

**Challenges in Achieving an Integrative Approach to  
People Management in Japanese Companies  
in Australia**

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## **CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Head Office:** Head Office of the company where informants work. They are mostly located in Tokyo. In this dissertation, Head Office also includes any branch offices of the company which are located in Japan. These branch offices in Japan have some association with offshore offices in Australia. This includes cases where Japanese expatriate staff are sent from a branch office in Japan, and where an office in Japan influences business activity of a branch office in Australia. For example, company in Japan imports products from Australia, and staff in the office in Japan provide instructions and directions on business matters to a branch office in Australia

**Staff:** People who work for Japanese companies which participated in this study. All companies have offshore office(s) in Australia. The term ‘staff’ in this dissertation includes all types of groups categorized in this study such as Japanese staff (JS) and non-Japanese local staff (NJLS). It includes all types of positions held in Australia.

**Japanese staff (JS):** Japanese nationals working in the company. It includes people in all positions in the company. Namely, Japanese expatriate staff (JEXS) and Local Japanese staff (LJS).

**Japanese expatriate staff (JEXS):** Japanese nationals who are sent from Head Office in Japan. It includes all types of positions held in Australia, namely, Japanese expatriates in managerial positions (JEXM) and Japanese expatriate employees (JEXE).

**Japanese expatriates in managerial positions (JEXM):** Japanese nationals who are sent from Head Office in Japan and hold a managerial position in Australia.

**Japanese expatriate employees (JEXE):** Japanese nationals who are sent from Head Office in Japan and do not hold a managerial position in Australia.

**Local Japanese staff (LJS):** Japanese nationals who are employed locally. This includes local Japanese managers (LJM) and local Japanese employees (LJE).

**Local Japanese managers (LJM):** Japanese nationals employed locally who hold a managerial position in Australia.

**Local Japanese employees (LJE):** Japanese nationals employed locally who do not hold a managerial position in Australia.

**Non-Japanese local staff (NJLS):** People who are not Japanese nationals and are hired as local staff. This includes non-Japanese local managers (NJLM) and non-Japanese local employees (NJLE).

**Non-Japanese local managers (NJLM):** People who are not Japanese nationals, and are hired locally and hold managerial positions in the company in Australia.

**Non-Japanese local employees (NJLE):** People who are not Japanese nationals, and are hired locally and do not hold a managerial position in the company in Australia.

## Abstract

Japanese companies have always experienced challenges in managing white-collar local employees in their overseas subsidiaries (e.g. Byun & Ybema 2005; Hayashi 1994; Taga 2004; Tokusei 1994), as exemplified by the characteristic of a lack of integration which exists in overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Dedoussis 1994; Kidahashi 1987; Yoshihara 2001; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997). This is apparent in the demarcation between two groups of employees, local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, with the latter having close ties with the Head Office of the company.

Elucidation on how to succeed in managing local staff in overseas Japanese companies is an important agenda. To attain this goal, the current study will examine the problems experienced by Japanese and local staff, and the strategies perceived as effective for the improvements by using Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) to understand the cross-cultural interactions within Japanese companies operating in Australia.

This thesis has the following aims and objectives:

- (1) To explore the types of role stress experienced by Japanese and non-Japanese white-collar staff holding managerial and non-managerial positions in Japanese companies operating in Australia; and
- (2) To examine the strategies perceived as effective to relieve their role stress.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 68 white collar employees of Japanese companies operating in Australia, including expatriates, local Japanese hires, and non-Japanese local staff. The qualitative data were analyzed using Nvivo software, according to thematic issues (Miles & Huberman 1994).

There are four main findings. First, new types of role stress (that is, role ambiguity and role conflict) which have never been noted in the literature on role theory were identified. These new types of role ambiguity are lack of cultural understanding and communication problems. The communication problems involve language



competency and the technique of 'guessing'. With regard to role conflict, the current study identified two new types, namely, role exclusion and liaison role conflict. New types of coping strategy were also discovered. These are: hiring bicultural staff and indirect active coping. Among these new types of role stress and coping strategies, lack of cultural understanding, communication problems, and hiring bicultural staff are concerned with cultural issues. Thus, these are not found in a mono-cultural context but only in an inter-cultural context. These new types of role conflict illustrate a lack of integration among staff in companies.

Second, the current study identified various sources of role stress. These are communication problems, work culture, cultural distance, and the position of expatriates. Similar to the new types of role stress types identified, the majority of these role stress sources are related to cultural issues. These types of role stress sources are, therefore, not relevant in a mono-cultural context but are applicable in an inter-cultural context.

Third, the findings showed a link between role stress and coping strategies, indicating that role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategy are inter-related, which is consistent with an earlier finding by Stahl (2000). It suggests that selection of coping strategies should be made by taking into account employees' role stress experiences.

The findings led to a theoretical implication that role stress and the coping strategies found in a mono-cultural context are not necessarily applicable in an intercultural context. Further research is required in inter-cultural settings.

Fourth, the results identify four different groupings of staff in Japanese companies in Australia. Staffing groups of Japanese companies in Australia are comprised of Japanese expatriate managers, non-Japanese local staff, local Japanese staff, and cultural integrators. This is contrary to past studies that state that overseas Japanese companies are composed of two groups, local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (e.g. Dedoussis 1994; White & Trevor, 1983; Kidahashi 1987; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33).

Overall, these findings lead to a theoretical implication that role stress and coping strategy developed in a mono-cultural context are not necessarily applicable in an intercultural context. Coping strategies perceived as effective to alleviate role stress in overseas Japanese companies are identified in this research. Implementation of these strategies, however, requires taking into consideration: types of role stress experienced by employees, their cultural background, and their corporate culture.

Finally, the current study suggests development of positive relationships among staff is imperative to overcome a lack of integration among staff and establish successful white-collar management in overseas Japanese companies. Language and communication barriers are the long residing problems in overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Bamber et al. 1992; Tokusei 1994; Yoshihara 2001). The overall findings illustrate that removing these barriers, and enriching cultural understanding are the keys to improving integration among staff. In doing so, the 'us and them' mentality will be diminished and a shift will occur towards the growth of unity among staff.

White collar management of overseas Japanese companies is acknowledged as the 'dark side' as opposed to their successful blue collar management recognized as 'bright side' (Yoshihara 1989). This doctoral research has opened the path to elevate white-collar management of overseas Japanese companies to reside in the 'bright side'.

Limitations exist in this research. First, some of the sample sizes of the respondent groups and thematic issues were small. The level of generalizability of the findings is, therefore, unconfirmed. Second, the current study did not examine the level of role stress from the point of view of both parties of the role sets (role sender and focal person). Third, all of the Japanese expatriate staff in the current study were male. The findings are, thus, limited to male expatriates. Future research should, therefore, consider these limitations.

Furthermore, research in different intercultural settings should be carried out, such as

in Japanese companies located in Asian countries. There has been a significant increase in recent years in Japan's overseas direct investment in Asia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2005), and thus research in these countries is important. Finally, future research should be undertaken to discover how overseas Japanese companies can acquire valuable aspects of cultural diversity (e.g. Cox 1991; Cox & Blake 1991) and develop innovative and creative companies.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

The ties between Australia and Japan have expanded considerably since the signing of the bilateral Commerce Agreement in 1957, and on the basis of a strong equality the relationship of the two countries has broadened and deepened (Drysdale 1996). The relationship still continues to grow today and Japan remains Australia's most important trading partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006a).

The close ties between Australia and Japan are not limited to the economic sphere but also include personal ties. One example is the number of Australians learning the Japanese language. Australia ranks third highest in the world in terms of the number of Japanese language learners outside Japan with the total number reaching 380,000 in 2004, and 2,142 schools, including primary and high schools, are teaching Japanese as a second language in Australia (Japan Foundation 2004). This desire to learn Japanese demonstrates the nation's increasing interest in Japan. The two principal motivations are stated as being: (1) to gain knowledge of Japanese culture and (2) to be able to communicate using the Japanese language (Japan Foundation 2004).

In conjunction with increasing globalization, the number of Japanese living overseas has grown exponentially reaching one million for the first time in 2005 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006b). Among the numerous countries where Japanese reside, Australia is the fifth most popular country. As of January 2006, more than 52,000 Japanese were living in Australia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006a).

Japanese companies have subsidiaries world wide but regrettably these overseas Japanese companies experience challenges and problems in managing their employees within the host countries (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004;

Yoshihara 1989, 2001). Studies on these issues concerning white collar employees have primarily been carried out in the United States of America (Beechler & Yang 1994; Paik & Sohn 2004; Linowes 1993) or the United Kingdom (Kranias 2000, 2001; White & Trevor 1983), and comparable studies on white collar management within Japanese companies in an Australian context are limited (Yamanaka 1991; Taga 2004).

The rapidly increasing number of Japanese residing in Australia is contributing to a greater volume of interactions taking place between the Australian and Japanese peoples than at any previous time. This is also the case in the corporate environment where Japanese and Australians work together on a daily basis within the same company, thereby adding to the upsurge in intercultural exchanges. It has, therefore, become increasingly important to mitigate the problems that have arisen in managing white collar staff in Japanese companies in Australia.

In comparison to the management of blue collar employees, the management of white collar employees in overseas Japanese companies operating in the West has often been deemed a failure (Ishida 1988, p. 62; Yoshihara 1989, 2001; White & Trevor 1983). In terms of the differences between the manufacturing and service sectors in overseas Japanese management, Yoshihara (1989) asserts that factory situations are more successful than office situations. He explains that workers and front-line supervisors welcome Japanese style people management as it provides them with greater participation. Moreover, blue collar employees tend to respond favorably to increases in leadership participation and efforts to enhance friendly, cooperative relations among workers. Not only are management styles adapted more smoothly, they also lead to lower costs, higher productivity, and fewer defective products. On the other hand, the management of white collar employees has been a problem in overseas Japanese companies (Yoshihara 1989). The Japanese management of blue collar workers is consequently referred to as the 'bright side', while that of white collar employees is regarded as the 'dark side' (Yoshihara 1989).

The 'dark side' is reflected in anti-discrimination suits citing violation of US labor laws, and overseas Japanese companies in the US have been criticized for sexual and

racial discrimination (Hanami 1998, pp. 205-210). Further aspects of this 'dark side' can be found in the non-integration of relationships between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff among the white collar management of overseas Japanese companies. This lack of integration has been referred to as a 'dual personnel system' (White & Trevor 1983), 'dual organization' (Kidahashi 1987), 'double standard' (Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33), or a 'peripheral model' of Japanese management (Dedoussis 1994).

Overseas Japanese companies are further criticized for having failed to develop a successful learning organization, particularly in developing the ability of staff members to be efficient when communicating and sharing information, responding to changes, and learning and developing through a process of cultural adaptation (Dirks 1995). In contrast to this criticism, Japanese companies in Japan are described as being superb at sharing information, having a high level of communication among staff, and developing creative and innovative companies (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996).

Cultural diversity is regarded as bringing competitive advantages to companies including the transfer and sharing of knowledge (Pablos 2004, p. 114), problem solving, creativity, enhancing companies' flexibility, and marketing to local markets (Cox & Blake 1991; Harris & Moran 1996, p. 90; Miroshnik 2002, p. 528). Overseas Japanese companies do exhibit cultural diversity, but their unsuccessful management of white collar staff creates a barrier in these companies in terms of deriving benefits offered by cultural diversity. Cultural differences influence the transferability of management practices overseas (Newman & Stanley 1996), and those Japanese management practices that are peculiar to Japanese companies and culture have proved difficult to practice when managing host country nationals (Beechler & Yang 1994; Chikudate 1995). Cultural diversity for these overseas Japanese companies, therefore, is seen as a problem rather than an opportunity capable of yielding a variety of benefits. Whether overseas Japanese companies can transform this 'problem' into an 'opportunity' hinges upon how the management in the companies deals with it.

Past studies demonstrate that white collar management of overseas Japanese

companies is not providing the competitive advantage that is available through cultural diversity (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004; White & Trevor 1983). The aim of this research, therefore, is first, to discover the means whereby successful improvement can occur, and second, to shed light on the failure of white collar management in overseas Japanese companies (also known as the 'dark side' by Yoshihara, 1989). It is anticipated that the current doctoral research will stimulate the conditions whereby white collar management in overseas Japanese companies can be transformed. Eventually, the 'problem' of cultural diversity will become the 'opportunity' for the development of successful management of white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies. This is the point of departure for this research project.

## **1.2 RESEARCH PROBLEMS**

The literature review identifies the problems faced by overseas Japanese companies in managing white collar employees (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004). This dissertation adopts Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) as the theoretical framework. Role Theory facilitates an understanding of patterns of human behavior and explains role stress in organizations (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). In the literature review, following Katz and Kahn, role stress is operationalized to comprise role ambiguity and role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978).

The management of overseas Japanese companies involves considerable use of informal processes where employees need to understand informal rules and tacit communication (Ishida 1985, pp. 12-14). The problems of managing local staff in overseas Japanese companies are linked to the informal management processes (Ala & Cordeiro 1999, p. 23; Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1994). Exploring the informal management processes is essential when role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) is to be examined. Hence, the following research question.

Research Question 1:

*Are there any informal management processes carried out in Japanese companies located in Australia, in relation to decision making, information*

*sharing, and job roles? If so, what are they? How are they carried out?*

Studies conducted on role stress in intercultural contexts are scarce. As past studies revealed contradictory findings (e.g. Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992), this has led researchers such as Peterson et al. (1995) and Shenker and Zeira (1992) to question the applicability of Role Theory in intercultural contexts.

Past studies found a lack of integration between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff (Dedoussis 1994; Kidahashi 1987; White & Trevor 1983). A locally hired Japanese workforce is available in Australia. Since no study has been carried out to investigate role stress experiences of locally hired Japanese staff, no results are available. Their role stress experience is an area that requires exploration. The following research question is thus set.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (i.e. role ambiguity and role conflict) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

In contrast to the extant literature on problems of overseas Japanese companies (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004), no empirical study has explored what might constitute effective strategies for the alleviation of role stress in overseas Japanese companies. Chikudate (1995, p. 28) condemns the existing literature for failing to pay attention to problem solutions and preventive mechanisms. Similarly, Shimada (1998, p. 3) asserts that Japanese companies have an important mission to discover effective strategies that can realize the, as yet only ideal, additional value of white collar management in offshore offices (Shimada 1998, p. 3).

The appropriate usage of coping strategies enables the mitigation of role stress in companies (Feldman & Brett 1983; Hall 1972; Stahl & Caligiuri 2005). Hence, discovering effective coping strategies is essential for the mitigation of role stress. Contrary to the numerous studies examining coping strategies in mono-cultural settings, studies conducted in intercultural contexts are limited (Stahl & Caligiuri 2005). Hence, much research is necessary into exploring effective coping strategies.



Alleviating role stress is indispensable for developing a healthy organization (Gates 2001, p. 395), and gaining an understanding of coping strategies must be given a high priority if companies are to assuage role stress (Van Sell et al. 1981). This leads to the following research question.

Research Question 3:

*What attitudes and strategies are perceived to be effective in coping with role stress by individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines the justification and explanation of the research design, data collection method, and data analysis adopted in the current research.

#### **1.3.1 Research Design**

This research adopted a qualitative approach. It is the most suitable approach for induction, exploration, description, in-depth understanding, and particularly for elucidating the meaning of experiences (Merriam 1988, p. 17-21). Exploring the meaning of experiences is one of the aims of the current study. This includes those experiences that incur role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) among staff in overseas Japanese companies and the reasons for experiencing role stress. Thus, this research is concerned with induction, exploration, description, and in-depth understanding. A qualitative approach is, therefore, appropriate.

A qualitative approach is also a pertinent method for discovery (Merriam 1988, p. 17). The current research aims to reveal role stress and coping strategies in both local and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. The current study thus explored both local and Japanese staff including those in managerial and non-managerial positions. Locally hired Japanese staff's role stress and coping strategies in overseas Japanese companies have never been a topic for study, and this research has included local Japanese staff as a target group to be investigated.

Similarly, as mentioned in the previous section (see section 1.2), the exploration of coping strategies perceived as effective to reduce role stress is still overlooked. Hence, the current research is concerned with discovery, and a qualitative approach makes it possible to explore and discover new issues. A qualitative approach, therefore, is essential for this study.

Multiple sources of data were utilized to increase internal validity. They include in-depth interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observation, and field notes. Interviews were recorded on audio-tapes, and raw data has been preserved following the recommendations outlined by Seale (1999, p. 147). As advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994), the frequency with which texts occur was counted by using codes and tabulations in order to increase rigor. A member check was also carried out. This was undertaken by sending transcripts to the interviewees to seek validation.

To minimize researcher bias, a critical incident technique was adopted during interviews. This technique is regarded as the most suitable technique for obtaining information on an individual's authentic experience, behavior, and phenomena (Wolf 1981, p. 863). This technique also assists in forming rational categorizations (Wolfe 1975, p. 873). Following the suggestion by Brislin (1986, p. 164), increasing reliability and reducing bias were also attempted. This was achieved by using follow-up questions as a way of providing proof during the course of interviews.

Furthermore, the bilingual and bicultural backgrounds of the researcher of this doctoral research offer competitive advantages for increasing validity and reducing researcher bias. Establishment of validity in cross-cultural study is acknowledged as difficult due to the different cultural assumptions between researcher and informants (Anderson & Skaates 2004, p. 465). Bilingual and bicultural skills allow issues to be viewed from wider perspectives as they can take into account both cultures (Brislin 1986, p. 157).

The bilingual background of the researcher also offers strengths in increasing validity and reducing researcher bias as claimed by Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004, p.

224). They state that the use of English alone has negative impacts on obtaining access to informants, establishing rapport and trust, and building a relationship between researcher and respondents. The use of a single language can also bring about misunderstanding, researcher bias, and neglect of important messages. A multilingual approach, therefore, is crucial in order to obtain valid and trustworthy data (Marschan-Piekkari & Reis, 2004, p. 232). Patton (1990) also states that the use of a respondent's native language assists in ensuring the quality of data. The bilingual and bicultural backgrounds of the researcher of this doctoral research, hence, provide strengths that aid in increasing validity and reducing researcher bias.

### **1.3.2 Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 68 staff working for Japanese companies located in Australia. Informants were all white collar staff selected from those holding managerial positions as well as those who did not hold managerial positions. Both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff were included as informants. In total, four types of staff participated in the current study. These were: non-Japanese local and Japanese staff holding managerial positions, and non-Japanese local and Japanese staff not holding managerial positions. Among those, 45 informants were Japanese and 34 were non-Japanese local staff. The duration of each interview was approximately 50-90 minutes on average. Following the recommendation by Silverman (2000, p. 131) that transcribing data from audio-tape is a theoretically saturated activity, interviews were transcribed.

### **1.3.3 Data Analysis**

Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis is beneficial for international business research (Lindsay 2004, p. 486), and it facilitates the increase of rigor (Seale 1999; Silverman 2000, p. 156). Hence, the current research processed data using the computer software package NVivo 1.1 (Qualitative Solutions & Research Pty Ltd, 1999) for the coding of the qualitative data. This software was selected due to its multilingual capability. This current research collected data in both English and Japanese, and the use of raw data is important as it can increase validity (Anderson &

Skaates 2004, p. 481). NVivo allowed the researcher to process both English and Japanese raw data simultaneously, thereby facilitating validation of the research. Coding was conducted, with care taken to employ 'indexing' in the early stages as suggested by Seale (1999, p. 154).

Counting the frequency of phenomena is effective for verifying a hypothesis and for reducing researcher bias (Miles & Huberman 1994, pp. 215-216). The current research thus employed this approach, by counting the number of the text segments under the code, and comparing this data. This approach assisted in identifying features of role ambiguity and role conflict by different types of staff, enhancing credibility of the data analysis, as well as minimizing researcher bias.

#### **1.4 OUTLINE OF THESIS**

This thesis comprises ten chapters.

Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter outlining the background of the research. An overview of the study is provided including research problems, methodology, and limitations to this study. The contribution of the research is also stated.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature covering the fields of management of white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies, Role Theory, and coping strategies. The review shows that problems experienced by staff working for overseas Japanese companies constitute role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict). Study on Role Theory in an intercultural context is limited, thus there is much remaining to be researched. Exploring the sources of role stress in companies within an intercultural context is an example.

In contrast to the abundant literature identifying problems of overseas Japanese companies, there is no empirical study which investigates effective coping strategies for the alleviation of role stress. Very little research has been carried out on coping strategies in an intercultural context. Identifying effective coping strategies is crucial if overseas Japanese companies are to diminish role stress. There is a strong need for

such research to be conducted.

Chapter 3 provides the justification for the methodology adopted by this dissertation. A qualitative approach was employed in this research taking into consideration its nature and the strengths of this approach. In order to increase validity, multiple sources of data were collected. These include in-depth interviews, documentation, archival records, and direct observation.

The findings of this study are reported in the five chapters commencing with Chapter 4 and concluding in Chapter 8. Chapter 4 provides the findings relevant to Research Question 1. The question aims to discover whether informal management processes are carried out in Japanese companies in Australia. The results show that informal processes in making decisions are conducted predominantly among Japanese expatriate staff. A degree of vagueness was also found in the manner in which job descriptions were written. This represents a Japanese style of informal management process and is an indication that Japanese companies in Australia wish to practice Japanese style informal management processes in Australia.

Chapters 5 and 6 report the findings for Research Question 2, exploring role stress, namely, role ambiguity and role conflict. Chapter 5 presents the findings on role ambiguity. Three types of role ambiguity are identified. These are (1) communication difficulties, (2) information shortage, and (3) lack of cultural understanding. Role ambiguity is found to be experienced by all staff types, that is, non-Japanese local staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and local Japanese staff.

Chapter 6 reports on role conflict as outlined in Research Question 2. The results reveal four types of role conflict. These are (1) liaison role conflict, (2) role exclusion, (3) role incompetence, and (4) role overload.

The findings of Chapters 5 and 6 reveal that each staff type, non-Japanese local staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and local Japanese staff, has different experiences of role stress. There is also a feeling of discontent among the three staff types. These findings suggest that role ambiguity and role conflict are inter-related

Chapter 7 reports the findings in respect to Research Question 3. This question aims to explore the perception of coping strategies as being effective in alleviating role stress. Six types of coping strategy are identified. The findings suggest that coping strategies and role stress are also related to each other.

Chapter 8 reports on the differences identified between particular groups of local staff. These groups of staff include both non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff. They are distinguished by specific characteristics. The characteristics include their assistance in resolving problems by acting as ‘middle-men’ between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. These characteristics are attributed to the role of cultural integrator.

Chapter 9 integrates the findings from Chapters 4 to 8, and provides a discussion of the findings and their theoretical implications. Three key issues are discussed. First, demarcations exist between the four groups, non-Japanese local staff, local Japanese staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and local staff playing the role of cultural integrators. The demarcation refers to different role stress experiences, different perceptions about effective coping strategies, discontented feelings towards another group, and no indication of positive personal relationships with another group. Hence, Japanese companies in Australia can be seen to be composed of four groupings of staff.

Second, the findings suggest that there are four sources of role stress in Japanese companies in Australia. These are (1) communication problems, (2) work culture, (3) cultural distance, and (4) expatriate position.

Third, the findings demonstrate that role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies are inter-related, and that there is a cyclical process among them. That is, role ambiguity induces role conflict, and coping strategies are enacted to fill the shortcomings of role stress, in particular, role ambiguity. Coping strategies also assist in reducing unmet expectations between role sets (role sender and focal person). These issues and future research implications are summarized in the next section of this chapter.

## **1.5 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS**

There were three limitations associated with the research design. First, some of the sample sizes of the findings presented in the tables were small. Thus, the significance of these findings cannot be confirmed.

Second, the current study examined role stress from the perception of only one of the parties comprising a role set (role sender and focal person). Since dyadic analysis was not carried out, it is uncertain whether the perceptions of one party within a role set are congruent with those of the other party.

Third, the Japanese expatriate informants who participated in the current study were all male. Different findings may have resulted if the role stress of female Japanese expatriate staff and their perceived effective coping strategies had been examined.

This research also identified several future research directions. First, the above-mentioned three limitations, sample size, level of analysis, and gender of expatriate staff, should be considered for improvement in these areas. Second, future research should be carried out in a different intercultural context, such as Japanese companies in Asian countries. Those who were not included in the current study, third country nationals, should also be included in future research on overseas Japanese companies. Third, future research should be carried out to uncover how overseas Japanese companies are able to take advantage of the valuable aspects of cultural diversity (Cox 1991; Cox & Blake 1991), and ambiguity (Mukaidono 1988 p. 208; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996), in order to develop innovative and creative companies.

## **1.6 CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

This research provides a number of practical contributions to the knowledge of managing white collar staff holding managerial and non-managerial positions in Japanese companies in Australia. Similarly, theoretical contributions are also made to knowledge in the fields of Role Theory in an intercultural interaction context, and coping strategies in an intercultural context.

First, as suggested by Shenker and Zeira (1992), in relation to the lack of studies which examine role stress types in an intercultural context, the current research identified role stress types which have not been acknowledged in the literature on Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). The new intercultural role stress types found in role ambiguity were language competency, the need to guess, and lack of cultural understanding. Two types of role conflict were identified. They were role exclusion and liaison role conflict. New types of coping strategies were also identified. These are indirect active coping and hiring bicultural staff.

Second, this study identified sources of role stress that are applicable in overseas Japanese companies in Australia. These were communication problems, work culture, cultural distance, and expatriate position. The findings, thus, suggest that sources of role stress in a mono-cultural context are not necessarily applicable in an intercultural context. This is in line with researchers' (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992) arguments that it is questionable whether Role Theory developed in a US-based context is applicable to international or intercultural contexts.

Third, the current study also demonstrated that role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) incurs disaffection among staff. It influenced the degree of disconnection between staff in Japanese companies in Australia.

Fourth, Japanese companies in Australia were found to be composed of four groupings of staff. This result contradicts previous studies (Dedoussis 1994; Kidahashi 1987; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33) which suggest that overseas Japanese companies are composed of two groupings, local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. It demonstrates that Japanese companies overseas have been



changing, and that four groupings of staff need to be considered by management when new managerial practices are planned and implemented.

Fifth, a link between role stress and coping strategies was identified in this doctoral dissertation. This involves the inter-relatedness of role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies with one another. Thus, experiences of role ambiguity and role conflict should be considered when coping strategies are implemented.

## **1.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides the background to and an overview of the dissertation. The research problems are outlined and the three research questions are presented. This study examines the management of managerial and non-managerial white collar staff in Japanese companies in Australia, and the ultimate aim is to reveal methods to improve the existing problematic intercultural situation. The research problems address the difficulties that exist in overseas Japanese companies, and the areas of investigation necessary to accomplish the aims of the thesis. Subsequently, the methodology adopted in this study is justified. The limitations and contributions of this study in the field of management of overseas Japanese companies, Role Theory, and coping strategies are briefly presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of the literature review is to identify research gaps in the management of Japanese companies in Australia. The literature review chapter consists of three parts. The first part examines the problems that exist in overseas Japanese companies. The second part is a review of Role Theory which is, the theoretical framework used in this dissertation. The relevance of Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) as both a framework for the current study and for understanding intercultural management in overseas Japanese companies will be explained and justified. The first two research questions of this dissertation are presented in this part.

The final part of the literature review focuses on reducing role stress in overseas Japanese companies. It consists of two sub-sections. First, it reviews suggestions on how to reduce role stress. These suggestions have been put forward by researchers on overseas Japanese companies and are not based on empirical findings. Second, the literature on coping strategies is reviewed. The final research question of this thesis is also presented.

## **2.2 PROBLEMS OF OVERSEAS JAPANESE COMPANIES**

Past studies have identified problems in managing white collar employees in overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004). Four significant problem areas have been identified. These are (1) communication, (2) job distribution, (3) participation of local staff, and (4) Japanese expatriate's role as link-pins.

### **2.2.1 Communication**

Communication is one of the most common problems encountered by local staff and Japanese managers in overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Bamber et al. 1992; Hori 1982). This section reviews these problems in communication focusing on how and why such barriers exist. It involves two areas, differences in communication style and language competency. The review seeks to clarify the communication problems existing between local staff and Japanese expatriates. The link between communication problems and role ambiguity in overseas Japanese companies will also be established.

#### **2.2.1.1 Communication Problems**

Communication barriers exist between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriates (e.g. Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005; Farid 1990; Ishida 1988, p. 80; Linowes 1993, p. 29; Tokusei 1994). Local managers find that explanations, instructions or directions provided by Japanese managers are frequently imprecise, abstruse or ambiguous (Linowes 1993, p. 29; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Trevor 1989; Yamanaka 1991). Instructions or directives are often left unclear or indeterminate and this can result in misunderstanding (Tokusei 1994; Yamanaka 1991).

These communication barriers involve clashes of communication styles between people in the West and Japan, which provokes emotional mal feeling and conflict (Hall 1966; Hall & Hall 1987; Hayashi 1988, pp. 121-122; Imai 1981, pp. 3-13; Kobayashi 1997; Peltokopri 2006; Sato 1992, pp. 93-94; Simon 1991).

The associated challenges are recognized as arising from differences in communication style (Linowes 1993, p. 29; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Yamanaka 1991), as well as differences in culture and language (e.g. Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 24; Dawson 1994; Iida 1985; Yamanaka 1991; Pucik et al. 1989; Simon 1991).

#### 2.2.1.2 Communication Style

Hall (1989) distinguishes cultures according to context and the level of dependency on context. According to Hall, culture can be classified as being either high context or low context. Japan is regarded as a country with a high context culture and its communication style is characterized as implicit and ambiguous meaning that reliance on linguistic information is limited (Hall 1989). Instead, there is higher level of dependency on information other than linguistic such as culture, knowledge, and situational and circumstantial conditions. Thus, in order to understand a message it is necessary to be familiar with the culture, knowledge, and context of the situation.

In a low context culture, on the other hand, a reliance on language in communication is far greater than that of a high context culture, and information is generally articulated in a clear and explicit manner. Hall (1989) explains that many Western countries are low context cultures, and that there is a difference in communication between the West and Japan in this regard.

Literature on communication styles in the West and Japan demonstrate Hall's cultural classification (1989) where Western style communication is described as direct, straightforward, and explicit (Hall 1966; Hall & Hall 1987; Hayashi 1988, pp. 121-122; Imai 1981, pp. 3-13; Kagawa 2001, pp. 12-35; Kobayashi, 1997; Peltokopri 2006; Sato 1992, pp. 93-94; Simon 1991; Yashiro 1996). In contrast, the Japanese style of communication possesses opposite features. Ishii and her associates (1996, pp. 125-128) claims Japanese communication involves '*Sasshi*' (guessing) and as a consequence people draw inferences at the interpretation stage using various cues such as culture and the context of the situation. There are a variety of terms employed to illustrate the features of Japanese communication style, all of which

exhibit a vague, uncertain, or ambiguous nature (Hall & Hall 1987, p. 61; Goldman 1994).

For instance, the expression 'Say 1, know 10' indicates that when a major point is articulated, that is '1' or 10 percent of the message; the listener is expected to be able to elicit the details that comprise the remaining 90 percent of the message, that is, 'know 10' or 100 percent of the message. The expectation is that a listener will be able to decipher the whole message when provided with only 10 percent of the information. Expressing the entire message can indicate a tendency to be pushy or patronizing to the listener (Kagawa 1997, p. 68-69). This expression, hence, requires '*Sasshi*' (guessing).

Similarly, the term '*ki o kikasu*' (to use one's mind and be considerate) refers to the listener's ability to infer what is required to satisfy the speaker's expectations and act accordingly (Kindaichi & Ikeda 1996, p. 423). In this manner, the terms describing a Japanese style of communication require '*sasshi*' (guessing) content that is not articulated and deducing the expectations of the speaker. Action is then decided upon on the basis of the listener's own judgment. This indicates the need to comprehend what is not verbalized and act accordingly.

When a Japanese style of communication is in operation between local staff and a Japanese manager, local staff are confronted with the challenging task of guessing the non-verbalized elements as expected by the Japanese manager. Past studies have identified communication barriers (Hall & Hall 1987; Hayashi 1988, pp. 121-122; Peltokopri 2006) and local staff's experiences of uncertainty or ambiguity in communication with Japanese managers (Linowes 1993, p. 29; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Tokusei 1994; Yamanaka 1991). Uncertainty and lack of clarity are central themes in role ambiguity (Hardy 1978, p. 82), and the experiences of local staff, thus, refer to experiences of role ambiguity. This suggests that local staff's role ambiguity involves guessing.

### 2.2.1.3 Language Competency

This section reviews the English language competency of Japanese expatriate staff and illustrates the linkage between their language competency and role ambiguity among staff in overseas Japanese companies.

Language competency is recognized as crucial for successful intercultural management (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Takeuchi et al. 2002, p. 1237; Welch et al. 2001, p. 198). For overseas Japanese companies, establishing good relationships with local staff is critical for expatriate staff (Kakabadse et al. 1996; Peltokorpi 2006), and language competence is a vital tool for developing effective personal relations (Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935). This is greatly facilitated by the ability to understand another culture and to thereby enable expatriate staff to adjust to the host country (Mendenhall & Oddou 1985).

Conversely, lack of language competency can cause divisions among staff in a company (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935), and indicates a lack of understanding about another culture. Language is also recognized as the largest barrier to knowledge flow in intercultural organizations (Ford & Chan 2003). Lack of language competency, therefore, is pertinent to a lack of understanding of corporate culture and staff from different cultural backgrounds in overseas Japanese companies.

Research has demonstrated that the level of English language competency among Japanese managers in the West is insufficient for managing staff in the host country (Byun & Ybema 2005; Clark & Lipp 1998, p. 24; Dawson 1994; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 421; Yoshihara 2001). Their level of competency has been described as mediocre (Lincoln et al. 1995, pp. 421-422), and there are many mistakes in English pronunciation and grammar made at meetings (Pucik et al. 1989, p. 73). This suggests that explaining issues fully and clearly using English is an arduous task for Japanese and can result in lack of effective communication.

Language competency endows staff with more power and this in turn leads to the development of an extensive communication network (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8).

This may extend beyond their official title or employment status in the company (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Kidahashi 1987, p. 102; Welch et al. 2001, p. 198). Communication networks are important as they can influence access to information (Kidahashi 1987, p. 102; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1997). An informal communication network, in particular, relies heavily on language competency (Rice 1986, p. 198).

The literature cited above (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 9; Kidahashi 1987, p. 102; Welch et al. 2001, p. 198) suggests that Japanese staff with the appropriate level of language competency have the potential to enjoy power and advantages. It also signifies that insufficient competency in the English language by Japanese may hinder development of communication networks among local staff and Japanese staff, as well as limiting the level of shared information between them. As a result, the overall experience is of a lack of information.

Research on overseas Japanese companies in the West reveals that Japanese expatriate managers prefer to communicate in Japanese and spend time among themselves (Byun & Ybema 2005; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, p. 199). As they lack proficiency in English they are reluctant to communicate in this language (Takeuchi et al. 2002, p. 1237). Lack of competence in English, therefore, limits the frequency of communication between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff in a company.

The reviews above indicate that an insufficient level of language competency can give rise to lack of clarity, communication, and information, which are the key components of role ambiguity (Kahn et al. 1964). English language competency among Japanese staff, therefore, has a direct effect on the experience of role ambiguity among staff of Japanese companies in Australia.

Although management acknowledges the need for development of communication skills, it has failed to carry through and address the need to improve the existing levels of communication skill (Pucik et al. 1989, p. 77; Saka 2004). Consequently, this problem remains unresolved and underestimated (Pucik et al. 1989, p. 77; Saka 2004). Similarly, despite the significance of language competence, researchers have

not investigated language issues in relation to intercultural management to any significant degree (Feely & Harzing 2004, pp. 5-8; Welch et al. 2001, p. 193-198; Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Takeuchi et al. 2002, p. 1237).

As stated above, an insufficient level of English language competency involves the key components of role ambiguity such as lack of clarity, communication, and information (Kahn et al. 1964) among staff in a company. The reviews of this section, therefore, show that the level of competency of Japanese staff in the English language is directly related to role ambiguity. Hence, it is of critical importance to take language competency into account when exploring role ambiguity in Japanese companies in Australia.

### **2.2.2 Job Distribution**

The manner in which jobs are distributed among staff is peculiar to Japanese companies (Shimada 1998, p. 7; Whitehill 1991). Employees find the range of their responsibilities to be elusive and ambiguous (Ishida 1985, 1994; Hayashi 1994, 1996). This section illustrates the problem as represented by role ambiguity, and raises the question as to what part ambiguity plays in terms of job distribution.

#### **2.2.2.1 Ambiguity in Job Distribution**

One of the confusing, aggravating, and elusive issues for local staff in overseas Japanese companies is uncertainty in relation to the scope of their duties, and the way tasks are distributed among staff (Ishida 1986, 1994; Hayashi 1994, 1996). Local staff members experience job demarcation as failing to be explicit and authority as being extremely low (Ishida 1986, 1994; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Yamanaka 1991). Information on fundamental organizational practices is also felt to be deficient (Ishida 1985, 1994; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Yamanaka 1991). The result is that local staff have to infer what the Japanese manager is thinking and expecting of them without being told. This is a difficult and unfamiliar task for locals leaving them feeling uncomfortable and confused (Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 45-46). They are unable



to grasp exactly what is expected of them (Trevor 1989) and are eager to receive precise instructions and explanations (White & Trevor 1983, p. 112).

Similar to the dissatisfaction of local staff, Japanese managers also have negative impressions of the host country staff. The Japanese experience frustration over the need to explain things to locals which they regard as readily understandable. They resent the need to repeat instructions every time they wish tasks to be undertaken (Trevor 1989). Thus, they often complain about local staff as being '*ki ga kikanai*' (cannot/do not use one's mind and be considerate) (Ishida 1986, pp. 165-169).

Japanese managers are accustomed to a high level of job flexibility involving overlapping jobs and collective authority, with support received from colleagues including collaboration across functional boundaries (Wooldridge 1995).

When local staff members refuse to undertake duties not included in their job description (Byun & Ybema 2005; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 421), Japanese managers regard this as lack of cooperation and flexibility, as well as an avoidance of job responsibility (Ishida 1994). They also complain that locals only do what they are told to do and fail to show initiative in going beyond that point (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994). Japanese managers feel that local staff members regard their job description as a protection from carrying out extra tasks (Byun & Ybema 2005).

In addition to job flexibility, managers in Japan expect a work environment where their employees routinely work longer hours (Byun & Ybema 2005). According to Ericsson and Fujii (1995, p. 30), "*overtime is a natural and obvious part of working life*" and the expectation of Japanese employees to be flexible in working hours is a notable feature of Japanese companies. Japanese managers are, therefore, dissatisfied with the 'nine-to-five' mentality of local staff as they leave work at the prescribed work completion time (Byun & Ybema 2005).

Overall, Japanese expatriate managers perceive local staff as showing a lack of initiative (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Trevor 1989) and autonomy (Lincoln et al. 1995, pp. 425-426), as well as being apathetic and passive (White & Trevor

1983, p. 112). Although these frustrations and dissatisfactions are often caused by well-intentioned behavior on the part of local staff, conflict can develop between locals and Japanese managers (Ishida 1994). Managing local staff, who are used to different work practices from Japanese work practices, is thus a challenging task for Japanese managers (Wooldridge 1995).

#### 2.2.2.2 Job Distribution in Japanese Companies in Japan

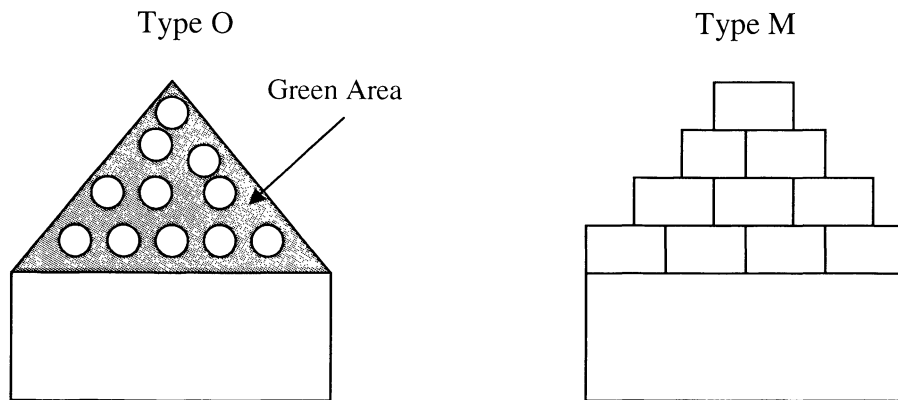
In Japanese companies in Japan, job distribution is unclear (Drummond 1992; Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986; Nonaka 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Whitehill 1991, p. 177; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997), and heavy reliance is placed on implicit rules (e.g. Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986; Nonaka 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997).

Ishida (1986, 1994) explains how duties are distributed in Japanese companies as compared to Western companies. According to Ishida, there are no clear descriptions of duties and no clear demarcation of duties among staff in Japanese companies. Instead, there are broad common or shared duties in which peers, senior staff, or groups participate. This requires a high level of job flexibility. Following Ishida's early work (1986, 1994), job flexibility in the current study is defined as the level of flexibility exhibited by staff to carry out broad common duties. There is no clear demarcation of duties among staff in Japanese organizations (Ishida 1986, 1994). Ishida (1986, 1994) states that a high level of job flexibility is extremely important to meet the needs of changing situational, client, and or environmental demands. In contrast, the duties of each staff member are explicitly described in Western companies, and the demarcation of duties is clear (Hayashi 1996; Ishida 1994). Hence, Western staff find it difficult to work in Japanese companies.

In a similar discussion to that of Ishida (1986, 1994), Hayashi (1996) points out that the distribution of duties in Japanese companies is a source of problems in overseas Japanese companies. He names this type of Japanese company as Type O as opposed to Type M as seen in Western companies, and refers to common duties as the 'green area' (Hayashi 1996 p. 58). He depicts this situation in the following figure (see

Figure 2.1). This is comparable to Ishida's (1986, 1994) suggestions.

Figure 2.1 Type O and M organizations



(Hayashi 1996, p. 57)

Type M is a typical Western organization where all duties are clearly distributed to each individual. The triangle in Type O indicates management and administration, and the square box below represents clerical or floor level duties. The circles are a particular individual's routine or specialized personal duties conducted, for example, by a section chief or manager. The duties in the triangle, excluding the circles, indicate the common duties or 'green area'.

Since the duties within the green area require the involvement of multiple personnel to carry them out and to share responsibilities, collaborative work is necessary along with a high level of information sharing among staff in order to complete the task efficiently. In this sense, Japanese companies have been found to be unique among the companies of 80 countries in terms of the way duties are carried out (Hayashi 1996, p. 56). Employees in Western companies are unfamiliar with the need to figure out their duties and the expectations of others, so the green area is experienced by them as a 'grey' area (Hayashi 1996, p. 65). Both claims made by Ishida (1986, 1994) and Hayashi (1996) involve uncertainty and ambiguous experiences. These are the central themes of role ambiguity (Hardy 1978, p. 82), and job distribution in Japanese companies is directly related to role ambiguity.

Hayashi's claim (1996) differs from that of Ishida (1986, 1994) in the analysis of how local staff perceive the duties within green areas in relation to their experiences of role ambiguity. It thus contrasts with Ishida's claim (1986, 1994) that role ambiguity among local staff is about how jobs are distributed, and refers to the lack of clarity and information about job distribution. Hayashi (1996 p. 64) explains that these duties are clear from the viewpoint of Japanese staff, and that this constitutes the green area. They understand what to do and how to do it without need of an explanation. However, the duties are not 'green' but 'grey' from the perspective of Western staff.

Corresponding to Hayashi's argument (1996), Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996, p. 14) and Murayama (1984) claim that there is a fundamental difference in the understanding as to what constitutes 'sharing' between Western and Japanese people. Japanese companies do not adopt a 'division of labor' but 'a shared division of labor' (Nonaka 1990, p. 32), and the connotation of sharing duties for the Japanese is 'duplication' (Murayama 1984). Thus, the duties in a Japanese company in Japan demonstrate components of redundancy or overlapping, which are valued features in Japanese companies (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14).

In contrast, 'sharing' is perceived as meaning 'dividing' in the West (Murayama 1984), and for Westerners, 'duplication' in sharing duties as seen in Japanese companies is considered a 'waste' (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14). These arguments suggest that local staff's role ambiguity involves a lack of understanding about what constitutes the sharing of duties, and as a result they experience uncertainty in carrying out common duties. Although various components of role ambiguity have been identified in the past (Kahn et al. 1964; King & King 1990; Shenker & Zeira 1992), the factor of lack of understanding about the meaning of 'sharing' duties has not been raised, to the researcher's knowledge.

Hayashi's argument (1996), combined with the differing understandings of 'sharing', leads to the suggestion that local staff's role ambiguity involves a lack of understanding about how to carry out common duties. Moreover, local and Japanese staff experience role ambiguity in performing common duties differently.

Past studies on overseas Japanese companies have revealed that local staff's ambiguous experiences involve a lack of explicitness in job demarcation and authority (Ishida 1985, 1994; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Yamanaka 1991). However, these studies did not examine the extent to which overseas Japanese companies practice the Japanese style of boundary-less job distribution, nor how local staff are informed about their jobs, and how they understand their scope of responsible duties in relation to the information obtained. Hence, whether or not their role ambiguity involves lack of clarity about their duties, and whether or not it involves a difference in understanding 'sharing', has not been confirmed.

A job description is essentially a description of a role (Van Dyne et al. 1995) which assists in the reduction of role ambiguity (Organ & Greene 1981). Thus, job description plays a key role in informing staff about their duties, and what they understand about their own duties in the company. Studies on role ambiguity in overseas Japanese companies should, thus, take into account how local staff understand their duties in relation to their job description and what, if anything, they perceive as ambiguous or elusive. This would provide understanding as to what they experience in terms of role ambiguity, and what solutions would be pertinent.

As reviewed above, there is a need for research on what constitutes role ambiguity among local staff. The influence of cultural background on the experience of role ambiguity when carrying out common duties needs to be explored. Furthermore, role stress among local Japanese staff working for overseas Japanese companies has been overlooked, and there is little information available on this issue. Investigation in these areas is, thus, required.

### **2.2.3 Participation of Local Staff**

Participation of local staff is another problem area in overseas Japanese companies (Lincoln et al. 1995; Pucik 1990). This section reviews the experiences of local staff due to lack of participation in information sharing and decision making. It examines the link between participation and role conflict.

#### **2.2.3.1 Lack of Participation of Local Staff**

Participation in information sharing and decision making is a crucial activity particularly for managers, and continual updating on information is related to a decrease of anxiety as well as the development of trust (Donovan 1984). In relation to this, the literature reveals that local staff are dissatisfied with what they experience as an insufficient level of participation in sharing information, and consequently feel alienated (Bamber et al. 1992; Donovan 1984; Hayashi 1996; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 435; Pucik 1990; Yoshihara 2001). This was also found to be the case in Australia (Iida 1985; Yamanaka 1991).

Local managers feel that a method of systematic and strategic information sharing is not developed in overseas Japanese companies (Pucik 1990). They do not receive sufficient information from Japanese expatriate managers on corporate plans and policies (Bamber et al. 1992), and other strategic information (Pucik et al. 1989, p. 40). Local managers, therefore, tend to make assumptions about what is going on concerning the company (Donovan 1984). Correspondingly, Japanese managers are reluctant to impart information to local managers (Pucik et al. 1990; White & Trevor 1983, p. 108; Heise 1989).

Similarly, in the decision making process, the level of participation by local staff is low leading to feelings of estrangement and frustration (Ishida 1988 p. 88; Simon 1991; Stening & Yamaguchi 1981, p. 30; Yamanaka 1991). Local managers are also frustrated by insufficient opportunities to participate in strategic planning (Simon 1991).

Past studies reveal that the Japanese style of decision making processes, '*ringi*' and

*'nemawashi'* (see section 2.2.3.3), both methods of consensus-based participation processes, are practiced in overseas Japanese companies (Iida 1985; Trevor 1983, pp. 136-141). This informal activity, *'nemawashi'*, is practiced predominantly among Japanese managers (Iida 1985; Trevor 1983, pp. 136-142), and local staff are excluded from the process. Similar results have been found in Japanese companies in Australia (Dedoussis 1990, 1994; Dedoussis & Littler 1994).

A common example is provided when important discussions are found to have taken place in communications with Head Office rather than at formal meetings. Discussion is pursued informally during 'after five drinking sessions' among Japanese managers where an intimate network of expatriates is developed (Byham & Dixon 1993; Whitehill 1991; Yoshihara 1989). Since these activities require close proximity and shared cultural values, bringing local managers into these activities is considered to be too difficult by Japanese managers (Wooldridge 1995). Local managers are thus not able to participate in these activities and they lack the ability to develop such network relationships (Byham & Dixon 1993). Corresponding relationships to those that develop among Japanese managers are not built between local managers and Japanese managers (Wooldridge 1995).

In some cases even senior local managers or executives are excluded. Simon (1991) explains that Japanese managers informally interact with other Japanese managers without any advance consultation with, or approval from senior local executives. Instead, they are simply notified later of the results or decisions taken by Japanese managers. These incidents indicate that the position held in an overseas Japanese company does not necessarily accurately portray the reality, real authority or decision making power (Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 45-46). Managerial positions are allocated to local staff as a means of showing progress in the adaptation of overseas Japanese companies to local conditions. It therefore resembles a 'façade' (White & Trevor 1983, p. 155; Kidahashi 1987, p. 85). These local managers are referred to as 'cosmetic change' (White & Trevor 1983, p. 155) and 'sign equipment' (Kidahashi 1987, p. 85).

Behind the scenes of such a 'cosmetic change', Japanese management maintains its

monopoly on power (Kidahashi 1987, pp. 75-80; Ikezoe 2002, p. 96; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 40; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, pp. 200-201; Yoshihara 2001) and its own method of informal mechanisms in offshore offices (White & Trevor 1983, p. 155). Thus, although both local staff and Japanese staff may hold managerial positions, actual authority and power between them may differ greatly (Ishida 1985, pp. 188-189). In contrast to the renowned Japanese style of decision making known as 'consensus base' or 'bottom up' as against 'top-down' in the US, the style of decision making in offshore offices tends, in fact, to be 'top-down' (Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 45-47) and autocratic. Thus, the process is not consensus-based (Negandhi et al. 1985, pp. 99-101).

The result of these activities is that local staff feel their level of participation, and the authority and delegation bestowed on them to be insufficient (Shimada 1998, pp. 6-7). They feel they are treated as 'second-class citizens' and experience feelings of inferiority under Japanese ways of managing local staff (Haitani 1990; Hori 1982). Their stressful experiences indicate that there is little correspondence in expectations between local staff and Japanese managers. Role conflict involves unmet expectations between the role sender and focal person (Katz & Kahn 1978), and the experiences of local staff in overseas Japanese companies, therefore, represents role conflict. The exclusion of local staff appears to have a bearing on language competency as well as features of Japanese companies in Japan. The following sections provide a review on these issues.

#### 2.2.3.2 Participation and Japanese Language Usage

Past studies on overseas Japanese companies have revealed that the Japanese language is often used in their offshore offices (Byun & Ybema 2005, Yoshihara 2001). This includes meetings (Byun & Ybema 2005; Kidahashi 1987, p. 108; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 73; Yoshihara 2001), discussions about confidential or important information (White & Trevor 1983, p. 139; Yoshihara 2001), and communications with Head Office (Byun & Ybema 2005; White & Trevor 1983, p. 110; Yoshihara 1989). Despite a company rule which states English should be used at work (Byun & Ybema 2005; Kidahashi 1987, p. 111; White & Trevor 1983, p. 139), Japanese is the



predominant language used in correspondence between subsidiaries and Head Office (White & Trevor 1983, p. 110; Yoshihara 2001).

