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Japanese Business Culture: A Study on Foreigner Integration and Social Inclusion

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Eastern Kentucky University

Japanese Business Culture: A Study on Foreigner Integration and Social Inclusion

Honors Thesis
Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment
Of The
Requirements of HON 420
Fall 2017

By
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Faculty Mentor
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Abstract description: With the lack of research and awareness about foreigner integration in the Japanese business working environment, this thesis delves into the underlying factors that influence the perceptions of foreigner integration and social inclusion. Key topics include the history of Japanese business culture, the major differences between American and Japanese business culture, the psychological implications of culture shock on integration, the possibility of ‘below surface’ foreigner integration in the working environment, and the recommended actions by foreigners for better social acceptance and adaptation to the culture. Through observations and interviews, it was discovered that ‘below surface’ integration is possible. However, it is on contingency to the perceptions of the individual based on their efforts, attitudes, and stage of culture shock. Individuals must possess the motivation and self-efficacy essential to proactively learning and understanding the culture to effectively adjust behaviors and norms to achieve social integration and social inclusion.

Keywords and phrases: social integration, social inclusion, Japanese business culture, foreigners, honors thesis

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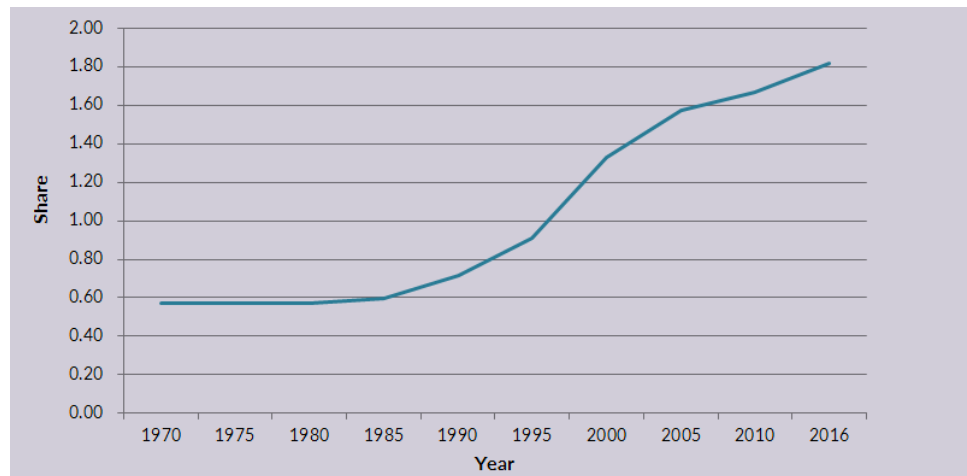
I would finally like to thank all of my family, friends, and peers who have supported me throughout this research.

Introduction

As the world is developing stronger transcontinental relationships, international business is the direction most companies are advancing towards for growth. Expectedly, Japan is currently on the trend to becoming more globalized and expanding their markets. According to Murai (2016) from the Japan Times, Japan reached an all-time high in the number of foreign residents in 2015 at a total of 2.23 million long-term and permanent foreign residents. As seen in Figure 1 (Green, 2017), the foreign share of Japanese population overall has gradually grown, rising from 0.7% in 1990 to 1.8% in 2016. Once traditional companies are now looking to strengthen their global functions, recruiting and accepting more and more foreigners for working and living in Japan. There are various strategies for companies to grow 'globally,' so not only accepting international workers in Japan, but they are also sending Japanese workers to foreign locations.

Japan is a highly homogeneous society known for their collectivistic views that put the harmony of groups before the individual. This cultural norm is the opposite of western cultures that are more multi-ethnic- hence meaning multi-cultural- and individualistic. According to Peltokorpi (2008) and Eschbach, Parker, and Stoeberl (2001), 80% of expatriates placed in Japan are seen as failures by their company headquarters and 10 to 50% of expatriates end their assignments early. This might be partly due to Japan's

Figure 1. Foreign Share of Japanese Population (%), 1970-2016



(Green, 2017)

“toughness” or differing culture and working styles on expatriates, but mainly adjustment difficulties related to communication, adaptation, and social integration. There are notable differences in Western and Japanese business cultures that may be impacting expatriate’s sensed toughness of their environment. However, with the movement of globalization compelling Japanese companies to meet business global standards, potentially decreasing the significance of this so called ‘toughness’; what will become of the so-called ‘outsider?’

The purpose of this thesis is to obtain information about Japanese business culture and to discover whether foreigners experience integration and social inclusion in the Japanese business working environment. The following research questions will be addressed in this thesis:

- 1) What is the history behind Japanese business culture? Is it connected to their social/ cultural norms?
- 2) What are the differences between American and Japanese business culture?

- 3) What are the psychological impacts of culture shock and how could this affect integration?
- 4) Is it possible for a foreigner or outsider to integrate below surface into the Japanese business working environment?
- 5) What are the recommended actions foreigners should take in order to better feel socially accepted and adapted to the culture?

To address these questions, I conducted a literature review to provide background on Japan, the business culture, and how to effectively manage culture shock accelerating cross-cultural adjustment. In order to address my Research Questions 3 through 5, I collected data through personal observations from an internship held in Tokyo, Japan and interviews and surveys of individuals connected to the Japanese business working environment.

Literature Review

Japanese Culture

Japan is located off the Pacific coast of the mainland of Asia. It is an island country (shimaguni; 島国) that consists of 4 main islands (Honshû, Shikoku, Kyûshû and Hokkaidô) surrounded by smaller ones. The geography of Japan has been an influential factor in the development of its society and culture (Heinrich, Japan's Geography). Its location plays a role in its intercultural relations with other countries, demographics, and standing in international markets.

Due to the geographic isolation of Japan, it has one of the richest histories of culture in the world. Its culture is said to be a multi-layered structure where the reciprocal

relationships between Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shintoism are selectively adopted and tailored into their cultural elements. These philosophies are the pillars of foundation for the societal norms seen in Japan's business culture. For example, Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion that has no founder or doctrines, focused on the development and preservation of communities. The central aspect of Shinto is the purification of both mind and body. The purified mind (seimeishin; 清明心) should be unselfish, holding the community in highest regard. This connects further to Confucianism that supported social harmony, loyalty to superiors, and benevolence towards inferiors (Takeda, 2015).

The tenets of Confucianism promote the presence of collective mentality, where they can maintain relationships in well-defined hierarchies. The dependence of family character within traditional companies, has fostered various long-term company-employee relations that influence Japan's current management practices such as lifetime employment and seniority based promotions (Keys, Wells, & Denton, 1998). Confucian philosophy also had great influence on the samurai in the Edo period (1600 - 1868). While Confucianism swayed samurai to attainment of valuing family relations, Buddhism would be considered the mental discipline that helped them succeed in their honorable pursuits (Takeda, 2015).

