The expression of compassion in leadership in intercultural organizational situations: the case of Japanese leaders in India

Abstract

In this paper, we examine the role played by compassion in leadership in intercultural situations. Focusing on the growing and important economic context of Indo-Japanese business, we develop a model that identifies contingent factors that affect Japanese leaders' expressions of compassion in intercultural organizational contexts. We engage with the spiritual capital construct and analyse leaders' lived experiences leading to a novel extension of the well-established Nested Spheres Model of Culture. By adopting an inductivist and social constructivist approach, semi-structured interviews with Japanese business leaders operating in India are employed to generate data. The empirical data show how changes in time and place cause deeply embedded cultural values (such as compassion) to surface and become more explicit in leadership. The study also underlines the need to explore the wider spatial, temporal, and economic contingencies that affect both the dynamics of compassion in 'intercultural' business situations and spiritual leadership in intercultural contexts.

Keywords: Cross-cultural management, compassion, spiritual capital, leadership, India, Japan.

Introduction

This study explores ways in which 'compassion' (exemplified by, for example, qualities of empathy, benevolence, and interconnectedness) (Dutton et al., 2007; Rynes et al., 2012; Simpson & Berti, 2020) may emerge and transform (i.e. change in terms of how it manifests itself) as part of the spiritual capital (Stokes, Baker & Lichy, 2016)—encompassing values, beliefs and attitudes (VBAs)—and lived experiences of business leaders in intercultural contexts. Critically, we reveal the relevance of the intercultural experience in enabling changes which lead to the manifestation of compassion. The paper creates a model to empirically illustrate this phenomenon and develops and evolves a novel dataset from elite Japanese leaders (i.e. emanating from an advanced economy context) who are operating in intercultural business situations within India (i.e. an emerging economy context). Considering spatial-temporal variegations and the nature of culture (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012), we explore contingency factors such as place and moment (i.e. those factors other than the values, beliefs, and attitudes) (cf. Bird & Mendenhall, 2016) that impact upon the manifestation of compassion. We argue that despite often being relegated to the implicit subconscious level (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; Kimura & Nishikawa, 2018), compassion deserves explicit scholarly attention, especially within cross-cultural settings. This establishes the first of two research questions:

> *RQ1. In intercultural contexts, how do spatial-temporal variations give rise to diversity in the manifestation and expression of compassion?*

In this study, we differentiate between the established branches of cross-cultural management (CCM) scholarship: *unicultural* (single country study), *comparative* (two or more country study), and *intercultural* (fusion of cultures/interactive study) (Adler, 1983; Bird &

Mendenhall, 2016). We note that culture, and any concomitant experiences in a leader's 'home' country, including compassion, may well undergo adjustment when interacting with cultures other than the home culture. Yet, compassion is normatively studied within the unicultural lens. Thus, there is a clear need for it to be studied through an '*intercultural*' lens (Adler, 1983). In conjunction with this framing, compassion in leadership remains an under-addressed topic in the management literature (Thomas & Rowland, 2014). As a potential case in point, the Japan-India relationship is drawing increasing attention. More specifically, in the post-pandemic global environment, companies in advanced economies like Japan have sought to diversify their international business (IB) operations to other countries (Kawashima, 2020; Shibata, 2020) and in this regard India's attractiveness as a destination has been highlighted as extremely important (Gao & Ren, 2020). This suggests the potential for examining shared leadership values, including compassion, across the two cultures and environments. This context has prompted the formulation of the following focused and illustrative exploratory research question:

> *RQ2: How do leaders of Japanese Multi-National Enterprises (MNEs) demonstrate shared compassion in the intercultural dynamics of their Japanese-Indian cross-cultural collaborations?*

This study simultaneously contributes to the 'intercultural' sub-branch of CCM—an under-researched field (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016) of IB scholarship—and to the emerging compassion and spiritual leadership literatures (Fry, 2003; Gotsis & Grimani, 2017; Reave, 2005; Stokes, Baker & Lichy, 2016). We seek to innovate upon extant conceptual frameworks through primary empirical evidence based on semi-structured interviews with elite Japanese business leaders operating in India. The paper proposes a model that modifies and extends the well-established

Nested Spheres Model of Culture (NSMC) so as to better represent and understand compassion in intercultural situations. By employing a social constructivist epistemological approach, we engage with, and account for, the dominant functionalist management paradigm and, in so doing, we provide richness to scholarly inquiry through the use of increasingly extolled paradigm plurality (Lowe, Magala & Hwang, 2012; Patel, 2017; Piekkari, Welch & Zolner, 2020; Romani & Holgersson, 2020). Furthermore, the CCM literature is notably affected by a general under-examination of both Japan and India (two major Asian economies) (Ronen & Shenkar, 2013) and the study also contributes to scholarship in this regard.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, a consideration of the theoretical background which extracts the salient insights from the relevant literatures. This generates the conceptual framework that governed our empirical investigation. Second, the methodology is explained. Third, the findings are presented and our proposed modified NSMC for *intercultural* situations is developed. Finally, the study's contributions to scholarship, managerial implications, limitations, and indicative avenues for further research are discussed.

Theoretical Background

Leadership and compassion linkage

To some observers, the terms 'compassion' and 'leadership' may seem incompatible particularly in the face of the pressures of a for-profit business context. This is likely to be especially the case in historically functionalistic settings—such as those characterised by Fordism and McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2013). Such contexts have commonly prompted questions over the extent to which organizations genuinely respect their employees (Stokes, 2016). Nevertheless, compassion is a well-recognised humanistic trait and potentially has an important contribution to

make to leadership contexts. However, it has hitherto received inadequate attention in the literature and this situation requires attention. By way of approaching this issue, recent research has focused on the values underpinning *processes* of leadership (Northouse, 2016), which have encompassed, among others, spiritual leadership. Fry (2003) defines spiritual leadership as: "*comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviours that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership*" (p 694-695). In being acknowledged as a desirable value in leaders, compassion may also be seen to be affiliated with spirituality (e.g., Fry, 2003). Moreover, it may also be aligned with social capital (Putnam, 2000). Regarding social capital, Putnam (2000) usefully identified *Linking Capitals* (operating as 'glue' connecting people within a given group) and *Bridging Capitals theory* (functioning like a lubricant between different groups) (Stokes et al., 2016). The successful operation of these capitals is connected with harmony and interconnectedness (McGhee & Grant, 2017) and they are identified as potential elements and mechanisms that may also drive spiritual capital.

By theorizing on its positive impact on successful organization culture, Stokes et al. (2016) extended the concept of 'spiritual capital' (viewed as interconnected with social capital) beyond, for instance, only faith groups, to encompass *all* individuals and organizational management situations. Accordingly, we position compassion as an intersecting value of spiritual capital and spiritual leadership. Moreover, we propose that the spiritual capital of international business leaders and, *ergo*, their manifestations of compassion (including, among others, the quality of empathy), are increasingly important in the current highly volatile and uncertain times (Caligiuri et al, 2020).

