Assigning Credit to Organizational Leaders: How Japanese and Americans Differ

Yuriko Zemba and Maia J Young

Abstract
Prior research has shown that Japanese blame organizational leaders more harshly than Americans: Americans blame organizational leaders based on the behavior of individual leaders, whereas Japanese blame leaders based both on the behavior of individual leaders and that of the organization. This finding can be explained by a cultural difference in cognitive orientation to focus on the causal influence of groups but also by a cultural difference in value to subordinate individual goals to group goals. By asking Japanese and American respondents to make credit judgments for positive organizational incidents, the current work tests these two rival explanations. Results support the view that group-based crediting occurs because of perceivers’ cognitive orientation to perceive group causality. Implications of this cultural difference and the judgmental processes are discussed.

Keywords
responsibility attribution, credit assignment, cultural difference

Do people from different cultures assign responsibility to organizational leaders in the same way? Assigning responsibility to organizational leaders is ubiquitous in modern industrialized societies (e.g., Sanders & Hamilton, 1996). Traditionally, leaders have been thought to be assigned great responsibility because of their actual and/or assumed causal influence in the organization (e.g., Hamilton, 1978; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Shultz, Jaggi, & Schleifer, 1987). Assigning responsibility according to the causal influence of a person over an incident (we will call this “a personal causality logic”) is known to be universal (e.g., Hamilton & Sanders, 1983; Shaw & Iwawaki, 1972; Zemba, Young, & Morris, 2006), and this personal causality logic is undoubtedly a major and universal logic in assigning responsibility to leaders as well. However, recent research suggests that there is also cultural variation in assigning responsibility to leaders. Studies presenting the same organizational harm vignettes to participants in different cultures have found that Japanese blame organizational leaders more harshly than Americans—Japanese assign greater blame to individual leaders than Americans do, regardless of the causal involvement of individual

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leaders (Zemba et al., 2006). In the present research, we attempt to test two explanations for this cultural variation—whether it reflects differences in (a) perceivers’ cognitive orientation to focus on group causality, which by association is extended to a leader who represents the group, or (b) perceivers’ collectivistic value orientation to protect the group’s interest, whereby perceivers are motivated to blame the leader so that the group is relatively exonerated.

In the analysis, we use a crediting rather than blaming context for two reasons. First, the cognitive-orientation explanation can only be teased apart from the collectivistic-value explanation in a crediting context. In the blaming context, perceivers who are cognitively oriented to focus on group causality and those who are oriented to protect the group’s interest would assign great blame to the leader. In the crediting context, perceivers who focus on group causality would assign great credit to the organization and its representative (i.e., a leader), while perceivers who want to protect the group’s interest would not assign great credit to a leader because it promotes the individual’s rather than the group’s interest. Second, the cultural difference in judging a leader’s responsibility has only been explored in negative incidents such as organizational accidents (Zemba et al., 2006). But activities of an organization or its members sometimes result in positive outcomes such as promoting public health or saving a life. To understand the cultural difference in judging leaders’ responsibility more comprehensively, it is important to explore judgments in positive cases, too. In such occasions, would East Asian perceivers credit an organizational leader beyond his or her causal contribution? In the following sections, we offer a more detailed explanation about the two rival frames to explain the cultural difference.

Perceiving Group Causality in a Blaming Context

Recent cross-cultural research suggests that cultures vary in the orientation to perceive causal agency in groups (see reviews by Morris, Menon, & Ames, 2001; Yamaguchi, 2001). Empirical evidence suggests that East Asians are more likely than Westerners to conceptualize collectivities as causal agents (Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999). According to attribution research based on this view, perceivers use their culturally differing conceptions of agency when they need to make sense of ambiguous social events (Menon et al., 1999). For instance, when explaining an ambiguous outcome, East Asians are more likely than North Americans to focus on a plausible group and attribute the outcome to properties of this group (Menon et al., 1999). Further empirical evidence suggests that the East Asians’ tendency to focus on group causality does not necessarily prevent them from considering personal causality; Chao, Zhang, and Chiu (2008) and Zemba et al. (2006) both found that East Asians and North Americans do not differ in their responsibility judgments of an individual actor who was causally involved (i.e., both cultural groups assign great responsibility) but that the two cultural groups differ in their judgments of group responsibility (i.e., East Asians assign more group responsibility than North Americans).

