Japanese corporate culture of *Horenso*. *Horenso* is a Japanese communication culture that is often applied to Japanese companies around the world. *Horenso* is an abbreviation derived from 3 words: *Houkoku*, *Renraku*, and *Soudan*. According to Yamaguchi (2008), *Houkoku* is the process of reporting the progress and results of the work we are currently doing to related parties, while *Renraku* means providing information to coworkers or clients about the work done at this time. And the last one is *Soudan*, which, if interpreted literally, means consultation. At the same time, according to Kameda (2013), Soudan is an activity of discussing or consulting with superiors regarding difficulties or problems faced when carrying out work. In this study, researchers conducted research on implementing *Horenso*'s Japanese corporate culture at a Japanese Virtual Assistant Startup Company. Researchers used qualitative research methods by collecting data using questionnaires and interview methods. The results of the questionnaire that the researchers have distributed to respondents, 85.7% of the respondents have no problems implementing the *Horenso* communication culture, this is based on the results of the questionnaire which show that the respondents have no problems in implementing *Horenso* in their daily activities. As for the 14.3% who need help in implementing *Horenso*, due to the lack of application of Soudan when finding problems at work.

Keywords: Culture, Horenso, Communication, Startup Company

INTRODUCTION

Japan is a country steeped in culture and manners. Culture plays a big part in the daily lives of Japanese people, from the small things in daily life to the world of work. However, when it comes to working, Japan is a country with a corporate culture known worldwide. One of the reasons why Japan's corporate culture is known worldwide is that many Japanese companies have established branches in other countries, so the Japanese corporate culture can spread easier and be learned by various workers around the world.

One form of Japanese corporate culture that has been adopted by many companies and workers around the world is 報連相 (*Horenso*). *Horenso* is the process of sharing information based on members' abilities and knowledge and synchronizing activities for changes in the work environment (Inomata Atsuo, 2012). In addition, Kameda (2013) defines 報連相 (*Horenso*) as the basis of communication between subordinates, superiors, and colleagues while working on a project. *Horenso* is an acronym based on three Japanese words which are the main points, namely, 報告 (*Houkoku*), 連絡 (*Renraku*), 相談 (*Soudan*).

Horenso itself, as mentioned earlier, consists of three words derived from the Japanese language, namely 報告 (*Houkoku*), 連絡 (*Renraku*), and 相談 (*Soudan*). 報告 (*Houkoku*) is a word derived from the Japanese language which means reporting. *Houkoku*, in the essence of *Horenso*, means reporting the results or progress of a job in a timely manner and if instructed by a superior. Meanwhile, *Renraku* means transmitting helpful information from someone to those who may need it. And lastly, *Soudan* means consultation and discussion with superiors or people involved in a problem to exchange ideas and opinions (Kameda, 2013).

According to Kameda (2013), language and culture are two sides of the same coin, which means they are inseparable. Therefore, employees of Japanese multinational companies must understand the culture that is the background of their company and also understands that their culture is different from workers who live or work in other parts of the world. In addition, one of the main principles of Japanese corporate culture is group harmony, where a person who does not belong to a group will not be strong, while a person who is a member of a group is one of the basic foundations of society (Wolf Ruth, 2013).

According to Marcoulides and Heck (1993), culture in an organization or company is significant, especially if the company has values that characterize the culture of an organization or company, because it can significantly affect performance. Especially in a world that has become entirely digital, it is no longer strange to work with various workers from various countries worldwide. Japanese companies are no exception. Cooperation between countries is easier than ever. It is also more accessible for the spread of corporate culture from Japan, one of which is the *Horenso* culture brought by Japanese companies to the world, including Indonesia.

The company at the center of this research is one of the Japanese startups engaged in virtual assistants. Virtual assistants themselves may not be familiar to the general public. This job, which relies heavily on digital skills and proficiency, is a unique case because there are no employees or superiors from Japan who are present in person to give instructions or directions, but everything is done online.