The characteristics of the samurai can be directly linked to Buddhism. These legendary Japanese warriors were in pursuit of honorable objectives such as knowledge, honor, and truth. According to Keys et al. (1998) and Takeda (2015), the practice of Zen meditation materializes in Japan's drive for continuous improvement and in product designs as mention by Steve Jobs, cofounder of Apple. The entwining of these multiple philosophies within each other to transformed Japanese business culture into what it is

today. One can now say that the history of Japanese business culture directly relates to their cultural and societal norms. In the next section, I will discuss the characteristics of Japanese business culture and what the notable differences between the business cultures of Japan compared to the United States entails.

Japanese Business Culture

Culture deals with the accepted beliefs, values, and attitudes of a people. It is continuously evolving over time, and varies between countries. This idea of culture is a key component in influencing the way a business is operated. As defined by Agata (2016), business culture is “a collection, or synthesis, of social customs; human behaviors; organizational behaviors; expectations of the society, company, and country; and ultimately the way of life of individuals belonging to the business establishments.” This means the phrase, ‘Japanese business culture,’ includes the organization’s ethics, etiquette, values, visions, and working style. It is a cocktail of the daily activities of business that can impact management styles, decision-making, or basically all business functions. Instead of addressing business cultures of two countries comprehensively, I will discuss notable differences relevant to the current thesis.

Overtime Work and Work-life Balance. The first concepts that come to mind regarding Japanese business culture would be the terms of overtime work and work-life balance. Overtime work has become a very serious issue in Japan because it has brought about the even more concerning topic of ‘karo-jisatsu’ or suicide by overwork (Kawanishi, 2008). Kawanishi raises the discussion of the cultural tradition that suicide used to be seen as an admirable act, such as during the feudal period of ‘seppuku’ or the samurai’s ritual suicide and during WWII *Kamikaze* pilots. The emergence of *karo-*

jisatsu was first seen in the early 1990's and is still seen today in the cultural and social stress of diligence and self-sacrifice for the sake of the company. However, Japan is currently in the phase of trying to eliminate this problem by emphasizing work style reform and work-life balance. According to Reuters (2017), Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is pushing for the new initiative of reducing working hours, encouraging Premium Friday releasing employees early, and offering incentives for taking vacation. This is all in support of reducing overwork, stimulating the economy, and promoting work-life balance. Another report stated that the only way to move forward was to address the "fixed employment practice of prioritizing work above all else" (Ikezoe, 2014).

Lifetime Employment. Lifetime employment or 'shushin koyo seido' is a value stemmed from the philosophy of Confucianism, as noted from the earlier topic of Japanese culture (Keys, et al., 1998). During the 1980's, Japanese firms became famous for offering employees full job security. This system expects loyalty from employees and staying with the company from the first entry until retirement (Haghirian, 2010). The strengths of this system would be that it focuses on long-term innovations with no fears of turnover and cultivation of employees KSA's (knowledge, skills, and abilities) through cross-training. The extensive "shūkatsu" or job-hunting system is a recruiting method of simultaneously hiring new college graduates to enter the company. After graduation, most students begin working and stay with the company for life, so these recruitment periods are critical and can begin as early as third year in university. The weaknesses of this system, however, would be its influence on seniority based promotions where salary in the beginning is low and as they gain experience within the company their salary increases to relatively high figures. Another negative effect of lifetime employment

would be the creation of generalist employees. These employees often do not have opportunities to develop specific skills and rotate around the company as internal experiential training program. Due to this system, many organizations have little chance of removing or firing employees with unsatisfactory job performance.

Hierarchical Structure. Traditional Japanese companies have strict and defined social roles based on a hierarchical structure. Japan does not have the highest power distance in consideration of other countries, but in relation to the U.S., it has a comparatively high-power distance. This means that the culture accepts wide differences in power and shows a great deal of respect towards the seniors in the company that hold authority (Keegan, 2011). The ‘senpai’ or mentors are responsible for the younger employees or ‘kohai.’ These senpai-kohai relationships will last for a long time due to the system of lifetime employment (Haghirian, 2010). Nommunication, an unreserved communication over drinks, occurs frequently in Japanese businesses. Since there might be limited opportunity for younger employees to speak up because of the hierarchical system, they can provide their input at ‘nomikai’ or informal drinking parties (Agata, 2016). Times have begun to change as Japan is beginning the implementation of western practices such as debating. These are helping to reorganize the value of formal communication and recognition.

Culture Shock

The degree of differentiation of Japanese culture and its business culture compared to other regions in the world can be challenging for expats to adjust to. This toughness can be characterized through the term ‘culture shock.’ Culture shock is a complex, multilayered experience from contact and interactions with a different culture that results

in numerous stressors. These stressors may include, but are not limited to: interpersonal stress or conflicts. Individual reactions to culture shock may instigate psychological crises or social dysfunctions when differences in cultural norms impede performance (Winkelman, 1994). In order for an individual to effectively deal with culture shock, one must recognize the occurrence of the shock and implement behaviors to overcome the shock utilizing stable adaptations. This will help one to foster constructive intervention of their experiences with culture shock and aide them in reframing their situations with adapted responses and problem- solving strategies. Approaches to managing culture shock surround one's awareness, learning, and adaptation to the stages and causes of the initial shock.

There are four primary stages of culture shock that involves the following: 1) honeymoon phase, 2) cultural shock phase, 3) adjustment and recovery phase, and 4) adaptation phase. These phases occur chronologically and are cyclical so that the phases can be repeated when met with new crises (Winkelman, 1994). The honeymoon phase is the experience someone receives when first entering into the other culture that is characterized by interest, excitement, and positive expectations. The involvement within the culture is superficial like a tourist that thinks they can 'handle anything.' When the honeymoon phase passes, next comes the culture shock phase. It usually happens within the first month and is characterized by minor differences leading to major problems and irritation. This may surface unintentional or unwanted biases and stereotypes about the native people and culture. One may begin to feel homesick and sense a lack of control over their environment and actions.

This leads into the recovery phase where primary focus is about learning how to effectively adjust to the new cultural environment being experienced. It helps to make sense of and appreciate the differences, reducing negative reactions and responses. Lastly, in the adaptation stage, one is able to develop stable ways of successfully resolving problems and managing the new culture (Eschbach, 2001; Winkelman, 1994). To help shorten or minimize the shock and promote better acculturation, organizations often offer employees working overseas or placed in an international environment cross-cultural training.