Based on the view that East Asians emphasize group causality, Zemba et al. (2006) explained the cultural difference in responsibility judgments for organizational outcomes as follows. East Asian perceivers are likely to assign responsibility to the organization itself (not only to individual actors). An organization, however, is often not an easy target to assign full sanction (whether the sanction is positive or negative) (Coffee, 1981; Itakura, 1975). Consequently, perceivers choose to sanction the organization symbolically, by extending the responsibility to an individual who is in a higher level position to represent the organization. This blaming process was termed as proxy blaming because the leader is blamed as an organizational proxy (Zemba et al., 2006). Proxy logic—as opposed to personal causality logic—is thus a group-based logic where a person is assigned responsibility based on his or her group’s behavior, not for his or her own behavior. Organizational leaders might be assigned responsibility either by the personal causality logic or by the proxy logic or both. The two are often difficult to distinguish, but they can be
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differentiated when a newly joined organizational leader is assigned responsibility for the past organizational incidents. A leader who had no direct or indirect causal influence in the past can be assigned responsibility by the proxy logic but not by the personal causality logic. East Asians compared to North Americans blame leaders more harshly because East Asians blame leaders based both on the leader’s own fault (including his or her fault to oversee organizational activities) and on the organization’s fault, while North Americans blame leaders based on the leader’s own fault (Zemba et al., 2006, Study 2).

Collectivistic Value Orientation in a Blaming Context

Although the above explanation is plausible, there is an equally plausible explanation—one based on perceivers’ cultural orientation for “collectivistic value.” On the bases of Hofstede’s (1980) work, (cross-)cultural psychologists have often assumed that East Asians are more collectivistic than North Americans (cf., Takano & Osaka, 1999). As Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) pointed out, an essential attribute of collectivist cultures is the subordination of individual to group goals (e.g., Wade-Benzoni et al., 2002): Individuals are induced to subordinate their goals to the goals of the group, and much of the behavior of individuals concern goals that are consistent with the goals of this group.

The alternative explanation based on this view is as follows: East Asian perceivers are willing to extend organizational blame to its leader and blame him or her beyond his or her fault because they believe that individuals’ interest (i.e., leaders’ interest) should be sacrificed for the sake of the group’s (or the organization’s) interest. East Asian perceivers are willing to scapegoat individual leaders because by so doing, the organization’s interest might be protected—the organization might be exempted from sanction if leaders share the blame and sanction which was originally directed to the organization.

Testing the Competing Explanations Using a Crediting Context

The plausibility of these two explanations has not yet been tested because past research has analyzed only negative organizational incidents. The advantage of positive cases is that opposite predictions are derived from the above two explanations.

Research analyzing cultural differences in information processing of causal judgments suggests that the cultural difference in the cognitive process is symmetric across positive and negative incidents (Choi, Dalal, Kim-Prieto, & Park, 2003, Studies 1 & 2). The cognitive explanation therefore leads to a symmetric prediction for positive and negative incidents. The perspective that East Asians are cognitively oriented to focus on group causality predicts that East Asians, more so than Westerners, would trace the cause and responsibility of positive incidents to the organization itself. Assigning full sanction (positive sanction, in this context) to an abstract entity like an organization, however, is not always easy. Sometimes, praiseworthy organizations would be rewarded in the market (succeed in their business because of their good image), but this kind of reward is uncertain because other factors like economic conditions affect the amount of reward. Therefore, the more perceivers assign credit to an organization, the more they adopt a symbolic way to praise the organization—prising an organizational leader who serves as an organizational proxy (i.e., an organizational representative). Thus, this perspective predicts that East Asians are more likely than Westerners to credit the organization and extend the credit to its leader.

On the other hand, the perspective that East Asians are oriented to promote collective (organization’s) interest over individuals’ (leaders’) interest predicts the opposite—East Asian perceivers are less likely than Western perceivers to show credit extension. Different from blame extension, credit extension from an organization to its leader is not as beneficial to the
Perceiver has the cultural orientation to focus on group causality

Credit is assigned to the organization

Credit is extended to the member (i.e., organizational proxy person)

Figure 1. The Judgmental Process of Proxy Crediting

organization. It prevents the organization from reaping the credit, because part of the credit which was originally directed to the organization goes to the individual leader, who fortunately was in the position to represent the organization. So perceivers who seek to promote the organization’s interest would be reluctant to show credit extension.

Predictions

We developed our hypotheses based on the former view that East Asians are oriented to focus on group causality to make sense of ambiguous social events and that an organizational leader is likely to serve as a proxy for the hard-to-sanction organization:

Hypothesis 1: When a positive outcome is caused by an organizational member, East Asian perceivers are more likely than Western perceivers to credit the organization itself.

Hypothesis 2: The more perceivers credit a positive outcome to the organization, the more these perceivers would extend the credit to a member who serves as an organizational proxy.

