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KEIEIJUKU - MÔ HÌNH LIÊN KẾT VÀ ĐÀO TẠO DỰA TRÊN TRIẾT LÝ NHẬT BẢN DÀNH CHO CÁC NHÀ QUẢN LÝ CẤP CAO CỦA CÁC DOANH NGHIỆP VỪA VÀ NHỎ VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt

Đối với các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ (SME) ở Việt Nam, phát triển doanh nghiệp gặp rất nhiều khó khăn do thiếu nguồn lực và kinh nghiệm của các nhà quản lý cấp cao còn hạn chế. Một trong những giải pháp cho vấn đề này là cung cấp cho các nhà quản lý các chương trình đào tạo và phát triển, cũng như tăng cường liên kết giữa các doanh nghiệp để mở rộng các mối quan hệ và nguồn lực kinh doanh. Cộng đồng Keieijuku do Viện Phát triển Nguồn nhân lực Việt Nam - Nhật Bản (VJCC) tổ chức là một cộng đồng liên kết điển hình với mô hình kết nối hiệu quả các thành viên là các doanh nghiệp Việt Nam đã tham gia vào khoá đào tạo dựa trên triết lý kinh doanh của Nhật Bản. Qua việc nghiên cứu mô hình đào tạo Keieijuku và một số hoạt động của Cộng đồng Keieijuku từ năm 2014 đến 2019, kết quả của bài nghiên cứu cho thấy sự thành công của khoá đào tạo nhà quản lý cấp cao Keieijuku cần đi kèm với cộng đồng liên kết các doanh nghiệp có chung quan điểm kinh doanh, có sự tin tưởng lẫn nhau, có hệ thống đánh giá với các tiêu chí rõ ràng, đa dạng và hoạt động dưới sự lãnh đạo của một ban điều hành có năng lực.

Từ khóa: Keieijuku, quản lý dựa trên triết lý Nhật Bản, đào tạo quản lý cấp cao

KEIEIJUKU – THE JAPANESE PHILOSOPHY-BASED TRAINING AND LINKAGE MODEL FOR TOP MANAGERS OF VIETNAMESE SMES

Abstract

For small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Vietnam, the development of businesses has faced many difficulties due to the lack of resources and limited experiences of senior managers. One of the solutions to this problem is providing top managers with more training and development sections, as well as strengthening links among businesses to expand relationships and resources. The Keieijuku Community organized by the Vietnam - Japan Human Resources Development

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Institute (VJCC) is a typical interfirm linkage community with an effective connecting model for Vietnamese enterprises who have participated in the training course based on Japanese business philosophy. By researching Keiejuku training model and some activities of Keiejuku Community from 2014 to 2019, the results of this paper indicated that the success of the Keiejuku senior manager training course needs to be accompanied by a community of businesses that share a same business perspective, have mutual trust, have an evaluation system with clear and diverse criteria, and operate under the leadership of a competent executive board.

Keywords: Keiejuku, Japanese philosophy – based management, top manager training.

1. Introduction

The private sector plays a very important role in the national economy of Vietnam, contributing to the liberalization of the workforce, the release of creativity, the increased productivity, and the enhanced capacity to manage and create jobs for economic growth and development of the country. However, the private sector is currently developing below its potentials since the management still lacks skills and knowledge to run the companies in such a very competitive business environment.

Cooperation of companies can be defined as common undertaking of a business task by two or more independent entities which should be based on active involvement of all parties (Ratajczak-Mrozek, 2012). Cooperation allows partners to either fulfill common goals, reach for benefits while achieving different goals neutral to each other or prevent other entities from attaining goals which are discrepant (Wasiluk, 2013). A company can increase the scope of its cooperation by participating in a network. According to Adamczyk and Sagan (2015), a cooperation network can be defined as an increase in the company's competitiveness by developing a network of formal and semi-formal relationships with other actors in a business environment. Within this network, an enterprise is a mere element of a wider net that is the system of entities mutually entwined and influencing each other. Being a member of a network, each business can increase the opportunities to reach the market and suppliers as well as to gain more knowledge in different business aspects. Thus, developing effective interfirm linkage networks are very important for every business community and governments.

