EXPLORING THE SPIRIT OF INGENUITY AND THE MANAGEMENT OF FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Although the COVID-19 pandemic, artificial intelligence, Internet of Things have transformed business models, it is, nevertheless, highly relevant to search for solution of decent work and economic growth which is the eighth goal of the SDGs, Sustainable Development Goals. Managing with hierarchical structure and the effective command system to respond to the changing situation is a significance issue for business leaders. Decent work for frontline employees could be for those who demonstrate ingenuity with 'delicate' and 'sophistic' work spirit. This study borrows ingenuity, 匠心 which is Japanese spirit of workmanship as a core factor of framework for study. Managers carefully weaving together each work process into a refined manner, can lay the foundation for successful business operations starting from the bottom of the organisation. However, unclear authorisation from top-level management can result in a confused command system and adversely impact business performance. Re-educational training for middle-level managers can change their management style and communication skills towards the new generation of employees. By combining business philosophy with what employees are passionate about. A work environment can be created where employees work decently. Under an effective command system, employees are authorised to exercise their autonomy and create the highest operational efficiency in a decent working process.

Keywords: hierarchical structure, ingenuity, frontline employee management, learning of decent work

INTRODUCTION

Global political and economic changes, advances in artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things, digitisation, and the COVID-19 pandemic have altered human lifestyles and business models. These changes have also affected the relative relationship between workplace leaders and employees. Conceptualising a means to make necessary adjustments in response to the situation is a vital issue that business leaders must address. In business operations, a suitable hierarchical structure is the most efficient division of labour design. However, some leaders believe that the traditional hierarchical structure is too cumbersome and cannot adapt to changing times (Kanter, 1979). However, the smooth operation of an organisation should not be determined by the length of the hierarchy but by how the company's management philosophy is integrated with the passion of its employees (Buckingham, 2022). By doing so, the employees can freely exercise their independent spirit of ingenuity under intuitive judgment and enjoy a sense of accomplishment and fun during work.

In organisational management, the fundamental unit is 'people' In addition to job stability and satisfaction, employees aspire to not only be empowered with autonomy in their work but also have minimal administrative interference or constraints, while enjoying opportunities for growth and development through their work. In the face of the new generation of employees, middle-level managers should also be prepared for re-education to bridge the gap in ideas with the new generation of employees. If efficiency is pursued only through standard operating procedures and performance evaluations, employees will become living robots that complete all their work-related actions. Without a sense of autonomy, they are prone to feeling disengaged and unable to produce their best work. Therefore, creating an environment that inspires employees' enthusiasm is the cornerstone of determining the success of a company.

This study adopts an 'action research' approach, collecting valuable data through personal experience, observation, and interviews (Pan, 2004). The study investigates the ingenuity of Japanese check points, ramen, and sushi, as well as the issues and assistance desired by 'frontline employees', the smallest unit in management, in organisational operations. The characteristics of each action in the workflow, implicit training, and the cultivation of the ingenuity of grassroots employees are analysed. Additionally, the study addresses the issues faced by frontline employees, connecting the highest management effectiveness levels with the innermost feelings of employees and the basic workflow of the organisation.

Ingenuity

Ingenuity, also known as '工匠精神' or '匠こころ', refers to the idea (change to spirit) in pursuing perfection in products, processes, and procedures among professional craftsmen (Grossman, 2008). It emphasises achieving the state of 'delicate' and 'sophistic' in every process of production, with its essence lying in the commitment to work wholeheartedly (こころの奥から、真剣に頑張ります). If all the intricate work processes can be well linked together, 'everything goes right'. However, if they cannot be smoothly connected, then 'everything goes wrong'. Through observation, it has been reported that the pace of social life in Japan is well-ordered and calm, with a peaceful feeling of non-interference. Although the pace of the workplace is tight, there is still an inexplicable sense of coordination and stability, exuding a sense of order. This manifests in individuals as a methodical and step-by-step approach, while in organisations, it is reflected in a sense of team spirit as a whole. This study establishes that from the act of check point to the selection of ingredients for ramen, sushi, cooking, plating, and service attitude, a sense of professionalism and harmonious comfort can be felt. This kind of dedication that starts from oneself and extends to the pursuit of excellence, practicality, and beauty in the people, things, time, space, and environment around us is the essence of the long-standing 'ingenuity' in Japanese culture—investing in work with a drive to pursue perfection from the heart and enjoying the pleasure of work in an orderly pace. If all employees within a company can demonstrate attention to detail and thoroughness in the work process, success should not be unexpected. This study will discuss the concept of ingenuity in Japan through the examples of 'check point', 'ramen'（ラーメン）, and 'onigiri suhsi'(お握り寿し).
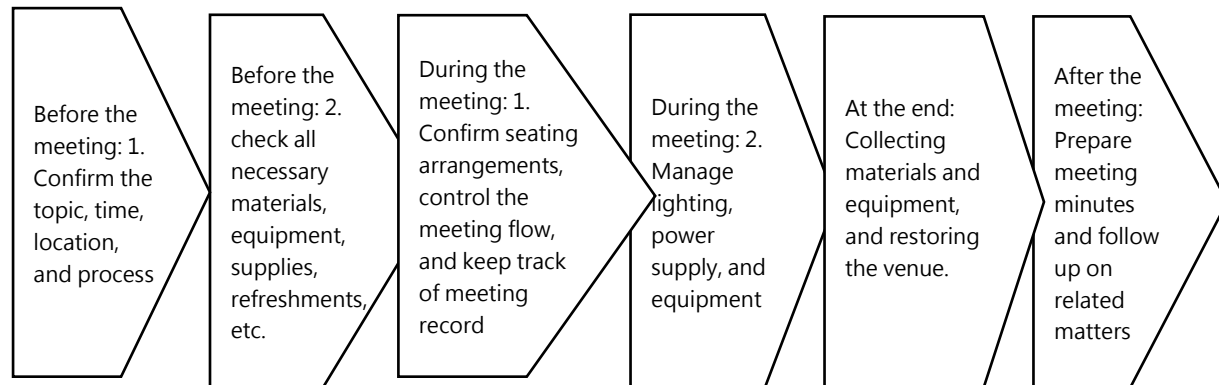
Check point

The author holds that the simplest 'check point' can be regarded as the starting point for cultivating ingenuity. The Japanese people have long been accustomed to the habit of 'check points' in their daily lives and the workplace. It is an unconscious habit of conducting basic check points of the environment and work processes. In addition to self-examination, it is done without causing inconvenience to others due to personal negligence or affecting team operations and performance. The practice of check point can begin with the most basic personal workspace. Although the workspace may be limited and cluttered with documents, data and stationery, it is orderly and not chaotic. The method is to first sort the supplies, stationery, and files by category. Prior to leaving the office, it is necessary to check each item to ensure that nothing is left unchecked, thereby fostering a habit of meticulousness and attention to detail. Starting from the smallest management unit of the individual, gradually expanding to the team,

section, and department, and finally, to the entire company and enterprise group, this is also the reason why Japanese companies can have a place in the international market. The cautious and rigorous work processes in the Japanese workplace embody ingenuity, which is developed through long-term training. For instance, elevator service personnel in department stores must undergo training to ensure that even a simple greeting such as 'welcome'(いらしゃいませ) or 'thank you'（ありがとうございます）is conveyed with a sense of genuine gratitude that customers can feel. The interaction between the platform chief and the train driver at the train station is also a form of 'check point'. When the train is about to depart, the platform chiefs will use their fingers to check each car door from the rear to the front of the train, ensuring that all doors are securely closed and nothing is caught in the doors. Once safety is ensured, the platform chief will point to the train driver and nod 'ok', and the driver will sound the horn to start the train. Although it may seem like a small gesture, this action embodies the fine-tuned operational process and tacit understanding developed through long-term training, thus transforming a simple and mundane gesture into a means of ensuring safety and elegant conduct of command.

