

Ingroup underestimation by involuntary core members: False consensus among Japanese labor union

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Purpose of this research

Based on the social identity theory, much social psychology research has been done regarding labor unions and political parties in Europe (Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Klandermans, 1997). However, in Japan, there has been almost no research focusing on labor unions to investigate intergroup relations.

The stagnation of union activities reported by Kelly & Breinlinger (1996) in England is occurring also in Japan. Many Japanese labor unions are organized in each company, and mutual connections do not exist among these unions. Executives or core members of Japanese labor unions are rarely selected from candidates who step forward on their own. Regular members are also hardly committed to, or participate actively in, union activities. Moreover, no group actions such as strikes are carried out now. Many members of executives and regular members in Japanese labor unions have little interest in union activities.

The factors that influence the stagnation of the union activities in Japan or other countries in Asia, however, may be different from those in England. Japanese union executives' underestimation of other members' intentions is reported here in from the result of a survey of a company labor union (Mullen & Hu, 1988). Furthermore, this study examines the influence of underestimation of group members on executives' intention to conduct union activities. How do members themselves evaluate other persons? How do involuntary union executives evaluate the behavior of their union members, both executives and regular members? What kinds of influence do such assessments of executives and regular members have on the desire to conduct union activities? This article introduces an attempt to interpret union activities in Japan, based on SIT and the false consensus effects (Ross, Greene & House, 1977).

Method

A questionnaire was distributed to 711 union members, including 71 executives and 640 regular members of a company labor union. Based on snow-ball sampling, the distribution and collection of the questionnaires for regular members were conducted through the executives.

The actual evaluation of the union by its members was judged in terms of 3 items, "Union activities are enjoyable", "The union is currently attractive to members", "The union is useful for me", all on 5-point scales. The actual intention to participate in union activities was asked on one item, "I want to participate in union activities". Actual action was measured by the statement, "At my workplace, I talk about the

union with my colleagues.” At the same time, all members were asked to surmise how executives and regular members responded to the same questions, for example, “I guess that regular members think union activities are enjoyable.”

The responses are defined as the subjective ingroup value, when the executives respond to a question to presume the other executives’ evaluation of the union, others intentions, and action. On the other hand, the executives’ estimation of the regular members is defined as the subjective outgroup value. These two values were also defined in the regular members’ responses.

Result

Figure 1 shows the means of the 3 items used for evaluation of labor union. Next, means of intention and union action are shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, respectively. Group (executives, regular

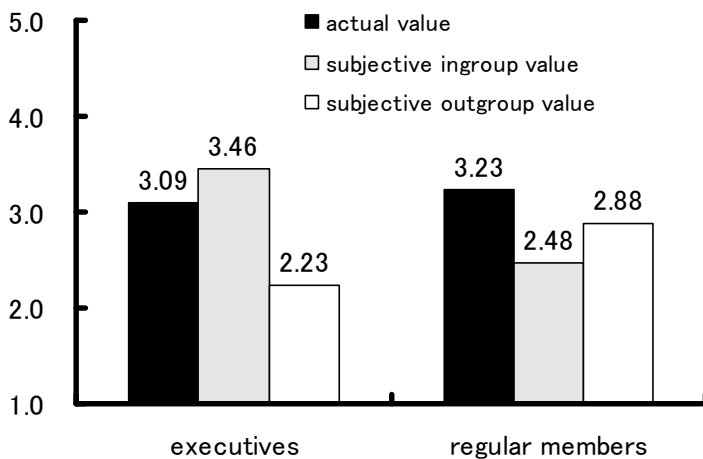


Figure1 Means of evaluation of the union

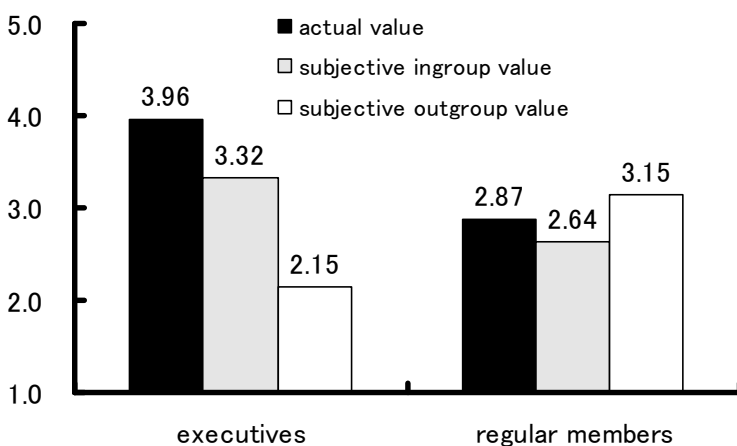


Figure2 Means of intention

members) \times scale (actual value, subjective ingroup or outgroup value) ANOVA was conducted for the three variables, evaluation of the union, intention, and action. The interaction of group \times scale was found to be significant in all three ($F [2, 1412]=172.86, p<.001$; $F [2, 1414]=140.91, p<.001$; $F [2, 1418]=139.43, p<.001$). For these three variables, moreover, the simple main effect of the scale was significant in both the executives ($F[2, 140]=136.09, p<.001$; $F[2, 140]= 115.64, p<.001$; $F[2, 140]= 41.07, p<.001$) and the regular members ($F[2, 1272]=344.57, p<.001$; $F [2, 1274]=74.35, p<.001$; $F[2, 1278]=328.32, p<.001$). The following results were obtained in multiple comparison tests by the Tukey method. First, significant differences were found between the actual value, subjective ingroup value, and outgroup value ($p<.05$) in the executives’ evaluation of the union and their intentions. With respect to the union activities of