Beside US and European management style, Japanese philosophy – based management has been well-known and studied in many countries around the world. For decades, many researchers tried to find out how Japan can be so advanced in terms of technology and infrastructure whilst at the same time being wedded to traditional cultural approaches to all things corporate. Japanese companies are at the same time innovative and disruptive while retaining strong alignment to traditional hierarchical structures, risk aversion and detail obsession. Tomasz Olejniczak (2013, p 41) defined Japanese management as the philosophy that put “the people as the most important organizational resource through the strategies of community building, the internal labor market and Human Resource Development; and the creation of corresponding practices that maximize the input of the human factor in the production process”. Prior research has shown that the Japanese style of management organization consists of three different characteristics: (1) As an *innovative organization*, the organization objectives are explicitly illustrated, and growth and employee welfare are highly valued. Top management will be imitative but sensitive to new opportunities. They are also accommodated by the staff of the headquarters office. In addition, Japanese organizations are well-known for their application of kaizen, 5S, monojukuri, just-in-time (JIT) or

total quality management (TQM) which strongly adhere to the constant improvement philosophy. (2) As a *soft organization*, jobs in Japanese companies can be in a state of ambiguity, and employees are willing to do any related jobs. Because the majority of decisions are made through participation, a group decision is the most common type. (3) As a *community organization*, employees in a Japanese organization are considered as partners. They may stay in the organization for their life-time. The organization provides more opportunity for promotion and wage increase with trivial differentials, which serve as incentives. As a result, learning from this management method can be extremely beneficial for Vietnamese SMEs (Kono, 1982).

Keiejuku is an advanced business course organized by the Vietnam - Japan Human Resources Development Institute (VJCC) and is sponsored by The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in order to train and guide Vietnamese business leaders in managing and operating Japanese-style enterprises. Until now, after nearly 10 years of operation, Keiejuku has admitted more than 400 members of which many businesses have reached annual sales of up to hundreds of billion, even thousands of billion Vietnam Dong. From a group of companies participating in the same training course, Keiejuku recently is famous for their interfirm connection and cooperation network, which can be a successful business network model that needs to be shared in Vietnamese enterprise communities. A study on the forming and managing model of Keiejuku can be useful for many companies in Vietnam as well as other countries since this training and business linkage model can be learnt and applied in a wide range of business communities.

2. Literature review

2.1. Training and the importance of training

Training is defined as the process of imparting practical skills, professions or knowledge related to a particular field, so that the recipients of the training program can grasp and master the knowledge, skills, and professions in a systematic way. It is a planned learning experience designed to instill permanent change in an individual 's knowledge, attitudes, or skills (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970).

Organizational training can be considered as the knowledge and skills which are delivered to employees and managers to accomplish organizational goals. Organizations involved in the evaluation of training effectiveness have to take accountability for the amount of knowledge employees learn, and also ensure that the knowledge gained by employees can be effectively applied to the job. There are many factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a training program; which includes: training environment, training design and development, training delivery, training implementation and training evaluation (Akhila, Ravi, Sunitha, Danaiah, 2011).

Training is an opportunity to expand the knowledge base of all employees, but many managers think that the investment in this growth opportunity is very expensive. However, employees are likely to miss the work time while attending training sessions, which delays or slows down the completion of a project. Despite these potential limitations, training and development offers the company and also individual employee's great benefits that make the cost and time worth investing.

Training in business can help increase employee productivity. According to the data of the Navigos Group report in 2021, up to 82% of the 225 enterprises participating in the survey believe that training underpins the performance of the staff. A well-trained employee will be able to do his

or her job better and become more aware of how to do the job efficiently. In addition, training can boost employee confidence as they gain a better understanding of their jobs and responsibilities to the company. Ongoing training also helps employees stay abreast of industry developments. This may mean that employees who are able to adapt and manage change well will partly help the company maintain its leading position and be a strong competitor in the industry.

