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Omotenashi at the Japanese Non-Profit Organization for Indonesian Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

Omotenashi is a concept of hospitality in receiving guests or tourists that has been applied for generations and is one of Japan's cultural traditions. Omotenashi is generally used in industries directly related to services, such as tourism, hospitality, shop services, etc. This raises the question of whether omotenashi is also applied to non-profit agencies operating in the social sector. One of the non-profit agencies collaborating between Japan and Indonesia is a Japanese non-profit agency based in Jakarta that provides wheelchair services for disabled children. This research examines omotenashi as applied to a Japanese non-profit agency that provides wheelchairs for disabled children in Indonesia. The research method used in this research is a qualitative descriptive research method. The data in this research are the result of observations and interviews. The omotenashi concept used in this research is the omotenashi concept from Kamoun (2014). From the results of this research, it was found that four elements of omotenashi were applied, namely personalization, host/guest relationship, comfort, and hospitableness. Personalization that was found was in the form of providing wheelchairs that suit the needs of children with disabilities, elements of the host/guest relationship that were found in the form of holding meetings every six months between hosts and guests to discuss the condition of wheelchairs for children with disabilities who received assistance, elements of comfort. What was found was that the wheelchair provided prioritized the comfort factor by adapting to the condition of the child with a disability, while the aspect of hospitableness that was found was in the form of services that were immediately provided when the aid recipient had problems with the wheelchair being used. This research concludes that omotenashi is not only applied to the franchise industry but also to non-profit agencies in the social sector.

Keywords: Omotenashi; service; non-profit organization

1. Introduction

Omotenashi is a Japanese cultural concept that is important in service-related industries in Japan. According to Kobayashi (2015), omotenashi is a high-quality service influenced by Japanese nature, culture, history, and lifestyle (Kobayashi, 2015). Meanwhile, according to Nakao and Umeshitsu in Terasaka and Inaba (2014), omotenashi is the process of pleasing a conversation partner by placing oneself in the position of the conversation partner so that one can understand the needs or condition of the conversation partner (Kyoko Terasaka, 2014). In other words, omotenashi is a concept of hospitality influenced by nature, historical culture, and Japanese lifestyle to understand the needs or conditions of the conversation partner. Japanese omotenashi originates from cha-no-yu, the Japanese tea ceremony popularized by Sen-no-Rikyu in the 16th century (Sato, 2014). This is because, during a tea ceremony, the care and sympathy shown to guests is considered the most important thing. The host must prepare thoroughly for the guests, providing a pleasant experience, and the guests need to enjoy the host's preparations (Ota, 2017).

Omotenashi is usually applied in industries directly related to services, such as tourism, hospitality, shop services, etc. Research on omotenashi in hotel service companies, tourism, and providing halal food in Japan has been widely carried out. Such as research by Wijayanti (2021), W.N. & Saifudin, A. (2021), who examines the implementation of omotenashi in Japanese Ryokan in Wijayanti, and Ilma Sawindra Janti (2020), who discusses the provision of halal food in Japan (Janti, 2020). From the results of these studies, the application of omotenashi can be seen. The companies that are the targets of the research above are franchise companies that focus on making profits. This raises the question of whether omotenashi is also applied to non-profit agencies operating in the social sector and how it is applied. This research is a case study with the research target being a non-profit agency collaboration between Japan and Indonesia that provides wheelchair services for children with disabilities based in Jakarta.

Indonesia has the fourth largest population in the world after China, India, and America, and continues to grow every year. The absence of reasonable control and anticipation from some individuals results in children being born malnourished, with minimal education, or born with disabilities. In Indonesia, as many as 11.5 million people suffer from disabilities, and between 2-3 million people (physically disabled) need wheelchairs (Pusdatin-2010). The non-profit agency collaborating with Japan, which provides wheelchair assistance, which is the target of this research, was founded in 1999 in Japan. In 2014, it started collaborating with Indonesia and opened a branch in Jakarta. This agency operates in the social sector, explicitly providing wheelchairs and mobility support for people with disabilities in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Omotenashi concept*

The term *omotenashi* became famous when it was featured in the speech of Japan's representative at the 2020 IOC (International Olympic Committee) Olympic and Paralympic Bid in September 2013. *Omotenashi* is a term that resonates with Japanese hospitality culture, rooted in the concept of *omotenashi*, which includes the notion of welcoming and entertaining. Additionally, it is described as an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and friendly attitudes toward others, which are shaped by cultural background and other influencing factors (S. Morishita).

