

TITLE The Sensei Within: A Study of Leadership Qualities in Japanese Martial Arts

RESEARCHER Marc S. Scheimann
Innovation, Creativity and Leadership
City University London
Unpublished master's thesis: January 2014

OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to provide an insight for martial artists and especially Senseis, who are looking for new leadership models and concepts.

METHODOLOGY

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with six Japanese martial artists of varying experience levels in or around the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The average interview length was 30 minutes. An online survey was created, with the prime question based on the Characteristics of an Admired Leader, developed by Kouzes and Posner (2007). The aim is to compare the results of a sample of Japanese MA practitioners with the original study done by the authors, and understand any differences. Through an agreement with the authors, the checklist was reproduced but the layout and formatting were adjusted. In addition, respondents were queried about (a) experience with their Sensei being more closely aligned with management or leadership, following the framework of Covey (2009) and Kotter (2012); (b) the style of leadership the participant associated with a good leader, based upon the work of Ekvall and Arvonen (1991); and. (c) hierarchy, skills, communication, coaching, and Sensei effectiveness. The online sample included 157 respondents, with 80 percent men, with an average age of 38 years. Thirty-nine percent identified as novices, 29 percent as junior Senseis, and 30 percent as Senseis; with an average of 7+ years of experience.

KEY FINDINGS

The author concludes:

When asked about the key attributes for that an effective Sensei should have, the participants mentioned being competent, honest, inspiring and supportive. Finally, the Sensei's who demonstrated praise and encouragement had generated more positive experiences for their students, whilst Senseis who known to be selfish and greedy were seen as ineffective (p. 59).

The most highly valued characteristic was competence (74%) followed by honesty (66%), and the lack of competence was featured as a prime reason in both participants' negative experiences in MA and observed behaviours of ineffective Senseis. Inspiring and supportive were also highly rated. And the author notes: "On comparison, the values

for being honest, inspiring and competent were valued in similar ranges for both studies (within a 21% change), giving credibility to the fact that an admired leader - whether in business or MA - needs to demonstrate these attributes to gain the trust and confidence of their followers” (p. 63). Forward-looking was ranked 2nd by business executives but 14th by martial arts participants, and, according to the author “What this difference really tells us, is how different the samples are in context - namely, the workplace/organisation and the dojo. Where the workplace model is pervasive and familiar in the western world, the dojo and its interaction model is less understood” (p. 64).