2.2. Training model for managers

Argyris (1960) made what was arguably the first rigorous attempt to link interpersonal skills training to business effectiveness in the 1960s. His primary goal was to determine how interpersonal feedback influences behavior. Second, what effect did this feedback have on organizational-wide outcomes such as cohesion, climate, growth, and change patterns?

Top management is the group of employees who receive the majority of a company's training budget (Morrow, Jarrett and Rupinski 1997; Lupton, Weiss and Peterson, 1999). Furthermore, even when firms cut training expenses due to the recession, cuts to managers' training are smaller than cuts to the rest of the staff. This is one of the findings of a recent study conducted by Kranz (2009) based on responses from organizations based in the United States.

Table 1. Soft skills approaches of different training models

Training models for top managers	Contents
Davis et al. (1996)	There are five groupings of managerial skills, which, they argue, are essential for a manager to be successful. These are: (1) administrative; (2) communication; (3) interpersonal; (4) leadership; and (5) motivation skills.
CIPD (2010)	Representing business organizations and HR, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) looked at various industry reports and came up with a policy-based non-technical skills map. The model attempts to define both non-technical skills and “softer intelligences” and it identifies three elements: self, people and task (CIPD, 2010).
MSC (2014)	MSC model covers functional areas of management and leadership that are important to FLMs: self-management and personal skills; providing direction; facilitating change; working with people; using resources; achieving results
Crosbie (2005)	Crosbie (2005) listed eight non-technical skills which she felt were important for the role of leadership and management: teamwork; communication; initiative; leadership ability; people development; personal effectiveness; planning and organizing; presentation skills

There has been a lot of research in the world on different types of training models for top managers, however, no attention has been paid to Keiejuku - the Japanese philosophy-based training and linkage model, as well as its benefits on a wide range of business communities in Vietnam. Therefore, without the deep research on Keiejuku framework model, The Keiejuku Community in Vietnam has difficulty in strengthening links among businesses and expanding relationships and resources. After considering the effect of training for managers, it is important to also recognize Keiejuku as an effective model for managers training. The lack of conclusions from previous research makes this area worth doing more research on.

For the above reasons, the author has chosen the topic "Keiejuku – The Japanese philosophy-based training and linkage model for top managers of Vietnamese SMEs" to clarify the issue. The purpose of this research is to get a better understanding of Keiejuku training model for managers as well as Keiejuku Vietnam interlink model. The study also aims to investigate the relative impact of the Keiejuku senior manager training course through some activities of Keiejuku Community in Vietnam.

3. Research method

To deeply understand the model to organize training activities and the business linkage model, we conducted qualitative research. Some research techniques (desk research and focus group) were applied to help explore how the Japanese – philosophy-based management course was delivered for Vietnamese enterprise CEOs and the lessons in organizing training courses and interlink networks for SMEs. The research process is described in figure 1.