Cross-Cultural Training. The nature of culture shock comprising of multiple variables requires organizations to develop cross-cultural training programs for preparation, orientation, and acquisition of culturally appropriate social skills (Winkelman, 1994). According to Eschbach (2001), integrated cross-cultural training programs should begin before departure and continue periodically throughout assignment placement in the foreign culture until the expatriate has made reasonable adjustments. The program offers accurate expectations of the cultural working and social environments. There are a variety of methodologies that can be used such as; fact-oriented training, attribution training, cultural awareness training, experiential learning, or interaction learning. In addition, language training can help with simple daily tasks to understanding the linguistic aspects of the culture on a psychological level.

In order to effectively train and promote cultural awareness, companies need to teach global dexterity within their employees to increase cultural sensitivity. Global dexterity is defined as “the ability to adapt one’s behavior- smoothly and successfully- to the demands of a foreign culture, without losing oneself in the process” (Molinsky, 2016).

This means that it is not just about cultural knowledge, but one's ability to adapt and change their behaviors in light of the differences to fit the cultural norms. Companies should implement and support this mindset in cross-cultural training through focusing on cultural differentiation with cultural congruence. The key is that these cultural blends should match the values or beliefs of the individual, while still respecting the culture and traditions of the differing perspective.

Cross-Cultural Adjustment. There are many different adaptation options, but most lie in the hands of the individual's own characteristics, personality, and goals. Cultural adjustment refers to "the degree to which expatriates are psychologically comfortable and familiar with different aspects of a foreign culture" (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2012). In order to promote positive cultural adjustment, there are a number of skills that make up the "toolbox" (Polin, 2017). Perspective-taking and open-mindedness should be utilized to combat conflict situations or misunderstandings in communication due to differing perspectives that may cause dysfunctional feelings. Molinsky (2016) states that one must be flexible and conscious of the disruptive feelings that are likely to occur while trying to adjust. Emotional intelligence (Polin, 2017) will help in understanding not only one's own emotions, but those of others as well. These tools in unison will cultivate psychological safety where one is able to overcome defensiveness and share information with reduced fear of interpersonal risks. This comfortability, once in place, will stimulate the ability to gather knowledge and awareness of the cultural differences, eventually leading to learning of the correct behavioral norms and social mannerism.

Yamazaki and Kayes (2004) introduced an experiential model of cross-cultural learning skills. Their model incorporates the four dimensions of experiential learning of

concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation in relation with the seven competency clusters. They believe the specific skills necessary for cross-cultural adaptation are the: interpersonal skills of building relationships and valuing people of different cultures; information skills of listening and observing and coping with ambiguity; analytical skills of transforming complex information into understandable terms; and action skills of taking action and initiative while managing others. Most people learn from experience, as portrayed in the following example. According to Nissan CEO and Sony board member, Carlos Ghon (Taylor, 2005), he was appointed at the time of a crisis in to the Japanese company. He was supposed to change Nissan from the inside and was immediately received with resistance to change and seen as an outsider. He pushed through the curiosity and skepticism by being observant, respectful, and willing to learn, which in turn helped him overcome most of the cultural barriers he faced. With the literature background in place, this guides us into the next portion of the study covering the research methods of internship observations and interviews.

Method

This section will discuss the methods and procedures followed when gathering the qualitative observations while interning in Japan with a formerly traditional Japanese company trying to globalize. It will also discuss the process adhered to for conducting and collecting the interview and survey findings.

Observations

Procedure. Observations were conducted during my four-week internship in Japan. The company will remain private and will further be considered as Company J. The

premise of the internship was to work on training program recommendations related to the topic of cultivating globally competent young talents. The internship would be in cooperation with the Human Resource Department and encompass a total of four weeks. This is due to the fact internships are not as common in Japan as they are in the U.S. and that for Company J this happened to be their third time supporting an internship to a foreigner. The major difference between the previous two interns and myself was that their ethnicity was of Asian descent, compared to a Kentucky grown Caucasian blue eyed, blonde haired girl. I summarized my observations from the first-hand experiences of interning in the Japanese working environment.

Subjective Statement. Observations are subjective to my perspectives based from personal experiences both academically and professionally within Japanese society and culture before researching into the topic for this paper. Previously, foreigners may have felt a distance between themselves and their Japanese coworkers, but with the new trend of globalization, foreigner acceptance and integration below surface into the Japanese business working environment has a higher percentage of happening, as long as this said ‘outsider’ not only shows knowledge and awareness of the culture, but attempts to learn the language and adapt their behavior to respect the cultural differences and people.

Interviews

There has been a lack of research about foreigner integration in to the business culture and the thoughts of the Japanese workers pertaining to this subject, as well as, a suggested way of action for an outsider to gain better acceptance from their Japanese coworkers. I wanted to raise questions about what the Japanese and foreigners’ views are on this subject. My end goal is to utilize the discovered answers to these questions as a

tool to inform people interested or who are currently working in Japan to help them in gaining the skills and knowledge necessitated in supporting their acceptance and integration further into the business culture.

Participants and Procedure. The primary data were gathered by interviewing individuals who are familiar with Japanese work environment. Inclusion of participants in the study was based on the criteria that they must have a connection to the Japanese business working environment; either it be they work/worked in a Japanese company or they are expatriates either from Japan working in the U.S. or other country working in Japan. Participants were excluded if they were below the age of 18 and if they had no prior connection to the Japanese working environment. Participants were contacted by email or Facebook messenger containing the purpose of the study and were invited to either complete an online survey or do a face-to-face interview onsite at Company J's facility in the U.S. Upon completion of the interview or survey, the participants were debriefed and thanked.

The demographics of the participants incorporated eight interviews and fourteen surveys for a total of twenty-two respondents. They comprised eight different countries including: Norway (1), United Kingdom (2), Australia (1), France (1), India (1), Thailand (1), U.S.A. (7), and Japan (8). Six identified as female, while the remaining 73 percent identified themselves as male. The participants covered a wide range of ages from 18 to 55 and they all had experience working in Japan either for short- or long-term for work-related excursions. There were varying levels of Japanese language proficiency from lowest at none to highest at native. Based on the data collected, there was no notable relationship between demographic characteristics and one's feeling of social integration.

Measure. Participants were individually asked the same set of questions (See Appendix A). There was a total of 14 questions that were constructed using both open-ended and Likert scale formats. Participants were not required to answer all questions and were able to skip any they preferred not to answer. These questions were chosen based on the research questions and my prior experience within the Japanese business working environment.