Japanese is used extensively in decision making (Byun & Ybema 2005; Kidahashi 1987, p. 108; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 73; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, p. 199; Yoshihara 2001). This results in a low level of information sharing among staff. Local staff, therefore, feel alienated and are unhappy with the situation (Ishida 1988, p. 80). This exclusion of local staff deprives them of active participation in the business activities of the company and circumscribes their career advancement opportunities (Feely & Harzing 2003, p. 48).

The reason given for the use of Japanese language is the lack of English competence among Japanese staff members (Byun & Ybema 2005; Yoshihara 2001). This type of overseas Japanese company is described as having a 'dual linguistic structure' (Kidahashi 1987, p. 102). Yoshihara (2001) describes the management of overseas Japanese companies as "managed by Japanese and in Japanese".

The above review suggests that Japanese language usage is linked to the exclusion of local staff, and a study investigating the exclusion of local staff must consider Japanese language usage.

#### 2.2.3.3 Information Sharing and Decision Making in Japanese Companies in Japan

The style of decision making in Japan has two components: formal and informal. Formal processes include meetings held after a consensus has been achieved by the informal activity '*nemawashi*', the ground work conducted to gain consensus from every member, and '*Ringi-sho*' (proposal) described as "simply the official memorization of a plan or strategy" (Kato & Kato 1992, p. 51). This process includes intense interaction among staff including after work hours both inside and outside the workplace (Ala & Cordeiro 1999, p. 23; Hall 1985, p. 20; Hayashi 1988, pp. 125-130; Maher & Wong 1994; Takatsuji 1985). Many important issues are discussed in these informal interactions (Ala & Cordeiro 1999, p. 23; Hall 1985, p. 20; Hayashi 1988, pp. 125-130; Maher & Wong 1994; Takatsuji 1985). Davies and

Ikeno (2002, pp. 161-162) explain that the activity of '*nemawashi*' or informal process, plays a significant role in reaching consensus and is an indispensable process.

The above literature identifies a number of strengths of Japanese style decision making. The formal process where a proposal is taken to all the participants for approval ensures everybody understands what is going on in the company (Ala & Cordeiro 1999, p. 23; Umeshima & Dalesio 1993; Sullivan 1992). This illustrates a high level of information sharing among staff. It also assists in reducing uncertainty as well as obtaining an acceptance of outcomes among employees (Hall 1985).

As for the informal processes, Takatsuji (1985, pp. 165-168) points out that the informal activity, '*nemawashi*', induces emotional affinity among the '*namawashi*' players, and that it is conducive to building a sense of camaraderie. Thus, a skilled '*namawashi*' player is able to develop expanding positive relations in a company. Takatsuji (1985, pp. 165-168) further states that Japanese managers tend to have a preference in working with subordinates who actively participate in this process.

The above strengths suggest that the decision making process also enhances conformity, commitment, personal relationships, and creates a cooperative corporate working environment. These strengths demonstrate that intense interaction and informal communication among staff are prerequisites for the efficient, collaborative operation of a company. As reviewed earlier, there are communication barriers between Japanese managers and local staff (see section 2.2.1.1), and insufficient English competency among Japanese staff limits the frequency of their communications with local staff (see section 2.2.1.3). This demonstrates that if overseas Japanese companies continue to practice these methods of sharing information and making decisions, it will create barriers to local managers' ability to participate in these practices with Japanese managers.

#### 2.2.3.4 Participation of Japanese Expatriates and Local Managers

Local staff may feel estranged due to cultural confusion and the lack of trust evident between themselves and expatriates and/or Head Office (Hall 1990). Trust and communication with Head Office are claimed as keys to increasing levels of participation in the decision making process for local managers and executives (Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 45-49).

The literature indicates that exclusion occurs primarily among local staff (Lincoln et al. 1995; Shimada 1998, pp. 6-7; Yoshihara 2001). Few researchers raise issues concerning the estrangement of expatriate staff (Byun & Ybema 2005; Peltokorpi 2006) where expatriates with insufficient language competency are likely to be alienated by local staff from obtaining information on their subsidiary (Welch et al. 2001, p. 199). To support this claim, a study on a Japanese company in Holland revealed that Japanese expatriates experienced rejection in regard to participating in sales meetings (Byun & Ybema 2005). The reason given was that local staff wished to discuss matters at a deeper level (Byun & Ybema 2005).

Similarly, a study on a subsidiary of a Nordic company located in Japan (Peltokorpi 2006) revealed interesting findings. In the subsidiary office in Japan, Nordic expatriates and locally hired Japanese staff worked together within the same company. Although exclusion of staff was found in this study, the staff excluded were not, however, local Japanese staff but Nordic expatriates.

Peltokorpi's (2006) study revealed that local Japanese managers maintained a strong control over business operations in the subsidiary office in Japan, and refused to acknowledge the power held by Nordic expatriates as legitimate. Furthermore, Nordic expatriates were not provided with sufficient information, and were not fully integrated with local Japanese staff. This was so despite the fact that Nordic expatriates officially held higher power and authority than those of the local Japanese managers, and Nordic expatriates had a closer link with Head Office.

These findings contrast with those of overseas Japanese companies where local staff are the ones who experience exclusion, and Japanese expatriate staff are the ones who exclude the local staff (Lincoln et al. 1995; Shimada 1998; Yoshihara 2001).

The literature (Byun & Ybemba 2005; Peltokorpi 2006), thus, indicates that both local managers and Japanese expatriate staff of Japanese companies in Australia can experience exclusion, and attention should be paid to both types of staff in terms of this type of role conflict.

#### **2.2.4. Japanese Expatriates as Link-Pins**

A previous study on role stress by Tokusei (1994) revealed that Japanese managers experience role conflict when attempting to fulfill a role that requires spanning boundaries. The role conflict found in her study includes coordination between Head Office and its offshore office, and coordination between affiliates and the offshore office. Other studies also reveal this problem (Ikezoe 2002, p. 96; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 40; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, pp. 200-201; Taga 2004, pp. 61-62).

Tokusei (1994) also found that within an offshore office in the US, Japanese managers experienced role conflict when playing the role of link-pin between top management and local American staff, and between customers or suppliers and the offshore office. Researchers claim that a person playing a link-pin role is prone to experience role stress (Behrman & Perreault 1984; Kahn et al. 1964; Sager 1994; Singh et al. 1994). Tokusei (1994) states that such stress is primarily due to the dual roles of employee of the Head Office in Japan and an official position in the offshore office in the US.

Researchers on overseas Japanese companies acknowledge Head Office exerts a strong control over a local office (Bamber et al. 1992; Hall 1986; Ishida 1988, p. 65, 1989; Lincoln et al. 1995, pp. 425-427; Pucik 1990; Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 34-35; Rice 1986), and a local office is closely connected with Head Office (Dedoussis & Littler 1994; Ishida 1988, p. 65; Lincoln et al. 1995; Kustin & Jones 1995; White &

Trevor 1983, p. 140). Thus, the communication with Head Office is intense (White & Trevor 1983).

Important positions are held primarily by Japanese expatriates sent by Head Office (Byun & Ybema 2005; Dedoussis, 1994; Dedoussis & Littler 1994; Gong 2003; Haitani 1990; Taga 2004, p. 32; Tolich et al. 1999; Yoshihara 2001), and apparently the number of expatriates sent by Japanese companies to their offshore offices is greater than in other multinational companies (Chung et al. 2006; Ishida 1985, p. 69; Lehrer & Asakawa 2003).

It is, therefore, Japanese expatriates who are the primary communicators between local office and Head Office (Ikezoe 2002, p. 96; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 40; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, pp. 200-201), and local staff perceive expatriates' primary concern as being with Head Office rather than the local office (Heise 1989) seeking direction from Head Office (Shimada 1998, pp. 6-7).

Sending nationals from the parent company to overseas subsidiaries enables Head Office to control and monitor the business activities of their overseas subsidiaries (Harzing 2001a; Schuler et al. 1993). These expatriates are competent in introducing Head Office's corporate culture and practice into overseas subsidiaries (Rosenzweig & Singh, 1991). In particular, the practice of transferring expatriates for the purpose of control and coordination of overseas subsidiaries is prevalent in Japanese multinational companies (Harzing 2001b).

Head Office in Japan relies heavily on expatriates to manage overseas subsidiaries, and dependence on local staff is regarded as of much less consequence from the perspective of both Japanese expatriates and Head Office (Chung et al. 2006; Linowes 1993, p. 32; Taga 2004, p. 34; Tolich et al. 1999; Wooldridge 1995; Yoshihara 2001). Haitani (1990, p. 247) proffers the explanation that expatriate managers sent by Head Office display characteristics such as obligation and loyalty, and they possess a great deal of knowledge about the company, its people, and corporate culture. They are, therefore, regarded as members of the corporate family, and for this reason Head Office relies strongly on Japanese expatriates (Haitani 1990,

p. 247). Local staff are not considered to be members of the corporate family but members of their offshore office, so that they are discriminated against (Haitani 1990, p. 247). Thus, the employment status of staff in terms of whether they are employed by Head Office or not, equates to the level to which Head Office is prepared to depend on them (Haitani 1990, p. 247).

Ishida (1988, p. 65) argues that Head Office relies on local staff who have a good understanding of the organization's corporate culture, Japanese culture, and language. It includes proficiency in understanding Japanese culture, corporate culture and customs, as well as Japanese language skills. Unless staff in overseas Japanese companies are equipped with these requirements, Head Office will not extend trust to them and they will not be allocated important positions (Ishida 1988, p. 67). Primary responsibilities are, therefore, laid on Japanese expatriate staff (White & Trevor 1983).

A local office is, hence, described as operating under 'direct ruling'. This term refers to Head Office controlling their local offices by transferring their staff to local offices (Ishida 1988, p. 65). This creates a division in companies where Japanese expatriates are the 'core' workforce and locals operate as a 'peripheral' workforce occupying lower level positions with limited career opportunities (Dedoussis 1990, 1994; Dedoussis & Littler 1994). This division exposes overseas Japanese companies as comprising two groups, namely local staff and a second group consisting of expatriates and Head Office (Dedoussis 1994; Kidahashi 1987; White & Trevor 1983; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33).

The strong control exerted by Head Office, its close link with local offices, and its heavy reliance on Japanese expatriates, thus has a bearing on the inter-role conflict of Japanese expatriate staff (see section 2.3.3), with Japanese expatriate staff also appearing to reinforce the alienation of locals.

The necessity for a strong reliance on Japanese expatriate staff and a close tie between local and Head Office as a source of exclusion is questionable today. Contrary to the statement that the number of expatriate staff sent by Japanese

companies to offshore offices is higher than other multi-cultural companies (Chung et al. 2006; Ishida 1985, p. 69; Leher & Asakawa 2003), the number of expatriate staff has in fact been declining in overseas Japanese companies (Kranias 2000, 2001; Paik & Sohn 2004). This is due to the high costs involved and has resulted in greater reliance being placed on local managers (Kranias 2000, 2001; Paik & Sohn 2004). This situation has also been confirmed in Japanese companies located in Australia (Taga 2004).

An example of the trend towards a weakening of the reliance on Japanese expatriates and a concomitant increase in the reliance on non-Japanese local managers is that non-Japanese local managers are sent to Head Office for a few years in order to broaden their understanding of the company. They are then returned to their home country to control the subsidiary office in a manner typical of Japanese expatriate staff (Paik & Sohn 2004, p. 68). In this instance, the role conflict of Japanese expatriate staff who act as link-pins may be significantly reduced.

Role conflict experienced by playing a link-pin role between Head Office and the offshore office, therefore, may be more concerned with the extent of Head Office control and on whom Head Office relies in managing the offshore office rather than such matters as whether or not staff are employed by Head Office or the cultural group to which staff belong. It is, thus, probable that local managers may experience role conflict as a result of playing a role as a link-pin.

### **2.2.5 Informal Management Processes in Japanese Companies**

Informal management processes are commonly carried out within Japanese companies in Japan (Jackson & Tomioka 2004, p. 158; Jaeger 1983; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997). Four features of informal management processes have been identified from the literature and will be reviewed in this section. This provides evidence that the problems reviewed in the sections above (see sections 2.2.1 – 2.2.4) are related to informal management processes, and an investigation of informal processes is imperative.

The first feature is concerned with an informal 'psychological contract' (Sparrow 1996; Makin et al. 1996). Psychological contracts exist in Japanese companies to a greater degree than in companies in the West (Jackson & Tomioka 2004, p. 158; Morishima 1996). According to Sparrow (1996, p. 77), these contracts are non-tangible forms of agreement as defined below:

They are open-ended agreements on what is given and what is to be received and amalgamations of unwritten individual contracts concerned with the social and emotional aspects of exchanges between employer and employee. They represent a set of unwritten reciprocal expectations between an individual employee and the organization.

In the case of Japanese companies, behaviors such as long work hours (Duerr & Duerr 1997), and showing cooperative attitudes and loyalty are expected by management (Alarid & Wang 1997). These exist as tacit expectations between juniors and superiors in Japanese companies, as illustrated by Jackson and Tomioka (2004, p. 150): "*You know what I/we expect of you, I/we know what you expect of us, and (through your experience of induction and ongoing experience of learning in this particular organization) I/we know that you know what I/we expect*".

The tacit expectations existing in Japanese companies involve being able to think from another individual's perspective (Murayama 1984), informal rules and tacit communication (Ishida 1985, pp. 12-14), tacit understandings (Hilmer & Donaldson 1996, p. 115; Rice 1986, p. 124), imagination, anticipation, and intuition (De Mente 1994, pp. 13-14; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 229). Hence, the psychological contract refers to an informal level of management which governs employee's attitudes and behaviors. Thus, employees are required to understand tacit expectations that are not available in a written form.

These expectations are reciprocal (Sparrow 1996, p. 77), and there is a strong interdependency between employee and management in Japanese companies (Goldman 1994, p. 33; Haitani 1990, pp. 238-239; Kato & Kato 1992; Naylor 2000; Whitley 1999; Schmidt 1996). Yoshimura and Anderson (1997, p. 57) explain that the establishment of an interdependent relationship brings advantages such as receiving help or favorable treatment. Examples include providing employees with



access to important or crucial information, being taken care of by senior members, and being protected by sharing responsibility and embarrassment.

Since Japanese employees acknowledge the benefits and importance of developing interdependent relationships, they are keen to learn how to meet the expectations placed on them (Kim & Nam 1998; Nisbett 2003; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997). Thus, their relationship is based on reciprocity and mutual obligations (Goldman 1994, p. 37; Haitani 1990; Naylor 2000; Whitley 1999; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997).

The strong interdependency between senior staff and subordinates is compared to that between a mother and a child, and is referred to as '*amae*' (strong dependency) relations by Doi (1989, 2004). He explains that an equivalent to the term '*amae*' does not exist in English. Its existence in Japan distinguishes it from other countries. It exists as a principle not only between people generally in society but also in all the interactions of Japanese including those in organizations (Doi 1989, 2004). Understanding relationships based on the concept of '*amae*' (strong dependency) is extremely difficult for non-Japanese (Kato & Kato 1992).

Employees make great efforts to perform to the best of their abilities and be patient expecting that these attributes will be rewarded by better career opportunities and salary increases (Rice 1986, p. 124). Such a relationship, thus, induces autonomous mutual cooperation and support (Haitani 1990). The efforts and sacrifice made in meeting expectations in these reciprocal relationships continue so long as an association continues with a person, even one who is not respected (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 29; Kato & Kato 1992, p. 2). Thus, without being specified in a written form, the effort to derive benefits from interdependent relationships naturally develops a particular set of behaviors which are anticipated and perceived as 'right' by their group members (Kim & Nam 1998; Nisbett 2003; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997). This is demonstrated by flexible working hours of employees in Japanese companies (Ericsson & Fujii 1995).

The unwritten expectation in the psychological contract is connected to role expectations and role behaviors. Role conflict is defined as incompatible expectations between a role sender and a focal person (Dubinsky et al. 1992; Katz & Kahn 1978; Gross et al. 1966, p. 288; Latack 1981), and when expectations are not explicitly stated, this can lead to incompatible expectations or role conflict. It thus suggests that exploring the tacit expectations that exist and how these are interpreted by staff is indispensable for the study of role conflict in Japanese companies.

The second feature of informal management processes concerns ambiguous and indirect styles of communication. As reviewed earlier (see section 2.2.1.2), guessing is crucial in communication among Japanese, and a focal person needs to grasp the expectations of the role sender by guessing and act accordingly (Ishii et al. 1996, pp. 125-128). Subordinates are not provided with precise instructions that are articulated clearly and fully (Nonaka 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14; Hayashi 2004, p. 364), and '*tatemae*' (façade or enunciated principle) is expressed in place of true feelings, '*honne*', in a company situation (Selmer 2001a). This is due to the importance of maintaining '*wa*' (harmony) in Japan (Davis & Ikeno 2002, pp. 9-15).

In Japan, developing group harmony is highly valued (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 29; Kagawa 1997, pp. 54-61; Kobayashi 1997; Tudor et al. 1996; Hayashi 1988; Whitehill 1991, p. 51) and carrying out day-to-day tasks is not smoothly facilitated when such harmonious relations are lacking (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 29). Davies and Ikeno (2002, pp. 9-15) explain that expressing negative feelings or criticizing others in an open communication is regarded as something to be avoided, and this is the cause of the ambiguity and indirectness that are ingrained in communications. Ambiguities and indirectness are, thus, described as 'lubricants in communication'.

For people to identify '*honne*' (true feeling) of others, communication in an informal and private atmosphere as well as emotional participation are indispensable (Imai 1981, pp. 12-13). In order to build harmony and good relations, spending time together after working hours is expected in a Japanese company (Selmer 2001a, p. 237). If local staff in overseas Japanese companies do not participate in these informal communications, then, they are unable to hear '*honne*' (the true feelings) of

Japanese managers, and personal relationships between them are unlikely to develop. These activities rely on informal communication.

The ways in which employees are instructed or managed in a Japanese company involve communication on a guessing or informal level. Role ambiguity is commonly defined as uncertainty (Katz & Kahn 1978; King & King 1990; Singh & Rhoades 1991) and lack of information or clarity (Biddle 1979; Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978; Shenker & Zeira 1992), and consequently methods of communication in managing employees appear to be linked to role ambiguity. Examining the informal aspects of communication, therefore, is vital for exploring role ambiguity in Japanese companies in Australia.

The third feature of informal management processes concerns how jobs are distributed in Japanese companies. As reviewed in section 2.2.2, there are common duties carried out by multiple staff in Japanese companies (Ishida 1986, 1994), and there is a heavy reliance on implicit rules (Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986; Nonaka 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996, p. 14). The distribution of jobs in Japanese companies, thus, is linked to role ambiguity (see section 2.2.2).

Ishida (1986, 1994) explains that Japanese managers have a tendency to expect local staff to carry out common duties, and local staff sometimes reject this. This can result in frustration and conflict between them. There is an unmet role expectation between them, and it is related to role conflict.

Thus, the ways in which tasks are allocated is related not only to role ambiguity but also to role conflict. An examination of job distribution is, therefore, essential for exploring role stress among staff in Japanese companies in Australia.

The last area of informal management processes concerns information sharing and decision making processes in Japanese companies. As reviewed above (see section 2.2.3.3), the two processes are heavily reliant on informal, intense communication among staff (Ala & Cordeiro 1999, p. 23; Hayashi 1988, pp. 125-130; Maher & Wong 1994). Information on how to carry out these activities does not exist in a

written form. Local staff may experience alienation in these two areas, and investigating the two processes at both formal and informal levels is a prerequisite for a comprehensive understanding of the processes of sharing information and making decisions (Davies & Ikeno 2002, pp. 161-162).

All four features reviewed above demonstrate that these informal management processes are closely linked to difficulties encountered by overseas Japanese companies. Looking at these features, therefore, is crucial to an investigation of problems in Japanese companies in Australia.

### **2.2.6 Summary and Research Question**

This section has reviewed four specified problem areas in overseas Japanese companies. The first area concerns communication barriers between local and Japanese staff. The second area is about job distribution within Japanese companies, and the third area examines the participation of local staff who are dissatisfied due to an insufficient level of participation in sharing information and decision making. The fourth area concerns Japanese expatriate managers' stressful experiences in playing a link-pin role. The reviews illustrate that all four problem areas of overseas Japanese companies exhibit role stress consisting of both role ambiguity and role conflict.

The management of Japanese companies is heavily reliant on informal processes, and four features have been identified. The first feature relates to the psychological contract that governs employees' attitudes and behaviors. Understanding the role expectations of Japanese managers is difficult for local staff and meeting these expectations is an onerous experience. The second feature concerns ambiguous communication. Since this involves tacit understanding and requires guessing, uncertainty and lack of clarity can occur. The third feature pertains to job distribution in Japanese companies. Understanding common duties, which it is expected will be conducted by multiple staff without explicit instruction, is a challenge for local staff, and mismatched expectations can occur between local staff and Japanese staff. The fourth feature relates to informal processes involved in sharing information and decision making. Since local staff do not understand how

these processes work, it is difficult for them to participate. Thus, lack of information and clarity can occur, which lead to local staff experiencing alienation.

All four processes are carried out at an informal level and they all have a close linkage with either or both components of role stress, that is, role ambiguity and role conflict. Information on how these processes are carried out is not obtainable in a written or tangible form and the processes themselves are perceived by local staff to be vague, uncertain, and ambiguous. It can, thus, be argued that informal processes induce an experience of role stress, consisting of both role ambiguity and role conflict, among local staff in overseas Japanese companies. Exploring informal processes is indispensable where role stress is being investigated. Hence, the following research question.

Research Question 1:

*Are there any informal management processes carried out in Japanese companies located in Australia, in relation to decision making, information sharing, and job roles? If so, what are they? How are they carried out?*

## **2.3 ROLE THEORY**

Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) is a theoretical approach that provides the conceptual framework of this dissertation. This section reviews Role Theory. It commences with an examination of Role Theory and what is involved in role stress. A definition of role stress, as used in this dissertation, is included. It then reviews the two components of role stress, namely, role ambiguity and role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). This is followed by a section on the relevance of Role Theory in the international and intercultural context. The review establishes Role Theory as the most appropriate theoretical framework for this dissertation.

### **2.3.1 Role Stress**

Role Theory is the study of complex human behavior in individuals or in groups, and it attempts to understand patterns of behavior within given contexts (Katz & Kahn 1978; Thomas & Biddle 1966). Role Theory provides solutions on how to reduce role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978; Shenker & Zeira 1992). Kahn and his associates (1964) developed the Role Episode model which depicts a cyclical process of sending role expectations from sender to receiver in an organizational setting. The model reveals that the role sender has role expectations that are communicated to a focal person. This focal person interprets them and responds to them through role behavior. The role behavior is observed and evaluated by the role sender, and his/her expectations of the focal person may then be modified or reformed. The modified role expectations are again sent to the focal person, and the process is repeated.

Kahn and his associates (1964) explain that the interpretation of the role sent by the role sender is subjective. That is, the focal person develops his or her own perceptions of the role. Thus, even when two persons receive the same role sent from the same role sender, their perceptions of it may differ.

Similarly, they further claim that role expectation in this model is also a subjective expectation. Latack (1981) claims that role expectation in a person-role conflict situation involves personal needs and values, and this type of unmet expectation is

related to fundamental issues, and can therefore cause long-term stressful situations.

The term 'role stress', thus, is concerned with a subjective feeling referring to the role occupant's disturbed state of mind (Goode 1960; Hardy 1978, pp. 76-78). A variety of terms have been assigned to role stress including frustration, tension, apathy (Goode 1960), incompatibility between company norms and those of its workers (Blau 1964), and non-conformity of employees to the role expectations placed on them (Blau & Scott 1962). Role stress, understood from these perspectives, can be described as a staff member's subjective and negative feelings such as frustration, distress, and ambiguity which arise from interaction between role occupants.

Biddle (1979, p. 161) suggests widening the meaning of role stress to include conformity, consensus, accuracy of expectations, veridicality, and the concept of role expectation itself. If role stress is defined so narrowly that it can only be seen to occur in a limited number of situations, the likelihood of overlooking other sources of conflict will be increased. It is, therefore, prudent to broaden the definition. Role stress is commonly regarded as being two constructs, role ambiguity and role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). Based on the above discussion, 'role stress' can be defined as 'any emotionally negative feelings experienced by people in an organization; comprises two categories, role conflict and role ambiguity'.

A number of studies have been carried out on role stress in organizational contexts (Jaskyte 2005; Singh 1993; Irving & Coleman 2003). These studies have concentrated on investigating individuals who are in the position of spanning boundaries (Babin & Boles 1996; Johlke & Duhan 2001; Stamper & Johlke 2003; Singh et al. 1994). They also focus on relations between role stress and organizational outcomes, and the negative consequences on organizational outcomes (Boles & Barbin 1994; Jackson & Schuler 1985; Shih & Chen 2006).

### **2.3.2 Role Ambiguity**

As discussed in the section on problems of overseas Japanese companies (see section 2.2), the problems experienced by staff working for overseas Japanese companies involve communication and job distribution, and are related to role ambiguity.

Role ambiguity is recognized as having a dysfunctional impact on organizational outcomes such as job performance (Jackson & Schuler 1985; Hartenian et al. 1994; Tubre & Collins 2000), job satisfaction, and tension (Jackson & Schuler 1985). Committed employees are found to be more vulnerable to experiencing role ambiguity than less committed employees (Irving & Coleman 2003).

Role ambiguity is defined as uncertainty in relation to one's role (Katz & Kahn 1978; King & King 1990; Singh & Rhoades 1991). This uncertainty can be understood from a number of perspectives. For instance, it is about behavior (Kahn et al. 1964; Van Sell et al. 1981, p. 44; Walker et al. 1975), job outcomes (Kahn et al. 1964), and about the unpredictability of a job outcome and behavior (Pearce 1981). Uncertainty is also recognized as including the scope of responsibility and the role sender's expectations (King & King 1990). Furthermore, Behrman & Perruault (1984) acknowledge that uncertainty is about the expectations placed on the role incumbent, that is, how she or he is able to meet these expectations, and the consequences of role performance.

Role ambiguity is also defined as lack of information or clarity (Biddle 1979; Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978; Shenker & Zeira 1992; Van Sell et al. 1981; Walker et al. 1975) and lack of feedback (Jackson & Schuler 1985). Role ambiguity, in other words, is subject to wide interpretation.

The use of definitions of role ambiguity varies from study to study (Gross et al. 1966, p. 287; Hardy 1978, p. 82). Although there are common themes among the definitions such as vagueness and uncertainty (Hardy 1978, p. 82), overall the definition of role ambiguity is itself ambiguous. Both role ambiguity and the term 'ambiguity' signify a lack of clarity in the role situation. Mukaidono (1988, pp. 38-40) explains ambiguity by defining five aspects of the term 'ambiguity'. These



are (1) incompleteness, (2) ambiguity, (3) randomness, (4) imprecision, and (5) fuzziness.

The first aspect, incompleteness, refers to a lack of knowledge, leading to an inability to fully comprehend a situation or topic. The second aspect, ambiguity, relates to indefiniteness where one word or expression carries several interpretations or meanings. For instance, a Japanese term '*hashi*' can refer to a bridge, an edge, and a chopstick. It is therefore an ambiguous term. The third aspect, randomness, concerns probability involving future events. The probability of casting a particular number on a dice provides an obvious example. The fourth aspect, imprecision, involves impreciseness and incorrectness of information. An example would be where ambiguity is experienced due to errors. The final aspect, fuzziness, refers to semantic ambiguity where the meaning is deduced according to subjective perception. Examples of this are whether a person is beautiful or not, or whether the weather is hot or not.

The fact that the term 'ambiguity' carries various aspects may be extrapolated to suggest that it results in varied interpretations of role ambiguity. Thus, exploring role ambiguity in relation to the aspects outlined by Mukaidono (1988) can lead to clarification of role ambiguity. This is especially vital for studies conducted in underdeveloped areas, particularly, role ambiguity in an intercultural context.

### **2.3.3 Role Conflict**

Role conflict is defined as incompatible expectations between a role sender and focal person (e.g. Dubinsky et al. 1992; Katz & Kahn 1978; Gross et al. 1966, p. 288; Latack 1981). In order to develop a coherent picture of role conflict, Kahn and his associates (1986) present five types of role conflict: (1) intra-sender conflict (the expectations of a single role sender are incompatible), (2) inter-sender conflict (the expectations of multiple role senders are incongruent), (3) inter-role conflict (a focal person belonging to a group creates role pressures by playing incompatible roles such as that of employee and father), (4) person-role conflict (the role expectations of the focal person and of the role sender are incompatible), and (5) role overload (a focal

person is given too many tasks to complete by the required time period) (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 19-20).

In addition, Hardy (1978, p.83) adds two other types, role incompetence which involves a role occupant's insufficient skills and role over-qualification where a role occupant's skills exceed his or her role. In relation to role conflict experiences in overseas Japanese companies, insufficient participation of local staff (see section 2.2.3) is indicative of person-role conflict. The stressful experiences of Japanese expatriates when playing a link-pin role (see section 2.2.4) refer to inter-role conflict.

Analogous to studies on role ambiguity, studies on role conflict focus intensively on investigating the effects of role conflict, and these studies reveal that role conflict induces negative influences on an organization (Behrman & Perreault 1984; Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). Negative influences include job performance, organization commitment (Jackson & Schuler 1985), and job satisfaction (Jackson & Schuler 1985; Hartenian et al. 1994). Personal relationships are also affected when people experiencing role conflict feel a lack of compatibility with their role sender, place less trust in them and have a diminishing esteem for them so that communication between them decreases (Katz & Kahn 1978). Furthermore, it entails unethical behavior on the part of the marketing manager (Shih & Chen 2006).

There is also contention among researchers as to who is most prone to experience role conflict (e.g. Kahn et al. 1964; Sager 1994; Siegall 1992). Status and authority appear to be related to experiences of role conflict. In particular those with a higher status or authority are prone to experience role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 123-149; Miles 1977). Focal persons tend to experience a higher level of role conflict when they receive conflicting expectations from an important role sender as opposed to a less important role sender (Siegall 1992), and a focal person is more likely to comply with the demands of a person of higher authority and status (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 123-149; Miles 1977).

The number of role senders also affects role conflict experiences where a person who has multiple superiors experiences higher levels of role conflict than those with only

one superior (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 123-149; Miles 1977). 'Boundary spanners' refers to those who have multiple role senders, and are usually required to liaise with two or more organizations or departments, each with different goals, objectives, and norms (Kahn et al. 1964). They are acknowledged as experiencing higher levels of conflict (Sager 1994; Stamper & Johlke 2003; Behrman & Perreault 1984), in particular, inter-sender conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, p. 23; Miles 1976). Furthermore, a person who occupies multiple roles is also likely to experience role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964).

All the above mentioned incidences of those who experience relatively high role conflict are based on studies in mono-cultural contexts (Kahn et al. 1964; Siegall 1992). Hence, contradictory findings may be revealed in studies carried out in international or intercultural contexts.

#### **2.3.4 Role Stress in an International and Intercultural Context**

This section reviews role stress in an international and intercultural context. The specific focus is on how far Role Theory as it currently stands can be applied to these areas. This section addresses three areas that require further research on role stress in an intercultural context. They are the role occupant's position in a company, exploring unidentified role stress types, and examining the link between culture and role stress type.

While there has been an abundance of studies applying Role Theory to organizational studies, the majority have been conducted in a mono-cultural context (Kahn et al. 1964; Siegall 1992). Only a small number of studies examine Role Theory in an international or intercultural context, and little is known about role stress in these situations (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992). The findings from these studies have been contradictory, leading researchers to question to what extent Role Theory developed within a US based sample can be applied to other contexts (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992).

Among studies in international contexts, Dubinsky and his associates (1992) revealed that role stress, both role conflict and role ambiguity, has negative effects on sales

people in different countries. This suggests that role stress is applicable not only in the US, but also in other countries. Perrewe and her associates (1995) found that the effects of role stress differed between people in Hong Kong and the US. Other comparative studies also identified differences in the effects of role stress among people of different cultural backgrounds (Agarwal 1993; Peterson et al. 1995). In an intercultural context, the majority of studies on role stress have focused on minority groups (Cox et al. 1991; Freedman & Phillips 1988). The findings revealed that a minority culture group is more likely to experience role conflict (Cordova 1982; Richard & Grimes 1996).

Researchers argue that people of minority cultural groups are subjected to intolerance in many aspects of their lives such as values and attire (Davis & Waton 1982, Jones 1986) and may experience alienation when placed in an intercultural environment (Thomas & Alderfer 1989). The source of their role conflict experiences is derived from their high degree of ethnic identification with endogenous role expectations that differ from those of the majority group (Cordova 1982, pp. 203-204).

In the studies cited above (Cordova 1982; Richard & Grimes 1996), the majority group comprises company managers, executives or company owners, and the minority group comprises employees or, at most, managers. Thus, the majority group holds a higher position and greater authority than the minority group. There are, however, cases where it is the cultural minority who hold a higher position and authority. Such an example is seen in Tokusei's study (1994) which investigated an offshore branch of a Japanese firm in the US. In this instance, Japanese expatriate managers were outnumbered by their local staff who held subordinate, or equal positions depending on their background and experience. Her study investigated role conflict as experienced by both American and Japanese managers, and an analysis using Role Theory revealed findings contrary to those described above (Cox et al. 1991; Freedman & Phillips 1988). That is, the American managers, who constituted the majority group, experienced an equivalent degree of role conflict to the minority group of Japanese managers. Thus, definitive statements on role stress experiences of minority and majority groups remain elusive.

In contrast to the majority of studies on minority groups (Cox et al. 1991; Freedman & Phillips 1988), in Tokusei's (1994) minority group, Japanese expatriate managers not only held managerial positions but also occupied the role of representative of Head Office. The findings suggest that the position of a role occupant in a company should be taken into account when undertaking role stress studies in an intercultural context.

Apart from studies on minority groups, studies on role stress in intercultural contexts generally have not explored the impact of role stress of staff of non-managerial positions. For instance, Shenker and Zeira (1992) looked at role stress experienced by CEOs only, and did not take into account possible role stress experienced by other employees. Similarly, Tokusei's (1994) study on role stress of Japanese companies in the US analyzed only those in managerial positions, leaving aside role conflict as experienced by employees in non-managerial positions.

As reviewed in the previous section (see section 2.3.3), status and authority influence role conflict experience (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 123-124; Miles 1977). Schuler (1977) also states that position effects employee's role stress, and the type of role stress experienced by staff differs according to the position held. Examining role stress according to position is vital to avoid contradictory results (Schuler 1977). For a study exploring role stress of Japanese companies in Australia, it is essential, therefore, to include local staff in non-managerial positions.

The second area requiring investigation is that of unidentified types of role stress. Shenker and Zeira's study (1992) investigated role stress in an international joint venture. Their study presented findings of a notable type of role stress. It was concerned with communication which was identified as a significant source of role ambiguity. They found that CEOs had difficulties decoding, understanding, and interpreting information sent by culturally different parent firms, particularly when the messages were obscure, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Thus, it is probable that there are other unidentified pertinent types of role stress in international or intercultural contexts (Shenker & Zeira 1992). Identifying the full range of role stress types is crucial to enable solutions for reduction of role stress to be devised.

Hence, the existence of any unidentified role stress types should be explored.

The third area requiring further elucidation is the link between culture and role stress type. Shenker and Zeira (1992) also found new factors that influenced role stress. These were the dominance of a parent firm and the objectives and cultural distance of the parent companies, revealing that culture influences the experience of role stress. Culture is defined as “*collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another*” (Hofstede 1994, p. 40). Culture is also described as something learned from a social environment (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25). It is not genetically inherited but consists of a shared system of meanings (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25). Since each person interprets meaning based on their own experiences, people of the same culture tend to have common interpretations not shared by people of different cultural backgrounds (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25). These shared interpretations and thinking patterns develop common understandings of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, as well as what is appropriate or inappropriate behavior (Paik & Sohn 2004). Dirks (1995, p. 77) also explains that management of cultural background, norms, and practices influences business operations of companies in intercultural contexts. These claims illustrate that there is a commonality in interpretations of role expectations among people of the same culture, and differing interpretations are likely to be made between people of different cultures as to the role expectations sent by the same role sender.

Role stress involves unmet role expectations (Katz & Kahn 1978; Latack 1981). This is termed role conflict (Katz & Kahn 1978; Latack 1981) and uncertainty about role expectations is referred to as role ambiguity (Katz & Kahn 1978; King & King 1990; Singh & Rhoades 1991). People who share the same culture are, therefore, likely to experience similar types of role stress. Likewise, different types of role stress types are experienced by people of different cultural backgrounds. Hence, in Japanese companies in Australia, the local staff’s role stress types may differ from the role stress types of the Japanese staff.

The differences in role stress types and interpretations of role expectations, therefore, indicate the need to explore both cultural groups in a study on role stress in an

intercultural context. Simultaneously, the position in a company must be taken into account.

Hence, study on role stress in Japanese companies located in Australia requires investigation of both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff. The staff in such companies can be divided into four groups. These are non-Japanese local managers, Japanese managers, non-Japanese local employees of non-managerial positions, and Japanese employees of non-managerial positions.

### **2.3.5 Summary and Research Question**

This section provides a summary on Role Theory in relation to problems of overseas Japanese companies. It also presents one of the research questions of this dissertation.

Four areas of difficulty are identified in overseas Japanese companies (see sections 2.2.1 - 2.2.4). They involve communication, job distribution, insufficient level of participation from local staff, and the role of Japanese expatriate staff as link-pins. The reviews suggest that each problem represents either or both role ambiguity and role conflict (see sections 2.2.1 - 2.2.5).

Role Theory is a study of complex human behaviors and it facilitates understanding about patterns of behavior within given contexts (Katz & Kahn 1978; Thomas & Biddle 1966). Role Theory also offers solutions on reducing role stress (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). Uncovering a path to improve areas of management and non-management of white collar employees of overseas Japanese companies is an ultimate goal of this dissertation. Employing Role Theory as a framework for this dissertation is an appropriate choice.

Role Theory examines role stress as consisting of role ambiguity and role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978), and the first endeavor of this dissertation, therefore, is an exploration of Role Stress in staff working in Japanese companies in Australia.

There is a paucity of studies on role stress in an intercultural context, and past studies have revealed contradictory findings, leading researchers to question the applicability of existing Role Theory to intercultural contexts (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992). The reviews on role stress in an intercultural context (see section 2.3.4) suggest three crucial keys for investigating role stress in Japanese companies in Australia (see section 2.3.4).

First, the role occupant's position in the company influences their role stress experience. Second, unidentified role stress types must be explored. Third, role stress types and role behaviors may differ according to the cultural background of the role occupant. The three keys suggest that staff of both managerial and non-managerial positions should be included in the investigation. Moreover, two types of cultural groups, non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff, must be studied, and comparisons drawn.

Hence, people working for Japanese companies in Australia can be divided into four groups. These are non-Japanese local managers, Japanese managers, non-Japanese local employees holding non-managerial positions, and Japanese employees holding non-managerial positions. Since no study to date has investigated role stress among locally hired Japanese staff of overseas Japanese companies, their role stress experiences have not been demonstrated. The need to elucidate their role stress experience necessitates the following research question.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (i.e. role ambiguity and role conflict) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*



## **2.4 ROLE STRESS REDUCTION IN OVERSEAS JAPANESE COMPANIES**

Past studies reveal that people working for overseas Japanese companies experience role stress (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994; Taga 2004). Alleviating role stress is a requisite for establishing a healthy organization (Gates 2001, p. 395). Nevertheless, no empirical study has been carried out to explore effective strategies for alleviating role stress in overseas Japanese companies. The current researcher has established this fact through search results using multiple research databases including ABI/INFORM Global, Proquest Asian Business and Reference, Social Sciences Index, Business Source Premier, and Omni-File Full Text Mega on 2 April, 2007. There were only two entries resulting from the key words 'coping strategy' and 'Japanese company', and these were unrelated to overseas Japanese companies. There was only entry when 'coping strategy' and 'Japanese management' were entered. This study concerned health, and was unrelated to coping strategies in overseas Japanese companies.

Researchers have offered suggestions in regard to problems found in overseas Japanese companies and these provide clues for improving the situation of overseas Japanese companies (Hayashi 1994, 1996; Magoshi 2000; Paik & Sohn 2004). These suggestions are reviewed in this section which comprises two sub-sections, (1) culture related strategies and (2) reduction of ambiguity.

Culture related strategies refer to seeking assistance from bicultural staff who can help solve problems that occur between local staff and Japanese staff. The characteristics and roles of these strategies are reviewed (Chikudate 1995; Hayashi 1996). Reduction in ambiguity concerns whether or not diminishing ambiguity is the optimal strategy for mitigating role ambiguity as well as benefiting the company. The review shows a link between the suggestions for overseas Japanese companies and coping strategies. The review on coping strategies is presented following this section (see section 2.5).

### **2.4.1 Culture Related Strategies**

Adapting to a different culture is accompanied by experiencing difficulties (Bennet 1986; Kim & Ruben 1988; Tokusei 1994), and the literature suggests a strategy involving cultural issues for the reduction of role stress. Cultural issues include improving cross cultural sensitivity (Pucik 1990), cultural understanding (Paik & Sohn 2004; Peltokorpi 2006), and intercultural communication skills (Dirks 1995; Frankenstein & Hosseini 1988; Hawes & Kealey 1981; Hayashi 1996; Takeuchi et al. 2002; Yamanaka 1991). It is argued that these are indispensable for the reduction of role stress.

Seeking assistance from a bicultural person has been suggested as a way of managing conflict as well as integrating local and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 23; Hayashi 1994). Since establishing cooperative relationships is related to reducing role stress (Nelson 1989) and is claimed as crucial (Frankenstein & Hosseini 1988; Peltokorpi 2006; Yamanaka 1991), these bicultural persons are valued by companies, and the inclusion of bicultural individuals in multinational organizations is strongly recommended (Chikudate 1995; Hayashi 1994). Seeking assistance from bicultural individuals is a type of coping strategy known as problem-focused strategy. Details of this strategy are described in a later section (see section 2.5.2).

Hayashi (1996, pp. 217-221) describes bicultural persons as those who have cross cultural sensitivity and an empathic understanding of the cultures of the host country and Japanese culture. They may have competence in both languages and are trusted by at least one of the groups. Such a description assumes that an individual who possesses the requisite characteristics is capable of integrating local and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies.

Chikudate (1995), on the other hand, focuses on describing these bicultural individuals on the basis of the benefits they bring to the company. Three types of beneficial effects are put forward. First, such individuals are able to translate cues into meaningful communication and explain differences in an appropriate manner to both groups. This means they can play a role as an equivocal communicator. Second,

they can assist in problem solving, conflict resolution, and developing a positive atmosphere. They can also assist as a conflict mediator. Third, they can help expatriates to learn and adapt to the local culture, a role known as a 'cultural guide'.

There are a number of terms to describe this type of person. They include third culture person (Hayashi 1994, 1996), a unique third culture with cultural mediator (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 33), a liaison and cultural interpreter (Chikudate 1995), interface (Negandhi et al. 1985), boundary-spanning (Saka 2004, pp. 223-224), and communication hub (Peltokorpi 2006). There are, therefore, a number of terms available for use in this dissertation. The common themes of this type of bicultural person include an integration of cultures and an integration of local and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. The researcher of the current study has decided to use the term 'cultural integrator' when referring to this type of person. Therefore, in the current research, the researcher will adopt the following definition: "*A cultural integrator is a person who can assist in alleviating role stress between people of different cultural groups in a company*".

Various findings exist as to who plays the role of cultural integrator in overseas Japanese companies. Johnson (1977) identifies three types of cultural integrator in Japanese companies in the US. These are (1) Caucasian Americans who are familiar with Japanese culture and/or language, (2) Japanese Americans, and (3) Japanese expatriates who are proficient in English skills. He finds that among these three groups, Japanese expatriate staff are reported to be the most successful integrators. Japanese staff were also found to be operating as cultural integrators in a different context where they were locally hired employees working for a Nordic company in Japan (Peltokorpi 2006). Peltokorpi's study (2006) reveals that a local Japanese manager played this crucial role between Nordic expatriate staff and local Japanese employees enabling, in particular, information flow both vertically and horizontally within and outside the company.

Other studies reveal that Japanese Americans, who are usually second or third generation, play the role of cultural integrator successfully (Johnson 1988; Lincoln et al. 1995). This may be due to their familiarity with cultures, languages, and the host

country.

In contrast to these findings, the local manager is found to play the key role of cultural integrator in Japanese companies in the US (Hayashi 1994, p. 35; Johnson 1988; Pucik et al. 1989, p. 74), Germany (Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 432), and in the UK (White & Trevor 1983, p. 117).

Locally hired Japanese have never been targeted as informants in studies on overseas Japanese companies and whether or not they play the role of cultural integrator has not been established. It is possible that they may offer assistance as cultural integrators. There are varied findings as to who plays the most crucial role as a cultural integrator, and extended research is, therefore, required.

#### **2.4.2 Reduction of Ambiguity**

The lack of clear definition of job distributions and an ambiguous communication style that requires the use of guessing in Japanese companies have been reviewed in a previous section (see section 2.2). These features are commonly acknowledged as having negative affects on people management in overseas Japanese companies and constitute an ambiguity that should be avoided (Beechler & Yang 1994; Ishida 1989). Researchers have suggested alleviating role stress through management processes such as increasing explicitness and clarification (Hayashi 1996; Iida 1985; Ikezoe 2002, p. 95; Ishida 1988, 1989; Magoshi 2000, p. 53; Ohishi 1993; Okamoto 1997; Pucik 1990), as well as providing information (Ishida 1985; Hayashi 1996). One example is the provision of an English language manual which describes an offshore office's management systems clearly and systematically (Ishida 1988, pp. 78-79; Ohishi 1993). These strategies represent a problem-focused coping strategy that is recognized as beneficial for reducing role stress (Folkman & Lazarus 1980; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). These strategies recommend elimination of ambiguities and the need to guess, and assume that a strategy of elucidation diminishes role ambiguity among staff in a company.

In Role Theory, the reduction of role ambiguity requires diminishing ambiguity as

well as increasing clarity and understanding through providing information (Kahn et al. 1964; Krayner, 1986; Rizzo et al. 1970) and feedback (Singh 1993). In providing information, Marginson (2006) reveals that information presented in a written form reduces role ambiguity more positively than a method where information is provided by two-way communication such as face to face or telephone. Johlke and Duhan (2001) find that increasing frequency of communication is effective in reducing ambiguity. However, emphasizing informal communication did not appear to be of significant benefit for this purpose.

In contrast to the recognition that ambiguity is detrimental to a company, there are acknowledged beneficial aspects to ambiguity (Alvesson 2001; Mukaidono 1988, pp. 202-205). For Japanese management, ambiguity is considered vital and is purposefully built into a company (Nonaka 1990; Sullivan & Nonaka 1986; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996). Sullivan and Nonaka (1986) explain that uncertainty is generated in an ambiguous and equivocal manner by the manager, while encouraging varied ideas, opinions, and abundant data at the same time. Through this process, ambiguity becomes a source of new directions, alternate meanings, and a new way of thinking (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996).

The overlapping of duties in Japanese companies appears to be ambiguous (see section 2.2.2). According to Nonaka (1990, p. 28), overlapping of duties leads to information redundancy, which can spur creativity and generate new meanings. It also incurs laborious and cooperative interaction (Nonaka & Toyama 2002) and assists the development of trusting and loyal relationships (Nonaka 1990, pp. 29-34). The process of making use of ambiguity is utilized to a greater extent by Japanese managers than American managers (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996), and ambiguity provides an edge for Japanese companies (Nonaka 1990; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996).

These beneficial aspects of ambiguity (Nonaka & Toyama 2002; Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996) thus raise a question about the appropriateness and viability of employing elucidation strategies to eliminate ambiguity in overseas Japanese companies. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996, p. 222) claim that overseas Japanese companies are able to derive positive effects from ambiguity when working with non-Japanese local staff.

However, they neither suggest what these effective strategies are, nor how they may yield beneficial effects. Nor do they outline a method whereby Japanese companies could attain a creative advantage in their offshore offices. Effective coping strategies that reduce existing role ambiguity while taking advantage of the beneficial aspects of ambiguity, thus, must be uncovered.

### **2.4.3 Summary**

Despite the need to reduce role stress in overseas Japanese companies, there is no empirical study attempting to identify effective strategies for the reduction of role stress. What are available to date are suggestions from researchers (e.g. Hayashi 1994, 1996; Chikudate 1995; Ishida 1989) based on findings on existing problems in overseas Japanese companies. These studies provided two types of recommendations for reducing problems in overseas Japanese companies.

The first recommendation is to seek assistance from a bicultural person who is able to play a role in reducing stress between local staff and Japanese staff in a company. For the purposes of this dissertation, this type of person is termed as 'cultural integrator'. Varied findings exist as to who plays the role of cultural integrator. Since locally hired Japanese have never been investigated, it is not known whether they play this role or not.

The second recommendation concerns the lessening of ambiguity which is commonly suggested as essential to assuage role stress in overseas Japanese companies. This is consistent with this specific perspective on Role Theory. It is, however, argued that ambiguity can be beneficial to a company and is deliberately built into Japanese companies. These antithetical arguments, therefore, raise a question about the appropriateness of diminishing ambiguity.

In relation to coping strategies, the two types of suggestions, seeking assistance from a cultural integrator and reducing role ambiguity, are relevant to problem-focused coping strategies commonly regarded as effective for reducing role stress. Further details on coping strategies are reviewed in the next section (see section 2.5).

## **2.5 COPING STRATEGIES IN AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT**

Coping strategies incur both positive and negative outcomes (Schuler 1986, p. 46), and the appropriate use of coping strategies can alleviate role stress in an organization (Feldman & Brett 1983; Hall 1972; Stahl & Caligiuri 2005). Uncovering effective coping strategies is, thus, crucial in order to reduce role stress and create an integrated organization.

In relation to the suggestions on reducing role stress for Japanese companies reviewed above (see section 2.4), this section reviews coping strategies in three areas. The first area is the link between a coping strategy and the cultural background of the coping strategy user. The second area is the type of coping strategy employed in an intercultural context, and the third area details the effects of coping strategies.

The reviews reveal that suggestions for resolving the problems of overseas Japanese companies (see section 2.4) are related to coping strategies. This section also identifies areas which require investigation to develop an understanding of coping strategies in an intercultural context.

### **2.5.1 Interrelation between Coping Strategies and Cultural Background**

There is a paucity of studies on coping strategies in intercultural contexts compared with those in mono-cultural contexts (Stahl & Caligiuri 2005), and those studies conducted in an intercultural context tend to focus on expatriate managers in host country locations (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999, 2001b, 2002). Using the EBSCO research database a search was carried out on 1 February, 2007. This search found 39 results from key words such as 'coping', 'stress', and 'culture'. Among them, there were only two results involving an intercultural context that were relevant to the current study. Both of these articles discussed expatriates on international assignments. Thus, the search for relevant articles demonstrates that study on coping strategies in organizations in an intercultural context is limited.

Studies on coping strategies in an intercultural context yield findings of factors that are likely to occur in an intercultural context. These findings concern expatriate

managers' coping strategy usages.

For the use of coping strategies by expatriate managers, Selmer (2001b) finds that expatriate managers are likely to use problem-focused coping strategies when they regard themselves as being able to make an adjustment. However, when they regard themselves as being unable to adjust, they tend to use an emotion-focused strategy. Hence, their use of different coping strategies is distinguished by their perception of their ability to adjust.

The cultural background of expatriates also influences the use of coping strategies. Selmer (2002) finds the opposite pattern of coping strategy use between Hong Kong Chinese expatriate staff and Western expatriate staff posted in China. In his study, comparisons were made on the coping strategy usage of expatriate staff from different countries residing in China. He found that Hong Kong Chinese expatriates use less problem-focused strategies and more emotion-focused strategies compared to Western expatriates.