The disorderliness of manufacturing plants is commonplace, but it is noticeable that in Japanese factories, almost all supplies, spare parts, and components are arranged in an orderly manner, and some are even colour-coded. The work areas are clean and tidy, and the toilets are immaculate. In the Steve Jobs biography, it was mentioned that he was deeply impressed by the cleanliness of Japanese factories, which was lacking in American factories. This cleanliness demonstrated remarkable teamwork and discipline (Isaacson, 2011). Japanese factories can achieve this level of cleanliness and order because of the diligent execution of checklists that emanate from the hearts of employees. Japanese factories can achieve this level of success largely because of the thorough implementation of internal inspections, which stem from a sense of commitment and ownership amongst the employees. They view the workplace as an integral part of their personal lives and take the company's objectives as their own, hence fostering a strong sense of unity and teamwork. When arranging meetings, using a check mode to confirm the topics, time, location, process, materials, equipment, refreshments, seating, lighting, power and audio equipment, and meeting records that must be prepared beforehand is essential. After the meeting, the materials and equipment used must be collected, and the meeting venue should be restored to its previous state. The meeting records should be compiled, and the issues should be tracked. The most critical aspect is the detailed check point and correction at each stage and link, which is essential to creating a successful meeting, following the process outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Process checklist for conducting meetings

| Before the meeting: 1. Confirm the topic, time, location, and process | Before the meeting: 2. check all necessary materials, equipment, supplies, refreshments, etc. | During the meeting: 1. Confirm seating arrangements, control the meeting flow, and keep track of meeting record | During the meeting: 2. Manage lighting, power supply, and equipment | At the end: Collecting materials and equipment, and restoring the venue. | After the meeting: Prepare meeting minutes and follow up on related matters |

Source: Authors' compilation

The ingenuity in Japanese cuisine

There are countless examples of impressive Japanese cuisine, ranging from simple ramen to elaborate sushi, which represent the essence of Japanese culinary artistry. In addition to being fresh, delicious, and visually appealing, these dishes showcase the professional chefs' 'loyalty' to the characteristics of the ingredients, using their skilled techniques to transform a variety of ingredients and seasonings into perfectly harmonious combinations resembling works of art. While diners relish in the enjoyment of the exquisite cuisine, professional chefs also find joy in the process of creating an artistic masterpiece.
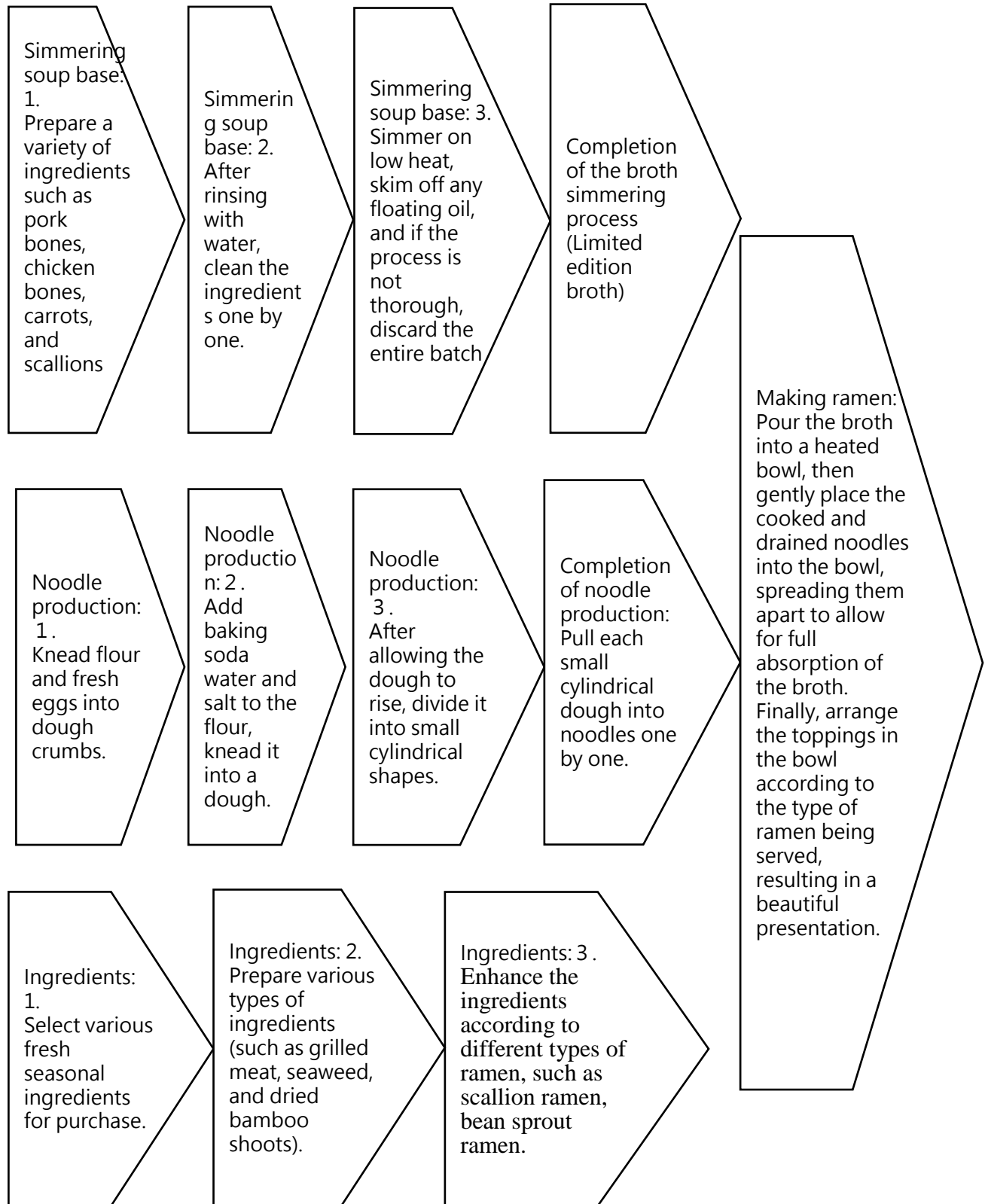
Ramen

Japanese ramen is a regional delicacy that embodies the unique characteristics of its locality. From ingredient selection and cooking to service, emphasis is placed on a delicate and sophisticated production process, showcasing the ingenuity demonstrated by culinary skills and cultural heritage that have been passed down through generations. With different simmering soup base, noodles, and toppings, ranging from light soy sauce ramen to rich tonkotsu ramen (豚骨ラーメン), it forms a diverse array of popular dishes that are both delicious and humble, reflecting the warmth of the skilled artisans behind their creation. In the world of ramen, the 'soup base' plays a major role in determining the overall taste and quality. For example, in Hokkaido, seafood and shellfish are commonly used to create the soup base, while in Tokyo, miso and soy sauce are the representative flavours. In Kyushu, large pork bones are often used for cooking the soup base, resulting in different regional characteristics, tastes, and cultural influences.

