

The Japanese Multinational Enterprise Influence on Sustainability Reporting Practices of Philippine Subsidiaries: A Theoretical Review

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Sustainability reporting has been standardized in Japanese non-financial reporting, taking into consideration its business environment, legal framework, and cultural values. Particular to environmental management, Japanese manufacturers have institutionalized sustainability reporting in their mode of governance in the past decade. On the other hand, there are no reporting guidelines yet on sustainability reporting in the Philippines, notwithstanding the current greening of global economies.

This study aims to describe how Japanese multinational companies influence sustainability reporting practices of their Philippine subsidiaries by: (1) annotating significant theories and literature on organizations, institutions and networks; (2) deriving the most relevant theory; (3) and developing propositions on how environmental reporting practices are trickled down the multinational enterprise subsidiary networks. Toyota Motors Corporation and Toshiba Corporation were considered in this study as Japanese companies engaging in sustainability practices, with their Philippine subsidiaries taking part in the consolidation of their global environmental activities.

Keywords: sustainability, environmental accounting, institutional theory, network theory

INTRODUCTION

The country of origin is an important determinant of how multinational enterprises (MNE) behave around the world with regard to their subsidiaries. In a study of voluntary annual report disclosures, Meek et al. (1995) reveals that the type of discretionary information and the degree of voluntary disclosures is determined by an MNEs' country of incorporation.

Considering that there is no international policing agency and no hard regulation on how MNEs should behave, it is noteworthy to study how they govern their environmental practices and how they transmit these practices to their subsidiaries in developing countries like the Philippines.

A conventional stakeholder approach points to customer preferences, customer monitoring and expected sanction in home countries as

determinants of compliance of MNEs (Christmann & Taylor, 2006).

A Japanese MNE is unique because its subsidiaries are, in effect, 'little Japans' in their domestic operations. In the Philippines, there are no environmental reporting standards that go with existing environmental laws, but Japanese subsidiaries in the country perform voluntary disclosures and sustainability reporting anyway.

Comparative studies, therefore, reveal differences and similarities in MNE. Husted & Allen (2006) suggest an examination on whether there are differences in practice not only between the home MNE and the subsidiaries, but also across its different subsidiaries and networks. After investigating how corporate social responsibility (CSR) is managed within MNEs, they studied the relationship between global and country specific practices. They define global CSR issues as those issues that transcend national boundaries; and about which considerable consensus is emerging, such as human rights and environmental protection. Significantly, their results show that institutional pressures rather than strategic analysis of social issues and stakeholders are guiding decision-making with respect to CSR. Hence, with sustainability reporting being discretionary and heavily integrated with CSR reports, it is seen in this paper as within the context of this construct.

This study aims to describe how Japanese multinational companies influence sustainability reporting practices of their Philippine subsidiaries by: (1) annotating significant theories and literature on organizations, institutions and networks; (2) deriving the most relevant theory; (3) and developing propositions on how environmental reporting practices are transmitted.

Toyota Motors Corporation and Toshiba Corporation were considered in this study as Japanese companies engaging in sustainability practices, with their Philippine subsidiaries taking part in the consolidation of their global activities. Personal interviews with their CSR reporting division representatives were conducted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multinational enterprise strategy and the Japanese MNE

Multinational strategies were earlier espoused by Yip (1995) as having three key points: (1) the development of a core strategy which is the basis of sustainable strategic advantage; (2) internationalizing the core strategy through international expansion of core activities and adaptation of core strategy; (3) and globalizing the international strategy by integrating the strategy across countries. This may include sustainability practices and environmental accounting and reporting. A standard practice from the Japanese headquarters, the country subsidiaries follow the guidelines and contribute in the global sustainability report.

Yip updates this framework with Tallman (2001) by extending the activities of the country subsidiaries in a global integration scheme. Other related businesses of the MNE are likewise integrated in pursuit of the global strategy.