Results

The data from observations and interviews were utilized to answer questions pertaining to Japanese business culture, specifically the ability for foreigners to integrate into the societal norms of Japanese companies. First, I will present observations from my internship in Japan. Then, I will discuss the findings from the interviews with individuals who are familiar with the Japanese working culture.

Observations

In order to set the tone for the internship observations, I will begin by providing personal background relating to my connection with Japan. To start, I had no prior experience in diverging cultures, but always had a huge fascination for new customs, traditions, social atmospheres, and foods; inspiring me to study abroad in a culture that was completely different from my own. I studied abroad at Akita International University (AIU) for two semesters for the Spring/ Fall 2016 terms. I focused my studies on learning Japanese language and culture including tea ceremony (Sado), flower arrangement (Kado), societal norms, and business culture.

Attending AIU gave me the opportunity at connecting with a variety of people and experiencing a diversified school setting. I joined three different clubs on campus including: Esperanza (women's futsal), GPIAS (men's futsal), and XMA (extreme martial arts). Even though I went against the norm joining the men's futsal team, they were so welcoming and gradually accepting of me on their team. I gained the real Japanese experience of participating in official matches, team bonding events, barbeques, nomikai (drinking parties), senpai/ kohai (senior/ junior) social structures, etc. I obtained a work permit with AIU RCOS volunteer program as an English Village International Conversation Partner and supported English learning and communication with elementary to high school students. I believe that I made lifelong friendships and was truly accepted by the people. This experience motivated me to attain an internship in Japan. In the following section, I have organized the detailed observations during my internship by week.

Internship Host Organization. Company J is trying to cultivate global executives from the younger generation by developing training programs focused on a global aspect. They are trying to promote diversity as seen in my global internship and work style reform to integrate a western style of business into their own. Company J is also intensely trying to adopt English as a common language by motivating employees by offering tutors and incentives for high marks on the TOEIC exam.

Week One. Upon arrival to Japan, a total of three days was given to adjust to the 13-hour time zone difference. Since I had prior experience studying abroad for two semesters in Japan, Company J did not require any pre-internship cross-cultural sensitivity training. However, experiencing Japanese business culture first-hand proved to

be a rude awakening from the previous life at an international university where English was the common language utilized in the classrooms and Japanese was offered as an elective course.

On the first day, I arrived at the office thirty minutes early at 8:20 am to greet my new coworkers in the same department. I was accommodated in a hotel just 15-minute walking distance away, so I had no trouble with the simplified commute to get to work on time. It was a part of the organizational culture to have a daily departmental meeting in the morning to introduce new faces, projects, and any news of the day. The meeting was held in Japanese, so when introductions came around and the focus was on me, I slightly bowed and began, “みなさんおはようございます！はじめまして、サラと申します。” I said good morning to everyone and introduced myself very politely. As I was about to continue, probably due to the fact I looked so nervous, they told me I could use English. I learned later that I was asked to introduce myself in English because the company was interested in adopting English as the common language by 2018. After the formalities, I had an orientation and toured around the departments. After gifting my coworkers with famous Old Kentucky chocolate bourbon balls that were individually wrapped as omiyage (souvenir), they cleared a desk for me to use during the next four weeks.

Everyone seemed so kind, yet shy at approaching or speaking to me. Most of the people in the office were not proficient in English, which presented an unintended language barrier. They had a welcome dinner party the second night with people from the department. They discovered my interest in learning Japanese and of the culture, which helped to break the ice. Based on seniority and cultural norms, it was custom for the

older, higher ranked superior to treat their kohai (junior) to a meal. Almost every day someone would invite me to have lunch or dinner together. Even when going to tour plants or conduct interviews for my presentation in other prefectures, people were very humble and even invited me to stay at their house for a weekend (at the end of week three). There was always someone with me when travelling on these business trips. The social experience was truly inviting and created an environment of acceptance. However, the work side was off to a rough start.

During the first week of my internship, I felt the guidelines for my work were vague and loosely given. The schedule was in Japanese and was constantly being modified. I felt it was unorganized, however, I would not attribute this incident with the company's culture. It was probably because the company was new to having an international intern like myself. After a week, I received an updated version of my schedule translated to English. I was expected to give a presentation at the end of the internship, but details for the presentation were not set. They allotted time each day to meet with workers in other departments to go over information about the company from all aspects of the business; some of these presentations were only written in Japanese and explained in English, while some presenters were not versed enough in the English language to clearly communicate the topic.

When I was not in the meetings regarding my presentation, I shadowed my boss (the Global HR Supervisor) to his meetings. The company was trying to standardize the language of communication, so if there was an international worker in the room, they were supposed to use English. Even so, it seemed there was a natural tendency to convert back to their native language of Japanese which seemed to further strain the

communication process. These tasks seemed almost menial and impractical to me; almost like an overload of information because I could not understand the terminology in the complex Japanese conversations or grasp the context in regard to my presentation.

Almost like they were utilizing this time to help workers practice presenting in English or as a parade of how the company was diversifying. Reflecting back now, I understand that I was one factor in a process to help employees get accustomed to working with diversity and build employee confidence and comfort with English. I believe that I felt frustration because I did not want to be given the “gaijin card” or be 'othered' as a foreigner. I thought it would hamper integration and set the expectations my coworkers had of me adhering to cultural practices and norms in a negative way where I would be given a ‘by’ in my actions and never taught the correct accepted behavior.

On the last day of the week, I told my direct boss that I would like to receive more clarity on the project at hand. Being that Japanese hold seniority high and tend to be more indirect, I was unsure of the consequences of the action and was worried that it might have come across as too “strong.” Either way, I believed the benefits would be greater than the costs, so I presented my worries to him and was given feedback in a timely manner. My boss seemed shocked, but understood the situation and said that a full vision for the outcomes and objectives of my presentation were not available yet. He promised that starting next week, he would organize the project’s goals concretely. This brought a sigh of relief over me, which helped improve my motivation of achieving an outstanding performance and the perseverance of giving not only myself, but other foreign interns I might lead way for, a good image. My integration into the Japanese working style, completing my presentation, and building social relationships will help those coworkers

around me become more comfortable working with foreigners, helping to positively form perspectives on international expatriates joining Japanese companies.

