

## **Towards Environmentally Friendly Management at “Konbini”: Case Study at a Convenience Store in Japan**

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**Shino Koda**, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University, Japan

**Abstract:** In response to the recent growing environmental awareness, companies have attempted to satisfy people’s demand for the environmentally friendly management. In this context, this paper focuses on the wastefulness at convenience stores derived from “the convenience”, namely, the nature that convenience stores possess. This paper attempts to introduce the case study conducted at a convenience store in Kyoto, Japan, in 2008, based on the methodology of group dynamics. As a result of the thorough participant observation, it was found that the franchisee’s dilemma created by the franchiser wields bad influence on the behavior of the employees and the customers. Following the results, this paper suggests the need for the drastic change of the norm created by the customers, the franchisee and the franchiser. In conclusion, for the betterment of the environmentally friendly management at a convenience store, the solution of the dilemma is a key. The fundamental change of the norm that leads people to the environmentally friendly behavior is needed for the environmentally friendly management at a convenience store.

### **1 Introduction**

In response to the recent growing environmental awareness, companies have attempted to satisfy people’s demand for the environmentally friendly management. Environmentally friendly something such as environmentally friendly action, activities and products are intimately linked to people’s proenvironmental behavior in daily life.

Many of recent studies have focused on people's proenvironmental behavior. Minton and Rose (Minton & Rose, 1997), for example, investigated the relative effects of environmental concern and social norms pertaining to concern for the environment. Costarelli and Colloca (Costarelli & Colloca, 2004) traced the influence of attitudinal ambivalence on the environmentally friendly

*Shino Koda, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan*

behavioral intention by conducting a survey. Fransson and Gärling (Fransson & Gärling, 1999) considered whether environmental concern plays an important role for behavior changes. Stern (Stern, 2000) developed a conceptual framework for the theory of environmentally significant individual behavior. These previous findings are insightful. Little, however, discussed the relationship between the proenvironmental behavior and the environmentally friendly management from the social constructionist perspective.

This paper focuses on the proenvironmental behavior at convenience stores from the viewpoint of the formation of the convenience-oriented norm.

## **2. Methodology**

This section provides the overview of the methodology of group dynamics as well as the brief explanation of the overall nature of a collectivity described by using the image of “canopy” for its metaphor advocated by Sugiman (Sugiman, 1992, 1998).

### **2.1 Group Dynamics**

A new group dynamics advocated by Sugiman (Sugiman, 2006) accentuates collaborative practice by researchers and people, maintaining social constructionism as its meta-theory. It greatly differs from traditional group dynamics created by Lewin (Lewin, 1947a, 1947b). Group dynamics proposed by Sugiman emphasizes the nature of a collectivity while the traditional group dynamics by Lewin underlines the psychological process of individuals.

Sugiman (Sugiman, 1998) defines group dynamics as “a field of study in which the dynamic nature of human collectivities or groups is investigated by examining the collectivities as wholes on the one hand, and the dynamic bilateral relations between the collectivity and the lives, or the psychological states, of individuals who belong to these collectivities on the other.”

## **2.2 Overall Nature of a Collectivity: the Concept of “Canopy”**

Sugiman (Sugiman, 1992, 1998) vividly describes the overall nature of a collectivity by using a metaphor of an image of a “canopy”, or "*kaya*" in Japanese. Sugiman (Sugiman, 1998) outlines the dynamic and bilateral relations between the nature of a collectivity and the individual life-world as follows:

- (1) Every collectivity is encompassed by a canopy and thus the life-world of each person in the collectivity is determined to some extent by the canopy;
- (2) The life-world of each person is not, however, determined completely by the canopy. Each person still feels, thinks, and behaves more or less freely even while they are determined by the canopy;
- (3) The exercise in free choice by each person in turn changes the canopy to some extent;
- (4) The canopy which has now changed again determines the life-world of each person, and so on.

(Sugiman, 1998)

According to Sugiman (Sugiman, 1998), any collectivity in an ordinary setting is almost always encompassed by many canopies which are theoretically countless and partially overlapping. Each person is encompassed by partially overlapping multiple canopies which might lead to his or her uniqueness. In the concept of “canopy”, people are influenced by canopies and people influence canopies, which means the overall nature of a collectivity is mutable. This concept enables this paper to analyze and discuss the case study conducted at a convenience store in Japan.

*Shino Koda, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan*

### **3. Case Study at a Convenience Store**

This section shows the details on the case study conducted in Kyoto, Japan, and provides the analysis of the results as well as the brief summary of convenience stores in Japan.