Cultural distance between expatriate and host country nationals should be taken into account when studying the usage of coping strategies in an intercultural context (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Stahl 2000). It is thus important for expatriates managing host country nationals in their overseas subsidiaries to consider cultural distance (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Stahl 2000).

For instance, a study investigated Western expatriates sent to different countries including Saudi Arabia, Europe, South America, and Japan (Feldman & Thomas 1992). The study revealed that expatriates who reside in Saudi Arabia use problem-focused coping strategies less frequently in comparison to Western expatriates who are sent to Western countries and Japan (Feldman & Thomas 1992).

Stahl (2000) compared German expatriates living in the US and in Japan. He found that German expatriates who resided in Japan used more emotion-focused strategies involving avoidance and withdrawal than German expatriates who lived in the US. German expatriates living in the US used problem-focused coping strategies more



frequently than German expatriates who resided in Japan. These findings illustrate that cultural distance between expatriates and host country nationals influences the use of coping strategies.

In an intercultural context, the cultural background of expatriates as well as the cultural distance between expatriates and host country nationals has been shown to be a factor in differentiating usage of coping strategies (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Stahl 2000). Nevertheless, further investigation on the relations between coping strategies and cultural background are required (Feldman & Thomas 1992). Taking these claims into account, the current research investigates both local staff and Japanese staff in exploring the coping strategies of Japanese companies in Australia.

Another possible source of differing usage of coping strategies is the link between coping strategy usage and role stress type. Stahl's study (2000) revealed that there are differences not only in the usage of coping strategies but also in the experience of role stress between German expatriates living in the US and those who live in Japan. The role stress of German expatriates living in the US involved legal issues and adjustment problems of the family. The role stress experienced by those living in Japan was primarily concerned with communication barriers and problems related to Japanese life-style and business practices. The finding that German expatriates in Japan used avoidance and withdrawal of emotion-focused strategies more frequently may be due to communication barriers. The finding, thus, signifies a link between coping strategy usage and role stress types. The link demonstrates that study on coping strategies must be explored together with role stress when coping strategy usages are being examined.

### **2.5.2 Coping Strategies in an Intercultural Context**

Coping is defined as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage a situation perceived as taxing (Lazarus & Folkman 1984, p. 140). It is also the activity of role occupants who seek fairness while attempting not to make a loss (Blau 1964; Homans 1974). Thus, role occupants practice coping strategies when they experience role stress (Kahn et al. 1964; Schuler 1986).

Coping strategies are commonly recognized as being composed of problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies (Folkman & Lazarus 1980; Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Lazarus & Launier 1978). A problem-focused coping strategy refers to a role occupant's active attempts to remove the sources of a problem and ease their role stress. On the other hand, an emotion-focused coping strategy, involves avoiding, or withdrawing from a situation to mitigate problems. These two types of coping strategy are commonly used in studies on coping strategies (Folkman & Lazarus 1980; Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Lazarus & Launier 1978). However, types of coping strategies that cannot be classified within either of these two strategies, problem-focused and emotion-focused, have been identified (Aldwin & Revenson 1987; Petermann et al. 1995). Having acknowledged that there are other forms of coping strategies, Keaveney and Nelson (1993) claim that these strategies must be uncovered and included in research on coping strategies (Selmer 2001b).

It is also argued that the common classification of coping strategies into two categories is too broad, and that more specific types of coping strategies must be identified (Latack & Havlovic 1992). Carver and his associates (1989) developed a detailed inventory classifying coping strategies. They provide three categories, (1) problem-focused, (2) emotion-focused, and (3) less useful coping strategies. Both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies involve the role occupant's active behavior and psychological activity to alleviate a problem. Both these categories are further subdivided into five categories.

Problem-focused strategies involve (1) active coping, (2) planning, (3) suppression of competing activities, (4) restraint coping, and (5) seeking instrumental social

support. The five categories of emotion-focused strategy are (1) seeking emotional social support, (2) positive interpretation, (3) accepting reality, (4) denying reality, and (5) turning to religion. The less useful coping strategies have three subdivisions, namely (1) focusing on venting emotions, (2) behavioral disengagement, and (3) mental disengagement.

Following an inventory similar to that of Carver and his associates (1989), Begley (1998) outlined three types of classification, 1) problem oriented, 2) emotion oriented, and 3) appraisal oriented. A problem oriented strategy is concerned with the attempt to change the source of stress, and an emotion oriented strategy, on the other hand, is an attempt to change oneself, in order to adapt to the source of stress and ease the problem. Appraisal oriented strategy is about disengagement, and examples include quitting work and using drugs or alcohol.

The problem oriented strategies outlined by Carver and his associates (1989) and Begley (1989) involve active attempts on the part of role occupants to reduce role stress through changing the source of the stress. Similarly, the emotion oriented strategy of Carver and his associates (1989) and Begley (1989) is about an individual changing in an effort to adapt to a situation

In contrast, the third type, the less useful coping strategies outlined by Carver and his associates (1989) and the appraisal orientation of Begley (1989), involve disengagement. These three types of categorization methods provide greater detail than the commonly used two categories, problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

Stahl's (2000) study explored the full range of coping strategies among expatriate managers, and identified four types of coping strategies. These are (1) task-oriented involving planning and implementing organizational change, (2) learning and adjustment where expatriates alter expectations and learn about the local culture, (3) interpersonal strategies which attempt to build a personal relationship, and (4) avoidance and defensive strategies involving withdrawal from the situation. The first strategy, task-oriented strategy, is related to reducing ambiguity. The reduction of

ambiguity is suggested by researchers to mitigate role stress of staff in overseas Japanese companies (see section 2.4.1).

Stahl (2000) claims that the second strategy, learning and adjustment which involves cultural issues, is distinctive and very little study has been carried out to identify all types of coping strategies among expatriate managers. He maintains the need for further investigation in this area. As described in the previous section (see section 2.5.1.), coping strategy usage is related to cultural issues such as cultural background and cultural distance. Coping strategies which remain to be unidentified may be found by investigating a range of coping strategies in various intercultural contexts. Thus, studies in the various intercultural contexts should be carried out.

### **2.5.3 Effects of Coping Strategies**

This section reviews the effects of coping strategies and focuses on three areas. These are, first, how coping strategies are related to role stress, second, the effects of coping strategies in an intercultural context, and third, personal relationships and social support. The review provides a deeper understanding of how coping strategies work in relation to role stress and identifies gaps concerning the effects of coping strategies. It also reveals the issues that need to be considered when exploring effective coping strategies in an intercultural context.

#### **2.5.3.1 Coping Strategies and Role Stress**

Coping strategies are brought into operation by the experience of role stress in an attempt to minimize role stress (Kahn et al. 1964; Schuler 1986). Thus coping strategies and role stress are inter-related (Kahn et al. 1964; Schuler 1986). It is commonly acknowledged that a problem-focused coping strategy has a positive effect in reducing role stress, and that an emotion-focused coping strategy has a negative effect in reducing role stress (Billing & Moos 1981; Feldman & Brett 1983; Latack 1986; Leiter 1991; Nelson & Sutton 1990).

In order to reduce role conflict, it is necessary to narrow the gap in unmet

expectations between the role sender and focal person (Katz & Kahn 1978; Tsui & Ashford 1994). This is achieved by changing the expectations of the role sender, or by changing the behavior of the focal person (Katz & Kahn 1978; Tsui & Ashford 1994). Tsui and Ashford (1994) call this change process, adapted over time, 'adaptive self-regulation'.

Adaptive self-regulation involves three stages. The first stage is to set standards in relation to one's own role behavior, including what roles should be played and how these roles should be performed. The second stage concerns detecting the gaps between the expectations placed on the focal person and his/her actual role behavior. The third stage involves reducing the gaps identified in the second stage by using appropriate coping strategies.

Lang and Markowitz (1986) identified a strategy that involves careful organization and planning of work, namely planned task management. This consists of narrowing the gaps of unmet role expectations between role sender and focal person. This strategy thus reflects the above-mentioned role conflict reduction process, adaptive self-regulation (Tsui & Ashford 1994).

Lang and Markowitz's study (1986) identified a critical finding as to the relation between the effect of a coping strategy and role stress. That is, the planned task management strategy was found to be beneficial only for the reduction of role overload. This finding suggests that a particular coping strategy is effective only in regard to a particular type of role stress, and the two elements, coping strategy type and role stress type, must correspond in order to reduce role stress. It suggests that studies identifying effective coping strategies must take account of types of role stress, and both coping strategy type and role stress type must be explored.

### 2.5.3.2 Effective Coping Strategies in an Intercultural Context

In comparison to studies on the effects of coping strategies in a mono-cultural setting, very little research has been carried out on identifying various types of coping strategies used by expatriate managers, as well as on the effects of such strategies (Stahl 2000). Among the existing studies in intercultural contexts, those coping strategies that have been revealed as effective for reduction of role stress have included task oriented strategies (Selmer 1999; Stahl 2000); learning about and adjustment to culture (Stahl 2000); interpersonal strategies (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999; Stahl 2000); showing tolerance and patience (Selmer 1999); and psychological reappraisal (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Feldman & Thompson 1993).

Task oriented strategies involve the planning and implementation of organizational changes, and learning and adjustment involves adapting oneself to a new environment and learning about a new culture. Among interpersonal strategies, frequent communication between expatriates and local staff is regarded as vital since it facilitates positive relations and is effective in limiting physiological and psychological stress (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999). Personal relationships are further reviewed in the next section (see section 2.5.3.3). Psychological reappraisal refers to the role occupant trying to focus on positive aspects of a problem, and having accepted these, enabling benefits to become available for the job. The effect of interpersonal strategies has been found to be stronger than that of psychological reappraisal (Feldman & Thomas 1992).

Past studies in mono-cultural contexts have commonly found that a problem-focused strategy is associated positively with role stress reduction and that an emotion-focused strategy has a negative influence on role stress reduction (Tung 1998; Stahl 2000). Contradictory results, however, occur in intercultural contexts. Psychological reappraisal is an emotion-focused strategy and is commonly recognized as having a negative influence on role stress reduction (Billings & Moos 1981; Feldman & Brett 1983). It has, however, been shown to be a beneficial strategy in facilitating adjustment of expatriates. The explanation given is that psychological reappraisal can ease the anxiety of role occupants, particularly for those who are new to a host country environment (Feldman & Thomas 1992;

Feldman & Thompson 1993).

There is also hypothesis that instead of actively integrating with local staff, an emotion-focused strategy which involves spending time together with other expatriates can produce benefits for adjustment, particularly at the initial stage of an assignment, and that an emotion-focused strategy may be useful (Stahl & Caligiuri 2005, p. 604).

There are also conflicting findings as to problem-focused coping strategies in intercultural contexts. Seeking assistance with tasks, which is categorized as a problem-focused strategy, has not been found to assist in expatriates' adjustment (Feldman & Thomas 1992). Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) report mixed results, with some problem-focused strategies being effective and some not.

In contrast to the belief that coping strategies have either a positive or negative influence (Billings & Moos 1981; Long 1988), Feldman and Thompson (1993) reported a coping strategy which has both positive and negative effects on role stress reduction. They identified the strategy of working harder, which is a problem-focused coping strategy recognized as having a positive influence (Billings & Moos 1981; Long 1988). Their results revealed that it assists positively in satisfaction with work adjustment, while it also has a negative effect on psychological aspects of the role occupants.

As reviewed earlier (see section 2.4), reducing ambiguity in reference to task-oriented strategies, has been suggested as a means of alleviating role stress in overseas Japanese companies. The conflicting findings above (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Feldman & Thompson 1993), however, raise the question as to whether this suggestion is appropriate or not. Further investigation is thus called for.

Furthermore, Stahl and Caligiuri (2005) explain that the effect of coping strategies involves contingencies such as the nature of the host country and the position of the role occupants. It may, therefore, be possible that the effects of coping strategies differ for people of different cultural backgrounds and their position in a company.

This, therefore, suggests that both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff should be included when identifying effective coping strategies. Moreover, staff holding both managerial and non-managerial positions should be investigated. Hence, it is considered desirable that four staff types, non-Japanese local managers, Japanese managers, non-Japanese local staff with non-managerial positions, and Japanese staff with non-managerial positions, should be the target informants for uncovering effective coping strategies among staff in overseas Japanese companies.

#### 2.5.3.3 Personal Relationships and Social Support

The development of cooperative and positive relations is regarded as crucial for overseas Japanese companies (Frankenstein & Hosseini 1988; Peltokorpi 2006; Yamanaka 1991). It assists in augmenting a shared identity (Kobayashi 1991), easing expatriates' role stress, and allowing employees to receive improved performance ratings (Van Dyne & Lepine 1998). A higher performance rating is obtainable by being active in establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships and displaying cooperative behavior (Van Dyne & Lepine 1998). This type of behavior is known as extra role behavior (Van Dyne & Lepine 1998).

Dissatisfaction with co-workers is found to be strongly associated with role stress, especially, role ambiguity, role overload, and under-utilization of skills (Beehr 1981). It is also a contributing factor in job dissatisfaction, life dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, depression, and fatigue (Beehr 1981). Establishment of cooperative relationships is associated with lower levels of conflict (Nelson 1989). Studies on coping strategies in an intercultural context also find developing such relationships is effective for reducing role stress (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999; Stahl 2000). To do so requires recognition by role occupants that they are not exploited and their role sender will collaborate with them (Cox et al. 1991).

Social support is another requisite for developing cooperation. It is particularly crucial for expatriates adjusting to a host country as they are entering a new working environment where the organizational culture, socio-culture, and language are



unfamiliar to them (Black 1990). Social support is regarded as indispensable for establishing relationships as well as for mitigating role stress (Fugate et al. 2002; McMillan & Lopez 2001). Supporting activity and personal relations are, thus, inter-related with each other (Takagi 2003). Hence, establishing cooperative relationships is vital for reducing role stress, and social support is of great assistance in establishing positive relationships.

Sand and Miyazaki (2000) claim that there are two types of social support: within an organization such as meetings, and outside the organization such as family and religious affiliations. They claim that meetings and personal one-on-one meetings do not reduce role stress. In contrast, Clarke and Lipp (1998, p. 24) claim that one-on-one meetings to discuss delicate issues rather than meeting as a group is a preferable method for overseas Japanese companies.

These contrasting types of social support illustrate that social support is an abstract term and lacks concreteness. It can, therefore, be interpreted in various ways. Exploring the details of social support including identifying social support types is crucial to alleviate role stress (Sand & Miyazaki 2000). Unless other effective types of social support are discovered, a company may be unable to implement social support in its training program and in managing employees in order to reduce role stress. Extensive research is, thus, required.

#### **2.5.4 Summary and Research Question**

This section is a summary of coping strategies in relation to the reduction of role stress in overseas Japanese companies. The final research question of this dissertation is presented at the conclusion of this section. The reviews reveal four gaps and/or keys to exploring effective coping strategies in an intercultural context, specifically Japanese companies in Australia (see section 2.5).

The first area concerns studying coping strategies together with role stress. The review shows that coping strategy usage is linked to the type of role stress experienced by role occupants (see section 2.5.1). Similarly, a particular coping

strategy works only with a particular role stress type, and their correspondence needs to be in place in order for the coping strategy to be effective in reducing role stress (see section 2.5.3.1). The reviews, thus, suggest that study on effective coping strategies should be carried out in conjunction with the exploration of role stress.

The second area examines the breadth of meaning in types of coping strategies. In the review on coping strategies, social support, although recognized as important for reducing role stress, is shown to be an abstract term that lacks definition (see section 2.5.3.3). It, thus, develops different interpretations and incurs contradictory results. Concrete description is, hence, required to avoid confusion in understanding the effects of social support. Since conflicting results have been produced as to the effects of coping strategies in an intercultural context, concrete descriptions of other types of coping strategies should be explored.

The third area concerns those who should be investigated when studying effective coping strategies in an intercultural context. The review shows that cultural background and cultural distance between role sender and focal person are responsible for the different uses of coping strategies in an intercultural context (see section 2.5.1). Furthermore, the effect of a coping strategy is influenced by the cultural background of the host country national (see section 2.5.3.2). It illustrates that people of different cultural background may experience different effects from coping strategies. Thus, identifying effective coping strategies in Japanese companies in Australia requires investigating both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

Previous studies on coping strategies place heavy emphasis on expatriate managers (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999, 2001b, 2002), and very little is revealed on effective coping strategies among local staff in an intercultural context (see section 2.5.1). The fact that the effect of a coping strategy is also related to the position occupied in a company (see section 2.5.3.2) signifies that the effects of coping strategies may differ according to the position a person holds in a company. Thus, staff of both managerial and non-managerial positions should be included in the investigation.

Taking into consideration both cultural background and position, four staff types, non-Japanese local managers, Japanese managers, non-Japanese local staff of non-managerial positions, and Japanese staff of non-managerial positions, should be the target informants for uncovering effective coping strategies in overseas Japanese companies.

The fourth area concerns the effects of coping strategies. In contrast to interpretations of effective coping strategies that have been developed in a mono-cultural context, past studies have revealed conflicting findings in intercultural contexts (see section 2.5.3.2). Identifying effective coping strategies for an intercultural context is still an underdeveloped area, and further research is imperative.

Diminishing ambiguity is suggested as a means to reduce role stress in overseas Japanese companies (see section 2.4). Ambiguity, however, can be seen as valuable and is purposefully built into Japanese companies (see section 2.4). This raises questions concerning the appropriateness of reducing ambiguity in companies. The suggestion has been made by researchers on the basis of problems found in overseas Japanese companies, but these are not based on empirical findings that have investigated coping strategies in overseas Japanese companies.

To the knowledge of the researcher, there is no actual study which explores coping strategies perceived as effective in reducing role stress in overseas Japanese companies where data has been obtained directly from staff working for Japanese companies. Moreover, locally hired Japanese staff have never been investigated in studies on effective coping strategies. Hence, there is little information available on this issue.

In summary, coping strategies can assist in mitigating role stress in organizations (Begley 1998, Feldman & Brett 1983; Stahl & Caligiuri 2005), and the mitigation of role stress is a prerequisite for the development of a healthy organization (Gate 2001, p. 395). Understanding coping strategies must be prioritized for the reduction of role stress (Van Sell et al. 1981). Therefore, the following research question is being raised:

Research Question 3:

*What attitudes and strategies are perceived to be effective in coping with role stress by individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

## **2.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter reviews the problems of overseas Japanese companies in relation to Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978), which is the theoretical framework used in the current research. Coping strategies in relation to reduction of role stress in overseas Japanese companies are also reviewed.

Role Theory provides an understanding of patterns of human behavior and offers solutions to reducing role stress (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978). The purpose of this doctoral dissertation is to examine the problems experienced by management and non-management staff working for Japanese companies in Australia and to uncover a trajectory to mitigate their difficulties, so that establishing successful management of white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies becomes attainable. Role Theory, thus, assists in fulfilling this purpose, and can be used as a theoretical lens in this doctoral dissertation to understand role stress in an intercultural context.

The reviews suggest that informal management processes in Japanese companies are connected to role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) (see section 2.2.5). These processes have uncertain and ambiguous features, and these processes may, therefore, influence the occurrence of role stress experiences among local staff in overseas Japanese companies. Investigation into these informal processes should be carried out when role stress is being explored. Hence, the following research question.

Research Question 1:

*Are there any informal management processes carried out in Japanese companies located in Australia, in relation to decision making, information sharing, and job roles? If so, what are they? How are they carried out?*

The reviews show that problems found in overseas Japanese companies represent role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) (see sections 2.2.1 – 2.2.5). Research on role stress in an intercultural context is still underdeveloped, and contradictory findings have emerged in comparison to those undertaken in mono-cultural contexts (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992).

The reviews suggest study on role stress in Japanese companies in Australia should carry out investigations among staff holding both managerial and non-managerial positions, as well as staff of both cultural backgrounds, non-Japanese local and Japanese staff (see section 2.3.4). Hence, the current study investigates four types of staff, non-Japanese local managers, Japanese managers, non-Japanese local employees in non-managerial positions, and Japanese employees in non-managerial positions. The research question is, thus, set out below.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (i.e. role ambiguity and role conflict) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

An appropriate use of coping strategies makes it possible to alleviate role stress in organizations (Feldman & Brett 1983; Hall 1972; Stahl & Caligiuri 2005), and understanding coping strategies is crucial to alleviating role stress (Van Sell et al. 1981). Unless effective coping strategies are identified, uncovering a path to improve management of managerial and non-management white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies is unachievable. Hence, the following research question.

Research Question 3:

*What attitudes and strategies are perceived to be effective in coping with role stress by individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

This doctoral dissertation carries out an investigation with the aim of obtaining answers to the above-mentioned three Research Questions.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

This chapter presents the research design and methods used in the research. This doctoral study is concerned with organizations in an intercultural context and aims to explore role stress among individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia. It also explores the coping strategies that respondents perceived to be effective in withstanding this stress. A descriptive and exploratory approach is required to answer this research problems, and a qualitative approach has, therefore, been selected. Data were collected from multiple sources to provide detailed, in-depth information and to identify the dynamic patterns sought by this study.

The chapter contains four sections. The first section outlines the research design, providing justification for the adoption of a qualitative approach. Reliability and validity issues are also discussed in this section. In the second section, data collection using multiple methods is described. In the third, the method of analysis is discussed, and in the fourth section, the ethical issues in relation to this study are outlined.

#### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

##### **3.2.1 Qualitative Approach**

The current study adopted a qualitative methodology to answer the three research questions. This section discusses the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach.

A qualitative approach is inductive and exploratory, and it is an appropriate method for discovery (Merriam 1988, p. 17-21). A quantitative approach, on the other hand, is deductive and experimental (Merriam 1988, p. 17-21), and it is pertinent to test theory (Silverman 2000, p. 1-7). Standardized measures are utilized in the quantitative approach, and people's varied experiences and perspectives are categorized into a limited number of predetermined categories (Patton 1990, p.

13-14). It contrasts with a qualitative approach where there is no constraint of the predetermined categories in analyzing data (Patton 1990, p. 13-14).

This study aims to uncover information on role stress and coping strategies in both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. As mentioned in the literature review, effective coping strategies in overseas Japanese companies have not been explored in past studies. Equally, locally hired Japanese have never been a target group in studies on overseas Japanese companies. Hence, predetermined categories do not exist for coping strategies of both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff as well as for role stress of locally hired Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. A qualitative approach allows the exploration and discovery of new issues, and possesses the requisite attributes needed for this study.

As opposed to a quantitative approach, process rather than outcomes or end products (Merriam 1988, p. 17), or true or false statements (Silverman 2000, p. 128) is also emphasized in a qualitative approach. Focusing on the process is valuable in the current study. This study extends previous studies relating to overseas Japanese companies by examining informal management processes. An analysis of management at a formal level, along with its related formal interactions, does not fully reveal what is actually happening in overseas Japanese companies, given the implicit nature of Japanese people, culture, and work practices as discussed in the literature review. Previous studies developed results from data on formal aspects of management only (Dedoussis & Litter 1994; Iida 1985; Pucik et al. 1989; Lincoln et al. 1995), and the informal management processes are overlooked.

This study examines Japanese companies in Australia by scrutinizing the processes of both formal and informal aspects, and role stress is explored in association with both management processes. As stated by Buckley (1967, pp. 66-67), “*A simple model of causation and correlation and its methodology is woefully inadequate in the face of complex adaptive systems*”, employing qualitative approach is therefore apposite to this doctoral research.

Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2004, pp. 7-8) state that conducting research within

cross-cultural organizations requires a more refined development of theory, and conducting an exploratory study is inevitable. Thus, they claim a qualitative approach can provide deeper understanding of cross-cultural issues, and that this type of approach is much needed.

Silverman (2000, p. 4-5) states “*quantitative research ignores the differences between the natural and social world by failing to understand the ‘meanings’ that are brought to social life*”; whereas, a qualitative approach enables researchers to obtain meanings and deeper understanding of social phenomena (Merriam 1988, pp. 17-21; Silverman 2000, p. 7-9). This study investigates the meaning of experiences, that is, what experiences bring about role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) among staff of overseas Japanese companies. Qualitative research is, therefore, relevant and pertinent for this study.

In order to interpret meanings, the researcher is required to be responsive to the context of situations (Merriam 1988, p. 19). Understanding the context assists greatly in interpretation, and a qualitative approach provides space for this (McGaughey 2004, p. 529). This is an important strength of this approach, and choosing this method is appropriate when contextual explanations are required (Zalan & Lewis 2004, p. 512).

This study aims to consider contextual elements in association with incidents or feelings. Qualitative studies using interview techniques are able to tap into detailed information as well as supplying facts or feelings (Patton 1990, p. 196). These are usually unobtainable in survey-based quantitative research (Patton 1990, p. 196). Thus, employing a qualitative approach is also appropriate in this regard.

A qualitative approach is also pertinent to investigate subjective perceptions and phenomena:

... qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities—that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring.

(Merriam 1988, p. 17)



This study does not intend to test existing theories. Instead, it aims to gain greater understanding of the management of white collar staff of management and non-management levels in Japanese companies in Australia by adopting role theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) as the theoretical base for this dissertation. It is a study of human behavior that focuses on subjective psychological *perceptions* of individuals in organizations. This study aims to explore the role stress of informants from the perspective of their perceptions.

The use of an interview technique enables the researcher to remain close to informants' perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p. 10). It is also recommended as a means to obtain important insights into relations in situational contexts when studying human phenomena (Yin 1994, p. 90). These statements are further evidence of the appropriateness of this technique for this dissertation.

Furthermore, collecting multiple sources of evidence is claimed to be an appropriate method of exploring and understanding the subjective perceptions, experiences, and phenomena within human behavior in organizations as noted, "*the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question*" (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p. 4). This approach of collecting multiple sources of data including the interview technique was thus employed for this study.

Overall, taking into account the above mentioned nature and strengths of the qualitative approach together with the objectives of this study, adopting the qualitative approach is the best suited to this doctoral research.

### **3.2.2 Validity and Reliability**

It has been argued that the issues of validity and reliability in a positivist approach are irrelevant in qualitative studies (Anderson & Skaates 2004; Marschan-Pikkari & Welch 2004; Merriam 1988; Seale 1999; Silverman 2000, p. 188). These issues are based on the assumption that there is a single reality. Qualitative research, however, does not concur with the assumption as below:

One of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, and measured.

(Merriam 1988, p. 167)

The data obtained from qualitative study are more context-related rather than consisting of generalizations and verification (Marschan-Pikkari & Welch 2004; Patton 1990). Marschan-Pikkari and Welch (2004, p. 17) express the difficulties confronted when attempting to conform to a scientifically rigorous approach based on universal assumptions. Validity and reliability issues are, therefore, more relevant to experimental research that aims to detect causal relationships while the establishment of these issues in qualitative study is claimed to be a practice of artificial consensus (Seale 1999, p. 42). Nevertheless, this study has endeavored to increase validity and reliability as well as to minimize researcher bias.

For the sake of increasing internal validity, multiple sources of data collection have been employed. These include in-depth interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observation, and field notes. As suggested by Seale (1999, p. 147), interviews are recorded on audio-tapes, and raw data is thereby preserved. Counting the frequency with which texts occur by using the codes and tabulations recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994) was adopted to increase rigor. Moreover, a member check was also carried out. In a member check, transcripts are sent to the interviewees to seek validation.

External validity, which involves generalization and transferability, is a major challenge in qualitative studies (Zalan & Lesis 2004, p. 520). As discussed, generalizability of research findings is not a central issue in this study. Nevertheless, this study relies on information obtained from informants working for Japanese

companies in Australia, and external validity is, therefore, limited to respondents working for companies participating in this study. Efforts to enhance external validity, however, have been made following the suggestion of presenting rich and detailed description, especially by concentrating on setting (Merriam 1988, p. 177). The researcher used follow-up questions to probe for further information and increase reliability as well as to reduce potential bias during the course of interviews. This was done on the basis of the methods suggested by Brislin below:

... probe might be ‘what do you mean?’ or ‘Could you tell me more about that?’ . . . the quality of answers can be judged according to whether or not answers make sense given the answer to other probing questions.

(Brislin 1986, p. 164)

In relation to researcher bias, the technique of using probing follow-up questions during interviews is also of help. As suggested by Patton (1990, p. 295), the researcher also maintained a neutral attitude and avoided using leading questions. She also took a non-judgmental stance with respect to any information given by respondents. Such practice is regarded as essential for successful interviewing (Merriam 1988, pp. 75-76).

Critical incident technique was used during interviews to collect data about respondents’ role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) experiences as well as their perceived effective coping strategy. The technique was originally established by Flanagan (1954), and has significant advantages (Gummesson 1991; Locke 1976; Wolfe, 1975; Wolf 1981). Critical incident technique is related to the method of direct observation and offers the researcher richer and more detailed information than may be possible to obtain through direct observation (Gummesson 1991, pp. 117-118). It is also claimed to be the best technique for retrieving information in terms of authentic experience, behavior, and phenomena (Wolf 1981, p. 863). This technique can, therefore, assist in minimizing researcher bias.

Questions are put to respondents employing the methods suggested by Gummesson (1991, p.118) asking informants for example, “think of examples when they ....”, “Describe ...”, and “Provide details on ...”. An example question on role ambiguity is

“Please recollect an incident when you felt uncertain, confused or unhappy about conducting your duties in this company” (see Appendix A).

Further advantages of this technique include placing less cognitive demand on the informants (Locke 1976, p. 1337), and allowing the researcher to make rational categorizations (Wolfe 1975, p. 873). It fosters the development of concepts as stated below.

... inductive method where no hypotheses are needed and the incidents, as they appear in the answers, are allowed to form patterns that the researcher can develop into concepts and theories.

(Gummesson 1991, p. 118)

Critical incident technique not only helps to reduce researcher bias but also offers the added benefit of facilitating rational categorization. Hence, it is of great assistance in the coding phase.

Lastly, the bicultural and bilingual background of the researcher in this study provides a competitive advantage for the increase of validity and reduction of researcher bias. Establishing validity in a cross-cultural study is regarded as difficult due to the differences in cultural assumptions of researcher and informants as noted below:

... qualitative research strategies that may be accepted models for producing valid science in, for example, a specific Scandinavian IB department may not be viewed as valid elsewhere.

(Anderson & Skaates 2004, p. 465)

A person with bicultural and bilingual skills is capable of viewing issues from a wider perspective taking into account both cultures as commented below:

Pre-test work with bilingual and bicultural people can also yield good items (Wesley & Karr, 1966). Such people have lived in two or more cultures, perhaps as a function of extensive study abroad, traveling with their parents as a result of their job assignments, or a personal history of immigration (Brislin 1981). These people can be asked to think about a concept, and then asked to reflect upon it from the viewpoint of one culture, then the other.

(Brislin 1986, p. 157)

The researcher of this thesis is a Japanese national who has lived and worked in Australia for more than a decade, and has also been educated in both countries. She is also equipped with cultural understanding of both Australians and Japanese, and is able to make a careful and pertinent analysis from a broader perspective that considers both cultural aspects. Thus, any bias toward one culture will be minimized as compared to a study conducted by a researcher familiar with only Australian or Japanese culture and only one language in analyzing the data.

The bilingual background of the researcher also offers benefits in increasing validity and reducing researcher bias. Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004, p. 224) claim that the language issue in cross-cultural studies has been taken for granted. They state that English has been the most commonly used language in cross-cultural studies and this has been justified by arguing that it is the shared corporate language in business and multinational companies. They insist on the need for a multilingual approach if valid and trustworthy data is to be collected. Wilkinson and Young (2004, p. 212) support their argument about the use of a multilingual approach as it enhances the effectiveness of communication between researcher and interviewee. Patton (1990) also believes the use of the respondents' language aids in ensuring the quality of data:

Using words that make sense to the interviewee, words that reflect the respondent's world view, will improve the quality of data obtained during the interview. In many cases, without sensitivity to the impact of particular words on the person being interviewed, the answer may make no sense at all or there may be no answer.

(Patton 1990, p. 277)

Marschan-Piekkari and Reis (2004, p. 232) raise the issue of the negative effects of a monolingual approach in cross-cultural studies. They state that the use of a single language, English, has a negative affect on obtaining access to informants, establishing a rapport and trust, and the relationships between researcher and respondents. They also call attention to the results of misunderstanding, researcher bias, and neglect of important messages. They express the need for researchers to be aware as stated below:

The process is an outcome of communication and language skills, and the

challenge is exacerbated in cross-cultural interviews in which the researcher and the interviewee may have a different mother tongue. However, this whole issue may be invisible to an English-speaking researcher who conducts cross-cultural interviews in English and contributes to international business as a field of study.

(Marschan-Piekkari & Reis 2004, p. 225)

The use of the native language of respondents is of great value in cross-cultural studies, especially when the informants' level of English proficiency is not sufficient to express their views without constraints. The English proficiency of informants in cross-cultural studies does not often achieve this level (Daniels & Cannice 2004, pp. 199-200). In this situation, their answers tend to be shorter with the result that the researcher misses valuable information resulting in errors in the data (Zalan & Lewis 2004, p. 521). Although there are individual differences, it is likely that not all the Japanese informants in this study had attained sufficient competency in English to speak without constraint. This is especially so for expatriates. These claims, therefore, clearly demonstrate that two languages should be used for data collection in this study. Hence, the bicultural background of the researcher assists in enhancing validity and the reduction of researcher bias.

Multiple sources of evidence also improve reliability and validity (Denzin & Lincoln 1998, p. 4; Yin 1994, pp. 90-92). Thus, multiple sources of evidence are used in this study to assist in expanding evidence and corroboration (Yin 1994, p. 86). Findings are, therefore, presented as the result of combining multiple data sources. Data sources used in this study include in-depth interviews, documentation, archival records, direct observation, and field notes. These will be reviewed and discussed in the following section (see section 3.3).

### 3.3 DATA COLLECTION

Data collection commenced at the beginning of 2000. The companies that participated in this study are all Japanese companies located in Australia with their Head Offices in Japan. Japanese expatriates are sent to the company in Australia and work with local executives, managers, and employees in the same workplace. The types of industry among the companies vary and include manufacturing and service industries such as trading companies and financial institutions.

**Relevance of interviews.** Employing an interview technique is regarded as pertinent to an exploratory study as well as to the discovery of new situations and it can lead to theory building that can be tested later (Daniel & Cannice 2004, p. 186; Eisenhardt 1989). It also allows the researcher to understand issues from an informant's perspective (Patton 1990, p. 196). Since this study involves exploration as well as revealing issues which have not been previously examined, interviewing is the requisite method for this study. Moreover, the method enables the researcher to capture what is beyond the reach of observation:

Interview is made to find out what we cannot find from observation such as feelings, thoughts, and intention, and also behaviors made in the past, how one organizes the meaning about what is going on. This must be asked.

(Patton 1990, p. 196)

Investigating role stress involves thorough exploration of feelings, thoughts, and how informants make sense or meaning of things or incidents that happen to them. Interviewing is, therefore, crucial for this study.

**Preparation for interview.** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the aim of answering the research problems, and the content of the interview questions focused on issues related to the research questions. Interview protocol was prepared. It was derived from the literature, in particular, a doctoral dissertation by Tokusei (1994) who explored role stress in American and Japanese managers of a Japanese company in the US. The questions used by Tokusei (1994) that relate to the research questions of this study are adapted. These include questions related to role conflict, role ambiguity, cultural differences, and communication (see Appendix A). Her study

looked at role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) of American managers and Japanese managers only. The current study, however, explores those of non-Japanese local and Japanese expatriate staff holding managerial positions as well as non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff holding non-managerial positions. Thus, there are four types of staff in the current study, and these questions were put to them all to ascertain whether only staff in managerial positions experience role stress, or whether those in non-managerial positions were also affected and if so, what types of role stress they experienced, and the reasons for their role stress. Moreover, exploring the coping strategies of American managers and Japanese managers was not included in Tokusei's (1994) study. The current study, on the other hand, aims at identifying coping strategies perceived as effective in reducing role stress. To this end, questions related to coping strategies were also included in the interview (see Appendix A). Respondents were questioned on the basis of this interview protocol, and were encouraged to discuss, elaborate, and reflect on their experiences, feelings, and actions.

Prior to the interview, each informant was individually contacted by the researcher by letter and/or e-mail, and information on the interview and research was provided. This included the purpose of the study, how it was to be carried out, and confidentiality and ethical issues. It also included information suggested by Patton (1990, p. 328) on the importance of the information each interviewee provides for the study, the reason for the importance, and the willingness of the researcher to explain the importance. It also included information on how the findings of this study could contribute towards easing role stress and improving skills in working with Japanese or non-Japanese staff for individuals working in Japanese companies overseas. This was deliberately stated as interviewees' understandings about the study and interests of the researcher can enhance the quality of information they offer to the researcher (Morse 1998, p. 74).

**Informants.** Interview data was collected from individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia. They were employed in various industries, including finance, manufacturing, and trading. Informants were all white collar staff consisting of four types categorized by position and cultural background: non-Japanese local and



Japanese of managerial position, and non-Japanese and Japanese of non-managerial position.

In total, 68 interviews were carried out in which 45 informants were Japanese and 23 were non-Japanese local staff. Japanese informants were either locally hired or expatriates who were sent to Australia from their Head Office. Local Japanese were all born, brought up, and educated in Japan. They also had work experience in both Japan and Australia, and they were familiar with Japanese corporate life. They were either permanent residents of Australia or held a work permit visa sponsored by their employer.

Among the 45 Japanese informants, 31 were expatriates and the rest were locally hired Japanese. Except for one expatriate informant, Japanese expatriates held managerial positions. Among the locally hired Japanese, three informants held the position of manager. As for non-Japanese local staff, there were 23 respondents, and 10 of those held managerial positions. The details are listed in Table 3.1 below.

**Table 3.1 Respondents Who Participated in This Study**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Japanese Expatriate</b>	<b>Locally hired Japanese</b>	<b>Non-Japanese Local</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Managerial</b>	30	3	10	43
<b>Non-Managerial</b>	1	11	13	25
<b>Total</b>	31	14	23	68

**Interview Processes.** This study adopted the process suggested by Daniels and Cannice (2004, p. 198). At the start of the meeting with informants, business cards were exchanged in order to put the interviewee and researcher at ease, and then the researcher engaged the interviewee in small talk. This helped to establish rapport and trust as well as to create a relaxed atmosphere. The topics included ones unrelated to the study. For instance, interviewees asked the researcher questions about herself such as how long she had lived in Australia, why she came to Australia, what sort of work she did, and so on. The researcher also asked the interviewees questions about

themselves. Disclosing information about the researcher assisted the informants in disclosing information about themselves. After this small talk, the researcher briefly explained the study, provided assurances about confidentiality, and asked for approval to record the interview.

As suggested by Merriam (1988, pp. 75-76), the researcher displayed respectful as well as neutral and non-judgmental attitudes towards respondents. She also adopted the role of a good reflective listener, and was sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal communication. As mentioned earlier, probing questions were also asked to elucidate further explanation, clarification, and elaboration. The duration of each interview was approximately 50-90 minutes on average.

Interviews were recorded and were carried out using two languages: English and Japanese. English was used for non-Japanese staff and Japanese was used for locally hired Japanese and expatriate staff. The two languages were purposefully used as it was considered an additional advantage for collecting data as discussed in an earlier section (see section 3.2.2). The critical incident technique was adopted. This is because this technique offers researchers a number of benefits (see section 3.2.2). An example is facilitation in obtaining rich and detailed information (Gummeson 1991, pp. 117-118).

After the completion of the interview, the researcher thanked the interviewees for participating in the study and switched off the audio-tape recorder. Here again, a second round of small talk took place until departure. The topics included personal matters and extensions of issues just discussed during the interview. Small talk at this time took place in a more relaxed and informal atmosphere compared to the initial chat. This allowed interviewees to talk or disclose more about themselves, their feelings, and other issues more freely and frankly. Some of the information obtained during the second round of small talk may not have been obtainable during the interview, especially while the audio-tape recorder was on. This was also an important data collection stage, and the information gathered during the second period of small talk was a valuable part of the data.

**Direct observation.** Direct observation serves as a source of evidence (Silverman 2000, pp. 98-99; Yin 1994). Yin (1994) suggests conducting direct observation on behavior and the environment at the time of the field visit:

Less formal, direct observations might be made throughout a field visit, including those occasions during which other evidence, such as that from interviews, is being collected. For instance, the condition of buildings or work spaces will indicate something about the climate or impoverishment of an organization; similarly, the location or the furnishings of a respondent's office may be one indicator of the status of the respondent within an organization.

(Yin 1994, pp. 86-87)

Following the recommendations of Yin (1994) and Silverman (2000, pp. 98-99), direct observation was adopted in this study. It was carried out when the researcher visited the company for the purpose of conducting interviews. Observations included company buildings, the reception area, office layout, facilities, furniture, the private or shared offices of informants, meeting rooms, and work atmosphere on the floor. In terms of the duration of observations, when the interview was conducted in an area where the work floor was observable, observations were made throughout the interview. When the interview was carried out in a room where the workplace could not be observed through glass walls and doors, observation on the work floor was made before entering the room as well as after the completion of the interview until leaving the building. In this instance, observation time was limited. However, the length of time available for observation is not a key point for this data source as stated by Merriam (1988) below. Instead it varies depending on the target information:

There is no ideal amount of time to spend observing nor is there one preferred pattern of observation. For some situations, observation over an extended period of time may be most appropriate; for others, shorter periodic observations make the most sense given the purpose of the study and practical constraints.

(Merriam 1988, p. 91)

With regard to office settings, Silverman (2000, p. 140) comments that spatial allocation can differentiate between groups of people. As discussed in the literature review, past studies on Japanese companies overseas revealed a boundary between

local workers and Japanese (Dedoussis 1994; Kidahashi 1987; White & Trevor 1983; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997). This may, to some extent, be influenced by office settings, and this study, therefore, looked at the spatial arrangements and proximity among staff, along with behavior, office atmosphere, and other environments.

**Other data.** Field notes were created following Silverman's suggestions of systematizing field notes, "*Recording what we can see as well as what we hear, and expand field notes beyond immediate observations*" (Silverman 2000, pp. 140-143). Field notes were created including records of observations, information gained during small talk, and other personal reflections. The researcher also included information obtained from the two periods of small talk where the first round of small talk was carried out prior to the interview, and the second was conducted at the completion of the interview. In particular, the researcher was able to obtain valuable information during the second round of small talk as informants were more relaxed and conversation was not recorded.

Documentation and archive records such as reports, internal documents, and personal or organizational records can also provide evidence in a qualitative study (Yin 1994, pp. 81-83). This study also collected documentation as one of its multiple sources of data. This included job descriptions, company reports, company information available from the internet, and articles in Japanese community papers.

**Transcribing data.** Transcribing data from audio-tape is a theoretically saturated activity (Silverman 2000, p. 131), and interviews were transcribed by experienced transcribers. Japanese interview data was transcribed by native Japanese speakers, and English interview data was transcribed by native English speakers. In order to correct any omissions and errors, the researcher proof read the transcribed data by listening to the tape and reading through the transcripts.

**Completion of data collection.** Data collection was completed when it reached saturation. Saturation is reached when iteration from data sources is obtained (Morse 1998, p. 76), and no further categories are generated (Patton 1990, p. 199). It is described as:

. . . further iterations involving review of the full transcript provided no additional codes, or sub-codes, and no further meaningful rearrangement, or renaming of existing codes to assist the interpretation of the data.  
(Lindsay 2004, p. 496)

This study followed this process, and the researcher continued collecting data until iterations occurred. This assisted in confirmation of data and ensured saturation (Morse 1998, p. 76). This was reached when 68 interviews were completed.

### **3.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

Computer assisted qualitative data analysis increases rigor (Seale 1999; Silverman 2000, p. 156) and is beneficial in studies researching international business (Lindsay 2004, p. 486). The data in this study was processed using computer software for qualitative analysis, NVivo 1.1 (Qualitative Solution & Research Pty Ltd, 1999). NVivo was chosen from among a range of software because of its particular ability in processing multilingual data. The use of raw data is strongly recommended as it can increase validity (Anderson & Skaates 2004, p. 481). This study collected data in both English and Japanese languages, and the use of NVivo allowed the researcher to process the English and Japanese raw data simultaneously.

NVivo also allows for coding of specified segments of the texts, and retrieval of the texts marked under the same code. It can retrieve and display both English and Japanese texts marked under the same code simultaneously, so that a display of codes can contain a mixture of texts written in both languages in a single code text. Coding is a data reduction process that enables the drawing of concepts and conclusions (Miles & Huberman 1994, pp. 10-11). It enables the researcher to identify patterns and trends, and to make contributions to the development of theory (Richards & Richards 1998, p. 216). This thesis uses NVivo primarily for coding purpose.

**Coding Process.** Coding was conducted on all data collected. Seale (1999) makes some propositions for the coding process:

The early stages of coding are therefore more appropriately called 'indexing', acting as signposts to interesting bits of data, rather than representing some final argument about meaning . . . point index words increasingly come to describe phenomena that the researcher believes to have a certain stability or regularity in the way in which they occur across different contexts. At this point we are seeing a gradual transition from indexing to coding.

(Seale 1999, p. 154)

Coding process was carefully carried out following these suggestions. Fixing meaning was avoided at an early stage, and the process started with 'indexing' the texts. That is, it was conducted through clustering items deemed to be similar in order to obtain answers to the research questions. The 'indexing' activities, then, were gradually transformed to 'coding'. In order to ensure internal validity and reliability, patterns and themes were derived through careful processes of recoding as well as linking of the codes and data. These were carried out by identifying broad themes to the development of sub-themes (Lindsay 2004, p. 496).

An inter-rater check was not carried out for this study in accordance with Janesick's stance (1998, p. 47) that the researcher should make final decisions about the texts. There is also a view that standardization in interpreting texts is not an essential issue in qualitative study (Silverman 2000, p. 186). Strong criticism has also been made concerning the use of inter-raters as below:

This process actually violates the process of induction, because the first investigator has a bank of knowledge from conducting other interviews and from observing that the second researcher does not have. As the process of inductive qualitative inquiry frequently depends on insight and on the process of linking data (both among categories and with established theory), expecting another investigator to have the same insight from a limited data base is unrealistic.

(Morse 1998, pp. 77-78)

As mentioned earlier, it can be difficult to achieve validity in cross-cultural qualitative studies (Anderson & Skaates 2004, p. 465). Individuals from different cultural backgrounds do not share the same cultural assumptions and do not have a shared understanding on how they look at issues (Anderson & Skaates 2004, p. 465). An inter-rater check by people with different cultural backgrounds, or those who

have different levels of cultural understandings about the two countries, Australia and Japan, therefore, may not yield reliable results. It may also hamper the quality of the coding paradigm.

Counting the number of phenomena is strongly recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 215-216). They claim that it is an effective way of verifying a hypothesis and reducing researcher bias. It also assists in increasing credibility and persuasiveness of data presentations, and is effective for making generalizations (Seale 1999). This study employs this approach where the analysis of data includes counting the frequency of text segments under the code and making comparisons. It aims to identify the characteristics of role conflicts and role ambiguities by different groups of people working for a company, increasing the credibility of the data analysis, and protecting against researcher bias,.

### **3.5 ETHICAL ISSUES**

This section discusses ethical concerns and how they are treated to avoid violation of ethical guidelines. Topics discussed here are: approval by the Ethics Committee, disclosure of identity of the researcher and information about the study, participation in this research, affects on informants, confidentiality and anonymity.

**Ethics Committee approval.** This study was approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of data collection. It provides assurance that the research activities including data collection, analysis, and reporting were conducted legitimately abiding by the ethical guidelines set out by the University. All respondents were informed about the approval in the letter/e-mail they received initially from the researcher. The name of the Research Ethics Officer and contact details of the Committee were also provided to the informants on an informed consent form signed by the informants. The informed consent form as well as the interview protocol were also approved by the Committee.

**Disclosure of the researcher's identity and information about the study.** As mentioned previously (see section 3.3), all informants were given information on the

researcher's background and the study when they were contacted initially via a letter and/or e-mail. Information about the researcher was not disguised, and included the institution she is affiliated to for her doctoral study, her occupation, employer, and her contact details. It also included a brief introduction to the project, the purpose of the study, and ethical issues (see below for details). As mentioned above, information concerning approval by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee was provided. The letter and/or e-mail were written in English to non-Japanese local informants, and were written in Japanese to local and expatriate Japanese. This was done to ensure that all informants clearly understood the research project and information on the researcher.

**Participation in this research.** All informants were informed in the letter and/or e-mail mentioned above that they received from the researcher that participation in this study was voluntary. They were also informed that they were free to withdraw from participating in this study at any time they wished and they could do so without giving any reason. This information was reiterated prior to the commencement of the interviews. It was included on an informed consent form (Appendix B) signed by the informants as well as by verbal explanation from the researcher. It was also explained to informants that they had the option to not answer any questions if they wished during the interview.

**Effects upon informants and organizations.** The researcher was careful to avoid causing any negative effects on informants participating in the study. Informants signed a formal consent form prior to participating in this project (see Appendix B). It included the approval by the University's Ethics Committee, information about the study, the researcher, voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

Prior to the commencement of interviews, interviewees were informed again about voluntary participation and told they were free to withdraw from any aspect of the research, as well as to refuse to answer any questions if they wished. The researcher endeavored to use their time as productively as possible and conducted interviews in a respectful manner. She did not intrude into the personal affairs of participants, and all informants were able to preserve personal privacy. It was also explained that the



researcher was not linked to the organization where they were employed, and any information that might cause any negative effect on informants would not be passed on to any individuals including colleagues, their seniors, executives, and the overall organization. Informants were also given the opportunity to read and provide comments on the transcript of their interview.

**Confidentiality and anonymity.** The confidentiality of participants and organizations were secured in line with the University's ethical guidelines. First, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to informants through the letter and/or e-mail used for initial contact by the researcher, and they received an informed consent form prior to the commencement of the interview. Informants were guaranteed confidentiality on three separate occasions.

Second, all informants were given an identification code. Third, the researcher did not discuss the content of information obtained from informants with other informants. Fourth, the informants were also informed that the data was accessible only by the researcher. Fifth, all data collected such as transcriptions, audio-cassettes, and field notes were securely stored at the researcher's home. Moreover, the computer containing information obtained from this study can only be accessed by the researcher.

Anonymity and confidentiality were also adhered to strictly at the reporting phase. The actual names of individuals and organizations were not revealed in the quotations. Informants should also not be recognizable in quotations through contextual information (Morse 1998, pp. 79-80). The researcher was assiduous in all pursuits at the reporting phase concerning contextual and circumstantial references to protect informants and organizations.

### **3.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter has provided the justification for adopting a qualitative approach, and outlined the research design, methods of data collection and analysis. Reliability, validity, and ethical concerns were also discussed.

This research's aims involve induction, exploration, and discovery concerning role stress among Japanese and non-Japanese white collar staff holding managerial and non-managerial positions in Japanese companies operating in Australia, and how they cope with these problems. A qualitative approach is inductive and exploratory, and is pertinent for discovery (Merriam 1988, pp. 17-21). Qualitative study is, therefore, an ideal approach to answer the research questions.

Multiple methods of research were adopted for this study. They include in-depth interview, documentation, archival records, direct observation, and field notes. This study takes the approach of combining multiple sources of evidence as this can assist in expanding evidence and corroboration (Yin 1994, p. 86). The data collected from the methods provided rich and detailed information, and enabled the researcher to answer the research questions set out for this study.

It is crucial for Japanese companies overseas to alleviate their existing problems, learn how to manage white collar staff, and establish a successfully integrated organization. To attain this goal, an exploration of role stress among all types of staff and the coping strategies that are perceived to be effective in improving the situation are indispensable. Locally hired Japanese staff's role stress experiences and effective coping strategies have not previously been investigated, and no information in this regard is available. Research to date has paid little attention to exploring effective coping strategies that are crucial for improving management of people in overseas Japanese companies. Hence, there is a need for descriptive and exploratory studies that take into account these issues. The research design of this study is able to make a contribution towards filling this gap in past studies and to improve the people management of Japanese companies in Australia.