Recent decades have witnessed increasingly explicit mentions of cultural values, such as compassion, in leadership scholarship in general (e.g., Eisenbeiss, 2012; Fehr, Yam & Dang, 2015;

Pearse, 2017; Reave 2005; Schlosser et al., 2013), and in spiritual leadership scholarship in particular (e.g., Fry, 2003; Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). Overall, leadership scholarship can be seen to be evolving from concerns which are essentially grounded in *power* and *inequality*, to advocating for more *interconnectedness* and *compassionate* dispositions and perspectives. Therefore, the location of the cultural value of compassion in developing leadership theory can be visualized as shown in Figure 1, residing mostly, but not exclusively, within the spiritual subset of leadership.

Insert Figure 1 here

The conceptualization of the construct of compassion varies across scholars. Conventionally, compassion implies an understanding of the suffering of 'others' and, as such, is echoed, for example, in Buddhism (notably important in both the Indian and Japanese settings). However, in the leadership context, followers need not necessarily suffer physical pain (Pearse, 2017). Though Thomas and Rowland (2014) indicate that compassion seems somewhat challenging to define, we adopt the definition of compassion provided by Reave (2005) for the purposes of the present paper. As such, compassion is…

> "*showing respect, demonstrating fairness, expressing caring, listening attentively, and appreciating other's gifts and contributions*" (Reave, 2005: 657).

Management, on the other hand, is a subset, and a reflection, of everyday life (Knights & Willmott, 1999). Compassion, within management and leadership, can be re-visualized as an aspect of the bridging and linking social capitals and enhancement of spiritual capital (cf. Stokes et al., 2016) and spiritual leadership. The above arguments have outlined and discussed the nature

and positioning of compassion. The paper now applies and examines these ideas to the specific context of Japanese business leaders working in organizational settings in India.

Compassion in Japanese leaders (using NSMC frameworks)

Compassion may be found in a range of different national settings. The present paper presents a conceptual framework that elaborates and demonstrates how, in the case of Japanese organizational leadership, the Japanese are 'primed' for compassion to their 'core' (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012). 'Priming' is the process whereby various stimuli affect the decision-making and behaviours of individuals (Tsalikis, 2015). Two stimuli that are important in the context of Japanese leadership are highlighted here: religion and (perhaps less expectedly) the writing system. First, compassion is a central value of Buddhism (Weber, 1958, 2012). As such, and following Knights and Willmott (1999) and their conviction that the everyday infuses organizations, it strongly influences the values found in the Japanese business context (Ashta, Stokes & Hughes, 2018; Sai, 1996). Compassion, and the Japanese societal desire for harmony, are illustrative of this (Ashta, 2021; Hatvany & Pucik, 1981).

Second, in the Japanese context, interestingly, compassion is signalled through other acts such as the writing system. The Japanese language has three writing systems, two phonetic (*hiragana* and *katakana*) and one pictorial (*kanji*). For instance, the kanji character for person is 人, in popular lore, is explained as a pictorial representation of one human being supported by another. Furthermore:

> "*the two kanji used to write human being/s are 'person/people' and 'between'. We can understand the Japanese language socializing its speakers to view an individual as connected with other people.*" (Hattori & Heller, 2018: 107).

This develops a perspective whereby an ongoing notional invitation (i.e. priming) of interconnectedness occurs from an early age—i.e. when the Japanese learn to write—which points at the *collectivist* nature of Japanese society. In contrast, in Western settings, statements such as: "*I think, therefore I am*" (Descartes, 1596-1650) or "*I am what I am so take me as I am*" (Goethe, 1749-1832) portray *individual* identity, whereas Japanese thinking embodies: "others exist, and therefore I am". Thus, in Japan, compassion is not just 'another value', it operates at the existential core. Therefore, within the '*unicultural*' (Adler, 1983) NSMC (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012: 29), compassion operates at the implicit, sub-conscious level, as shown in Figure 2 Part A, in the innermost sphere.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) pointed to the blending of groups of people in different "*geographic regions*" (p 31), while, at the same time, acknowledging that people in such regions (countries) embody different cultures. Therefore, in the present paper, we recognize this as a *spatial factor*, referring to the country whence a leader originates. Thus, spatially the 'home country' Japan versus the 'host country' India. In turn, Japan and India, as separate countries, offer *boundary* conditions (which define the separation of entities, including a space entity and *time* stage entity, cf. Stokes, 2011) in the creation of the 'others' (those who fall beyond the boundary conditions). The conjoined nature of time and space is well-recognized in the literature (e.g., Baynham, 2015; Dawson & Sykes, 2019; Stokes, 2011). Accordingly, correlating with the spatial factor, we also acknowledge a *temporal* one, specifically relating this to the Japanese leaders' *pre-move* (when in Japan, before moving to India) and *post-move* (when in India, after the move) times.

Furthermore, Trompenaars and Hamden-Turner (2012) also suggested that change occurs when survival is at stake and, as culture is seen as a product of, and response to, given boundary conditions, any change in such conditions (geographic region, country, time, etc.) may bring about

a change regarding where compassion is situated within the NSMC. We infer that the *post-move* temporal factor might function with further boundary dimensions of compassion located in the *implicit* sphere—vs. the *explicit* one (as elaborated below)—which lead us to believe that a 'modified NSMC' could potentially work to explain 'intercultural' (Adler, 1983) *post-move* situations more effectively.

In addition, although Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) indicated that norms and values can be "*conscious or subconscious*" (p.30), they also posited that any deeper meanings assigned to the *implicit* sphere (the core sphere in their model) escape "*conscious questioning*" (p.32) and become self-evident (as "*natural as breathing*", they suggested), as a routine response to the environment. Therefore, in the NSMC for Japan, compassion resides within the *implicit* or *core* sphere—the *subconscious* level—with its attendant impacts on managerial decision-making (Tsalikis, 2015; Welsh & Ordonez, 2014). Conversely, the *explicit* sphere of culture in the NSMC is the one in which VBAs are manifest to the senses (e.g., clothes that can be seen, food that can be tasted, oral expressions that can be heard, etc.). Magnier-Watanabe et al. (2017) found that, in the Japanese context, organizational virtuousness (i.e. behaving well), in which the authors include compassion as an integral component, enhances job performance. This lends to the perspective that the compassion infused by Japanese leaders in their Indian operations could potentially contribute to business success, which aligns with the kindred construct of interconnectedness (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

Importantly, in their study of Japanese leadership, Kimura and Nishikawa (2018) revealed that the above-noted societal ideas pertaining to ethics are evolving. Although scholars have previously noted a strong influence, among others, of Buddhism, there is a discernible

contemporary tendency toward compliance encouraged by *institutional* pressures. However, in discussing their empirical research results, they conjectured that:

> "*…Japanese managers take for granted that leaders will act with 'consideration and respect for others' rather than seeing these traits as a discrete element of ethical leadership. This is supported by previous studies that have regarded treating others with compassion … as characteristics of Japanese culture*" (p 719, text underlining added).

