

Making Movies and Community of Talent

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Abstract: Staff members at a movie company Daiei, known for presumably the world's best film technology, continued to produce movies for several months even after the company went bankrupt. It was because they desired to make outstanding films. A director can create a high-quality film by combining the skills and ideas of such staff. Akira Kurosawa named the group that could produce excellent works the "Community of Talents". By using research on a community as a clue, this paper aims to highlight how the "Community of Talents" is organized. First I point out that a "Community of Talents" is formulated primarily by the labor of the staff based on Kumazawa's "Community on the Shop Floor". The paper subsequently refers to research by Heinrich Nicklish, a representative researcher on the study of community in Germany, in an attempt to verify that the community is a group of people established on functions. Lastly, the paper explores Guido Fisher's research to reveal the role of democratic leadership centered on the director who transforms the objectified staff in the organization into an independently-minded presence and help them prove their abilities. The paper continues to emphasize the significance of leadership in the formation of the "Community of Talents".

Key words: community; community of talents; labor union; leadership; film making

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1. Introduction

The shooting of Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* ended with a battle scene in the rain. Characters, Kyuzo and Kikuchiyo, are shot dead by bandits. When the bandits lie dead, another character, Katsushiro, yells in confusion, "Bandits! Bandits!" Kambei, the commander, replies, "The bandits are no more". Katsushiro then crouches in muddy water and cries. Later, after Kurosawa yelled, "Cut!", the actor continued crying; he was no longer acting. The crew found it difficult to resist the temptation to cry as well (Hirosawa, 2002, p. 173). *Seven Samurai* was a tough movie to make, taking about 1 yr to shoot. Kurosawa was difficult to work with (p. 151), and the crew was forced to work in extremely harsh outdoor conditions. Extras were often left trembling in the rain, "their sense of fulfilment and pride oozing from their bodies." (Takase, 2005, p. 5).

For years afterwards, Hiroawa, an assistant director from the movie, frequently contacted other staff members from the movie to write his book, helping retain them in a very reminiscent and melancholic mood (Hirosawa, 2002, p. 137). It is true that producers often grow attached to their products, especially during a massive creative job. This was clearly true for the *Seven Samurai* team (p. 173).

Making a movie is a comprehensive art form. Talented staff members from a variety of fields, such as

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production design and filming, collaborate to create an artistic work. Movie-making still requires an impressive division of labor. With the progress of digitalisation, the allocation of labor has changed significantly. With *Seven Samurai*, assistant directors also worked as temporary laborers. They were employed by the film studio and were easily allocated to movies. Director Yoji Yamada, known for the movie, *Family*, commented, “I think it is even better for the team when there is one weak staff member.” (Yamada, 1978, p. 168).

In Japan, movie companies were directly owned by studios, where they employed staff for shooting, design, acting and labor. This led to the growth of their film industry. In modern times, this type of studio system has collapsed. Thus, movie companies have been forced to abandon the shooting studio method. Movie production is now entrusted to independent agencies, and staff members are recruited. It is no longer necessary for a movie company to directly hire actors and staff. However, according to director, Yoji Yamada, “Staff members from an independent production work very hard”, because every movie supports their living. “When I observe their work, I feel they are thoroughly preparing the work written on the script, without fail. However, they cannot imagine matters and anticipate them when they are not written.” (p. 169).

Even without directly hiring staff for activities (e.g., design and shooting), it is possible to create excellent work. For this, it is necessary for staff and actors to communicate daily (Hirasawa & Yu, 2016). “Movies are created by the talent of individuals as well as a community of talent from many individuals”, Akira Kurosawa said. “It matters how much effort was made to create that community” (Kurosawa, 1990, p. 305).

In this report, we clarify how such community of talented workers are created by a talented producer, such as Akira Kurosawa. We also describe how the community participates in movie production. Recently, even in the business administration, empirical methods are dominant, and they rely on human actions. They require an understanding method, where extant phenomena are elucidated based on their sense of purpose, depending on the subject and circumstances. Therefore, in this paper, we consider the meaning of community formation by surveying research literature written about directors. The role of an independent producer is important nowadays in Japan. However, we examine the organisation where a film director is at the centre.

2. Community and Labor

Director Keisuke Kinoshita said, “The work of making a movie is like travelling with a group of friends with the same chemistry.” (Yamada, 1978, p. 175). Today, films are produced by staff members dispatched from independent production agencies. Generally, a coordinated group of humans, unlike a random arrangement, is called a *Gemeinschaft* Community (Tönnies, 2005). To analyse the conglomeration of talented workers on a movie production set, we adopt Makoto Kumazawa's view that labor unions create a society.