Japanese MNEs, however, have their distinct features according to a study by Tsurumi (1976). They are seen to have relatively loose control structures and a strong local market orientation, in contrast with US MNE's strong central control and globally integrated strategies. The international divisional structure is predominant in Japanese MNEs, likewise in contrast with the trend toward global product divisions or matrix organizations in US MNEs. With proportions of expatriate managers much higher in US than in European firms, there is a strong proclivity for transferring Japanese management and production systems to foreign subsidiaries; this is referred to as the creation of 'little Japans' (Tsurumi, 1976).

Transaction cost economics

To explain the existence of Japanese subsidiaries and the value they contribute to the MNE network, the transaction cost theory becomes relevant in this discussion. The theory argues

that MNEs arise to organize interdependencies between agents (subsidiaries) located in different countries, assuming that the benefits of organizing interdependencies within the firm are higher than their costs (Hennart, 2001)

Williamson suggests an economic approach to the study of organizations that generally focus on efficiency. This is accomplished by making the transaction, rather than commodities, the basic unit of analysis; and by assessing governance structures, of which firms and markets are the leading alternatives in terms of their capacities to economize on transaction costs (Williamson, 1981).

Particularly, Williamson (1981) was concerned with the governance of the internal organization that, in another environment and culture like Japan, gives premium importance to the environment. These levels of analysis relate clearly to the extended enterprise system and networks of Japanese automotive and electronics manufacturers. Williamson cites the technological interdependence of production processes of subsidiaries and parts suppliers as far as the transactions cost theory is concerned.

Transaction cost theory also details the circumstances for which reason productive activities are coordinated within the firm or by the market. Within the MNE network, firms exist because they offer a cost-efficient way of organizing production and because their size is determined by the relative magnitudes of the costs of using the market and organizing additional transactions within the firm.

While transaction cost theory offers an initial view on MNEs, it is criticized as offering very little understanding of the nature within and among networks of companies. Much of the transaction cost literature focuses on transaction modes and how the MNE can be the most cost efficient mode of executing transactions, without engaging in an arm's length market (Yeung, 1998).

Yeung cites the importance of the social embeddedness that appears to have been neglected in the economic interpretation of firm dynamics. Despite the call to introduce social concepts such

as culture, cooperation and trust into conventional economic analyses of the MNEs, few attempts have been made to address the social dimensions of economic institutions. A proponent of network analysis (discussed below) Yeung presents an alternative way of looking into MNEs.

Internationalization theory

Relevant to and closely approximating the transaction cost theory is Buckley & Casson's (1976) internationalization theory which addresses market imperfections by minimizing costs. The theory is not limited to production because it also applies to intangible activities such as marketing, distribution and research and development.

On the basis of transaction cost arguments, internationalization theory contends that the MNE basically functions as an internal market to overcome the costs involved in an arm's length transaction in the external market. Underpinning the notion of internationalization theory is that the net benefit from internationalizing an intermediate product market linking activities located in different countries, is both a necessary and a sufficient condition for the existence of the MNE. Therefore, the MNE becomes a device for reducing transaction costs by buying or creating complementary assets in different nations and integrating their operations within a single unit of control (Buckley, 1992).

Institutional Theory

Among most literature on Japanese MNEs and their practices, DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) institutional theory with three isomorphic processes is the most relevant. They hypothesize on the impact of resource centralization and dependency, goal ambiguity and technical uncertainty, and professionalism and structuration on isomorphic change that is evident in Japanese MNEs as discussed above.

Institutional similarity, called isomorphism, is the emergence of a common structure and approach among organizations in the same field. It

is the process that causes one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions (Daft, 2003).

Coercive isomorphism results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organizations upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations function. In such circumstances, organizational change is a direct response to government mandate, such as environmental accounting reporting guidelines provided by the Japanese government, or the way Toshiba Corporation requires all of its subsidiaries to abide by its environmental management system.

The existence of a common legal environment affects many aspects of an organization's behavior and structure. In this regard, the legal environment in modern times is no longer confined within geographical boundaries and may include various stakeholders and influential groups, such as the Global Reporting Initiative, Japan for Sustainability and other third party audit agencies. Other legal and technical requirements, such as the consolidation of annual financial reports and sustainability reports by the Japanese headquarters also shape organizations in the same way.