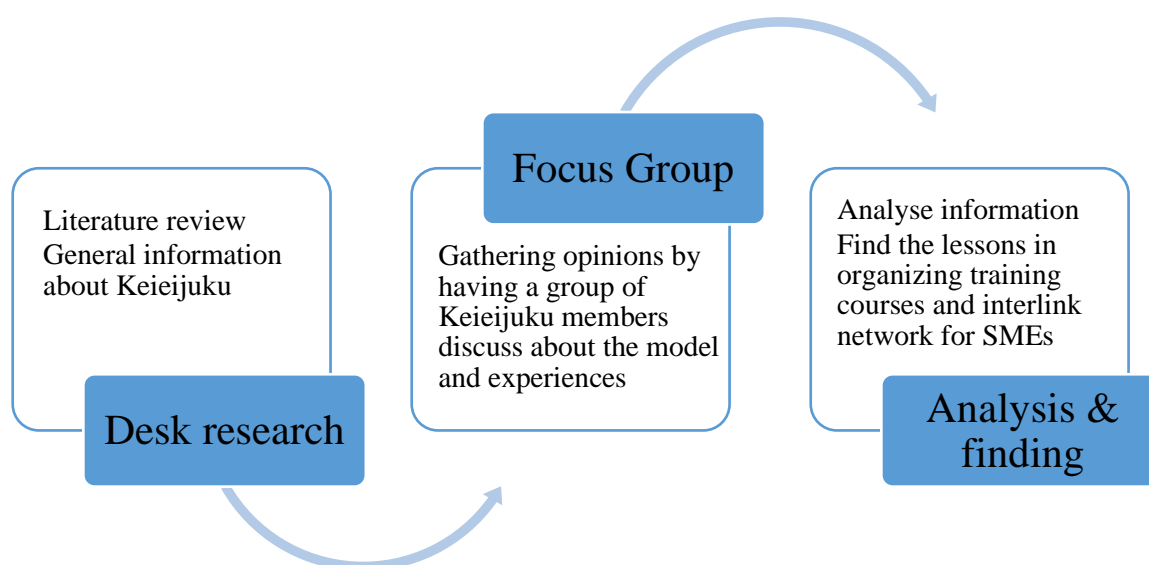


Figure 1. Research process

4. Keiejuku training model for top managers of Vietnamese SMEs

In fact, in Vietnam, the manufacturing industries still lack attractiveness to foreign enterprises. The reason comes from the lack of synchronous development of production technology, production methods, capable leadership team and supporting industries. Especially, in the current

extremely difficult environment, the growth of businesses in the world and in Vietnam is deeply affected. In that context, a business administrator must be a pioneer, orienting his company on the right path.

In order to improve management competencies of Vietnamese enterprises, from 2009, VJCC with the support from JICA organized a training course for CEOs of many small and medium companies. With the objective of transferring Japanese management philosophy and experiences, the content of this course focuses on building modern managers who manage their companies to the “employee focus, quality focus and community focus” vision.

Keiejuku Training Faculty is an in-service training course for Vietnamese business executives such as directors, deputy directors, chairman of the board of directors, etc. Participants who want to participate in the course will have to apply. with a set of documents including an essay introducing yourself, the business, and the problems the business is facing, and in case the applicant is not a business leader, they also need a letter of recommendation from the leader. again. After the application is approved, the candidate still needs to pass 1 more interview before being allowed to participate in the course.

The training course will consist of 10 semesters, with 9 semesters in Vietnam and a special final internship lasting 10-14 days in Japan. 8 semesters of the class were taught by economists and business leaders in Japan and 2 semesters of the class will be taught by experts in Vietnam to convey practical experiences. The study time is fixed all day from Monday to Friday and only focuses on a single week in a month. On Saturday, students can choose to participate in a seminar or visit in conjunction with an enterprise consultant with Japanese experts and Keiejuku alumni (optional).

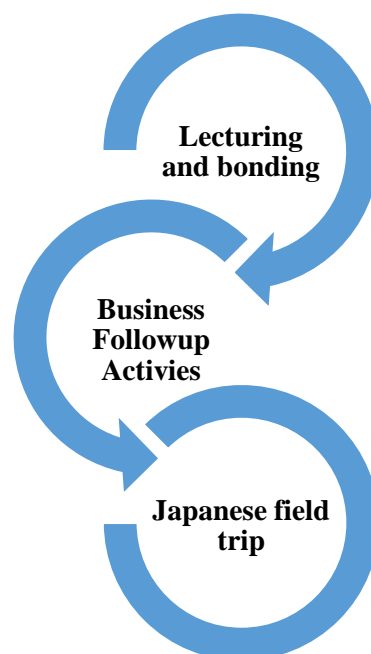


Figure 2. Keiejuku training model

Business modules taught in this program includes:

Table 2. Content of Keiejuku Program

No	Content
1	Module 1: Build today for tomorrow
2	Module 2: Corporate strategic management (basic and advanced)
3	Module 3: Human resource strategy
4	Module 4: Strategic marketing management
5	Module 5: Corporate finance management
6	Module 6: Japanese operation management – Monojukuri
7	Module 7: Business plan and business cooperation
8	Module 8: Field trip to Japan

Source: vjccorg.vn

Besides, Keiejuku Vietnam has another important function that links economic relations, finding and exploiting markets between Vietnamese enterprises and Japan as well as among businesses in Kei Club. With a long-term learning process and the need for cohesion to do business or support each other between businesses, Keiejuku also became a business linkage community in Vietnam. In other words, Keiejuku was originally a business course but later formed a business community with Japanese business philosophy models, directions and styles. This interlink community is an open training course for every Keiejuku member since they can learn from their co-members in many different real business cases.