Toho, Kurosawa's studio, was established by the merger Photo Chemical Laboratories (PCL) and JO Studios in 1937. PCL was originally an institute that researched movies. In 1932, it entered the production realm. To produce movies, PCL signed exclusive contracts with actors and staff members and introduced a producer system, Nikkatsu and Shochiku. PCL also publicly sought assistant directors in newspapers. From this, Kurosawa was later hired as an assistant director. Thanks to PCL's liberal and rational management climate, many talented young people gathered to create great movies (Horikawa, 2000, p. 42). Among them, there were many left-wing attitudes. Toho expanded its business to compete with other industry leaders, such as Nikkatsu and Shochiku. During the war, to acquire materials for movie production (e.g., rolls of film) and to maintain a margin advantage, Toho strengthened its connection with the military and started making national policy films (Horikawa, 2000). In fact,

Kajiyo Yamamoto, another director, created a movie supporting the war while a labor union was formed. Consequently, he was nominated to be the union chairman. He later admitted that this was a bad decision, “I regret my wrong attitude towards the war.” (Hirosawa, 2002, p. 132).

With Toho, the formation of labor unions advanced after the end of the war (i.e., 1945). The formation of labor unions was not only promoted by Allied forces, they grew all across the movie industry. The purpose of organized labor was to improve the poor working conditions caused by the war. However, at Toho, the wish to make good movies was greater than the wish to improve working conditions (p. 90). In fact, there were many employees who hoped to make good movies during the war. Instead, the company got tied up with military contracts and produced films for national policy. Near the end of the war, they formed a labor union, desiring to freely make movies. Later, Kurosawa said, “I felt that was the ideal workplace I had been looking for at that time.” (Horikawa, 2000, p. 91). Kumazawa regarded the foundation of labor union activities, including labor practices and regulations, as a worker society. The labor union organized by Toho’s employees requested participation in company management and movie planning, to include collective bargaining rights and the right to strike. The labor union pressed the company’s management team agree to establish a screenwriting council. This council had a strong influence on movie production. The Communist Party evidently had a strong influence in the labor unions. Nearly 70% of its members were Communist Party sympathisers (p. 92). It was a policy of the Communist Party that newly formed unions seek to take part in the planning of movies and participate in management. However, the party desired to change company management and behaviours without inconveniencing the audience (Inoue, 2007, p. 31).

Management opposed the influence of the Communist Party and strove to eradicate their influence. Consequently, a number of disputes emerged, ultimately resulting in the union’s defeat. 20 union leaders voluntarily left Toho. 2-yrs later, in 1950, 1315 people (35% of all employees) were dismissed. Most were members of the labor union (Kawanishi, 1986, p. 100). Kurosawa looked back on this dispute and said, “The company was breaking up the precious community of talented workers we had cultivated”. I finally understood that, although I thought the studio was my home, it was actually an utter stranger’s home (Kurosawa, 1990, pp. 305, 307).

Kumazawa focused on the meaning of unity, rather than union functions. However, he believed that workers did not live in a “society” that behaved on a daily basis (Kumazawa, 1975, p. 127). Thus, he sought a foundation of unity for workers throughout their daily lives. While introducing the views of Frank Tannenbaum, he pointed out, “for workers, a labor union does not just exist in the workplace, it is also the basis of social relationships in leisure time, a place for recreational activities and an institution for mutual aid” (p. 128). This created the desire for society participants to be treated equally, and a common awareness for lifestyles was created. Consequently, a sense of resistance to competition and to management was created. The labor union movement was certainly a defence against competition and intervention by management. According to Tannenbaum, this defence process was “a process of establishing an industrial democracy against the industrial dictatorship, which deprived laborers of creativity and their spirit of co-operation” (p. 135). Based on Tannenbaum's perspective, Kumazawa regarded labor as the basis of an autonomous worker culture.

Whereas Japanese labor unions were often formed to defend people from poverty caused by their nation’s war defeat, the labor union at Toho was formed because of the desire to make good movies. However, when the company got tied up with military projects, they were prevented from free film production. Thus, “the desire to secure autonomy in film production was like a red Communist flag that went up in the Toho dispute” (Inoue, 2007,

p. 14; Sato, 1995).