The "*taken? for granted*" element of their notion brings us to infer that such compassion is likely to remain at the intangible, implicit, sub-conscious level (i.e. the level of the unmanifested) with respect to the NSMC introduced above. Kimura and Nishikawa (2018) also mention that the respondents in their study—which had been carried out in a *unicultural* setting — "*did not use symbolic words drawn from traditional Japanese ethics*" (p 720), therefore providing motive to explore and understand the degree to which feelings of compassion might rise to *the explicit manifest level* (of the NSMC) in an *intercultural* business situation in India. The above-presented considerations feed into the notion of the 'contextualised person' which is an important concept in Japanese culture. Hattori and Heller (2018) emphasized the relational nature of Japanese leaders, which is influenced by the notion of the 'contextualized person', which asserts that: "*who a person is and the actions he or she takes is based on the person's relationship with others*" (p 107). This contrast between the Euro-American identity as an *independent* self-construal and the Japanese tendency toward an *interdependent* one is recognized by Japanese scholars (e.g., Kitayama et al., 1997). Research dealing with Japanese contexts has found that self-enhancement is a universal human motive that prescinds from self-construal (Sedikides et al., 2003), whereby people self-enhance along personally important dimensions. In the Japanese case, personal interdependency

correlates to compassionate goals (Crocker et al., 2015). Moreover, showing care for others becomes embedded in Japanese people's personalities where it is so deeply taken for granted that it is no longer considered a separate discrete element of leadership (a conjecture raised by Kimura & Nishikawa, 2018). Such perspectives seem to reinforce the notion that, in Japanese leadership, compassion is in the subconscious. Hattori and Heller (2018) further stated that: "*the way the leader and follower interact within a specific social context are the touchstones of leadership in Japan*" (p 106), pointing at a spatial dimension of leadership relationships. This infers that any boundary condition changes that pertain to managing either in Japan or India may surface as spatial influences on the implicit subconscious compassion in Japanese leaders.

Japanese leaders moving to India can be theorised and portrayed through CCM scholarship. Where there are spatial influences, temporal changes also emerge (Stokes, 2011). Evidence of this coexistence of spatial and temporal impacts is found in wider intercultural research (Stokes et al., 2015). Brewster et al. (2014) called for greater attention to be given to the impacts of the *temporal* dimension on leaders' beliefs and behaviours in foreign subsidiaries. Thus, the examination of the literature points at the possibility of potential changes in Japanese leaders' behaviour in relation to compassion when moving (across boundaries) from the (unicultural) Japan home country base to an inter-cultural setting, such as for example, India. In particular, and as demonstrated above, within the Japan context compassion is a deeply embedded and implicit established value. However, a leader's move to India may have time (i.e. temporal) and place evolving effects on that compassion that make its expression more explicit. Taken together, this developing notion underscores the importance of the current RQs.

In conclusion, the preceding discussions point to a potential relocation for Japanese leaders of compassion out of the core sphere (the innermost sphere of the NSMC, cf. Figure 2) to the outer one—i.e., from the *implicit to the explicit*—which can be conceptualized as shown in Figure 2, Part B, a possibility that has previously been unexplored in research. Overall, the above literature review has highlighted the nature and operation of compassion as an aspect of a wider spiritual capital that operates in organizational life. In particular, in recognising specific issues and challenges when a leader moves from a unicultural to an inter-cultural setting, a gap in the literature is revealed on the dynamic shifting of values from the inner implicit core toward the explicit outer level (our RQ 1). The potential case in point of interactions across Japan-India society and business value systems was alluded to above (our RQ 2) and this now provides a focal case as the argument moves into the methodology and empirical data parts of the paper. The subsequent sections of the paper aim to demonstrate and exemplify in a more detailed manner the dimensions regarding how Japanese leaders moving to, and working in, India deal with and may exhibit compassion in the Indian organizational context. In turn, lessons for wider contexts are also identified.

Insert Figure 2 here

Methodology

Research Design

In line with the exploratory nature of its research questions, our study embraced an inductivist and social constructivist approach (Edmondson & McManus, 2007)—i.e., one that

involves constructing theory based on an interpretivist analysis (Brewer, 2004). This is favoured as a valuable way to deliver an in-depth understanding of organizational situations (Van Maanen, 2011). Our chosen research design is widely employed to answer RQs on the manifestation of compassion in intercultural situations occurring against a bi-national backdrop (Primecz, Romani & Sackmann, 2009; Stokes et al., 2015; Xing et al., 2016). Along this vein, then, we employed semi-structured interviews to produce narrative vignettes, which are recognized as a useful tool for cross-cultural studies (Boje & Perez, 2016) and especially for the interpretation of interactive situations such as leadership (Soin & Scheytt, 2006). Additionally, the research team has had extensive engagement with both the Japanese and Indian business contexts. The lead author (being Hindi and English-speaking) in particular, has engaged with Japanese business (working as a manager and subsidiary CEO) for over three decades and become fluent in the Japanese language. Accordingly, we were confident in interpreting the data (Adams, Ellis & Jones, 2017; Gümüsay & Amis, 2021; Haynes, 2011), which reinforced our decision to study and interpret narrative vignettes.

Data Collection

Context remains critically important within business and management studies (Child, 2009). Taking such sentiment into account, the lead author used his existing contextual awareness and contacts in the industry to access and interview Japanese business leaders within the chosen research setting of India. Furthermore, interviews were conducted in Japanese to build the required bond of trust (Brewer, 2004; Pass, 2020). This made it easier for the Japanese respondents to share their lived experiences (Schedlitzki et al., 2017). Each interview (see Appendix 1 for an indicative sample of the questions and probes used) lasted more than one hour and was followed-up by phone

and email to see if any clarifications were required at the analysis phase. Due to the qualitative nature of our research, the number of interviews required was not based on deterministic considerations (Pratt, 2009). Saunders (2012) suggested that a sample size of four to 12 subjects is adequate for a relatively homogenous cohort, and the relative homogeneity of Japanese managers is well-established in the literature (Reisel, 2017; Sekiguchi et al., 2016). Moreover, and significantly, our sample is made up of a rare, elite interviewee business leader cohort that is reputedly difficult to access (Kraus et al, 2023; Moore & Stokes, 2012).

We adopted a two-step process for our empirical work. In step 1, we collected data and performed our organic thematic analysis. Then at step 2, we collected more data for illustrative reinforcement, and the resulting triangulation enhanced robustness (Pratt, 2009; Xing et al., 2016). This involved additional interview data posted on the Internet (a long-advocated but under-used approach) in the form of eavesdropping (Cowton, 1998 p 430) or of ethnographic-style observation conducted as "*an interloper*" (Pass, 2020 p 293). Such secondary data was accessed to reconfirm, refine, and reinforce our findings, adding to our confidence in the robustness of our research.