## CHAPTER 4 MANAGEMENT PROCESSES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents findings on informal aspects of management processes in Japanese companies in Australia. The emerging themes address Research Question 1 of this dissertation. The question is stated again below.

Research Question 1:

*Are there any informal management processes carried out in Japanese companies located in Australia, particularly in relation to decision making, information sharing, and job roles? If so, what are they? How are they carried out?*

Common themes emerged by establishing a ratio of staff comments concerning informal aspects of management processes carried out in their companies. Two types of themes were revealed. These are, firstly, informal communication and, secondly, flexibility in conducting duties.

Findings on each theme are presented in the analysis tables. They indicate frequency of respondents' comments on a theme and are organized according to informant group type to illustrate their level of agreement with the theme. Examples of comments relevant to the theme are also provided.

## 4.2 INFORMAL COMMUNICATION

Informal communication was revealed as one of the informal management processes. It refers specifically to informal discussion among staff members on issues surrounding both work and non-work matters. The details are presented in the following three sections. The first section presents the findings on informal communication which occurs prior to formal decision making. The second section deals with frequency of informal staff communication, and the final section presents the findings on when and where informal communication takes place.

### 4.2.1 Informal Decision Making Style

A theme on informal process in decision making emerged. This theme highlights or captures instances of informal decision making in overseas Japanese companies. The data showed that it is common for Japanese expatriates to decide upon matters to be raised in meetings prior to the official business meeting. The following table displays the frequency of respondents' comments on this trend.

**Table 4.1 Informal Discussions Regarding Decisions to Be Made**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	60.00% (6)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	7.7% (1)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	30.4% (7)
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	61.3% (19)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	7.1% (1)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> )(n=45)	44.4% (20)

The results revealed that respondents in both managerial and non-managerial positions were holding informal discussions for the purpose of making decisions. The frequency of comments by respondents in non-managerial positions was, however, fairly low – around 7 percent.

On the other hand, the frequency of comments by both non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff was similar, with approximately 60 percent of each group commenting on their informal discussions prior to official meetings. This would appear to indicate a considerable difference in the practice of using informal discussions between staff in non-managerial positions and both non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff. The diametrically opposed results are not surprising, as decision making primarily involves managers and executives.

Japanese expatriate staff carried out the process of informal decision making in their own language. Most commonly, the staff members who remained in the office after official work hours were Japanese managers. Consequently they took the opportunity to use this time to discuss issues in a quieter office environment, in an informal and relaxed atmosphere.

Japanese expatriate staff stated that unless there are visitors from Japan, Japanese staff in offshore offices do not participate in after-work activities, such as going out for a drink and karaoke, as much as they might in Japan. Instead, a more common practice is to go to lunch with other Japanese colleagues or managers, typically to a Japanese restaurant. In some companies, a manager and a managing director will lunch together. This would not happen in the Head Office in Japan, where there may be hundreds of staff and where a managing director would be considered far too senior in comparison to a manager for them to lunch together. However, in offshore offices in Australia, this is acceptable owing to the small number of Japanese expatriate managers. During these lunches, various business issues would be discussed and directions set. The following are some comments on how this is practiced:

When we [Japanese] get together [over a drink or lunch], there is a lot of chatting, and during that time, we discuss things about business, so these sorts of things get accumulated little by little and lead to the decisions we make eventually . . . We Japanese usually go together to a Japanese restaurant or a noodle bar for lunch every day, and when I have something I would hesitate to report to our managing director formally [at a meeting], I just report to him over lunch informally. . . . Because, you know, there are only four or five Japanese [expatriates] here, so we go to lunch with our managing director too. Like, three or four of us go to lunch together in the same car, and if I have something I need to report to him, I just report it to him in the car on the way to the restaurant.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HWAI, Date: 17/03/2000)

Non-Japanese local managers initially found this informal approach difficult to understand, in its importance, how it works, and how they should carry it out. They needed to determine whose opinions were of greater value, and seamlessly combine them into a proposal for submission. Once they learned the process, they came to see it not just as a concession to the methods of their Japanese colleagues, but to value the practice for itself, and incorporated it into their own daily work activities. The following are some comments from non-Japanese local managers:

For example, if I find that something is going wrong, and I need to take some corrective action, I need to describe, talk to the person involved, we can talk in the corridor, we can talk outside, we can talk downstairs, and discuss the issues. Then, informally we discuss the possibility, and come up with the possible idea. Then, at this stage, you make it formal. We call the formal meeting, and say this is the problem, this is my idea for the solution, these are the various ideas discussed, and then, the final decision is always formal . . . Once informal decisions are made, it's formalized, and finally the formal decision is made informally, 90% you reach the consensus. It [formal meeting] is a ratification sort of thing.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: HDYI, Date: 17/03/2000)

The hardest thing to learn in this organization is informal process. In an Australian company, if I had an idea or suggestions, I show it to my boss who would sign it off and say yes go ahead. In this company, I would have an informal discussion with my boss and all other General Managers to get their view and see if anyone had any objections, and try and incorporate their ideas, and that would take a long time sometimes. Some of those people's opinions matter more, and some people's matter less, . . . Then once that is all

together, then, I can make a formal proposal. It tends to go through fairly quickly after that.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

As displayed in Table 4.1 above, 60 percent of non-Japanese managers who participated in this study used this informal decision making process. Of these, 33.3 percent of non-Japanese local managers found it to be beneficial.

Four positive aspects were found. First, mastery of the informal process increased interaction opportunities with Japanese managers. Second, they were able to gain better access to information owing to the increased interaction. Third, by receiving more information, they were able to attain a greater understanding of both the matter at hand and the company's workings as a whole. Fourth, it promoted personal relations between non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff. Non-Japanese local managers' comments are provided below:

The way the Japanese work in terms of obtaining information from everybody around the place, informally, if they are putting together a proposal, is a really effective way of doing it, because when you are implementing something, things can go smoothly, rather than having problems with implementation because then people raise objections. So I think that is a really positive thing, and a good thing. And those informal meetings and those informal strategies and networks I think that has been important both personally, in terms of learning how to do that, as well as business-wise, because I think that informal networks are a good way, obviously, to move through a company and get some information etc. And also help you solve problems, because you understand more closely what is happening.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

I will speak to the General Manager of each of those divisions before I circulate. I explain to them, I will do a kind of *nemawashi*. I started to do so about twenty years ago, and did not do that for the first ten years as I didn't understand that it was important. I just come to know and understand after some time that it works better, no doubt.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJOI, Date: 5/10/2000)

## **4.2.2 Frequency of Informal Communication**

The above section (see section 4.2.1) illustrates how informal communication is used to discuss issues to be decided prior to formal meetings. This section presents frequency of informal communication in relation to this. Two types of informal communication emerged: communication between Japanese expatriate staff, and communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.

### **4.2.2.1 Informal Communication between Japanese Expatriate Staff**

One of the clearest trends to emerge was the number of Japanese expatriate staff who used the informal communication process most frequently with each other. Approximately 48 percent of Japanese expatriate staff revealed that their fellow Japanese expatriate staff, of all group types in the company, are the ones they spend more time with and communicate with most frequently.

No comment to the contrary, such as, there was little communication between Japanese expatriate staff, was made by anyone interviewed. In fact, 20 percent of non-Japanese local managers interviewed mentioned the strong tendency of Japanese expatriate staff to seek out one another's company (to 'stick together'). One of these, a woman who had gone to lunch several times with Japanese expatriate managers shortly after she joined the company, described expatriate lunches:

Over lunch you can do a lot of probably sort of networking and stuff like that, or chatting off the cuff. And you're all around the one table or something. And so rather than have to go from this little section where this person sits, come round and talk to this one who sits there, and then round to talk to this one who sits here. They are all together, and of course they throw lines because they've known each other so long, they throw lines at each other, you know, oh you know, just chatting about stuff. But that's a good interaction going to lunch.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

Japanese expatriate staff provided their reasons for gathering with fellow Japanese expatriate staff. First, it was partly due to their level of English language competence.



They felt they could communicate comfortably in their own language with no need to find the right words and expressions and translate them to their second language, English. They therefore felt more comfortable talking with fellow Japanese expatriates than talking with non-Japanese local staff.

In addition, the fact that a greater extent of common ground exists among Japanese expatriate staff than they share with anybody else in the company was given as a reason. The common ground includes: being an expatriate sent from Japan, the duties of managing a local office while satisfying requests from Japan, and knowledge and experience of corporate culture in Japan. The following is an example of a comment regarding this:

Because it's so much easier to talk to other fellow Japanese, you know. We can talk in Japanese, and it's more comfortable. And we are in the same situation, this is another reason why we stick together, I think. For instance, we understand each other very well regarding the experience of our pay reduction, and we have more common ground [than with local staff] like family things and being an expatriate here. We have many things in common. So, in this sense, we mix well, I think.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: HHII, Date: 17/03/2000)

#### 4.2.2.2 Frequency of Communication between Non-Japanese Local Staff and Japanese Expatriate Staff

As to communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, approximately half the non-Japanese local staff described it as infrequent and insufficient. In particular, the frequency of this comment from non-Japanese local managers was 70 percent. This was the highest among all staff. Approximately 33 percent of Japanese staff expressed this in similar terms. The table below presents the number of respondents interviewed that held this perception.

**Table 4.2 Insufficient Communication Between  
Non-Japanese Local Staff and Japanese Expatriate Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	70.0% (7)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	38.5% (5)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	52.2% (12)
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	29.0% (9)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	42.9% (6)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	33.3% (15)

Non-Japanese locals, who described a lack of communication and felt distanced from the Japanese expatriates, wished to communicate more and have better relationships with the Japanese expatriates. They expressed the belief that there is a stronger bond and more frequent communication among Japanese expatriate staff as compared to that between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. Their perception was that Japanese expatriate staff were not interested in improving communications with local staff, and had no intention of breaking down the barriers that existed between them and developing improved personal relationships. Non-Japanese local staff, therefore, sensed a distance between themselves and the Japanese expatriates, and became of the opinion that Japanese expatriate staff were unapproachable. The following are some examples of comments made by non-Japanese local staff:

I knew [Japanese expatriate staff mix well], I expected, but it's still hard sometimes. I mean, even though you know that's the way they are, you feel that it would be nice if they made some effort, to try and appreciate the difference and try to work better with national [i.e. local] staff. Some of them do. You know, some of the Japanese, generally I guess the more younger generation, the ones that have had a bit more Western experience at a younger age, tend to be better. The older ones tend to be more the older ways and separate themselves from national [i.e. local] staff.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MCOI, Date: 29/09/2000)

Locally hired managers find it a bit difficult to go directly to the General Affairs manager [Japanese expatriate staff] or to '*Shachoo*' [Japanese Managing Director] to discuss anything. There's not an open discussion between the locally hired managers and the imported managers [i.e. Japanese expatriates]. There's not a free exchange. It's kind of a love/hate relationship between those guys.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

Similarly, Japanese expatriate staff agreed that they tended to congregate with other Japanese expatriate staff, and that they communicated a lot less with non-Japanese local staff compared to Japanese expatriate staff.

Talking about the frequency of communication, I definitely talk more often with Japanese managers. There are two [non-Japanese] local managers among four General Managers reporting to me. Yes, they [non-Japanese local managers] come to see me to report, but I don't particularly tell them 'do this' and 'do that' much. Well, after all, the frequency of communication with [non-Japanese] local managers is about half or one third compared with communication with Japanese managers.

(Japanese Expatriate Executives: MHAI, Date: 19/10/2000)

Japanese expatriate staff's comments suggest that their communication with non-Japanese local staff is minimal. That is, they communicate nothing more than what is required to carry out their duties. They also mentioned feeling distanced from non-Japanese local staff as the comment below illustrates:

Japanese [expatriate] staff sticks together at lunch time, yeah, and we communicate among ourselves. I don't know how other people feel about this. You know, there are staff from different countries in this company, but you know, I feel that the only 'foreigners' in this company are the Japanese, and other staff integrate well regardless of their nationality such as Chinese or American, you know. Maybe this is because it's a Japanese company, but I feel that Japanese staff in this company are one step outside the circle of our company staff compared to everyone else in this company.

(Japanese Expatriate Employee: HNAI, Date: 21/03/2000)

This study revealed data which provides supporting evidence for the feeling of being distanced from one another that non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff

experience. The evidence illustrates how Japanese expatriates in the company are regarded by local staff. The study revealed that local staff – both Japanese and non-Japanese – regarded the Japanese expatriate staff as ‘special’. Table 4.3 displays the frequency of respondents’ comments on this.

**Table 4.3 Local Staff who Regard Japanese Expatriate Staff as ‘Special’**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	60.0 % (6)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	69.3 % (9)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	65.2 % (15)
Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	71.4 % (10)

The table indicates that 65.2 percent of non-Japanese local staff felt that Japanese expatriate staff were ‘special’ and different from other locally hired employees. There was not a large difference regarding this in the perceptions of non-Japanese local managers and non-Japanese local employees. Similarly, 71.4 percent of local Japanese staff shared this view. The following are some examples of comments.

With local people, it’s easier to discuss, we can discuss in the corridor, we can discuss in the toilet, we can discuss over a cup of tea. With local people, it’s more relaxed. But with Japanese expatriates, it’s more formal. You won’t talk to the Japanese expatriates in the corridor, or something. So it’s a little bit different... with a Japanese person, we are more careful.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: HDYI, Date: 17/3/2000)

We try to please the expatriate staff because they come from Head Office, they’re obviously very important people.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JFAA, Date: 16/04/2002)

The results show that approximately 22 percent of Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged that local staff consider them to be 'special'. An example of a comment follows:

Local staff know the differences between Japanese expatriates and local staff. They [locals] have been trained to act this way [to show respect and treat expatriate staff differently] while working in the company. So even when a younger Japanese person like me was sent from Japan, local staff, including the [non-Japanese local] director, showed me respect, and I didn't experience any discomfort at all.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: JASA, Date: 22/05/2002)

Overall, the findings in this section show a significant contrast: Japanese expatriate staff have a high level of informal communication among themselves, but their level of informal communication with non-Japanese local staff is considerably lower.

The results also revealed that Japanese expatriate staff were considered as being 'special' and different by local employees and managers, including non-Japanese and local Japanese staff. The findings suggest that local staff and Japanese expatriates experienced a sense of distance between each other, with a feeling of 'us and them' prevailing. It corroborates that there is a lack of integration in the staff as a whole.

#### **4.2.3 When and Where Informal Communication Takes Place**

This section presents findings on when and where informal communication takes place. It identifies and compares the two types which emerged: (1) informal communication among Japanese expatriate staff, and (2) informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. These are presented in the following two sections.

#### 4.2.3.1 Informal Communication among Japanese Expatriate Staff

Among Japanese expatriate staff, two kinds of opportunities for informal communication were apparent. These are during lunch, and outside official work hours. Table 4.4 indicates the percentage of Japanese expatriate staff who provided information regarding the times at which they have informal communication with each other.

**Table 4.4 Informal Communication among Japanese Expatriate Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Lunch Percentage of staff</b>	<b>Outside Work Hours Percentage of staff</b>
Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> )(n=31)	22.6% (7)	32.3% (10)

Approximately 22 percent of all Japanese expatriate staff who participated in this study frequently carry out their informal communication during lunch with each other, usually at a Japanese restaurant. Approximately 32 percent of them spent time with each other outside ‘nine to five’ official work hours. This included working back late at the office as well as drinks and dinner and gatherings at weekends.

Because locals do not stay back at the office as often as their Japanese counterparts, Japanese expatriates take the opportunity to communicate informally and share information with each other. They themselves acknowledged this tendency. The following are examples of comments:

Yeah, after five o’clock, we have informal talks. ... I try to talk with many [local] staff, but usually with people [Japanese] at management level.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: JASA, Date: 22/05/2002)

I go to lunch with Japanese people [expatriate staff] almost all the time. ... You see, every Japanese person has a different area of responsibilities, and we don’t

have much involvement in each other's work. So, for this reason, we want to talk with them [to get to know what is happening in their sections].

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: HHII, Date: 17/03/2000)

#### 4.2.3.2 Informal Communication between Non-Japanese Local Staff and Japanese Expatriate Staff

The findings of this study identified where and when informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff takes place. Four types of gathering locations were identified from the data. They are: smoking areas, at work during work hours, at work after work hours, and company functions.

As is often the case, smoking areas were established in response to the non-smoking regulations in the building. In this study, the smoking areas identified were spaces around the main entrance or back entrance of the office building. Approximately 26 percent of Japanese expatriate staff mentioned that in the smoking area was when they had informal communication with non-Japanese local staff. During the research stage, the researcher often observed staff smoking outside their work locations, where Japanese and non-Japanese staff engaged in informal conversations. In these areas, interaction could occur between staff who may not normally have had the opportunity for interaction inside the company. In this way, smoking provided a way to interact with others of any position, section, or cultural background. An example of a comment follows:

I smoke, and this floor is a non-smoking area, so I have to go down and smoke there [outside]. And, there are people who also smoke in this company, so I often just have a chat there with them.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HTAI, Date: 22/03/2000)

The results revealed that only one non-Japanese local staff and one Japanese expatriate staff commented that informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff occurred after work hours. This type of informal communication will not occur unless non-Japanese local staff stay back at the office, and

this situation is the least likely to occur. In contrast, informal communication at work during work hours was the most common occasion where 30 percent of non-Japanese local managers and 13 percent of Japanese expatriate staff commented about this. The following is an example of a comment:

To discuss work, then, I go to their desk and talk to them [i.e. non-Japanese local staff]. If there are many people, then we will use a room. And for chatting, well, maybe at the toilet, and also when I go to our photocopier room, I have chats with them [non-Japanese local staff].

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: HHII, Date: 17/03/2000)

Company functions were another opportunity for informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This refers to staff social gatherings which are organized by the company. Larger size companies tend to have functions such as Friday drinks, or weekend gatherings like picnics and sports days. These offer interaction opportunities with people with whom one does not normally talk informally. An example of a comment follows:

There is a tendency for Japanese staff to stick together, and similarly for non-Japanese local staff to also stick together. So, we organize what we call a 'get together' once a month. We have this not only in Sydney [office] but also in Melbourne [office] as well. It's on the first Friday of the month. On this day, we use our meeting room on the 47<sup>th</sup> floor just above this [floor]. It's a big meeting room, and we have finger food, beer, and wine; non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff talk and have a chat. We use these occasions, for instance, to introduce new staff who have just joined the company to everyone, or to farewell staff who are leaving for some reason. Traditionally, we've been doing this without distinction between non-Japanese local staff or Japanese staff.

(Japanese Expatriate Executive: MHAI, Date: 19/10/2000)

Among the four types of gathering locations, smoking area (26 percent by Japanese expatriate staff) and at work during work hours (30 percent by non-Japanese local managers) were the most common locations for informal communication to occur between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.



Comparing informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff with informal communication among Japanese staff, there were common factors contributing to when and where informal communication takes place between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, and informal communication among Japanese expatriate staff.

Informal interactions between Japanese expatriate staff typically happen during lunch and outside 'nine to five' work hours, including weekends. This kind of communication requires a certain commitment in arrangement and participation, and the findings illustrate that Japanese expatriate staff are willing to spend time with other expatriate staff.

In contrast, informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff generally takes place at work, including the smoking area and during company functions. These types of informal communication do not require commitment or a willingness to make the opportunity to spend time together outside work. They signify, rather, a passivity – a willingness to take, but not create, the opportunity. The results, hence, suggest that between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff there is a reluctance to spend time together.

The findings, thus, corroborate that there is a marked difference between the willingness of Japanese expatriate staff to initiate informal communication with each other, and the willingness of non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff to do the same thing.

This reluctance is supported by the findings that the frequency of informal communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff is lower compared to that of the informal communication which takes place among Japanese expatriate staff (see section 4.2.2).

### **4.3 FLEXIBILITY IN CONDUCTING DUTIES**

The informal aspects of conducting one's duties emerged as one of the informal management processes in Japanese companies in Australia. The next section looks at job descriptions – how the jobs are in fact described, and how staff interpret them. It then looks at the manner in which local staff perform tasks which are not mentioned in their job description.

#### **4.3.1 Job Descriptions**

This section presents the findings about job descriptions of employees, and managers of local staff, including non-Japanese and Japanese staff. This is followed by the results of Japanese expatriate staff.

##### **4.3.1.1 Local Staff Job Descriptions**

Job descriptions were found to vary from short and simple, describing only broad areas of duty, to quite detailed where every aspect of the job was described.

The results show that the job descriptions of more than half the non-Japanese local employees (53.8 percent) as well as nearly 40 percent of all non-Japanese local staff (i.e. including both non-Japanese local managers and non-Japanese local employees) were not set down in detail. Similar to this, 50 percent of local Japanese staff described their job description as 'not detailed, vague, and/or covering only general areas of duty'. For instance, a job description provided by a non-Japanese local manager (code identification MCOI) contains a clause which requires him to perform other duties when needed by the company.

In contrast, the percentage of those who saw their job description as detailed was far less. Notably, there were no non-Japanese local managers in this category. Moreover, the percentage of local Japanese staff with detailed job descriptions was 7.1 percent. This is only 1/7 of local Japanese staff who responded that their job descriptions are not set

down in detail. The results, therefore, suggest a certain tendency for job descriptions in Japanese companies in Australia to be vague, and/or covering general areas of duty only, rather than detailed.

The following are examples of comments made by non-Japanese local employees and managers who talked about their non-detailed job descriptions:

Because that is very generic. It's not specific. The job description says it's for all marketing for Hidaka [Name of the company disguised], so that means anything.  
(Non-Japanese Local Employee: HMOI, Date: 29/03/2000)

My job description is very vague, responsible for everything. I think everyone does extra duties because you can never write a job description that is absolutely definitive to cover every situation there is in the day unless people help each other.  
(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KPHL, Date: 06/05/2000)

The following are examples of comments made by those whose job descriptions were written in detail:

Yes, everyone has a job description, and it's reviewed every six months. It's a detailed one. My job description was already developed when I joined this company.  
(Local Japanese Staff: JFUT, Date: 22/02/2002)

It's pretty detailed, we had a lot of input to what went into the job description.  
(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MCAI, Date: 29/09/2000)

The implication for those staff with 'vague and/or general' job descriptions is that they are expected to take on any task that may come up or that may be peripheral to their normal duties. There is an implied obligation on their part to be flexible whenever necessary, and local staff are expected to understand this obligation. This is common practice in Japanese companies and is seen as a normal informal management process (see section 2.2.5).

#### 4.3.1.2 Japanese Expatriates and Job Descriptions

The results revealed that the Japanese expatriate staff's attitudes to their job descriptions are somewhat different. Approximately 32 percent of them explained that they did not concern themselves with the content of their job descriptions, and expressed their willingness to do anything that was required whenever necessary. The results thus illustrated a great deal of job flexibility on the part of Japanese expatriate staff.

Japanese expatriate staff had a strong sense of their responsibility to take on any kind of task whenever required. They believed that this attitude was a requirement of the expatriate in the company, especially in their capacity to liaise between the local office and Head Office in Japan. For this reason, their job descriptions were to them purely a formality. Some did not even remember what their job description actually said. Others commented that job descriptions were developed for local staff only, and Japanese expatriate staff did not have them in Australia. The following are examples of comments regarding this:

I think the locals' ones [job description] are much more properly done. I think that for the Japanese or in Japanese companies, these things are not regulated, are they? In Japan, we don't do those things. When I go back there [Japan], we don't have job descriptions. We can't do the work in the way it's done here [in Australia], so we have it in a general form. Even when we have it, it's very vague. In my case, I've got to do various things, so you can't really say something like these are your duties and those are not. So, I just do anything according to the need.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HHII, Date: 17/03/2000)

Well, it's really impossible to write down all the jobs I do here. Arguing about job demarcation issues, yes, there are employees like that who sometimes say that it's not my job! .... To be honest, I didn't write my job description. I had it done by someone else. I haven't even checked the content. As long as it exists, then that's fine. That's what I think.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HWAI, Date: 17/3/2000)

To me, a job description is something that simply indicates who has responsibility for certain areas. So basically, I don't think about much other than that. ... Only the bare minimum is written down.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HTAI, Date: 22/03/2000)

The job description states duties clearly. ... Being in a liaison role, I can't ignore tasks, saying "this is not my job".

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TIYO, Date: 28/03/03)

The results above suggest that the attitudes of Japanese expatriate staff to their job descriptions are unique among the staff types identified in companies, differing from local Japanese and non-Japanese staff. Moreover, this attitude is common among employees in Japanese companies in Japan (see sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.5). The Japanese expatriate staff are merely continuing to follow the work customs of their home country in a foreign setting.

#### **4.3.2 Perceptions of Local Staff Regarding Tasks which Fall Outside Job Descriptions**

The literature review chapter described the 'Green area' in Japanese companies where tasks are carried out by multiple staff members, and staff need to be flexible in conducting their duties (see Figure 2.1). Job flexibility is an informal process carried out in Japanese companies (see section 2.2.5).

This study revealed that both non-Japanese and Japanese local staff perceived themselves to be flexible in relation to taking on tasks not stated in their job description, if required. The frequency of comments by local Japanese staff was far greater than that of non-Japanese local staff. A majority of local Japanese staff (78.6 percent) commented on their flexible attitude towards their work – almost 35 percent higher than that of non-Japanese local staff. Local Japanese staff understood that if necessary they might have to take on a job not included in their job description, or a job that might not be directly related to their area of responsibility.

Raised in Japan and inculcated with their own work culture, local Japanese staff basically conduct their duties according to the customs of their native country. That is, sensing what they ought to do and what they are expected to do without being explicitly told by their Japanese expatriate colleagues. Whether they are local or expatriate,

Japanese employees share a cultural connection and understanding of what is expected in a Japanese company. The results illustrate that local Japanese staff work as though they were in Japan, rather than in Australia. The following is an example of a comment:

Well, this is a Japanese company, so we know to what extent your duties are supposed to be through '*A-un no kokyuu*' [Japanese style communication; communicate with little articulation].

(Local Japanese Staff: ONAB, Date: 26/10/2001)

With regard to non-Japanese local staff, approximately 43 percent of both non-Japanese local managers and employees mentioned their job flexibility. This is close to half the number of non-Japanese local staff participating in this study. They basically believed in the importance of teamwork and accepted the *modus operandi* of a Japanese company. The following are examples of comments made by non-Japanese local managers and employees:

Sometimes those things fall outside those boundaries [as to the limits to which one can ask the other to do]. But you just do it, to avoid saying no and getting people offside. You make time, then you just do it and then usually you just forget about it. ... I think that's just ... I'm not that type of person that says, that's not on my job description. And I think all managers have to be like that. Like if someone asks you to do something and you can do it, you have to do it.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

I've learnt, I've just learnt not make a big issue out of those things because I know that sometimes you're doing something to hurt someone else, but I'm a firm believer in teamwork and that if the division doesn't work as a team by helping each other out even though it's not on their job description, it's not going to help with the overall business.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MCOI, Date: 29/09/2000)

In summary, the findings suggest that both non-Japanese and Japanese local staff of Japanese companies in Australia considered themselves to be flexible in the matter of accommodating the Japanese method of working. The number of local Japanese staff who held this opinion was significantly higher than that of non-Japanese local staff.

#### **4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presents the findings on informal management processes. Two themes emerged: informal communication and flexibility in conducting duties.

With regard to informal communication, the results revealed that approximately 60 percent of respondents in managerial positions used informal methods to discuss matters to be decided, prior to the official meeting. This includes not only Japanese expatriate staff but also non-Japanese local managers.

The finding suggests that the Japanese method of informal decision making was employed in Japanese companies in Australia by both non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff. It also suggests that non-Japanese local managers accommodated and adopted this method. Among the non-Japanese local managers who used the informal process, 33.3 percent of them had a positive opinion of informal communication, identifying four advantages.

This study also revealed the frequency of informal communication and when and where it takes place among staff. The results showed that Japanese expatriate staff participated in informal communication most frequently with fellow Japanese expatriate staff, while communication between non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff was perceived as insufficient by both local and Japanese staff.

The findings on when and where communication takes place suggest a lack of willingness to spend time together on the part of non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This unwillingness could explain why there is insufficient communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. In addition, the study found that Japanese expatriate staff were regarded as 'special' and different by local staff, and Japanese expatriate staff themselves were aware of this view. This perception, together with the unwillingness to communicate, and insufficient communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, contributes to a feeling of distance prevailing between them.

As for flexibility in the execution of duties, the findings revealed that there was a certain degree of vagueness in the job descriptions. This is the Japanese style of job description, which is more of an informal management process. It implies the necessity of staff to be flexible in taking on tasks outside their job description as well as surmising correctly what precisely they are expected to do. The results indicated that management expected to practice Japanese style informal management in Japanese companies in Australia.

With regard to the attitude towards job flexibility, Japanese expatriate staff did not concern themselves with the content of their job descriptions. They understood that it was their responsibility to do anything required whenever necessary. A significant number of local Japanese staff also claimed that they took on tasks outside their job description when necessary. Non-Japanese local staff also stated that they performed duties outside those listed in their job description if necessary. The frequency, however, was not as high as that of local Japanese staff. The findings, therefore, suggest that local staff of Japanese companies in Australia considered themselves to have job flexibility.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **ROLE AMBIGUITY**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following sections report on the findings from the data on role ambiguity. They address Research Question 2 below.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (i.e. role conflict and role ambiguity) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

Three main themes emerged, namely, (1) communication difficulties, (2) information shortage, and (3) lack of cultural understanding. The consequences of all three themes were misunderstanding and uncertainty.

The results are presented in analysis tables displaying the frequency of staff comments on a particular theme with example comments listed below.

#### **5.2 COMMUNICATION DIFFICULTIES**

The term ‘communication difficulties’ refers to the inability to comprehend meaning within the communications that take place between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This may lead to misunderstandings on one (and sometimes both) sides. Communication difficulties can be broken down into three sub-categories.

- (1) Differences in communication style
- (2) Necessity of guessing
- (3) Insufficient English competence

Each of the above addresses different causes of misunderstanding and uncertainty.

### 5.2.1 Differences in Communication Style

The results show that non-Japanese local staff felt that there were stumbling blocks to being able to conduct a candid conversation with Japanese expatriate staff. This inevitably led to misunderstandings. Table 5.1 below displays the frequency with which non-Japanese local staff made comments on the difficulties of communicating with Japanese expatriate staff.

**Table 5.1 Difficulties of Communicating with Japanese Expatriate Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	70.0% (7)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	38.5 % (5)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	52.2 % (12)

There are two types of Japanese staff: local Japanese and Japanese expatriates. Non-Japanese local staff did not refer to difficulties in communicating with local Japanese staff, so the difficulties mentioned here refer solely to communication with Japanese expatriate staff.

About 50 percent of non-Japanese local staff admitted that they encountered difficulties in their attempts to conduct efficacious communication with Japanese expatriate staff. They felt that Japanese expatriate staff avoided dialogue where candid opinions were expressed and a constructive conclusion could not, therefore, be achieved by the participants. The uncertainty they experienced remained unresolved at the end of the conversation and they could not grasp what their Japanese colleagues were thinking. Non-Japanese local staff, in other words, regarded communication with Japanese expatriate staff as ineffective and inefficient.

The difficulties were related to communication style. Non-Japanese local staff described their own communication style as ‘open’, ‘aggressive’, and

‘confrontational’. By contrast, the communication style of Japanese expatriate staff was described by terms such as ‘harmony’, ‘accepting’, and ‘avoidance’. The following comments illustrate the communication style differences:

There are a number of cultural challenges, for example, the predecessor to Mr Tanaka [name disguised] found a couple of people that work in this office very abrasive and offensive, and the relationship broke down, alright? So, an understanding on both sides. Japanese people need to understand that Australians can be very abrupt and basically rude and we need to understand that Japanese people have a very high expectation of politeness and structure in the way that the communication is undertaken. So that misunderstanding can be a negative.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

Basically because Japanese people are not confrontational, and if someone comes up to them and wants to have an argument, they’ll be more likely to go backwards, than they are to stay there, and want to fight it out ... And often I think it’s the opposite characteristics, because this person might want an argument, but this person won’t have the argument.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

The differences in communication styles prevent both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff from understanding one another and lead to confusion and ambiguity. These difficulties in understanding each other’s opinions and ideas indicate that neither party possesses the requisite communication skills to overcome their contrasting styles. The usual process of getting to know each other and establishing positive human relationships is, therefore, hampered.

Moreover, when non-Japanese local staff discussed characteristics of different communication styles, phrases such as ‘Japanese are ...’ and ‘Australians are ...’ were often used. It indicates a distinct ‘us and them’ attitude in the minds of the speakers and suggests a lack of integration within the company staff as a whole.

### 5.2.2 Necessity of Guessing

The second sub-theme relates to a particular style of communication used by Japanese, where the full meaning of a communication is not articulated. This requires the receiver to ‘guess’, or see beyond what has been merely spoken in order to comprehend the intended message in its entirety (see section 2.2.1.2). Both local Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff considered non-Japanese local staff to be incapable of this. Table 5.2 displays the frequency of Japanese staff comments on non-Japanese local staff’s lack of skills in this area.

**Table 5.2 Non-Japanese Local Staff Lack of Guessing Skills**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	25.8 % (8)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6 % (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	26.7 % (12)

Approximately 27 percent of Japanese staff regarded non-Japanese local staff as incapable of conveying information by less overt means. They claimed non-Japanese local staff were unable to make inferences, interpret innuendoes, or fully apprehend what was being implied and expected of them. For instance, when Japanese staff ask non-Japanese local staff to do something, the simple articulation ‘do this task’ can be interpreted in a number of ways. This may include expected actions, how they are to be performed, methods that will yield the best outcomes, and completion time. Since more than one interpretation is possible, there will necessarily be a certain vagueness or ‘fuzziness’ in the articulated communication as defined by Mukaidono (1988, pp. 38-40). Mukaidono explains that subjective perception is required to understand the meaning of fuzziness and this may result in a word being interpreted differently or being difficult to define. Interpreting this fuzziness, therefore, requires guessing and the use of discretion to interpret all possible clues.

Japanese staff have a tendency to only verbalize the core issue: 'I want you to do this task', and in doing so they expect non-Japanese local staff to not only work out the fuzzy information, but also to work it out correctly. When, as is often the case, they guess incorrectly, misunderstanding naturally arises. Below are examples of comments illustrating this:

They [non-Japanese local staff] can't guess, I'm sure you've experienced this, but uh, what I mean by 'guessing' is to sense what the person really means and what he expects and thinks on the basis of the contextual situation. They can't do this, so when I want to ask them about something, I have to write it in detail. If I say 'I want information about this', then a Japanese person can bring me back the very rich information that has everything I want, but they can't ... I just mentioned to you that we need to specify every detail to get things done decently. So, you know, it's hard [to get things done in a manner I expected]. If I don't say it all very concretely, the message can't be conveyed. I suppose this is the gap, the cultural gap [that exists between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff]. It's difficult.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: YEGO, Date: 25/03/2002)

There is no '*a-un no kokyuu*' [i.e. Japanese style communication; communicate with little articulation] here. I may be exaggerating a bit, but in Japanese communication, we can understand each other by just saying 'that one, you know'. You'll understand what I mean if I say this expression 'that one, you know' to you during this interview, so we can understand each other this way, but it doesn't work like this with anyone other than Japanese. So, this is the big difference. When we want them [non-Japanese local staff] to work on some task, then, they really need to understand what the task is about. Otherwise, they won't do it well.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: KTAU, Date: 14/03/2002)

This problem is illustrated by comments from non-Japanese local staff about the difficulties in clearly understanding Japanese staff. Approximately 40 percent of non-Japanese local managers brought up this issue as an example of the communication problem with expatriate Japanese staff. They found it difficult to deduce exactly what Japanese staff meant in the oral communication. Because a full explanation was not given, interpretation of the communication rests entirely on the local staff themselves, which has led to misunderstanding of the communication. They, therefore, felt the need for clearer articulation, as can be seen in the following comment:

Because I know there is some sort of Japanese way of communicating, by not communicating. Okay? Because I know among Japanese, they understand and don't say anything. I understand this. You need to try to communicate with non-Japanese people, you can't expect them to have the same kind of mentality. They don't know what you are thinking. So for me, in the workplace, it is better to say it. .... So everyone knows it. Who cares? Everyone is busy. How do I have time to guess what you are thinking? What if you guess it wrong?

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MMAA, Date: 15/09/2002)

However, among non-Japanese local staff, there were some informants who claimed that they were able to get a sense of what Japanese meant using all possible clues available. Although the number of those informants was small, they were, however, distinct. They stood out from their non-Japanese colleagues who did not possess this guessing ability. The following table displays the frequency of comments by those informants.

**Table 5.3 Non-Japanese Staff who Claim to Use 'Guessing'**

Total Number of Respondent Type	Percentage and Number of Respondents
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	20.0% (2)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	7.7 % (1)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	13.0 % (3)

They were aware that solely relying on verbalized information was not sufficient when communicating with Japanese, and that it was necessary to use any and all clues available to interpret fuzzy meanings correctly, including non-verbal behavior, cultural knowledge of Japan, and the context of the situation. What was common to these three respondents who claimed to use guessing, was that they had worked with Japanese for more than five years and were familiar with Japanese people, culture, and corporate customs. The comments below illustrate their guessing skills:

... what people say is not always what they mean. And you look for the body language, you look for the tone of voice, you're looking at all the other clues and hints.

Non-Japanese Local Employee: MCOI, Date: 29/09/2000)

I understand exactly what they're asking me even if it is in good English, or in bad English, and likewise, they understand what I say.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

One of the informants explained what non-Japanese local staff should do when experiencing frustration in this area:

Don't be aggressive in the way you communicate, look for the signs of 'I don't want to talk about this'. Yes, you have to read between the lines.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

There were corresponding comments by Japanese staff who acknowledged that there were non-Japanese local staff with the ability to intuitively grasp what they really meant. They appreciated them as being quick on the uptake and able to understand the fuzziness of Japanese communication. The ability to take a hint was greatly appreciated, particularly in those cases where they were unable to explain matters clearly due to their lack of English.

They also noted that these non-Japanese local staff were usually familiar with Japanese people through a long association with them in one form or another, as the following comments illustrate:

When I tell them [non-Japanese local staff] "I really need information about this", then, some of them can understand why I need it, but at the same time, some other staff think "why does he need this information?" Those people, who can understand what I mean, understand Japan very well. Yes, they have a long experience in working with the Japanese, or they've been working for this company for a long time, or they talk with the Japanese very often at work. For instance, when I want to tell them to do some task in a certain way, I say "you'd better do this way and that way". They usually get my point straightaway. But other people are not like that. They show us an attitude of 'umm I don't know what that means'.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2002)

In sum, the results revealed that some Japanese staff continued to use the Japanese

style communication of ‘Say 1, know 10’ and ‘*ki o kikasu*’ described in the literature reviews (see section 2.2.1.2) in an Australian context, and they expected that non-Japanese local staff would have the guessing skills to deal with this. They articulated only the core message, which could be interpreted in different ways. This kind of communication proved too fuzzy for non-Japanese local staff, who were not able to guess and could not interpret what was not articulated. They were unable to grasp the meaning, so that the fuzziness remained unless appropriate clarification was made. This led to misunderstandings between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

There were, however, a few non-Japanese local staff equipped with the necessary guessing skills. They had learned to communicate with their Japanese colleagues in the Japanese manner, and were as quick to understand the non-verbalized aspect of a message as their Japanese colleagues. As such, they stood out from other non-Japanese local employees and were valued by Japanese expatriate staff.

### 5.2.3 Insufficient English Language Competence

The findings revealed that insufficient competence in the English language on the part of Japanese staff hindered understanding between non-Japanese local staff and their Japanese expatriate colleagues. Table 5.4 shows the frequency of Japanese expatriates admitting to language difficulties when speaking English with non-Japanese local staff. Similarly, the next table, Table 5.5, displays the frequency of comments by non-Japanese local staff on the difficulties in understanding their Japanese colleagues due to their level of English competence.

**Table 5.4 Japanese Staff who Admitted to English Language Difficulties**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	54.8 % (17)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	42.9 % (6)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	51.1 % (23)



**Table 5.5 Difficulties in Understanding Japanese Staff  
Due to the Language Barrier**

Staff Type	Percentage of staff
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	30.8 % (4)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	34.8 % (8)

Table 5.4 shows that Japanese staff acknowledge the difficulties inherent in communicating in English, with one out of two admitting they have insufficient competence in English. The difficulties were experienced not only by expatriates but also by local Japanese staff, although it was the expatriates who felt it slightly more.

Non-Japanese local staff likewise acknowledged the problem, in particular, 40 percent of non-Japanese local managers experienced communication difficulties due to the language barrier (see Table 5.5). The findings demonstrate that insufficient English language competence impedes communication in the workplace.

All Japanese informants in this study completed their formal education in Japan and worked there before moving overseas. Although some have lived overseas for many years and have a good command of English, they were still not perfectly bilingual, in that their English proficiency had not yet reached the level where they can use either language with ease.

Difficulties still occur, especially in complex contexts, even for Japanese who are competent English speakers. The language barriers caused misunderstanding and uncertainty, especially when attempting to explain or describe issues. The following are examples of comments made by both Japanese and non-Japanese employees:

At first, there is a language problem. Even when we have some idea in our head that we want to do something in such and such a manner, we can't describe them all clearly, so it is misleading for them [non-Japanese local

staff].

(Local Japanese Employee: ONAB, Date: 26/10/2001)

I say look we would like this, and they [Japanese expatriate manager] say no because of this, this and this. It's hard to sometimes make a clear argument. But maybe if I am asking an English speaking person I might be able to argue a bit more clearly. But sometimes it's a bit hard.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JTRA, Date: 04/06/2002)

Communication with Head Office was important as Head Office could influence the business activities of the local office. This study found that the language barrier was not only a source of difficulty among staff in Japanese companies in Australia but also between local staff and staff at Head Office. Since Japanese expatriate staff were sent from Head Office in Japan, they were the group within the entire staff who were most familiar with Head Office staff. Approximately 23 percent of Japanese expatriate staff specifically raised the difficulties of getting messages understood between staff in Japan and non-Japanese staff in Australia due to lack of English competence. Below is an example of a comment on the insufficient English competence of staff in Japan:

Communication [between non-Japanese local staff and staff of Head Office] has been fairly increasing, but the English ability of people in Japan is not good. They can't do things in English. The ideal situation is, say for instance, if we ask them something in English, then they reply back to us promptly in English without any problem, or they send us instruction saying "do this in such and such ways" using correct English. The reality is, they still communicate with us in Japanese, then we translate it [into English] afterwards. This is how we do it very often.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: JASA, Date: 22/5/2002)

Language is an indispensable tool in communication, and the lack of English competence impedes comprehension, causing misunderstandings to occur and information to become garbled. This naturally discourages communication between Japanese and non-Japanese staff, hampering the process of becoming familiar with one another and rendering the establishment of positive personal relationships far more arduous.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that there were barriers between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff which discouraged communication. Japanese

expatriate staff played the crucial role of ‘go-betweens’, as well as carrying the serious responsibility of managing the local office (see section 6.2). Intelligible communication with non-Japanese local managers is necessary in this role, and communication difficulties prevent them from carrying out their duties in this capacity. Similarly, Japanese expatriate staff’s lack of English competence led to frequent use of Japanese at work. This is a contributing factor to the exclusion felt by non-Japanese staff and acknowledged by their Japanese expatriate colleagues (see section 6.3). The findings, thus, suggest that the theme, communication difficulties, is linked to two types of role conflict, liaison role conflict and role exclusion.

### **5.3 INFORMATION SHORTAGE**

Information shortage was identified as a theme of role ambiguity in this study. It involved local staff failing to receive sufficient information from Japanese expatriate staff. This resulted in feelings of unrest, annoyance, and uncertainty.

This section reports on information shortage in the following two sections. The first section looks at the lack of information given to local staff, while the second section looks at the reasons why. Both sections present analysis tables displaying the frequency of respondents’ comments on this theme.

#### **5.3.1 Imparting Information**

This study found that local staff were dissatisfied with the level of information they were able to obtain from management, and this lack of information resulted in feelings of uncertainty and frustration. The table below displays the frequency of comments from local staff who felt that the information available was insufficient.

**Table 5.6 Sufficient Information Is Not Imparted**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	60.0 % (6)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	38.5 % (5)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	47.8 % (11)
Local Japanese Staff (LJS) (n=14)	35.7 % (5)

As shown in the table above (Table 5.6), almost half the number of non-Japanese local staff interviewed were dissatisfied with the level of information they received. Although local Japanese staff reported the same feelings, their ratio was 35.7 percent, approximately 10 percent lower.

This trend is also related to the non-disclosure tendency of Japanese expatriate staff, which affects how much information they are willing to reveal concerning Head Office. As Head Office influences decisions and the directions of offshore offices in Australia, any information concerning Head Office or from that source was important for local staff.

Local staff experienced uncertainty about the company's macro-strategies such as its vision, future directions, and the intentions of Head Office. This made it difficult for them to understand what was happening in the company they worked for and, as they had limited access to 'the big picture', it was often difficult for them to understand the reasons behind certain decisions. Since non-Japanese local staff generally acknowledged the influence of Head Office on their Australian operations, they felt irritated and annoyed under these circumstances. This, in turn led to a sense of estrangement and alienation. Here are some examples of comments:

They're just ignorant. They don't realize that the locals may actually be interested in what's happening in Japan and the local economy. Of course

we're interested, because if Japan's economy is weak, then our jobs are weak.  
(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

And that's lack of business information, so the general manager might know enough, and he might tell his next person down, but the rest of the team doesn't know or doesn't understand where the direction is, so there's not a lot of, in that way, sometimes there's not a lot of direction given. And the full picture isn't given by the Japanese staff.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

Local staff, thus, expressed the need to receive more information from management, as shown below:

I think there are times when he has given such information [about Head Office intentions] and it has improved my understanding significantly and it makes understanding his decision a lot easier and it helps being able to know what is going on, because if you're not sure what is going on, then it can be very frustrating and you feel there is some problem or some issue because you're not told. It just makes you feel that you're not part of the team.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MCOI, Date: 29/09/2000)

This study identified two themes that support the existence of information shortage. First, approximately 55 percent of Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged the lower level of information sharing with staff in Australian companies compared to that of Head Office or offices in Japan. Second, nearly 33 percent of Japanese expatriate staff mentioned their own hesitation in providing information, especially important information, to local staff. Here are examples of comments:

Well, they [local staff] probably think that they have little information about Head Office. They know what is happening here in this company [in Australia], but as for information from Head Office, you know, I think they probably want to be given more information about it.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2002)

Well, I'm not kind to local staff in terms of giving them information, especially about Head Office matters. In Japan, April is a new financial year, and around that time, they release the coming year's management policy and directions. At the same time, [Japanese] managing directors of overseas office get together and have a meeting in Japan, and we discuss our future management policies of the year, medium and long term. When I return from Japan, I don't tell them [locals]. I might tell a little on some issues related to here [in this company] in Australia.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: IMIW, Date: 21/02/2002)

Some Japanese expatriate executives, however, claimed that their policy was to disclose as much as possible:

The information we don't give to locals is about us, expatriates, you know. For instance, we don't need to tell [local staff] about amendments to our fringe benefits. Other than these, well, I understand that we should share business-related information, so that information other than that related to expatriates, we try to share as much as possible.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TKOO, Date: 12/10/2000)

In sum, the findings revealed that lack of information not only developed uncertainty among local staff but also frustration and a feeling of being excluded by the management of both the Australian branch and Head Office. There was also evidence that Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged that they did not impart sufficient information to local staff.

### **5.3.2 The Reason Why Information Shortage Occurred**

This study identified two related themes which explain why information shortage exists. The first theme was concerned with Japanese managers' fear that local staff would 'leak' company information to outsiders. The second theme was the way in which Japanese expatriate staff imparted information to local staff.

The first theme was related to the high turnover of local staff. Among those Japanese expatriate managers who acknowledged that they did not give local staff sufficient information, half indicated that they did not want to impart information to local staff who may leave the company in the near future and leak information. Example comments are listed below:

Well, maybe we can say [to locals about our future visions etc.], but it will be problematic if they [locals] leak the information somewhere, you know. ... to other companies, if they find out what we are thinking, then, we have to work hard to blot it out, you know. It's really troublesome.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNAL, Date: 16/11/2000)

Of course, there is information we cannot disclose [to local staff] in the company. But the balance sheet is different, it's created by our local staff, so

when they see it, then they know it all, so we don't have anything to hide in this sense. But when it comes to information like what people in Head Office are thinking about this company [in Australia], we don't tell them. Because it involves our company's future, it may create unrest [among local staff]. Also, if they [local staff] leak it to other companies, it may cause us problems.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAI, Date: 20/02/2002)

The above respondent also commented on who had access to the information:

Well, up to Nishiyama [name disguised: Japanese expatriate who is the General Manager of accounting department], and also other managers sent from Japan. There are issues that David [name disguised: non-Japanese local manager of General Affairs Department] knows and those that he doesn't.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAI, Date: 20/02/2002)

The findings suggest that information sharing was related to role exclusion of local staff, while the fear that local staff would leak company information to outsiders suggests that they were not fully trusted. It also illustrates an 'us and them' mentality between Japanese expatriates and local staff.

The second theme which may explain why information shortage exists concerned the manner in which Japanese expatriate staff imparted information to their local colleagues. There was a tendency to provide only a summary of information, so that comprehensive information was lacking. About a quarter of Japanese expatriate staff, who participated in this study, admitted to this tendency. The fact that they did not provide comprehensive information was related to three issues. These were, first, Japanese expatriate staff were primary communicators with Head Office, second, Japanese staff's lack of English competence (see section 5.2.3), and third, time efficiency.

The managerial or executive positions were predominantly occupied by Japanese expatriate staff, and as representatives for Head Office, they played a key role in the transmitting of information from Head Office to local staff. This meant they were cognizant of much detailed information, including situations directly concerning Head Office.

Due to insufficient English competence, Japanese language was frequently used in

documents, discussions, meetings, and informal chats, both among Japanese staff and also between the local office and Head Office. When Japanese expatriate staff passed information to local staff, they had to translate it into English for them.

Explaining information verbally was regarded as more time-efficient than putting it in writing. Another advantage of this method was that local staff could ask questions about the information on the spot. During this process, only the main points or summary were given. Alternatively, a written summary translated into English was issued, and further information was explained verbally.

These methods did not facilitate comprehension of details such as background information for non-Japanese staff. Nor were they able to understand how and why the matter at hand arose and was resolved.

In these situations, the information shortage arose from the normal workplace necessity for expediency, not from any intention to conceal information. The following are examples of comments by Japanese expatriate managers:

Information from Head Office comes in English and Japanese. When it comes in Japanese, then, I translate it very briefly and either tell them or write it down, and give it to Australian staff. So I ask Japan [Head Office] to send it in English. Because I am not sent here to be an interpreter or translator, and I don't have enough skills for that.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2002)

We use both English and Japanese [to correspond with Head Office]. They send me mail in Japanese too, and I think we use Japanese more [than English]. Because, you know, the speed is different. Because if we write in English, you know what I mean, right? Both of us are Japanese, and we don't need to use English, right? But for the issues related to business activities here, they [Head Office people] need to send a copy here [to local staff], then, they use English. But you know, when I'm here, [the people in] Japan are no good [as they don't use English], you know. After all, I need to summarize [what Head Office sends me in Japanese] and tell our staff in English. Of course, I don't translate word to word though. In principle, a global organization must use English all the time, but if we do that, then our efficiency would be very poor, you know. It's three times faster [when we use Japanese], I mean the speed is. So, we wouldn't be able to complete our work [if we were to use English at all times].