Week Two. As the second week rolled around, the first week's welcoming attitude seemed more distant as everyone got back to business. This was the start of a stressful period for the HR department trying to meet deadlines and the major recruiting activities coming in the next several weeks. This played a factor into the loss of interaction between my coworkers and myself during the work hours. The HR administrator who was in charge of overseeing my stay, seemed almost to volunteer a young junior that was female, similar in age, and could speak very proficient English to have lunch with me. I was grateful and the young junior was so nice and a breath of fresh air due to the small age gap, not to mention communication was a breeze, but it felt a little forced. The first time to lunch was fun where the junior showed me around the underground station tunnels where the best 'obento' or lunch boxes were at. The second and third day we had lunch with her regular group and they were not as versed in the English language as she was. They, of course, had very bright personalities, but it almost felt like I was imposing which made the situation slightly awkward. After this, I was introduced to a woman from the office sent from the Thailand branch. Her English and Japanese was poor, but she invited me to lunch with two other people from China and one from the U.S. Upon meeting them, we all bonded over being "gaijin" or foreigners and continued to eat lunch together for the rest of the stay whenever possible. They noted that they were rarely invited to eat lunch together by Japanese coworkers or that they belong to out-groups.

Japan is known for their extensive shūshoku katsudō (job-hunting activities). During my internship, there was one of the largest recruitment fairs in Japan. The Global HR

Supervisor asked me to help market Company J to the rising junior class of future college graduates. The recruitment fair was held in a large venue where companies throughout Japan gathered to begin recruiting potential new hires. Each company had a set floor space and was allotted 30 minute increments for presentations to attract students.

Company J, like most others, recruited people from varying disciplines. They targeted in a more generalist aspect, planning to train the new recruits of the technical skills required of them in the first four preliminary months after entering the company in late March or Early April.

Although I would say things like, “良かったら来てください,” or “If you’d like, please come and listen,” it seemed that the Japanese students had high anxiety in communication with a foreigner and avoided confrontation. Most looked down and walked past with no answer, while a few would smile, nod, or even ask a question. They all conformed in their mannerisms and dress attire for the recruitment fair. It made me question where the individualism or marketing oneself to stand out against the crowd was of self-expression. They embody very humble and respectful, yet shy and indirect personalities. Reflections on the recruitment fair led me to think that these behaviors are not that of isolation or unacceptance, but rather stem from the societal norms of the people. As one objective for my ending presentation, I had to address these subtle ingrained mechanisms that I noticed, and develop a way to foster a culture of creativity, encourage diversity, confidence, and teamwork, and promote integration of collectivism and individualism.

Week Three. In a meeting with the HR Director, HR Global Supervisor, and female coworker, I witnessed how the Japanese interact in a complex web of vertical

relationships. In the conference room with a long table, the HR Director sat furthest from the door to show their status and authoritative power. I also noticed gender roles during the meeting. The female coworker spoke only when asked and only to her direct superior, the HR Global Supervisor. She never spoke directly to the male HR Director. Japan is a high power-distance country where they accept wide differences in power to show respect for those in authority. Expression of power distance was less prevalent in non-work settings (for example 'nomikai' or drinking parties).

During the third week, I had no business trips and was supposed to focus on the final presentation. It may have been due to the short period given for the internship, but it seemed I was idly sitting at my desk unproductively waiting for a task to be given. I would constantly ask if there was anything they would like me to help with or do, but they would always respond with an apologetic no. Due to the timely document translations between the languages, it made it hard to assign me any other roles outside of the given one. I normally stayed 30 minutes to an hour after work hours to respect the 'senpai' who would work into the late hours of the night. I felt bad for leaving 'early,' but began to leave as soon as the chimes indicating the working hours were over went off. This week was pretty relaxed, so my Thai coworker and I would go to eat dinner or tour around the busy shopping centers in Tokyo. It amazed me how people could be so dedicated to work and how long of hours they were willing to put in.

This brings the topic of overtime into play. While talking with one of my coworkers, I found out that Company J put a limit on overtime work and was even pushing employees to take their vacation days. The government is posing limits to overtime, which is causing the companies in Japan to adjust their practices. The coworker said that most Japanese

people feel bad for leaving their work on others while they take their paid-time-off, so they rarely take all the days. They follow the organizational cultural norm set by their superiors who never tend to take their vacation. The coworker also informed that even though Company J had set limitations on the overtime work per so many months, quite a few in the department had already gone extremely over. She mentioned the company had yet to establish consequences for this because it was newly in place.

On one of the previous work excursions, I met a kind woman who invited me to stay with her family over the weekend. Her husband was living in Tokyo and working in the same division as me at Company J, so he escorted me to his home as we commuted together. They were the kindest family and their son loved to play with me. He enjoyed the Girl Scout cookies I gave as a thank you gift. I would rate myself as conversational in Japanese, so during my stay I utilized mostly Japanese for communication. They gave me their bedroom to sleep in for the two nights I stayed, while they slept in their tatami room with futons. When it came time for bathing, families normally share the same bath water. They were trying to be understanding of our cultural differences and let me go first to rinse off, then soak in the bath. They invited friends from the factory to come over for a welcoming dinner and the next day even took me to a plum tree viewing festival with their mother, while wearing kimono. They were moved that I was trying to learn Japanese and am respectful of the culture. They loved to hear that I was aware of the small societal mannerism of interaction (ex. taking off shoes before entering), interested in Japan's history, could eat sushi and raw fish, and even that I liked onsen (hot springs). The language barrier was there, but because both sides made an attempt to understand one another, it was not that evident.

Week Four. The last week of my internship has finally come around. I had my presentation prepared and reviewed by my boss Monday morning. My tasks for this week were just to revise and practice the presentation. I had more than enough time for completing my presentation in the time given during my internship. Because of my extra time, Company J sent me to check out another recruitment fair that the company was not participating in. This particular recruitment fair was geared toward international students. Upon arriving, there was a noticeable size difference in how many companies were participating indicating that recruitment fairs targeting internationals still have a way to go. Compared to the first convention I attended, the venue was in a small room of a hotel and had at most twenty companies. Moving around the different exhibitions, I noticed that even though the fair is focused on recruiting international students, they were not very English friendly. I assumed that the presentations or presenters would be able to speak English, but everything was in Japanese, even the paperwork. For my Japanese ability, I was unable to understand the core of the presentations and had to have my friend help translate the conversations. I look at this fair as the beginnings of promoting diversity in Japanese companies through recruiting international workers.

During this week, it just so happened to fall on my birthday. A few of my coworkers gave me small gifts of chocolates or souvenirs from their previous business trips. The Head HR Director even invited me and some of my coworkers to eat ‘fugu’ or blowfish because it just so happened to be his birthday as well. Since I was not well versed in the correct sonkeigo (respectful language using honorifics towards superiors) to use, I spoke in English stressing the occasional Japanese vocabulary that I intertwined in my sentences. I respect the norm that senpai or ‘senior’ normally treats to dinner. However,

in this situation, I felt very awkward in accepting and trying to show my gratitude because the dinner choice was quite expensive and he was gracious in ordering all variations of dishes for my coworkers and myself. The dinner was great and rather informal compared to our roles while in the working environment. This is because it was a type of 'nomikai' where we expressed ourselves through "nommunication" as they called it. To further elaborate, 'nomu' means to drink, so you take 'no' and add it to communication to get a drinking party where communication is more comfortable in an informal setting. They all wished me luck and said that they hoped I would consider working for the company after graduation.