#### **3.1 Convenience Stores as “Konbini” in Japan**

The first convenience store was launched in Japan in 1969. Convenience stores in Japan have developed differently from the ones in other countries (Kim, 2001) and they became different from the ones in other countries. Convenience stores in the United States, for instance, are mainly located in residential areas, while convenience stores in Japan are located in not only residential areas but also other areas (Terasaka, 1998). Since the first convenience store was established in the late 1960s, the number of the convenience stores has kept increasing. Since the establishment of the first convenience store, convenience stores –known familiarly as “Konbini” among Japanese –have influenced Japanese lifestyle.

According to the Statistics Bureau of Japan, convenience stores are defined as small-sized retailers whose space is more than 30 m<sup>2</sup> and less than 250 m<sup>2</sup>, opening 24 hours a day or for longer hours with the self-service style and selling a limited range of goods mainly foods and beverages for daily consumption (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, 2004). At convenience stores in Japan, people can buy all kinds of hot and cold foods and beverages as well as commodities for daily use. Moreover, they offer postal service and private home delivery service. People can pay even the utility bills. In short, convenience stores in Japan are truly convenient. It can be said that Japanese lifestyle is based on the convenience, thus Japanese society can be regarded as “a convenience-oriented” society.

It is plausible to say that going to convenience stores is almost a habit for Japanese people. In Japan, one of the typical daily activities is to go to convenience stores to buy

foods and beverages as well as daily commodities. According to the statistics conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan, 2011), the number of the convenience stores in Japan is more than 42,000. Other surveys support that going to convenience stores is essential to Japanese people's daily activities. For instance, more than 60% of Japanese men and women who are over 20 years old go to convenience stores at least once a week, men in the 20s go to convenience stores every two days, and more than 80% of women in the 20s go to convenience stores every day (Nomura Research Institute Ltd., 2001a, 2001b; Nomura Research Institute, 1998)(Nomura Research Institute, Ltd., 1998).

Convenience stores in Japan pursue, literally, “convenience”. People can get almost everything and they can do almost everything that they have to do in their daily life at a convenience store – posting, payment, and so on—. In addition, most of the convenience stores in Japan are open 24 hours a day. Convenience stores in Japan are literally convenient. This makes a big difference between convenience stores in Japan and the ones in other countries.

### ***3.2 Environmental Problems Caused by Convenience Stores in Japan***

Convenience stores in Japan have several environmental problems. Copious amounts of food waste, for instance, are one of the issues that has generated a major discussion. Every “bento” – boxed lunch–, for example, is pulled from the shelves and thrown away when the setting period of time passed despite of the fact that they are substantially eatable.

Huge amounts of energy consumption are derived from the results of the 24-hour operation of the air conditioners and lighting inside the store. According to the environmental reports distributed by the Japan Franchise Association (Japan Franchise Association, 2011), the total amount of CO<sub>2</sub> exceeds 2.5 million ton per year.

*Shino Koda, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan*

### **3.3 Environmental Activities by Convenience Stores**

Each convenience store company in Japan has undertaken various environmental activities such as the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, less food waste, environmentally friendly logistics and so on. Lawson, the second largest convenience company, for example, has conducted several environmental campaigns that should be undertaken together with the customers (LAWSON, INC., 2008). CO<sub>2</sub> Offset Campaign is based on the concept of offsetting all or a portion of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions utilizing reductions, or CO<sub>2</sub> emissions credits, achieved in developing countries and other regions, “Bring Your Own” Bag Campaign aims at reducing the plastic shopping bags at check-out counters, and “Bring Your Own” Chopsticks Campaign is intended to reduce the usage of disposable chopsticks.

Franchisers try to promote these kinds of environmentally friendly activities for the environmentally friendly management, and they order their franchisees to follow their policy. Have these environmental activities by each convenience store in Japan achieved any results? Yes, they have. They have, more or less, produced some outcomes. Then, here should be one more question. Are they “optimal” outcomes?

Most of the convenience store companies in Japan respectively set goals to be achieved for each environmental activity. It is true that their environmental activities yield some results, but some of the environmental activities mainly related to wastefulness such as the reduction of the plastic shopping bags at check-out counters have not been achieved as they expected to be (e.g., LAWSON, INC., 2011).

### **3.4 Case Study**

Based on the methodology of group dynamics, the thoroughgoing participant observation was conducted at a convenience store in Kyoto, Japan from June to August in 2008.

Let me explain about this participant observation briefly. I recorded the behavior of the customers and co-workers, every manual provided by the franchiser, daily reports written by the employees, and every message given by the franchiser to the franchisee in order to increase sales. I also kept a log as possible as I could. I worked as a part-timer at the convenience store. I did just the same as what other co-workers did as a job. I was mainly a cashier and cleaner. When there were not so many customers inside the store, I had to do many things such as displaying goods, collecting garbage inside and outside the store, and so on. In summary, working just like other employees, I collected the ethnography and recorded the dialogues between the employees and the customers, their behavior and every conversation in the store as well as the manuals and messages given by the franchiser.

