

Entrepreneurial Service Performance and Technology Management: A Study of China and Japan

Shawn M. Carraher, Cameron University

Geralyn McClure Franklin, The University of Texas of the Permian Basin

John A. Parnell, The University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Sherry E. Sullivan, Bowling Green State University

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Introduction

China is fast becoming a dominant player in the world economic arena, with foreign investments of over \$50 billion a year. Although China is primarily seen as a source of cheap manufacturing and service labor, the country's growing economy, developing business environment, and improving educational system could also help make China a rich future source of inexpensive knowledge workers (Crocitto *et al.* 2005). Despite China's transition to a more competitive business environment, we know relatively little about the characteristics of Chinese employees (Tu *et al.*, 2003), especially in the high technology organizations and when compared to its Asian neighbor Japan (Ng and Tuan, 2005; Wang *et al.*, 2004). Further, the majority of research on successful management practice has been conducted in low to moderate technology environments. What generally is believed to be true about high technology firms may simply presume the transferability of generic management practices to high technology environments (Ferris *et al.*, 1999), especially across different countries and cultures (Carraher, 2003; Carraher *et al.*, 2003).

This paper is a modest beginning to increasing our understanding of performance issues in these organizations. Specifically, the paper examines the utility of a selection instrument in predicting two types of performance – service and technologically oriented performance – in entrepreneurial, technically oriented businesses in China and Japan. Following a literature review, methods and results of a survey of Chinese and Japanese employees in technical support positions within entrepreneurial high technology businesses are presented. Conclusions and directions for future research are also outlined.

Literature review

Recently, there has been a dramatic increase in the attention given to human resource management issues in high technology organizations as they pertain to the professional (e.g. scientists, engineers, and research and development specialists) and managerial occupational groups (Buckley *et al.*, 2001; Huang and Carraher, 2004; Sullivan, 1999). Work in entrepreneurial high technology organizations is considerably different than that in any of the other environments in which professionals and managers typically practice (Miner and Smith,

1994; Parnell *et al.*, 2000). The fact that external and internal environments in which high technology organizations exist are neither well defined nor well understood can create a set of unique demands on the activities of both supervisors and those supervised (Eisenhardt, 1989). Further, the environment in high technology organizations results in a fundamental dilemma for management practitioners because there is a need to be both structured (in terms of making timely decisions concerning rapidly changing technology) and flexible (able to shift rapidly due to changes in technology).

The observability of performance in a high technology environment is seemingly beset with challenges because much of the output in this environment may be intellectual in nature and therefore unobservable for long periods of time. For example, how does one evaluate the thought processes that another has experienced? Thus, we might expect that an evaluation would utilize numerous sources of information in order to determine an accurate appraisal. Additionally, because of potentially long cycle times, divergent objectives, and technological uncertainty, managers may be interested in several types and forms of performance (Buckley *et al.*, 2001; Gebauer and Friedli, 2005; Shainesh, 2004).

The construct of service orientation serves as an excellent means of evaluating the contributions of service employees to organizational performance. Service orientation has been measured via samples during the past two decades, although a concerted effort to understand service orientation in high technology organizations has not been forthcoming.

McBride (1988, 1997) and McBride *et al.* (1997) based upon the work of Saxe and Weitz (1982), Hogan *et al.*, (1984), Parasuraman *et al.*, (1985) and Schoenfeldt (1999) used samples of students to create a multidimensional inventory to measure service orientation in order to predict service-oriented performance. He developed a 39-item inventory hypothesized to contain the following seven topical scales: life satisfaction, sociability, agreeableness, resistance to stress, responsibility, need for achievement, and the desire to make good impressions on others. The sociability and good impressions scales were significantly related to estimates of service orientation.

Carraher *et al.* (1998) used four samples with a combined sample size of 861 in order to examine whether or not a modified version of McBride's 39-item instrument could be used to predict service-oriented performance with non-student samples. During the analysis, Carraher *et al.* (1998) found support for eight-factors (i.e. with agreeableness split into two factors, helpfulness and agreeableness) and also noted that service orientation ratings were consistently associated with the good impression, sociability, and helpfulness scales.