Our research accessed a rich diversity of interviewees (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; King, 2004), as shown in Table 1. We provide background information on various attributes of the interviewee profile such as purpose and tenure in India at the granular level so as to contextually inform the present debate. For example, we understand that intercultural leadership can be studied at different organizational levels, such as the CEO level or middle manager level (Barmeyer et al., 2021). Accordingly, when reading through the data we were mindful of clarifying such context (i.e., CEO or non-CEO).

Insert Table 1 here

Data Analysis

Following Braun and Clarke (2016), the analysis of the data was conducted manually using *organic* thematic analysis (as opposed to *ontologically realist-oriented* thematic analysis, with its related expectations of thematic saturation)— the term organic referring to creation of themes by the researchers based on their interpretations (ibid). To elaborate, although an ontologically-objectivist approach to thematic analysis would have ensured the inter-rater reliability of coding—with its underlying assumption of any themes being 'really' out there—our relativist ontological stance meant that the themes were actively created within our research team (Braun & Clarke, 2016), with 'plausibility' being an important undercurrent to our interpretive construction (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Creswell, 2007; Gabriel, 2018; Schwandt, 2000).

The first stage of the analytical process involved reading the transcripts and re-reading to take account of what was being revealed with respect to the CCM RQs (Braun & Clarke, 2016). During the manual reading of the Japanese transcripts, the lead author used markers to highlight narratives and quotes indicating compassion. Following this, the second stage involved the interpreting of how these narratives informed the manifestation of compassion, constructed along contingency factors such as space and time. These narratives were translated into English. The author team strengthened the dependability and accuracy of the data analysis by reviewing the first author's interpretations independently and adjusting them through cross-referencing back with data, discussion during the finalising of the narratives, and during manuscript draft discussions. Overall, extensive research team meetings and discussions took place during this back-and-forth process.

Finally, mindful of avoiding formulaic research reporting (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013), - and acknowledging paradigm-commensurate criteria for robust interpretivism (Symon et al., 2018) - we acknowledged the possibility of rich and diverse explanations and, accordingly, infused such

alternative potential perspectives into our analysis. This is evidenced in the presentation of our findings in the following section, and readers are invited to judge the plausibility of the findings for themselves.

Findings

The analysis of the interview transcripts showed that the interviewed leaders evidently displayed elements of compassion in their thought process. At the same time, the manifestation of various (spatial, temporal, and economic) 'contingencies' toward displaying compassion in India was also observed. These points are explained in turn before we develop and present a modified version of the NSMC with the aim of improving conceptualisation of intercultural situations.

Spatial contingency

In their interaction with the Indian context as their new setting, the Japanese leaders in the sample identified some common ground with their CCM environment. For example, when asked whether there was anything about which they were mindful while working in India, interviewee TSU replied: "*I make it a point to remain thankful to be here*", while, in a similar vein, interviewee ASM stated: "*I can be comfortable with Indian colleagues*". This non-Japanese spatial element was elaborated upon by interviewee HKA in this comparative statement:

> "*As opposed to China, at first glance, Indians' physical features and many aspects of their culture seem completely different from those found in Japan; but, in fact, the way of thinking is very close to that of the Japanese people. In China, it took me two years to build a sales organization with which I could communicate; but, in India, it took only two months.*" (HKA, CEO)

Thus, we observed an enhanced inter-connectedness, which was expected, given the shared Buddhist origins of the Japanese-Indian intercultural setting. However, an aspect that our

respondents would normally leave unexpressed in Japan—consideration and respect for others — was brought to the surface and expressed explicitly in India. For example, when asked about the reason for her success, interviewee MSA replied: "*I am happy here* [in India] *thanks to the good relations I can develop with my colleagues*". Her gratitude pointed to a shared sense of compassion. (cf. Introduction, definition of compassion). Therefore, we found support for the conceptualization shown in Figure 2 that the spatial contingency concomitant to the CCM situation (i.e., relocation to India) affects the NSMC in shifting the *implicit to the explicit*, as embodied in a conscious verbalization of experience. In contrast, differences were noted between moving to China or India, signalling a variability in the cross-cultural management dyads.

As indicated above, spirituality is an important bedrock of Indian society, perhaps slightly more so than in Japan. When asked about the charm of working in India, another CEO with over 10 years of experience responded:

> "*In terms of compassion to others, one can see the remnants of the good qualities of Japan of yesteryears. The longer you socialize with Indians, the more you get trusted from the heart; sometimes a relationship based on more than 'gain' is born.*" (KNA, CEO)

This present argument commenced by introducing India as an emerging market that could potentially benefit from investment from an advanced economy (Japan). Under conventional capitalist and foreign direct investment scenarios, the profit motive would normally be a priority. Therefore, this last response seems counterintuitive: in this Japanese business leader's mind, the greater charm lies in the compassion prevalent in Indian society, which takes precedence over the business opportunities found in the country. Thus, rather than: "*Our business exists, and our company entered India*", the nuance is: "*India exists, and our business has come here*". This by no means suggests that the capitalist exploitation of an emerging market is not a motive—indeed, the business motif is signalled—however, 'simple exploitation' would not appear to be the CEO's

primary or only interest. Other interviewees reported similar VBAs: "*by prioritizing mutual respect for each other's objectives, we could maximize profits*" (HIA, CEO). Within the spatial theme of '*showing respect*' (cf. Introduction, definition of compassion), relationship-building was frequently referred to in the following terms: "*It is easy to work with Indian colleagues*" (SUS, non-CEO); "*It is important to be accepted by Indian subordinates*" (SEC, non-CEO); and "*When in need, I can reach out to my Indian staff for help*" (KAT, non-CEO). Again, we observe compassion being prevalent in an explicit form, with respect to the NSMC.

Integral to our study was whether Japanese leaders would demonstrate compassion in the CCM context of Indian subsidiaries. We found that they do, even though a stronger tendency toward the profit motive could have been expected. Our data infer that our pool of Japanese leaders tended not to talk primarily in terms of, say, metrics as typically measured, for example, by conventional means of indices and numbers such as profit and return on investment. Instead, they invested their time in talking at great length about issues which they deemed as important for the organization, issues such as team building, trust, and the need to explore life. These are perhaps less easy to evidence in numerical and metric terms or quantifiable in terms of financial statements, but nonetheless, critical to explore and showcase. Prioritization to *connect* (as reflected in Reave's (2005) definition of compassion) in business circumstances was also apparent: "*What would be a shared assumption in Japanese communication, I explain to my Indian colleagues using the explicit language of words*" (KAT, non-CEO) and "*Although I should not engage in self-promotion, I think I am more attentive to my employees than my colleagues in other companies*" (HKA, CEO). Both these statements—by a CEO and non-CEO—underline the efforts made to ensure connection through communication; this could also be interpreted as a tendency toward paternalistic leadership, which would also point to an undercurrent of compassion.