The main purposes of this participant observation are to collect the ethnography, to observe the behavior of the customers and the workers, and to analyze the communication and the relationship among the franchiser, franchisee and the customers based on the ethnography I obtained during this participant observation.

Responding to the recent growing environmental awareness, convenience stores have engaged in a variety of efforts to conduct the environmentally friendly management, and the convenience store where I conducted the participant observation was no exception. Franchisees get two kinds of files –“manuals” and “messages”- from the franchiser. “Manuals” and “messages” have two different roles. “Manuals” are intended to give the franchisees the significant orders of how to manage the store. The franchisees must follow these manuals. On the contrary, “messages” are intended to give the franchisee the instructions that are regarded as “advice” for the better sales. Whether the franchisees follow the messages or not totally depend on each franchisee. Instructions of conducting environmentally friendly activities are given to each franchisee from the franchiser as a form of “messages”, which means weather

*Shino Koda, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan*

each franchisee conducts those environmentally friendly activities or not is dependent on each franchisee per se.

The convenience store where I conducted the participant observation received various messages given by the franchiser for the enhancement of the environmentally friendly activities that had never been conducted.

### **3.5 Results**

The inconsistent orders for the franchisee from the franchiser and the fear of the franchisee for the opportunity loss were observed. The franchiser ordered the franchisee to conduct environmentally friendly activities that the franchiser believed that they would contribute to increasing sales. The franchisee, however, disobeyed the orders from the franchiser although the franchisee initially tried to follow the orders.

It was also found that the franchisee had the belief that the customers did not expect the franchisee to conduct the environmentally friendly activities for the reason that the franchisee knew that most of the customers were convenience-oriented. Thus, the franchisee put priority on satisfying the needs of the customers, which means making more profit by avoiding the opportunity loss, rather than practicing the environmentally friendly activities according to the "messages" given by the franchiser.

Convenience-oriented customers demand from the franchisee truly convenient services that they think they have the right to enjoy. Then, the franchisee tries to satisfy all the demands by the customers so that they will not have the opportunity loss. As a result, the customers take for granted these kinds of convenient services. This situation goes on and on. Even if the franchisee tries to conduct environmentally friendly activities followed by the messages from the franchiser, the customers will not allow it to do that and they might complain about this directly to the franchiser because most of the environmentally friendly activities cause inconvenience to the customers. In such cases, the franchiser gives the franchisee the orders saying that the



franchisee must satisfy the customer's demand. In this way, these three - the customers, the franchisee, and the franchiser- are to create one certain "canopy" that is convenience-oriented.

#### **4. Towards Environmentally Friendly Management at a Convenience Store**

Based on the analysis of the thorough case study, this paper indicates several significant conclusions.

First, it is affirmed that the dilemma mainly caused by the inconsistent orders by the franchiser and the fear of the franchisee for the opportunity loss were factors of the franchisee's unwillingness to conduct the environmentally friendly activities. Let me discuss this dilemma through the lens of each side.

The franchiser cares about the profit most, of course, and it believes that practicing environmentally friendly activities leads to much more profit because it thinks the customers prefer the company that is keen on environmentally friendly activities. It also believes that satisfying all the needs of the customers also leads to more profit. Therefore the franchiser requires the franchisee to carry out the environmentally friendly activities as well as to make more profit and satisfy all the needs of the customers at the same time. The franchiser, however, does not follow these instructions. The franchisee initially tries to follow the instructions from the franchiser, but eventually it begins concentrating on only making more profit and satisfying the needs of the customers. Under such circumstances, through the lens of the franchiser, the franchisee does not make any effort to make more profit with the disobedience to their instructions.

The franchisee believes that carrying out environmentally friendly activities leads to less profit. Through the lens of the franchisee, the orders from the franchiser are deeply conflicting because carrying out environmentally friendly activities does not mean making more profit and satisfying the needs of the customers. That

**Shino Koda**, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan

is to say, the orders from the franchiser are incompatible. At first, the franchisee tries to conduct the environmentally friendly activities according to "the messages" given by the franchiser, but the franchisee soon gives up following "these messages" and concentrates on satisfying the needs of the customers because the franchisee fears the opportunity loss.

This causes the dilemma. Behind the convenience-oriented norm lies this dilemma. It leads the franchisee to the disobedience to the orders from the franchiser and the environmentally "unfriendly" management, and, eventually, to the convenience-oriented norm.

Secondly, for the betterment of the environmentally friendly management, the solution of the dilemma is a key. Then, the fundamental conversion of the norm and the creation of the new meaning of the environmentally friendly behavior leading people to the environmentally friendly behavior at convenience stores are needed for the environmentally friendly management. This will eventually lead people to the environmentally friendly daily life.

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**Shino Koda**, Graduate School of Energy Science, Kyoto University,  
Japan

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