Three essential elements of ramen: the soup base, noodles, and toppings

When customers take their first sip of soup and taste their first bite of noodles, experiencing that moment of deliciousness, it is a manifestation of the delicate and sophistic action and ingenuity of the ramen makers throughout the production process. The process involves several stages, beginning with the careful selection and washing of ingredients for the soup base in the first stage. The cooking time for the soup base is closely monitored to ensure that it is perfectly prepared. The next stage involves kneading, resting, and pulling the noodles into the desired shape before boiling them. Once cooked, the noodles are drained with a rhythmic shaking motion before being placed in a bowl. The final stage involves the artistic presentation of toppings, arranged like a masterpiece to create the perfect bowl of ramen. The first priority in preparing the soup base is the local and seasonal ingredients, as well as their freshness, with even the water quality being a consideration. The strict control of the cooking process is essential, including washing each ingredient thoroughly, such as brushing and cleaning chicken and pork bones to ensure that no bloodstains are left. After bringing the ingredients to a boil, they are simmered on low heat for 8 hours while closely monitoring the temperature and skimming off any floating oil or impurities. The key is that even a slight mistake in the cooking process would mean discarding the entire pot and starting over. Additionally, the amount of soup base produced is limited, and once it is used up, no more orders are taken. The noodle-making process involves kneading a mixture of medium- and high-gluten flour with fresh eggs into a dough, whereafter it is mixed with a small amount of baking soda, water, and salt. The dough is placed in a plastic bag with a cloth and lightly stepped on with both feet to ferment and rise (in some cases, it is simply left to sit for a while). Finally, the dough is divided into small cylindrical pieces and hand-pulled into noodles, after which it is sprinkled with some sweet potato starch and set aside. The variety of ingredients is another major factor, besides the soup base, in determining the type of ramen. The main toppings include char siu（チャーシュー）, seaweed, seasoned egg, scallions, nori, dried bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, and so on. Over 10 different flavours of ramen are prepared based on customers' orders (the process of making Remen as shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2. The process of making ramen

Simmering soup base: 1. Prepare a variety of ingredients such as pork bones, chicken bones, carrots, and scallions

Simmering soup base: 2. After rinsing with water, clean the ingredients one by one.

Simmering soup base: 3. Simmer on low heat, skim off any floating oil, and if the process is not thorough, discard the entire batch

Completion of the broth simmering process (Limited edition broth)

Noodle production: 1. Knead flour and fresh eggs into dough crumbs.

Noodle production: 2. Add baking soda water and salt to the flour, knead it into a dough.

Noodle production: 3. After allowing the dough to rise, divide it into small cylindrical shapes.

Completion of noodle production: Pull each small cylindrical dough into noodles one by one.

Making ramen: Pour the broth into a heated bowl, then gently place the cooked and drained noodles into the bowl, spreading them apart to allow for full absorption of the broth. Finally, arrange the toppings in the bowl according to the type of ramen being served, resulting in a beautiful presentation.

Ingredients: 1. Select various fresh seasonal ingredients for purchase.

Ingredients: 2. Prepare various types of ingredients (such as grilled meat, seaweed, and dried bamboo shoots).

Ingredients: 3. Enhance the ingredients according to different types of ramen, such as scallion ramen, bean sprout ramen.

Source: Authors' compilation

Sushi

Sushi is another type of refined cuisine with unique Japanese characteristics, culture, and heritage. The most representative styles are the 'Edomae sushi'（江戸前寿し） from the eastern Kanto region and the 'Hako-Sushi'（箱寿し） from the western Kansai region. The former represents the rich and vibrant culture of Tokyo, while the latter represents the elegance of Kyoto. Whilst crafting sushi may appear to involve only a handful of gentle and straightforward actions. become a skilled sushi chef demands a decade or more of decade training, commonly referred to as the "three years for mastery of vinegared rice preparation and ten years for master of sushi making" journey. In Japan, the training of sushi chefs follows a strict 'master–apprentice' system, where novice apprentices learn various sushi-making techniques and engage in repetitive skill development under the guidance of their mentors. In addition, they must learn communication skills to interact with customers, as responding appropriately to their requests and reactions at the 'itamae sushi' (板前寿し) is one of the crucial determinants for building customer loyalty. One can imagine the multitude of intricate production processes and the warmth of sushi chefs that lie behind the moment of enjoying the exquisite cuisine.

Workflows of making Onigiri

In addition to various toppings such as raw fish, shrimp, sea urchins, and scallops, the key ingredient in onigiri is vinegar rice. The success of making onigiri largely depends on the preparation of the rice, which involves selecting a specific type of rice, cooking it, and adding vinegar water before sifting and cooling it while mixing it with air. The rice is then shaped into the desired form, and each step in the process is essential to achieve the perfect onigiri. To enhance the flavour of sushi, specialised condiments such as soy sauce, wasabi, shiso leaves, and pickled ginger are commonly used. The first step in making onigiri or hand-pressed sushi, is for the sushi chef to visit the fish market early in the morning to select the best seasonal and fresh seafood with unique characteristics for the restaurant. Through long-term trade relationships built on mutual understanding, sushi chefs are usually able to obtain high-quality seafood that exceeds its value. Although the prices may be relatively high, skilled sushi chefs can create dishes with high added value. As a result, most professional sushi restaurants take the path of high-quality and high-price dishes.

Sushi restaurants typically have a basic structure consisting of a kitchen, a dining area, and a sushi counter. The kitchen area houses chefs responsible for sourcing ingredients, preparing food, and making sushi at the sushi-making counter as well as assistants (apprentices) who assist in seafood preparation and help the sushi chefs. The dining area is

primarily staffed by frontline employees who greet customers both inside and outside the restaurant. The counter staff, usually comprising women dressed in traditional kimonos, have another important role. They have excellent communication skills, friendly attitudes, and elegant manners, playing a crucial public relations role.

Professional sushi restaurants create an elegant dining environment with refined decor, gentle Japanese classical music, and different uniforms for the sushi chefs, counter staff, and servers, demonstrating the division of labour and team spirit. The exquisite menus and the elegant ordering and serving process create a welcoming atmosphere, making guests feel at home. Upon entering the restaurant, customers are warmly greeted and guided to the seat while being offered a warm towel and tea. Ordering marks the beginning of the intricate movements by the sushi chef. In addition to directly serving customers at the sushi counter, the sushi chef (itamae-san;板前さん) oversees the flow of the restaurant and controls the overall operation while preparing the sushi. For each piece of sushi, sushi chefs first dip their hands in water to prevent the vinegared rice from sticking to their palms. With their right hand, they deftly grasp a small amount of vinegared rice, allowing the grains to make full contact with the air. Using their left hand, they pick up a slice of raw fish (さしみ) and hold it upright between their palm and fingers. The sushi chef then lightly brushes some wasabi onto the raw fish before placing the vinegared rice on top. With their left hand holding the fish and their right hand using their index and middle fingers to mould the sushi, the chef repeatedly shapes the sushi into a neat form. Finally, the chefs flip the sushi over with their right hand, placing it on a geda (ゲタ, sushi plate) and presenting it to the customer with a sense of showmanship (See Figure 3).

Tasting

The most enjoyable way to savour Japanese sushi is to sit at the counter in front of the sushi chef (itamae sushi;板前寿し), it is often the most expensive seat in the restaurant. First, one admires the seafood on display and then places an order based on one's preference or the chefs recommendation. As the chef expertly crafts the sushi in what is almost an artistic performance, the most valuable aspect is being able to chat face-to-face with the chef. The chef will tell you all about where the fish was caught, how it was procured, and how it was prepared to create the most precious sushi, and they will advise on the best order to enjoy the sushi, and the most delicious way to pick up the sushi and dip it in the sauce. When the sushi is gently placed in the mouth, the delicious taste spreads and stimulates the taste buds, causing an inner sensation of 'wow'. In that fleeting moment, there is an intuitive feeling that this is not just food but rather the sublimation of food to the realm of beauty (See Figure 4).