Two years later, Chait *et al.* (2000) used 605 job applicants to reexamine the relationship and the measure. Using principal components analysis, they found support for a five-factor model with a modified McBride's selection instrument and further found that this five-factor model was similar to the big five personality factors of extroversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness to experience. The results from this five-factor model had a similar multiple R (0.46) to that from the originally hypothesized seven-factor solution suggested by McBride (1988, 1997) and McBride *et al.* (1997).

Carraher *et al.* (2002) studied 704 job applicants from the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom in order to validate the construct with non-American samples and to examine the test-retest reliabilities for the instrument. Again, they found that across countries the service-orientation ratings were significantly correlated with extroversion, openness to experience and agreeableness, and they were also significantly correlated with conscientiousness in both non-American samples but not in the American sample. The six-month, test-retest reliability estimates were found to range from 0.73 (openness to experience) to 0.84 (extroversion).

Recently, Carraher *et al.* (2005) surveyed employees from a global financial information services organization in the United Kingdom ($n=403$) and Poland, Russia, and Ukraine ($n=295$) to examine the effectiveness of the instrument's value for selection and developmental purposes. They found that the instrument was more effective in Eastern Europe (multiple $R=0.50$) than in the United Kingdom (multiple $R=0.37$), lending support to the five-dimensional solution for the instrument. To date, however, the instrument has not been employed to examine technically oriented performance or to investigate customer orientation in Asia (Begley *et al.*, 2000; Ferrard, 2002).

Methods

The present study surveyed 262 technical support employees in entrepreneurial high technology businesses (155 men; 107 women) in mainland China and 236 in Japan (120 men; 116 women) employed in. The primary instrument utilized was the customer service selection instrument developed by McBride (1988, 1997) and McBride *et al.* (1997) as modified by Carraher *et al.* (1998). with the modifications having been recommended by McBride and associates.

In addition to demographic items, many of the questions contained in the inventory consisted of experiential, attitudinal, and behaviorally-based items (e.g. "When you were a member of a small group, how much do you participate? How comfortable are you in new places and situations?"). A five-point Likert scale was utilized.

Performance was measured on the job. Three trained raters evaluated the performance of each respondent in order to allow a comparison in the ratings. Each of the raters had graduate training in psychology and assessments and received additional training in order to accurately and consistently identify differing levels of service-oriented performance and technically oriented performance.

Findings

The average performance score for Chinese employees was 3.45 (on a five-point scale) for service-oriented performance and 3.48 for technically oriented performance. Scores for Japanese employees were slightly higher (differences significant at the 0.05 level), producing means of 3.70 for service-oriented performance and 3.58 for technically oriented performance.

Data for the customer service selection instrument was factor analyzed to test for consistency with previous findings. Results of the factor analyses did not support the five-dimensional models previously found, but did support a seven-dimensional structure within each group. In the

Chinese sample, the seven dimensions appeared to consist of extroversion, emotional stability, the desire to make good impressions on others, conscientiousness, life satisfaction, performance orientation, and helpfulness. In Japan, the seven dimensions consisted of extroversion, emotional stability, the desire to make good impressions on others, conscientiousness, closed mindedness, empathy, and lack of helpfulness. Hence, five dimensions were similar across both countries, but two were unique to each. Owing to problems with the use of coefficient alpha reliability estimates (Sethi and Carraher, 1993), limited information factor analysis as suggested by Schoenfeldt and Mendoza (1994) was employed before calculating alphas. These ranged from 0.73 (openness to experience) to 0.85 (emotional stability). Carraher *et al.* (2002) found the six-month, test-retest reliability estimates to range from 0.73 (openness to experience) to 0.84 (extroversion).

Pearson product-moment correlations for the personality-oriented instrument scales and the performance (i.e. the average composite measure of service orientation from the raters) are presented in Table I. The multiple *Rs*, beta coefficients, and significance levels for the direct regression analyses where the scales are regressed on the criterion are presented in Table II.

Conscientiousness is the only dimension significantly associated with service orientation, technology orientation, and age. Extroversion, good impressions, and helpfulness demonstrated significant correlations with performance in the Japanese sample, while emotional stability was a significant factor in the Chinese sample.