Friday was the day of my presentation and the end of my internship. It came with a heavy heart, because I met many people and developed relationships with coworkers that I hated to say goodbye to. In my presentation, I discussed the company's corporate philosophy and history including their recent global HR operations of systematically cultivating human resources, developing unified global HR management systems, restructuring their global management education system, and implementing global standards of a unified language of communication. I then analyzed the company's current trends towards globalization and their current English ability determined from their average TOEIC scores.

At the end of my presentation, I made a few recommendations for practice in Company J based on my findings. I utilized the interviews I conducted while touring other factories or 'works' to support my recommended additions to training programs. I recommended in the trainee stage to promote awareness and education of Japan's societal and behavioral norms to help them become better global minds and leaders. In the staff

position for global communication, I recommended practice of 'breaking the wall' of previously mentioned ingrained mechanisms in society, group opportunity to converse (role play) with national staffs, and to create team communication leadership building programs. The last recommendation I made was for the core global training program to offer cultural sensitivity training and practice of 'bridging the gap' meaning they should teach global dexterity by focusing on cultural differentiation with cultural congruence that blends together the values and beliefs of the person while still respecting the culture and tradition of the different one.

My presentation concluded smoothly and really impressed the coworkers that were invited to listen. It was mid-afternoon by the time I ended, and being that I did not have anything else to do until the end of the day, my boss let me leave early. I came back to the office around 5pm for closing remarks and a farewell meeting with the HR department. As soon as the working day ended, I went with my boss and a few other coworkers for a farewell nomikai. They gave me a parting and congratulatory gift, and then we enjoyed the night talking and drinking. We all hoped to work together again in the future.

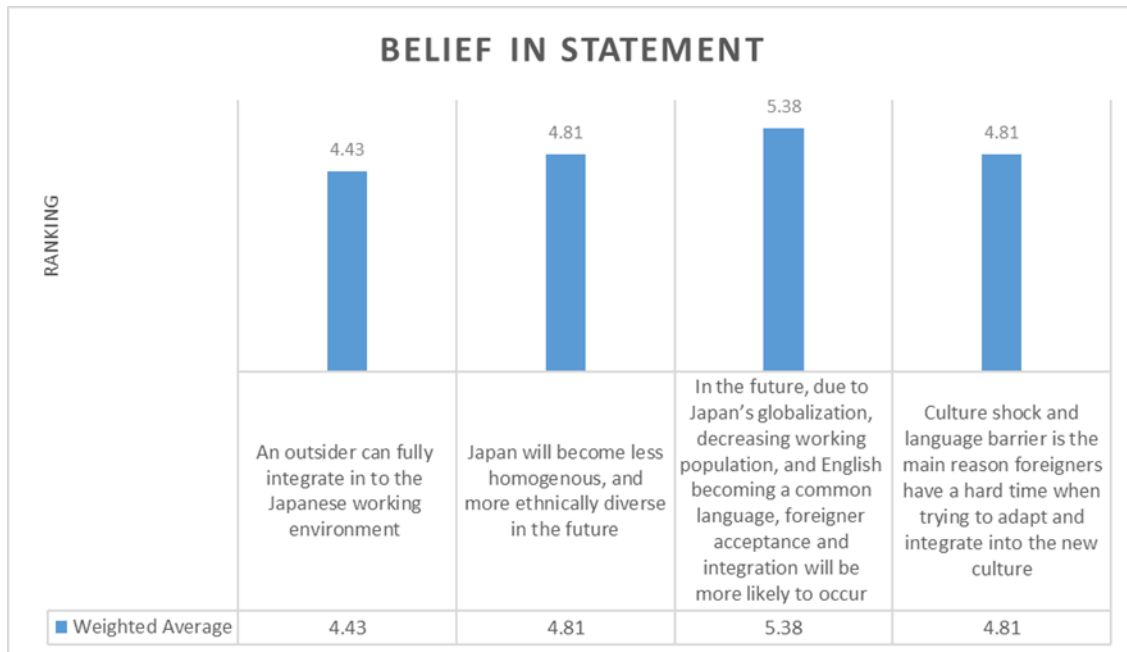
Summary. The major themes found within the internship observations would first be the effect of short-term commitment and language barrier for international interns. I believe that I was accepted by my coworkers, but if I had more time, I feel that I would have been better able to effectively integrate in to the flow of Company J's business environment and the societal norms of Japan. The language barrier was also a crucial wall to building social relationships both within and outside the company and to efficiently communicate to complete the tasks at hand. International interns need to keep

in mind the time frame of their internship and their ability or willingness to study and learn the native language in effort to generate effective communication. The second take-away would be the functions of out-of-workplace experiences. These could include but not be limited to my homestay with co-worker, nomikai, lunch dates, etc. In order for one to truly feel socially accepted and integrated, one cannot solely focus on the working life. One needs to be proactive in finding a community to belong to such as sports clubs that help to facilitate their own adjustment and self-satisfaction within the culture. This will help to strengthen relationships.

Interviews

When asking a total of 14 foreigners if they had experienced social isolation and/ or integration, the majority answered that they had experienced both at some point in time. The average of 21 participants using a Likert scale to determine the extent to which they believe an outsider can fully integrate in to the Japanese working environment was placed at 4.43/ 7.00 (neither agree nor disagree) (See Figure 2). This score might reflect their experience with both integration and isolation. All of the participants noted that they did not immediately feel integrated. They said it was a difficult process and had to proactively integrate themselves. Without giving their best effort to join Japanese clubs or activities to create a community for themselves, they remarked it was difficult to even develop a relationship with a native. Simple relationships were easy to build; however, stronger relationships took time and energy as it was harder in a new environment and culture where they did not already have family or friends. Those who had already formed social relations with natives and/ or internationals before coming to Japan to extend their professional and personal networks experienced less isolation.

Figure 2. Respondents Rating of their Belief in Interviewed Statements



In regards to the sense of isolation felt by the participants, one respondent stated that Japan is a closed society and due to the particular cultural differences and language barrier, any individual could feel isolated from the society. Another respondent answered that no matter how long they spent in Japan or how much they learned and sounded Japanese; their physical characteristics of how they look will automatically label them in the category of outsider by the Japanese people. In a society where conformity is so valued, the ability to blend into the cultural and social norms is tested if physically one stands out against the crowd. To combat this feeling for future international expats, using the Likert scale mentioned above (See Figure 2), the statement that Japan will become less homogenous, and more ethnically diverse in the future received a slightly agree of 4.81 out of 7.00. Regarding the belief that in the future, due to Japan's globalization, decreasing working population, and English becoming a common language, foreigner

acceptance and integration will be more likely to occur, also ranked as a slightly agree with a 5.38 out of 7.00 which was the highest of the four statements asked to be ranked.