Kumazawa pointed out that the employees at Toho had created a society (i.e. labor union). Management's intervention in this society created intense labor disputes. A community of talented workers is built upon labor encouraging creativity and a spirit of co-operation, as seen in movie production. Whereas daily unity, based on labor, creates a workplace society like a labor union, it is difficult to believe that such a society, with equal treatment of its participants, would immediately result in a community of talented workers. At Toho, the labor union set up a screenwriting council, giving it a strong influence in movie production. Moreover, it is said that the Communist Party's voice in filmmaking became stronger. Consequently, one of the scripts for a work led by Akira Kurosawa was subjected to change in its first draft, owing to the intentions of the screenwriting council. The reason was, that a screenplay with a similar topic had already been submitted to the council (Kurosawa, 1990, p. 276). In addition to the desire to make good movies, quality leadership must be available to connect their talents. Movie directors are the people for this task. Next, we examine the creation of a community of talented workers.

3. Organisation and Community

Based on the desire to make good movies, a society where union members are equally treated was created at Toho. Kurosawa supported the union side, praising its sense of unity (Horikawa, 2000, p. 92). However, dissatisfaction with the Communist Party, primarily owing to censorship, began to rise. In Germany, labor disputes frequently occurred, and the erection of communities became a problem. Leaders of the International Conglomeration of Free-Trade Unions decided to cooperate with the war regime when WWI broke out. Furthermore, owing to labor shortages, the government supported collective bargaining agreements in industries that already had agreements, and they established a wartime committee comprising equal numbers of representatives from labor and management sides. They added a military party to disseminate the system of labor unions and a policy of mutual consultation. Thus, the approval of labor unions was promoted from the viewpoint of its co-operation for the war. However, demonstrations and strikes occurred frequently, because of the soaring costs of living caused by the war. Furthermore, soldiers, farmers and workers rebelled in various places. One example was the Kiel Mutiny, conducted by sailors at a military port, which led to the collapse of the German Imperial Government. In the face of the intense labor-management conflict, the establishment of a community was sought. It was Nicklisch who created a systematic theory.

Like Kumazawa, Nicklisch also viewed business as a society. In his first book (1912), he viewed companies as economic organisations contributing to a country's economy. However, owing to the outbreak of WWI, labor-management conflicts became intense. Thus, with the economic aspects, human aspects were involved. Nicklisch interpreted that business activities produced goods for markets, acquired money through the production of those goods, and provided members of the management team with money as a share of production. He called this a business community (Fujitsu, 1959, p. 125).

A community is an organisation comprising multiple people. Nicklisch analysed community from the perspective of "what is a human being"? He identified the spirit as the essence human beings' ability to be distinguished from other entities. According to Nicklisch, each human being is a complete individual, comprising one part of a larger body. In this spirit of consciousness, humans understand that they are a single person and a part of the whole. Nicklisch mentioned that the business community is a place where humans live a life of business in a unified manner (Nicklisch, 1932, p. 296). A human being is a complete individual and,

simultaneously, a member of a business organisation. The task of establishment can be completed when jobs in the business organisation are allocated to an individual as a task. They can then be performed. Human beings have diverse interests. According to Nicklisch, the purpose of business lies in the production of goods and the acquisition of money. Furthermore, it exists to satisfy the desires of the business members by distributing money. Thus, the desire of the members of the business group matches the business purpose. However, in business communities, it is necessary for members to internally approve. Thus, when the business objectives and the members' purposes match, they feel freedom (Fujitsu, 1959, p. 129).

Nicklisch's view was based on the issue of how individuals should have been integrated into organisations for their survival during WWI's labor conflicts. Such a view seems to be very similar to Barnard's theory. His research theme was the harmonisation between the accomplishment of organisational objectives and the satisfaction of individual motivation (Gonn, 1984, p. 158; Suzuki, 1987, p. 18). Barnard put an emphasis on the leadership of managers to fulfil this subject.