Conscientiousness was also the only factor significantly related to both measures of performance in both samples when multiple regression models were constructed (Table II). In the Chinese sample, conscientiousness, extroversion, emotional stability, and performance orientation are also predictive of service-oriented performance, while only conscientiousness, emotional stability, and performance orientation were predictors of technically oriented performance. In the Japanese sample, conscientiousness, extroversion, good impressions, and empathy are significantly related to both types of performance. In the Chinese sample, 12.7 percent of the variance in service-oriented performance, and 11.1 percent of the variance in technically oriented performance can be explained. In the Japanese sample, 22.6 percent of the variance in service-oriented performance, and 33.4 percent of the variance in technically oriented performance can be explained. Thus, it would appear that not only does the dimensional structure of the instrument vary across the two countries but that the instrument has a much greater utility in Japan than in China.

Discussion and future directions

Based on our findings, technologically oriented organizations should develop more information sources pertaining to the evaluation of individual performance. In order to conduct an accurate performance evaluation, it is essential that all sources of work-related information be utilized. Different sources of information, by definition, come from different perspectives, which could be of value in the performance evaluation process (Carraher *et al.*, 1999). In the current study, two different types of performance were examined. Although results across the two types of performance in Japan were relatively consistent, the results in China were not as much so.

Additionally, model refinement is required to understand the characteristics that are likely to result in a particular employee being productive.

While the dimensional results differed not just between Japan and China but also with results previously found in North American and Europe, the predictive results are relatively consistent with other published work. For instance, as previously noted, Carraher *et al.* (2005) found multiple *Rs* of 0.50 for Eastern Europe, and 0.37 for the United Kingdom with the current instrument. Chait *et al.* (2000) reported a multiple *R* of 0.46 in the United States for service-oriented performance. It should also be recognized that in both cases the instrument that was designed to predict service-oriented performance was as useful if not more useful at predicting technologically oriented performance than for predicting service-oriented performance. Additional research should be performed to see if this holds true in other countries as well.

More cross-country research should examine what is important to high technology organizations in terms of the identification, recruitment, selection, reward, and retention of high performing professionals and managers (Carraher and Whitely, 1998; Malhotra *et al.*, 2005). It might also be useful, for example, to examine whether individuals from different countries perceive of performance and reward problems in the same manner (Carraher and Buckley, 1996) and whether cultural differences influence the effectiveness of socialization processes, and subsequent performance, of new employees (Buckley *et al.*, 1998).

The cross-cultural research that has been published to date has been sporadic, with a variety of country combinations and constructs considered. There is a particular need for further research in Asia and in emerging economies. Research considering service and other orientations of employees in high technology environments can be especially worthwhile given the high technology orientation typically found in Chinese and Japanese managers (Poon *et al.*, 2005; Kurokawa *et al.*, 2005).

Additional research should also address two key methodological issues. First, the application of western scales to non-western samples continues to be a challenge to researchers (Peng *et al.*, 2001), and the present study was no exception. When scales are not translated to account for both language and cultural differences for generalizability sake, scale reliabilities generally suffer as a result. However, when scales are translated and/or modified to address cultural differences, then direct comparisons between distinct cultural groups are tenuous at best. Solving this dilemma is not easy. Nonetheless, future research should embrace multiple approaches to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena.

Second, western models and instruments typically do not measure the constraints in which Chinese employers function (Adler *et al.*, 1989). Researchers may choose to develop instruments from indigenous Chinese values (Fahr *et al.*, 1987, 1998) to maximize measurement precision. Unfortunately, doing so is expensive and typically produces results that are incomparable with western literature (Peng *et al.*, 2001). Studies that integrate both approaches in hypothesis testing may lend more robust and reliable conclusions. Further consideration should also be given to conducting research that moves beyond pitting one culture against another. A good example of this approach is Fahr *et al.* (1997) development of the Chinese organizational citizenship

behavior (OCB) scale in which they examined cultural variability within the Chinese culture, not between or among cultures.

Managerial implications

In addition to the implications for future research, findings of this study suggest two key implications for managers. First, supervisors must be trained to properly conduct performance evaluations in order to provide useful feedback for employees and reduce rater error. Initially for this study, we considered using internal performance records in a concurrent validation strategy. We found, however, the results to be rather unreliable, suffering from leniency errors, and ripe with political bias. It is easy to be lenient in performance evaluations and to let politics influence judgments. In order to reduce such errors and bias, performance evaluation processes should have tight, clearly-defined standards, policies, and procedures. The vigilant monitoring of performance evaluation processes must also be a priority.