Organizations are increasingly homogenous within given domains and increasingly organized around rituals of conformity to wider institutions such as culture. In Japan, it is common practice to waste segregate with the principle of environmental consciousness in mind. The 'little Japans' in the subsidiaries are forced to behave likewise in order for them to effectively consolidate with the Japanese headquarters.

At the same time, organizations are getting less structurally determined by constraints posed by technical activities and held together by output controls. In the case of Philippine subsidiaries they are constrained by market structure and technological limitations on life cycle assessment, in so far as end of product life dismantling, materials renewal and recycling and responsible disposal are concerned.

Mimetic processes may refer to uncertainty as a powerful force that encourages imitation. When

environmental philosophies are ambiguous and sustainability reporting inconceivable, such as in the Philippine business environment, organizations like Toyota Motors Philippines model themselves after other organizations such as Toyota Motors Japan; in the same manner as other Japanese manufacturing companies model themselves after earlier adopters of the sustainability reporting practices. Modeling, according to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), is a convenient response to uncertainty, such as environmental innovations and resource productivity. The idea that the 'best practices' are done by leading companies like Toyota and Toshiba explains why other manufacturing companies would want to follow through.

DiMaggio & Powell hypothesized the predictors of isomorphic change in organizations; but those more relevant to Toyota and Toshiba Japan and their Philippine subsidiaries are greater interdependence, centralization of supply, uncertainties in the future and goal ambiguities. These factors cause greater isomorphic changes.

As for the normative isomorphic processes, Parsons (in Scott, 2001) argues that "value systems of organizations are legitimized by its connections to the main institutional patterns in different functional contexts" (Scott, 2001). As such, the value of environmental management can be seen to be in compliance with Japanese norms of caring for the environment. He applies his general cultural-institutional arguments to organizations primarily by examining the relation between an organization and its environment (business and natural environment).

Since environmental management systems are institutionalized in Japanese society and production systems, these normative structures legitimize the patterns of operations of MNEs like Toyota Motors Corporation and Toshiba Corporation. However, different value systems may exist between the Japanese MNE and their subsidiaries where they have extended enterprise systems.

Organizations operating in different functional sectors are legitimized by different values, exhibit

different adaptive patterns, and are governed by different codes and normative patterns. Moreover, value systems are stratified within a society, such that organizations serving more highly esteemed values are thought to be more legitimate and are expected to receive a disproportionate share of societal resources (Parsons, 1953 in Scott, 2001).

Network theory

The second most relevant theory to Japanese MNEs is the network theory. Networks may be defined as a web of relationships linking various and heterogeneous business units that provide transaction benefits through the coordination of mutually dependent activities. Exchange of information and access to complementary assets are facilitated as the network plays a central role in the innovation process (Paprzycki, 2005).

The recognition of networking as a distinct form of organizing production has resulted in the study of production networks, which represents comparatively new ground in the field of economics. Networks constitute an organizational form of production that differs markedly from the assumptions underlying conventional economic theory: where inter-firm transactions are governed solely by market mechanisms; and where firms in networks, rather than dealing with anonymous buyers and sellers, engage in relational contracting with a limited number of counterparts they know well. The existence of relationships, as in the supplier relationships of automotive and electronics manufacturers, implies that companies are interlocked with one another, transcending the market and blurring the boundaries of the firm.

In relation to the earlier theory on transaction cost, relational contracting represents an efficient means of minimizing or eliminating such costs. However, the focus in recent years has shifted to transactions gains over and above the elimination of transaction costs. Transaction benefits can be seen within the context of technological innovations that provide the main rationale for relational contracting and networking.

Network analysis focuses on the relationship between firms, describing the observed phenomena as 'inter-firm cooperation' (Richardson, 1972) or as Blois (1971) puts it, vertical quasi-integration. Hence networks are defined as situations where some firms are gaining the advantages of vertical integration without assuming the risk or rigidity of ownership, according to Blois. In network analysis, the approach has tended to focus on the dynamic aspects of the organization of production, with adaptation and innovation issues occupying a central role.