The combination of these two hypotheses predicts that the credit extension (from the organization to its leader) is more likely in East Asia than in the West. In addition to these primary hypotheses, we assumed boundary conditions that moderate this cultural variation (see Figure 1). First, based on Menon et al.’s (1999) assumption that perceivers use their cultural belief about causality to make sense of ambiguous social events, we expected that the cultural difference in crediting the organization would be more prominent when the causal influence of the organization is ambiguous. The amount of organizational influence over a member’s action is often more ambiguous in an on-duty context than in an off-duty context because an on-duty action can be caused by both organizational factors (e.g., organizational policy, organizational culture, resource of the organization, influence from a boss) and personal factors (e.g., the person’s will, the person’s ability), whereas an off-duty action is seldom caused by organizational factors. In fact, a prior empirical study found that even East Asian perceivers are unlikely to emphasize organizational causality for organizational members’ off-duty actions (Zemba et al., 2006). Therefore, we predicted that the cultural belief about causality is more likely to be used in making sense of an organizational member’s on-duty action rather than an off-duty action:

Hypothesis 3: The cultural difference in crediting the organization (i.e., the pattern described in Hypothesis 1) is more prominent when the positive outcome was caused in an on-duty rather than in an off-duty context.

Another factor that would affect the cultural variation in credit extension would be the position of the proxy person. According to the proxy logic, perceivers extend the organizational responsibility to its member to symbolically sanction the organization, and therefore a qualified
member is the one who is perceived to currently represent or stand for the organization (Zemba et al., 2006). Thus, we predicted that credit extension from an organization to its member is more likely to the extent that the member is in a position to represent the organization:

Hypothesis 4: Credit is more likely to be extended from an organization to its member to the extent that the member is in the position to represent the organization.

The above four predictions are based on the cognitive explanation, but if collectivistic value explanation is the true explanation, there will be no credit extension by East Asians. Collectivistic value explanation predicts that East Asians compared to Americans would assign less responsibility to individual leaders, reflecting the belief that individual’s interest is subordinate to collective interest.

The Present Studies

We analyzed credit assignment in two studies. Because our focus was proxy crediting (i.e., credit extension from the organization to its leader) rather than crediting based on personal causality, we analyzed credit assignment to a causally uninvolved new leader. In Study 1, we compared student samples of Japanese and Americans, testing hypotheses about the cultural difference in crediting the organization (Hypothesis 1), the credit extension from the organization to a causally uninvolved leader (Hypothesis 2), and a factor moderating the cultural difference in crediting the organization (i.e., on-duty vs. off-duty context) (Hypothesis 3). In Study 2, we again compared Japanese and Americans, testing the cultural hypothesis (Hypothesis 1), the hypothesis of credit extension (Hypothesis 2), and a hypothesis that the credit extension depends on the role representativeness of the proxy person (Hypothesis 4).

Study 1

Method

Participants. Participants in Japan were 66 undergraduates (16 male, 50 female) attending a private university in Tokyo. The average age was 18.9 years ($SD = 0.89$). Participants in the United States were 60 undergraduates attending a public, west coast university and university community members (35 male, 25 female). The average age was 21.0 ($SD = 3.25$). There were no main effects or interactions of gender, and age was not a significant covariate, so these variables were not included in the reported analyses.

Scenario. Participants read the following information about a prosocial behavior by an employee of a shipping company:

An employee of a shipping company found an injured person lying on a road. The injured person had just been knocked down by a hit-and-run driver and was seriously injured. This injured person was able to escape death because the employee of the shipping company quickly gave appropriate first aid to the injured person and called an ambulance.

Manipulation of the incident context. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: the incident occurred either while the driver was driving on his day off and helping his friend to move (off-duty condition) or while the driver was driving on the job (on-duty condition).

Organizational causality and credit assignment. After reading the story, participants rated the causal contribution of the organization—whether they thought that the injured person was able to escape death thanks to this shipping company. Then, participants made judgments about credit...
assignment to the organization and to the causally uninvolved new president (i.e., newly joined company president). This new company president was described as having joined the company from another, unrelated company on the day the incident occurred. Hence, this new president had no causal influence on the incident. Credit assignments to the company and to the new president were assessed on three items (the target in the following questions was “the company” when the questions were about the company and “he” when they were about the new president): (a) (The target) should be praised because the injured person’s life was saved, (b) (the target) deserves heightened reputation because the injured person’s life was saved, and (c) it is to (the target’s) credit that the injured person’s life was saved. All the variables were measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (I don’t think so at all) to 10 (I think so very much). A summary score for credit assignment was calculated for each target by averaging the above three items of credit assignment. (In Japan, the Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for the company, and it was .96 for the newly joined president. In the U.S., the Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for the company, and it was .97 for the newly joined president.)

**Results**

**Organizational causality.** Consistent with previous research (Menon et al., 1999; Zemba et al., 2006), Japanese compared with Americans perceived more organizational causality, $M_{Japan} = 5.39$, $SD_{Japan} = 3.67$; $M_{US} = 3.15$, $SD_{US} = 2.28$; $F(1, 122) = 17.5, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .13$. Importantly, there was a significant interaction effect of culture by incident context on judged organizational causality, $F(1, 122) = 5.75, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .05$, and the cultural difference was more prominent in the on-duty condition, $M_{Japan} = 6.86$, $SD_{Japan} = 3.20$; $M_{US} = 3.48$, $SD_{US} = 1.96$; $t(57) = 5.18, p < .01, d = 1.37$, than in the off-duty condition, $M_{Japan} = 3.74$, $SD_{Japan} = 3.49$; $M_{US} = 2.84$, $SD_{US} = 2.54$; $t(55) = 1.16, ns, d = .31$. This finding that even Japanese perceivers were unlikely to emphasize organizational causality for organizational member’s off-duty actions was again consistent with previous findings (Zemba et al., 2006).