Therefore, it is interesting to see how *Horenso* is implemented in Japanese startups operating in a foreign country like Indonesia. From the author's personal experience working at a Japanese startup in Jakarta, there are some interesting differences from the implementation of *Horenso* at the startup where the author works. Such as the number of daily reports between employees and superiors, the form of reports, and how employees and superiors solve problems at work. Because the startup is from Japan, of course, the author also works with employees who are from Japan. In the startup itself, there is a team that contains only Indonesian employees and a team that contains Japanese and Indonesian employees. Therefore, it is interesting to see the difference in the implementation of *Horenso* in the two teams with different cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, the main objectives of this research are to find out how the Japanese corporate culture, *Horenso*, is implemented in a Japanese virtual assistant startup company in Jakarta. In addition, this final project research also aims to find out, what are the differences in the implementation of *Horenso* in both Indonesian and Japanese teams in daily work activities, and find out whether Japanese culture implemented in other countries that have different cultures can be implemented according to the description of *Horenso* itself, or are there any difficulties in implementing it on a daily basis.

Horenso is a communication culture often used in Japanese companies (Victoria & Miroshnik, 2009). *Horenso* itself consists of three words: *Houkoku* (報告), *Renraku* (連絡), and

Soudan (相談). According to Yamaguchi (2008), *Houkoku* is a reporting process related to the results and progress of a job. Meanwhile, according to Kameda (2013), *Houkoku* is a reporting activity related to the results and progress of a job to the supervisor on time. *Renraku* itself is Japanese for contacting. However, in the context of *Horenso*, *Renraku* is the activity of providing information, both to coworkers and clients, regarding the work being done (Yamaguchi, 2008). Meanwhile, *Soudan* is the process of discussion or consultation with superiors regarding problems or difficulties encountered at work (Kameda, 2013).

Communication that occurs within a corporation is, of course, not limited to communication between colleagues; of course, there will be communication with superiors and subordinates. According to Bangun (2012), Upward communication or vertical communication is the delivery of information from subordinates to superiors. In addition, there is also Horizontal communication, which is the communication or delivery of information carried out by equal positions.

In this study, researchers used the definition of *Horenso* based on the book *Dekiru Hito ni Naru Horenso Nyumon* written by Yamaguchi Shinichi. Researchers used the notion of *Horenso* to serve as the basis for questions that would later be asked of sources and respondents.

According to Yamaguchi (2008), reporting, or *Houkoku* (報告), has two types: basic type and application type. Basic type *Houkoku* has three different types, namely *Chuukan Houkoku* (中間報告), *Kekka Houkoku* (結果報告), and also *Toraburu Houkoku* (トラブル報告). Of these three basic types of *Houkoku*, there are stipulations that must be fulfilled in reporting, such as listed below:

Kekka Houkoku or result report is a report that must be carried out while fulfilling these conditions:

・ Reports should be given to the right person

・ Reports should prioritize results or conclusions, with progress and other details to be explained later.

・ The report should be made as short as possible.

As for *Chuukan Houkoku* or interim report should be done following these conditions:

・ If the work takes much time, progress reports are needed in between work. ・ If there are any obstacles or problems, report them immediately.

・ Still, communicate what you feel is important, even if you feel like there is no time.

Finally, *Toraburu Houkoku* or problem reports should be submitted with the conditions below:

・ When things get bad, report immediately.

・ While time and place are important when reporting something, if it is an emergency, it is best to report immediately without thinking about time and place first. ・ Prepare yourself to answer questions that will be asked if what you are reporting is not a good thing.

In addition to basic type *of Houkoku,* the researcher also examined the implementation of application type *Houkoku*, which includes two types of reports, namely *Henkou Houkoku* (変更報告) and *Jouhou Houkoku* (情報報告).

Below are the conditions that must be met when doing *Henkou Houkoku* or change report:

・ Use easy-to-understand delivery to make it easier to comprehend what has been changed.

・ Use images or visualizations to facilitate delivery

・ Conveying your own ideas

As for the *Jouhou Houkoku* or information report, below are the conditions that must be met when doing an information report:

・ Always reports as it happened without adding or subtracting anything that did not happen.