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: YEGO, Date: 25/03/2002)



Two findings have a bearing on why information shortage occurred. First, Japanese expatriate staff feared that local staff would leak important information to outsiders. Second, when Japanese expatriate staff translated Head Office information, only the summary or main points were provided for reasons of time efficiency. The two findings contrast with each other, in that one involves a deliberate intention to conceal information, while the other does not.

The results suggest that the attitude of Japanese expatriates towards local staff was founded on a lack of trust and a somewhat divided relationship. It also substantiates the claim that the language barrier not only hampered understanding (see section 5.2.3) but also weakened the level of information sharing within the company. As such, these results demonstrate that information shortage is relevant to the problems of role exclusion (a role conflict type) (see section 6.3).

#### **5.4 LACK OF CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**

The third theme is concerned with difficulties in cultural understanding. This includes work culture, which, when misunderstood, leads to aggravation, misunderstanding, and vagueness on both sides. This section presents findings on this theme in two sections. The first section reports on the lack of understanding in regard to Australian culture. This is followed by a section presenting the lack of understanding of Japanese culture.

##### **5.4.1 Understanding Australia and its Work Culture**

Non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff have different cultural backgrounds. All Japanese informants, both Japanese expatriate and locally hired Japanese staff, who participated in this study, were brought up, educated, and worked in Japan. In Australia, they were working in a new environment where work culture, customs, and language differed from their own.

This also applied to non-Japanese local staff. As the majority of management positions were occupied by Japanese expatriate staff, non-Japanese local staff found themselves working in an environment where work culture, customs, and language

differed from their own. In addition, there were locally hired Japanese staff in some companies, who had also been brought up in Japan and worked there. In these cases, non-Japanese local staff were working alongside an even greater number of Japanese staff. Thus, both Australian and Japanese staff were in a foreign work culture in the same company, and such work environments always have a lower level of shared understanding than those where employees have the same cultural background. This study identified annoyance, irritation, misunderstanding, and ambiguity as arising from the lack of shared understanding.

The findings revealed that 30 percent of non-Japanese local managers and employees commented about Japanese expatriate staff being deficient in understanding Australian people, culture, work culture, and customs. Japanese expatriate staff were the only ones accused of this. They found that Japanese expatriate staff's speech and behavior were sometimes inappropriate or unacceptable in Australia and cited situations including terminating and hiring staff, what it is acceptable to ask of other staff members, what comments are appropriate, and how female staff should be treated with. Their perceptions were formed through observation and their own work experience.

For instance, particular issues such as openly treating female staff differently from male staff and expecting female staff to serve tea were raised. Non-Japanese local staff interpreted these situations as inappropriate and offensive. These incidents stemmed from Japanese expatriate staff's lack of understanding as to what was appropriate and acceptable in Australian culture and its work environment. Here is an example comment made by a female non-Japanese local staff member:

One of the other staff, a male staff, was also asked to go and my boss called me in and said "Okay, the other guy will be working from 9 to 5 and then overtime" but he said "Kelly [name disguise] because you're a lady you can have a sleep-in in the morning and go in at 12 and work until 9 and then you won't be so tired." And he was trying to be nice but it was such an offensive thing and it was so annoying because I work long hours, I do a lot of work, I never take sick leave and I'm not a weak employee and I was so surprised that he even bothered to differentiate to say "Well, the boy can do that but you're a lady, you can't do that." And he didn't know why I was so angry with him. Because he thought he was being nice because he thought I

can sleep in, ... but I thought it was just – it's just discrimination.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JTRA, Date: 04/06/2002)

The following comment is about a misunderstanding which occurred due to a lack of cultural understanding:

My [Australian] colleague who's been with the company for twenty years here, it was his view that the way we had it written on the board was correct, and it wasn't until this [Japanese] General Manager said "No no that's all wrong" and he was saying "For twenty years I've been thinking that's what it was and it's not !" So my first thought was that it was my lack of understanding of how the way the business works, but then I thought it may be, it must have been, it may be a cultural thing, because in the explanation, the way it was explained, obviously you interpret information based on your own background, so I think it was a combination of communication as well as your own cultural view of things.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

For their part, Japanese expatriate staff themselves acknowledged their insufficient understanding of local culture. Even local Japanese staff expressed their concerns about expatriate staff's inadequate cultural understanding. Similar to the frequency of non-Japanese locals, nearly 30 percent of Japanese expatriate staff admitted an insufficiency in their understanding of Australian culture, work culture and customs, and local knowledge, including the local market situation.

Understanding the local market situation is crucial to doing business in Australia, and Japanese expatriate staff, who were sent to Australia on rotation and were, therefore, unfamiliar with local matters, needed to rely on host country staff to provide them with local information. They were also uncertain as to how to treat female staff, what constituted sexual harassment, and what comments were inappropriate in respect to religion, as the following remarks show:

We [Japanese] are different [from local staff] in terms of culture, values, the way we were brought up, experiences, and history. So, I found that something that is accepted in Japan is not accepted here. Things are taken differently here, so I get confused. For instance, when I mention something about religion without thinking much, they [non-Japanese local staff] get so offended. We Japanese are not religious, aren't we? Many of us don't believe in a particular religion seriously. But here, there are some taboos related to talking about a certain religion, so they get offended. And another

thing we shouldn't say is, you know, sexual harassment issue is not so strict in Japan, right? But here, it's very strict. So, we shouldn't say things that may be considered as sexual harassment [by people in Australia]. There are things that are not considered sexual harassment in Japan, but are considered as sexual harassment here.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: KNII, Date: 30/04/2002)

In particular, many Japanese expatriates appear to have a lot of frustration. It comes from language and communication, but also from the differences in corporate customs and culture.

(Local Japanese Manager: ONAB, Date: 26/10/2001)

In sum, both non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff regarded Japanese expatriate staff as lacking cultural understanding of Australia. Correspondingly, Japanese expatriate staff themselves acknowledged this and admitted that it was the cause of some irritation, annoyance, misunderstanding, and ambiguity for both local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.

#### 5.4.2 Understanding Japanese and their Work Culture

Just as Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged their lack of understanding of Australian culture, non-Japanese local staff themselves admitted to difficulties in understanding Japanese culture, including work culture and customs. The following table displays the frequency of non-Japanese local staff comments on this.

**Table 5.7 Non-Japanese Staff's Lack of Understanding About Japanese Culture**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	70.0% (7)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	30.8 % (4)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	47.8 % (11)

Approximately half the non-Japanese local staff interviewed in this study admitted to having an insufficient understanding of Japanese work culture, with non-Japanese

local managers mentioning it the most often, at 70 percent. They believed that the differences in culture and the lack of understanding about each other’s culture caused annoyance and uncertainty, and was an impediment to workplace efficiency. Here are some example comments:

Maybe that is also the cultural thing, Japanese like emphasizing ‘*Choowa*’ [harmony]. ... It depends on how you interpret it, right? Because maybe for local staff without any knowledge of Japanese culture, they may not know that (attitudes of Japanese expatriate staff) is because of the importance of ‘*Choowa*’ [harmony].

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MMAA, Date: 15/09/2002)

It’s very difficult for people to come to this company without I’m not sure whether this is a Japanese thing or just a KKP [company name disguised] thing, but it’s very difficult for people to come to this company and blend in immediately. There are a number of cultural challenges.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

Coinciding with non-Japanese local staff’s perception of themselves, both local Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff also raised the matter of non-Japanese local staff’s insufficient understanding of Japanese culture, as well as work culture and customs. The following table displays the frequency of Japanese staff’s comments on this.

**Table 5.8 Non-Japanese Local Staff’s Lack of Cultural Understanding About Japan**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	60.0 % (18)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	50.0 % (7)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	55.6 % (25)

More than half the Japanese staff interviewed mentioned this issue, with Japanese expatriate staff showing the highest frequency at 60 percent. Here are example

comments relating to the non-Japanese local staff's shortcomings in understanding Japanese culture and corporate customs:

I explain to them [non-Japanese local staff] that we do this because this is the Japanese way of doing things for our customers. But they don't understand it. ... This is because of the differences of corporate customs and the way people do business [between Japanese and Australia]. If you have Japanese clients, then, you must do things in a certain way, you know.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: KOSL, Date: 16/11/2000)

For them [non-Japanese local staff], Japanese are like aliens, so they don't understand Japanese. That's why they can't communicate with us.

(Local Japanese Manager: HWAKI, Date: 21/03/2000)

Non-Japanese local staff's lack of understanding encompasses such areas as the importance of commitment to work, ways of doing business with Japanese, and the current situation at Head Office. Of these, Japanese expatriate staff said that understanding what was happening at Head Office – especially how things were done, what was valued, and what was prioritized – was simultaneously the most difficult, but also the most important, for non-Japanese local staff to grasp.

One example of this concerned decision making. This is a lengthier and more involved process in Japanese companies, which non-Japanese local staff find difficult to comprehend. Another example related to the matter of sales in Australia: an order volume may be more valued than profit and total sales, yet Head Office may value total profit over order volume and total sales amount. These sorts of differences can give rise to clashes between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, necessitating explanations as to what Head Office considers important and the reasons why.

For the same reason, Japanese expatriate staff sometimes had to explain to non-Japanese local staff the underlying meanings and connotations of communications from Head Office – even when they were in English. Comments made by Japanese expatriate executives are below:

I usually explain a report or a document sent from Head Office in English to our [non-Japanese] local staff. I tell them something like 'This really means

so and so, and this is the reason why I want you to find out about this point or that point'. I can't just pass the document to locals. I need to explain what it really means. Because when they read it, they sometimes misunderstand the points [of what Head Office means in the documents]. So I need to explain what Head Office really means, why they have requested us to do this task, and what exactly Head Office wants us to investigate.

(Japanese Expatriate Executive: IMIW, Date: 21/02/2002)

Many Japanese companies overseas are controlled by Head Office. Myself, I mean [Japanese] expatriates understand about Tokyo [Head Office], but for people brought up here, it's really hard to understand Tokyo's situation. If you think about business, making profit only, then, what they [non-Japanese local staff] recommend us to do is reasonable. But sometimes we can't do that because of the situation at Tokyo [Head Office], so I explain to them [non-Japanese local staff] about it, but it's so difficult [for them to understand]. This is the most difficult thing here in this company.

(Japanese Expatriate Manager: NGOI, Date: 16/01/2001)

In sum, the findings demonstrate that Japanese staff consider their non-Japanese colleagues to be lacking in understanding of Japanese culture, work culture, and Japanese ways of doing business. In particular, they regarded Head Office's intentions and motivations as the most challenging for non-Japanese local staff to understand.

Having to act as an unofficial translator, as well as carrying out official duties as a representative of Head Office, is a time-consuming and difficult task for Japanese expatriate staff, suggesting that lack of cultural understanding (a role ambiguity type) is related to the occurrence of liaison role conflict (see section 6.2).

Non-Japanese local staff themselves acknowledged their insufficient understanding of Japanese culture and companies. This lack of understanding gave rise to annoyance, misunderstanding, and uncertainty among both Japanese and non-Japanese local staff.

## 5.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter addresses Research Question 2 by presenting findings on role ambiguity. Three themes were identified: (1) communication difficulties, (2) information shortage, and (3) lack of cultural understanding.

The first theme, communication difficulties, referred specifically to those existing between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. The findings revealed three types of impediments to understanding. First, differences in communication style between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff made the candid exchange of opinions and ideas an arduous process. Second, there was the necessity to guess. This is because Japanese staff tended to practice Japanese style communication, ‘Say 1, know 10’ and ‘*ki o kikasu*’ (see section 2.2.1.2), where only core information is articulated. Since more than one interpretation is possible the subsequent ambiguity is referred to as fuzziness and is directly related to non-Japanese local staff’s difficulty in understanding. They could only acquire a correct sense of the information by guessing but this was difficult for them. Third, the level of English language competency among Japanese staff prevented them from achieving an equivalent degree of smooth communication with their non-Japanese colleagues as they had when speaking their native language. Non-Japanese local staff, in turn, were unable to fully understand what was being conveyed to them.

Since good communication with local staff is crucial for Japanese expatriate staff in their liaison role between local staff and Head Office (see section 6.2), the difficulties in communication were problematic. The communication difficulties lead to an overall lack of communication with a concomitant exclusion of local staff. The results, thus, suggest that communication difficulties (a type of role ambiguity) are related to two types of role conflict, liaison role conflict (see section 6.2) and role exclusion (see section 6.3).

The second theme, information shortage, was concerned with management failing to provide local staff with sufficient information. The findings revealed that Japanese expatriate staff were hesitant to disclose important information. This was due to their fear that local staff might disclose or ‘leak’ company information to outsiders.



Moreover, since Japanese expatriate staff had to translate information into English to pass it on, they tended to impart only summary or key points, and omit detailed information. This suggests that information shortage also has a bearing on role exclusion (a role conflict type) (see section 6.3).

The third theme was lack of cultural understanding. Non-Japanese local staff regarded Japanese expatriate staff as deficient in understanding Australian culture, as well as work culture and customs. Similarly, Japanese staff regarded non-Japanese local staff as lacking in understanding of Japanese culture, as well as work culture and customs. In particular, expatriates claimed that understanding Head Office's intentions and motivations was the most challenging for local staff. They were constantly obliged to address this issue by acting as unofficial translators and explainers. This finding suggests that lack of cultural understanding (a role ambiguity type) is related to the occurrence of liaison role conflict (a type of role conflict) (see section 6.2).

Overall, the findings revealed that the three themes in role ambiguity have a bearing on the occurrence of role conflict. These include a linkage between lack of cultural understanding (a type of role ambiguity) and liaison role conflict, as well as a linkage between information shortage (a type of role ambiguity) and role exclusion (a type of role conflict). One of the role ambiguity types, communication difficulties, is linked to the occurrence of two types of role conflict, liaison role conflict and role exclusion.

The three themes led to uncertainty, fuzziness, misunderstanding, and aggravation among staff. Moreover, Japanese expatriate staff did not fully trust their local colleagues. The results suggest that difficulties in understanding each other impeded the building of positive relations between them, signifying an 'us and them' mentality on both sides.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **ROLE CONFLICT**

#### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

The following sections report the findings from the data on role conflict experienced by individuals working for a Japanese company in Australia. The overview on the themes of role conflict addresses a section of Research Question 2 of this dissertation, as stated below.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (i.e. role conflict and role ambiguity) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

Four common themes emerged: (1) liaison role conflict, (2) role exclusion, (3) role incompetence, and (4) role overload. The first theme, liaison role conflict, involves conflict occurring between non-Japanese locals and their Japanese expatriates. The second theme, role exclusion, is concerned with local staff's dissatisfaction with the level of participation permitted them. The third theme, role incompetence, deals with Japanese staff's dissatisfaction with non-Japanese local staff's ability to carry out their roles in the company. The last theme, role overload, is concerned with local Japanese staff's displeasure at the expectations placed on them by Japanese expatriate staff.

The results of each theme are presented within analysis tables. The tables indicate the frequency with which respondents, according to their informant group type, comment on a theme and show their level of agreement with it. Example comments are also listed.

## **6.2 LIAISON ROLE CONFLICT**

The first theme, liaison role conflict, is concerned with Japanese expatriate staff playing a role of 'go-between' or middle person between local office and Head Office. The liaison role conflict found in this study includes a particular feature associated with the position between the role sender, in this case a junior Japanese expatriate staff, and the focal person, a non-Japanese local superior. Since this type of liaison role conflict has not been previously noted, it is referred to as 'Reversed Role Conflict' for the purposes of this dissertation.

This section reports on this type of conflict, first describing what it is and who is involved, followed by reasons why it arises. It is accompanied by analysis tables on its occurrence.

### **6.2.1 Reversed Role Conflict**

Among the companies who participated in this study, Japanese expatriate staff dominated managerial and executive positions such as Assistant General Manager, General Manager, Deputy Managing Director, and Managing Director, with only a minority of non-Japanese local staff in these positions. There were, however, some Japanese expatriate staff who had been placed under a non-Japanese local. The results revealed that 35.5 percent of Japanese expatriate staff who participated in this study had had experience working under a non-Japanese local superior. Among those who had had such an experience, nearly half this number (45.5 percent) had encountered difficulties in this position, admitting to feelings of irritation and annoyance.

Although Japanese expatriate staff officially held titles lower than their non-Japanese local superiors, they were able to exert a stronger influence over them than would be usual for a subordinate. They seemed to feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the efficient running of the local office, even though this fell outside the official duties of their position:

The risk is too high if only local staff manage everything here, you know, so, as an Assistant General Manager, well, my official title here is just manager. But in a sense, I give support [to my local General Manager] as if I was his AGM [Assistant General Manager]. Our company doesn't give GM [General Manager] positions to Japanese expatriate staff. The local is the one who is given a position of GM. Our system is like the local is the one who gives instructions or orders [to other local staff], and if they [local] seem to give some instructions we consider as unfavorable, we, then, [Japanese] give some advice to the local GM, you know. ... This is our company's policy.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TIYO, Date: 28/03/2003)

When Japanese expatriate staff gave junior local staff instructions or advice, it was more easily accepted. Junior staff are, after all, expected to listen to their superiors, but problems arose when junior Japanese expatriates needed to give their local superior instruction and advice. An example is provided by a Japanese expatriate whose first position in Australia was 'Assistant Manager' under a non-Japanese local manager. He described his annoyance and feelings of conflict:

I was originally sent here [Australia] as an 'Assistant Trade Manager', but you know, to be honest, it's a bit rude to say, but I used to give orders to him [non-Japanese local manager], give directions. ... and the situation became like where no one could deny the fact that this was a bit strange and an odd situation, you know. I always gave him directions, and I myself started to get confused. ... There was nothing more torturing than reporting to him, you know. No way, no time for that. I knew that I should write a report or something [to him], but I thought why do I have to do this! Very often, he told me to come to his office and explain matters. Well, he was officially my boss, so this meant I was reporting to him, but you know, it was rather like teaching him [about the work].

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNAL, Date: 16/1/2000)

Below is a further example of a comment by a Japanese expatriate manager who worked with a non-Japanese local executive who was in a superior position at the time of the interview:

I think that he [local executive] feels very uncomfortable because his actions are checked up and monitored [by me at all times]. He can't control everything. The point is that not only for matters on company benefit or financial report but also many many daily issues, we are told what to do by our Head Office. Of course,

it's my duty to tell those things [advised by Head Office] to him [local executive], you know. He must hate this. He used to be able to control everything [when there was no Japanese expatriate here] before [I was sent here], and a boy [I myself] from Head Office came and is beside him now.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: YEGO, Date: 25/03/2002)

These expatriates had to make definite efforts to overcome the difficulties through informal processes. In this situation, a Japanese expatriate manager would sometimes come to a decision on a matter in private consultation with the Japanese Managing Director, and then pretend to 'consult' his senior local executive on the issue and try to lead him to the same decision. If this ruse proved unsuccessful and the local superior was not to be persuaded, the expatriate would simply inform the Japanese Managing Director, who would then use his senior position to inform the local manager that things would be done in the manner already secretly decided. The following comment is an example:

You know, I should lead the situation to the right way. It depends on the situation. ... Well, I should talk to the [non-Japanese local] Deputy Managing Director first, and then to our [Japanese] Managing Director. But the reality is that there are times when I talk to our [Japanese] Managing Director first. I do '*Nemawashi*' [informal negotiation prior to the official meeting] with him you know. It's dangerous, and I shouldn't do that though. But informally I do, you know, I first talk to our [Japanese] Managing Director and receive consent, then I try to convince our [non-Japanese local] Deputy Managing Director. So, I can never tell him that our Managing Director wants to do it this way. ... So we need to be careful. I talk over things with Managing Director informally, but never tell the local executive about it. I then approach him [the non-Japanese local executive] saying something like "What do you think about it?" This is the way to go smoothly. But if we really have to do it in a certain way, then, I will have our [Japanese] Managing Director to tell him that we will do this way using his executive power.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2002)

Although the Japanese expatriate's official title might be hierarchically below that of the non-Japanese local, the findings suggest that the reality sometimes failed to reflect this. That is, Japanese expatriate staff tended to manage all local staff, including their superiors, but were forced to do so in a tacit, informal and occasionally downright secretive manner. In these circumstances, the positions of superior and subordinate were

reversed. The findings, therefore, suggest that this type of role conflict is associated with informal aspects of the management process.

Comments relating to reverse role conflict were not obtained from non-Japanese local staff in this study, as there were no non-Japanese local staff informants who had had a Japanese expatriate for a subordinate. Thus, all comments about this stressful experience are from the Japanese side only.

### **6.2.2 Reasons for Reversed Role Conflict**

Reversed role conflict was identified in the current study. It involved the strong influence of Japanese expatriate staff over their superior non-Japanese local manager or executive, and resulted in clashes occurring between them. This study found two reasons which may explain why reverse role conflict occurred. These are, first, the dual roles of Japanese expatriate staff and second, the disparity of interests between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.

When commenting on reversed role conflict, Japanese expatriate staff mentioned their strong sense of responsibility towards managing the local office in accordance with the intentions of Head Office in Japan. A significant number of Japanese expatriate staff (80.6 percent) claimed that Head Office's intentions must be taken into account when managing the local office. This sometimes had a decisive impact on the business activity of the local office, causing clashes between local staff and expatriates:

I think local people are not that happy. Because there are Head Office's ways of doing things. I mean, our Head Office has their macro-strategy, and we need to follow it. In this sense, it's really troublesome. I think many local staff think 'Why do we need to do this?'

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HNAI, Date: 21/03/2000)

The dual role of Japanese expatriate staff – their official title in Australia, and their role as representative for Head Office – is illustrated by the responsibility they perceive

themselves as carrying towards regulating the company in Australia. The following comments illustrate this:

Well, my title here is trade manager, but another duty is ..., well, after all, I'm a representative, this company is a 100 percent owned subsidiary, and Head Office has its own direction and business interests, and we need to follow them.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNAL, Date: 16/11/2000)

Officially, Mr Seko [name disguised] is here, ... and his role is to maximize the performance of Kashiwa [company name disguised]. But I also believe that a part of his role is this, you know, the representative role of Kashiwa Head Office [company name disguised]. ... whenever I traveled to Kashiwa offices in other parts of the world, there is a similar culture.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

Part of the role of representative is that of a liaison officer or facilitator, who helps overcome obstacles to progress between the local office and Head Office. As described in a previous section (see section 4.2.2), local staff regarded Japanese expatriate staff as 'special' or different, and Japanese expatriate staff themselves acknowledged this. Their role was often described as 'communicator', 'ambassador', 'liaison manager', 'link-man', 'representative', and 'guest' by both local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. These roles, as illustrated by the significant number of Japanese expatriates indicating the importance of following the Head Office intentions, point to Japanese expatriate staff as being a powerful influence in the local office. The following comments by non-Japanese local managers and employees demonstrate this:

They're treated differently, I guess, from the other managers. I guess because they can hold up payments and ... It seems they have more communication with Head Office than anybody else does, probably because it's easier for them to communicate in their own language.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: CSHA, Date: 15/02/2001)

Naturally, the Japanese manager can give us the input they carry the message or they carry the information from Tokyo, and one of the biggest responsibilities is to sort of fully interpret and fully pass that on because it's very valuable, so that's an important part of their role. .. yes, they're an ambassador.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CIAA, Date: 25/11/2001)

Japanese expatriate staff understood that Head Office acknowledged the importance of their role as representatives and for this reason valued them more highly:

When you looked at my position in Australia, I had little responsibility and authority. But if you looked at my position from the perspective of Head Office, they didn't look at me in the manner local staff here did in Australia. The Head Office regarded me as having a much higher position, maybe higher than my local General Manager's, so that they contacted me directly all the time, not my boss, my local General Manager. Head Office regarded me as a person in charge of all accounting and financial matters. So I knew my official boss [non-Japanese local General Manager] did not like this and was thinking, "Why is my junior staff always telling me what to do all the time" .... so you know, I could not say things to her [non-Japanese local General Manager] worded as directions or instructions, but I had to tell her.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HWAI, Date: 17/03/2000)

In this way, the dual role forced Japanese expatriate staff to become involved in issues not directly related to their official responsibilities and resulted in them advising or instructing local staff when they had no official authority to do so. This is illustrated by the finding that 29 percent of participating Japanese expatriate staff specifically expressed the fact that they exercised this informal practice in companies in Australia. Local staff perceived this practice as meddling in their duties, and naturally found it annoying. When they resisted it, conflict arose:

When we find some problems in the company, we need to look at a company as a whole, you know. For instance, when we think that if they do something this way, then things will go more smoothly, something like that. There are lots like this, anyway, we look at those things objectively, and give them advice, changing staffing, for instance. We don't have such authority and responsibility in this company though, but we give advice to senior management people such as the [local] Deputy Managing Director. I know that from time to time, local staff don't like something about Japanese [expatriates] staff. Sometimes, they look at us like 'Why are you Japanese telling us such a thing?'

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2008)

The findings, thus, illustrate that liaison role conflict is closely linked to those informal aspects of managing the company where Japanese expatriate staff had a strong influence on the business activities of their local office in Australia.



As presented in the previous chapter (see section 5.4.1), Japanese expatriate staff stated that understanding Head Office intentions was extremely difficult for non-Japanese local staff. Conflict arose when Japanese expatriate staff attempted to explain some issue to them and get an endorsement from senior non-Japanese local staff members. Sometimes they had to enforce Head Office's intentions. At the same time, in their capacity as unofficial go-betweens, and only too aware of their local managers' frustrations, they would try to obtain approval from Head Office for what was desired by the local office:

When we want to enact a request from Japan, the request may be an ordinary practice in Japan, but when we want to enforce it here, then, a problem occurs. .... For a big issue, we explain to Head Office, saying something like "things are different here [Australia] due to so and so. We will, therefore, do it this way", and we request approval. By doing this way, we get an approval from Head Office, then, we do it the local way. ... So we [Japanese expatriate] as management staff, make a judgment, taking into account Japan's requirement and also the situation here, then, assess if it is the right judgment or not. After we do this, we try to get them [Head Office people] to understand our decision and judgment, then, get approval. So, sometimes there are issues that we get approved and some we don't.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TKOO, Date: 12/10/2000)

While non-Japanese local staff recognized that this was how things worked in Japanese companies, they nevertheless felt frustration and aggravation, as illustrated by the following comments:

There are times when there is conflict of opinion. I've seen conflict between Australian ideals and Japanese ideals ... This is the Japanese direction and he [Japanese expatriate] is our manager, so we follow his direction. Yeah, I think the manager makes the decision and you work with that. ... I think the management certainly take on board what people are suggesting to them, but at the end of the day, I think the direction is controlled by them [Japanese expatriate staff].

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JFAA, Date: 16/04/2002)

We don't ever do anything here without getting permission from Head Office. ... if we are talking about financing ..., I am to be standing in the background, the expat managers take care of this...you know, they're the communicator, the liaison manager, you know. ... they have to be able to satisfy and run a local office. So, it's a, you know, a pivotal role.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

The findings, thus, illustrate that in general, the expatriate's dual role of safeguarding Head Office's intentions together with non-Japanese local staff's difficulty in understanding these intentions, brought about a clash between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. These experiences were particularly aggravated in those cases where Japanese expatriate staff needed to advise or instruct their non-Japanese local superiors.

The term 'cultural integrator' in the current study refers to a person playing a role of go-between to alleviate role stress between people of different cultural backgrounds (see section 2.4.1). Liaison role conflict among Japanese expatriate staff coordinating between staff of Head Office and local staff of subsidiaries in Australia is an indication that Japanese expatriate staff were performing the role of cultural integrator.

The second reason which may explain the occurrence of reversed role conflict is the disparity of interests between non-Japanese local managers and expatriates. Head Office has a global viewpoint, in which their offshore office in Australia is only one among a number of business units comprising their worldwide company. Expatriates tended to share this outlook, and regarded Head Office intentions as critical. Local staff, however, focused on local interests and therefore had a narrower perspective. The following is a comment by a Japanese expatriate manager regarding this situation:

Local managers' and executives' primary interest are the benefits accrued to our Sydney office, and their ways of thinking are based on individualism. They press us for an answer of what is fair, and what sort of benefits Sydney office will get. As we expatriate staff in Sydney understand well what local staff are seeking, we suggested to our Head Office that we should give them some proposals or conditions that will meet their expectations to some extent. [Our non-Japanese] local director cares only about the local office's interests. We expatriates are directors in the Sydney office, and we get paid by our Sydney office, but at the same time we have the delegations instructed from Head Office. We are really in the middle, and need to modulate well. Otherwise, things don't get worked out. Only Japanese can do this role.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: YEGO, Date: 25/03/2002)

The disparity of interest was due, in part, to the size of the Australian market, which was significantly smaller compared to that of the United States and Europe, and subsequently had a lower priority for Head Office. The voice of the offshore office in Australia was only faintly heard. The following example comments explain this situation:

After all, a large enterprise is, you know. I think it's not the matter of whether Japanese or American managing. ... When Head Office looks at Australia, Australia occupies only a few percentages of our worldwide business. So when the decision, which was made from this global viewpoint, is attempted to be enacted here in Australia, local people are obviously not happy about it. There are a number of occasions like this. But, it can't be helped, you know.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TMUO, Date: 28/03/2002)

We cannot produce product just for a country of eighteen million, so we don't tend to listen to their suggestions, and local Australian staff don't like it. They have lots of opinions and ideas, but there are the company's [Head Office's] global strategies, and things often go against their [local staff's] interests, and they cannot influence that. Actually, I myself feel the same as locals towards Head Office. We don't have much of a say, you know. It's associated with sales volumes. Here, it's small compared with America and Europe, and the level of 'having a say' decreases according to the sales.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HHII, Date: 17/03/2000)

Disparity of interests can lead to a problematic situation, with the local viewpoint being quite logical and correct in terms of the local office's interest, but running contrary to the interests and intentions of the Head Office. This type of conflict can end with both parties, local and Japanese, feeling dissatisfied.

### 6.3 ROLE EXCLUSION

A theme of role exclusion, experienced by both non-Japanese and local Japanese staff, emerged in this study. The following table displays the frequency of comments by respondents who admitted to having these thoughts and experiences.

**Table 6.1 Local Staff Feel Excluded**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	50.0 % (5)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	46.2 % (6)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	47.8 % (11)
Local Japanese Manager ( <b>LJM</b> ) (n=3)	66.7 % (2)

As the table shows, 47.8 percent of non-Japanese local staff experienced role exclusion. Among them, 50 percent of non-Japanese local managers expressed their dissatisfaction concerning role exclusion. There was only a small difference in the frequencies between non-Japanese local employees and non-Japanese local managers.

In contrast, among local Japanese staff, there was a large gap between local Japanese managers (66.7 percent) and employees (only 9.1 percent), a ratio of about seven to one. The findings suggest that role exclusion was experienced, in particular, by non-Japanese local staff.

The study revealed that local staff had a strong desire to be allowed to participate more fully in business activities, especially decision making. This corresponds to the finding that informal decision making activities were primarily carried out among Japanese expatriate staff (see section 4.2). Approximately 39 percent of non-Japanese local staff believed that they should be provided with more participation opportunities in business

activities. Non-Japanese local staff expressed their dissatisfaction (39.1 percent) more than local Japanese staff (14.3 percent) did. In particular, the employee type of non-Japanese local managers reporting dissatisfaction was the highest at 50 percent. An example comment by non-Japanese local staff is provided below:

Because I think that many national staff [i.e. local staff] are underutilized. They have more ability and more capacity than their general manager understands or is prepared to understand. In other words, he thinks I can't ask my national staff [i.e. local staff] to do that because maybe they can't do it well enough. In my opinion, that's wrong.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJOI, Date: 05/10/2000)

The desire to be allowed to participate more fully in decision making was prevalent. Below are example comments about exclusion from this:

Sometimes, there are personnel changes or policy changes in the admin or personnel, and they haven't told me about it, and then they've told me about it later. And said, "oh, that is changed." And I go, "well who changed it!?" And they say, "we did." And I said "well that's my job, so you didn't tell me." And they say, "oh yes, sorry about that." So that is disrespectful.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

Role exclusion was sometimes very obvious to other local staff who sensed that Japanese management in Australia did not respect local staff as they should. An example comment by a non-Japanese local employee follows:

I feel a bit sorry for some of the local managers that they don't get included. .... I think they're a bit on the outside ... You can see from the body language. I've seen Australian managers speak in English and seen the reaction back, and you can tell that they're not as much respected from the Japanese side, to believe what the Australian is saying in this company. I haven't experienced it elsewhere like this. ... Even for some of my colleagues, they are local staff, they have worked here for more than twenty-five years. I feel sorry sometimes, they do decide something, the Japanese decide something, so they talk among themselves, and they (locals) only receive the instruction, just do it.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JMAA, Date: 04/06/2002)

The previous chapter reported on the lack of English language proficiency among Japanese staff (see section 5.2.3), and Japanese language was used frequently among Japanese staff in the local office as well as in communications between the local office and Head Office. This study revealed that Japanese language usage is linked to role exclusion of non-Japanese local staff.

During the data collection phase, the researcher of this study frequently observed that Japanese language was used among Japanese staff in the workplace. The participation observation data corroborate the finding which showed that 30 percent of non-Japanese local managers experienced a feeling of alienation due to the frequent use of Japanese language at work. Those respondents who commented on this could not speak Japanese, and so were unable to understand documents written in Japanese or discussions in Japanese during meetings.

In meeting situations, for instance, there were two types of manager meetings: those attended by Japanese staff only, and those attended by non-Japanese locals as well. In the latter case, Japanese often outnumbered non-Japanese, especially at management meetings, and meetings in which all participants were Japanese were naturally conducted entirely in their native language. Non-Japanese local managers, who experienced role exclusion at meetings, explained that even those meetings where not all, but the majority, were Japanese, they would still frequently have discussions in their own tongue, regardless of the presence of non-Japanese participants. One of the respondents, a non-Japanese local manager, explained:

If there are any English speakers in a meeting, then, you've got an obligation, and it's commonsense to speak in English. ... It reflects badly on the manager that speaks in Japanese. It proves that he, he either doesn't trust the locals, or he can't be bothered. Which is both a bad trait for a manager. You've got to make the extra effort.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

Another non-Japanese local manager described her experiences of being excluded:

The meeting is conducted in Japanese. And all the documentation is in Japanese. ... Well, I position myself next to someone who I know will translate for me. Some will and some won't ... They give me brief information obviously, because they're trying to listen as well to get the information as well. So they give me brief information. Or else I meet afterwards, after the meeting is finished, and whoever has spoken at the meeting, if it's a lengthy discussion, then, I will meet with them and say "can you tell me what you said?" ... I actually find those meetings not useful at all, and I get my information about what's happening at the meetings and what's happening behind that, in the meetings beforehand or after, so that's the most difficult thing I find.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

As they were not proficient in English, Japanese staff could not converse with their non-Japanese local colleagues as easily as they could with each other (see section 5.2.3). For the same reason, non-Japanese local staff also said they had difficulty understanding their Japanese colleagues (see section 5.2.3).

From the Japanese managers' point of view, conducting an entire meeting in English was not an easy task, especially when attempting to convey complex matters. Because of this, they tended to lapse into their native language, causing local staff to feel excluded. An expatriate describes this situation below:

... at the time when managers were all Japanese, the meeting was conducted in Japanese only, and we discussed freely without any restraints. But, when we started to have meetings in English because we had two local managers, the meetings did not function the way they used to, so that Japanese managers complained, "Why do we need to have the meeting in English for the sake of only two local managers?" ....

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: MKII, Date: 25/10/2000)

The findings on insufficient participation opportunities for local staff are an indication of how the development of communication and trust between Japanese expatriate staff and local staff can stall.

Excluding local staff from the decision making process is related to the representative role Japanese expatriate staff have in relation to Head Office, described in the previous

section (see section 6.2.2). As presented in an earlier chapter (see section 4.2), the most frequent communication Japanese expatriate staff had was among themselves, and it was at this time that informal decision making activities took place. The findings, thus, suggest that role exclusion is linked to the type of informal communication used in management processes described in Chapter 4 (see section 4.2).

#### 6.4 ROLE INCOMPETENCE

Role incompetence emerged as a form of role conflict in Japanese companies in Australia. This concerns the perceptions of Japanese staff on the role competence of non-Japanese local staff. The following table displays the frequency of Japanese staff who regarded non-Japanese local staff as being incompetent in their role.

**Table 6.2 Non-Japanese Local Staff Do Not Have Satisfactory Competence**

Staff Type	Percentage of staff
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	35.5 % (11)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	50.0 % (7)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	40.0 % (18)

As the table above indicates, 40 percent of Japanese staff held this opinion about non-Japanese local staff. The results revealed that not only Japanese expatriates but also local Japanese held this view. Apparently 50 percent of local Japanese staff regarded their fellow non-Japanese local staff's level of competence as unsatisfactory, nearly 15 percent greater than the ratio of Japanese expatriate staff.

The reasons for the occurrence of role incompetence also emerged. They were associated with flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995), especially in relation to conducting tasks promptly, keeping a deadline even if it compelled local staff to stay



back late. Japanese staff experienced stress when non-Japanese local staff left work at their prescribed work completion time without completing a task required on the day. The following is an example comment on this frustration:

The negative thing about [non-Japanese] locals is, after all, the fact that they go home at their prescribed time, I get stressed. ... Even when I said to them “If you don’t finish this, then, it will cause a problem, so it must be done today”, they just close the file and go home.

(Local Japanese Staff: KONI, Date: 12/07/2001)

Japanese staff claimed untimely completion of tasks occurred more frequently in Australia than in Japan. What was more, they claimed that non-Japanese local staff often made excuses instead of admitting and apologizing for faults or delays, an attitude which was considered inappropriate and unprofessional:

Locals are irresponsible. They don’t keep promises to complete jobs. They say, “Okay, I’ll do it”, but they don’t often do it by the due date. There are many cases like this. Plus, in this country, making excuses is accepted. In a Japanese company, people think making excuses is a very unattractive practice, and it really damages your evaluation. Here, if you have a good reason, then it is accepted in business. Here it is more relaxed and lenient. But in Japan, it’s more strict.

(Local Japanese Staff: HWAKI, Date: 21/03/2000)

Punctuality and keeping deadlines is regarded as crucial, and both Japanese expatriates and local Japanese staff made an effort to be on time and to send back completed work by the date requested, especially with requests from Japan:

People in the Head Office are, I think, very Japanese. So, their expectations of us [local Japanese] are also Japanese. For instance, keeping the deadline properly. So after all, we need to do things in the Japanese manner [in our department).

(Local Japanese Staff: JFUT, Date: 22/02/2002)

Corresponding to the comments above some non-Japanese local staff regarded Japanese expatriate staff as being punctual and strict as stated below:

Stricter in the way that ... not strict ... I'm thinking of the word ... like rigid. Like sort of things have to be done at a certain time, or things have to be done on time, especially with deadlines or things like that. If they say a meeting starts at 10 then, you know, they expect it to start precisely at 10 o'clock. They're sort of more, stricter about with time. I think.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JFAA, Date: 16/04/2002)

Two supporting pieces of evidence for Japanese staff's stress concerning their perceived role incompetence among non-Japanese local staff were identified. First, both non-Japanese local managers as well as local Japanese staff understood that Japanese expatriate staff in a company in Australia preferred working with people who demonstrated a high commitment to work by adopting Japanese style positive attitude towards flexible work hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) and job flexibility (Ishida 1986, 1994). This included working overtime and performing tasks outside their area of responsibility. They valued such staff highly, and perceived those who did not to be irresponsible, unreliable, and disloyal. The results revealed that 40 percent of non-Japanese local managers held this perception, and the ratio of local Japanese staff was even higher at 71.4 percent. Example comments on taking on extra tasks and working overtime are as follows:

I think that they value highly people who show strong commitment to work, that can translate into – I think it does translate for them into work hours, so people who are working more than full time hours if you like, so you have a dedication to your job: they value that highly. They value, ah people who will – what's the word I'm looking for, it's not loyalty, it's more – they certainly value loyalty, so people who have been here a long time. ... There's something else that stands out. Some of them take on extra work, local staff, Yes, so things that just might happen to be around, and that tends to be more personally related. So, the staff they [Japanese expatriate staff] value highly are the staff in the divisions that will assist their wives. To help them, whatever, help them take their car to work. So those sort of things are valued quite highly in the staff, even though the staff member may not be able to perform their own job. We have got situations where the staff member themselves is not very good at their job, but they're very good with the family {laughter}. Yes, very helpful with the wife and the family, but they're not very good at their job. But they're valued for their cooperation.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

This is a company in Australia, but Mr. Sato [name disguised], he just came from Japan, and he is of course, a very capable person and is younger than me. He demonstrates his Japanese-ness here [in Australia]. ... He doesn't tell them [local managers directly], but he thinks that it's so strange that they leave at a prescribed work completion time. He tells me about it, because both of us are the same Japanese, so we know about it, you know. He says like "why do they leave at 5:30?" I know why he says it, because he doesn't like it. So I tell him "Of course, they leave at 5:30 when they finished their work" as a kind of joke, not seriously, you know. But this [the Japanese expatriate comments about locals] happens every day between us continuously. It continues everyday. What happens is that, it comes to influence to their [local's] appraisal as a result, you know. Well, it really shouldn't be that way. ... He doesn't understand how things normally work in a company in Australia, so I cannot leave here at 5:30.

(Local Japanese Manager: KONI, Date: 12/07/2001)

Second, this study found that when Japanese expatriate managers asked non-Japanese locals to take on tasks that may require overtime or are not included in their job description, as is consistent with their practice in Japan where they expect their subordinates to display flexible work attitudes, their requests tended to be declined. After this, they hesitated or even ceased to ask locals to do anything of this nature.

Table 6.3 displays the frequency of Japanese expatriate staff's comments on this. The frequency of comments by local Japanese staff indicates their perception of Japanese expatriate staff, not themselves.

**Table 6.3 Japanese Expatriate Staff Hesitate To Ask Non-Japanese Local Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	22.6 % (7)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6 % (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	24.4 % (11)

Table 6.3 reveals that nearly 25 percent of Japanese staff commented on Japanese expatriate staff's reservations about asking non-Japanese local staff to take on extra tasks. The ratio of local Japanese staff was slightly higher. Below is an example:

Well, expatriates say just "okay" and give up asking them [non-Japanese locals] ... Gradually, they [expatriates] start to learn that they cannot ask him/her [to do any extra work]. Then, the works goes to the Japanese people who are, to some extent, a subservient type, yeah, more and more jobs come to us, you know.

(Local Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

The Japanese expatriate staff's hesitation indicates their decreased reliance on and trust of non-Japanese local staff and is linked to their perception of non-Japanese local staff's role incompetence.

As explained in the literature review chapter (see section 2.2.2.1), displaying a Japanese style work attitude with flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) is common in companies in Japan. It involves staying back late to complete a required task without being requested by senior staff.

The findings, thus, suggest that Japanese style flexible working hours have a bearing on the perception of role incompetence of non-Japanese local staff working in companies in Australia. The results also corroborate the claim that when there are Japanese staff in a company, working behavior which does not follow the Japanese way can damage the reputation of local colleagues' abilities.

Staying back late is not enforceable, and employees have the right to leave at the prescribed work completion time. The expectation that a non-Japanese local employee will stay back late goes beyond what is outlined in his or her job description. The damaging perception of an individual's role competence, thus, demonstrates that an informal management process determines the perception of role capability in Japanese companies in Australia.

It is also probable that the level of reliance Japanese expatriate staff place on local staff diminished if they were perceived as incompetent in their role. This suggests that the two types of role conflict, role incompetence and role exclusion, are inter-related.

## **6.5 ROLE OVERLOAD**

The final theme to emerge within role conflict is related to the degree of overload in role expectations experienced by local Japanese staff. They felt that higher expectations were placed on them by their expatriate colleagues compared with non-Japanese local staff. This caused role overload. The expectations placed on them primarily related to job flexibility (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996) and flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995).

Results revealed that 64.3 percent of local Japanese staff who participated in this study, raised the issue of these expectations, job flexibility (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996) and flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995). They understood that if necessary, they might be expected to take on a job not included in their job description, or a job that might not be directly related to their area of responsibility. As a result, they often ended up accepting extra duties and remaining at work until late to meet deadlines.

Local Japanese staff also said that they sometimes had to take over a task from a non-Japanese local colleague. This occurred partly because of lack of job flexibility in the non-Japanese local staff (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996). Similarly, it occurred because of a lack of the Japanese style work attitude, flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995), in non-Japanese local staff. Role overload is thus related to role incompetence as described in the previous section (see section 6.4), where Japanese staff perceived non-Japanese local staff as lacking the Japanese style work attitude, flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995). Example comments reflecting their experiences are listed below:

I find that [non-Japanese] local staff draw a clear line around the job they do. I mean, it's like "This is my job up to here, but more than this, it's not my job. So, ask someone else." When they [Japanese expatriate staff] are told this, they cannot say anything, so they come and ask us [local Japanese], and sometimes they even ask one [local Japanese] from a different section! ... We do our work mainly for Japanese clients, so we, Japanese have to bear their [non-Japanese locals] work.

(Local Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

There are times when they say "I can't." There are many cases where they didn't do the task even though I asked them and they said "okay." Well, they will do it eventually, but it doesn't mean they do it right now, it means tomorrow or the day after tomorrow. We can't wait that long, we get a call from Japan, and so we Japanese need to take it on.

(Local Japanese Staff: TKAR, Date: 02/05/2002)

Two findings emerged as explanations as to why this was happening. These demonstrate the relationship between local Japanese staff and Japanese expatriate staff.

First, 42.9 percent of local Japanese staff understood that Japanese expatriate staff preferred to ask them rather than asking non-Japanese local staff. Second, although the ratio was not high, 16.1 percent of Japanese expatriate staff corroborated this. The following is an example comment:

Yes, I have a Japanese secretary over there [in addition to a non-Japanese local secretary], in that building over there [pointing at the building]. She takes care of different areas, but you know. Because she is Japanese, it's easier to ask her things. ... Because there is a language problem [with non-Japanese local staff], you see. I can't tell a non-Japanese local secretary all the details and finer points. So, it's much faster to ask her in Japanese, and she will do it straight away ...

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TTSO, Date: 16/08/2002)

As the comment above illustrates, the reasons why Japanese expatriate staff found it more comfortable to ask local staff were their ease in using Japanese language and the convenience of a shared cultural background. Expatriate staff were aware that their local Japanese staff had worked in Japan and understood how companies operate there. This indicates, therefore, that Japanese expatriate staff assume that local Japanese colleagues

will not only understand the Japanese expatriates' expectations but accept them as well.

Example comments by local Japanese staff are below:

We Japanese can't take holidays when we want. We know that [without asking Japanese expatriate staff]. Even when we ask for it, sometimes it's turned down by the [Japanese] director. But other Australian staff takes holidays for 3-4 weeks, you know. They won't get refused by our boss. Our boss knows that if he says no, then, they [Australian staff] may sue the company. Because by law, we have a right to take four weeks holiday, you know, but we Japanese don't have that kind of custom. Our boss knows that – that's why they say "no" to us.

(Local Japanese Staff: TKAR, Date: 02/05/2002)

Japanese expatriate staff look so comfortable in talking with other Japanese. Because we speak the same language, you know. So, when they need to ask something that is hard to ask to someone, after all, they ask [local] Japanese. I feel that there is the tendency in this company. Because they find it harder to ask foreign staff, I suppose. ... Because both of us are the same Japanese and that they can do '*amae*' [dependency] to us. ... We hardly ever say "no" to them. ... There are times when we do the favor with a sullen look.

(Local Japanese Staff: ISHT, Date: 10/02/2001)

Importantly, all local Japanese staff who experienced role overload, were demonstrating job flexibility, as well as the Japanese style work attitude, flexible working hours, similar to employees in Japan, even though they were working in Australia. It seems that local Japanese staff were still behaving with 'Japanese-ness' including values and work customs, even when working outside the home country. The following is a comment by a local Japanese employee commenting on this:

Local Japanese who are married here and live here for a long time is, you know, their basis, their core is to work co-operatively. So that, even though we don't like to say "yes" to Japanese expatriates, we still say "yes." Thinking of the negative consequences, saying "yes" is better. You see, atmosphere or the relations between us will go bad if we were to say "no" to them.

(Local Japanese Staff: ISHT, Date: 10/02/2001)

The following comment shows their displeasure at their workload and the expectations placed on them:

Everyone [local Japanese] feel in their mind that “why is it like this?” you know. What I mean “why is it like this?” is that “why is our workload heavier and their [non-Japanese local] workload is lighter, so they can take it easy?”. I think every local Japanese staff feels this way more or less.

(Local Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

Overall, the findings suggest that Japanese managers tended to have higher expectations of local Japanese staff in terms of job flexibility and flexible working hours. These expectations are related to informal management processes (see section 2.2.5). Thus, role overload and informal management processes (see section 4.3) are linked to each other.

All local Japanese staff who mentioned role overload tended to avoid refusing requests made by their Japanese expatriate managers, with 78.6 percent admitting to doing tasks beyond their job description (see section 4.3.2). This confirms that the attitudes of local Japanese staff were similar to Japanese employees in Japan.

Moreover, no Japanese expatriate interviewed expressed any dissatisfaction with any local Japanese colleague’s flexibility. It is, thus, possible to assume that their expectations were being satisfactorily met.



## **6.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter presented findings on role conflict in order to answer an aspect of Research Question 2 of this dissertation. The findings revealed four themes: (1) liaison role conflict, (2) role exclusion, (3) role incompetence, and (4) role overload.

Liaison role conflict was experienced by Japanese expatriate staff, including conflict between non-Japanese local superiors and junior Japanese expatriate staff. Japanese expatriate staff differed from local staff in that they had dual roles, as representatives of Head Office as well as performing their official positions in the offshore office. Japanese expatriate staff, thus, felt it necessary to play a major role in decision making and issues for which they were not, in their official capacity, directly responsible. This led to clashes between junior Japanese expatriate staff and their non-Japanese local superiors.

Because such situations arose from expatriates acting outside their official capacity, these findings suggest that liaison role conflict and informal management processes are inter-related.

The second theme, role exclusion, was experienced by local staff. They were unhappy in any situation where they had insufficient opportunities to participate, but especially in the area of decision making. Because liaison role conflict involved expatriates exerting a strong influence, it led to the exclusion of their non-Japanese local superiors. It is, thus, suggested that role exclusion is related to liaison role conflict.

The third theme, role incompetence, concerned the Japanese perception of non-Japanese staff's incompetence, and was associated with the Japanese style work attitude, flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995), including the prompt carrying out of tasks, keeping deadlines, and willingness to do overtime.

There were two findings which may explain this perception. First, Japanese expatriate staff tended to prefer employees who demonstrated the Japanese style work attitude towards flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) and job flexibility (Ishida 1986,

1994). Second, once they had had the experience of being refused, they rarely asked non-Japanese local staff to do anything outside their job description again.

Their hesitation demonstrates their low opinion of the reliability of non-Japanese local staff. A decreased level of reliance could lead to the exclusion of local staff. The results, thus, suggest that role incompetence had a bearing on role exclusion.

The expatriate expectation of flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) was related to their perception of local staff as incompetent. Because this expectation was one of the informal management processes used in Japanese companies in Australia, it is, therefore, suggested that this informal management process is related to role incompetence.

The last theme, role overload, centred on the stress and pressure experienced by Japanese staff. This was caused by the expatriate expectation that local Japanese staff would work as hard as their compatriots back home. Again, because this expectation was essentially an informal management process (see section 2.2.5), overloaded role expectation can be seen as related to informal management processes.