Dubois (1998) provides the characteristics of inter-firm relationships to include: continuity, complexity, a low degree of formalization, asymmetry of resources and initiative, adaptations and connectedness. This typically captures how Japanese MNEs are structured across the globe.

As for technological innovations, Teece (1991) points out that inter-firm cooperation brings together existing capabilities on which new products can be based. He continues: an innovating firm or consortium that has developed a new product or process with good commercialization prospects has taken only the first step. It must secure access to complementary technologies and complementary assets on favorable terms in order to successfully commercialize the product or process, according to Teece. Toyota's hybrid car technology has enjoyed rapid commercialization as a result of the complementation provided by its thousands of suppliers. In the same manner, these suppliers share in the value creation process by imbibing the environmental principles of Toyota.

Global Production Networks

Institutional and network theories are rooted on sociological perspectives. The more tangible economic adaptation is the concept of a global production network (GPN). It is a conceptual framework that is capable of grasping the global, regional and local economic and social dimensions of the processes involved in many forms of economic globalization.

GPN analysis is concerned with networks, distribution of power, the significance of labor and value creation, the institutions that influence firm strategy and the implications of these areas for technological upgrading for companies involved in the supply chain. Investigation of these areas is guided with reference to three conceptual categories identified as: value (creation, enhancement, capture), power (corporate, collective, institutional), and embeddedness (territorial & network) (Henderson, et. al. 2002).

The Japanese flying geese model

To bring in a Japanese historical perspective on how headquarters influence sustainability reporting practices of their subsidiaries, Akamatsu’s (1962) *flying geese model* is considered. His classic paper ‘A Historical Pattern of Economic Growth in Developing Countries’ came into the literature with the three key aspects of intra-industry development, inter-industry development and international transmission (Staples, 2008).

The original essence of the metaphor is to capture the figurative representation of three time series curves denoting the import,

domestic production, and eventual export of manufacturing goods. Relative to the Vernon’s product life cycle, the flying geese model focuses on sequential industrialization in developing countries. Akamatsu theorizes further that some countries advance further quickly, while some advance slowly or stand still at a certain stage.

Adopting the flying geese model provides a macro perspective on the evolution of sustainability reporting from within and across industries in Japan and its eventual adaptation in Philippine subsidiaries of automotive and electronics manufacturers.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Earlier explained in this essay is the rise of institutional and network theories as the most relevant among economic, sociology and management theories to sustainability practices of a Japanese MNE. In this light, I will now attempt to describe the transmittal of practices through any or a combination of institutional isomorphisms mentioned earlier (Figure 1).