The basic concept of *omotenashi* is rooted in traditional Japanese culture and is mainly applied to the Japanese tea ceremony. *Omotenashi* strives to ensure the comfort and happiness of its customers by providing an informally customized and individualized experience without expecting anything in return (Iwamoto, 2015). *Omotenashi* prioritizes selflessness and satisfying customers with personalized service. This is demonstrated through informal but thoughtful actions, where customers' true wishes are known before being explicitly communicated. *Omotenashi* is rooted in cooperation between servers and customers, a concept from the Japanese tea ceremony. In this cultural tradition, servers do more than entertain customers; they also elicit thoughtful responses. Servers do not seek customer recognition; everything they do is an example of unconditional *omotenashi* driven by selflessness. This attitude is based on deep insight and increased spirituality of Japanese society in the context of their high culture. *Omotenashi* not only requires the waiter to consider the customers' intentions but also for the customers to be sensitive enough to recognize the waiter's efforts. This reciprocal relationship characterized by high-context communication is the foundation of *omotenashi*. The main characteristic of *omotenashi* is anticipating what customers want from situations and contexts to please them (Ueda, 2011).

2.2. *Aspects of omotenashi*

Omotenashi is very similar to hospitality, but the difference can be seen from its roots, namely Japanese culture. According to Kamoun (2014), hospitality is a character of deep thinking or knowledge, according to the rules of considering other people's needs. Aspects of hospitality include personalization, host/guest relationships, comfort, and hospitability (Skandrani, 2014). Personalization is changing or finding characteristics or identity in serving consumers according to their personalities. The approach can be in the form of providing a welcome letter or remembering the consumer's name, or it can also be by placing the consumer's personal information. Personalization can also be done by understanding individual preferences, such as hotel room preferences, preferred facilities, and special requests. Then, adjust services, such as changing the temperature and lighting of the room used based on consumer preferences. There is also flexibility in service, such as when consumers have unique requests or preferences that are not part of the service standards, and staff are required to meet those needs. This flexibility contributes to a genuine sense of care and attention to guests' individual needs. The application of personalization itself will help implement the second aspect, namely, the host/guest relationship. The host/guest relationship in *omotenashi* is a fundamental aspect of Japanese hospitality that emphasizes the profound relationship between the service provider (host) and the service recipient (guest).

In contrast to a transactional approach where services are provided simply as a business exchange, *omotenashi* seeks to create deeper and more meaningful interactions between hosts and guests. There are several examples of aspects in a host/guest relationship, such as mutual respect, where both parties recognize and appreciate each other's roles and realize the importance of a relationship. Then there is service with sincerity, providing service sincerely as a more profound commitment to the welfare and satisfaction of consumers. Then, there are mindful interactions, creating connections beyond the transactional aspects of service that involve friendly conversation, sharing insights, and actively listening to consumer preferences.

Then comfort provides the best service that is more than just physical comfort and extends to creating a sense of emotional and psychological well-being for consumers. The goal is to provide a good and enjoyable experience and to anticipate and meet guests' needs. Some examples of comfort aspects include physical comfort, such as providing comfortable accommodations, well-designed spaces, and supporting facilities for consumer comfort. Then, there is empathy and understanding, such as consumer needs, emotions, and preferences, making it possible for service providers to adapt and adjust their services and interactions. An example of the last aspect is cultural sensitivity, where cultural sensitivity is an essential aspect of comfort. This aspect involves understanding and respecting guests' diverse cultural backgrounds, ensuring that services are culturally appropriate and contribute to a comfortable experience. And finally, there is hospitality, namely having a spirit of service, one of which is taking the initiative in serving customers with complete sincerity. Some examples of hospitality are a warm and sincere welcome, a caring attitude in understanding and meeting consumers' needs and preferences, the ability to adapt to consumers' unique needs, anticipating needs, and elegance and politeness in interactions.

Meanwhile, based on the synthesis results from Morishita's research (2021), *omotenashi* has elements of hospitality as mentioned above. The differences are:

1. Understand implicit requests

Implicit is a term for something implied that is not said directly. Japanese culture is high-context, so understanding when communicating is not only obtained from speech but also based on context. Through context, service providers can realize

implicit requests from customers. This is what differentiates it from hospitality, which only focuses on explicit verbal requests or requests that are expressed directly;

2. Being offered in a casual manner

Information on customer needs is obtained by communicating with customers casually. Communication is done naturally and spontaneously, not in a pre-planned way. The goal is to make communications feel friendly and approachable. This relaxed approach to assisting requires sincerity and genuine willingness to connect or help; and

3. Formality & politeness

The difference between omotenashi and hospitality lies in the emotional closeness between the waiter and the customer. Omotenashi is conveyed through terms such as formality and politeness, which embody cultural patterns or words. This approach is characterized by a deep and relaxed attitude and collaborative efforts. In addition, omotenashi is characterized by careful, even excessive politeness applied to avoid potential disrespect towards guests. Omotenashi originates from traditional Japanese culture, spirituality, and interpersonal relationships. The caring and attentive nature of omotenashi is manifested in different ways, with the provider showing concern by anticipating the guests' needs and aiming to please and fulfill them (Morishita, 2021).