Moreover, local Japanese staff, who experienced role overload, claimed that non-Japanese local staff's inflexible work attitudes towards issues such as job flexibility and flexible working hours resulted in extra work for them. For this reason, local Japanese staff were also inclined to regard their non-Japanese local colleagues as incompetent. This suggests that role incompetence and role overload are inter-related. Despite their dissatisfaction, however, all local Japanese staff, who experienced role overload, demonstrated job flexibility and flexible working hours, as expected by Japanese expatriate staff.

The overall findings demonstrated that each role conflict was connected to the others, including liaison role conflict and role exclusion, role exclusion and role incompetence, and role incompetence and role overload. Furthermore, the results illustrate a definite involvement in informal management processes and its connections with role conflicts

within Japanese companies. First, liaison role conflict and role exclusion pertain to informal communication (see section 4.2). Second, role overload are related to flexibilities in conducting duties (see section 4.3).

Overall, the findings reveal the ways in which Japanese expatriate staff manage the local office and what they expect of local staff. It also demonstrates the involvement of informal management processes. Although these processes are, by their very nature, less acknowledged and more difficult to define, it would be a mistake to overlook them. The above findings would be undetectable if only the formal aspects of management processes had been investigated.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **COPING STRATEGIES**

#### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the coping strategies which were perceived as effective by white collar management and non-management staff in Japanese companies in Australia. Themes identified as coping strategies address Research Question 3 of this dissertation. The question is provided again below.

Research Question 3:

*What attitudes and strategies are perceived to be effective in coping with role stress by individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

Six common themes emerged, and these are presented together with the frequency that the respondents perceived them as effective coping strategies. They are (1) avoidance, (2) active coping, (3) building relationships, (4) communication, (5) participation opportunities, and (6) hiring bicultural staff. These will be reported together with examples of comments which illustrate the strategies.

The results of each theme are presented together with analysis tables. Each table displays the frequency of informants' comments on a particular theme with results grouped by informant type to show the level of their agreement with it. Examples of comments are also provided.

## 7.2 AVOIDANCE STRATEGY

This theme is about avoiding confrontation. Avoidance strategy was used solely by Japanese expatriate staff and only for dealing with non-Japanese local staff. The results found that nearly 30 percent of Japanese expatriate staff participating in the current study recognized their own avoidance tendencies when dealing with non-Japanese local staff.

The avoidance strategy occurred in potential disciplinary situations such as when non-Japanese local staff made frequent private phone calls during work, when they regularly took days off, or when they left work without finishing a task required to be completed on the day. In these situations Japanese managers in Japan would normally caution their junior staff to refrain from doing these things. Japanese managers in Australia who participated in the current study however, tended to keep their concerns to themselves in order to avoid conflict with local staff, as the following comment demonstrates:

I suppose local staff here are a bit more relaxed than [people in] Japan about *keeping time* basically. But I try not to mention little things. Well, it may sound odd if I say this, but I try to be tolerant.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: IMIW, Date: 21/02/2002)

Most of the comments made by Japanese expatriate staff about avoidance mention their reluctance to be too demanding of local staff. 'Demanding' in this instance refers to expectations that Australian staff show a level of commitment similar to that shown in Japan. Although they were dissatisfied with local staff's work attitudes and were frustrated, they reiterated that they were working in Australia and should accept the local standards of work commitment.

By using this strategy, they were able to avoid causing any confrontations with non-Japanese local staff, preferring to maintain a peaceful work environment rather than take any risk of causing discord. This strategy has relevance to emotion-focused strategy (e.g. Folkman & Lazarus 1980; Lazarus & Folkman 1984) and emotion-oriented strategy categorized by Begley (1998).

One of the advantages of this strategy from the expatriate point of view is that no effort is required. The following local Japanese staff's comment describes the expatriate attitude:

They basically want to raise their profile in the company through increased sales volume, the dollars, you know, and they don't want to get involved in any troublesome matters [not directly related to raising their own profile] such as making changes for improvement [that do not directly raise their contribution to the company] or giving cautions to staff, ... so they try not to get involved in those troublesome matters as much as possible, as long as they can get away with it.

(Local Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

In summary, the findings revealed that even though Japanese expatriates acknowledged that their expectations of their non-Japanese colleagues should be adjusted to the Australian work environment, they nevertheless experienced frustration with local staff's level of commitment to work and could not help comparing their performance to that of Japanese colleagues back home.

This relates back to one of the role conflicts presented in an earlier section, role incompetence, where Japanese staff were dissatisfied with local staff's non-flexibility as compared to that of employees in Japan (see section 6.4).

### 7.3 ACTIVE COPING STRATEGY

In contrast to avoidance strategy, respondents using an active coping strategy attempted to resolve problems by confronting them. This is similar to one of the problem-focused coping strategy types, active coping, categorized by Carver and his associates (1989). The findings of the current study revealed that this active coping strategy can be divided into two kinds: direct and indirect active coping. Details of these sub-themes are reported in the following sections.

#### 7.3.1 Direct Active Coping Strategy

The direct active coping strategy involves staff confronting the situation directly for the purpose of resolution. The following table displays frequency of informants who commented on it.

**Table 7.1 Active Coping Strategy is Used**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	30.0% (3)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	15.4% (2)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	21.7% (5)

As the table above (see Table 7.1) shows, non-Japanese local staff were the only staff type who practiced active coping strategy. The highest frequency, at 30 percent, was non-Japanese local managers, with the frequency of non-Japanese local staff overall being 21.7 percent. In contrast, the frequency of Japanese staff, both locally hired and expatriate, who did report about the use of the strategy, was zero.

The results show that although this strategy was not used extensively among non-Japanese local staff, there was a distinct difference between non-Japanese staff and Japanese staff, both local and expatriate. Non-Japanese local staff who commented on this theme claimed that Japanese expatriate staff were obscure when communicating and, while admitting that the Japanese are never fond of confrontation, they nevertheless believed that solving a problem through active coping was the best solution. The following examples of comments illustrate their feelings about this:

[I solved problems] by not allowing the people that I was communicating with to be vague. So, if there was some uncertainty or some doubt about anything, I would pin them down to be precise. So if you mean, do I use this sort of network approach of going to speak to the Japanese boss and getting the Japanese boss to go and speak to somebody, well it's so childish. And the majority of Western people are offended by that sort of concept. It's how children behave. And furthermore, the people in overseas Japanese companies who reach the more senior levels are offended by it to a greater degree. So, it's not necessary, and it's unnecessary and it can be addressed, and so the best way to handle it is to address it. It's to confront it directly. Of course, the Japanese don't like confrontation.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: JIAP, Date: 27/03/2002)

There is always '*Choowa* [harmony]', no conflict. Sometimes I think conflict is necessary. ... Even though, if you are going to avoid conflict, you'd better encourage open communication. If you don't encourage it, sometimes the thing is, okay, there is nothing wrong, but it won't get better. That's the problem. ... Sometimes, I ... see they [Japanese expatriate staff] are not doing anything to improve the situation.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: MMAA, Date: 15/09/2002)

In sum, confronting the person concerned directly was regarded as effective by non-Japanese local staff only. However, they did not commonly practice this strategy, with the overall frequency being only 21.7 percent. Since Japanese staff did not comment on the strategy at all, there was a marked difference between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff in their attitude towards the strategy.



### 7.3.2 Indirect Active Coping Strategy

An indirect active coping strategy is also utilized. It differs from the active coping strategy in that it involves a third party or ‘go-between’ in order that there need be no direct communication between the primary parties. Table 7.2 displays the frequency of informants who commented on this.

**Table 7.2 Solving Problems Through a Third Party**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	30.0% (3)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	30.8% (4)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	30.4% (7)
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	22.6% (7)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6% (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> )(n=45)	24.4% (11)

Indirect coping strategy was utilized and was regarded as effective by 24 percent of Japanese staff and 30 percent of non-Japanese local staff. A typical scenario could be when a Japanese expatriate staff member needs to make a comment which they would hesitate to say directly to a non-Japanese local staff member. Cautioning or making requests are examples of this. In this situation, the Japanese expatriate staff member would ask a third party, such as a local Japanese staff member or a non-Japanese local manager, to relay the message. Example comments are provided below:

Yes, they [Japanese expatriate staff] often get an intermediary to get things done, they ask a [local] Japanese staff member to tell the [non-Japanese] local staff member that a task needs to be done. Then, the [local] Japanese staff member tells the [non-Japanese] local staff member about it, and then, the [non-Japanese]

local staff member does the job. In this way, they deal with [non-Japanese] local staff indirectly.

(Local Japanese Staff: KFUI, Date: 05/03/2002)

Things are discussed between Australians. For instance, an Australian manager tells [his junior] Australian staff to keep to the deadline, but Japanese bosses don't communicate much with them [non-Japanese local staff]. ... So when a problem occurs, then, they [Japanese expatriate staff] tell the Australian manager about the problem saying "This should not have happened, so you talk to the [non-Japanese] local staff about it, I'll leave it to you". ... But they [Japanese expatriate staff] talk to us [local] Japanese directly about the problem, yes, in person.

(Local Japanese Staff: TCHO, Date: 10/10/2001)

The third party does not necessarily hold a senior position, and thus could be junior or senior to the person requesting assistance and/or to the person they had to approach. The following table presents the frequency of informants who said they had acted as a 'go-between' when necessary.

**Table 7.3 Informants Who Play the Role of Third Party**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	23.1% (3)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	30.4% (7)
<b>C:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	14.3% (2)

Both non-Japanese and local Japanese staff of managerial and non-managerial positions acknowledged playing the role of third party. There was a relatively higher number of non-Japanese local staff. In particular, the non-Japanese local manager respondent type was the highest at 40 percent, compared to local Japanese staff at 14.3 percent. Only a

limited number of staff, in particular local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff, were playing the role of third party.

A common factor among these informants was their good understanding of the people, culture, and corporate customs of both Australia and Japan. It was this type of person who could act as a 'go-between' in order to smooth over problems occurring between Japanese expatriates and non-Japanese local staff. Those who played this role were equivalent to the 'cultural integrator' named in the current study (see section 2.4.1). Detailed findings concerning these people are presented in a later chapter (see Chapter 8). Example comments are provided below:

Locally hired managers find it a bit difficult to go directly to the [Japanese] General Affairs Manager or '*Shachoo*' [Managing Director] to discuss anything. There's not an open discussion between locally hired managers and the Mitayama [company name disguised] imported managers. There's not free exchange. It's a kind of a love-hate relationship between those guys. Whereas, I'm more neutral. I'm Australian, I don't speak much Japanese, I should, and I'm not Japanese. So they can use me as a middle man, I think. As long as I can be trusted.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

I think I tried hard to make them understand the cultural things that we do here. And I've always gone out of my way to try to explain at length when things don't work out or things are misinterpreted, why they've been misinterpreted.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

It emerged that the third party was perceived as more skillful than the person who requested assistance. A positive aspect of this strategy was that Japanese expatriate staff did not experience the stress they would have had if he/she had confronted the situation directly. Of the Japanese expatriates who commented on this strategy, those in executive or senior management positions were firm believers in the usefulness of this technique for managing non-Japanese local staff. It was felt that it provided local staff with encouragement and empowered them to carry out their duties. The following is an example comment from a Japanese executive, who called this technique 'indirect governing':

The most useful advice [to Japanese expatriate staff new to Australia] is to practice 'indirect governing'. We need to encourage local staff in everything, and let them do the work. The Japanese [expatriate staff] need to put a word in only for important issues. For instance, I don't tell our local staff, "this product must be sold for this price". I do this indirectly [getting other local staff to tell this to the local staff concerned]. The Japanese [expatriate staff] should stay behind the scenes.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TINO, Date: 28/03/2002)

Overall, this strategy enabled staff to solve a problem without having to confront the person concerned directly. Three parties were involved: (1) the person who requested help to solve a problem, (2) the third person (the third party) who acts as a go-between, and (3) the person whom the third party must approach.

The results suggest three advantages in employing this strategy. First, indirect active coping strategy does not require either of the primary parties (that is, the person who requested help to solve a problem and the person whom the third party must approach) to possess problem-solving skills. Second, the strategy allows the two primary parties to avoid experiencing stress and annoyance as a result of their direct confrontation. Third, the strategy bestows encouragement and empowerment, especially to local staff involved as the third party.

## **7.4 RELATIONSHIPS BUILDING STRATEGY**

Besides the coping strategies used when problems arise (see sections 7.2 and 7.3), the current study also identified strategies used during the normal course of daily work activities. This concerned the establishment of positive human relationships that fostered camaraderie among work colleagues. This section reports on this theme.

### **7.4.1 Importance of Positive Relationships**

The current study found that both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff regarded the establishment of positive relationships as essential in working together within the same company. This strategy involves understanding, respect, acceptance of fellow colleagues, as well as learning how they can work successfully together. The informants believed that when positive relationships were developed, the level of collaboration between staff increased. Thus when problems arose, they were resolved more smoothly. The use of this strategy can make a considerable difference compared with workplaces where such relationships are not developed. The 'relationship' here primarily refers to those between Japanese expatriates and local staff. The table below displays the frequency of informants who commented on this theme.

**Table 7.4 Establishing Comrade Relationships is Crucial**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	30.9% (4)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	34.8% (8)
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	32.3% (10)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	21.4% (3)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> )(n=45)	28.9% (13)

The overall frequencies of the table above (see Table 7.4) were slightly higher compared with those of other themes described earlier (see sections 7.2 and 7.3). The highest frequency of comments was by non-Japanese local managers, at 40 percent. Those holding managerial positions were slightly higher than those in non-managerial positions.

Japanese expatriate staff stressed the importance of an equal and collaborative working relationship. They stated that local staff should not be treated as subordinates whose role was merely to follow their orders. The following are examples of comments made by Japanese expatriate staff:

We should try to develop an atmosphere where staff feel that there is a camaraderie. The relationship should not be as superior and subordinate, but something like comrades. I think our staff will do better if we can develop such a collaborative atmosphere.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNII, Date: 30/04/2002)

After all, we are all human, so if we can share many things, we can naturally understand each other. We can't increase our language skills overnight. It's impossible. But we need to get to know them well in order to understand business customs, life customs, and their ways of thinking. Yes, this means spending time together. In order to understand one another and be able to

discuss many things effectively at official meetings, we need to establish good human relationships. We really must do this.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TKOO, Date: 12/10/2000)

Non-Japanese local staff also commented on the importance and necessity of building such relationships:

I usually say [to any new Japanese expatriate manager sent to Australia], “Look, you’ve got to meet the rest of the team and establish a relationship with them.”

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CIAA, Date: 25/11/2001)

In sum, both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff believed that developing a camaraderie and sense of fellowship among staff was crucial for the establishment of a collaborative work environment in the company.

#### 7.4.2 Being Polite to Japanese Expatriate Staff

This section reports on a key factor which was regarded by local staff as vital to the building of positive relationships (see section 7.4.1). It involves displaying polite and respectful attitudes towards Japanese expatriate staff. These attitudes were regarded as critical for the purpose of building positive relationships. The table below displays the frequency of non-Japanese local staff who expressed this.

**Table 7.5 The Importance of Being Polite to Japanese Expatriate Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	46.2% (6)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	43.5% (10)

As shown in the table above (see Table 7.5), approximately 40 percent or more of non-Japanese local staff shared this view, with the highest frequency of comments being by non-Japanese local employees at 46.2 percent.

By 'polite' the informants meant utilizing indirect speech and adopting a civil approach which included being non-argumentative, non-confrontational, and respectful. This was achieved by using courteous language and avoiding direct expressions such as "We should do...". It was believed that local staff should not insist on convincing Japanese staff about matters directly, in the way they were accustomed to with local staff.

The informants claimed that a polite, softly-spoken attitude towards their Japanese expatriate colleagues enabled them to resolve a problem more smoothly. More importantly, this strategy helped them to gain support and understanding from Japanese expatriate staff. An example of a comment illustrating the importance of such attitudes is provided below:

Respect the need for politeness I think is the most important. ... Well, if I was saying to one of the other [local] people in the office ..., I'd say 'Look, this is ridiculous, piss off and we'll talk about this later, okay?' With a Japanese person, I would probably say 'Thank you for sharing that information with me, but I don't think we're really getting anywhere, here, maybe we should go away and think about this and come back and talk about it later. ... And in written communication I've found that you can be direct, but soften it with, with structure points of politeness, like saying 'thank you' like saying 'please'. Just simple stuff, that seems to me to be appreciated.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

The polite approach attempts to persuade in a roundabout way, giving extensive explanations and information, followed by suggestions using such phrases as "What do you think about doing ...?" instead of "We should do ...". Opinions were respectfully sought using such expressions as "Please let me know your opinions about this". The following example comments describe this approach:



But I learnt, especially with decision making and things like that, I found Japanese people don't like confrontation. You can't go in and say that what should we do about this? Because you don't get an answer. Whereas, I've learnt that if you say 'this is the situation and there are three solutions one, two, and three, and I recommend number three. What do you think?', and then, they say 'Yes, I agree with your decision'. ... So I learnt about it early on to make things happen quickly. And also to have a bit of, if you show yourself as I've checked this, I've checked this and done that, I recommend this. It's easier to convince them that. .... And all they need to do, then, is to agree that my recommendation is okay. ... So I found that you need to go softly, softly ... Then you know, they just say that "that's good we'll do that", and "oh, thank you very much". ... So that's a very big thing. That took me you know, years [to learn about this]. That was a very big skill. ...

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JTRA, Date: 04/06/2002)

I think you have to be assertive without being aggressive. I still think you have to be for them [Japanese expatriate staff] not to feel threatened by you, I think you still have to be reasonably feminine. .. what I mean by that is that if you're too aggressive in a male sense aggressive, then, you won't get their cooperation. So when I say feminine, I mean those qualities of femininity in terms of being sometimes more conciliatory, sometimes more softly-spoken, rather than forcefully-spoken, to be able to listen rather than always put forward your own point of view. ... I do that by trying to be diplomatic, trying to find a compromise, but if I believe something strongly, and then I felt that the [Japanese] General Manager may be erring in their judgment, then, I stick to my guns while accepting their thoughts and saying "I understand what you're saying but these are my reasons".

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: MJAI, Date: 11/10/2000)

Non-Japanese locals who used this strategy deliberately chose to take a circuitous rather than a straightforward approach. It includes making suggestions, and seeking a superior's opinions rather than simply transmitting the bare facts.

### **7.4.3 Showing Care and Respect to Local Staff**

Just as local staff placed an importance on politeness in dealing with expatriate colleagues, so too did expatriates consider certain criteria as crucial to establishing good relationships with non-Japanese local staff. The results revealed that about 23 percent of Japanese expatriate staff commented that showing care, support, and respect towards non-Japanese local staff was pivotal for the development of good personal relationships and a collaborative workplace. Although the frequency is not significant, this was the most commonly mentioned approach for building good personal relationships with non-Japanese local staff.

The informants also stressed the importance of treating local staff as respected members of the company rather than robots or underlings carrying out assigned tasks. They believed they should exhibit attitudes and use language which indicated care, acknowledgement and appreciation for their good work and cooperation. The following comments are examples:

Ultimately, this is about human to human [association], so after all, how can I describe it, we should treat them [local staff] as people, we should treat them appropriately. You see, people sent from Head Office have a superior position, but it doesn't mean they are superior as human beings. So we need to associate with them as equal human beings, and should not develop a relationship where they perceive themselves as being treated like a machine or that sort of thing.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAU, Date: 14/03/2002)

In Japan, we tend to treat junior staff on the basis of the boss-subordinate relationship, right? I think we should give up this kind of thinking. We need to regard them [junior local staff] as colleagues. ... We have to have the attitude that they are our 'partners'. ... We should be careful about our conscious mind. We shouldn't regard them as our subordinates ... We shouldn't look down on them. We must have an attitude that we are on a level playing field and working together. Also, we should respect our secretaries' personalities. We should interact with everyone as an equal, whoever they are, colleagues or bosses.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: NGOI, Date: 16/01/2001)

This same manager commented that his secretary had a very cooperative attitude, so that he felt able to ask for additional commitment such as doing overtime when required. His comment regarding how he developed this business relationship is provided below:

Whether you can ask her to do extra tasks or not depends on how well you communicate with her daily and how comfortably she works with you. ... So, what I used to do was, have meals with her from time to time. I treat her well, you know. Also, I gave her some presents at Christmas time and whenever other opportunities arose. For Valentine's Day, I bought her flowers. I would also buy a small gift for her when I went somewhere on a business trip. And so, as a result of these actions, she is convinced that she is well taken care of by me. You don't need to be oversensitive about these things but I always made an effort to show I really regard her as important. This kind of thing has worked very well most of the time.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: NGOI, Date: 16/01/2001)

The current study revealed that Japanese expatriate staff understood the importance of demonstrating care and respect, and admitted their deficiencies in this area. The table below provides information to support this. It reports the frequency of local staff who commented on their impressions of Japanese expatriate staff as being abrasive and aloof.

**Table 7.6 Evaluation of Expatriates as Abrasive and Aloof**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	38.5% (5)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	39.1% (9)
<b>C:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=14)	14.3% (2)

The frequencies of non-Japanese local managers and non-Japanese local employees were close, suggesting that they had similar perceptions of Japanese expatriate staff.

Nearly 40 percent of non-Japanese local staff perceived Japanese expatriate staff as being authoritarian and overbearing.

In contrast, the frequency of local Japanese staff was only 14.3 percent; this is quite low when compared with non-Japanese local staff, which was nearly 2.7 times higher. The abrasive and aloof image of Japanese expatriate staff was a perception particular to non-Japanese local staff. This had come about following their experience of Japanese expatriate staff's: lack of politeness and respect, open shows of anger, and sometimes very harsh remarks. The following is an example of a comment:

I think that's a language problem. Some of it can be cultural. ... we do have some expatriate staff here, who won't say "please" and "thank you" at all. They say "do that", "write that". Now I think there are some senior Australian managers who do that as well. But they're fewer than the ones who'll say "please do this" or "please do that". Or "could you", "could" and "would" and "should". "Should you", that is often a better way. And that's what happens after a while [Japanese expatriate staff working in Australia]. You get these usages of words which are softer, and don't create, or don't invite conflict.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

The following comments demonstrate that the manner in which Japanese expatriate staff treated local staff was regarded as peculiar to them only, and not to Australian managers:

I've never seen anyone angry in an Australian company. But maybe that's just because I'm lucky. But I've seen it, not very often, but quite a few times in this company. They [Japanese expatriate staff] express their anger quite differently [from Australian bosses]. ... the managers that we have now from Japan are really lovely, but very tough. Very tough. ... When a Japanese man gets cranky, he's not a nice person. ... In general, I think if a Japanese manager gets really, really, cranky, it's best to just stay quiet.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JMAA, Date: 04/06/2002)

So it's, very evident in Australian men who started with Kashiwa (company name disguised) when they were young, they've developed a very chauvinist attitude. I have witnessed that.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: CMAA, Date: 17/01/2001)

Correspondingly, approximately 26 percent of Japanese expatriate staff had an image of themselves that was similar to the one that non-Japanese local staff had. That is, Japanese expatriate staff themselves acknowledged their attitudes toward non-Japanese local staff were high-handed and abrasive. They admitted that such attitudes sometimes caused a problem with non-Japanese local staff, as demonstrated by the following comments:

I think I am the one who creates problems in communication, so I'm more a persecutor than a sufferer. ... I get fairly angry, so I suppose that becomes the source of the conflict.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: HWAI, Date: 17/03/2000)

Improving communication in the team and the work atmosphere are important. For instance, developing an atmosphere, I mean, we shouldn't get angry. We shouldn't get angry. Also, we shouldn't talk in a high-handed manner to local staff.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNII, Date: 20/04/2002)

Japanese expatriate staff also acknowledged the necessity to modify their attitude to be more respectful. Example comments follow:

I think we shouldn't talk to our local staff in an overbearing manner. I mean this is about how we communicate with them. How can I describe it, we shouldn't tell them [our requests] as an instruction. Instead it should be more like thinking and discussing, and reaching the decision together. We should take the lead in this manner.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KMIL, Date: 21/11/2000)

I think we need to explain more, saying "We can't do this. This is because, the reasons are so and so". We need to explain properly. You know, Japanese people tend to suddenly get angry, skipping the middle process of the explanation, right? For instance, telling them in an overbearing manner "This is bad, bad!", "What have you done with this?!" or "You make so many mistakes!" Using this kind of communication with our local staff here is bad, I believe.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KNII, Date: 30/04/2002)

Comments by local employees, who wished to be treated with more respect by Japanese expatriate staff, corroborated these admissions. Table 7.7 below displays the frequency of their comments on this.

**Table 7.7 Local Staff Wish To Be Treated With Respect  
By Japanese Expatriate Staff**

<b>Staff Type</b>	<b>Percentage of Staff</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager (NJLM) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee (NJLE) (n=13)	46.2% (6)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff (NJLS) (n=23)	43.5% (10)
<b>C:</b> Local Japanese Staff (LJS) (n=14)	21.4% (3)

Approximately 44 percent of non-Japanese local staff had a strong desire to be treated with more respect, nearly twice as high as local Japanese staff. Although the majority of Japanese expatriate staff did not mention this, the results still suggest that Japanese expatriates are perceived by non-Japanese local staff to be abrasive and aloof.

'Respect' in this context meant receiving recognition, esteem, and appreciation from Japanese expatriate staff. Local staff desired encouragement, praise, and compliments, even simple verbal expressions such as 'Thank you' or 'Good work'. They emphasized the importance of encouragement and respect, and believed that such attitudes greatly increased work commitment, as the following comments demonstrate:

I think it's very important, um, to be rewarded for what you do. To be recognized. There are two ways. There's monetary or three ways. There's monetary, there is, you know, being told you're doing a good job. And also being acknowledged by maybe a change of position or raise in title or responsibility. ... I've found it is nice to have the money to be rewarded, but I

think what really is more important is to receive recognition and the respect for what you do.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: CMAA, Date: 17/07/2007)

You know, if you get the respect or the thank you, because a lot of the things I do they're very very grateful which is good, and they don't take me for granted. ... Unfortunately, a lot of the Japanese managers don't talk like that to their own staff. Which is a weird thing. ... They could do more for their own staff to make them feel useful and worthwhile. It's a wonderful thing, praise. If anyone's giving you a nice pat on the head, you always want to work harder. And it's a simple recipe for making people more productive.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

In sum, Japanese expatriate staff believed that showing care and respect to local staff was crucial for developing good personal relationships with them. Nearly 40 percent of non-Japanese locals had an image of expatriates as abrasive and aloof, and approximately 40 percent of non-Japanese local staff wanted more respect from them. Correspondingly, approximately 25 percent of Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged that they took a peremptory approach and recognized the need to develop a more respectful attitude. Thus, the findings corroborate Japanese expatriate staff's shortcomings in this area, and the necessity of altering their attitude to build more positive relationships.

## **7.5 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY**

Communication was identified as an important instance of coping strategies. The theme, communication strategy, was used for daily interactions between local staff and Japanese expatriates. It is connected to the relationships building strategy presented above (see section 7.4) and regarded as vital for the establishment of good human relationships.

This section reports on communication strategy, presenting first how staff acknowledge the importance of communication and how it should be carried out in the workplace. This is followed by two sections on the methods staff use to improve communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. It includes attempting to overcome language barriers, and accommodating the non-Japanese need for clear and full explanations.

### **7.5.1 Good Communication**

The current study revealed that both local staff and Japanese staff believed that effective communication was essential in establishing good relationships in companies, and that serious efforts must be made to communicate. Table 7.8 below displays the frequency of informants' comments on the importance of communication, indication that both local staff and Japanese staff acknowledged the importance of communication for establishing positive relationships.



**Table 7.8 Communication is Essential**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	53.8% (7)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	47.8% (11)
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	45.2% (14)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6% (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> )(n=45)	40.0% (18)

The informants who noted the importance of communication stated that more frequent communication must be carried out between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. The consequences of doing this would be an increase in the level of understanding about work, and the opportunity to get to know each other personally. It leads to the development of the kind of camaraderie that could transcend cultural differences. This in turn would lead to the facilitation of work activities and the building of a collaborative work environment. Examples of comments illustrating this follow:

... When you meet a colleague, talk to them. For instance, “Good morning, how are you?”, or “What happened about the thing you mentioned the other day?” So if you have this kind of communication, showing care for each other, trust will develop eventually. ... You need to communicate this way ... After people get to know each other well, a kind of friendship can develop. Then the Japanese boss can ask favors of local staff, they can do that. But [to develop this relationship] most of all, you need to have good communication.

(Local Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

So in any case, we need to develop a sense of being good allies, or camaraderie, [between Japanese expatriate staff and local staff], and we need to join the circle of communication among local staff members. The best thing would be regularly communicating with them about various topics, not just about work, you know. Drinking together at the pub after work and having a barbecue at

home together are good as well. This works well for our clients, too. Anyway, using this kind of method, we can draw them to us and win them over to our side. I mean, my way of doing things at work are Japanese ways. I am the type of person who is really practicing Japanese methods here. And we need to get them [local staff] to understand how we do business, help them to realize that ‘I see, there is another way to do a task’. Unless we get them to understand how it [Japanese ways of doing things] works, they won’t do it properly. No question about it.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KOSL, Date: 16/11/2000)

The findings suggest that communication was a vital tool for developing an understanding about work and staff in the company, which in turn facilitated good personal relationships. It was, in effect, conducive to smooth work operations and a collaborative work environment.

### **7.5.2 Overcoming Language Barriers**

A previous chapter reported on the insufficient English language competence of Japanese staff (see section 5.2.3), which hindered non-Japanese colleagues’ understanding and led to ambiguities. It also meant that Japanese was frequently used in company documents and in meetings. These language barriers discouraged communication and sometimes led to the exclusion of non-Japanese local staff (see section 5.3.1). Thus, communication barriers such as language differences hindered the development of positive personal relationships between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

Non-Japanese local staff emphasized the need to overcome language barriers, and efforts were made to this purpose. The following table displays the frequency of their comments stressing the importance of this.

**Table 7.9 Efforts to Overcome Language Barriers**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	40.0% (4)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	38.5% (5)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	39.1% (9)

The effort to overcome the language barrier was found to emanate from the non-Japanese side. Expatriates did not mention any attempts to overcome the language barrier with non-Japanese colleagues. Approximately 40 percent of non-Japanese local staff, in managerial and non-managerial positions, mentioned their attempts to foster better understanding between themselves and expatriates. These included such strategies as clear articulation, a slower speaking speed, rephrasing, using simpler terms, and providing visual aids such as diagrams. It was felt that utilizing such methods helped to reassure themselves that they had been understood. Examples of comments follow:

Because when I speak to a non-English speaking person, I would, especially someone when I know that their English isn't quite that good, I would, if it's something important, I would ask the question, and then I would say "Is this what you're saying?", then, they'd give me the answer, I would repeat back the answer, and say "Is this what you are saying?" or "You are saying that so and so". Because it just reinforces that the communication is delivered and understood to be the same by both parties.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: CMAA, Date: 17/01/2007)

I give them [Japanese expatriate staff] a lot of time to communicate. I will just wait till they communicate to me, and if I can't understand it, I will ask it again. So I am very tolerant. ... A lot of times it happens. You say something and they [Japanese expatriate staff] don't know what you're saying, and then you realize the word or slang you used, they didn't get it, so you say it in a different way.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: HDYI, Date: 17/03/2000)

One of the role ambiguity types found in the current study was communication difficulties (see section 5.2) which included insufficient English language competence of

Japanese staff. The above examples suggest that non-Japanese staff were primarily responsible for compensating for this lack of competence, by seeking to overcome the language barrier. Cultural understanding was also found to be one of the role ambiguity types in the current study (see section 5.4). Increased comprehension in communication facilitated the development of cultural understanding between non-Japanese and Japanese staff. Hence, the communication strategy assists in alleviating both types of role ambiguities, communication difficulties and cultural understanding.

### 7.5.3 Clear and Full Explanation

This section presents the need for clear and full explanation to be provided by Japanese expatriates for non-Japanese staff and is related to one of the role ambiguities, communication difficulties, described earlier. The findings were that 40 percent of non-Japanese local managers believed that comprehending exactly what Japanese staff were attempting to communicate was not an easy task (see section 5.2.2).

Corresponding to this need for clear and full explanation by non-Japanese local staff, Japanese staff acknowledged the necessity to improve clarity and comprehensiveness in communication with their non-Japanese colleagues. Table 7.10 displays the frequency of Japanese staff comments on this.

**Table 7.10 Clear and Full Explanation Required to Non-Japanese Local Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	38.7% (12)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	21.4% (3)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	33.3% (15)

Table 7.10 shows that 33.3 percent of the Japanese staff stated that they tried to avoid the Japanese method of ‘guessing’ when communicating with non-Japanese staff. This type of communication method is commonly used among Japanese and is often expressed as the ‘Say 1, know 10’ method. What this means is that when a major point is expressed (‘1’, or 10 percent of the message), the speaker expects the listener to grasp the details comprising the remaining 90 percent of the message (‘know 10’ or 100 percent of the message) (see section 2.2.1.2). Another common expression describing the Japanese style of communication is ‘*ki o kikasu*’ (to use one’s mind and be considerate) which indicates the ability of the listener to ‘take a hint’ and act according to what they have inferred in order to satisfy the expectations (Kokugo Daijiten, 1984, p.423). Japanese respondents of the current study often raised the topic of communication methods to explain the difficulties in their communication with non-Japanese local staff.

Japanese staff were aware that the communication style of non-Japanese local staff differed from their own, and that they should not expect them to be able to ‘guess’ in the same way as their Japanese colleagues did. Instead they should provide non-Japanese local staff with explicit explanations and instructions. Some example of comments illustrating this follow:

The Japanese usually value Japanese ways of doing things such as ‘people understand 100 % of what the other person meant even when they are told only half of it’. Yes, the Japanese usually value this method ‘*ki o kikaku*’. Japanese management uses this method, too. They expect staff to think and figure out what they meant to get across [without being told everything], and be considerate, practicing the method ‘*ki o kikasu*’. This sort of expectation is quite common [among Japanese]. But people here [in Australia], think everything should be articulated from A to Z. I know this is legitimate if people expect others to understand the whole message. But as Japanese, we think that if people are told only ‘1’ [10% of the whole message], then there is an expectation that they should know ‘2’ [20% of the message], and if people are told ‘2’ [20% of the whole message], then they are expected to know ‘3’ [30% of the message]. See, there is a gap [in communication] between Australians and Japanese. Yeah, people here [in Australia] think ‘how can we understand everything when we are not told everything?’ This is quite right [and we need to be clear].

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAI, Date: 20/02/2002)

There are so many cases where things don't go smoothly. This is because our instruction [to local staff] is bad, I mean, we don't explain things to them properly. Or we thought that they [local staff] had understood, but the local staff actually hadn't. So, I think it's our fault. So there are cases where we thought the staff had understood what we wanted them to do, but the task local staff completed did not come out as we'd expected. This happens because of our practice '*a un no kokyuu*' [Japanese style communication: communicate with little articulation]. That is, when we said only '5' [50% of the whole message] to non-Japanese local staff, we thought that the local staff understood everything that we meant, but they actually did not understand the full 100 % of what we'd meant. So, we need to tell our local staff '10' [100% of what we mean] instead of telling them '5' [50%] in English. Because they don't get it right very often.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAU, Date: 14/03/2002)

In summary, the above comments suggest that the coping strategy of clear and full explanation was related to one of the role ambiguity types, communication difficulties. Similar to the feature of overcoming language barriers above (see section 7.5.2), the coping strategy of clear and full explanation assists in reducing communication difficulties (a role ambiguity type) (see section 5.2). It also facilitates cultural understanding between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff. Hence, the strategy of clear and full explanation assists in alleviating both types of role ambiguities, namely communication difficulties (see section 5.2) and cultural understanding (see section 5.4).

## **7.6 COPING STRATEGY BY MANAGEMENT**

The last two kinds of coping strategy are carried out by management in appropriate situations. These are participation opportunities, and hiring bicultural staff. The following two sections present the two themes.

### **7.6.1 Participation Opportunities**

This strategy emerged as vital for company management, and is related to role stress, including information shortage, presented as one kind of role ambiguity (see section 5.3), and one of the role conflicts, role exclusion (see section 6.3). This strategy, participation opportunities, arose where local staff were dissatisfied with the amount of information provided by Japanese expatriates, and wanted greater participation in the company's activities, particularly in decision making.

Corresponding to the local staff's dissatisfaction, Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged the desirability of raising the participation level of local staff. Approximately 26 percent of Japanese expatriates participating in the current study believed that increasing local staff's participation was a valuable management strategy. This included encouraging them to provide input into matters, and letting them handle assigned tasks without interference. The strategy, thus, involves management displaying reliance on local staff, and an expectation that local staff would take an active role in the company's business activities. Examples of comments on the strategy follow:

I think we need to respect them [local staff] and leave the task to them. Tell them that they only need to report it to us. ... Yes, just report to us [about what they did] properly. But leave it to them, just let them handle it and let them take the responsibility. I think we shouldn't interfere with them much.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: NGOI, Date: 16/01/2001)

Respect [is important], after all. So, for decision making, for instance, we need to let them [local staff] participate and we should seek their opinions. Well, it doesn't necessarily mean we accept and follow their opinions though. This is about letting them take part in the discussion, as opposed to making the final

decision. Because the final decision may sometimes go against the suggestions they make.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAI, Date: 20/02/2002)

Japanese expatriates also described the positive outcomes of the strategy, including employee empowerment and prevention of high staff turnover, especially in relation to retaining promising staff members. It also resulted in the input of a variety of ideas which but for local staff would have never been raised, and helped to increase their understanding of the company's business activities. This in turn led to the reduction of ambiguity. The following examples of comments describe these benefits:

We need to get them [local staff] to express their opinions. Yes, let them speak out about what they think. This has the effect of reducing problems when they feel ambivalent or dissatisfied about something. So firstly, we need to encourage them to express their opinions, including in policy-making situations.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TKOO, Date: 12/10/2000)

I think we need to respect them as members of staff here. There is a wall between expatriate staff and local staff. All matters are decided by expatriates, and we just give them the instructions. This kind of bureaucratic method shouldn't be practiced any more, you know. So we need to develop a system where we give them more input, information, and we should reach decisions only after they are discussed by everyone. This way, they will be more motivated, and they'll feel that they have participated in reaching the decision. Well, it's very easy to say, but it is difficult. ... We need to get them to feel that they are the driving force of the company, and because of their contribution, the company can exist in Australia.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: JASA, Date: 22/05/2002)

As the expatriate above points out, what they believed they should do and what was actually put into practice were two very different things. It would seem that although expatriates understood the positive effects of allowing local participation, there were challenges and difficulties in putting these good intentions into practice.

In summary, the findings show that providing local staff with more participation opportunities assists in mitigating the role ambiguity designated as information shortage



(see section 5.3), as well as the role conflict designated as role exclusion (see section 6.3).

### 7.6.2 Hiring Bicultural Staff

The last kind of coping strategy used by management was their practice of hiring local staff who were considered to be culturally adjusted to Japan. The term ‘bicultural staff’ refers to staff members familiar with Japanese people and well versed in Japan’s culture, corporate customs, and/or language.

This type of local staff member had typically studied the Japanese language and/or Japanese studies. Some of them had had experience of living, studying, and/or working in Japan. In addition, they had worked with Japanese people in Australia for some time, and so were familiar with the Japanese way of doing business and the corporate culture. The following table shows the frequency of those who commented on this.

**Table 7.11 Preference for Bicultural Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	25.8% (8)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6% (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> )(n=45)	26.7% (12)

Approximately 26 percent of Japanese informants mentioned this. Their comments reveal that people regarded as bicultural staff were not only well acquainted with Japan, but also tended to accept Japanese corporate customs and culture. Thus, they were perceived as quite different from local staff who did not have these qualities.

The current study revealed that some of the bicultural staff's attitudes and ways of thinking were found to be 'Japanized' to some extent. For example, when they were requested by Japanese expatriate staff to take on a task that did not fall within the scope of their own duties, they never refused on the grounds that it was not their job but accepted it instead. Hence, their attitudes were flexible and similar to those of Japanese employees in Japan. They were, thus, acknowledged as cooperative in a Japanese sense, and considered to be culturally adjusted.

Two reasons for the preference for hiring bicultural staff emerged. First, both Japanese expatriates and local Japanese staff were far more comfortable working with them. Second, this type of staff member was better able to handle Japanese clients.

Common across the Japanese companies participating in the current study was the fact that some or even the majority of their clients were Japanese nationals located in Japan and/or in Australia. For this reason, companies preferred to hire locals who were familiar with the Japanese way of doing business. This was the case even when the position did not officially require this. Examples of comments follow:

Well, you know, for instance, when we hire an Australian, if they have lived in Japan or studied Japanese, then they understand about Japanese culture a bit, right? But people who don't have this sort of experience get so shocked [when they start to work here]. They see everybody works till late, you know. ... it's a different sense of working style. ... So, we prioritize that type of person [who understands about Japanese culture] at the time of hiring.

(Local Japanese Manager: KONI, Date: 12/07/2001)

In order for non-Japanese local staff to progress up the corporate ladder in Japanese companies, understanding Head Office intentions, I mean, understanding the Japanese mentality is necessary. Because as they are given a higher position, they get involved in management. So, yes, we can say that's how it works. ... Yes, these things [concerning Japanese mentality] are considered when our [non-Japanese] local managers get promoted. Because they know what the Japanese don't want to do, and they know that some issues will not proceed without doing certain things, so they don't insist on their own preferred ways. Yeah, so in a sense, they accommodate us.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: KTAI, Date: 20/02/2002)

In relation to this theme, non-Japanese local staff acknowledged that gaining an understanding of Japanese people and culture was of great assistance. The table below displays the frequency of non-Japanese local staff comments acknowledging this.

**Table 7.12 The Advantages of Being Familiar with Japan/Japanese**

Total Number of Respondent Type	Percentage and Number of Respondents
<b>A:</b> Non-Japanese Local Manager ( <b>NJLM</b> ) (n=10)	50.0% (5)
<b>B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Employee ( <b>NJLE</b> ) (n=13)	30.8% (4)
<b>A+B:</b> Non-Japanese Local Staff ( <b>NJLS</b> ) (n=23)	39.1% (9)

Nearly 40 percent of non-Japanese local staff mentioned the benefits of understanding Japan and its ways of doing business, and the value of taking a course to learn about Japanese people and culture, with the frequency of local managers’ comments being the highest, at 50 percent.

The majority of those represented in the table above (see Table 7.12) often played the role of ‘go-between’ to help smooth over conflicts between Japanese expatriates and local staff. They had close associations with Japan, either having lived there, or studied the language and culture, and/or had experience working closely with Japanese people. Their associations with Japan suggest that their viewpoint was developed on the basis of their experiences, knowledge, and understanding associated with both Australian and Japanese people, and their exposure to the culture, both corporate and otherwise. The following examples of comments discuss the benefits of this:

I think it’s important for them to know a little bit about the Japanese way of doing business, to learn a little bit of the culture, and I think, because Australians tend to, you know, we’re boisterous, we tend to go in there and sometimes create the wrong impression because we are so loud and so almost

an advantage over non-Japanese local staff. Examples of comments illustrating this follow:

He [a Japanese speaking non-Japanese local staff] is an account officer in an area where he has some business with Japanese corporations. Japanese language skills are not a 'must' for the position, but if the person has them, communication goes well. Of course, if one can speak, read, and write Japanese well, we welcome that. At the time of recruiting someone to a position in this department, we told our employment agency that we preferred to hire this kind of person, and so, we hired him.

(Japanese Expatriate Staff: TKOO, Date: 12/10/2000)

The advantageous point for us is, after all, the fact that we can speak two languages. ... For Japanese expatriate staff sent here from Japan for the first time, they find it more comfortable to talk to Japanese people. So in this respect, Australian staff are at a disadvantage if they happen to have this kind of boss.

(Local Japanese Staff: KFUI, Date: 05/03/2002)

Similarly, those non-Japanese staff who could speak Japanese also acknowledged the advantages of being bilingual. Of the non-Japanese local staff interviewed, eight could speak Japanese at an intermediate to advanced level, and some of them frequently conducted their work in Japanese. Approximately 62 percent of bilingual locals acknowledged their 'edge' over their monolingual local colleagues, mentioning such advantages as greater participation in decision making and better access to information. Furthermore, because they could communicate with expatriates better, it was easier to establish personal relationships with them.

So I tend to have a lot of information. But then for the non-Japanese staff, they don't know. They know 50% of what I know. Because I go to Japanese meetings and I deal with Head Office. So I do get information. ... I find that a couple of non-Japanese-speaking managers [who are my superiors], really don't know much at all. ... They don't have much information at all. Actually, when we have a management meeting, it's all expat Japanese plus me and then the other two, three managers are, non-Japanese speaking. So there's very much a division. I mean, the expats automatically talk to each other [in Japanese] at meetings and then they talk to me as well. I tend to talk in English at the meeting, but everything they had, you know, that they had a meeting before the meeting.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JTRA, Date: 04/06/2002)

rude or forward, without meaning to be, but this is just I think the Australian way, our culture. Whereas, the Japanese are much more reserved, and sometimes, a lot of times, I think we never embarrass a Japanese person so much but we put them into a situation that's very uncomfortable for them, because we are confronting.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: CMAA, Date: 17/01/2007)

They [Japanese expatriate staff] will never say it as straight as it needs to be said. So it needs to be a course. So a course run by whatever will be given me on these basic things [on how to work well with Japanese].

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

Furthermore, nearly a quarter of all Japanese staff interviewed were of the opinion that being bilingual in English and Japanese was also valuable when working for a Japanese company in Australia. Table 7.13 displays the frequency of their comments on this.

**Table 7.13 The Value of Bilingual Staff**

<b>Total Number of Respondent Type</b>	<b>Percentage and Number of Respondents</b>
<b>C:</b> Japanese Expatriate Staff ( <b>JES</b> ) (n=31)	22.6% (7)
<b>D:</b> Local Japanese Staff ( <b>LJS</b> ) (n=14)	28.6% (4)
<b>C+D:</b> Japanese Staff ( <b>JS</b> ) (n=45)	24.4% (11)

Since companies participating in the current study commonly had Japanese clients and had frequent communication with Head Office staff, the Japanese language was used frequently. Due to their lack of competence in the English language, Japanese expatriate staff were more comfortable using their own language, and found it easier to talk with their Japanese colleagues than with non-Japanese locals.

All local Japanese staff who participated in the current study were brought up, educated, and worked in Japan. Local Japanese staff understood that their bilingual skill gave them

I find the advantage is because we have a lot of Japanese coming in, business clients or sometimes they come in from Japan, visiting. .. They are Japanese. They feel a lot better if I serve them in Japanese, and on the telephone, I speak as much Japanese as I can. ... Unfortunately my language skills are poor. If I spoke more Japanese, it'd be a lot better.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JMAA, Date: 04/06/2002)

Non-Japanese local managers who didn't speak Japanese also acknowledged the effectiveness of using Japanese in a daily work context.

Another example that I use, not locally, but when I'm in Japan, is that I don't speak Japanese, but I just know a few words, and I find that saying these words like "Thank you" and "Pleased to meet you", and "Good morning" just help to, the feeling that I get is that people appreciate it, because it shows some kind of, you know, I'm trying, I can't do it, but I'm trying [to be nice to you]. So, just helping us to understand things like that is good. Now completely, the reverse works. Also the Japanese expat should be getting this instruction on us.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

In summary, the current study identified a tendency on the part of Japanese management to hire locals who were well adjusted to Japanese culture and corporate customs. This strategy helped compensate for any deficiency in cultural understanding between Japanese and non-Japanese staff, and assisted in overcoming role ambiguities such as cultural understanding (see section 5.4) and communication difficulties (see section 5.2).

Furthermore, this tendency to hire bicultural staff indicates that cultural adjustment was expected to be made from the local side. It leads expatriates to be free from making efforts to understand, accept, and adjust to the local culture and customs. It also demonstrates that Japanese management in companies in Australia prefer to recreate the Japanese work environment.

## 7.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented findings on coping strategies which were perceived as effective for solving problems and improving the workplace in Japanese companies in Australia. Research Question 3 of this dissertation, coping strategy, was addressed. The current study identified six themes: 1) avoidance, 2) active coping, 3) building relationships, 4) communication, 5) participation opportunities, and 6) hiring bicultural staff. The first, 'avoidance', refers to emotion-focused coping strategy, and the rest are relevant to problem-focused coping strategy.

The frequencies of all themes were approximately similar, ranging from 25 percent to 45 percent, with no particular theme emerging as being favored by the majority of staff. The first theme, avoidance strategy, was chosen by Japanese expatriate staff in order to avoid confronting non-Japanese local staff in stressful situations. The findings revealed that Japanese expatriate staff expected local staff to work in a similar manner to employees in Japan. Hence, this is related to role incompetence (see section 6.4) where Japanese staff were dissatisfied with local employees' commitment to work, for the same reason (see section 6.4).

The second theme, active coping strategy, involved taking an active approach to resolving a problem. The active coping strategy does not specify a particular method, or any actions to be carried out by the person playing role of the third party, to resolve a problem. This strategy can, thus, assist in mitigating any type of role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict).

This strategy was further divided into direct and indirect types, with the former being considered effective only by non-Japanese local staff. No Japanese staff member had this perception. It demonstrates a distinct difference between the two culturally different staff types in their opinion of this approach. The latter type, indirect active coping strategy, used a third party to resolve a problem. This strategy was recognized as effective by all staff types, including non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

The third theme, building relationships, concerned the development of good personal relations and was considered vital by all staff types. The results found that non-Japanese local staff stressed the importance of displaying a polite and respectful attitude towards Japanese expatriates. On their part, Japanese expatriate staff acknowledged the need to show care and respect towards non-Japanese local staff. It was believed that when positive relationships were built, the level of collaboration was higher and resolving problems was easier. Thus, the relationships building strategy was able to assist in reducing all types of role stress.

The fourth theme, communication, was concerned with how to improve communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff. It was regarded as important by all staff types. The communication strategy was closely linked with the previous strategy, relationships building, where informants believed that good communication facilitated an understanding of each other and a sense of camaraderie which could cross cultural boundaries. Hence, good communication was perceived as indispensable to the development of good personal relationships. Increased communication was also seen as desirable and necessary. The results revealed that communication strategy was linked to role ambiguity where the strategy assists in mitigating communication difficulties (see section 5.2) and improving cultural understanding (see section 5.4).

The fifth theme, participation opportunities, referred to the provision of more opportunities for local staff to participate in the company's business activities. The results suggest that practicing this strategy helped reduce information shortage (see section 5.3), one of the role ambiguities, as well as role exclusion (see section 6.3), one of the role conflicts. It thus assisted in the reduction of dissatisfaction felt by the local staff.

The last theme, hiring bicultural staff, referred to Japanese management's preference for hiring local staff familiar with Japanese people, culture, and corporate customs. This strategy compensated for the lack of communication skills and understanding between



non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. It illustrates that hiring bicultural staff assisted in overcoming two types of role ambiguity, cultural understanding (see section 5.4) and communication difficulties (see section 5.2).

In summary, avoidance strategy and the role conflict of role incompetence were linked. Similarly, a strategy of participation opportunities assisted to reduce the role ambiguity of information shortage (see section 5.3) and the role conflict of role exclusion (see section 6.3). Communication strategy and hiring bicultural staff also helped alleviate the role ambiguities of cultural understanding (see section 5.4) and communication difficulties (see section 5.2). Communication strategy was perceived to be of great assistance in the relationships building strategy. Active coping and relationships building strategies are linked to alleviating all types of role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict). The findings, thus, suggest interrelations between role conflict, role ambiguity, and coping strategies.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **ATYPICAL STAFF**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

This is the final of the five data presentation chapters of this dissertation. The first of these concerns the management processes in Japanese companies in Australia (see Chapter 4) and addresses Research Question 1 of this dissertation. The second data presentation chapter covers role ambiguity (see Chapter 5), and the third deals with role conflict (see Chapter 6). These two chapters address Research Question 2. The fourth data presentation chapter (see Chapter 7) reports on coping strategies of staff in Japanese companies in Australia, addressing Research Question 3.