The high-end and colourful sushi, made with fresh ingredients, an elegant environment, and warm service along with the combination of elegant craftsmanship, has created a distinctive and tasteful image for the restaurant, forming a brand that is well-known among households. Located in Ginza, Tokyo, Japan, the 'Sukiyabashi Jiro Honten' restaurant, which has been awarded three Michelin stars for consecutive years, is run by Jiro Ono, known as the 'sushi god' of Japan. Notwithstanding its small size with only 10 seats, Jiro has been perfecting his sushi-making skills since the age of seven, creating a unique brand with his mouth-watering and melt-in-your-mouth sushi. As a result, even international dignitaries flock to his restaurant.
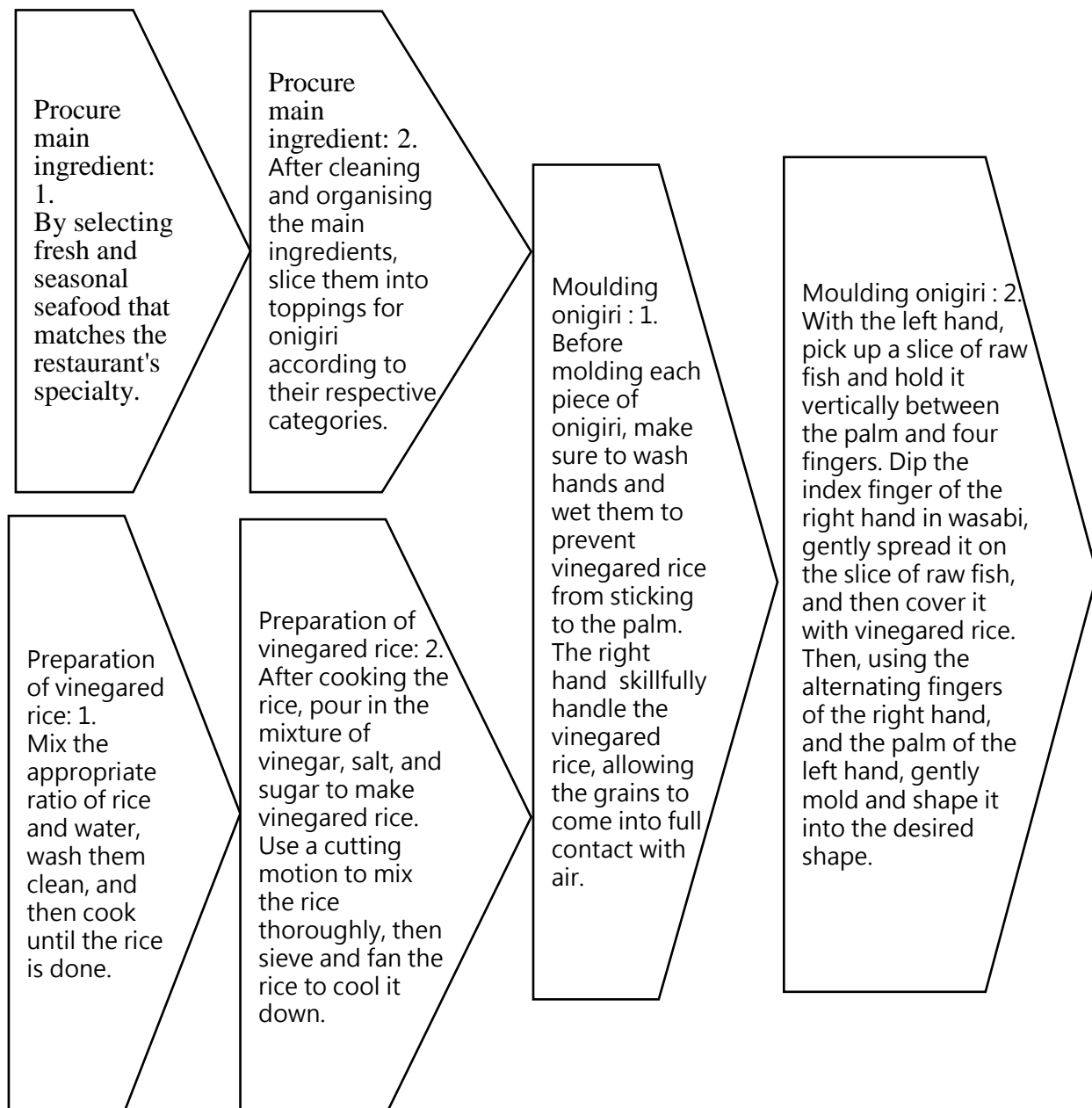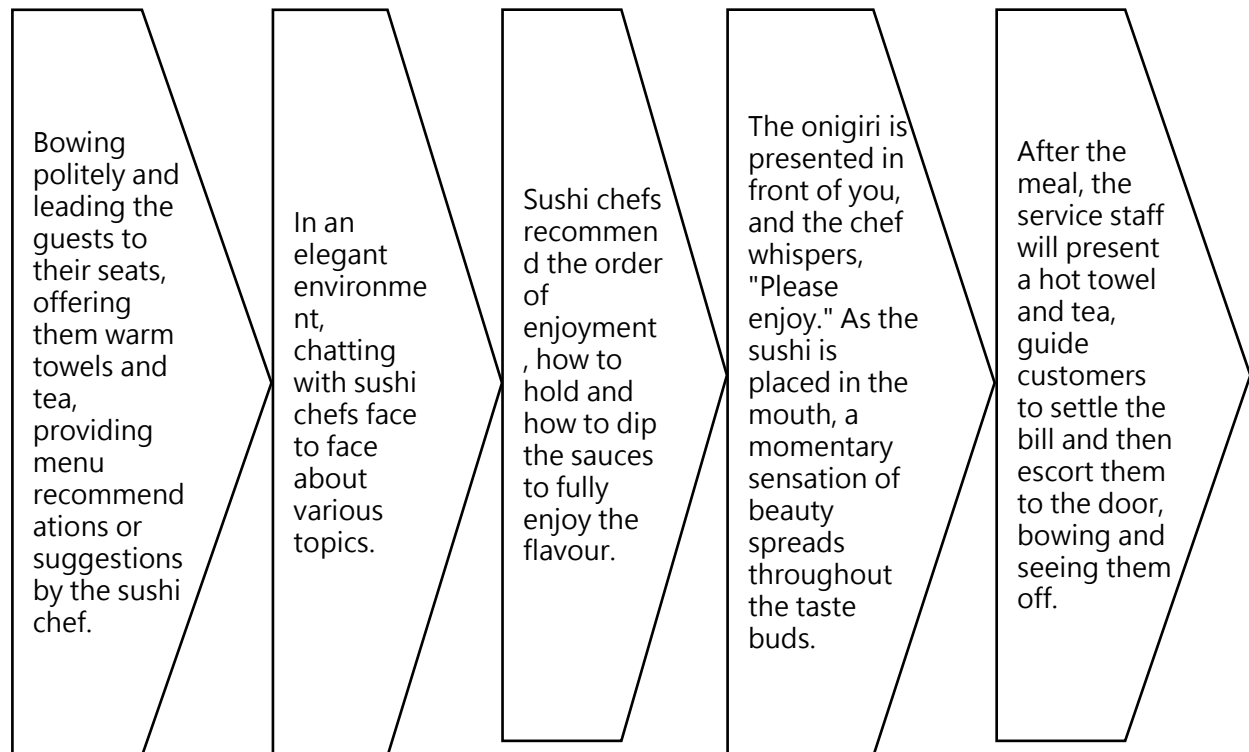
Figure 3. Workflows of crafting onigiri

Procure main ingredient: 1. By selecting fresh and seasonal seafood that matches the restaurant's specialty.