The Keiejuku community has undergone a process of change and development for over 10 years until it came into operation in a methodical and effective manner with many activities connecting and supporting businesses among participating members. If the first course had only one class for members from the South and the North, then in 2014, the Southern participants had their own class in Ho Chi Minh City and 2017, Keiejuku course was run in Hai Phong. 2014 was the year when the Keiejuku Community was established (including all members from the first intake), by 2016 there were 156 northern members with many different industries (especially focusing on production groups). Business Follow-up Seminar (BFS) is the first program organized by the Community to connect and share knowledge for businesses, which was launched in 2015 and continues to be updated and developed till now.

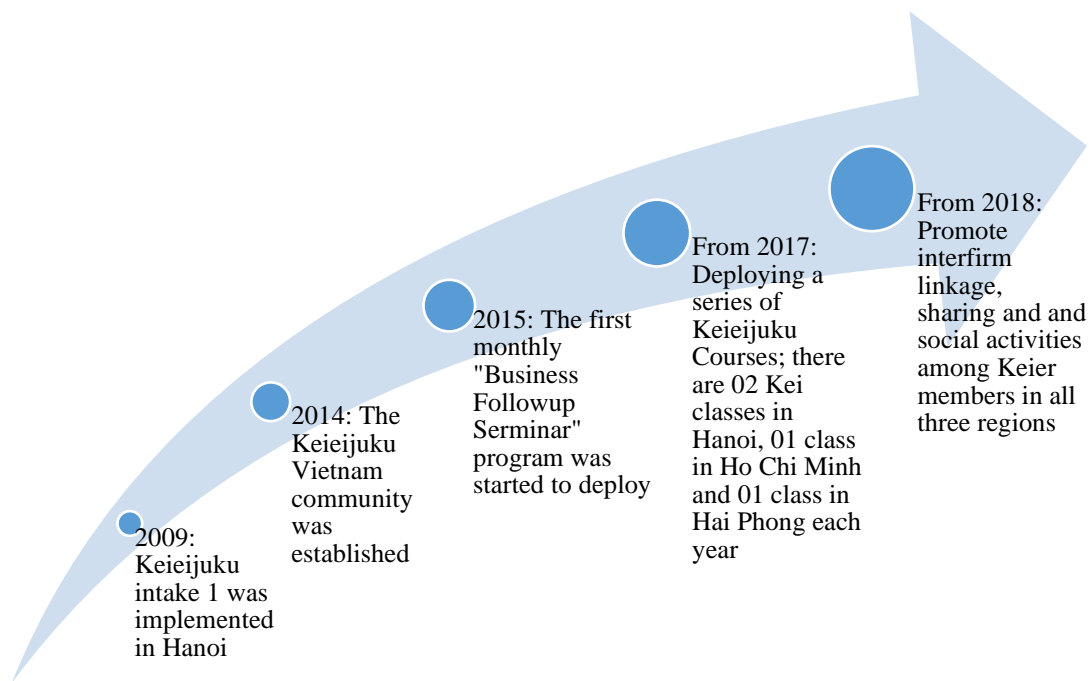


Figure 3. The development of Keiejuku community

Business philosophy of the Keiejuku community: "Building an Autonomy - Self-reliance – Self strengthening Vietnamese business community which comprised of entrepreneurs who love Japanese philosophy-based management style, through connecting and sharing practical activities to create a superior management power of each member enterprise is firmly grasped and thoroughly implemented by its members in their activities. The members of the club operate on the principles of voluntariness, respect, equality, and cooperation, working together, supporting and exchanging to create a happy Keiejuku shared house.

5. Keiejuku Vietnam interlink model

The model of Keiejuku Vietnam Community described in Figure 2 shows four key groups involved in the development of Keiejuku Club.