Temporal contingency

The study data also indicate that our sample Japanese leaders had activated their compassion only once they had overcome any reservations they had held in regard to their new Indian CCM context. Such findings are consistent with CCM scholarship which suggests that adjustment to new environments goes through stages of *honeymoon, shock, adjustment, and mastery* (Lysgaard, 1955) and, further, that the time spent in each of these stages varies from individual to individual. Consistent with such prior research, we also found that compassion can emerge during tenures varying from six months (Interviewee WKA) to five years (Interviewee SOM). Thus, gleaning that duration of stay impacts interconnectedness, with respect to the focus of the current study, this time-lag is linked to the *listening* element of compassion (see our adopted definition of compassion by Reave (2005)), as exemplified in the statements: "*So, staying on the job longer* (in India) *will help improve communication*" (SOM, non-CEO) and, "*As I explained the circumstances, over time, my Indian colleagues started understanding my standpoint…*" (HIA, CEO). Similarly, in relation to the gratitude and prejudice elements of compassion, interviewee MSA shared her experience:

> "*Indian people share their lunch and sweets, which are gratefully received. This is a custom no longer seen in contemporary corporate Japan, so I was initially perplexed … Indians have child-like pure hearts. There are things that are quite surprising to us, such as their behaviour, not being able to read between the lines, and their own speed of doing things. But in Japan, too, there are people who cannot read between the lines, people who are selfish, people who need constant reminding. Once any prejudice against Indians is overcome, you will no longer be concerned or irritated*." (MSA, non-CEO)

The statement, "*Once any prejudice against Indians is overcome*", indicates the strength of her initial reservations. Once she had overcome them, she had started 'gratefully receiving' food from her Indian colleagues, an element of compassion. In these situations, compassion begets

compassion (i.e., when in India do as the Indians do), becoming progressively more explicit. Thus, with reference to the NSMC, the emergence of compassion from the implicit inner core layer takes time. The temporal element also surfaced in time-contrasting qualifiers like "at the beginning", "following explanation of circumstances", and "over time". This 'time needed to develop the connect' emerged with interviewee WKA, who stated:

> "*There were many things I did not understand when I started—so many things I struggled with, including many failures. However, after about two months, I decided not to bother about what I did not know. Initially, I was worried about how to talk with my Indian staff and I needed to muster a lot of courage. Recently, the mutual understanding of our work has increased, and I am able to ask questions when I wish to. I feel I am getting a little used to things at last, after half a year. There is still a long way to go, but I'm feeling really happy to be here*." (WKA, non-CEO)

WKA reported her initial disconnect, which she was overcoming. The subconscious need to express and obtain compassion—to realize the contextualized identity is ignited over time. We recognize that WKA's statements could also be partially interpreted through the extant scholarship's explanation of time to adjustment; therefore, while not wishing to contradict such scholarship or to be dogmatic, we nevertheless assert that our plausible interpretive finding facilitates the development of a new theoretical direction, as we discuss below.

Economic contingency

In their CCM work in India, Japanese leaders—both with CEO and non-CEO mandates—also experience workplace strain. Anxiety-laced expressions were found to abound in our interview transcripts: "*the pressure is reflective of the challenge*" (SUS, non-CEO); "*I had a panic attack*" (DYK, CEO); and "*India is perhaps the most stressful place to work in*" (SAM, CEO). Thus, we were able to gather that the purpose of the assignment could impact the manifestation of

compassion, and we revisited our data to identity the purpose at a more granular level, such as managerial control, filling a skill gap, or launching a new endeavour. Although they surface in different ways, these purposes create a common umbrella economic theme, as shown below.

Interviewee YHO, who was tasked with launching a new endeavour (see Table 1) responded: "*During my two years as an expatriate, I did not feel there was a problem or any issue related to language*", but did go on to express other concerns:

> "*However, I could feel a difference in the way of thinking and culture. Japanese workers do not care about their salary when working. Once they have decided on doing something, they do it. They do not ask for pay rises on an annual basis. Rather, these are left to the boss's discretion*." (YHO, non-CEO)

Then, she acknowledged the economic factors driving cultural differences and organizational dynamics:

> "*Here* [in India] *because the cost of living can increase by 10% on a yearly basis, it is common for workers to initiate requests for pay rises. As I was involved as an in-between, I had to deal with this problem. The problem was not with understanding the language, but with understanding this different way of thinking*." (YHO, non-CEO)

Contextually, it is important to note, for example, that the annual inflation rate in Japan has remained circa 0% for many of the last 25 years. Thus, the cultural factors at play pertain not only to traditional values, but also to the influence of the contemporary economic environment—with the differences leading to frustration in meanings—a scenario of which both she and her firm were unaware, perhaps because they were launching a new endeavour and thus did not have any prior local knowledge. YHO continued:

> "*Had I accepted the requests for pay rises, all would have been fine; but, because I was brought up in a different environment, I blurted out my thoughts, 'This is not a matter for you to decide, but rather it is the boss who decides, and so you should not initiate this.' That remains a problem. I wonder what the best way would be. They knew they were joining a Japanese company, and we asked for their*

> *understanding. The workers were not convinced but continued working. Both the President* [CEO] *and I still don't know what the right way is*." (YHO, non-CEO)

In this case, YHO seemed to be baffled by the cultural differences relating to a specific business economics scenario. As a result, she presented the issue as an 'us vs. them' situation that was compromising inter-connectedness. Here, with reference to the NSMC, compassion can be observed to be attenuated despite being dislodged from the implicit core inner layer. We chose the word 'attenuated'—rather than 'absent'—because the statement: "*Both the President* [CEO] *and I still don't know what the right way is*." signals that, even though the issue seems to have been resolved—the workers continue without a pay rise—she still ponders over the 'right' way, which points at compassionate thought.

We next examine the response given by a project manager (KTH), whose purpose was to bring in firm specific knowledge to India, when asked about any critical incidents he may have experienced during his tenure. He stated:

> "*During our meetings with Vendor T, we often heard the assurance 'No problem'. We had our concerns about whether such assurance was based on a perfect understanding of the work we were requesting; even so, we were promised that the work would be done. I would wonder, 'Why do you bother to bid and carry out quotation work free of charge?' and 'Is this a type of kindness, or even hope for future project work?' Anyway, we could not get quotation turnaround within the specified deadline, and there was a plethora of excuses. Therefore, we had to visit them again. Each time they would say, 'We understand'. Perhaps one might attribute this attitude to the Indian character. Although I developed an affinity for Vendor T, the job ended up not being completed*.' (KTH, non-CEO)

KTH raised business concerns about work not being completed and difficulties in dealing with vendors. In terms of understanding the Japanese leader's mind, his statement, "*Although I developed an affinity for vendor T …*" is of interest here. Once again, the primary concern for

establishing a connection with the host society (in this case, with Vendor T) should be noted. Such attenuation of compassion under business pressures is evidenced by other extracts:

> "*I could maintain a harmonious communication with our Indian counterparts most of the time, but there certainly were some difficult moments too. These difficulties arose, for example, when our Head Office wanted things done in a certain way, but our Indian counterparts were thinking of doing them differently.*" (SOM, non-CEO).