The similarities and differences between omotenashi and hospitality described above can be seen in table 1 below:

Table 1. The similarities and differences between omotenashi and hospitality

Aspek	Hospitality	Omotenashi
Personalization	✓	✓
Host/guest relationship	✓	✓
Comfort	✓	✓
Hospitableness	✓	✓
Understand implicit requests		✓
Being offered in a casual manner		✓
Formality & politeness		✓

The aspects contained in the omotenashi section in Table 1 are the basis of this research.

3. Research Method

The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method. The data in this research are the result of observations and interviews. Researchers made observations in every activity carried out by the non-profit agency staff. The researcher also interviewed two agency staff members, namely a section head and a wheelchair and service coordinator.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Aspects of omotenashi in non-profit wheelchair agencies

Based on the results of the analysis of interviews and observations, it is known that the aspects of omotenashi implemented in non-profit wheelchair agencies are:

1. Personalization
2. Host/Guest Relationship
3. Comfort
4. Hospitableness

5. Understand implicit request
6. Being offered in a casual manner
7. Formality and politeness

4.2. *Application of omotenashi in non-profit wheelchair agencies*

After researching to learn about aspects of omotenashi through observation and interviews, the author can conclude that the non-profit agency applies the omotenashi concept in detail as follows :

1. Personalization

The personalization aspect found in this agency is in the form of assessment, fitting, and resolving obstacles according to needs. The agency will collect information in the assessment process by asking questions about the condition, complaints about the physical condition, and measurements. During the measurement session, the process of fitting or adapting the wheelchair to the beneficiary's physical condition occurs. Some of the obstacles that are often experienced are the availability of suitable wheelchairs and geographic factors. Difficulty in road access to provide direct assistance is an obstacle often faced by agencies. The solution is to offer alternative chairs until a special wheelchair can be provided and collaborate with communities of people with disabilities or with social services.

2. Host/Guest Relationship

In this aspect, the agency routinely carries out follow-ups every six months to ask about the beneficiaries and the wheelchairs provided, whether there is anything that needs repair or not. Follow-up is carried out via telephone or WhatsApp chat, and the agency also carries out home visits to stay in touch with the beneficiaries. The follow-up itself will continue as long as assistance from the agency continues to be used.

Apart from follow-up, the agency also holds several online and offline events to strengthen relationships.

3. Comfort

In this aspect, to increase comfort for aid recipients, the agency provides several services such as measuring the recipient's body, providing several special adjustments, and also providing information on how to use the wheelchair provided. The agency is very concerned about the condition of the beneficiaries, who then adjust the wheelchair to the beneficiaries' physical condition.

When agencies hold events offline, they will facilitate transportation costs for the event's beneficiaries. Apart from that, the agency will also provide snacks and lunch if the event runs until noon.

4. Hospitableness

In this aspect, the agency will carry out a follow-up every six months to check the physical condition of the beneficiary and the condition of the wheelchair. The agency also takes the initiative to ask before the beneficiary submits their complaint.

5. Understand implicit requests

The agency will assist in the accessibility of aid recipients when attending offline events by assisting with transfers from cars to wheelchairs without being asked.

6. Being offered in a casual manner

The agency prioritizes comfort for aid recipients, and one way to provide this comfort is by communicating in a relaxed situation. Conversations in this relaxed situation can also help aid recipients express their feelings so that it is not awkward, both from what they need and whether there is a story they want to tell.

7. Formality & Politeness

Even though they offer help in a relaxed situation, they also try to remain formal and maintain politeness. One form of politeness that they apply is avoiding using the word "disabled," which has the potential to offend the recipient of aid, and replacing it with words such as "recipient of aid," "beneficiary," and "disability."

5. Conclusions

Based on this research, it can be concluded that non-profit wheelchair agencies implement aspects of omotenashi, namely personalization, host/guest relationship/comfort, and hospitableness. Not only does it apply the omotenashi aspect, which is also part of the hospitality aspect which is well known in Western countries, but also the omotenashi aspect, which is related to Japanese culture, such as understanding implicit requests, being offered in a casual manner, and formality & politeness. Especially in non-profit agencies such as agencies providing wheelchairs for people with disabilities, omotenashi is needed to maintain the comfort

of the beneficiaries physically and non-physically. From this, omotenashi is widely used in various service fields, both in franchise and non-profit companies in Japan.

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