- **Jica:** Supporting Japanese advisors for training programs and some consulting activities for businesses
- **VJCC:** Organizing and managing Keiejuku classes, Business Follow-up Seminar courses; is the center that connects Kei Club's activities
- **Keiejuku members:** participating in courses, connecting programs to create a strong spreading community
- **Keiejuku Executive Board:** Directly develop plans and organize the implementation of activities of the Kei Club community.

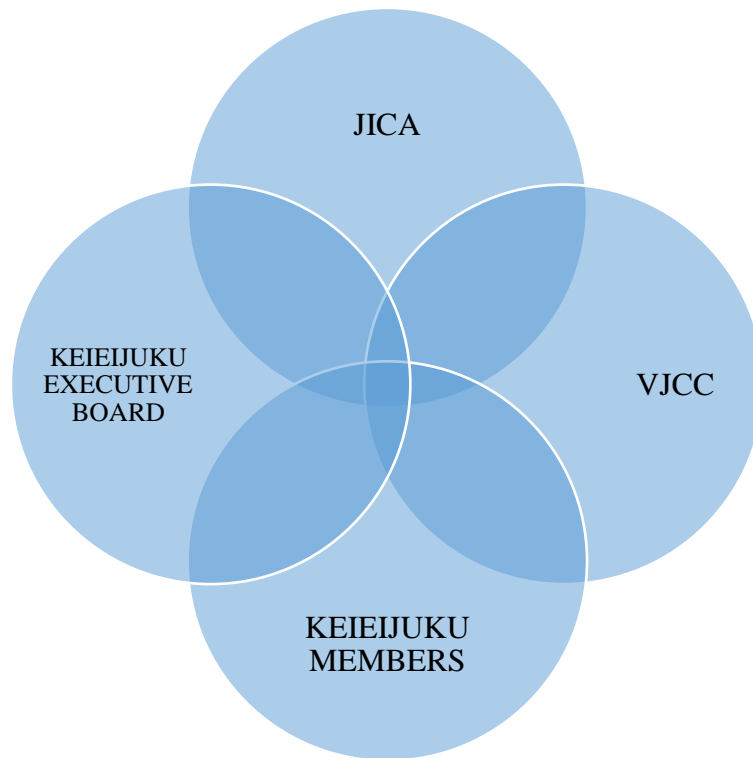


Figure 4. Keiejuku Vietnam interlink model

Enterprises participating in Keiejuku community are oriented and supported to develop a clear development roadmap including 5 steps with the long-term goal of becoming an effective business enterprise and contributing much value for the community (Described in Figure 5).

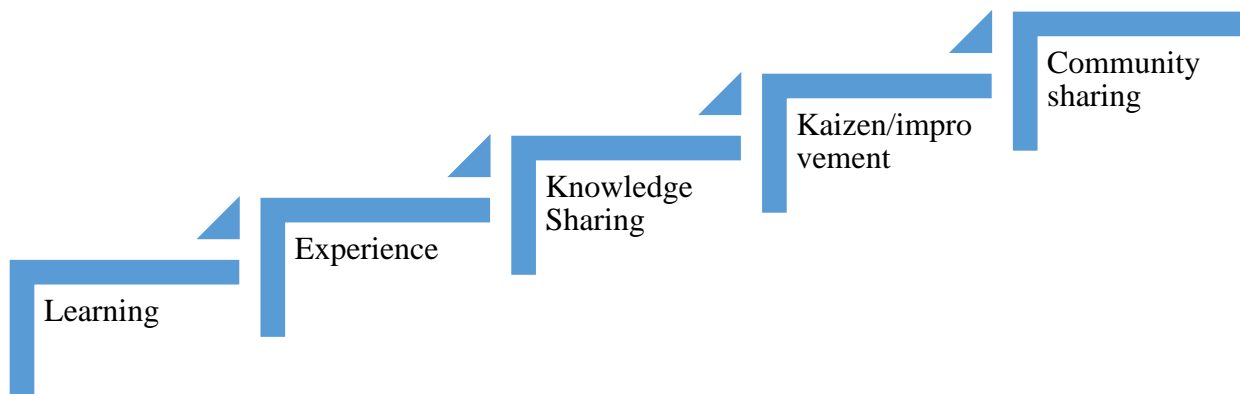


Figure 5. Development roadmap for Keiejuku members

Learning: Businesses taking part in the Keiejuku Course are supplemented and improved the necessary business knowledge and networking in the business community.