SOM's purpose was managerial control and local management development; here, although the difficulties underline a compromised situation, continued respect for the Indian colleagues' different ways of doing things can still be seen.

Acknowledging compassion within NSMC: a modified process model

Building on the above findings and analysed narrative vignettes, we modified the NSMC in regard to our three constructed themes. Here, leading into discussion and conclusion, we commence the process of building a new NSMC that visualizes and acknowledges how compassion might manifest itself in Japanese leaders, as shown in Figure 3. The first development concerns the *spatial* impact on the boundary conditions of the unicultural NSMC. In Japan, compassion remains embedded in the sub-conscious of the leader-to-be as a value that is taken for granted in a society influenced by Buddhism. This is manifest even in the Japanese writing style. However, following the spatial change to India, an initial shock is caused by the differences between the environments: language, body language, etc. Over time, this changes the latent compassion into a conscious one, with a *temporal* variation in the manifestation of compassion. At the same time, touching on the third developed theme—which referred to the variation in stress levels linked to hierarchy—there is an attenuating effect fuelled by underlying *economic* considerations. Depending on the extent to which a CEO's attention turns to issues such as vision etc., the economic pressures are eased and the attenuation is reduced.

Insert Figure 3 here

Discussion and Conclusion

While, over recent decades, the concept of organizational compassion has attracted interest from organization scholars (Dutton et al., 2007; Simpson, Clegg & Pitsis, 2014)—who have explored its manifestations across various firm level settings—to date, little scholarly attention has been devoted to the role played by compassion within leadership studies and, more specifically, within intercultural contexts.

Developing further the conversation on compassion within organizations, especially through cross-cultural analysis (e.g. Simpson & Berti, 2020), our study advances understanding of how compassion manifests itself in Japanese Multi-National Enterprise (MNE) leaders within the cross-cultural context of their Indian business operations, within a spiritual capital framework. Our research uncovered three core meta-themes of contingency elements (spatial, temporal, and economic) impacting the manifestations of spiritual leadership, specifically compassion, among international business managers in Cross-Cultural Management (CCM) situations. Through a thorough analysis of our generated data, outlined above in our findings, we have striven to modify the NSMC and developed a revised model (Figure 3) to address our core research questions: first, how spatial-temporal variations manifest and second how Japanese MNE leaders demonstrate compassion in the intercultural context of their Indian operations.

Theoretically, while most of the extant CCM literature tends to be based largely on positivist 'comparative' studies focussed on national dimensions of culture (Patel, 2016; Primecz et al., 2009), our work extends the existing knowledge, showcasing how it is also appropriate to identify wider contingencies that affect both the dynamics of 'intercultural' business situations

(Bird & Mendenhall, 2016) and spiritual leadership in intercultural contexts (Gotsis & Grimani, 2017). Critically, our exploratory research reveals that such contingency elements do influence the ways in which Japanese MNE leaders display spiritual leadership (compassion) in CCM situations (India). Using concepts drawn from the extant literature, we identified spatial, temporal, and economic contingency factors by employing Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's (2012) NSMC to explore the levels of manifestation of spiritual leadership (i.e., manifestations of compassion ranging from inner-core implicitness to outer-level explicitness). The three contingency factors identified have different impacts on the ways in which spiritual leadership (compassion) is manifested in international business leaders at the differentiated nested sphere layers laid out in the NSMC. The NSMC addresses *unicultural* (Adler, 1983) situations; conversely, the modified NSMC we offer addresses *intercultural* ones, capturing the contingency elements that can significantly affect the manifestation of spiritual leadership (compassion). Consequently, we were also able to identify a number of the coping strategies adopted to respond to changes in the manifestation of spiritual behaviour (compassion). The illustrative empirical narratives lend support to our conceptualization of such a 'modified NSMC'.

Although we developed a modified NSMC in the context of the compassion exhibited by Japanese leaders in India, we believe that such a model has potential scope to be theoretically generalized (Tsang, 2014) and thus applied to other CCM dyads such as, by way of indicative illustration, UK managers in India or even Italian ones in Ghana. Our study enhances our understanding of the manifestation of compassion in leaders. While, to date, most of the emerging management literature on compassion is based on Western framings, the empirical evidence for compassion in leadership in other contexts remains underexplored (Thomas & Rowland, 2014). Encouraged by Barkema et al. (2015), our study considered an East-meets-East intercultural (India

and Japan) situation and addressed the ways and extent to which compassion is exhibited in such a context.

Our study argues that the ways in which compassion is spiritually manifested in workplace leadership is associated with culture. Discussions of the post-secular organizational culture found in the West (Stokes et al., 2016) often point to a suppression of such spiritual values. The argument herein suggests that, in other contexts (e.g., Japan (Sai, 1996)), such a move to a spiritual values supressing secular culture has not taken place, and compassion can thus be seen to thrive in the workplace as an embedded cultural value implicit in the subconscious, rather than explicit in the conscious (Kimura & Nishimura, 2018). The increasing recognition of the importance of compassion to organization dynamics and business leadership makes it ever more important for the parties involved in intra-organization relationships to understand the factors involved in its manifestation. In the modified NSMC (Figure 3) produced by our intercultural study, different factors can lead to variation in manifestations of compassion. Building on concepts drawn from previous intercultural research (Stokes et al., 2015), this study built on the spatial and temporal dimensions that might influence manifestations of compassion. It additionally deployed the conceptualization that economic pressure could moderate compassion (Trevino et al., 2014). Accordingly, we developed an extended NSMC that acknowledges and reflects the contingencies impinging on *'intercultural'* situations in CCM.

Moreover, our framework incorporates the core themes, induced from the qualitative data, generated within our research study. We reveal that, in the context of their spatial move to India, compassion surfaces to the *conscious* sphere of Japanese managers. There is evidence of spatial-temporal elements, and it would be appropriate to reiterate a statement made by CEO HKA: "*In China, it took me two years to build a sales organization that I could communicate with, but in*

India it took only two months". The contrast in the time taken between India and China highlights the spatial and temporal elements. In addition, the argument can now be made that Japan clusters closer to India than, for example, to China, which diverges from the extant literature (such as the meta-analysis performed by Ronen and Shenkar, 2013).

The moderating influence of economic pressure highlights an important issue found in leadership studies—especially those based on Western contexts—related to the role played by the transactional vs. the transformational style (Smith, 2016). Although our model was developed in the context of Japanese leadership in India, our empirical evidence is consistent with the dichotomy suggested in the extant literature, and may be transferable to non-Japanese MNEs, as economic pressure would attenuate any potential compassion in their leadership too. To summarize, although our framework was developed in the context of the India–Japan dyad, the model has the potential to be transferred to other intercultural dyads with variations, for example, in the trajectories followed by manifestations of compassion along the outlined spatial-temporal dimensions. Thus, we strongly argue for the process plausibility associated with qualitative studies, rather than for the statistical generalizability of quantitative research (Gabriel, 2018).