**Credit assignment.** We predicted that Japanese compared with Americans would assign more credit to the organization (Hypothesis 1) and consequently assign greater credit to the new leader (Hypothesis 2). We also predicted that these cultural differences would be more pronounced when the positive outcome was caused in an on-duty context than in an off-duty context (Hypothesis 3). To test these predictions, we conducted 2 (Culture) × 2 (Incident Context) ANOVAs on judged organizational credit and judged new leader’s credit (Table 1). As the mean scores indicate, the amount of assigned credit to a causally uninvolved new leader was not great in both cultures. However, the expected effect of culture was significant for both judged organizational credit, $F(1, 122) = 31.38, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .21$, and judged new leader’s credit, $F(1, 122) = 12.98, p < .01, \eta^2_p = .10$. Japanese compared to Americans assigned greater credit to the organization (Hypothesis 1 supported) and to the new leader (Hypothesis 2 supported). Furthermore, the expected interaction effect was significant for judged organizational credit, $F(1, 122) = 5.14, p < .05, \eta^2_p = .04$, and almost significant for judged new leader’s credit, $F(1, 122) = 3.67, p = .058, \eta^2_p = .03$. As expected, the cultural difference was more prominent when the positive outcome was caused in an on-duty context rather than in an off-duty context (Hypothesis 3 supported).

**Moderating effect of incident context.** We expected that the incident context (on duty, off duty) first affects the link between culture and judged organizational credit and the effect then is carried to the judgments of leader’s credit (see Figure 1). To examine this moderating effect of incident context on the mediating relationship between culture and the crediting process, we next conducted a mediation test separately for each condition, analyzing the relationship between culture, judged company credit, and judged credit of the new president within each incident context (Figure 2). We followed Baron and Kenny’s (1986) mediation test procedure. In the
Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and ANOVA for Effects of Culture, Incident Contexts, and Their Interaction on Assigned Credit to the Company and the New President (Study 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable and Condition</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>ANOVA F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On duty</td>
<td>2.77a</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>5.90b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off duty</td>
<td>2.58a</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>3.90b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New president</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On duty</td>
<td>1.94a</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>4.04b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off duty</td>
<td>1.96a</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.59a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Higher means indicate greater assigned credit. The scale ranges from 1 to 10. Means in the same row that do not share superscripts differ at \( p < .05 \) by \( t \) test.

\( \dagger p < .10. \ast p < .05. \ast\ast p < .01. \ast\ast\ast p < .001. \)

analyses, culture was re-coded into a dummy variable: Japan was coded as 1 and United States was coded as 0. In the on-duty condition, new-president credit was significantly affected by culture (\( \beta = .43, p < .01 \)) and company credit was also significantly affected by culture (\( \beta = .61, p < .01 \)). When new-president credit was regressed on culture and company credit, the effect of culture became nonsignificant (\( \beta = .10, p = .44 \)), and only the company credit remained a significant predictor (\( \beta = .54, p < .01 \)). A Sobel test of the mediational role of perceived company responsibility was significant (\( z = 3.47, p < .01 \)). Thus, in the on-duty condition, Japanese assigned greater credit than Americans to the company and consequently to the causally uninvolved new president. In contrast, in the off-duty condition, perceived new-president credit was not significantly affected by culture (\( \beta = .16, p = .22 \)). The culture effect on perceived company credit was significant (\( \beta = .27, p < .05 \)) yet significantly smaller in this condition than that in the on-duty condition (as shown in the significant culture by incident context interaction effect on company credit reported in the above ANOVA). Importantly, the effect of judged company credit on judged new-president credit (with culture being controlled) was approximately the...
same level in the off-duty condition ($\beta = .55, \ p < .01$) and in the on-duty condition ($\beta = .54, \ p < .01$). These patterns were consistent with the assumed judgmental process that the incident context (on duty, off duty) first affects the link between culture and judged organizational credit, and the effect then is carried to the judgments of leader’s credit.

**Discussion**

Study 1 results were more consistent with “perceiving group causality” explanation than with “collectivistic value” explanation. Although the amount of credit assigned to a causally uninvolved new leader was not large for both cultures, Japanese assigned relatively greater credit to the leader than did Americans. Japanese compared to American perceivers assigned greater credit to the organization and consequently extended it to a causally uninvolved leader (Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 supported). Furthermore, this cultural difference was more pronounced for the judgments for an on-duty incident than for an off-duty incident (Hypothesis 3). Credit extension, which is beneficial to individuals, contradicts collectivistic value, but it does not contradict perceivers’ tendency to focus on group causality. Japanese perceivers, trying to explain causally ambiguous social events (i.e., on-duty incident rather than off-duty incident), might have used their cultural belief about causality (i.e., groups have great causal influence) and have assigned credit to the organization and to its symbol (i.e., leader). In the next study, we tested the two rival explanations using a different scenario.