Procure main ingredient: 2. After cleaning and organising the main ingredients, slice them into toppings for onigiri according to their respective categories.

Moulding onigiri : 1. Before molding each piece of onigiri, make sure to wash hands and wet them to prevent vinegared rice from sticking to the palm. The right hand skillfully handle the vinegared rice, allowing the grains to come into full contact with air.

Moulding onigiri : 2. With the left hand, pick up a slice of raw fish and hold it vertically between the palm and four fingers. Dip the index finger of the right hand in wasabi, gently spread it on the slice of raw fish, and then cover it with vinegared rice. Then, using the alternating fingers of the right hand, and the palm of the left hand, gently mold and shape it into the desired shape.

Preparation of vinegared rice: 1. Mix the appropriate ratio of rice and water, wash them clean, and then cook until the rice is done.

Preparation of vinegared rice: 2. After cooking the rice, pour in the mixture of vinegar, salt, and sugar to make vinegared rice. Use a cutting motion to mix the rice thoroughly, then sieve and fan the rice to cool it down.

Figure 4. Service workflows for onigiri tasting (take 'itame sushi' as an example)

Bowing politely and leading the guests to their seats, offering them warm towels and tea, providing menu recommendations or suggestions by the sushi chef.

In an elegant environment, chatting with sushi chefs face to face about various topics.

Sushi chefs recommend the order of enjoyment, how to hold and how to dip the sauces to fully enjoy the flavour.

The onigiri is presented in front of you, and the chef whispers, "Please enjoy." As the sushi is placed in the mouth, a momentary sensation of beauty spreads throughout the taste buds.

After the meal, the service staff will present a hot towel and tea, guide customers to settle the bill and then escort them to the door, bowing and seeing them off.

Analysis of ingenuity embodied in Japanese check point, ramen, and onigiri

From the analysis of the workflows of check point, ramen preparation, and onigiri crafting, it is revealed that each stage involves sophisticated preparation and delicate actions, highlighting the essence of Japanese ingenuity. In terms of strategy, for the check point, a meticulous and thorough work attitude is cultivated from the source of the work. For ramen and onigiri, they use carefully selected ingredients and also create distinctive dishes with a delicate and sophisticated approach. In terms of cost, by implementing thorough check points, businesses can reduce operational risks and achieve cost savings. As for ramen and onigiri, they are respectively positioned as more accessible and refined options, aiming to lower costs through cost-sharing measures. Regarding organisation, the check point process starts with individual training and expands to teams and companies to create a team spirit and culture. Ramen and onigiri also follow a rigorous and simple apprenticeship system, simplifying hierarchical structures to ensure the transfer of experience and culture (see Table 1). In terms of process, for check point, it starts with managing individual behaviour and extends to the smooth operation and command system of the entire organisation. As for ramen and onigiri, there are orderly and rhythmic workflows to achieve efficiency. In terms of aesthetics, for the check point

process, a sense of order and rhythm emanates from within during every movement, enabling the work to reach a state of smoothness and satisfaction. For ramen, a joyful mood with order and rhythm is achieved to create a popular dish, while for onigiri, the use of colourful ingredients and delicate craftsmanship creates a momentary perfect taste like a work of art. In terms of brand image, the meticulousness cultivated through the process of check pointing creates a credible image of a rigorous work attitude from the individual to the company level. Similarly, ramen and onigiri create an image of cultural heritage and culinary excellence through the use of carefully selected ingredients and exquisite techniques (see Table 2).

Table 1. Analysis of the ingenuity embodied in Japanese check point, ramen, and onigiri

Items	Strategies	Cost	Organisation
Check point	Cultivate a meticulous and thorough work attitude from the bottom of the job hierarchy	Regular check points reduce work risks, minimise losses, increase efficiency, enhance productivity, and lower costs.	Training expands from individuals to teams and companies, fostering team spirit and culture.
Ramen	Making soup base, noodles and topping in a delicate and sophistic way to present unique flavors for general public	By offering affordable dishes that appeal to the general public, create high profits at a low cost.	The apprentice system simplifies hierarchical structure and ensures the transmission of experience and culture.
Onigiri	Combining freshness, seasonality and seafood with skilled craftsmanship to create exquisite	Professional chefs use quality ingredients to craft gourmet dishes with high taste and added value, obtaining high profits.	The apprentice system simplifies hierarchical structure and ensures the transmission of experience and culture.

Source: Aggregated author experience and observation

Table 2. Analysis of the ingenuity embodied in Japanese check point, ramen, and onigiri

Items	Process	Aesthetics	Brand Image
Check point	It extends from basic personal behaviour management to the smooth operation and command system of the entire organisation.	The execution of all actions emanates from a sense of order and rhythm from within, enabling work to reach a state of smoothness and satisfactory.	Creating an image of meticulous work attitude from individual to overall company behaviour and work style.
Ramen	With meticulous and rigorous spirit, every action in the operation is linked to achieving the highest efficiency.	With a sense of order and rhythm, a pleasant mood is cultivated during the process of boiling soup base, making noodles, preparing ingredients, and creating the perfect dish for the general public	Utilising the characteristics of local ingredients to create a cultural brand image with different flavours and unique features.
Onigiri	With a meticulous and rigorous spirit, every action in the operation is linked to achieving the highest efficiency.	With vibrant ingredients and a meticulous, rhythmic craft, dishes that are almost artistic are formed, creating a perfect taste experience that is unique and memorable each time.	Combining cultural heritage, gourmet cuisine, elegant environment, and nearly artistic production techniques to create a unique brand image.

Source: Aggregated author experience and observation

Frontline employee management

This study investigates Companies A and B, both of which operate in a traditional management style. The organisational structure is clear, with well-defined business divisions. Although the hierarchical structure consists of nine and eight layers respectively. In actual operations, there are three layerls, including mid-level supervisors, frontline supervisors, and frontline employees. In Company A, the main executing unit is the 'Department', which is led by a department director. The basic executing unit is the 'Section', which is led by a section manager. Frontline employees in this company include senior specialists, specialists, and clerks. The primary operational unit of Company B is the branch office, which is coordinated by a director. The fundamental operational unit is the 'team', which is overseen by managers. The frontline employees consist of specialists, clerks, and assistant staffs. However, with the advancement of digital technology, to achieve efficiency, the command system has experienced a lack of smoothness in the direct command of the grassroots by the upper management, as well as a lack of coordination between supervisors. This has affected the work direction and morale of frontline employees and also impacted operational performance. This study aims to explore the issues arising from the hierarchical structure and command systems of Companies A and B, as well as the problems perceived by frontline employees and the assistance they expect to receive.

Hierarchical structure and command system issues of Company A

The company is an information service provider that has been in operation for over 50 years. Its main business involves providing customers with business information and opportunities for various commercial activities. In addition to the chairman, president & CEO, and deputy president & CEO, the organisational structure includes units such as planning and finance, industrial development, market development, digital commerce, digital technology, exhibition services, and talent training. In the nine layers of the company, the chairman and the president & CEO are the ultimate decision makers for important and general business, respectively. The actual execution of the business is carried out by the department head, who oversees several sections. The managers serve as frontline supervisors, leading the frontline employees in carrying out assigned tasks. The characteristics of the personnel structure are that there is an age gap between the management level and the frontline employees. The turnover rate of new employees is relatively high, possibly due to the new generation's employment habits. The current problems with the command system include direct command from senior management and external instructions that do not go through formal channels (see Table 3).