The modified NSMC and empirical data (narratives) suggest that spatial, temporal, and economic factors impinge on manifestations of spiritual leadership (compassion) and on the effects that such manifestations can subsequently have on business operations. In addition, our study contributes to the CCM literature by examining an 'intercultural' issue, which is an under-researched theme in CCM studies (Bird & Mendenhall, 2016). Our study is among the first to identify empirically the role played by contingent elements on manifestations of spiritual leadership in advanced/emerging market situations such as the Japan-India dyad. Our findings emphasize the joint influences of these elements and of the given intercultural dyad in shaping the

manifestations of compassion exhibited by international business managers, especially in light of the heightened role played by leaders in response to recent global crises and uncertainty (Caligiuri et al., 2020). We believe that spiritual leadership (compassion) will increasingly emerge as a critical issue in CCM; thus, our modified NSMC may act as a useful conceptual framework to enable a broader understanding of intercultural situations.

Finally, our study has pioneered a contextualized understanding of the tangibilization and manifestation of compassion in an intercultural setting, evidenced through our empirical approach focused on the case of Japanese leaders working in India. It contributes to the national dimensions of CCM theory (e.g., Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012) by providing empirical evidence for the transportability of collectivist-culture-based and interconnectedness-derived compassion to an intercultural setting. Our findings further confirm that the culturally embedded intangible subconscious found in Japan (Kimura & Nishikawa, 2018) can be temporally awakened following a leader's spatial move to India. Furthermore, our research study and the findings outlined in this article highlight the implicit interlinkages between CCM theory with emerging spiritual leadership theory by exploring the factors (i.e., values; in this case, compassion) that underpin both.

Implications for practice

An important finding in relation to practice pertains to spatial contingency. We now understand that the shifting of values from the inner implicit core toward the explicit outer level is influenced by the nature of the spatial change—e.g., by differences between moving from Japan to India versus, for example, from Japan to China. Accordingly, we suggest that any training programmes should be tailored to the leaders' spatial-temporal destinations, as opposed to being aimed at generic cultural awareness.

A related finding pertains to the time it takes to awaken compassion. Our data reveal empirical evidence of an initial hesitation, or even shock. This could be countered through training that could be conducted both pre-departure and on arrival. It could also be pre-empted through participation in informal business executive groups in which similar experiences could be shared. Equally, our evidence could assure Indian employees that any initial signs of irritability in their Japanese leaders will (hopefully) turn into compassion over time.

To reiterate, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) noted that displays of cultural attributes follow a normal distribution, and that these findings are certainly not scientific laws. In terms of implications for practice, this also brings to the surface the power inequality enjoyed by the business leader where he/she is 'excused' for any initial irritability. Thus, although our study addressed a positive spiritual value—compassion—the emergence of an issue of power difference between the giver and taker can also be observed in practical terms in an intercultural context.

A third finding pertains to the attenuation of compassion observed under conditions of economic stress. Therefore, economic stress could well be counterproductive in generating a downward spiral of organizational culture (cf. Stokes et al., 2016). To remedy this situation, the Japanese headquarters could de-emphasize the economic imperative of the overseas assignment. Alternatively, local policy makers in India could consider the overall contribution of foreign companies in terms of employment generation and technology transfer. Thus, appropriate incentives could be designed to ease any economic stress. Finally, in situations in which several home country nationals hold different leadership roles, the CEO could monitor the economic stress placed on the lower-level leaders and ensure that compassion is not too affected.

Our study sheds light on how compassion is activated and manifested among Japanese leaders in India. It may be anticipated that non-Japanese foreign leaders also face similar spiritual

situations in their work in India. Buddhist spirituality does not hold a monopoly on human orientations; other societies and widespread belief systems also exist (Eisenbeiss, 2012). As argued earlier, compassion is an important element of leadership in India; by following the maxim 'do in India as the Indians do', leaders from other countries could make a conscious effort to cultivate their compassion orientation, rather than focusing exclusively on the economic imperative.

Limitations and Future Research

Based on studies centred on a Japanese MNE operating in the UK, Stokes et al. (2016) concluded that VBAs make a powerful contribution to spiritual capital and thereby to the human capital-enhancing effectiveness of all members of an organization. Our study's exploration of how compassion is manifested in foreign leaders operating in an intercultural context was limited to a Japanese/Indian case. In addition, although we are confident that our spatial-temporal model enhances our understanding in this specific context, the reader is cautioned against global generalizability, as national trajectories may differ. Though contrasted as advanced/emerging markets, Japan and India are located in the same Buddhist cluster (Ashta et al., 2019). Our *intra-cluster* study of compassion will hopefully stimulate future *inter-cluster* research. For example, of UK leaders in India, Chinese leaders in India, American leaders in Ethiopia, and so forth. Second, the moderating influence of economic pressure is a concern. While its associated transactional-style leadership has its merits, it should be remembered that system organization performance is ultimately more than that measured by a single leader (Rowland, 2016). Third, our study adopted Reave's (2005) definition of compassion, which assumes construct equivalence. Such an assumption is necessarily recognized as a limitation. Kimura and Nishikawa (2018) indicated that the Japanese conception of the place held by compassion in leadership is particularly different

from that found in other countries. Therefore, further research on the equivalence versus salient differences in the conceptualization of the compassion construct across global cultures is recommended.

Finally, while addressing a gap in the literature (the paucity of scholarship on Japanese leadership in India), we chose to explore the specific manifestation of compassion. We did so because it involved addressing both the economic and social issues faced by society. However, Stokes et al. (2016), who fostered the consideration of spiritual capital, did not limit themselves to a single value; hence, we would recommend that further research be conducted into a gamut of VBAs—such as generosity, austerity, etc.—and into how they are activated in intercultural settings. Hopefully, our study will trigger an interest in spiritual leadership (with its clear foundations on values) as a topic in business ethics and cross-cultural management research in intercultural settings.

Declaration

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Appendix 1: Sample of interview questions (across the many interviews)

a) What kind of business are you in?

b) India seems to be a remote country but, actually, it is close. What do you think?

c) Why did you choose India over China?

d) What is the charm of working in India?

e) What important factors should be considered when working in India?

f) What is the charm of Japan that you recognize when working in India?

g) Your business looks impressive. What kind of ingenuity do you infuse in your management?

h) Please share two or three episodes related to your customer interactions in India

i) How has your communication with Indians been, which you had feared?

j) In the light of your initial fears, how has it been working in India?