Second, organizations must take action to help employees adapt to changing business practices. Although there has been a great increase in the number of privately-owned firms and firms owned by foreign investors as well as a shift towards making state-owned firms more competitive, communist principles have long dominated China's culture and may inhibit the use of performance appraisal systems. Basing rewards on performance rather than political ties or family relationships may require that some Chinese employees change long-held beliefs about job security and egalitarian rewards (Tu *et al.*, 2003). It is important for managers to help employees adjust to China's increasingly market-oriented business environment. Additionally, managers in China must learn to administer and implement new policies during these times of great economic change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are myriad issues involved in measuring service and technologically oriented performance in multinational entrepreneurial high technology organizations. Although further investigation is clearly necessary, this paper contributes in order to the increase the understanding of the problems that managers may confront when working cross culturally in high technology environments. It is imperative that managers within rapidly changing environments pay special attention to the difficulties in accurately assessing performance so that high performers can be adequately recruited and rewarded and lower performers can get the assistance needed to improve their performance. Because the instrument examined in this paper can make an important contribution in the identification of individuals likely to exhibit high levels of service-oriented and technologically oriented performance, we recommend that additional research on the various constructs of performance be completed in future research.

	Service	Tech.	Age
<i>China</i>			
Extroversion	0.1422 <i>P</i> = 0.021	0.1014 <i>P</i> = 0.101	0.1117 <i>P</i> = 0.071
Emotion stability	0.1319 <i>P</i> = 0.033	0.1704 <i>P</i> = 0.006	0.1971 <i>P</i> = 0.001
Good impression	0.0811 <i>P</i> = 0.191	0.0445 <i>P</i> = 0.473	-0.1384 <i>P</i> = 0.025
Conscientious	0.2366 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.1740 <i>P</i> = 0.005	0.2280 <i>P</i> = 0.001
Life satisfaction	-0.0030 <i>P</i> = 0.961	-0.0357 <i>P</i> = 0.566	-0.1794 <i>P</i> = 0.004
Performance	0.1207 <i>P</i> = 0.051	0.1929 <i>P</i> = 0.002	-0.0629 <i>P</i> = 0.311
Helpful	0.1095 <i>P</i> = 0.077	0.0271 <i>P</i> = 0.663	-0.2972 <i>P</i> = 0.001
<i>Japan</i>			
Extroversion	0.3034 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.3809 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.0541 <i>P</i> = 0.410
Conscientious	0.1573 <i>P</i> = 0.016	0.2372 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.1605 <i>P</i> = 0.014
Emotion stability	0.0005 <i>P</i> = 0.994	0.0350 <i>P</i> = 0.593	-0.0072 <i>P</i> = 0.912
Good impression	0.2142 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.2441 <i>P</i> = 0.001	-0.1722 <i>P</i> = 0.008
Closed mind	0.0494 <i>P</i> = 0.450	0.0232 <i>P</i> = 0.723	0.1103 <i>P</i> = .092
Empathy	0.2303 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.2465 <i>P</i> = 0.001	0.0584 <i>P</i> = 0.374
Helpfulness	0.0910 <i>P</i> = 0.164	0.1034 <i>P</i> = 0.113	-0.1046 <i>P</i> = 0.110

Table I.
Correlations

Table I Correlations

Scales	Beta values in regression			
	China		Japan	
	Service	Tech.	Service	Tech.
Extroversion	0.142*	0.101	0.303***	0.381***
Emotional stability	0.132*	0.170**	0.000	0.035
Good impressions	0.081	0.044	0.214***	0.244***
Conscientiousness	0.237***	0.174**	0.157**	0.237***
Helpfulness	0.109	0.027	0.091	0.103
Life satisfaction	-0.003	-0.036		
Performance orientation	0.121*	0.193**		
Closed mindedness			0.049	0.023
Empathy			0.230***	0.246***
Multiple <i>R</i> from regression analysis including five topical scales	0.356*	0.333***	0.476***	0.578***
<i>R</i> squared	0.127	0.111	0.226	0.334

Notes: **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001

Table II.
Regression analyses:
regression of personality
scales and performance
(service and
technological-oriented)

Table II Regression analyses: regression of personality scales and performance (service and technological-oriented)

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