**Study 2**

The major goal of the second study was to examine if the cultural difference in group-based credit assignment is more prominent when the target person is in the position to represent the organization. In Study 2, Japanese and American participants read a story about a positive organizational incident and then judged credit to be assigned to the organization and to a newly joined (therefore, causally uninvolved) member. The status of this causally uninvolved member was manipulated (organizational representative vs. nonrepresentative), and the extent to which perceivers assign credit to the organization and to the causally uninvolved member was examined. We predicted that Japanese perceivers will assign greater credit to the organization than Americans will (Hypothesis 1) and consequently extend it to a newly joined (causally uninvolved) member (Hypothesis 2), especially when this member is in the position to represent the organization (Hypothesis 4).

In addition to testing these hypotheses, we explored whether proxy crediting is empirically distinct from another cognitive process, social categorization, which may also lead to group-based credit assignment. Social categorization can lead to blame/credit extension to group members as follows. Social categorization leads perceivers to assimilate group members to the group prototype (i.e., depersonalization) (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). When an organization is perceived to be praiseworthy or blameworthy, group members, who are assimilated to the group prototype (and therefore perceived to be typical members), may be seen to share the praiseworthy/blameworthy disposition that defines the group. The possibility that dispositional inferences about group members may lead to the extension of responsibility is argued in Lickel, Miller, Stenstrom, Denson, and Schmader’s (2006) conceptual analysis of collective blame.

This “perceived typicality” mediated responsibility extension has been empirically distinguished from “perceived role representativeness” mediated responsibility extension in the blaming context (Zemba, 2006) but not yet in a crediting context. In Study 2, we measured both
“perceived typicality” and “perceived role representativeness” of the target person and tested if both perceptions independently affect credit assignment to the target person.

**Method**

**Participants.** Participants in Japan were 128 undergraduates (57 male, 69 female, 2 unreported gender) attending two private universities in Tokyo. The average age was 19.3 (SD = 1.25). Participants in the United States were 129 undergraduates (38 male and 91 female) attending a public, west coast university. The average age was 20.6 (SD = 2.64). There were no main effects or interaction of gender, and age was not a significant covariate, so these variables were not included in the reported analyses.

**Scenario.** Participants read the following scenario. We checked the credibility of this scenario in a pilot survey with a similar sample (28 Japanese and 27 American students) and found that the vast majority of them agreed that an incident like the story may happen (96% of the Japanese sample and 89% of the American sample agreed, and there was no cultural difference):

Food Company A recently produced a new ice cream. This ice cream contained a calorie-free synthetic sweetener which had just been developed by the company. The ice cream was promoted as less-fattening despite its rich taste. Before it was put on the market, Food Company A held a public sampling. Some of the customers who came to the sampling had chronic allergy symptoms, but their symptoms drastically improved afterward; they discovered that their headaches, nausea and rashes went away when they returned home from the sampling. Afterward, an investigation revealed that the sweetener that Food Company A had newly produced is very effective for allergy sufferers to cure their allergic symptoms.

**Manipulation of role representativeness.** Participants also read additional information describing a target person, Mr. K, who used to work for another, unrelated company and joined Company A after the food sampling. In the representative condition, Mr. K was described to be a newly joined company president, whereas in the nonrepresentative condition he was described to be a newly joined lower-level clerk. Participants were randomly assigned to either of these two conditions.

**Causal attribution.** After reading the scenario, participants assessed importance of the following factors as causes for the discovery of the allergy-healing new sweetener: (a) Food Company A’s ability to develop new food, (b) Food Company A’s effort, (c) chance, and (d) the ease of developing new food. The first two were organizational causes and the last two were nonorganizational causes. All the causal attribution measures were 6-point scales ranging from 1 (not important at all) to 6 (very important).

**Credit assignment.** Credit assignments to the company and to Mr. K were assessed on two items (the target in the following questions was “Food Company A” when the questions were about the company and “He” when they were about Mr. K): (a) (The target) should be praised for the drastic improvement of the customers’ allergic symptoms, and (b) (the target) deserves heightened reputation. The credit scores for the company and for Mr. K were calculated by averaging the two items. The correlation coefficients for items about Mr. K were .81 in the U.S. and .58 in Japan (p < .001 for both). The correlation coefficients for the items about the company were .62 in the United States and .71 in Japan (p < .001 for both).

**Judgments about role representativeness.** Participants also answered a question about perceived role representativeness of the target person: He is now in a position to represent Food Company A.