Experience: Experience activities take place in parallel with the learning process. Business owners have the experience of being a worker in a production line to understand the factory improvement method and to appreciate the hard work of the workers. In addition, they can experience 1-2 weeks of field trip in Japan, gain more experience in managing production, building culture as well as interfirm linkage models of Japanese businesses.

Sharing knowledge: During the learning process, businesses receive additional sharing information on how to manage and handle business problems from experts and other businesses in the same class. In addition, each month the Community organizes a Business Follow-up Seminar with topics proposed by businesses or visits to community member businesses. During and after a field visit, the host will share organizational and managerial experience and receive suggestions for improving management from community members.

Kaizen/improvement: Members conduct kaizen their businesses based on knowledge learned and shared from experts and other members of the community.

Community sharing: The long-term goal determined by the Keiejuku Club management is to build a thriving business community, enhance social responsibility activities. Therefore, in addition to sharing and consulting activities, there are more activities for society benefit in general and Keiejuku Community benefit in particular. These activities can be sharing advice for entrepreneurial health, charitable activities, researching and developing products for public health and the natural environment.

After 5 years of establishment and operation, the Keiejuku Club community has implemented more than 40 activities of visiting and consulting member businesses, nearly 20 seminars on business management consultancy, 03 connecting and cooperating activities within members across the region and lots of activities connecting Vietnamese businesses with other countries.

Table 3. Some activities of Keiejuku Community from 2014 to 2019

Business consulting and visiting activities	Business management consulting seminar	Keiejuku interfirm linkage activities	Activities to connect to businesses in other countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visiting and consulting Viet Duc Concrete Company • Visiting the Tien Phong Plastic Factory • Visiting and consulting Hoang Vu Inox Company Limited • Visiting and consulting H&A Co., Ltd. • Visiting and consulting Vinh Hung JSC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seminar: Financial Planning • Seminar: Sharing information about buying goods exported to Japan • Special course: Management competencies for middle leaders • Seminar: Money and personnel • Seminar: Troubleshooting for businesses about social insurance, health care, unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities of Keiejuku 7: sharing difficulties in marketing activities of Sapon Vietnam Joint Stock Company; Sharing about human resource management and insurance for workers. • Activity of Keiejuku 9: Sharing ERP implementation experience from Rang Dong thermos bulb company leader. • Activities of Keiejuku Hai Phong: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending Vietnam - Myanmar business cooperation forum • Events in Exchange, sharing and connecting businesses Keiejuku and businesses Hamamatsu City, Japan. • Vietnam - Japan business networking seminar • Join a US-funded small and medium enterprise support project

Business consulting and visiting activities	Business management consulting seminar	Keiejuku interfirm linkage activities	Activities to connect to businesses in other countries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Visit and consult BMC Joint Stock Company ● Visiting and consulting Viet Vuong Company ● Visiting and consulting Tomeco M&E Joint Stock Company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Seminar: Issues of commercial law and laws related to Vietnam - Japan relations ● Seminar: US-China trade conflict 	visiting and working with Son Hai Phong 2 Joint Stock Company, Sivico Joint Stock Company, and Cat Hai Seafood Processing Joint Stock Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Business connection activities between Keiejuku and Coco Bay businesses in Da Nang

Source: Collected by author

6. Lessons learned in building training and linkage model for top management in Vietnamese SMEs

After over 10 years of establishment, Keiejuku is famous for its effective top management training program and the Keiejuku community has proved itself to be a very effective business association with many sharing and supporting activities for members. Currently, the number of new businesses wishing to join the course and be admitted into the community is increasing in both the number and diversity of industries. The successful performance of this course is not only based on the Japanese management philosophy embedded in every module but also the result of interfirm linkage among members which enhance CEO's learning and implementing competencies.