executives, a significant difference was found only between the outgroup value and the other two values ($p<.05$). Second, similar significant differences were found among the three variables in regular members ($p<.05$). With regard to the union activities of regular members, however, a significant difference was seen only between the outgroup value and the other two variables ($p<.05$).

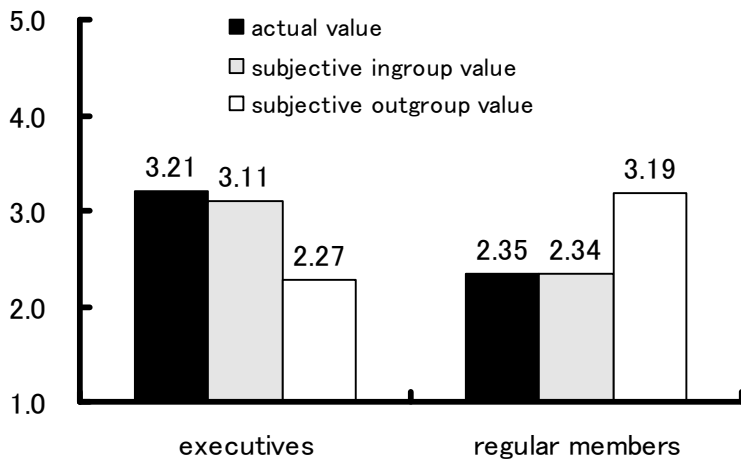


Figure 3 Means of union action

These results show that the executives overestimated the other executives' evaluation of the union, but underestimated the regular members' evaluation of the union. The executives, moreover, underestimated the behavioral intention of both fellow executives and regular members. Therefore, regular members' behavioral intention and evaluation of the union were underestimated by the executives. They also underestimated fellow executives' intentions, while they overestimated

fellow executives' evaluation of the union.

Next, Table 1 shows the results of multiple regression analysis including the actual value of intention as a dependent variable in the executives and regular members, respectively. Among the executives, it was their own actual evaluation of the union and the subjective outgroup intention that had significant influences on behavioral intention. On the other hand, all variables including both subjective outgroup and ingroup values significantly influenced actual intention of regular members. Yet, among those variables, two subjective ingroup values, evaluation of the union and intention, had the strongest effects their actual intention.

Table 1 Results of multiple regression analysis including actual value of intention as a dependent variable in each the executives and regular members

	Executives (N=71)	Regular Members (N=640)
Evaluation of the union: Actual value	.396**	.183***
Evaluation of the union: Ingroup Value	—	.272***
Intention: Ingroup Value	—	.261***
Evaluation of the union: Outgroup Value	—	-.146**
Intention: Outgroup Value	.246*	.102*
	$R^2 = .317^{***}$	$R^2 = .360^{***}$

— $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Note. Table shows standardized partial regression coefficients.

Discussion

Union executives underestimated fellow executives' intention to conduct union activities, while they overestimated their evaluation of the union. The results of a multiple regression analysis, moreover, indicated that executives' enthusiasm for union activities was affected by their suppositions as to the desire of the regular union members, in addition to their own evaluation of the union. Although behavioral intention is a simple item in this research, these results suggest a false consensus arising in a Japanese labor union, by which core members underestimate ingroup and outgroup member's intentions.

Executives' actual intentions are suppressed only by the underestimated intentions of outgroup members, that is, regular members. In both Japan and England, behavioral intention is affected by attitude and subjective norm, and the influence of the latter is especially effective (Abrams, Ando & Hikle, 1998). Labor union executives in a company is a member of the union, and also belongs the company.

Therefore the intention of union executive is affected not only by a subjective norm based on the other executives, but also by a subjective norm on the basis of colleagues and superiors in the workplace. It is conceivable that a colleague in the workplace is more influential than other executives, when the executives place greater importance on the category of the company than the category of the union. In that situation, executives' false consensus underestimating the union activity intentions of colleagues or important superiors would decrease their own enthusiasm for union activities.

This study focused on influence of an underestimation of the will of other members in the labor union on the union executives' own intentions. The validity of the scale may be disputed of the small number items, so result of this study is merely suggestive. However, future research can examine the relation between a subjective norm and false consensus in Japanese labor unions based on these results with improvement of the items.

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