While considering Nicklisch's views, we examine a community of talented workers. At Toho, the existence of the community became an issue in labor-management during and after WWII. However, it cannot be viewed as a managerial community. At Toho, many authorities concentrated on film directors, and communities were built around directors. However, the film directors also fought disputes as members of the labor union. Thus, the communities of talented workers differed from the community described by Nicklisch. However, the community of talented workers pointed out by Kurosawa was based on the purpose proposed by Nicklisch, which was to make movies. Individual staff members contributed to the purpose of the entire group by doing their individual jobs and by fulfilling the group's tasks for the organisation of movie production. Therefore, a community of talented workers was a professional ability-based organisation with a purpose, rather than a work-based organisation in which participants were equally treated, as advocated by Kumazawa. As to be expected, this way of understanding an organisation is conventional to organisational theory. Furthermore, this type of organisation has been commonly observed in movie production. The matter, then, is to integrate professional staff members into an organisation of film production to produce excellent works. Barnard, like Nicklisch, emphasised the integration of organisational objectives and individual motivations. Unlike Nicklisch, he emphasised the leadership of management to integrate organisational objectives and individual motivations. Thus, we refer to Fischer's viewpoint, which emphasised the management of human beings for building a community. Next, we discuss the establishment of a community and the leadership of a director.

4. Community and Leadership

In Germany, at the same time, business was considered from technical and economic viewpoints, and human viewpoints were ignored. Therefore, methods were soon proposed to examine business from human perspectives (Briefs, 1930, p. 1). Fischer performed this research with others. Like Nicklisch, Fischer viewed a business as a place where many people concurrently performed their duties and earned income to make a living (Fischer, 1952, p. 54). Gaugler, who studied under Fischer, said that "Fischer never once mentioned Nicklisch". According to Fischer, workers are exposed to the risk of popularisation because of technology, which forces uniform labor onto workers. This includes mass media, including radio and movies. Thus, today's workers are always at risk of popularisation, even during work and free time. Inevitably, their work efficiency decreases as the pleasure of labor decreases (p. 53). On the management side, it is important to respect worker individuality to motivate their

willingness to work.

Generally, policies for employees are controlled by personnel management, including employment decisions, promotions, placements and dismissals. This often results in humans being treated as objects, similar to production management. Therefore, to respect the individuality of employees and to motivate them, it is necessary to develop personnel management to better manage human resources. Fischer pointed out that the development of psychology contributed to this process to better manage human resources. Industrial psychology is a part of applied psychology, which elucidates the relationship between humans and their labor from the viewpoint of efficiency and productivity. A newly emerging form of management psychology is the study of mutual relationships among employees in business. The research studied consciously forming a working atmosphere. The development of such psychology encourages the development from personnel management to better manage human resources.

Fischer believed that the way to overcome popularisation in labor was through the formation of managerial communities, which implied human resource management. As a way of managing human resources in business, Fischer stated that it was necessary to explore factors impeding human co-operation. Such factors, including personal factors impeding work, should be eliminated. The essence of human resource management is the formation of human relationships. Thus, Fischer emphasised education and training, promotions, proper participation in management, etc. Specific measures that enable such efforts included the publication of factory newspapers and newsletters and factory tours for family members. Consideration of human aspects was emphasised when formulating a business community.

Kurosawa and his staff shared both good and bad times and maintained close relationships with their families. They often got together at Kurosawa's spacious mezzanine and had parties that included wives and children (Yoshio, 1999, p. 24). Such intimacy may have contributed to the improvement of human relations. There also may have been many members who avoided those events, because they disliked such associations. As pointed out by Nicklisch, to form a community, it is necessary to build relationships related to work duties, rather than relationships outside work. Actually, Kurosawa valued all the work of his staff members as one (Shiozawa, 2005, p. 30).

Film director Yoji Yamada provided the following anecdote regarding *Seven Samurai*.

In *Seven Samurai*, there is a scene where it started raining. While shooting this scene, Kurosawa told the staff that he wanted the rain to get harder and harder throughout the scene, but it could not be done with water from hoses. Staff members, including professionals on stage settings and props gathered and began discussing how to do it. Then, a staff member said that he saw such a scene with rain in another movie. Then, they interviewed an employee who had filmed such a movie. They then tried to produce it, but Kurosawa was not satisfied (Yamada, 2011, p. 17-20).

A community had thus been created, because they had produced a good movie using everyone's ideas and ingenuity. This was also true for Kenji Mizoguchi, who directed *Ugetsu Monogatari*. He combined his passion and energy to make movies (Ida, 1970, p. 11). Mizoguchi's staging focused on logic always. He asked actors, "Do you think your feelings were correct when you performed that scene?" (Shindo, 1976, p. 14), and he sought the best wisdom and ingenuity from actors and staff members (Ida, 1970, p. 73). Thus, he created superior works. Whereas Mizoguchi often worked with people with whom he was familiar, he did not form a community as did Kurosawa. Based on these directors' hopes to make good movies, they organised their members to bring out their best performances. Kurosawa tackled *Seven Samurai* from his desire to make a real movie, and he showed no

mercy. He saw only what he wanted to see on the set. Once he was determined to do something, he pursued it relentlessly until he was fully satisfied (Tsuzuki, 1999, p. 111).