Through the process of formation, construction and development, the Organization in charge – VJCC - met many difficulties and drew back the following experiences:

Firstly, businesses that participate in the training program and join the affiliate community need to have the same business philosophy and perspectives. This is the basis for the long-term alignment of businesses because when businesses do not have the same principles and business direction, the management concerns will not be the same. The common point of the businesses participating in the Keiejuku Community is that they are trained in Japanese-style corporate governance knowledge with the main orientation of sustainable business development, "mindful" and putting responsibility to employees and society first.

Secondly, affiliate activities must be based on mutual trust. In order to create trust, participating businesses need to boldly share their business issues. Every lecture at class and Business Follow-up sessions to visit businesses in the community are opportunities for businesses to share both their strengths and weaknesses with other members involved; also shows the trust of the host enterprise with other businesses when raising issues through consultation. Creating an environment which is open, friendly and supportive is a good way to build trust and increase their readiness to share problems and knowledge. This makes the number of members actively

participating in class discussion and Business Follow-up sessions increase more and more increase because after each meeting as a "guest" to visit other businesses, they are more open, more trust in effectiveness of Japanese philosophy – based methods and the result of advice ideas from Keiejuku community.

Training evaluation is also one activity that causes many difficulties. To effectively evaluate a course for employees with a certain content or skill in depth, businesses can easily give fairly clear and focused evaluation criteria. However, the construction of a scale and criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of administrators after a management course will be quite complicated. First, managers need to have knowledge in many areas of expertise such as strategy, human resources, finance... and three groups of skills: technical, human resources and conceptual skills. Therefore, the evaluation criteria will be diverse and need to be selected accordingly (sometimes there are some evaluation criteria that are difficult to quantify). Second, it takes time for managers to put the learned knowledge into practice and these changes in management have an effect. Therefore, it takes time to measure the management effectiveness of the administrator after learning a new management method. Although this effectiveness assessment is difficult, evaluating the effectiveness of courses for senior management such as the Keiejuku program is essential for the following reasons: (1) on the business side, administrators will evaluate the actual effectiveness that the course brings to their businesses, what the administrators have done to manage the business according to the Japanese management style. The development of a set of criteria that businesses can use to evaluate the effectiveness of the program for a wide range of learners also helps enterprises plan to train and develop resource managers and continue business change; (2) With the organizer, the results of the evaluation of program effectiveness from the business side will be the basis for the unit to continue to build and develop training courses for managers. business in general and, more specifically, improving the effectiveness of the program in particular.

Finally, in terms of enhancing the management of interfirm linkage among members of the training course, the interlink and cooperation activities must be managed by an effective Executive Board with a series of ongoing activities. Experience has shown that in Vietnam, there used to be a number of associations and groups that are set up to link private businesses. But in reality, when the Executive Board was not active, did not have many ideas and regularly organized activities for members, their activities would not be maintained. For the Keiejuku Community, the Executive Committee is elected for a 2-year term comprising representatives of Keiejuku classes in different intakes and regions. Every year, the Club has a ceremony to admit new members, a ceremony to recognize the member board and exchange activities within the community. Business Follow-up Seminars are held monthly and maintained regularly to help members have many opportunities to learn and share information with each other. In addition, the activities of the Keiejuku Community are immensely supported by the expertise of VJCC and JICA Centers, so the content of Business Follow-up sessions is very diversified, both theoretical and practical.

7. Conclusion

Building the effective top management training course along with business linkage communities is complicated but very vital in every economy nowadays. The success of an interlink network should be built by a consistent business vision and philosophy of the course and every member participating in this training, an environment that creates mutual trust among members, clear and comprehensive evaluating criteria and an effective and active executive board. Although

being established for over 11 years, Keiejuku is one of the typical cases in building effective top management training courses and maintaining inter-connection relationship networks in Vietnam. The model of Keiejuku can be shared and learnt by many different companies in Vietnam in particular and in other countries in general.

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