The perceptions of integration will be positively influenced by gaining knowledge of the challenges one may face when entering the new society along with knowing the best practices to implement to better socially integrate. To begin, I will introduce how the participants described Japanese business culture in relation to the challenges they experienced. Respondents mentioned the collectivistic views of the society in relation to the organization's conformity to the structure. Instead of the U.S. mentality of how one as an individual can get ahead, the focus is on how one's contributions can help the company or group as a whole. Dedication, hard work, and loyalty are all important aspects of Japanese business culture, however, respondents stated that there are high levels of social pressure present and large amounts of overtime is expected. They have difficulties balancing out their work and personal lives. In the hierarchical structure, there are high levels of complexity in social protocol making the decision-making process slow, but highly organized and rule-oriented. One respondent went as far to note about this process that most individuals seem very professional, but they seem to be not encouraged to use their creativity to grow their area of work or be innovative themselves due to the power-distance and risk averse atmosphere.

These responses are purely the thoughts and feelings of those experienced in Japan's working environment and are subject to vary between person. The challenges in relation to these experienced conditions mentioned above have been coded into four categories of groups that were most notable by the number of participants that mentioned the similar theme. (1) Communication and language were clustered together to form the top

challenge declared by 10 of the 21 respondents to this section. The second major difficulty would be (2) culture shock. Respondents stated that they had a hard time learning the specific mannerisms and expected behavioral norms within the society on an everyday basis. These two categories support the earlier findings that participants weighed culture shock and language barrier as the main reasons foreigners have a hard time when trying to adapt and integrate into the new culture as a 4.81/ 7.00 or slightly agree (See Figure 2). Another challenge that is encompassed within the coded responses includes (3) business culture. It was noticeable in 38 percent of the responses stating there are misunderstandings in accepted social mannerisms and the complexity of the social protocol when it comes to showing respect in the hierarchical structures. The first three challenges directly relate to the culture, so the fourth and final category was rather surprising being noted by only two respondents; (4) Japanese perspectives on foreigners. These challenges may include the assumption by locals that one does not speak Japanese or understand Japanese culture. They could also simply label the individual as an 'outsider.' Their perspectives are very influential as to whether one feels accepted into the society and work environment.

In order to overcome the different working styles and challenges that may arise from these cultural differences, respondents were asked the open-ended question about the best practices for foreigners to implement to better perceive social acceptance and integration. After coding the responses, three main themes were evident: (1) awareness and understanding culture with adjusted behavior, (2) learning the language, and (3) building social relations. Participants stated that it helps to be interested in the culture and to find people with similar interests, proactively immersing oneself both inside and outside the

organization. These social aspects are important in finding a community to belong to and building meaningful relationships of interdependence. Doing so will aid in the feeling of acceptance and integration allowing for positive contributions to the group dynamic. These recommended actions link to the tools discussed in the literature review of open-mindedness, perspective-taking, and emotional intelligence.

Discussion

This section will interpret and describe the significance of the findings in connection to the five research questions. The first research question was answered through the literature review. The integration of the Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism philosophies, throughout the history of Japan, directly connect Japanese business culture to its cultural and societal norms. In conjunction with each other, these three philosophies shaped the founding values of the people which influenced the organization's formation of their ethics, visions, working style, decision-making, and other business functions.

The second research question was addressed in all three methods of data collection including the literature review, observations, and interviews. There are many differences between American and Japanese business culture, but the most notable ones evident in the findings would begin with Japan's collectivistic view on society compared the more self-servient and individualistic view the U.S. portrays. Topics of work-life balance and overtime work were also evident in the interview section. Participants noted the work ethic and long works hours their Japanese coworkers commit to the company. As noted in the literature review, the issues that arise from this situation may lead to suicide by overwork. Through the internship observations, I was able to experience and see this type of commitment, as well as discover there is an underlying effect of not taking paid-time

off. Lifetime employment is expected of employees up to the age of retirement. This is quite different from the U.S. process of employment-at-will. As seen through the hierarchical structure and complexity of social protocol, there is a relatively high-power distance compared to the U.S. In Japan, “nomunication,” is utilized as an informal way of conversation over drinks for younger employees to interact with their superiors more comfortably. The last major difference would be the “shūkatsu” or job-hunting system that is undertaken by soon to be college graduates, so as to have a job already set in place.

Regarding the third research question, the psychological impacts of culture shock are influential in the different stages of adaptation. An individual’s ability to integrate and socially adapt are in relation to the stage of culture shock they are cycling through. The honeymoon phase impacts one’s interest, excitement, and positive expectations of the new culture. Interview respondents that were only on assignment for a few weeks can be deemed in this stage. Even though they noted challenges, they all stated they felt some form of integration. The downward sloping culture shock phase leaves one with a sense of anxiety and lack of control over their environment and actions. This can be linked to the feeling of social isolation because the small stressors that were once minor, turn into major problems that impede the perception of acceptance. The beginning stages link to the interview findings of participants experience with both integration and isolation.

The recovery phase helps one grasp their situation and learn how to effectively adjust to the new cultural environment being experienced. This may be the stage where respondents who are new to live and work in Japan are currently at. They understand the challenges and differences, but are still trying to implement the recommended actions mentioned in the later research question five. The adaptation phase ends with acceptance

and development of stable ways to successfully resolve problems and manage the new culture. This stage can be projected to include those expats well-versed in the Japanese language and deep roots within the Japanese society due to their length of stay. These stages affect integration because it is relatively perceived by the individual. The major takeaway would be that if one is in the culture shock phase, they are less likely to perceive integration and acceptance.

The fourth research question asked was whether social integration and acceptance below surface into the Japanese business working environment is possible. The expression of 'below surface' is defined in this context as not just the appearance of acceptance and integration on the outside, but the adjustment of behavioral norms to contradict the Japanese coworkers outlook of you as a 'foreigner,' offsetting the giving of the "gaijin card" or a 'by' in one's actions. This below surface integration decreases the negative affect of the set expectations coworkers may hold of internationals adhering to cultural practices and norms. Through my personal observations and the interviews, I believe this 'below surface' integration is possible. It is on contingency to the perceptions of the individual based on their efforts, attitudes, and current stage of culture shock.