Staff members had good attitudes, thinking “if you make the request, I’ll try to give you even more than that” (Nishimura, 1987, p. 90). As Nicklisch pointed out, this is the job of a managerial community in which members contribute to the objective. Moreover, the emphasis on individuality from exhibiting specialised abilities served as an attempt to stop the popularisation endorsed by Fischer. According to Fischer, the task of managing human resource in business properly organising human relations. Thus, along with the education and promotion of co-workers, he pointed out that the person ranking higher in organisation should respect the value of co-workers and instruct them to not be limited to their specialised fields. They should be interested in various organisational problems.

During film production, we should not disregard the director’s leadership. Kurosawa was involved in not only lighting, but in everything. He pushed his own thoughts forward without relying on other people (Tsuzuki, 1999, p. 438). Miyagawa, in charge of shooting some of Kurosawa’s excellent works, including *Rashomon*, pointed out that, on set, Kurosawa always ran around with professionals (Miyagawa, 1985, p. 66). His excellent staff members always tried to respond well to his requests. Thus, his leadership on set created strong relationships a thriving workplace atmosphere.

Many felt this was a kind of destiny, where they were a community in a studio spending lots of time together. They enthusiastically expressed their opinions about scenes they were shooting the following day or the next movie they wanted to make (Tsuzuki, 1999, p. 418). The situation was far from today’s workplace environments, where staff members are dispatched from independent firms. Work was severe with Mizoguchi and Kurosawa. If someone spoke loudly, he would get a reprimand, and if someone worked slowly, he would be barked at (p. 144). Staff members worked very vigorously, and there were few compromises. Workers were very close. However, when they got to a set, they insisted on having their own opinions. They often fought, sometimes even throwing punches (p. 418).

The process of producing movies was exactly like the process of training the staff members engaged in making movies. When Miyagawa, a world-renowned photographer, filmed a scene in a forest at *Rashomon*, he said to Kurosawa, “I want the scene to have high contrast, consisting of white and black, without gray” (Miyagawa, 1985, p. 60). According to Miyagawa, this caused his shooting tone to change. While enhancing the ability of staff members who already had high levels of technical prowess, they built up a community of staff members.

Movie directors were passionate about film production and organised their professional staff, who wanted to make good movies, building communities for movie production. Therefore, they produced excellent works. Regarding director leadership, we need to pay attention to the following points.

Kurosawa noted every process of movie production and drew creativity and ingenuity from professional staff members to the fullest extent. It is noteworthy that the leadership of directors provides the background needed. According to Yamada, assistant directors had no fixed work until the 1960s, and they did all of the work related to production. In fact, “chief assistant directors served the role of current production directors and programme directors, and another assistant director was responsible for costumes, and another assistant director was responsible for props” (Yoshimura, 1985, p. 56). Horikawa, who served as assistant director for Kurosawa, pointed out that, before the war, “PCL tried to have assistant directors familiar with the work of all the divisions necessary for movie production” (Horikawa, 2000, p. 35). Thus, assistant directors were involved in a variety of

jobs related to movie production. Because they experienced such a variety, they could develop their knowledge as directors to later organise staff members, who were called special technicians (Yamada, 1978, p. 174).

5. Conclusion

One thing that distinguishes movies from other forms of art is that many people collectively participate in their creation. It is the role of the director to organise craftsmen with expertise in a variety of fields, including photography, lighting and design. They do not merely gather staff members to produce movies. Directors who have a lot of experience in any division of film production do not easily make compromises or take advantage of human knowledge to the fullest extent. They communicate with members who demonstrate brilliant techniques, drawing out their creativity and ingenuity to create excellent works. As a prerequisite, directors and staff members should feel strongly about producing superior works. At the Daiei film company, the staffs continued their work without paying, suggesting “Let’s make good movies”, even after the company went bankrupt. The staff members had the desire to produce good movies and the directors were enthusiastic about film production. Thus, they formed strong relationships while collaborating, creating an atmosphere making them think hard about making good movies. Such cohesion represents a community of talented workers. It is not the kind of organisation that can be created under the current system. Nowadays, people are hired to make a movie, and when they finish, they are gone.