Table 3. Hierarchical structure and command system issues of Company A.

Industry: Information services industry							
Business philosophy: Providing customers and commissioned units with business information and opportunity services							
Established	1970		Number of employees		Around 1,300(2021)		
Main departments							
Industry and market development, digital business and technology, exhibition services, talent training, and human resources, etc.							
Hierarchy							
Chair man	President & CEO	Deputy President & CEO	Department management		Frontline employees		
			Director	Deputy Director manger	Senior specialist	Specialist	Assist-ant staff
Authority							
The chairman is the ultimate decision maker for important business matters, while the president & CEO makes final decisions on regular business affairs. Department directors are responsible for executing and supervising various business operations, while managers are frontline supervisors for carrying out business operations. Deputy president & CEO and deputy directors assist the president & CEO and department directors respectively, but they have relatively little decision-making power.							
Operating procedures							
Instructions are communicated from top to bottom, with the President & CEO who reports to the chairman for significant business matters and delegating tasks that are then handled by employees at the frontline. The progress of these tasks is reported in sequence to the manager, deputy director, director, deputy president & CEO, president & CEO, and ultimately the chairman, who makes the final decision on execution.							
Characteristics of command and management systems							
1. The chairman encourages direct reporting of suggestions. 2. Senior executives occasionally assign grassroots tasks directly. 3. Instructions from unofficial channels are constantly emerging.							

Source: Author's own experience and data from interviews with relevant personnel.

Problem analysis: using digital transformation as an example

The company's management adopts a traditional hierarchical responsibility system. In response to the digital network development trend, the chairman actively promotes 'cloud digitisation' transformation to change traditional operations and service methods. However, most employees lack a clear understanding of digital cloud concepts, resulting in internal coordination issues as traditional and digital operations run parallel to each other. To achieve effective transformation, the first step is to establish an informal 'agile team' selected by the chairman. This team aims to quickly obtain consulting opinions without going through traditional management layers, while maintaining the original operating methods of each unit. However, because most members are frontline employees with relatively limited experience and connections, they find it difficult to provide the chairman with valuable information (Kanter, 1979). Furthermore, owing to the ambiguous position of team members within their original units, relevant managers lose their management and supervisory authority over them. The chairman once again selected personnel from relevant departments to establish a formal

department called the 'Innovation Business Centre'. However, because the members still come from within the company, it is difficult for them to break away from traditional thinking patterns, and this affects the effectiveness of the transformation. The management problem that arises is that when members are sent to other units for guidance, it creates a phenomenon of alternative superiors, which affects the work direction and authority of the managers in the guided unit. Finally, experts with a background in digital transformation were invited to form a new unit to carry out the transformation task. By completely breaking away from the original thinking logic and mode, digital transformation operations are expected to have a better chance of achieving the desired goals. Taiwan's well-known business magazine BW's CEO once said that during the early stages of publishing digital magazines, they also transferred some of their staff to the electronic magazine department, but it did not achieve the desired results. Only after hiring professional personnel to establish a completely independent new company did they succeed. From this case, it can be observed that the 'Agile Team' and 'Innovation Business Centre' adopted to accelerate digital transformation can indeed quickly obtain frontline information and rapidly convey top-level instructions. However, as they bypass the hierarchical structure and issue direct commands, both the members who convey instructions and the frontline employees who receive instructions are likely to experience confusion and difficulties in maintaining a clear position. The middle managers face a dilemma in this situation. They can neither obtain real-time information nor can they obtain effective resources and support. They also have difficulty gaining the trust of their subordinates. They seem to feel that they have been marginalised by the organisation and are unable to perform their functions as middle managers. Under such powerlessness, they find it difficult to promote business activities (Kanter, 1979).

The problems and assistance expected by frontline employees

This study finds that during the transformation process, frontline employees generally feel trapped between their existing business responsibilities, directives from top management, and external instructions that do not come through formal channels. They spend most of their time on tedious and repetitive administrative tasks and dealing with a sense of uncertainty caused by the lack of clear direction, which complicates their accumulation of work experience and growth opportunities. The most frustrating issue is the inability to be creative and innovative due to strict regulations and constantly changing rules. It is also difficult to have different ideas and approaches accepted by superiors. When performing well, there are no appropriate rewards, and when the working performances are unmet, manpower and budget are immediately reduced. Frontline managers encounter challenges in carrying out orders because of the lack of support from their superiors in dealing with underperforming employees. Direct

orders from the higher-ups have had a significantly negative impact on the smoothness of the management system, causing confusion in the chain of command and priorities. Furthermore, when there are inappropriate demands and pressures from commissioned or external units, the relevant managers are unable to assist in resolving them properly. They only ask frontline employees to cooperate in handling them, resulting in them being exhausted by the burden and challenges of both their primary and additional workloads, ultimately leading to poor performance. Under this command system, it is difficult to cultivate the ingenuity of employees as in the Japanese cases that mentioned above, which represents a basic issue that cannot be ignored in business management.

Both senior and new-generation frontline employees seek not only job challenges and satisfaction but also the autonomy to make decisions at work and opportunities for growth. They expect clear work direction and execution methods. Once the direction and objectives are communicated, they want to achieve them at their own pace and in their own way. Managers do not need to micromanage the details but should play the role of a guide, providing effective support and assistance in solving internal and external problems. They should not simply convey or repeat orders but be able to serve as a shield for their employees when facing direct commands from top management or external pressures. Furthermore, they need to be able to listen to different opinions and practices, as well as providing the frontline employees opportunities to receive various job-related training to keep up with the pace of the workplace (see Table 4).

Table 4. Issues experienced by A company's frontline employees and expected support.

Perceived problems
1. Administrative operations are cumbersome and repetitive, leading to a loss of a sense of accomplishment.
2. The direction of work is uncertain and constantly changing, resulting in a loss of direction.
3. It is difficult to accumulate work experience and gain opportunities for growth from work.
4. Work methods are limited, and there is a lack of freedom in thinking and job autonomy.
5. There is an unequal distribution of work, with excessive workloads.
6. External forces interfere and affect operations and execution direction.

Expected support
1. Clear direction and execution methods for work.
2. Avoid Multiple Commands and repetitive assign.
3. Effective support, assistance in problem-solving, and a back-up in the face of external challenges.
4. Listen to employees' feedback, ideas, and suggestions.
5. Training and growth opportunities.

Source: Aggregated from the author's own experience and interviews with relevant personnel.

Company B: Hierarchical structure and command system issues

The company is a regional branch in the financial services industry, with its main business being foreign exchange, deposits and remittances, personal finance, and corporate finance. The management hierarchy of Company B, apart from the president and managing director of the head office and the department heads, consists of branch office director in each branch, in addition to the director, each branch is staffed with several managers and frontline staffs responsible for executing operations. The director is responsible for the overall planning, execution, and development of the branch's business. The branch office structure of the company consists of three layers: director, managers and frontline staffs, making it a relatively simple structure (see Table 5). The personnel structure is characterised by an age gap between the management level and frontline employees, a higher-than-average turnover rate for new employees, possibly due to the employment habits of the new generation, and a sense of unease among frontline employees when faced with supervisors with different styles of work in the same unit, which is the location of the command system issue.