The final research question to be discussed is the recommended actions foreigners should take in order to better feel socially accepted and adapted to the culture. The literature introduced the concepts of perspective-taking, emotional intelligence, flexibility, and open-mindedness. It can also be presumed that international workers need to have the skill of global dexterity where they are able to adapt and change their behaviors in light of the differences to fit the cultural norms; blending their own values, while respecting the dissimilar culture. As identified through the interview findings, these

skills will help stimulate proactive engagement through awareness and understanding of the culture with adjusted behavior, language learning, and building of social relations.

Implications

From the aforementioned discussion points, international workers moving to Japan should be aware and expect to go through the cycles of culture shock. To help shorten or minimize the shock and promote better acculturation, organizations should offer employees working overseas or placed in an international environment cross-cultural training. The perceived feelings of integration by the foreigner also depends on the views of those accepting them in to their culture and work atmosphere. Not only having knowledge of the culture, the motivation and efficacy to proactively understand and adjust behaviors are important. Based on the insight that Japanese coworker's perceptions of accepting and working with internationals can affect one's integration, globalizing companies should consider offering training in cultural awareness to their native employees as well.

Future Research

After discussion of the research study, there are several aspects that could be built on to further address unanswered or limited data results. Suggestions that should be explored in the future include the relationship between one's demographic characteristics and the perceived integration or acceptance by coworkers. As I mentioned earlier, this was not the focus of my interview questions and so, I have limited information on saying these factors either do or do not have an impact on one's ability to integrate. This topic has become important because of the gender roles I noted within my internship observations. There may be a difference in the expat or foreigner experience depending on the

individual's identified gender. For example, men may be more respected in the work place compared to their counterpart due to Japan's history in set female roles and positional norms within the working environment. It could be that females build stronger bonds due to the fact they are more expressive of their emotions in social settings. The ethnicity of the individual may also play a role in social acceptance. In the results section, a participant noted that as long as you looked different, you will be labeled as such. There may be potential differences in experiences depending on whether the individual is of Asian descent or represents more western traits.

This study was limited in collecting concrete information about the recurring characteristics and individual differences within those that felt integrated. The interview questions asked for the best practices to implement so foreigners can feel socially accepted and integrated, but it did not clearly define the personality traits of the participants. I believe that an individual's perception of integration and social acceptance is contingent upon the personality and individual differences they portray. In order to understand this relationship, survey research could be conducted to identify personality traits of the foreigners that are working in Japan and their integration and isolation experience. There should also be further study into the culture shock stages participants were undergoing in relation to their perceived feelings of integration or isolation. From the implications section, I noted that the perception of integration is contingent to what stage of culture shock individuals were in. This topic should be explored further to verify this finding and discover the relation of which stages produce the most positive feelings of integration and vice versa.

The final future study suggestion involves a survey of the perspectives of Japanese workers on foreigner integration and whether they would accept international coworkers in the workplace. Through the interviews, I discovered that Japan does not have an exact translation for “social integration.” They do have an academic word for the topic, but it is not commonly utilized or known by the average person. Not possessing a common understanding regarding “social integration” could be an influencer to their perceptions of internationals joining their workforce and their ability to accept them. This future study could address the reason why Japanese do not recognize and raise awareness of this concept. One could compare such perspectives of those who have experience working abroad or in an international work setting and those who do not have regular interactions with international workers. The results of such studies could help Japanese companies to train their native workers on social integration, as well on cross-cultural awareness. Better understanding of how to help international workers feel socially integrated in Japan would be beneficial for the Japanese company in an attempt to globalize and support their diverse personnel.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the significance of this thesis study is to raise awareness on the topic of social integration and identify the major themes that impact the perception of this feeling either positively or negatively within the Japanese business working environment. The research questions regarding the historical influence on the organization’s cultural norms and behaviors; notable differences in Japanese business practices; the psychological effects of culture shock; and the major challenges foreigners face in their attempt to ingrate are all important to be mindful of. Understanding of these factors help define the

key aspects that most international workers experience in Japan and facilitate their adaptation and adjustment in to the Japanese society. It allows realistic expectations to be set when entering into the new working environment. Once the potential issues and influencers have been recognized, there are actions that foreigners could take in order to better feel socially accepted and adapted to the culture. Implementing these actions discovered through the literature review, observations, and interviews will lead to better perceptions of social integration and acceptance.

With the lack of research and awareness about foreigner integration in the Japanese working environment, this thesis contributes to the understanding of foreigner integration because it delves into the underlying causes that influence the feeling of integration and isolation. The thesis incorporated research questions to gather both the Japanese and foreigners' views on foreigner integration and social inclusion. Through the observation and interview sections, foreigners were able to discuss their interpretations on the subject providing examples, realistic expectations, and implementable behavioral activities to foster the positive feeling of integration and ease of adjustment. The thoughts of the Japanese workers pertaining to this topic were also gathered to shed light on their perspectives. The current findings suggested ways of action for an outsider to gain better acceptance from their Japanese coworkers. These discovered answers can be utilized as a tool to inform people interested or currently working in Japan of the necessary skills and knowledge essential in supporting their acceptance and integration below surface into the business culture.

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview/ Survey Question

1. What is your age?
 - a. 18-25 years old
 - b. 26-35 years old
 - c. 36-45 years old
 - d. 46-55 years old
 - e. 56 or older

2. To which gender do you identify as?
Female
Male
Other: _____
Prefer not to answer

3. What country are you from?

4. Do you have experience going abroad?
Yes/ no

If yes, please explain the reason and extent that you were there. (ex. Study abroad/ work, long-term/ short-term)

5. Did you experience social integration where you felt you had strong, connected social relations of coexistence with those of the opposite culture? Please explain.

6. Did you experience social isolation where you felt you had poor social relations and segregated from those of the opposite culture? Please explain.

7. How would you describe Japanese business culture?

8. How would you rate your Japanese Language proficiency using the following scale (1=none, 2=basic, 3=conversational, 4=fluent, 5=native)?

9. What do you think the challenges are that foreigners face when trying to integrate into the Japanese working environment?

10. What are the best practices for a foreigner to implement so they will be better socially accepted and integrated?

Using a following scale, please indicate the extent to which you believe in each of the statements. 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=slightly disagree 4=neither agree nor disagree 5=slightly agree 6=agree 7=strongly agree

- An outsider can fully integrate in to the Japanese working environment
- Culture shock and language barrier is the main reason foreigners have a hard time when trying to adapt and integrate into the new culture
- Japan will become less homogenous, and more ethnically diverse in the future
- In the future, due to Japan's globalization, decreasing working population, and English becoming a common language, foreigner acceptance and integration will be more likely to occur