・ Separate between reports based on estimates and reality

・ When something new happens, report it as a personal opinion

According to Yamaguchi (2008), *Renraku* is a concept of conveying information and simple facts related to everything that happens regarding work or tasks to related parties. *Renraku* itself, according to Yamaguchi (2008), is not only done with coworkers but also with clients. Below are things that must be considered when doing *Renraku* with coworkers who work at the same company, according to Yamaguchi (2008):

・ When communicating with other parties, try to prevent the contents of the conversation from spreading to unrelated parties.

・ When communicating with absent parties, communicate it through memos and try not to spread it to unrelated parties.

・ Keep communication as short as possible.

・ Consider your interlocutor when communicating.

In addition to communicating with coworkers in the same company, *Renraku* is also done with clients. Things that should be considered when communicating with clients, according to Yamaguchi (2008), are as follows:

・ First, say things in a way that is easy to understand.

・ Keep all proof of communication.

・ After communicating, follow up with an email, fax, and other types of communication. ・ Beware of scams through various modes of communication.

Soudan, in the context of *Horenso*, according to Kameda (2013), is an activity of consultation and discussion with superiors or related parties to get advice or direction to find a solution to a problem.

When one has the need to do *Soudan*, according to Yamaguchi (2008), here are the things that must be considered for preparation:

・ Before conducting a consultation, prepare personal opinions in advance ・ Prepare data or matters related to the matter to be consulted

・ Review the things you want to consult about

Next are the things that must be considered when doing *Soudan* with superiors, according to Yamaguchi (2008):

・ Consider the other party when determining the time and place for consultation ・ Consult before you get into trouble

・ Distinguish between work and personal consultations

Finally, these are the benefits that we can get if we implement *Soudan*, according to Yamaguchi (2008):

・ Consulting can reduce errors in work and maximize work

・ By consulting, there is an opportunity to make progress in the work

METHODS

In this study, researchers used a questionnaire method to obtain data from 8 respondents who are employees at this company, which would later be analyzed to reach conclusions. The research method is descriptive analytical. The following are the research steps that will be carried out:

1. Conduct a literature study to determine the basis and theoretical basis related to *Horenso,* which will be used as a reference in this research

2. Create questions based on the theoretical basis (Yamaguchi, 2008), which are used as a reference for questions in the questionnaire that will be distributed to respondents.

3. Researchers will also conduct interviews to get more in-depth answers from the team leader.

4. Analyze research results using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative methods are used to analyze the questionnaire results, while qualitative methods are used to analyze the interview results.

Below are the questions that the researcher will use for the questionnaire that is based on the book "*Dekiru hito ni nareru horenso nyuumon*" Written by Yamaguchi, Shinichi (2008):

Questions regarding basic type *Houkoku*:

・ When you complete your work, do you immediately report the results of your work to the relevant party (employer)?

・ When reporting, do you report things as they are?

・ If the work you are currently doing takes much time, do you report on the progress of said work?

Questions regarding application type *Houkoku*:

・ When a problem appears in your work, do you report it immediately? ・ When there are changes in the report, do you report with simple delivery and use help materials to make the report easier to understand?

・ When you report changes to your work, do you also include your ideas?

Questions regarding *Renraku* with a coworker

・ Do you consider your interlocutor when you communicate to gauge the timing when making contact?

・ When you need to communicate with an absent party, do you leave a memo for that

party?

· When communicating, do you ensure that what is communicated does not spread to unrelated parties?

Questions regarding *Renraku* with the client

· When communicating with clients, do you consider the person you are talking to in deciding how to say something?

· Communicating with clients, do you keep evidence of your communications?

· Do you follow up when you have finished communicating with the client?

Questions regarding *Soudan* on daily work

· Before doing *Soudan*, did you prepare in advance the things that you will consult later?

· Did you consult before you got into trouble?

· Do you feel that you can reduce errors in your work after consulting?

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The questionnaire results are from the questionnaire that the researcher distributed to all Japanese Virtual Assistant Startup company employees.