Table 5. Hierarchical structure and command system issues of Company B

Industry: Financial services industry							
Management philosophy: The financial services industry operates on the business philosophy of 'service', 'efficiency', and 'innovation', providing customers with a range of financial services.							
Established		1905		Number of employees		Around 6,610 (2021)	
Main departments							
The departments include fund operations, international operations, digital finance, credit/debt/equity/risk/financial management, insurance agency, wealth management, information security and branch offices.							
Hierarchy							
President	Managing Director	Executive Director (head office)	management		Frontline staff		
			Director	Manager	Specialist	Clerks	Assistant Staffs
Authority							
The chairman serves as the ultimate decision maker for the head office, while the branch director holds the final decision-making authority for the respective branch. The manager provides actual supervision and direction to frontline staffs to handle assigned tasks.							
Operating procedures							
Orders are issued from top to bottom, with the head office issuing instructions to each branch, which are then assigned to staff at different levels by branch directors. After completing assigned tasks, frontline employees report to supervisors in sequence, who then report to the director. The branch director makes a final decision, or the relevant units at the head office are informed before reporting to the managing director or chairman for a final decision.							
Characteristics of command and management systems							
In addition to the general administrative procedures, an extra manager is assigned to the 'Corporate Finance' department, creating unease among frontline staffs who have to follow directions from two managers simultaneously.							

Source: Aggregation of interview data from relevant personnel and the bank's online resources

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Problem analysis: Taking managerial authorisation as an example

'Corporate Finance Team' is the main profit unit of the branch office, and, the X manager in charge of this business, has strong professional ability, high motivation, and attention to detail, which enable effective control. However, X has strong subjectivity, poor emotional management, and is not easy to accept different opinions. The newly appointed director initially relied heavily on X to run the business, but gradually this caused X to become difficult to balance, even dominating the director in terms of momentum, resulting in negative feelings among other associates and frontline staffs. The director sought to improve performance and expand the scale of the Corporate Finance Team. As the volume of the business continued to grow beyond the capacity of X, the director assigned Y manager from the 'Deposit and Remittance Team' to jointly lead the Corporate Finance business with X according to a division of labour based on credit amount, interest rate, collateral ratio, risk, and so on. However, due to Y 's lack of strict oversight, there have been numerous cases rejected by X that were even approved by Y. The frontline staffs, working under two managers with different work styles and responsibilities, are exhausted from the back-and-forth administrative work and gradually lose their senses of direction and enthusiasm for their work. They are also questioning Y's ability, leadership, and the communication and coordination between the two supervisors.

After multiple complaints to the director and other colleagues about their lack of responsibility and support, X took a long vacation. During this leave, Y acted as a full proxy. However, due to inadequate supervision, there was still a high volume of cases being sent back to the Y for review, thereby causing frontline employees to continue to struggle with constant revisions. This predicament has now shifted from being between the two managers to being between the director and Y. After returning from leave, X was reassigned as the manager of 'Deposit and Remittance Team' . However, even though the cases approved by the Corporate Finance Team of Y, when submitted to X for remittance, were still rejected due to flaws, causing them to fall into the same vortex of back and forth, and once again sapping the morale and enthusiasm of the frontline employees due to the lack of smooth operation and command system. When facing challenges such as customer complaints, the supervisors also failed to provide timely assistance and support. This increased the work pressure, and the supervisors' habit of giving orders without listening or communicating effectively, thereby engendering a sense of alienation. The biggest issue lies in the lack of coordination between the supervisors, which results in employees being busy in an uncertain environment most of the time, and subsequently losing opportunities for training and growth in their work. The frontline employees expect not to lose their work direction due to poor management systems, and they also hope that their supervisors can communicate and coordinate effectively when encountering internal

issues. Moreover, when facing external challenges, the supervisors should be able to provide effective support and assistance in solving issues. However, owing to unclear authorisation, there is a lack of coordination among supervisors, which even renders it difficult for frontline employees to fully engage themselves in their work. (see Table 6).

Table 6. Issues experienced by B company's frontline employees and expected support

Perceived problems
1. Confusion caused by two direct supervisors with different standards.
2. Questioning of the professional and leadership abilities of supervisors.
3. Inability to obtain immediate and effective assistance and support when facing challenges.
4. Commanding style of supervisors and lack of habit to listen to different opinions.
5. Poor communication among supervisors leads to no suitable solution.
6. Lack of training opportunities to cope with environmental changes.

Expected support
1. Clear and singular work direction and decision-making.
2. Communication and coordination between supervisors.
3. Ability to provide effective support and assistance in problem-solving.
4. To be a support for employees when facing external challenges.
5. Listening to different opinions and approaches.
6. Training opportunities to cope with changes in the environment.

Source: Compiled from interviews with relevant personnel and online information

After analysing the issues of companies A and B, a common characteristic was found to be the problems arising from an ineffective command system. In terms of strategy, Company A aims to improve its traditional operations, streamline its procedures, and enhance service efficiency through digitisation. Company B seeks to expand its profitable sectors and increase overall revenue, but the effectiveness of its execution has been hindered by a confusing command system. In terms of cost, Company A can significantly reduce hardware investment, operating costs, and labour costs after a successful transformation. Company B, due to the inefficiencies resulting from redundant authorisations in expanding its corporate finance sector, may experience an increase in operating costs. In terms of organisation, both companies have relatively sound structures. However, Company A's rapid digitalisation progress has impacted the consistency of its command system. Company B's use of redundant authorisations has confused employees' understanding of the organisational structure. In terms of processes, both companies have very sound operational procedures. However, Company A's direct top-down command approach and disregard for inappropriate external interference have caused issues. Company B has been hampered by unclear authorisations, resulting in internal process confusion and a negative impact on employee morale. In terms of education and training, both companies have comprehensive employee training plans. However, employees are hampered by ineffective command systems and the exhaustion of dealing with tedious and repetitive tasks,

which limits their training time and opportunities. Thus, it is important to provide the frontline employees the chance of learning of decent work. In addition, many middle-level managers are from the Y generation and may struggle to manage the new generation of employees traditionally, causing communication and coordination issues. Therefore, there is a need to provide middle-level managers re-educational training chance to enhance the intelligence to adapt to the management of new generation employees and reduce cognitive gaps. In terms of brand image, both companies have a good reputation. Company A has transformed its traditional service into digital service, which enhances its brand image. In the highly competitive financial services industry, Company B's unclear authorisation situation may not have an immediate impact on its external image, but if it is not improved, efficiency issues could lead to a negative brand image in the long run (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7. Business execution and problem analysis of Companies A and B

	Strategies	Cost	Organisation
Company A	Digitisation transformation aims to improve traditional operational methods and enhance service efficiency.	After successful transformation, it will significantly reduce operating costs and personnel costs.	The rapid digitalisation process has affected the consistency of the command system.
Company B	Expand the scale of profit-making departments and increase branch office profits.	Duplicate authorisations affect the division of labour efficiency, increase manpower loss and raise operating costs.	The duplication of authorisations has confused employees' understanding of the organisational structure.

Table 8. Business execution and problem analysis of Companies A and B

	Process	Education and training	Brand image
Company A	Digitisation can improve lengthy processes and increase operational efficiency, but direct control by top management can affect the smoothness of the process.	Provide employees with learning of decent work to adapt to the changes brought by the new generation and enhance the re-educational training of mid-level managers.	Transforming from traditional service methods to digital services can enhance the brand image.
Company B	Unclear authorisation leads to confusion in internal processes, affecting execution efficiency, performance, and employee morale.	Provide employees with learning of decent work to adapt to the changes brought by the new generation and re-educational training of mid-level managers.	Unclear internal authorisation may not affect the external image in the short term, but if it persists, a negative image due to efficiency issues will inevitably arise.