**Judgments about typicality of the target person.** Finally, participants judged the typicality of the target person on two items: (a) He is a typical member of Food Company A, (b) and he is similar
Table 2. Ratings of Causal Importance of Company Ability, Company Effort, Chance, and Task Ease by American Participants and Japanese Participants (Study 2)

| Variables       | U.S.        | Japan       | |t|  |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-----|-----|
|                 | M   | SD  | M   | SD  |     |
| Company ability | 3.84| 1.41| 4.45| 1.38| 3.50*** |
| Company effort  | 3.70| 1.44| 4.15| 1.50| 2.46*  |
| Chance          | 4.90| 1.33| 4.97| 1.29| 0.43   |
| Task ease       | 3.16| 1.28| 2.54| 1.26| 3.89*** |

Higher means indicate greater perceived importance (1 = not important at all; 6 = very important) as a cause for the discovery of the allergy healing new sweetener.

*p < .05. ***p < .001.

to other employees of Food Company A. The perceived typicality score was calculated by averaging the two items (r = .80 in the United States and r = .47 in Japan, p < .001 in both samples).

Judgments about credit, role representativeness, and typicality were measured on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (I don’t think so at all) to 6 (I think so very much).

Results

Judgments about role representativeness. In both cultural samples, the target person in the representative condition (i.e., the president) was more likely to be perceived to represent the company than the target person in the nonrepresentative condition (i.e., the lower level clerk), U.S.: M_{president} = 4.03, SD_{president} = 1.31, M_{clerk} = 3.08, SD_{clerk} = 1.32, t(127) = 4.10, p < .01, d = .73; Japan: M_{president} = 4.75, SD_{president} = 1.30, M_{clerk} = 2.25, SD_{clerk} = 1.41, t(126) = 10.42, p < .01, d = 1.86. Thus, the role manipulation was successful.

Causal attribution. Consistent with prior research (Menon et al., 1999; Zemba et al., 2006), Japanese participants in the present study emphasized organizational causality more than did American participants. As shown in Table 2, Japanese perceivers perceived greater causal importance in company ability and company effort than did American perceivers, t_{company ability}(255) = -3.50, p < .001, d = .44; t_{company effort}(255) = -2.46, p < .05, d = .31, while Japanese perceivers compared with American perceivers perceived similar level of importance in chance, t_{chance}(255) = 0.43, ns, d = .05, and less importance in task ease, t_{task ease}(255) = 3.89, p < .001, d = .49.

Credit assignment to the organization. Corresponding to the causal judgments, Japanese (M = 4.54, SD = 1.17) compared to Americans (M = 3.57, SD = 1.26) assigned greater credit to the company. A 2 (Culture) × 2 (Role Representativeness) ANOVA on the judged company credit revealed a significant culture main effect, F(1, 253) = 40.72, p < .01, η² = .14. Neither the main effect of role representativeness nor the culture by role interaction effect was significant.

Credit assignment to the target individual. We predicted that Japanese would show more credit extension than Americans, especially when the target person is in the position to represent the organization. Consistent with this prediction, a 2 (Culture) × 2 (Role Representativeness) ANOVA on the assigned credit to the target person revealed a significant interaction effect, F(1, 253) = 4.48, p < .05, η² = .02, in addition to a significant main effect of condition, F(1, 253) = 7.22, p < .01, η² = .03. Simple effects analyses revealed a significant effect of culture on assigned credit in the representative condition, t(128) = 2.15, p < .05, d = .38, but there was no cultural difference in the non-representative condition, t(125) = .85, ns, d = .15. Japanese compared to Americans assigned greater credit to the target person in the representative condition (when Mr. K was the president) (M_{JP} = 2.39, SD_{Japan} = 0.90; M_{US} = 2.02, SD_{US} = 1.05), but not in the
nonrepresentative condition (when Mr. K was a lower level clerk) ($M_{Japan} = 1.80, SD_{Japan} = 0.91$; $M_{US} = 1.95, SD_{US} = 1.04$) (Figure 3). It should be noted, however, that although the cultural difference was in line with predictions, the amount of credit assigned to a causally uninvolved leader was again modest in both cultural samples.

**Moderating effect of role representativeness.** To examine the moderating effect of role representativeness on the mediating process of credit extension, we next conducted two mediation tests. We analyzed the relationship among culture, judged company credit, and judged credit of the causally uninvolved new member in the representative condition and nonrepresentative condition separately (Figure 4). Based on our model (Figure 1), we predicted that the cultural difference in crediting the organization would result in a cultural difference in crediting a leader but not in crediting a lower status member. In the analyses, culture was recoded into a dummy variable: Japan was coded as 1, and the United States was coded as 0. In the representative condition, culture significantly predicted credit assignment to the new president ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) and that to the company ($\beta = .44, p < .01$). When new-president credit was regressed on culture and company credit, the effect of culture became nonsignificant ($\beta = .09, p = .36$), and only the company credit remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .22, p < .05$). A Sobel test of the mediational role of perceived company responsibility was significant ($z = 2.17, p < .05$). These results indicate that the cultural difference in crediting the organization leads to the cultural difference in crediting an organizational representative. In contrast, in the nonrepresentative condition, the cultural difference in crediting the company ($\beta = .29, p < .05$) did not lead to a cultural difference of crediting an organizational member in a nonrepresentative position.