1. *HOUKOKU* （報告）

A. Basic Type *Houkoku*

Below is a table of the results of the questionnaire on basic type Houkoku

Table 1. Questionnaire results of basic type Houkoku

No	Question	Answer	
1	When you complete your work, do you immediately report the results of your work to the relevant party (employer)?	Yes 100%	No 0%
2	When reporting, do you report things as they are?	Yes 100%	No 0 %
3	If the work you are currently doing takes much time, do you report on the progress of said work?	Yes 100%	No 0%

From the table above, it can be noted that all respondents have fulfilled the core requirements of the basic type *Houkoku* according to Yamaguchi (2008).

B. Application type *Houkoku*

Below is the result table of the questionnaire regarding Application type *Houkoku*

Table2. Questionnaire results regarding application type *Houkoku*

No	Question	Answers	
1	When a problem appears in your work, do you report it immediately?	Yes 85.7%	No 14.3%
2	If there are changes in the report, do you report with a simple delivery and use help materials to make the report easier to understand?	Yes 85.7%	No 14.3%
3	When you report changes to your work, do you also include your ideas?	Yes 71.4%	No 28.6

According to the table above, most of the respondents have implemented all the terms or conditions of the application-type *Houkoku*, according to Yamaguchi (2008). However, there are still some provisions that still need to be fulfilled, such as the submission of personal ideas when reporting changes to a job. When asked to elaborate on why respondents chose no, some respondents believed that including personal ideas is sufficient when the situation requires and is not required in all reporting done.

2. *RENRAKU* （連絡）

A. *Renraku* with coworker

The questionnaire results regarding *Renraku* with coworkers in the same company are listed in the table below.

Table 3. Questionnaire results regarding *Renraku* with coworkers in the same company

No	Questions	Answers	
1	Do you consider your interlocutor when you communicate to gauge the timing when making contact?	Yes 100%	No 0%
2	When you need to communicate with an absent party, do you leave a memo for that party?	Yes 100%	No 0%
3	When communicating, do you ensure that what is communicated does not spread to unrelated parties?	Yes 100%	No 0%

According to the questionnaire results in the table above, all respondents have fulfilled the terms and conditions when doing *Renraku* with company colleagues, according to Yamaguchi (2008).

B. *Renraku* with client

Below is a table of the results of respondents' answers to questionnaires regarding *Renraku* with clients

Table 4. Questionnaire results regarding *Renraku* with clients

No	Questions	Answers	
1	When communicating with clients, do you consider the person you are talking to in deciding how to say something?	Yes 100%	No 0%
2	When communicating with clients, do you keep evidence of your communications?	Yes 100%	No 0%
3	Do you follow up when you have finished communicating (meeting) with clients?	Yes 100%	No 0%

Similar to Renraku with coworkers, all respondents have implemented all the terms and conditions of Renraku with clients, according to Yamaguchi (2008). **3. *SOUDAN*** （相談）

And the last one is the table of the results of respondents' answers related to the questionnaire regarding *Soudan.*

Table 5. Questionnaire results about Soudan

No	Questions	Answers	
1	Before doing Soudan, do you prepare in advance for the things that you will consult later?	Yes 100%	No 0%
2	Did you consult before you got into trouble?	Yes 100%	No 0%
3	Do you feel that you can reduce errors in your work after consulting?	Yes 100%	No 0%

Judging from the table of respondents' answers above, we can understand that all respondents have implemented the provisions and conditions of *Soudan* according to Yamaguchi (2008).

DIFFICULTIES

In the questionnaire that the researchers used, there were also questions about the difficulties in conducting *Horenso* with the Japanese team to find out if there were any difficulties in implementing *Horenso*. Most of the answers given by the respondents revolved around the language barrier issue. Many of the respondents are employees with good Japanese, and some have experience working or studying in Japan. However, many of the respondents had the opinion that in communicating with the Japanese team, more effort and care were still needed.

DIFFERENCES IN IMPLEMENTING *HORENSO* WITH JAPANESE AND INDONESIAN TEAMS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INDONESIAN EMPLOYEES

In this study, the researcher asked the respondents what the differences in the implementation of *Horenso* between the Japanese team and the Indonesian team were. The answers from the respondents are as listed below.