Source: Compiled by the author's own experience, subsequent observations, and interviews with relevant personnel

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Creating a work environment that fosters employee satisfaction

An efficient hierarchical structure and a smooth command system can enhance employee morale, productivity, and innovation. However, having too many layers of hierarchy can lead to lengthy information flow and confusion in making multiple decisions. Moreover, if managers and subordinates are too close in terms of ability and experience, it can result in a lack of added value and authority for managers and make the organisation less efficient (Jaques, 1990). Moreover, if high-level executives directly command frontline employees as in Company A, or if managers duplicate their authorization as in Company B, it can confuse the command system and directly affect employee morale and business performance. In business operations, the most important stakeholders are employees. In addition to having an effective and unobstructed hierarchical structure, it is crucial to provide employees with motivation at work. Apart from tangible rewards such as salary, bonuses, and promotions, it is essential to provide a work environment that aligns with employees' interests and aspirations, forward-looking training, and opportunities for growth. Failure to do so may lead to the phenomenon of 'meaningless work' and result in a loss of opportunities for innovation, creativity, and sustainable development at the very core of the enterprise. One way to stimulate employees' passion for their work is by linking the company's mission and vision with their personal interests. Granting employees autonomy over their work can also help to foster enthusiasm (Buckingham, 2022). This study, conducted through action research, finds that frontline employees who demonstrate ingenuity and delicate and sophistic work attitudes by carefully and comprehensively linking each work process can create a joyful outcome from the heart in a mutually trusting environment. This is similar to the mentor–disciple structure of the Japanese ramen and sushi chefs, which operates with a clear division of labour principles. The source of ingenuity, although it is expressed in Japanese Chinese characters, but it can be traced back to the human evolution of the ingenuity in human-made axes. This beauty shows intelligence, planning capability, precise action control, and the ability to obtain special materials, which have evolved in human DNA for over 500,000 years. Such abilities form the foundation of management (Dutton 2010). Furthermore, Kuma's (2021) work, 'Welcome, feeling at work' in Lambro Park, Milan, presents a space that transcends East–West culture, seeking to evoke a sense of joy and satisfaction in work through architecture. Therefore, designing and creating a work environment that motivates employees to be fully devoted and cultivating a spirit of ingenuity from the very foundation of the enterprise can lay the groundwork for the success of business operations from the bottom of the management hierarchy.

Management of frontline employees

Apart from the strategies and direction set by leaders, the most critical factor for business success should be the frontline employees who work between the company and the customers. Without qualified and motivated frontline employees, even with excellent hierarchical structure and well-trained supervisors, efforts may go to waste. For example, frontline chefs in ramen and sushi restaurants who create delicacies with ingenuity and provide warm service to customers. This is because they have been instilled with a delicate and sophisticated spirit from the rigorous work training process since apprenticeship. As a result, work becomes a happy rhythm of pursuing aesthetic sense and receiving attentive training from their mentor. The most profound issue faced by frontline employees in Companies A and B is being trapped in an ineffective command system, lack of coordination among managers, and resistance to new ideas and practices. Administrative work and repetitive tasks leave them with little opportunity to exercise their creativity, thereby turning work into a source of pressure instead of joy. This lack of autonomy undermines their ability to demonstrate their performance. Managers who can demonstrate empathy and care, especially by changing the traditional command-and-control management style and actively listening to employees' feedback, can make a difference. Especially for frontline workers, who are usually from the so-called 'digital native' Generation Z (born after 1996), they value self-expression, lack hierarchical thinking, dislike repetitive and tedious work, do not view their job as a lifelong goal, and make good use of digital communication tools. They believe that their supervisors and senior colleagues do not understand their concepts, ideas, working styles, and values (Zhong, 2019). They mainly rely on communication software to keep in touch with people, accept and use vast amounts of information for a long time, and develop work habits different from other generations (Luo, 2022). The difference in communication habits is also one of the reasons for management difficulties. The authors themselves deeply feel that traditional management and communication methods seem to be ineffective, as careful guidance and frequent progress updates are perceived as 'interference'. The execution of business is done by quickly gathering and integrating diverse information, and presenting it only after achieving the goal. It appears that the experience of the supervisor is only taken as a reference. Although employees can learn various skills and accumulate experience from the organisation, authorising employees to freely unleash their creative spirit and reform relatively old operating procedures based on changes in the frontline environment can also help the organisation learn (Cook & Yanow, 2012). As time passes, with rapid changes in the social environment, widespread education, digital networks, and advancements in AI technology, the new generation of employees will become the main force in the workplace. Managers must adapt to the changing times and prepare for self-

improvement and growth, understanding the thoughts and work preferences of the new generation of frontline employees. This allows frontline employees to fully utilise their abilities in a motivated, interference-free, and free mindset, thereby displaying management capabilities that lead to operational excellence.

Middle management re-educational training

Managers play a crucial role in goal management, empowerment, and re-education within an organisation. An appropriate hierarchical structure and command system can motivate employees and enhance performance. However, with the rapid changes in digital technology and the workforce structure, different values and communication styles have emerged between new and old generation employees. The frontline employees of Companies A and B have found that their supervisors not only lack the willingness to communicate but also fail to provide timely assistance and problem-solving skills when facing customer complaints, thus causing difficulties in carrying out their lowest-level tasks. This demonstrates that besides unclear empowerment, middle managers require re-educational training to improve their abilities. The study finds that the lack of time and opportunities for training among frontline employees in Companies A and B is due to the fragmented and disordered chain of command from superiors and the external environment. Similarly, middle managers may also face the same dilemma and lose opportunities for retraining ad further re-education. In a world that is becoming faster, more complex, and more uncertain, middle managers, who serve as a bridge between traditional top-down leadership and frontline employees who are not accustomed to taking orders, play a critical role in not only showcasing their abilities but also lubricating the organisation's operations. Organisational leaders must provide mid-level managers with training in 'new generation management skills and communication abilities' to enhance their management and communication coordination abilities. This will allow frontline employees to perform their duties with sincerity and pursue successful outcomes in a happy state of mind, while ensuring their psychological safety (Edmondson, 2018). Middle managers should have the determination to continually improve their own intelligence because, in the trend of digitalisation, the abilities and skills they have learned in the past can easily be replaced by AI. Facing frontline employees with vastly different behavioural patterns, middle managers need to not only increase the added value of their abilities but also create a sense of belonging and security for frontline employees. For example, instead of changing job positions or firing unsuitable employees, they can work together to design job content, identify the roles employees wish to play and manage in a way that allows employees to execute tasks, face challenges, and develop their potential (Buckingham, 2022).

This study investigates how cultivating employees' ingenuity in the workflow is essential to laying the foundation for a successful enterprise in organisational operations. On the operational level, avoiding unclear directives and authorizations from upper management that could affect business performance, and providing mid-level managers with re-educational training in management and communication skills to keep up with the new generation of employees' thinking logic, and collaboratively constructing a meticulous and comprehensive workflow, are the fool proof measures for establishing the cornerstone of business success. The result of this study shows the ingenuity as expressed in Japanese character 匠心 is "the form" of workmanship, but in reality, it is constrained by organizational culture. It is fragile and easily being overlooked and disappear. Power failures in management circuit could make the routine work lose direction of purpose and overshadow by time pressure. This is limitation of the study. The future research recommendations of this study focus on the issue of second-generation successors. In a rapidly changing environment, second-generation successors must face different ideas, concepts, and management philosophies from different generations of subordinates and superiors, which test their wisdom and management capabilities. Notably, the challenge entails developing a means to break through to achieve effective management objectives.

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