**Perceived role representativeness and perceived typicality as distinct predictors of credit assignment.** Finally, we explored whether proxy crediting and a crediting based on social categorization are empirically distinct. As we noted before, in the proxy logic, responsibility extends as a function of perceived role representativeness of the target person, whereas in social categorization, responsibility would extend as a function of perceived typicality of that person. To explore if perceived role representativeness and perceived typicality of the target group member independently predict credit assignment to the member, we regressed the credit assigned to the target individual (Mr. K) on perceived role representativeness and perceived typicality of this person.
The two predictor variables, representativeness and typicality, were not mutually correlated ($r = .02, \text{ns}$), and both significantly predicted the credit assignment to the target person ($\beta_{\text{representativeness}} = .27$, $\beta_{\text{typicality}} = .23$, $p < .01$ for both, $R^2 = .12$). The finding that perceived role representativeness and perceived typicality had independent positive effects on the credit assigned to the target person clearly indicates that proxy crediting and social categorization are two different cognitive processes. Practically, it indicates that credit extension is most likely for a leader who has typical features for that organization.

**General Discussion**

**Summary of the Findings**

*Test of competing explanations*. The primary goal of the present research was to test two competing explanations for the cultural variation in assigning responsibility to organizational leaders: East Asian perceivers are more likely than North American perceivers to extend organizational responsibility to its leader either because of their cognitive orientation to focus on group causality (“perceiving group causality” explanation) (Zemba et al., 2006) or because of their collectivistic value to seek collective interest over individual interest (“collectivistic value” explanation). By having participants react to positive organizational incidents, we were able to test them. The “perceiving group causality” explanation predicted that East Asians are more likely than North Americans to perceive organizational causality and therefore credit an organization and its leader (an individual who symbolizes the organization). The “collectivistic value” explanation, on the other hand, predicted that East Asians credit the leader less than do North Americans because crediting the leader benefits the individual leader rather than the organization.

In the present studies, people from both cultures were not quite willing to assign credit to causally uninvolved new leaders. However, Japanese were less reluctant than Americans to credit causally uninvolved new leaders, and the overall patterns were more consistent with “perceiving group causality” explanation than with “collectivistic value” explanation. First of all, the present research (Studies 1 and 2) replicated Menon et al.’s (1999) finding that East Asians are relatively more likely than North Americans to focus on the causal influence of groups and organizations. It should be noted that the present research is the first instance of this cultural
difference using positive cases, and the pattern was robust across two different studies. The present research then found proxy crediting, which had a symmetric pattern to the previously documented proxy blaming (Zemba et al., 2006). East Asian perceivers, more so than North American perceivers, assign credit to the organization and consequently to an organizational leader (Studies 1 and 2). Similar to proxy blaming (Zemba et al., 2006), the proxy crediting is more likely to be observed when the incident was caused by the employee’s on-duty action than when it was caused in an off-duty action (Study 1), and the credit extends only to organizational leaders, not to lower status clerk (Study 2).

**Personal causality as the major logic.** Although the focus of the present research was the responsibility extension to a causally uninvolved leader, the assigned credit to the causally uninvolved leader was not great throughout the studies. People from both cultures seemed to understand that a person who is not causally involved should not be assigned great responsibility. Prior research has demonstrated the universality of personal causality logic in blaming context (e.g., Hamilton & Sanders, 1983; Zemba et al., 2006). The present finding suggests that the crediting context is not an exception: Proxy logic does not seem to surpass responsibility judgments based on personal causality.