Indonesian Team:

- Easier due to language similarity

- It can be done more casually

- In doing Countermeasures, the Indonesian team is more concerned with speed ·
Difficulties in implementing *Horenso* due to some of the Indonesian employees not understanding or not accustomed to implementing *Horenso* on a daily basis

Japanese team,

- smoother Horenso implementation due to the majority of Japanese employees being accustomed to implementing Horenso.

- In conducting countermeasures, the Japanese team prioritizes finding the root cause of a problem rather than speed.

- The Japanese team values workers who do a lot of *renraku* and *sodan* in advance to avoid mistakes.

INTERVIEW RESULTS

After obtaining the results of the questionnaire regarding the implementation of *Horenso* in a Japanese virtual assistant startup company, the researcher then conducted an interview with the Indonesian team leader by asking questions based on the results of the questionnaire that the researcher distributed earlier. The questions that researchers gave are as follows, along with the answers from the Team Leader.

Q: Why do you think Indonesian team members can work and implement *Horenso* well even though *Horenso* is a foreign culture?
A:

- From the very beginning of this company, we were given an understanding and training about *Horenso,* not only memorizing the definition but understanding and being able to practice it.

- Since the beginning of the team, every member has been required to implement

Horenso daily (for habit-building). If their *Horenso* needs to be better, they will be given feedback and asked to improve themself.

·   Gradually, team members become more and more accustomed and proficient in practicing it to the point of being able to reproduce *Horenso* knowledge to teach or "pass on" to new members.

Then for the second question is as follows.

Q: During your time as team leader of the Indonesian team, were there many team members who struggled with horenso?
A:

·   I would say it is 50:50, especially in the early days of the company, when the first assistants we hired did not know how to apply Horenso on a daily basis (because they had never worked in a Japanese company), so we had to create a scheme for how to do Horenso, monitor the practice, and evaluate the results. However, over the years, we have recruited many workers who have at least one year of work experience, so they are already familiar with *Horenso* even before they start working here.

From the interview with the team leader above, it can be concluded that the respondents' ability to implement *Horenso* in their daily work comes from the results of daily training and application, which helps employees to learn and adapt to *Horenso* culture. Then even though this startup company is a Japanese company, there are still quite a lot of employees who are not used to or do not understand *Horenso* culture at first, so workers who are already used to *Horenso* need to create a scheme to learn and monitor their daily work. However, the company has recently begun recruiting workers with at least one year of work experience to facilitate the implementation of *Horenso* in daily work.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that researchers can get from this research is that Indonesian employees who work for Japanese virtual assistant startup companies can implement *Horenso* well and in accordance with the terms and conditions of *Horenso*, according to Yamaguchi (2008). This can happen because of the habituation applied in daily activities at work and the feedback given when there are mistakes in the implementation of *Horenso*. In addition, many employees in this company have a background in Japanese language education or experience working in Japanese companies, so it facilitates the adaptation process for employees to implement the *Horenso* system.

Indonesian employees also find differences when conducting *Horenso* with fellow Indonesians or the Japanese team. The implementation of *Horenso* with the Indonesian team can be done more easily because the language used is the same and can be more casual, but sometimes there are still some Indonesian team employees who are not used to doing *Horenso*, so that it can be an obstacle in their daily work. As for the implementation of *Horenso* with the Japanese team, according to respondents, it can be done more smoothly because most Japanese employees already understand and are used to *Horenso*, and also Japanese employees value employees who do much communication and also Soudan when compared to the Indonesian team.

The last one is the difficulties of Indonesian employees in implementing *Horenso* in their daily work activities. Although the majority of the respondents have good Japanese language skills, the respondents mentioned Language Barrier as one of the difficulties in doing *Horenso* in daily work. The respondent's worries lie in how to convey not just the main message but how to convey the little nuances too.

This research was conducted in a fairly small scope, so the data obtained cannot be used as a reference for something more massive. Hopefully, in the future, researchers can research more deeply not only stop at implementation but also can research the effectiveness of *Horenso* in various companies, not only limited to Japanese companies, so that it can be used as a reference to determine the pure effectiveness of *Horenso* compared to other systems.

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