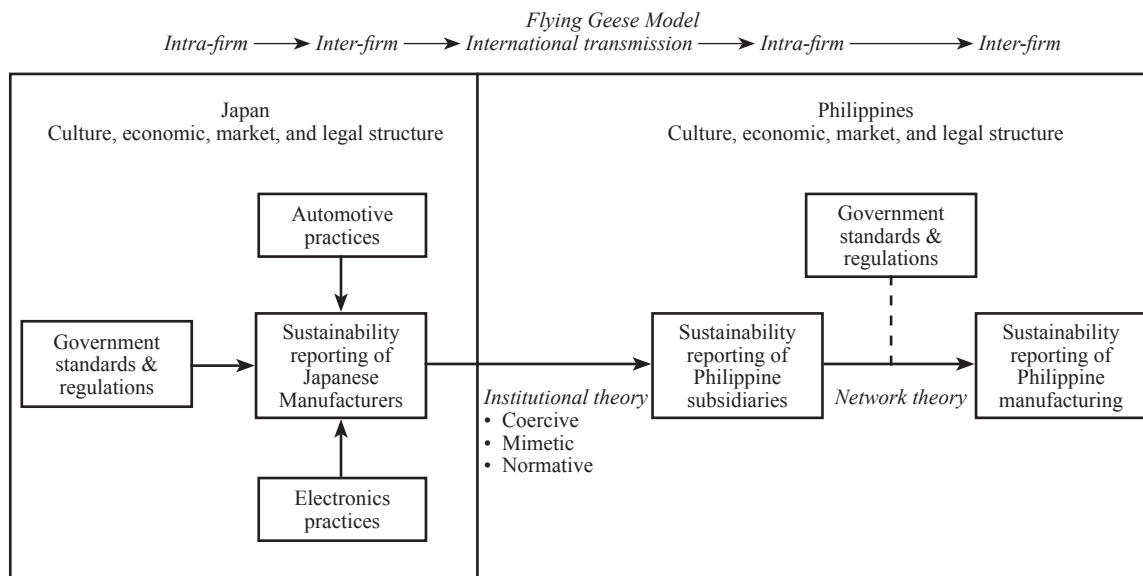


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model. Isomorphic processes transmit environmental management practices from the Japanese MNE to Philippine subsidiaries. Related companies mimic the best practi

Sustainability practices in Japan as a function of culture, technology, economy and market structure has been standardized by the government through regulation. As Porter (2008) puts it, regulation is needed to create pressure for companies to innovate and improve environmental quality in resource productivity; and to alert and educate companies on resource inefficiencies.

Toyota Motors Corporation and Toshiba Corporation have been pioneers in non-financial and voluntary disclosures reporting. They have started with the global reporting initiative and have coordinated with the Japanese government in drafting the Ministry of Environment guidelines on environmental accounting and reporting.

In addition to their annual financial report, these multinationals publish a sustainability or environmental report. Toyota sees environmental management systems as part of its governance structure, while Toshiba provides separate CSR and environmental reports.

The transmission process to their subsidiaries in developing countries now becomes a subject of inquiry. As regards institutional isomorphism, it can be explored whether coercive, mimetic, or normative processes influence sustainability reporting practices of a subsidiary, particularly in the Philippines. Hence, I present the first three propositions:

Proposition 1: Coercive processes within the Japanese MNE influence sustainability reporting of Philippine subsidiaries.

Philippine subsidiaries may feel ‘coerced’ through regulation from the Japanese headquarter’s end or through a prescribed format on sustainability reporting handed down within the MNE. A third party auditor or international accrediting body may likewise pressure a subsidiary to immediately conform to headquarter practices for an overall global consolidated environmental report. Since there is a culture of compliance in these ‘little Japans’, more so with its mother companies, coercive isomorphisms facilitate the adoption and advancement of

sustainability reporting practices in the Philippines. In the absence of any compelling regulation in the Philippine legal structure, Japanese MNE subsidiaries advance the practice of sustainability and discretionary CSR.

Guided by the prescribed format from the Ministry of Environment of Japan for environmental accounting, Toyota Motor Philippines Corporation is obliged to operationalize the framework based on their available environmental practices. Toshiba, on the other hand, has global programs for materials renewal, thereby forcing the Philippine subsidiary to follow environmental initiatives in responsible waste disposal, given the market structure and practices in the country (Cortez, 2011).

Proposition 2: Mimetic processes within the Japanese MNE influence sustainability reporting of Philippine subsidiaries.

Mimetic isomorphisms meet ambiguities in the future and goal uncertainties by adopting to the best practices in the industry or in the network. When the Japanese guidelines were drafted in 1998, representatives from the automotive, electronics and industry groups, from academe and the government participated. Around the same time, Toyota Motors Japan pioneered sustainability reporting using its own environmental accounting practices as examples available to adopters of the Japanese guidelines. On a comparative basis, there are very few Japanese manufacturing companies that show sustainability reports from 1998. Since the standardization in 2001, the practice has since been institutionalized in Japanese disclosures of performance. In the interim, Japanese companies were in search of best practices model, developed their own and contributed to the revisions of the environmental reporting guidelines for final drafting in 2001.