Considering the findings of these first four data presentation chapters as a whole, the current study identified one particular type of local staff. These staff members are described in the previous chapter on coping strategies (see section 7.3.2) as playing the role of third party in indirect active coping strategy. Their characteristics proved to be peculiar to them alone and different from all other staff participating in the current study. This chapter, the fifth and final of the data presentation chapters, looks at these characteristics and how these staff members differ from other staff in the company.

## **8.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF ATYPICAL LOCAL STAFF**

The previous chapter (see section 7.3.2) reports on informants who stated that they sometimes played the role of third party or ‘go-between’ when indirect active coping strategy was used to resolve problems. These informants are referred to as ‘cultural integrators’ who can assist in alleviating role stress (see section 2.4.1). There were only nine such informants: a minority out of all those who participated in the current study. This section focuses on the characteristics of the nine informants in order to understand these staff members and how they differed from other staff in the company.

As presented in the previous chapter (see section 7.3.2), all the nine informants who played the role of third party, were local staff. These staff members were: four non-Japanese local managers, three non-Japanese local employees, and two local Japanese staff (see Table 7.3). Table 8.1 lists their characteristics in the left column. Each informant who participated in the current study was given four capital letters as an identification code, shown on the second row. The presence or absence of an ‘X’ in each cell in the table indicates whether or not the informant held the characteristic listed in the left column of the same row.

**Table 8.1 Characteristics of Third Party ('Go-Between') Cultural Integrator**

Staff Type	Non-Japanese Local Managers				Non-Japanese Local Employees			Local Japanese	
Staff ID Code	CIAA	KDEI	CSTA	OSAB	JTRA	MCOI	TJEO	JYAA	KONI
Characteristics									
(1) Trusted by Japanese Expatriate Staff		X	X	X	X			X	X
(2) Takes on Extra Tasks	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
(3) Guessing Skills			X	X		X		X	X
(4) Japanese Language Skills				X	X		X	X	X
(5) English Language Skills	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
(6) Visited/Lived in Japan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
(7) Lived Outside Japan Over 5 yrs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
(8) Worked with Japanese Over 5 yrs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
(9) Worked with Non-Japanese Over 5 yrs	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Legend:

X: the informant held the characteristic listed in the left column of the same row.

The second characteristic ('Takes on Extra Tasks'), in the left column signifies that informants marked with 'X' on the same row claimed that they took on tasks which fell outside their job description whenever necessary, and who regarded themselves as having a flexible work attitude. As the table shows, all local staff except one stated that they had a flexible work attitude. This information is linked to what is stated in section 4.3.2 in the chapter on management processes. The section reported frequencies of local staff who perceived themselves to have job flexibility. The informants listed in Table 8.1 above are included among the informants who mentioned their flexible attitudes in section 4.3.2. What this means is that the majority of informants who played the role of third party in indirect active coping were also flexible about conducting their duties and took on extra tasks and overtime.

Another of the characteristics in the left column, (3) 'Guessing Skills', is concerned with informants who could practice the 'guessing' technique, common in Japanese communication, when dealing with Japanese expatriate staff (see Table 8.1). The chapter on role ambiguity (see section 5.2.2) describes this technique and the difficulties non-Japanese local staff experienced in dealing with it. However, a few non-Japanese local staff claimed to have mastered it, and Table 5.3 displays the frequencies. All the informants included in this table (see Table 5.3) also played the role of third party, as presented in Table 8.1. Thus, about half of the local staff who played the role of third party also had the ability to practice the 'guessing' technique.

The above findings suggest that local staff who acted as the third party in indirect active coping strategy could communicate with expatriates more easily than other local staff. Thus, they experienced less role ambiguity, identified as communication difficulties, than other local staff, to the extent that this technique was able to assist them in avoiding it.

With regard to local Japanese staff, since all who participated in the current study were brought up, educated, and worked in Japan, they experienced no problems in using the 'guessing' technique when communicating with Japanese expatriates. Table 8.1 also displays information about the background of the informants, revealing their familiarity with the culture and people of both Australia and Japan, and their

experience in working in an intercultural work environment. These include language skills, having visited or lived in Japan, having lived in the West, and experiences of working in intercultural workplaces where Japanese and non-Japanese staff worked within the same company (see Characteristics (4) – (9) in Table 8.1).

The characteristics of English and Japanese language skills in the left column, (4) and (5), indicate that the informants that are marked with an ‘X’ used the language for their work. This does not mean, however, that they always used Japanese language for work, or that they possessed native or near-native proficiency. This also applies to local Japanese staff whose English proficiency was not at the level of native English speakers, but who were sufficiently competent in the language to carry out their duties in a company in Australia.

Regarding the experience of visiting or living in Japan (see (6) in Table 8.1), all non-Japanese local staff categorized as atypical had done this at some time, for the purpose of study or travel, or for business reasons. Business trips included company training and visiting Head Office and other branch offices in Japan.

Both local Japanese staff members had spent over five years working in intercultural environments. Similarly, all non-Japanese local staff had had the experience of working with Japanese staff as colleagues in the company, as shown in the table (see (9) of Table 8.1). Hence, all informants who had played the role of third party had more than five years’ experience of working in intercultural workplaces, suggesting that they had an understanding of the work culture and customs of both Japan and Australia.

The informants who were trusted by Japanese expatriate staff (see (1) of Table 8.1) acknowledged in their interviews that they knew they were trusted by Japanese expatriate staff. In total, there were six such informants, three non-Japanese local managers, one non-Japanese local employee, and two local Japanese staff. Apart from these six informants, no other non-Japanese local staff participating in the current study claimed that they were trusted by Japanese expatriate staff. This suggests that local staff who played the role of third party tended to have the ability

to gain the trust of Japanese expatriate staff, and in this context they differed from all other local staff in the company.

The informants who won this trust understood that it was critical to one's success when working for overseas Japanese companies. The following is an example comment:

Trust is a big thing with Japanese. Yeah, definitely. If you fail to meet their expectations and trust, then they think you're unreliable and that. But I apologize a lot, and I say thank you a lot ... I try to be sincere. So they understand that I'm doing my best.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

These informants explained the benefits of obtaining this trust, stating that it was of great assistance in establishing good personal relationships. More importantly, it resulted in additional support being provided to trusted staff by Japanese expatriates than was granted to other local staff. Creating an environment in which trust flourished automatically provided the benefit to trusted staff of one of the coping strategies, relationships building, which all staff types in the company acknowledged as crucial (see section 7.4).

These relationships are collaborative relationships. The informants who explained the benefits of obtaining trust demonstrated a willingness to work hard and displayed the cooperative work attitudes expected by Japanese expatriate staff, who acknowledged and rewarded them by providing them with support. The informants understood that such rewards would not be received unless this kind of relationship was established. It was a fair and well-balanced reciprocal style of relationship. The example comments below describe the relationship, which was seen as mutually beneficial.

I will always work that extra hour. Whether I work it here, or whether I work it on the week-end at home. It is never a situation where I take everything, and give nothing, or vice versa. Or that everyone here takes everything and gives nothing ... We couldn't work under those conditions. So it's all very much a give and take. ... I've grown attached to Aoba [company name disguised] and also I think, I really do think I have some of that, Japanese salary man way of thinking that keeps me loyal to my employer, and there's a reciprocal arrangement there. I'm not abused. I'm well looked after.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: OSAB, Date: 28/02/2002)

Luckily, he and I have a really good relationship with the General Affairs Manager, Nishiyama san [name disguised]. Lucky, I was very lucky. I think that's the reason why I'm here. There's no magic formula that I'm a great admin manager. I think I've got good support from above. I helped him a lot when he first arrived. I helped him in his personal things. Just generally made him feel welcome here.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: KDEI, Date: 06/05/2000)

There was also the benefit of having access to more superior information, in terms of both quality and quantity, than was available to other local staff. As presented in Chapter 5 on role exclusion (see section 5.3.2), local staff were often dissatisfied with the information provided to them by Japanese expatriate staff, and expatriates themselves admitted to hesitating to give local staff complete information, especially the important parts. Access to this information was considered to be a privilege for local staff, and those locals who could play the role of third party were given this privilege, as demonstrated in an example comment below.

It's all based on trust. Okay? Now I think I have a good reputation in Kashiwa [company name disguised] in Japan, so the information that gets given to me at an official and unofficial level is pretty good, alright? But it's still not as good as what Mr Sekine [name disguised] gets two doors down. Now I don't worry about that. But I also rely on Mr Sekine to fill me in with some of the other information as well. And he trusts me too. But his sharing of information is also based on trust, and the previous person, because of whatever conflict of relationships, did choose not to communicate a lot of information to some of the other local staff. That in itself causes conflict.

(Non-Japanese Local Manager: CSTA, Date: 29/01/2001)

A better quality of information translates to a greater level of participation in the company's business activities. Exclusion, particularly from decision making, was one of local staff's role conflicts (see section 6.3). Thus, an improved quality of information results in a reduction in the level of exclusion experienced by local staff. The findings suggest atypical local staff experience less role exclusion than other local staff.



### **8.3 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter looked at atypical local staff, a minority group among the informants, who played the role of go-between to assist non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff to resolve problems that existed between them. Their characteristics were collected from the data presentation Chapters 4 to 7, and their features presented in Table 8.1.

The findings of the data presentation chapters demonstrate that there were local staff who were able to assist in resolving problems by acting as a 'go-between' for non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This type of local staff was familiar with the people, cultures, and work cultures of both Australia and Japan. About half of them were able to communicate using the Japanese technique of 'guessing', and they all had good personal relationships with expatriates. Their work attitudes were cooperative and flexible, and similar in a variety of ways to that of Japanese employees in Japan. They were given support by Japanese expatriate staff in return, and a greater volume of information was provided to them than to other local staff.

The increase in information provided is related to the reduction of information shortage which was presented as one of the role ambiguities experienced by local staff (see section 5.3). As well, the increased level of access to information provided the means to an increased level of participation in the company's business activities. The experience of being excluded from participation, particularly decision making, was one of local staff's role conflicts, termed role exclusion (see section 6.3). Thus, the increased level of information led to the reduction of both role exclusion (a role conflict type) and information shortage (a role ambiguity type).

Overall, local staff who were playing the role of third party in indirect active coping strategy differed from other local staff who participated in the current study in a number of ways. These included their communication skills with Japanese expatriate staff, their work attitudes, their relationships with Japanese expatriate staff, and their familiarity with the people, culture, and workplaces of both Australia and Japan.

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **THEORETICAL DISCUSSION**

#### **9.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

This chapter presents interpretations of the research findings and the concomitant theoretical implications. The interpretations are made on the basis of the literature review in Chapter 2. The three research questions examined in this dissertation were concerned with the role stress experienced by staff working in Japanese companies in Australia along with the strategies perceived as effective in coping with it. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore problems that arise from role stress in Japanese companies in Australia and to set out possible solutions that could lead to the establishment of successful people management. The theoretical implications of Role Theory and coping strategies in an intercultural context are also investigated thereby contributing to an area of study which is still underdeveloped (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992).

This chapter presents interpretations of the findings for each research question in section 9.2. The findings for Research Question 1 uncovered the informal mechanism of management in Japanese companies in Australia. The findings for Research Question 2 revealed role stress, including role ambiguity and role conflict, as experienced by staff. The findings for Research Question 3 identified coping strategies perceived as effective in alleviating role stress. Interpretations of overall findings as well as theoretical implications are discussed in the subsequent sections. Three key issues emerge in this chapter, each of which is discussed in sections 9.3 to 9.5.

## 9.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section presents the three research questions, with a summary of the findings presented in Tables 9.1 to 9.4. Findings arising from Research Question 1 identified the extent of informal mechanisms used in Japanese companies. This has allowed the researcher to interpret the way in which management processes operate beyond the formal level in the companies. This led to a comprehensive understanding crucial to the analysis of role stress and the detection of its underlying causes. Research Question 1 is listed below.

Research Question 1:

*Are there any informal management processes carried out in Japanese companies located in Australia, in relation to decision making, information sharing, and job roles? If so, what are they? How are they carried out?*

As reported in Chapter 4, the major findings are as follows:

1. Sharing information and decision making was predominantly carried out through informal communication by Japanese expatriate staff.
2. Non-local Japanese managers participated in the informal decision making process.
3. Written job descriptions tended to be vague
4. In relation to accepting tasks that lay outside their job description
  - i) Japanese expatriate staff felt a responsibility to do anything required
  - ii) Local staff, in particular local Japanese staff, accepted tasks outside their job descriptions.

In sum, the current study revealed that Japanese companies in Australia carried out informal management processes by sharing information, making decisions, and performing duties. The summary of findings for Research Question 1 is presented in the section 4.4.

Research Question 2 explores the perceived level of role stress in staff in overseas Japanese companies. Role stress in this study refers to role ambiguity and role

conflict. Role stress in both local and Japanese staff was investigated. The question is listed below.

Research Question 2:

*What is the perceived role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) of individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

Tables 9.1 and 9.2 display the summary of findings for role ambiguity and role conflict, both components of role stress.

**Table 9.1 Role Ambiguity of Japanese Companies in Australia**

<b>Role Ambiguity Type</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
Communication Difficulties	Three types of impediments to understanding one another a. Differences in communication styles b. Necessity of guessing c. Insufficient English language competence of Japanese staff
Information Shortage	Japanese expatriate staff provide local staff, especially non-Japanese local staff, with insufficient information. Local staff experience uncertainty about what is happening in the company.
Lack of Cultural Understanding	Both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff lack an understanding of each other's culture and corporate customs.

**Table 9.2 Role Conflict of Japanese Companies in Australia**

<b>Role Conflict Type</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
Liaison Role Conflict (Reversed role conflict)	Junior Japanese expatriate staff experienced liaison role conflict when working with non-Japanese local superiors. The conflict occurred due to the role of Japanese expatriate staff as a representative of Head Office.
Role Exclusion	Local staff, particularly non-Japanese local staff, felt excluded by Japanese expatriate staff, especially in the area of decision making.
Role Incompetence	Japanese expatriate and local Japanese staff perceived non-Japanese local staff as incompetent.
Role Overload	Local Japanese staff were pressured by an expatriate expectation that they would work as though they were in Japan. e.g. doing overtime, accepting extra tasks.

As listed in Tables 9.1 and 9.2, the findings revealed three types of role ambiguity. These were communication difficulties, information shortage, and lack of cultural understanding. Communication problems between local staff and Japanese staff were commonly acknowledged in studies on overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005; Stahl 2000), while communication style (e.g. Hayashi 1988, p. 121-122; Peltokorpi 2006; Tokusei 1994) and language competence issues (Byun & Ybema 2005; Yoshihara 2001) were acknowledged as sources of communication problems.

A study on role stress in an intercultural context reveals that communication is a source of role ambiguity (Shenker & Zeira 1992). The literature on role stress, however, has failed to acknowledge that role ambiguity involves the necessity of guessing as well as language competence. The necessity of guessing relates to a high context culture where communication requires attention to all possible clues (Hall & Hall 1987). Hall (1989) explains that Japan is a country with a high context culture and its communication style is characterized as implicit. This means there is less reliance on linguistic information. Western countries, on the other hand, are countries with low context cultures. This is a vital cultural difference between Japan and the West (Hall 1989). In an intercultural context where people from high and low context cultures work within the same company, this type of role ambiguity may

exist. Further discussion on the necessity of guessing is provided in a later section (see section 9.4.1.2).

In terms of role ambiguity involving language competency, this type of role ambiguity may be commonly found in an intercultural context where a native language is not shared between role sets (role sender and focal person).

Cultural understanding is also regarded as crucial for management of overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Ishida 1988, pp. 65-67; Yamanaka 1991). In particular, it is essential for expatriate staff to manage subsidiaries (Paik & Sohn 2004). It has been proposed as an influential factor on role stress in intercultural organizations (Shenker & Zeira 1992). This study found that lack of cultural understanding constituted one of the role ambiguity types that appeared in organizations in an intercultural context. Further discussions on cultural issues are provided in section 9.4.2.

Four types of role conflict were identified. These were liaison role conflict (reversed role conflict), role exclusion, role incompetence, and role overload. Liaison role conflict involved junior Japanese expatriate staff influencing matters for which their non-Japanese local superiors were responsible, thereby giving rise to clashes between them.

In a similar fashion to this reversed role conflict, studies on overseas Japanese companies maintain that the formal hierarchical position of expatriates in overseas Japanese companies does not necessarily coincide with the real authority and decision making power. This may result in local managers or executives becoming alienated (Kidahashi 1987; Pucik et al. 1989, pp. 45-46; Trevor 1983, p. 155). In this study, liaison role conflict is referred to as reversed role conflict. This is because in liaison role conflict, role positions between the local superior and junior Japanese expatriate staff are reversed. Role conflict that involves a reversed role position has not been previously identified. This type of role conflict can be found in subsidiaries where expatriate staff have a higher authority and status than local staff.

This research revealed that local staff participating in sharing information and decision making with Japanese expatriate staff experience alienation. This is in agreement with past studies on overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Bamber et al. 1992; Ikezoe 2002, p. 96; Yoshihara 2001). Role Theory, however, has not acknowledged this type of role conflict, which is referred to as role exclusion in the current study. Further discussion on role stress can be found in sections 9.3 to 9.5.

The final research question, Research Question 3, is concerned with those coping strategies perceived to be effective in dealing with role stress. The findings for the question suggest ways to work towards a solution to role stress which could provide principles to guide intercultural management in Japanese companies in Australia. The question is listed below.

Research Question 3:

*What attitudes and strategies are perceived to be effective in coping with role stress by individuals working for Japanese companies in Australia?*

This study identified six types of coping strategies. They are summarized in Tables 9.3 and 9.4 below.

**Table 9.3 Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy Perceived to be Effective**

<b>Emotion-Focused Coping Strategy</b>		
<b>Coping Strategy Type</b>	<b>Staff Type</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>Avoidance strategy</b>	<b>JEX</b>	Japanese expatriate staff solve problems by avoiding confrontation.

**Table 9.4 Problem-Focused Coping Strategies Perceived to be Effective**

<b>Problem -Focused Coping Strategies</b>		
<b>Coping Strategy Type</b>	<b>Staff Type</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>Active Coping:</b>		
- Direct Active Coping	NJLS	The situation is confronted directly. It involves direct communication between the parties. Used only by non-Japanese local staff.
- Indirect Active Coping	All types	The situation is confronted using a third person or 'go-between'. No direct communication involved. Perceived as effective by all staff types.
<b>Relationships Building</b>		Good personal relations are developed. Considered vital by all staff types.
	NJLS	Japanese expatriate staff treated with politeness.
	JEX	Care and support given to non-Japanese local staff
<b>Communication</b>		Communication is improved between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.
	NJLS	Non-Japanese local staff attempt to overcome language barriers
	JEX&LJS	Japanese expatriate staff provide clear and full explanation to non-Japanese local staff
<b>Participation Opportunities</b>	JEX	Local staff are given more opportunities to participate in the company's business activities.
<b>Hiring Bicultural Staff</b>	JEX&LJS	Japanese management hire local staff conversant with local culture and corporate customs.

Legend:

JEX – Japanese expatriate staff

LJS - Local Japanese staff

NJLS – non-Japanese local manager & non-Japanese local employee

In order to categorize and understand the perceived effective coping strategies, the categorization provided by Carver and his associates (1989) and Begley (1998) is used (see section 2.5.2). This research found that there were two types of coping strategy, notably emotion-focused and problem-focused. The former is understood as a person's adaptation to the source of the problem in order to ameliorate it, while the latter resolves the problem by changing its source. Problem-focused coping strategies



dominated the strategies perceived as effective to reduce role stress and only one emotion-focused strategy was identified.

One of the problem-focused coping strategies identified in this study is 'active coping'. It consists of two types, direct and indirect. The latter involves seeking assistance from a third party or 'go-between'. This is presented in the chapter on findings (see section 7.3.2) with further discussions in a later section in this chapter (see section 9.3.4). Carver and his associates did not include the indirect active coping strategy in their categorization (1989). Neither was it included by Begley (1998), or in other coping strategy literature. Hence, the term 'indirect active coping' is used in this study.

Past studies on effective coping strategies in an intercultural context recognize that learning about and adjustment to a culture is beneficial for such organizations (Stahl 2000). In relation to the cultural aspect, this research found that hiring bicultural people was perceived as effective. Bicultural staff are valued as they are familiar with Japanese culture and/or language, and both Japanese expatriates and non-Japanese local staff are able to rely on these people to act as a 'go-between' to resolve problems. The indirect active coping strategy enabled them to avoid experiencing negative emotions. This strategy was favored by Japanese staff. The coping strategy of hiring bicultural staff has not been put forward as an effective coping strategy to the researcher's knowledge. Further discussion on coping strategies is presented in the sections 9.3 and 9.5.

Three key issues emerged based on the findings of the three research questions. These are discussed in sections 9.3 to 9.5.

### **9.3. FOUR GROUPINGS OF STAFF IN OVERSEAS JAPANESE COMPANIES**

This section discusses the implications of the existence of divisions among staff. This dissertation is the first study to investigate role stress and coping strategies among local Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. This section describes the four different groups of staff found in Japanese companies in Australia.

There are five sub-sections. The first three are concerned with comparisons. First, those between local Japanese and non-Japanese local staff (see section 9.3.1), second between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (see section 9.3.2), and third, between Japanese expatriate staff and local Japanese staff (see section 9.3.3). The fourth sub-section examines the characteristics of cultural integrators (see section 9.3.4). The last sub-section (see section 9.3.5) discusses the four staff groupings in relation to a diagram developed to depict the pertinent features (see Figure 9.1).

#### **9.3.1 Demarcation between Local Japanese and Non-Japanese Local Staff**

Table 9.5 is a summary of the findings on the experience of role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) and perceived coping strategies. It compares the characteristics of Japanese expatriate staff, local Japanese staff, and non-Japanese local staff. It also includes work attitudes and other areas and illustrates their characteristics. In total, there are 21 items compared in Table 9.5.

**Table 9.5 Summary of Work Practices, Role Stress, and Coping Strategies of Japanese Expatriate Staff, Local Japanese Staff, and Non-Japanese Local Staff**

Items	Japanese Expatriate Staff	Local Japanese Staff	Non-Japanese Local Staff
<b>WORK PRACTICES</b>			
Flexible Work Attitudes	Highest	Higher	Lower
Japanese Expatriate Expectations	N/A	Higher	Lower
Japanese Expatriate Staff's Hesitation to Ask Favors	N/A	No	<b>Yes</b>
Wish to Receive Respect From Japanese Expatriate Staff	N/A	Lower	Higher
Dual Roles	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
Insufficient communication between NJLS and JEx	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>ROLE AMBIGUITY</b>			
Communication Difficulties (between JS and NJLS)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Information Shortage	No	<b>Yes Lower than NJLS</b>	<b>Yes Higher than LJS</b>
Lack of Cultural Understanding (between JS and NJLS)	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>
<b>ROLE CONFLICT</b>			
Liaison Role Conflict (Reversed Role Conflict)	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
Role Exclusion of Manager	No	<b>Yes Slightly Higher than NJL Manager</b>	<b>Yes Slightly Lower than LJ Manager</b>
Role Exclusion of Non-Managerial Staff	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
Role Incompetence (about NJLS)	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No
Role Overload	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
<b>COPING STRATEGIES</b>			
Avoidance Strategy	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
Direct Active Coping	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
Indirect Active Coping	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Relationships Building Strategy	<b>Yes</b> <i>Showing care and support to NJLS</i>	<b>Yes</b> <i>Showing care and support to NJLS</i>	<b>Yes</b> <i>Displaying polite attitudes to JEx</i>
Communication Strategy	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>

<b>Items</b>	<b>Japanese Expatriate Staff</b>	<b>Local Japanese Staff</b>	<b>Non-Japanese Local Staff</b>
	<i>Clear and full explanations to NJLS</i>	<i>Clear and full explanations to NJLS</i>	<i>Overcoming language barriers</i>
Participation Opportunities	<b>Yes</b>	N/A	N/A
Hiring Bicultural Staff	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	N/A

Legend:

N/A - not applicable

NJL Manager - non-Japanese local manager

NJLS - non-Japanese local staff

JEX - Japanese expatriate staff

JS - Japanese staff including Japanese expatriate and local Japanese staff

LJ Manager - Local Japanese manager

LJS - Local Japanese staff

This section discusses the different characteristics of local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff. As illustrated in Table 9.5, the findings suggest that local Japanese staff differ from their non-Japanese colleagues in a number of ways. These include their experience of role stress and their coping strategies, as well as their involvement in informal management processes. There was a feeling of distance between the two groups, noted by this researcher and also acknowledged by the staff.

First, non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff experienced role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) in different ways, as shown in Table 9.4. In the area of role ambiguity, non-Japanese local staff experienced communication difficulties and some confusion arising from cultural differences in their dealings with Japanese expatriate staff. Local Japanese did not experience this.

In relation to local Japanese staff's understanding and experience of Japan, all those participating in this study were born, brought up, and educated in Japan. They had also worked in Japan. In this sense, they shared a culture with Japanese expatriate staff. Cultural influence may, thus, explain why non-Japanese local and local

Japanese staff experienced different types of role ambiguity. Culture is defined by Hofstede (1994, p. 40) as the “*collective programming of the mind which distinguishes one group or category of people from another*”. Similarly, Hoecklin (1995, pp. 24-25) claims that people from the same culture have common interpretations which are not shared by people of different cultural backgrounds. This suggests that local Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff perceived matters in similar ways, and tended to have a common interpretation of them. This commonality suggests that local Japanese staff did not experience lack of cultural understanding, a type of role ambiguity. Hofstede’s (1994, p. 40) claims concerning culture as well as Hoecklin (1995, pp. 24-25) suggest that this commonality between local Japanese and Japanese expatriates does not exist between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, unless either or both possess the features of a cultural integrator.

In terms of communication difficulties (a types of role ambiguity), in contrast to the Western style, the Japanese communication style has ambiguous and indirect features (e.g. Hall & Hall 1987; Kagawa 2001, pp. 12-35; Kobayashi 1997). These have their origin in the cultural differences between Japan and the West (Hall 1989). Japanese people do not express their ‘*Honne*’ (true feeling) (Imai 1981, pp. 12-13; Selmer 2001a) and so need guessing skills (Ishii et al. 1996, pp. 125-128). Thus, non-Japanese local staff in overseas Japanese companies often have difficulty understanding Japanese managers (Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005). Moreover, it has been shown that the level of English language proficiency among Japanese managers is insufficient to manage host country employees (Byun & Ybema 2005; Dawson 1994; Yoshihara 2001), which exacerbates the problem. Since the local Japanese staff and Japanese expatriate staff in this study were all native Japanese speakers with a common cultural background, they had no communication difficulties. We can conclude, then, that role ambiguity and communication difficulties occurred only between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

In relation to role conflict, local Japanese staff experienced role overload and role incompetence, whereas these types of role conflict were not experienced by non-Japanese local staff. Role overload refers to the pressure experienced by local

Japanese to work as hard as their fellow employees in Japan. Role incompetence refers to non-Japanese local staff being perceived as incompetent by both local and expatriate Japanese staff.

Different role conflict experiences can also be explained in the light of the implications of cultural differences. As mentioned above, people sharing a culture have common interpretations (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25). Shared thinking patterns lead to a common understanding of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable; what can be considered appropriate behavior and what will be regarded as inappropriate (Paik & Sohn 2004). In this respect, Japanese staff regarded the attitude of non-Japanese locals towards deadlines and overtime as unacceptable. Overtime, for instance, was never overtly stated in the job description of local staff as being mandatory. Non-Japanese local staff therefore considered it acceptable to leave work at the prescribed time. Japanese staff, however, regarded this as inappropriate behavior, leading them to perceive their non-Japanese local colleagues as incompetent. This is referred to as 'role incompetence' in Table 9.5 above.

In relation to local Japanese staff's role overload, the findings revealed that expatriate staff had different expectations of local employees. As shown in the findings (see section 6.5), local Japanese staff felt that Japanese expatriates had higher expectations of them than of their non-Japanese colleagues. This was related to the expectation that local Japanese demonstrate job flexibility (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996) and a flexible attitude towards their working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) similar to employees in Japan, that is, accepting extra tasks and prioritizing work over private life. Japanese expatriates admitted that they felt more comfortable asking a favor of their Japanese colleagues than approaching non-Japanese staff (see section 6.5). Local Japanese staff themselves understood that they were far more likely to be asked to take on extra work than their non-Japanese colleagues (see section 6.5), leading them to experience role overload.

This discrepancy in the expectations placed on non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff and the subsequent role overload can be explained by a particular feature of Japanese culture known as '*amae*' (strong dependency) (Doi 1989, 2004)

(see section 2.2.5). Doi (1989, 2004) states that the term '*amae*' refers to a strong interdependent relationship comparable to that between a mother and a child. It exists not only in society but also in organizations. Employees are loyal and devoted, and in return, management provides them with various benefits (Kato & Kato 1992, pp. 21-22). Employees make a great effort to meet expectations so as to obtain these benefits (Kim & Nam 1998; Nisbett 2003). '*Amae*' based interdependent relationships allow managers to ask their junior staff for favors such as overtime and extra tasks.

Doi (1989, 2004) explains that '*amae*' exists only in Japan and there is no equivalent word for it in English. Japanese people who are brought up in and begin their working lives in Japan are accustomed to develop '*amae*' with each other. At the same time, they are not used to establishing it with non-Japanese people. Local Japanese staff and Japanese expatriates share the same cultural background and acknowledge their commonality. The majority of local Japanese staff in this study are accustomed to working in the Japanese work culture, and displayed flexible work attitudes (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996) and flexible attitudes towards their working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) as would be found in a Japanese employee in Japan. This led Japanese expatriate staff to expect to develop the same kind of relationships that they would back home. As a result, asking local Japanese to accept extra tasks or work overtime was easier than asking non-Japanese local staff.

Local Japanese staff, however, felt the pressure of these expectations. When non-Japanese local staff finished work at the prescribed time, leaving a task half-done which ought to have been completed, local Japanese staff sometimes felt obliged to stay back and complete it themselves. This was naturally frustrating for them. Aware that they were all local staff, Japanese and non-Japanese alike, they felt that being expected to work harder than non-Japanese local staff was unfair. For this reason, unlike their non-Japanese colleagues they experienced role overload.

Second, local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff differed in their approach to effective coping strategies. For instance, a direct active coping strategy involving direct confrontation with the person concerned was perceived as effective only by

non-Japanese local staff. This can be explained by the difference between Japanese and Western communication styles. Japanese style communication contains implicit, ambiguous characteristics, while the Western style is direct, straight, and explicit (Hall & Hall 1987; Kagawa 2001, pp. 12-35; Kobayashi 1997). For this reason, non-Japanese local staff regarded a direct active strategy as effective, while local Japanese staff did not.

Third, local Japanese staff participated in informal management processes more than non-Japanese local staff. Taking on overtime where necessary is a part of the informal management processes in Japanese companies (see section 2.2.5). It involves informal rules and tacit communication (Ishida 1985, pp. 12-14), tacit expectations (Zhe 1996), tacit understanding (Hilmer & Donaldson 1996, p. 115; Rice 1986, p. 124), and represents a psychological contract (Sparrow 1996; Makin et al. 1996). Compared with non-Japanese local staff, local Japanese staff displayed more positive work attitudes towards job flexibility (Ishida 1996; Hayashi 2006) and flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995). Thus, the level of local Japanese staff's involvement in the informal management process was higher than that of non-Japanese local staff.

Finally, local Japanese staff were discontented with non-Japanese local staff. As mentioned above, both local Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff perceived their non-Japanese colleagues as incompetent in terms of keeping deadlines, doing overtime, and carrying out tasks promptly. The local Japanese staff's experience of role overload was related to their perception of non-Japanese local staff as incompetent. When they had to take over an uncompleted task from a non-Japanese colleague, they felt pressured. Occurrences such as these contributed to negative feelings towards non-Japanese local staff.

This last point is supported by literature describing greater flexibility in work hours of Japanese employees in Japan (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) as well as the level of dissatisfaction experienced by Japanese managers towards the lower level of job commitment demonstrated by non-Japanese local staff, such as only working designated hours (Byun & Ybema 2005). For this reason, non-Japanese local staff



are judged as lacking initiative (Byun & Ybema 2005; Ishida 1994) and autonomy (Lincoln, et al. 1995, pp. 425-426). Non-Japanese local staff are also regarded as apathetic and passive (White & Trevor 1983, p. 112). This is a source of discontent that may result in conflict between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese managers in overseas Japanese companies (Ishida 1994). Until non-Japanese local staff change their working habits in such a manner as to satisfy the expectations of the Japanese managers, Japanese managers will not be able to develop any trust with them (Negandhi et al. 1985, pp. 99-101). Feelings of discontent about non-Japanese local staff have caused a lack of trust in Japanese managers towards their local staff (Yamanaka 1991).

Local Japanese staff who participated in this study grew up and worked in Japan, and had a shared commonality with Japanese expatriate staff. This included perceptions of non-Japanese local staff as incompetent and both experienced negative feelings concerning non-Japanese local staff in this regard. Hence, the findings suggest that negative feelings exist between local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff.

### **9.3.2 Demarcation between non-Japanese Local Staff and Japanese Expatriate Staff**

As illustrated in Table 9.4, the behavior of non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff differs in several ways. These include experiences of role stress, coping strategies perceived as effective, and status and authority. These differences are evidence that positive personal relationships have not been established between them.

First, non-Japanese local staff experienced role exclusion and information shortage. These role conflicts and ambiguities were not experienced by Japanese expatriate staff. Non-Japanese local staff felt excluded by Japanese expatriate staff from participating in information sharing and decision making. They were also dissatisfied with the level of information their expatriate colleagues shared with them. Hence, in this case, Japanese expatriate staff caused the discomfort primarily experienced by non-Japanese staff.

As in the situation between local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff, role incompetence (see section 9.3.1) is explained by the dissimilarities in perception between peoples of different cultures (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25; Paik & Sohn 2004). Disparities between Japanese culture and non-Japanese culture regarding what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior, have led Japanese expatriate staff to consider the work behavior of non-Japanese local staff, especially in regard to deadlines and overtime, as inappropriate and resulting in unmet expectations.

These differing experiences of role stress are indicative of discontented relationships. As the literature has revealed, local staff in overseas Japanese companies are dissatisfied with the information given by Japanese managers and experience alienation (Bamber et al. 1992; Hayashi 1996; Iida 1985). Japanese expatriate staff experience a similar discontent to that of local Japanese staff in regard to non-Japanese local staff (see section 9.3.1). They feel disgruntled with the local staff's 'nine to five' mentality of leaving work at the prescribed work completion time (Byun & Ybema 2005). This can lead to conflict (Byun & Ybema 2005). For this reason, Japanese managers tend to distrust local staff (Linowes 1993, p. 32; Simon 1991; Yamanaka 1991). This suggests that discontent is felt in both directions.

While such discontent exists, building positive personal relationships between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff remains difficult. This is evident in their communication difficulties, including insufficient contact and lack of cultural understanding (role ambiguity types). As past studies on overseas Japanese companies show, communication barriers between non-Japanese locals and Japanese managers lead to difficulties in understanding each other (Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005), with language barriers also producing divisions among staff in the company (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935). The findings of this study suggest that there is a separation between Japanese expatriate staff and non-Japanese local staff, which supports past studies (Dedoussis 1994; Yoshihara 2001; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33).

Second, non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff failed to agree on what constituted effective coping strategies. As with the case between local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff (see section 9.3.1), direct active coping strategies were not perceived as effective by either Japanese expatriate staff or local Japanese staff. Only non-Japanese staff saw it as a positive way to resolve problems. As discussed in the previous section (see section 9.3.1), this relates to the differences in communication styles between the West and Japan.

Finally, there was a notable gap in status and authority between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This was illustrated by the way Japanese expatriate staff were acknowledged by local staff, as well as the influence Japanese expatriate staff had over business operations in the local office. Japanese expatriate staff were regarded as 'special' and distinct from other local staff members, with the expatriates themselves acknowledging their special status in the company. Being an expatriate infers that they have a role of representative of Head Office. Thus, they need to follow Head Office's instructions to the extent of interfering in matters for which non-Japanese local superiors were officially responsible. The clashes arising from this sometimes led to liaison role conflict (see Table 9.4). Thus, the status and authority of Japanese expatriate staff was greater than that of local staff. This is supported by literature which notes Head Office's strong dependency on expatriate staff and their lesser reliance on local employees (Chung et al. 2006; Linowes 1993, p. 32; Taga 2004, p. 34). Imbalance of career opportunities, power and income between Japanese expatriate staff and local staff was also noted, as well as the relationship breakdowns that can result from such imbalances (Byun & Ybema 2005).

### **9.3.3 Demarcation between Japanese Expatriate Staff and Local Japanese Staff**

As shown in the table presented in an earlier section (see Table 9.4), Japanese expatriates and local Japanese staff have greater commonality in terms of culture, language, role stress experiences, perceptions of effective coping strategies, and work attitudes compared with those between Japanese expatriate staff and non-Japanese local staff. This is explained by the findings of Hofstede (1994, p. 40) and Hoecklin (1995, pp. 24-25) regarding culture and its influence (see section 9.3.1). They suggest that people who share the same culture perceive and interpret in similar ways.

Local Japanese staff and Japanese expatriate staff, however, have different role stress experiences and the status and authority of each differed greatly. These differences suggest that they were not establishing positive personal relationships with each other.

First, local Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff had differing experiences of role ambiguity and role conflict (see Table 9.4). Local Japanese experienced information shortage (a type of role ambiguity), where they regarded the information supplied by Japanese expatriate staff as insufficient. Local Japanese managers experienced role exclusion, where they felt excluded by Japanese expatriate staff from participating in information sharing and decision making. Local Japanese staff also experienced role overload when they were pressured by Japanese expatriate staff to work as hard as Japanese employees in Japan. Their experiences of information shortage, role exclusion, and role overload were not shared by Japanese expatriate staff. These experiences illustrate local Japanese staff's dissatisfaction with their expatriate colleagues, signifying that positive personal relationships had not been established.

This discontent may be explained by the lack of information supplied by Japanese managers, causing them to feel excluded (Bamber et al. 1992; Hayashi 1996; Iida 1985). Such dissatisfaction is representative of the disintegrated relationship between local staff and Japanese managers (Dedoussis 1994; Yoshihara 2001; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 33). It suggests that local Japanese staff are not enjoying positive personal relationships with Japanese expatriate staff.

In terms of status and authority, as discussed in section 9.3.2, the status and authority of Japanese expatriate staff is greater than that of local staff, with a notable discrepancy between Japanese expatriates and local Japanese staff.

#### **9.3.4 Cultural Integrators**

The current study identified two types of staff who act as cultural integrators between those of Japanese and Australian backgrounds. They are local staff (non-Japanese local and local Japanese staff) and Japanese expatriate staff. The findings on local staff are presented in Chapter 8, and reveal that they played the role of third person or 'go-between' for indirect active coping. This type has been described in past studies on overseas Japanese companies (Chikudate 1995; Hayashi 1994; Saka 2004). For the purposes of this study they are referred to as cultural integrators and defined as those who assist in alleviating role stress between people from different cultural groups in companies (see section 2.4.2).

This study identified staff whose characteristics matched those described by Hayashi (1996, pp. 217-221). They understand the cultures of both the host country and Japan sufficiently well, may have competence in both languages and are trusted by at least one of the groups. In addition, this study found that they also demonstrated adaptive attitudes towards Japanese culture and corporate customs. Demonstrating a positive attitude towards job flexibility (Ishida 1994; Hayashi 1996) is an example.

Non-Japanese local managers are sometimes found to be cultural integrators in overseas Japanese companies (Hayashi 1994, p. 35; Johnson 1988; Pucik et al. 1989). Other staff types, including a non-Japanese local in a non-managerial position as well as local Japanese staff, were also found to be cultural integrators. This is an important new finding as local Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies have never been investigated in relation to people management.

This study revealed two types of cultural integrator, those of local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. Local staff playing the role of cultural integrator are termed 'Type L

cultural integrators'. Cultural integrators among the Japanese expatriate staff are termed 'Type J cultural integrator'. This is to avoid confusion between the two types and to distinguish their characteristics.

In relation to Type J cultural integrators, Head Office relied heavily on Japanese expatriate staff, and Head Office exerted a powerful influence on business operations in Australian subsidiaries via the Type J cultural integrators. Japanese expatriate staff in Australia were held responsible for liaising between Head Office and the local office as 'go-betweens' and easing any conflict arising from disparity of interests between non-Japanese local managers and Head Office (see section 6.2.2). This study, thus, supports the literature claiming that Head Office retains control over business operations in their offshore offices (Bamber et al. 1992; Tokusei 1994; Yoshihara 2001) by relying on expatriate staff (Chung et al. 2006; Taga 2004; Yoshihara 2001). In this way, the local office is closely connected to Head Office (Dedoussis, 1994; Tokusei 1994; Yoshihara 2001), with Japanese expatriate staff liaising between the two and acting as the main communicator between them (Ikezoe 2002, p. 96; Swierczek & Onishi 2003, p. 200-201; Yoshihara 2001).

Since non-Japanese local managers and staff from the Head Office in Japan do not have the same cultural background, Japanese expatriate staff's role was to integrate staff of different cultural backgrounds. In this capacity, they can be considered cultural integrators.

In this study, Japanese expatriate staff had communication difficulties with non-Japanese local staff. Their English language competence was insufficient (see section 5.2) and they also lacked understanding of Australian culture and work environments (see section 5.4). Thus, the above mentioned local staff, who were able to play the role of Type L cultural integrator, were sought to assist in resolving problems occurring between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriates. This suggests that the Japanese expatriate staff in this study do not correspond to Hayashi's description of cultural integrators (1996, p. 217-221) which requires familiarity with both cultures and languages. The explanation is that Head Office is only prepared to rely on Japanese expatriate staff, and has considerable control over

business operations in local offices in Australia. Thus, Japanese expatriates are expected to act as cultural integrators whether they possess the necessary skills or not.

The findings, therefore, suggest four differences between Type L and Type J cultural integrators. The first relates to understanding and familiarity with the cultures of both the host country and Japan. A Type L cultural integrator is familiar with both cultures. This is often not the case for a Type J cultural integrator.

The second difference concerns the status and authority they are given. A Type L cultural integrator may be in a managerial or a non-managerial position. It was their inherent ability to integrate staff rather than their official status and authority endowed by the company that led them to play the role of cultural integrator. A Type J cultural integrator, on the other hand, held higher status and authority than local staff in the local office and performed dual roles, one of which was representative of Head Office (see sections 4.2.2.2 and 6.2.2).

The *third* difference relates to the way in which they perform their role of cultural integrator. A Type L cultural integrator has a personality that can establish rapport with others. The role of Type J cultural integrator comes with the role of representative of Head Office, regardless of experience and ability.

The fourth difference concerns who they assist. Type L cultural integrators assist relations between Japanese expatriate staff and non-Japanese local staff. They are limited to the staff in the local office in Australia. Type J cultural integrators, on the other hand, assist relations between Japanese staff at Head Office and local staff in Australia. Unlike the Type L cultural integrator, they do not assist staff within the local office.

Tokusei's study (1994) has similar findings to this study in terms of investigating role stress in overseas Japanese companies. She found the Japanese expatriate's role to be that of Type J cultural integrators where they needed to coordinate staff between a subsidiary and Head Office. However, she did not report findings on the

Type L cultural integrator. Given that the Type L cultural integrator has great potential for improving communication and understanding, and mitigating problems between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese, identifying their role and potential contribution to the development of integration among staff from both a short term and long term perspective is crucial for the company.

In summary, this study revealed two types of staff involved in integrating workers of different cultural backgrounds. Local staff are Type L cultural integrators and Japanese expatriates are Type J cultural integrators. Although both types aid staff integration, their characteristics differ.

### **9.3.5 Groupings of Staff in Overseas Japanese Companies**

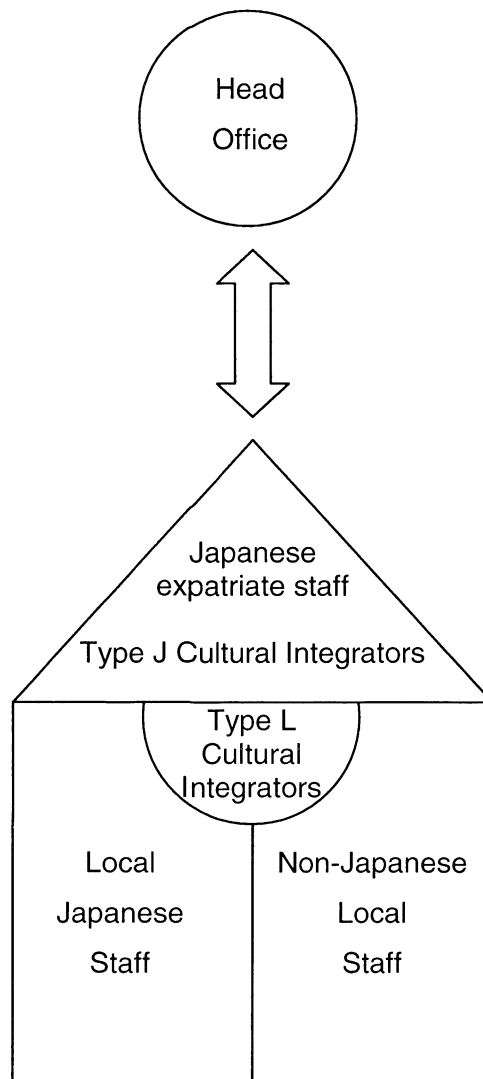
The previous sections discussed the differing characteristics and undeveloped personal relationships among staff in Japanese companies in Australia (see sections 9.3.1 to 9.3.4). It included comparisons between local Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff (see section 9.3.1), between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (see section 9.3.2), and between Japanese expatriate staff and local Japanese staff (see section 9.3.3). Two types of cultural integrators were identified and their differing characteristics discussed (see section 9.4.4). This study suggests that there are divisions between these groups. These divisions are defined by the following four features.

- (1) Differences in role stress experience
- (2) Differences in perceptions about effective coping strategies
- (3) Low frequency of communication between the groups
- (4) Feelings of dissatisfaction with other groups

The third and fourth features signify that cooperative personal relationships do not exist between groups. The discussions in the previous sections illustrate the existence of division (see sections 9.3.1 to 9.3.4) in terms of the four features. Figure 9.1 depicts the group types of Japanese companies in Australia.



**Figure 9.1: Four Groupings of Staff in Japanese Companies in Australia**



Past studies claim that overseas Japanese companies have two groupings of staff and a distinct division between the local group and a group consisting of Japanese expatriates and Head Office (Dedoussis 1990, 1994; Kidahashi 1987; White & Trevor 1983; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997, p. 3). This study found not two but four different groupings.

As shown in Figure 9.1, these groups are non-Japanese local staff, local Japanese staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and Type L cultural integrators. The company in Australia was closely linked to its Head Office and its business operated according to

Head Office's global strategy. The crucial liaison role was left primarily in the hands of Japanese expatriate staff. The presence of Type L cultural integrators indicates the development of a hybrid organization (Hayashi 1994, 1996).

The presence of local Japanese staff in Japanese companies in Australia is explained by an upsurge in the number of Japanese residing overseas, reaching one million for the first time in 2005 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006a). Of all the overseas countries in which Japanese choose to live, Australia is the fifth most popular, with over 52,000 Japanese residing there as of January 2006 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006a). Thus, a local Japanese workforce is available in Australia. This workforce is likely to be more familiar with the Australian environment than Japanese expatriate staff. It is for this reason that some find themselves playing the role of Type L cultural integrator.

Some non-Japanese local employees and managers also assist as Type L cultural integrators. This can be explained by the continuing close relations between Australia and Japan, with Japan being Australia's most important trading partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2006b). It can also be explained by Australians' increasing interest in Japan, demonstrated by the number of Australians learning Japanese. Australia has the third highest number of Japanese language learners outside Japan. The number reached 380,000 in 2004; in total, 2,142 schools, including primary and high schools, teach Japanese as a second language in Australia (Japan Foundation 2004). The two principal motivations for learning Japanese are (1) to find out about Japanese culture and (2) to be able to communicate in Japanese (Japan Foundation 2004). These figures demonstrate the interest of Australians in learning about Japanese culture and meeting Japanese people. When they are employed in Japanese companies, it is likely they will play the role of cultural integrator.

Overall, Figure 9.1 demonstrates the fragmentary nature of staff in Japanese companies in Australia. If all staff became cultural integrators, the company could increase solidarity and levels of cooperation until it became a unified whole.

## **9.4 SOURCES OF ROLE STRESS**

This study revealed role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) experienced by staff of Japanese companies in Australia. This is shown in the findings summary (see section 9.2). This section discusses how and why role stress occurs. There are four key factors: communication problems, work culture, cultural distance, and position.

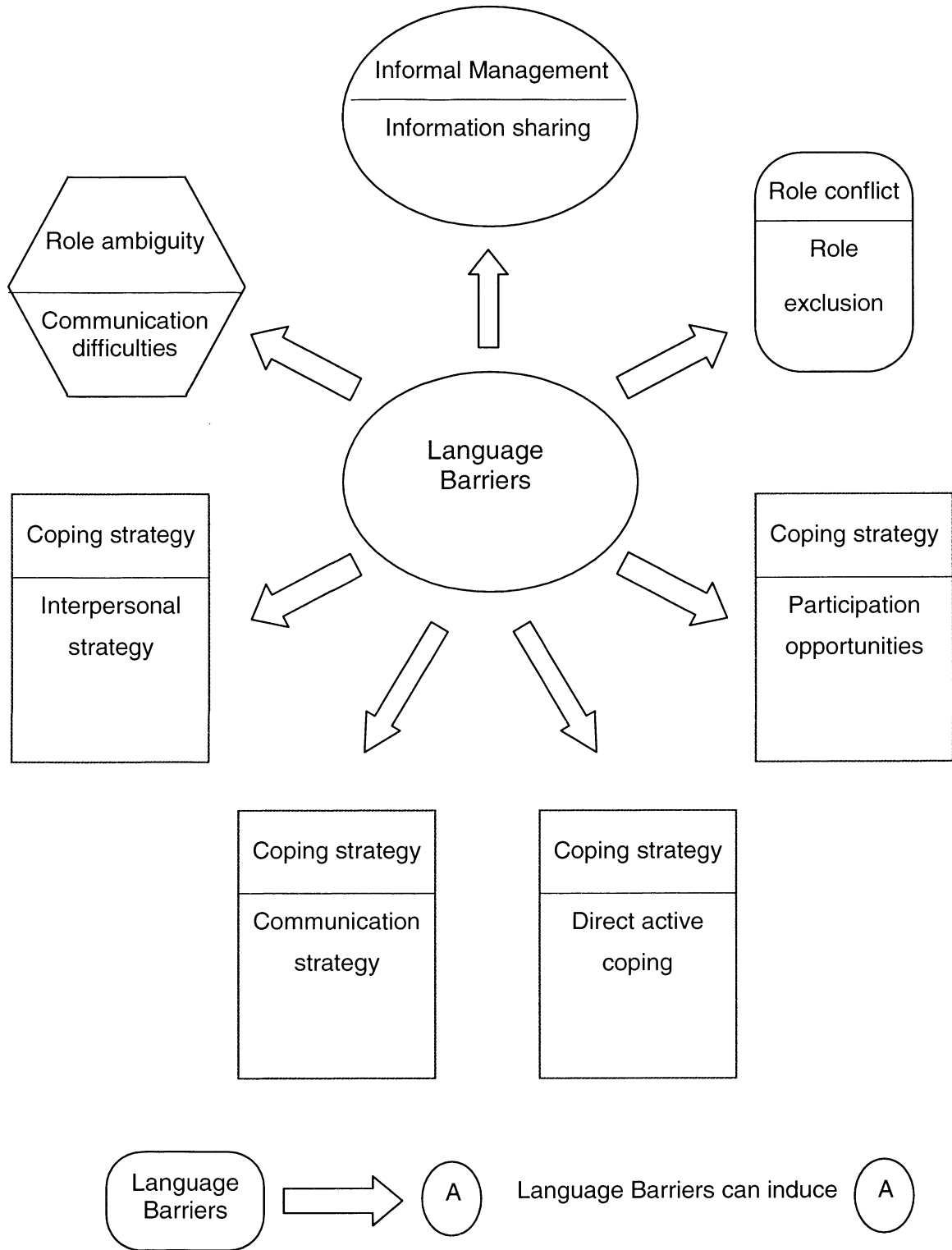
### **9.4.1 Communication Problems**

Communication difficulties between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff have been noted as a distinct problem affecting overseas Japanese companies (Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005; Tokusei 1994). This study confirmed that this problem still exists. It demonstrates that in over two decades, overseas Japanese companies have failed to resolve this issue. This section looks first at the part played by language barriers in this problem, and their influence on role stress and coping strategies in Japanese companies in Australia. Second, the necessity of guessing in communication is discussed. This is followed by a discussion on the obstacles to overcoming the problem.