**Implications and Future Research**

**Collectivism and responsibility assignment to organizational leaders.** Group-based responsibility assignment or collective responsibility has been considered a central component of collectivistic culture (e.g., Ho & Chiu, 1994). Prior research has shown that East Asians are more likely to show group-based responsibility assignment than North Americans (Menon et al., 1999; Shaw & Iwawaki, 1972; Zemba et al., 2006). We might be inclined to interpret it in terms of the stereotype that East Asians are more collectivistic than North Americans. However, recent meta-analyses of cultural variation in individualism and collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Takano & Osaka, 1999) suggest that we need more cautious interpretation. Through meta-analyses, it is increasingly recognized that some East Asians, such as Japanese and Koreans, are no more collectivistic than North Americans in many aspects of collectivism. For example, the common view that Japanese are more likely than Americans to emphasize group interest over individual interest is not supported by Takano and Osaka’s (1999) meta-analysis. And therefore, it is becoming more and more important to look at specific aspects of collectivism to understand apparently collectivistic phenomenon such as assigning group-based responsibility or collective responsibility. The present research provided some knowledge about which specific aspect is linked to third-party observers’ group-based responsibility judgments and which aspect is not. When third-party observers extend organizational credit to its leader, it is associated with observers’ causal belief (i.e., groups have strong causal influence) but not with their value to emphasize group interest over individual interest. Although the present research compared only two aspects of collectivism, future research should explore other aspects as well to more fully understand cultural variation in responsibility judgments. Future research should also pay attention to the context in which specific aspects of collectivism affect people’s judgments. For example, collectivistic value may not have a great impact on third-party observers’ judgments, but it may have a great impact on the judgments by in-group members of the group which caused the praiseworthy or blameworthy outcome. In-group members, who should be more interested in maximizing group-interest than third-party observers, may be willing to scapegoat a leader and reluctant to credit a leader. Recently, members of the top management team at a Chinese online commerce site, Alibaba.com, resigned to take responsibility for their salespersons’ fraudulent activities. The board knew that its leaders were not implicated in the fraud but still accepted its leaders’ resignation. In this case, the board may have had a strong concern to save the company’s reputation. The perspective difference (third-party observers vs. in-group members) should be analyzed in the future.
Credit assignment based on perceived typicality. Although the focus of the present research is proxy crediting, we found another criterion that participants used in crediting a causally uninvolved organizational member—that is, the members’ typicality. As shown in Study 2, perceived role representativeness (i.e., the judgmental criteria used in proxy crediting) and perceived typicality of the target member independently predict credit assignment to the member. The more the target member is perceived to be a typical member, the more this person is credited for the positive organizational incident even though this person made no causal contribution to the outcome. This finding is in line with Lickel et al.’s (2006) recent theoretical analysis of the cognitive bases of collective responsibility (i.e., blame assignment to other members for the harm caused by one member). They argued that not only causal inference about group members (i.e., whether the other members indirectly promoted the outcome or failed to fulfill their duty to prevent the outcome) but also dispositional inference about group members (i.e., whether the other members share a similar disposition with the member who caused the outcome) may form a basis for collective responsibility. Namely, the inference that other members share the same blameworthy qualities as the actor may promote and justify the assignment of collective responsibility. Although their focus is blame assignment in an intergroup context, the present finding suggests that their framework is applicable in the cases of credit assignment too. A group member, even if causally uninvolved in the positive incident, may be credited for the positive organizational incident if he or she is perceived to share good qualities with the other praiseworthy group members.

Possible asymmetry in proxy crediting and proxy blaming. The present research is limited in that we tested rival explanations with a crediting context only, not with a blaming context. As we noted earlier, it is difficult to directly examine the rival explanations in the blaming context because they lead to identical predictions. To exclude the possibility that the present finding applies only in a crediting context and not in a blaming context, it is important in the future to accumulate evidence for the similarity of the judgmental processes across crediting and blaming. For instance, it would be possible to explore whether both proxy crediting and proxy blaming occur to the extent that directly sanctioning the organization is difficult, whether the motives underlying credit extension and blame extension are similar, and so forth. Finally, although the present research focused on the symmetric aspects of proxy crediting and proxy blaming, it is quite possible that the two judgments also have asymmetric aspects. Positive behavior is socially encouraged, whereas negative behavior is socially discouraged. Consequently, people are likely to make situational attributions for positive than for negative behavior and are more likely to make dispositional attributions for negative than for positive behavior (Ybarra, 2002). This naïve causal understanding suggests that if perceivers are oriented to focus on group causality, this orientation would be pronounced for negative organizational incidents than for positive organizational incidents and might consequently show more proxy blaming than proxy crediting. To understand people’s blaming and crediting behavior for organizational incidents, future research should analyze both symmetric and asymmetric aspects of them using wider ranges of organizational behavior.

Practical implication. The current findings, combined with prior findings (Zemba et al., 2006), suggest that there is both an advantage and a disadvantage to being a leader in a group-oriented culture such as East Asia. The advantage is that a leader is credited for positive organizational outcomes even if he or she made no causal contribution. The disadvantage is that he or she is blamed for negative organizational outcomes over which he or she had no control. Although there are both advantageous and disadvantageous aspects, the latter might be more visible probably because negative organizational incidents, which have considerable impacts on people’s life, are more likely to be reported in the news. In fact, blaming East Asian organizational leaders is reported on TV, while their being undeservingly credited is seldom reported. Because proxy blaming, rather than proxy crediting, is more frequently reported in the news, people may think that organizational leaders in East Asia are treated as organizational scapegoats and they are
worse off than those in the West. This understanding, however, seems to be inaccurate. As the current research suggests, East Asian perceivers seem to expect organizational leaders to share the credit and blame with the organization, rather than give up credit for the organization and take the blame for the organization.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This paper was partially supported by a Waseda University Grant for Special Research Projects (project number: 2009A-857) and CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research) at UCLA (grant number: RGMY08).

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