Table 1: Interviewee profiles

Leadership level	Industry type	M/F**	Purpose	India tenure	Step *
CEO					
1. HKA	Manufacturing	M	Managerial control	7	1
2. NSA	Consulting	F	Managerial control/ customer interaction	10+	1
3. KNA	Services	M	Managerial control	10+	1
4. HIA	Services	M	Managerial control;	2	1
5. DYK	Entrepreneur	M	Launch and manage endeavour	14	2
6. SAM	Services	M	Managerial control	3	2
Non-CEO *e.g., middle manager*					
7. YHO	Education	F	Launch new endeavour	2	1
8. KTH	Manufacturing	M	Firm specific knowledge	2	1
9. MSA	Insurance	F	Fill skill gap	2	1
10. WKA	Manufacturing	F	Cultural bridging	0.5	1
11. SOM	Manufacturing	M	Managerial control and development	5	1
12. TSU	Services	F	Fill skill gap	3	2
13. ASM	E-Commerce	F	Launch new endeavour	5	2
14. SUS	Consulting	M	Launch new endeavour	6	2
15. SEC	Manufacturing	M	Managerial control	6	2
16. KAT	Services	F	Cultural bridging	3	2

Step 1: Thematic analysis Step 2: For illustrative triangulation

** M= Male, F=Female

Figure 1: Locating cultural value compassion in leadership theory

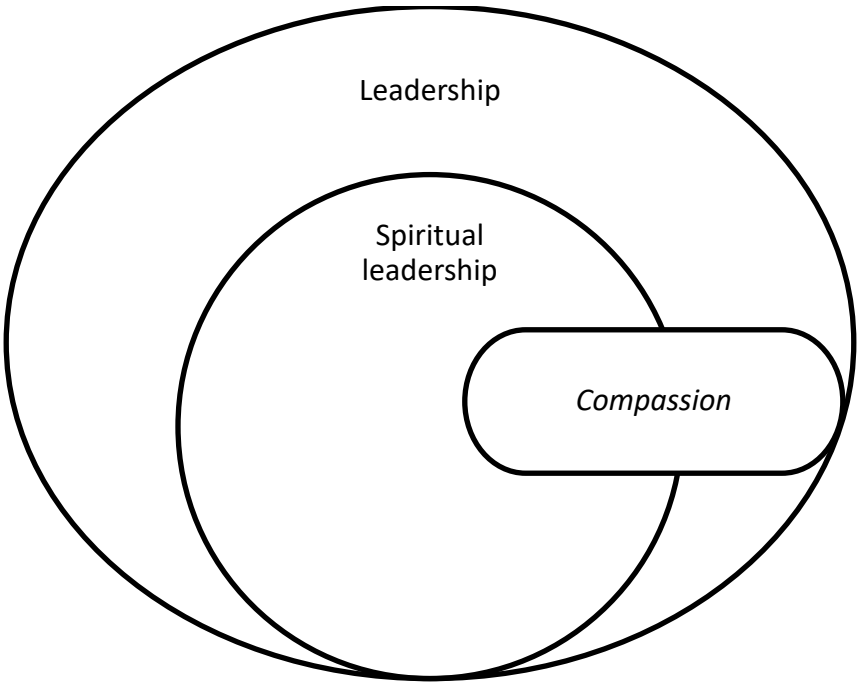
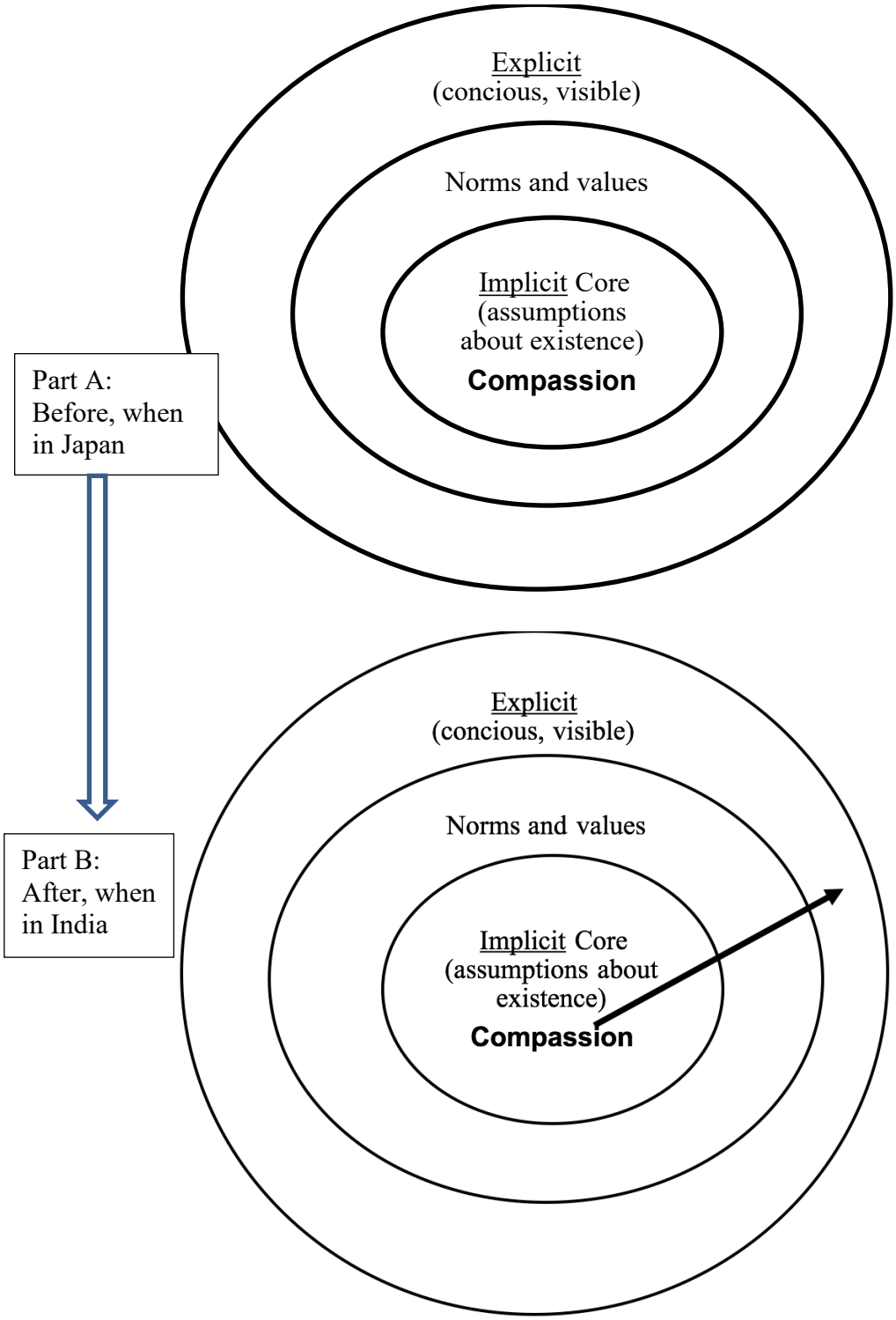


Figure 2: Image of conceptualized influence in the NSMC with changes in boundary conditions (change in geography, from Japan to India)



The change in boundary conditions *might potentially* dislodge compassion out of the core sphere – from the implicit to the explicit

Figure 3: Modified-NSMC process model for manifestation of compassion in Japanese leaders in their Indian operations (adapted from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (2012))