In the case of non-related companies, the best practices or pioneering activities of more established and reputable companies like Toyota & Toshiba may have spurred

imitation by companies similarly situated as the MNE's subsidiaries. These may have been competitors or related parties engaging in the extended enterprise system of the automotive and electronics manufacturer. With Toyota's thousands of part suppliers in its extended enterprise system and Toshiba's contribution to parts and components in the electronics industry, mimetic isomorphisms is seen to carry the sustainability practices within the value chain and subsidiaries.

Considering the Philippine manufacturing environment and their position in the export processing zones, Toyota and Toshiba inevitably influence the domestic manufacturing practices with their product and process improvements that are rooted in the environmental philosophies of their Japanese head quarters.

Proposition 3: Normative processes within the Japanese MNE influence sustainability reporting of Philippine subsidiaries.

Normative processes deal with the way standardized environmental management and reporting practices evolve within the MNE framework. This should not be taken separately from, but rather interactively with coercive and mimetic isomorphisms. Believing that they are part of the 'little Japans' of the MNE, the subsidiary institutionalizes the norm of environmental management and reporting practices. This practice has been institutionalized in Japan for over a decade now, while Toyota and Toshiba Philippines have performed their own reports more recently (i.e. in the past five years), even in the absence of any Philippine governmental regulation on sustainability reporting. Elevating the standards beyond regulation promotes awareness among institutions and networks in Philippine manufacturing.

Proposition 4: Quasi-integration within organizational networks transmit sustainability reporting practices in Philippine manufacturing.

Looking deeper into networks of organizations, quasi-integration or inter-firm coordination may also describe how sustainability practices are transmitted. With firms engaging in long-term partnerships with a common platform of technology and innovation, it is inevitable that certain practices are passed on within the network of organizations.

While a Japanese *keiretsu* (network organization of subsidiaries) structure is more complexly organized, Philippine quasi-integration of part suppliers to Toyota and Toshiba are conceptually clearer. With high quality standards, particularly on environmental compliance (i.e. elimination of substances of concern), networks of suppliers absorb sustainability practices of these Japanese MNEs.

Proposition 5: Government standards and industry regulations influence sustainability reporting practices in Philippine manufacturing.

Countries with highest incidences of environmental disclosures recognize the hegemonic role of governmental regulations (Stanwick & Stanwick, 2006; Kolk, 2003). The automotive, electronics, pharmaceutical & chemical industries of Japan have been recognized, together with those in the U.K. and Germany, as pioneers in environmental disclosures due to the early influence of such regulations (Kolk 2003).

Since sustainability practices have already reached Philippine shores via MNE networks, a call for the setting of government standards and regulations in coordination with industry associations may influence sustainability reporting practices of manufacturing companies in the Philippines. At present, there may be limited policies on environmental conservation from the Department of Environment, but as far as corporate reporting and disclosure requirements are concerned, the issue demands further policy making.

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing discussion of relevant sociological, economic and management theoretical perspectives on how MNE influence the practices of its Philippine subsidiaries, transactions cost theory, internationalization theory, institutional theory, network theory, global production networks and the flying geese model each and alternatively provide insights. I focus on the operationalization of the transmission process through the institutional and network theories, even as the other theories provide wider perspectives.

While Japanese guidelines on environmental accounting has been effected for almost a decade now, MNEs voluntarily report over and above the minimum requirements in an attempt to satisfy the varying needs of its diverse stakeholders.

A developing country like the Philippines is trailing behind global trends of corporate environmental reporting. In the absence of governmental reporting standards, sustainability reporting practices of subsidiaries are perceivably influenced by their Japanese headquarters, through either institutional isomorphisms or network quasi-vertical integrations, or through a combination thereof.

Comparative studies of non-financial and voluntary disclosures within the multinational company, its relations to and among its subsidiaries are research fields identified by Williams & Aguillera (2008) as potent fields of academic inquiry following the development of MNE studies.

Admittedly an unexplored field in Philippine management literature, the researcher attempts to stimulate more literature-building on this subject matter until the bigger picture of sustainability reporting in the country is painted and its multiple facets appreciated.

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