#### **9.4.1.1 Language Barriers**

The findings of this study revealed that communication problems between Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff were largely related to insufficient English language competence (see section 5.2.3) and frequent use of Japanese in the workplace (see section 6.3). The overall findings revealed that language barriers negatively affected a number of aspects, including role stress, coping strategies, and informal management processes. Figure 9.2 exhibits how the language barriers relate to them.

**Figure 9.2 The Impact of Language Barriers**



Lack of English competence among Japanese staff is a source of communication difficulty between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff. It impedes understanding, including informal talk. Informal communication relies heavily on language competence (Rice 1986). It is part of the informal management process in overseas Japanese companies and involves information sharing and decision making. It has been noted that lack of language competence reduces the level of information sharing among staff (Welch et al. 2001, p. 198). The language barrier, thus, impedes understanding in the informal management process.

One of the role ambiguity types, communication difficulties, refers to the restricted level of non-Japanese participation in the organization's business activities. This is attributable to the fact that Japanese expatriates' willingness to communicate with non-Japanese employees is related to their language competency (Takeuchi et al. 2002, p. 1237). At the same time, if communication is conducted in Japanese, it necessarily limits the participation of non-Japanese. This is supported by past studies which have found that Japanese language usage alienates local staff (Ishida 1988, p. 980; Yoshihara 2001), and that overseas Japanese companies are considered as 'managed by Japanese and in Japanese' (Yoshihara 2001). Thus, language barriers, in other words, cause feelings of estrangement in non-Japanese local staff.

Two effective coping strategies were identified in the current study: participation opportunities and direct active coping. However, these strategies rely on increased communication between Japanese and non-Japanese staff, and this may prove a stumbling block to their implementation. One coping strategy, that of communication strategy, is concerned with overcoming language barriers through rephrasing, articulating slowly, and using visual aids. However, the greater the language barrier, the greater the challenge to implementing the strategy. Language barriers, therefore, make it difficult for non-Japanese local staff to use this strategy with any degree of success.

Another coping strategy, relationships building, involves showing politeness, care, and respect to others. The fact that the strategy was perceived as effective illustrates that what matters is not *what* is said but *how* it is said. In other words, what matters is

skill in communicating. The language barrier impedes this, and so prevents staff from developing personal relationships. This is supported by the claim that a critical tool for developing personal relationships is language competence (Mendenhall & Oddou 1985; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935), and that insufficient language competence can cause divisions among staff (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935). The language barrier, therefore, refers in this case to the absence of an essential tool to establish positive relationships within the company. It suggests that the language barrier is an obstacle to the implementation of relationships building strategies. Overall, as shown in Figure 9.2, the findings demonstrate that the language barrier negatively influences both role ambiguity and role conflict. In terms of coping strategies, the language barrier was found to prevent the effective implementation of four of the six types of coping strategy identified in this study.

Language is indispensable for communication, and communication issues are endemic in studies on role stress and coping strategies in intercultural contexts (Shenker & Zeira 1992; Stahl 2000). In situations where CEOs of international joint ventures have difficulty understanding and interpreting information sent by people from a culturally different parent firm, communication is found to be a significant source of role ambiguity (Shenker & Zeira 1992). Similarly, German expatriate managers in Japan experience communication problems with local Japanese staff in their subsidiary, and they use the emotion-focused coping strategy of avoidance and withdrawal more frequently than German expatriate managers in the US, where these communication problems do not exist (Stahl 2000).

This study demonstrates, along with Shenker and Zeira (1992), Welch and her associates (2001), and Stahl (2000) that language barriers are a significant source of communication difficulties in intercultural contexts, and influence the occurrence of role stress, both role ambiguity and role conflict, as well as hindering the implementation of coping strategies. Role Theory was developed within a mono-cultural context (Biddle 1979; Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978), and is based on an assumption that people in role sets do not have difficulty decoding information sent between them. This study, however, corroborates the suggestion

that Role Theory in an intercultural context must take language barriers into account.

#### 9.4.1.2 Necessity of Guessing

One of the elements in communication difficulties (a type of role ambiguity) concerned the need to guess non-verbalized parts of communication. This is a common practice in Japanese style communication where not all information is verbalized and the listener has to infer meaning (Hall & Hall 1987, p. 61; Ishii et al. 1996, pp. 125-128; Kato & Kato 1992, p. 122).

Tokusei's (1994) study which explores role stress among American and Japanese managers refers to such communication as 'short-hand communication', and finds that the short-hand communication is commonly practiced by Japanese managers. It includes sharing information and making decisions. Her study reveals that understanding a message using short-hand communication is the most difficult task for American managers working for Japanese companies.

The current study also found that non-Japanese local staff experienced difficulties guessing what Japanese staff were trying to get across and understanding what was expected of them. For example, a simple instruction, 'do this task' may be interpreted differently in terms of actions required, how best to proceed, when to proceed and so on. Thus, there is more than one interpretation.

Various terms are used to describe these communication styles such as '*haragei*' (belly language) (Hall & Hall 1987, p. 61), '*Ishin-Denshin*' (heart to heart communication) (Kato & Kato 1992, p. 122), and 'Say 1, know 10' (Kagawa 1997, pp. 68-69), and they all involve the need to guess. This is directly related to one aspect of ambiguity known as 'fuzziness' (Mukaidono 1988, pp. 38-40) (see section 2.3.2). The uncertainty or ambiguity in communication difficulties (a type of role ambiguity) found in this study, thus, refers to fuzziness. Therefore, the current study suggests that role ambiguity among non-Japanese local staff in Japanese companies in Australia involves fuzziness.

#### 9.4.1.3 Communication as Learning Opportunities

The current study revealed that communication problems have been a longstanding issue for overseas Japanese companies. This section discusses two factors which may be obstacles to finding a solution. First, the frequent use of Japanese language in the workplace is linked to communication problems. Japanese language usage in overseas Japanese companies indicates a paucity of communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff. This, thus, deprives them of opportunities to improve communication skills.

Second, seeking assistance from cultural integrators also has a bearing on the longstanding communication problems. The current study found that both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff used a third party to solve problems instead of confronting the person concerned themselves. This strategy has not been noted in past studies on coping strategies, and it is henceforth referred to as indirect active coping. The third party used in these situations possessed the same features as a cultural integrator (see section 2.4.1). In overseas Japanese companies, the cultural integrator is seen as useful for integrating non-Japanese local staff and Japanese managers (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 23; Hayashi 1994), but they can also be a crutch on which staff rely in lieu of confronting a problem themselves. From this viewpoint, the reliance on a cultural integrator indicates two consequences. First, the level of communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff stays low. Second, Japanese expatriate staff continue to maintain close communication ties with their fellow Japanese expatriate staff. These issues were identified in the current study (see section 4.2.2), and the findings may be illustrating an implication of cultural integrators as a crutch.

Learning to adapt to another culture and developing integration always involves difficulties (Bennet 1986; Kim & Ruben 1988; Tokusei 1994). However, relying on a cultural integrator, although useful and expedient, allows staff to 'solve' a problem without having to pass through the uncomfortable stage of adaptation. Therefore, they may never acquire the ability to deal with a problem independently. This study found that an indirect active coping strategy which involved seeking assistance from a cultural integrator was perceived as effective. While it may well be effective in the



short term, it does not lay down foundations for coping in the long term. This suggests that such an indirect active coping strategy is double-edged. It may be both effective and ineffective, as noted by Feldman and Thomas (1992) who state that a coping strategy can have both positive and negative influences on role stress reduction.

Overall, Japanese language usage and indirect active coping strategies indicate a paucity of learning opportunities which hinder the development of staff integration. These are also a manifestation of the inability of Japanese expatriate and non-Japanese local staff to handle situations on their own. If this situation continues, the longstanding communication problems will persist and obstacles to the reduction of role stress and the successful implementation of coping strategies will remain.

#### **9.4.2 Work Culture**

As shown in the literature reviews, local staff were confused by the non-explicit nature of job demarcation in overseas Japanese companies (see section 2.2.2). Ishida (1986, 1994) claims that local staff experience ambiguity from the manner in which jobs are distributed in companies. Hayashi (1996), on the other hand, argues that role ambiguity for local staff has to do with how local staff perceive the common duties that are autonomously carried out by multiple staff.

The current study did not identify role conflict among non-Japanese local staff as noted by Ishida (1986, 1994) and Hayashi (1996). This study found role incompetence resulting from a lack of a Japanese style work attitude towards flexible working hours, especially in keeping to deadlines, overtime, and prompt implementation of tasks. The source of the problem was related more to overtime than to unclear job boundaries. As such, it relates to boundary of time rather than the boundary of job (Hayashi 1996; Ishida 1986; 1994). The findings illustrate that Japanese staff held the same expectations as those commonly held by Japanese staff in Japan. That is, task completion and deadlines take priority over private life and prescribed work hours. These expectations were not shared by non-Japanese local staff. This accords with Byun and Ybema's study (2005) where Japanese managers

are discontented with local staff's 'nine-to-five' mentality.

Duerr and Duerr (1997, p. 8) state that doing overtime is an important measure of employee dedication in Japanese companies so employees frequently work long hours. In terms of having one or two days off per week (Saturday and/or Sunday) and paid annual holidays, employees in Australia do not have such strict employment conditions in comparison to employees in Japan (Tanno 1999, p. 204). Displaying a positive attitude towards flexible working hours is common in Japan, and part of the nation's work culture (Ericsson & Fujii 1995). Unmet expectations, therefore, arise from differences in the work cultures of Japan and Australia. Culture has considerable influence, which means that the cultural background of management influences a company's business practices (Dirks 1995, p. 77). People sharing the same culture have common interpretations (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25) and common understanding (Paik & Sohn 2004). Culture determines people's perceptions, including perceptions of what is acceptable and unacceptable and what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Paik & Sohn 2004). In the current study, what Japanese staff regarded as an appropriate and acceptable work attitude did not coincide with what non-Japanese local staff regarded as appropriate and acceptable. This discrepancy gave rise to role incompetence. It appears that work culture is related to the occurrence of role conflict in intercultural organizations, and future studies on Role Theory in an intercultural context should take this into account.

#### **9.4.3 Cultural Distance**

This study investigated role stress as experienced by both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff in Japanese companies in Australia. The findings revealed that each group experienced different types of role stress including role ambiguity and role conflict (see Tables 9.1 and 9.2). As discussed in the previous section 9.3.1, people of the same culture tend to have common interpretations, and these interpretations are often not shared by people of different cultural background (Hoecklin 1995, pp. 24-25). This implies that the manner in which one interprets matters differs if cultural distance is greater between two parties. Similarly, the way one interprets matters has more commonality if cultural distance between the two parties is less. The

expectations Japanese expatriate staff have of their local staff may be, therefore, interpreted differently according to cultural distance between the two parties. The unmet expectations that occurred between Japanese expatriate staff and local Japanese staff of the current study did not coincide with the unmet expectations that occurred between Japanese expatriate staff and non-Japanese local staff. Thus, non-Japanese local staff and local Japanese staff experienced different types of role stress.

Similarly, role ambiguity experiences between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff did not accord with the role ambiguity experiences which exist between local Japanese staff and Japanese expatriate staff. Since there is a difference in the level of cultural distance between the two role sets (role sender and focal person), their role ambiguity experiences did not coincide.

There have been very few studies using Role Theory in intercultural contexts (Shenker & Zeira 1992; Peterson et al. 1995). As Role Theory was originally theorized in mono-cultural contexts, especially in the US, its applicability to intercultural contexts has been questioned by researchers (Shenker & Zeira 1992; Peterson et al. 1995). Shenker and Zeira (1992) raised the issue of cultural influence, suggesting that cultural distance between role sets (role sender and focal person) affects the experience of role stress in intercultural organizations. In relation to their suggestion, this study confirmed that the cultural distance of role occupants influences the types of role stress they experience.

#### **9.4.4 The Position of Expatriates**

The current study revealed that Japanese expatriate staff had a role as representatives of Head Office. This impacted on the occurrence of role stress, lowering the level of reliance on local staff and the development of integrated relationships in the company. As discussed earlier (see section 9.3.2), there was a large gap between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, with Japanese expatriate staff holding a higher status and authority. Japanese expatriate staff were able to influence matters for which their superior non-Japanese local manager was officially responsible. This

led to clashes, causing expatriates to experience liaison role conflict. Their high status and authority arose from Head Office's heavy dependency on them along with the control Head Office exerted over business operations in Australia. These findings were in line with past studies on overseas Japanese companies (Chung et al. 2006; Linowes 1993, p. 32; Taga 2004, p. 34).

The findings on liaison role conflict suggest that Japanese expatriate staff's actual authority goes beyond the formal authority prescribed by the company in Australia. The source of liaison role conflict can be explained by the recognition in Role Theory that a person of high status or authority who is also a boundary spanner will experience role conflict (Kahn et al. 1964, pp. 123-149; Miles 1977). The findings also substantiate the suggestion that the official managerial titles of local staff is sometimes a 'pretence'. This is in line with past studies on overseas Japanese companies where a staff member's position does not necessarily reflect any real authority or decision making power (Kidahashi 1987, p. 85; Pucik et al. 1989, pp.45-46; Trevor 1983, p.155).

The findings revealed that there was little reliance on local staff by Head Office, including those in managerial positions. This was reported as role ambiguity, but referred to as information shortage. It involved Japanese expatriate staff's fears that local staff might leak important company information to outsiders (see section 5.3.2). The information shortage, thus, shows their distrust of local staff. Similarly, one of role conflict types, role exclusion, involves the alienation felt by local staff when excluded from information sharing and decision making. It also indicates the low level of reliance on the local staff. This has been explained (Ishida 1988, p. 65) by the claim that an understanding of Japanese culture, work culture and customs, and knowledge of the Japanese language are essential criteria to gain the trust of Head Office. Local staff experienced role ambiguities such as communication difficulties and lack of cultural understanding when working with Japanese expatriate staff. This suggests that Head Office's reliance on them was minimal. This study supports the findings of past studies in which local staff of Japanese companies overseas were not relied on for important duties (Wooldridge 1995; Chung et al. 2006; Taga 2004, p. 34; Tokusei 1994; Yoshihara 2001) resulting in a large discrepancy between the

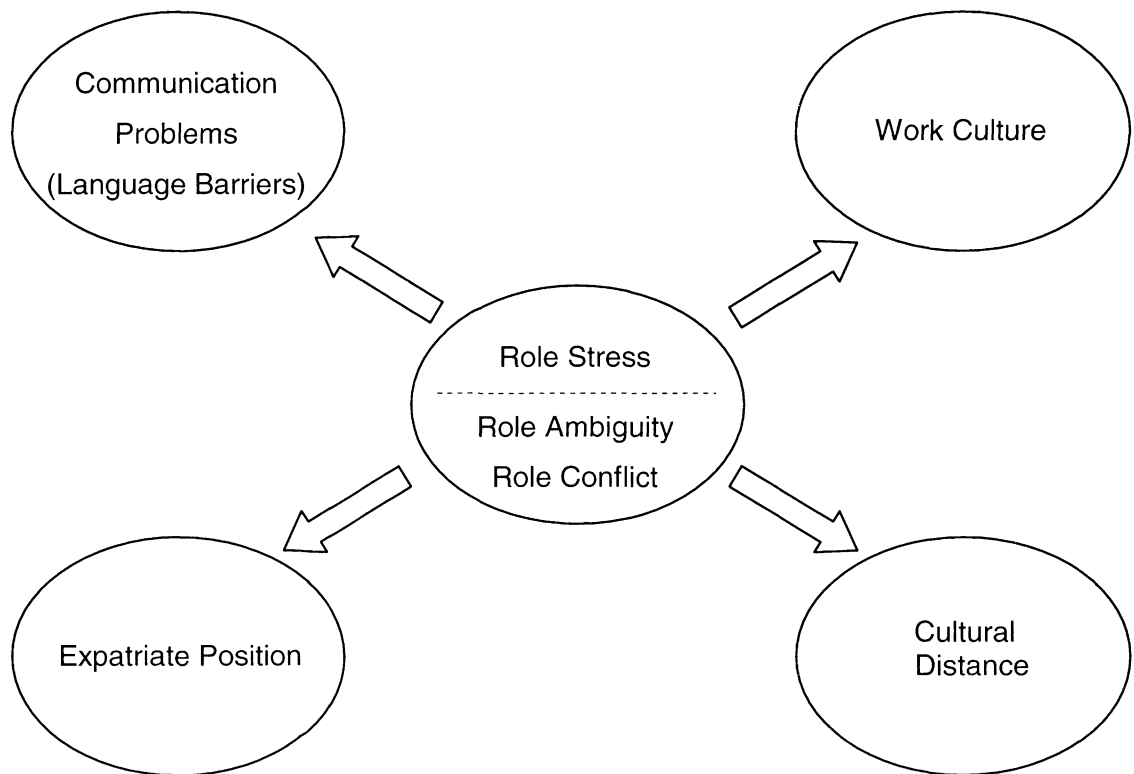
career prospects, income, and power of local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (Byun & Ybema 2005).

The heavy reliance on Japanese expatriate staff and the low reliance on local staff is connected to employment status. Haitani (1990, p. 247) argues that the level to which Head Office relies on a staff member depends on whether or not Head Office employed them. He claims that those employed by Head Office are considered to be a member of the corporate family. This is because these staff members have accumulated knowledge about the company, its people, and work culture, and have shown the necessary obligation and loyalty (Haitani 1990, p. 247). Haitani (1990, p. 247) further explains that for this reason, Japanese expatriate staff are regarded as a member of the corporate family, while local staff are regarded not as family, but as a member of a subsidiary.

Haitani's claim (1990, p. 247), thus, suggests that the crucial matter for staff of overseas Japanese companies is employment status. In other words, if they are an expatriate, there will be a considerable difference in the level of reliance Head Office places on them, as well as a difference in participation opportunities, career prospects, and income. This study revealed that local staff experienced information shortage and role exclusion (a role conflict type). These experiences are related to the above-mentioned differences between those who are members of the corporate family and those who are not. Thus, whether or not an employee is an expatriate will have a bearing on their experience of role stress. Furthermore, the discrepancies in career opportunities, power, and income may lead to disintegration in the relations between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (Byun & Ybema 2005). Thus, the expatriate position may also influence the level of integration among staff in the company.

In summary, the current study identified four sources of role stress in the context of Japanese companies in Australia as depicted in Figure 9.3. These are (1) communication problems between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff, (2) work culture, (3) cultural distance, and (4) the expatriate position.

**Figure 9.3 Sources of Role Stress**



The current study suggests that cultural issues including work culture and the cultural distance of role sets (role sender and focal person) influence the occurrence of role stress in companies in an intercultural context. When communication styles and native language are not shared between role sets (role sender and focal person), communication problems can be more likely to occur. This triggers role stress. Moreover, the expatriate position differentiates between expatriate staff and local staff in terms of status, authority, and the reliance Head Office places on them. This discrepancy leads to clashes between local staff and expatriate staff. Overall, the four sources of role stress are peculiar to companies in an intercultural context, and are not applicable to companies in a mono-cultural context. Hence, the current study demonstrates that role stress sources in the intercultural context do not necessarily coincide with role stress sources in a mono-cultural context.

## **9.5 ROLE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES**

As the findings on Research Question 1 illustrate, informal management processes exist in Japanese companies in Australia (see section 9.2). These include informal communication in information sharing and decision making, as well as demonstrating a positive attitude towards job flexibility and flexible working hours. Informal processes for sharing information and making decisions are common practices in Japanese companies in Japan (Kato & Kato 1992, p. 51; Davies & Ikeno 2002, p. 161-162). Past studies on overseas Japanese companies have found that local staff cannot fully participate in these informal processes, resulting in local dissatisfaction with Japanese management (Shimada 1998, pp. 6-7; Tokusei 1994; Trevor 1983, p. 155). Receiving information is crucial for employees, especially managers (Donavan 1984). Thus, if overseas Japanese companies practice these informal processes, they have an impact on the level of local staff's participation in information sharing and decision making.

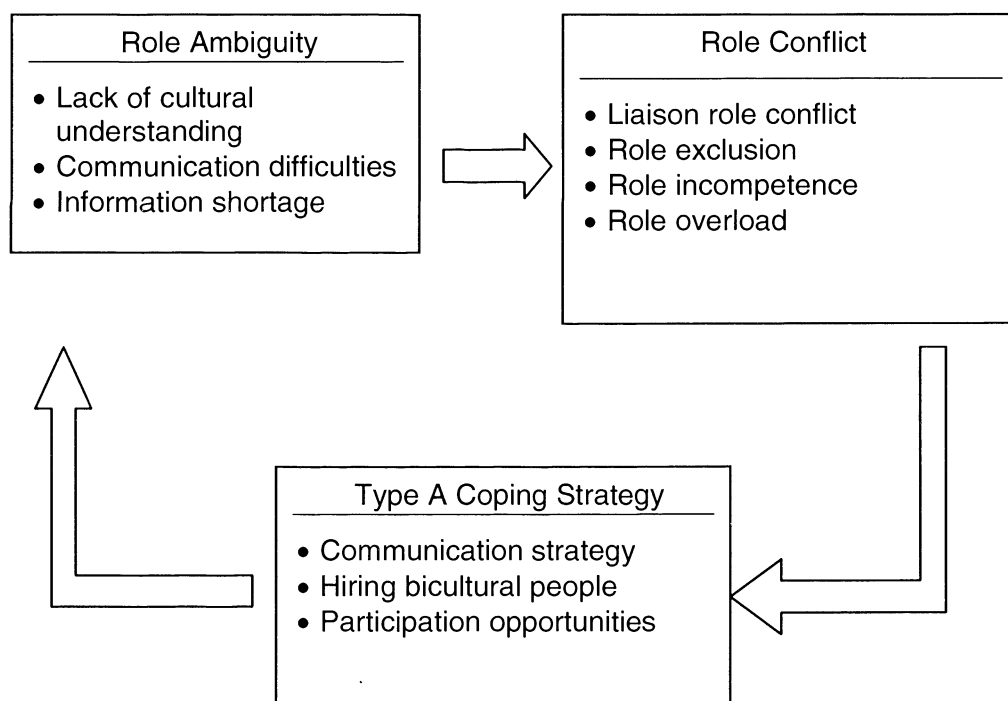
In terms of job flexibility, job demarcation in overseas Japanese companies is not clearly delineated, and a flexible work attitude is encouraged in regard to taking on extra tasks and carrying out common duties (Ishida 1986, 1994). In this system, employees rely on implicit rules, and the ability to guess what they are expected to do is crucial (Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986). Since this system contrasts with that of Western companies where employees' duties are explicitly described (Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986), guessing what is expected of them is difficult for non-Japanese local staff. As a consequence, they experience confusion and aggravation (Hayashi 1994, 1996; Ishida 1986). Since every staff member in a company has duties, this affects all staff, managerial and non-managerial alike. In this system, each staff member must possess guessing skills and must rely on implicit rules and tacit expectations. This affects what tasks are conducted and how they are carried out in all staff members' daily work activities. Hence, job flexibility is an indispensable part of their role in the company.

The expectations of flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) were held by Japanese expatriate staff. The feature of flexible working hours is a "natural and obvious part of working life" in Japan (Ericsson & Fujii 1995, p. 30). Doing

overtime is regarded as evidence of dedication by the employee (Duerr & Duerr 1997, p. 8). It is taken into account in evaluating employees (Zhe 1996). The acceptance of flexible working hours (Ericsson & Fujii 1995) is, thus, an important work attitude for employees of Japanese companies.

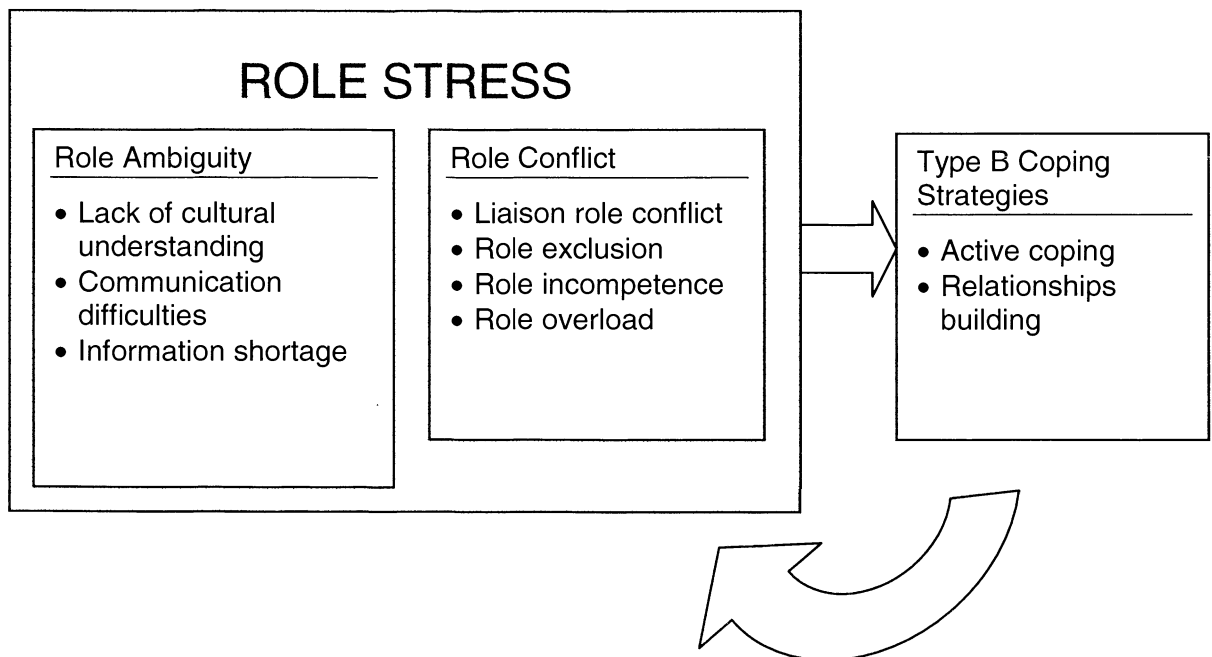
The informal management processes found in the current study, thus, demonstrate that staff in overseas Japanese companies operate within informal management processes, and this context is related to their experience of role stress. Figures 9.4 and 9.5 show the relationships between role stress and problem-focused coping strategies within the context of informal management processes.

**Figure 9.4 Relationships between Role Stress and Problem-Focused Coping Strategies within the Context of Informal Management Processes**





**Figure 9.5 Relationships between Role Stress and Problem-Focused Coping Strategies within the Context of Informal Management Processes**



The types of coping strategy in the diagrams are all problem-focused, divided into Type A and Type B. Type A coping strategies are presented in Figure 9.4, and Type B coping strategies are presented in Figure 9.5. The largest square box in Figure 9.5 indicates role stress. It comprises two components, role ambiguity and role conflict, and each component is placed in the square role stress box.

As shown in Figures 9.4 and 9.5, role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies are related to one another. This section uses these figures to explain their relationships. First, the feature of role ambiguity in inducing role conflict is discussed. Second, the ways in which coping strategies are related to role ambiguity and role conflict are discussed. This is followed by discussions on the overall relation between role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) and coping strategies.

### **9.5.1 Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict**

#### **Communication Difficulties versus Role Exclusion**

An example of a type of role ambiguity is communication difficulties. This results from the degree of English language competence among Japanese staff. Because Japanese staff found it easier to speak in Japanese, non-Japanese local staff were unable to fully participate in activities such as meetings, information-sharing and decision making. As a result, they experienced role exclusion (a role conflict type). This is an example of role ambiguity leading to role conflict among local staff.

Communication difficulties induce role exclusion as a result of the ways in which language competence affects staff participation in company activities. It affects the growth of communication networks (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8), and can cause demarcations between staff (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8; Peterson & Smith 1997, p. 935). Language competence limits Japanese expatriate staff's communication network with other non-Japanese local staff. Similarly, it prevents non-Japanese local staff from communicating freely with Japanese expatriates. This is supported by the current study's findings (see section 6.3). Since Japanese expatriates shared information and made decisions through informal talk, the fact that local staff were not part of that communication network meant that they could not participate. As a consequence, they experienced role exclusion (a role conflict type).

This study also found that because Head Office exerted considerable control over local business operations, communication with Head Office was essential for local management. Ishida (1988, p. 65) argues that Japanese language skills are crucial for communication with Head Office, so that the person who communicates with Head Office is the one who manages local staff, regardless of their official position. Thus, any local manager or executive who has communication difficulties with Japanese staff cannot play a key role in managing a local office. As a consequence, they will experience role exclusion (a role conflict type).

In addition, because communication networks affect access to information (Kidahashi 1987, p. 102; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1997), insufficient language competence is one of the largest barriers to knowledge flow in intercultural

organizations (Ford & Chan 2003). In a case where expatriate staff lack the necessary language ability to get their message across effectively, they are unable to pass on information to local staff, even when they have every intention of doing so (Welch et al. 2001, p. 200). Past studies on overseas Japanese companies have also shown that local staff have not received sufficient information and consequently have felt excluded (Bamber et al. 1992; Hayashi 1996; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 435; Tokusei 1994). This suggests that communication difficulties (a role ambiguity) induce role exclusion (a role conflict).

### **Information shortage versus role exclusion**

Another form of role ambiguity, information shortage, also leads to role exclusion (a role conflict). Information shortage refers to local staff receiving insufficient information from Japanese expatriate staff, causing them to feel alienated. As mentioned above, receiving insufficient information is related to local staff's lack of participation in informal management processes for information sharing and decision making. Receiving sufficient information is associated with a decrease in anxiety (Donavan 1984). It, thus, suggests that local staff experience role stress due to lack of information. The literature also reveals that local staff are discontented with the level of information they receive, and feel estranged (Bamber et al. 1992; Hayashi 1996; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 435). For this reason, a type of role ambiguity, information shortage, can be considered to relate to a type of role conflict, role exclusion.

### **Lack of cultural understanding versus liaison role conflict**

Lack of cultural understanding is also one of the role ambiguity types. Both non-Japanese and Japanese staff felt that they lacked understanding of each other's culture and corporate customs. Liaison role conflict was experienced by Japanese expatriate staff when they had to act as Head Office representative and advise their non-Japanese local superior on how Head Office wanted things done. This sometimes led to clashes. Japanese expatriate staff found helping local managers to understand Japanese work culture and customs the most challenging aspect of this role.

In relation to this difficulty, Dirks (1955, p. 77) states that management's cultural

background, norms, and practices influence decision making and structural implementation. It suggests that Head Office's work culture and practices strongly influence the business operations of local offices in Australia. Lack of understanding about Japanese companies' work culture and practices, therefore, indicates that local managers experience difficulties understanding Japanese expatriates' explanations and the reasons behind the company's decisions.

Similarly, it is important that expatriates understand the culture of the host country as it affects their efficiency in managing the local office (Paik & Sohn 2004). Claims by Dirks (1995, p. 77) and Paik and Sohn (2004), thus, suggest that understanding work culture has an influence on the occurrence of unmet expectations between local managers and Japanese expatriate staff. Hence, a type of role ambiguity, lack of cultural understanding is related to the occurrence of a type of role conflict, liaison role conflict.

#### **Lack of cultural understanding versus role exclusion**

Lack of cultural understanding (a role ambiguity) is also a source of role exclusion (a type of role conflict). Role exclusion involves local staff's insufficient level of participation in sharing information and making decisions. Ishida (1988, p. 65) explains that the staff on whom Head Office rely to manage their offshore office must have a good understanding of Japanese culture, work culture and customs. They must also possess Japanese language skills. Staff who are not thus equipped, will not be trusted by Head Office, nor will they be given an important position in the company (Ishida 1988, p. 67). This suggests that local managers in this study, who lack understanding of Japanese culture and corporate customs, are not trusted by Head Office. Thus, they are not able to participate in information sharing and decision making regarding the important business operations of the local office. As a consequence, they experience role exclusion. It thus shows that a type of role ambiguity, lack of cultural understanding, has an influence on the occurrence of a type of role conflict, role exclusion.

### **9.5.2 Effects of Coping Strategies**

This section discusses the effects of Type A coping strategies and their relation to role ambiguity and role conflict. It demonstrates that Type A coping strategies directly assist in alleviating role ambiguity, reducing unmet expectations between role sets (role sender and focal person), so that role conflict is alleviated.

#### **9.5.2.1 Communication Strategy**

Communication strategy is a coping strategy concerned with improving communication between non-Japanese and Japanese staff. In this strategy, non-Japanese local staff aim to overcome language barriers through the use of clear articulation, a slower speaking speed, rephrasing, or using visual aids such as diagrams. Japanese staff, on the other hand, emphasized the need to improve clarity and recognized that clear and full explanations should be provided to non-Japanese local staff.

In relation to communication strategy, communication difficulties (a role ambiguity) related to difficulty in understanding what the other was trying to express. It involved three aspects, (1) differences in communication style, (2) the necessity of guessing, and (3) insufficient language competence. Communication difficulties occurred between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

The difficulties for non-Japanese local staff in understanding Japanese staff are related to the different communication styles of Japan and the West, where the former is ambiguous and indirect (Hall & Hall 1987; Kobayashi 1997; Sato 1992, pp. 93-94). It requires the ability to guess by using available clues (Ishii et al. 1996, pp. 125-128). Researchers, who have studied overseas Japanese companies, suggest increasing clarity and explicitness to overcome communication difficulties (Hayashi 1996; Ikezoe 2002, p. 95; Pucik 1990). These suggestions are in line with one of the coping strategies found in the current study, namely, communication strategy. Hence, communication strategy assists in reducing one of the role ambiguity types, communication difficulties.

As discussed in a previous section (see section 9.5.1), one type of role ambiguity, communication difficulties, induces role exclusion. Since communication strategies aid in reducing communication difficulties, reduced communication difficulties would also imply a reduction in role exclusion (a role conflict).

This role exclusion has a link with communication difficulties (a role ambiguity type), in particular, language competence (see section 9.5.1). This is illustrated by the literature which states that insufficient language competence limits the development of a communication network (Feely & Harzing 2004, p. 8). A limited communication network results in limited access to information (Kidahashi 1987, p. 102; Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1997). Insufficient level of information sharing was found as a feature of role exclusion in the current study. Thus, there is a link between role exclusion and one of the features of communication difficulties, language competence.

Expatriate staff with insufficient language competence lack the communication skills to explain what they intend to say (Welch et al. 2001, p. 200). It naturally discourages communication between local staff and Japanese staff. This is supported by a claim that language competence is related to the willingness to communicate (Takeuchi et al. 2002). Hence, communication is discouraged between staff who have communication difficulties (a role ambiguity). This leads to demarcation among staff, and consequently, role exclusion is experienced.

Communication strategies found in the current study can assist understanding about each other. It can, thus, ease communication difficulties (a role ambiguity). The easing of communication difficulties between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff would mean an increased willingness to communicate. This would naturally lead to the growth of a communication network. The expanded communication network would, then, increase the amount of information local staff received from Japanese expatriate staff. Hence, participation level of local staff in the company's business activities would increase as a result. Role exclusion involves unmet expectations between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff in relation to the local staff's participation level. An increased level of local staff participation would reduce the number of unmet expectations. In this way, communication strategies reduce role exclusion. In sum,

communication strategies assist in reducing role ambiguity, namely, communication difficulties. Simultaneously, a role conflict type, role exclusion experienced by local staff, is ameliorated.

#### 9.5.2.2 Hiring Bicultural Staff

Another form of coping strategy involves employing local staff who are familiar with Japanese people, culture, and/or language. Because of their familiarity with both cultures, they can assist in mitigating communication problems and misunderstanding between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. This strategy makes up for the shortcomings of lack of cultural understanding and communication difficulties. Bicultural people have the potential to play the role of cultural integrator between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (see section 7.3.2). A cultural integrator is able to assist by interpreting between the two cultures and making appropriate explanations, as well as helping expatriates to learn and adapt to the host country's culture (Chikudate 1995). Thus, hiring bicultural people facilitates the reduction of two types of role ambiguity, lack of cultural understanding and communication difficulties.

As discussed in a previous section (see section 9.5.1), lack of cultural understanding, as a form of ambiguity, has an effect on liaison role conflict and role exclusion. Similarly, another type of role ambiguity, communication difficulties, is also related to the occurrence of role exclusion. The alleviation of lack of cultural understanding and communication difficulties, thus, indicates that role exclusion and liaison role conflict can be abated. The reduction in the occurrence of role exclusion as a result of reduced communication difficulties is discussed in the previous section (see section 9.5.2.1).

As discussed in the previous section (see section 9.5.2.1), lack of cultural understanding as a type of role ambiguity has an effect on the role exclusion of local staff. Head Offices of Japanese companies in Australia maintain strong control over their local offices, and an adequate understanding of Japanese culture, work culture and customs, and Japanese language skills is essential for staff in the offshore office

if they are to obtain Head Office's trust (Ishida 1988, p. 65). Unless local staff meet these requirements, they will never be promoted to an important position in an overseas Japanese company (Ishida 1988, p. 67). Conversely Japanese expatriate staff will be unable to trust local staff, will conceal their feelings and avoid sharing ideas and information (Linowes 1993, p. 32). These claims which are made by Ishida (1988) and Linowes (1993) suggest that increasing local staff's understanding of Japanese culture, corporate customs and practices will reduce unmet expectations between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. It, thus, entails alleviation of role exclusion (a role conflict type).

Lack of cultural understanding was also related to the occurrence of liaison role conflict. It involved clashes between local managers and Japanese expatriate staff who were trying to balance Head Office's wishes with local managers' intentions. Japanese expatriate staff's biggest challenge in managing a local office was to help local managers to understand Head Office's intentions and Japanese work culture and customs.

As claimed by Dirks (1995, p. 77), decision making and structural implementation in offshore offices are influenced by management's cultural background, its norms and practices. This suggests that an increased understanding of Japanese work culture and practices on the part of local managers will help reduce the difficulties faced by Japanese expatriate staff experiencing liaison role conflict. An increased understanding of culture diminishes unmet expectations between non-Japanese local managers and Japanese expatriate staff. Hence, the reduction of lack of cultural understanding means a reduction in liaison role conflict.



### 9.5.2.3 Participation Opportunities

One form of coping strategy, participation opportunities, works by providing local staff with more opportunities to participate in the company's business activities, especially in decision making and information sharing. This strategy arose out of Japanese expatriates' acknowledgement that local staff were dissatisfied with their exclusion from information and lack of participation in decision making. Thus, this strategy directly aims at overcoming information shortage (a type of role ambiguity).

It is critical for managers to participate in these processes, and, as has been noted, providing staff with sufficient information helps lower their anxiety and fosters trust (Donavan 1984). Role stress is defined for the purposes of this dissertation as any emotionally negative feelings experienced by people in an organization, and comprises two categories, role conflict and role ambiguity (see section 2.3.1). The anxiety felt by managers who received insufficient information is related to role stress. Donavan (1984) claimed that providing information alleviated role ambiguity. Similarly, high levels of information sharing can help reduce uncertainty (Hall 1985), as role ambiguity is defined as uncertainty in relation to one's role (Katz & Kahn 1978; King & King 1990; Singh & Rhoades 1991). As a coping strategy, participation opportunities serve to allay the role ambiguity of information shortage.

A reduction in information shortage through participation opportunities facilitates the lowering of the type of role conflict known as role exclusion that is felt by local staff. Past studies reveal that local staff in Japanese companies overseas are dissatisfied with the amount of information they are given, and feel excluded by Japanese managers (Bamber et al., 1992; Hayashi 1996; Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 435). They also complain that there is no systematic and strategic information sharing method in the company (Pucik 1990). This suggests that lack of information sharing leads to exclusion of local staff, and reducing information shortage can compensate for the defect of role exclusion. Hence, the coping strategy, participation opportunities, assists in overcoming role exclusion and is also related to a reduction in unmet expectations in the experience of role exclusion.

#### 9.5.2.4 Relationships Building Strategies

Relationships building is one of the two Type B coping strategies listed in Figure 9.5. It was recognized as essential by all staff types in the company. They believed that when these types of relationship were developed, collaboration levels increased and problems were resolved with greater ease. The use of this strategy, therefore, can make a substantial difference compared to those workplaces where such relationships are not established. It suggests that positive personal relationships help mitigate all role stress types. This is supported by the literature which claims that the development of positive relations is associated with reducing conflict (Nelson 1989), and is effective in reducing role stress in intercultural contexts (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999; Stahl 2000).

#### 9.5.2.5 Active Coping

Active coping is the other Type B coping strategy listed in Figure 9.5. It involves role occupants taking charge of solving problems and is divided into two types, direct active coping and indirect active coping (see Table 9.3). Direct active coping refers to the role occupant confronting a situation by communicating directly with the person concerned in order to resolve the problem. In indirect active coping, the role occupant confronts the situation using a third person or 'go-between', so that no direct communication is carried out between the primary parties.

Although it may be either direct or indirect, an active coping strategy does not involve any concrete or specific method. It is a free-floating strategy which can include any and all actions taken by the role occupant to solve a problem. An active coping strategy relates to problem-focused coping strategies. A problem-focused coping strategy is where the role occupant attempts to reduce the source of the problem. This is commonly acknowledged as effective for alleviating role stress (Carver et al. 1989; Folkman & Lazarus 1980; Lazarus & Folkman 1984). This suggests that active coping strategies can facilitate the easing of role stress, role ambiguity, and role conflict. Since it is not tied to a particular method, it can target any type of role stress, and can adapt itself to a situation as required.

### **9.5.3 Role Ambiguity, Role Conflict, and Coping Strategies**

Overall, Figure 9.4 demonstrates that role ambiguity influences the occurrence of role conflict. Coping strategies are used to make up for the shortcomings of role stress, in particular role ambiguities. It suggests that role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies are interrelated in a cyclical process, with role ambiguity giving rise to role conflict which in turn brings about a coping strategy to alleviate the consequences of role ambiguity or role stress as a whole.

For instance, communication difficulties (a type of role ambiguity) can lead to role exclusion (a type of role conflict). In this instance, implementing coping strategies such as participation opportunities and hiring bicultural people assists in alleviating role exclusion. A coping strategy can reduce unmet expectations between the role sender and the focal person. This is supported by Role Theory on the reduction of role conflict. Role conflict is defined as unmet role expectations between a role sender and a focal person (Dubinsky et al.1992; Katz & Kahn 1978), and reducing unmet expectations is recognized as crucial to overcoming it (Katz & Kahn 1978; Tsui & Ashford 1994).

Tokusei's study (1994) investigated role stress in Japanese and American managers of Japanese companies in North America, and found that American managers experience role stress as much as Japanese managers. Staff in non-managerial positions were not included as target informants of her study. This study, however, investigated staff in both managerial and non-managerial positions, and local Japanese staff were also included. The results found that all staff types including both managerial and non-managerial positions experienced role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict). It also revealed that role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies were interrelated, and a particular coping strategy was needed to reduce a particular form of role stress. Unless the types of role ambiguity and role conflict experienced among all staff in a company are understood, it is not possible to identify effective coping strategies to reduce role stress. This study, therefore, suggests that it is critical to explore role stress in all staff types.

In sum, the current study suggests that a cyclical process exists between role

ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategy, where role ambiguity induces role conflict, which leads to the enactment of coping strategies in order to counterbalance the unfulfilled expectations between role sets.

## **9.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This research provided an in-depth exploration of role stress among staff and the coping strategies perceived to be effective in Japanese companies in Australia. It included all staff types, namely, non-Japanese local staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and local Japanese staff and is the first study to examine role stress and coping strategies among local Japanese staff. It has also made a number of important theoretical contributions.

First, the current study revealed role stress types which have not been identified in the literature on Role Theory in an intercultural context. These included language competency, the necessity of guessing, and lack of cultural understanding for role ambiguity. The new types of role conflict found were role exclusion and liaison role conflict. These role conflicts occurred between local staff and Japanese expatriate staff.

Second, the study identified four types of role stress sources. These are (1) communication problems, (2) work culture, (3) cultural distance, and (4) expatriate position. These sources are peculiar to companies in an intercultural context. The findings demonstrate that sources of role stress in a mono-cultural context do not necessarily coincide with those of an intercultural context.

Third, this research also demonstrated that role stress triggered a feeling of discontent towards other staff. This, then, had an influence on the occurrence of disintegration among staff in Japanese companies in Australia.

Fourth, Japanese companies in Australia were found as consisting of four groupings of staff. This is different from the common acknowledgement that overseas Japanese companies consist of two groups, local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (e.g. Ishida

1989; Yoshimura & Anderson 1997).

Fifth, the study demonstrated the link between role stress and coping strategies. A cyclical process was found between role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies. In this process, role ambiguity triggers role conflict, which leads to the establishment of coping strategies to compensate for the shortcomings of role stress. This provided an understanding of how role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies are interrelated. The findings suggest exploring role stress types of all staff is crucial to identify effective coping strategies.

## **CHAPTER 10**

### **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

#### **10.1 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

This chapter discusses the practical implications of the findings of this study. First, the practical implications for Japanese management are discussed in the next section. The implications assist practitioners in understanding how to handle both management and non-management sections of white collar staff of overseas Japanese companies. Given that the purpose of the current study is to investigate possible methods for developing successful people management in these groups of employees in overseas Japanese companies, it is essential to examine the implications of the findings. These will provide practitioners with a framework to reduce role ambiguity and role conflict in companies operating in intercultural situations. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations and possible future research directions emanating from this study. The following sections identify methodological limitations associated with the current study, and future research implications. Finally, the concluding remarks provide a summary of this doctoral dissertation.

#### **10.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR JAPANESE MANAGEMENT**

This research has three major practical implications. First, implications for cultural integrators are considered. Specifically, how cultural integrators may contribute to the efficient reduction of role stress. Second, the discussion also examines the practical implications of the findings in regard to developing personal relationships and increasing a sense of harmony in companies. Finally the implications of problems in intercultural communications are discussed.

### **10.2.1 Cultural Integrator**

The current research identifies the existence of cultural integrators and examines how they assist in reducing role stress in companies. As discussed in the previous chapter (see section 9.4.1.2), seeking assistance from a cultural integrator as an indirect active coping strategy helps staff to minimize stress. The current research reveals a reliance on a cultural integrator when staff are confronted by a difficult situation. This reliance leads to reduced levels of communication between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, and an increased level of gatherings among Japanese expatriate which exclude non-Japanese local staff.

Experiencing difficulties is unavoidable when learning to adapt to another culture (Bennet 1986; Kim & Ruben 1988; Tokusei 1994). Continuous reliance on cultural integrators, however, prevents learning appropriate cultural strategies to solve problems independently. Thus, an indirect active coping strategy implies limitations to learning opportunities.

The current study found that indirect active coping was regarded as positive by both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff. This is due to the effects on staff who are freed from experiencing role stress. Given that the reliance on a cultural integrator implies a limitation of learning opportunities, the strategy is only effective from a short-term perspective. It is ineffective from a long-term perspective. Thus, seeking assistance from a cultural integrator as an indirect active coping strategy has ambivalent features revealing both effective and ineffective consequences.

The implications, therefore, are on how cultural integrators can make an effective contribution enabling positive results to be obtained from both short-term and long-term perspectives. As mentioned above, difficult experiences are inherent in learning to adapt to another culture (Bennet 1986; Kim & Ruben 1988; Tokusei 1994). For example, Tokusei (1994, pp. 541-576) identified a process of cultural adaptation among American and Japanese managers of a Japanese company in the US. It involves five stages known as (1) confusion (from the shock of cultural contact), (2) acknowledging the values of the other (obtaining points of comparison), (3) alternating viewpoints (viewing oneself and the other from the other's point of view),

(4) true empathy and re-evaluation of oneself (to find common ground), and (5) finally, I've got a clear picture — I'm happy here (keeping the best of both worlds). The process demonstrates that learning commences after experiencing the difficulties of intercultural contact. This is followed by acknowledgment of differences and understanding the other. Tokusei (1994) states that five to six years are required for staff to reach the fifth stage of feeling comfortable working in an intercultural work context.

As shown in Tokusei's (1994) process of cultural adaptation, confronting a person from the relevant different culture is crucial to enabling staff to learn to handle problematic situations on their own. What is important, therefore, is to alter the ways in which staff receive assistance from a cultural integrator. Specifically, staff, who have a problem, should seek advice from a cultural integrator on how to handle a situation and how to communicate with the person concerned instead of delegating a cultural integrator to resolve the problem. A cultural integrator is able to assist staff based on his/her knowledge, understanding, and experiences about both cultures. This way, the staff are able to obtain appropriate know-how to handle a situation and try it out. Through trial and error, they can eventually learn how to deal with problematic situations and acquire the necessary skills. This method can result in positive outcomes from both short-term and long-term perspectives.

It is important to encourage a cultural integrator who is playing the role of assisting other staff to learn how to handle the situation. This can be achieved by recruiting and selecting bicultural staff whose job description includes the role of cultural integrator. Explicitly describing this role assists staff who are capable of playing the role of cultural integrator, to acknowledge the role and understand the expectations placed on them. Their role should also be included in their performance appraisal, and their services should be rewarded. This will enhance their motivation to play the role effectively, and facilitate the nurturing of autonomous players of the cultural integrator role. Furthermore, the features of a cultural integrator such as a bicultural and bilingual background can be included in selection criteria at the time of recruitment of new staff to a company.



### **10.2.2 Personal Relationships and Increasing ‘Oneness’**

This study identified four groupings of staff in Japanese companies in Australia, and found fragmental features among staff in companies. This feature implies that Japanese companies are unintegrated and a mindset of ‘differences’ is present among staff. They are, however, in a position where each staff member is also a contributing member of the same company. Thus, unity exists among them although they may not be aware of this. An analogy is a flower composed of a number of petals. All the petals belong to the same flower, and they form a unity. The staff of Japanese companies fail to recognize this unity. Instead there is present a mentality of ‘you’ and ‘I’, and a lack of ‘we’ and ‘us’ among staff. This is confirmed by the finding that developing positive personal relationships was regarded as important by all staff types in the companies (see section 7.4). It is, therefore, imperative for Japanese companies in Australia to endeavor to establish positive personal relationships. Establishing such relationships is also recognized as important in overseas Japanese companies (Frankenstein & Hosseini 1988; Peltokorpi 2006; Yamanaka 1991).

Similarly, literature on coping strategies in an intercultural context acknowledges that establishing positive personal relationships is crucial for organizations (Feldman & Thomas 1992; Selmer 1999; Stahl 2000). Building positive personal relationships is related to providing staff with social support (Takagi 2003), and social support is acknowledged as essential for developing cooperative relationships as well as for alleviating role stress (Fugate et al. 2002; McMillan & Lopez 2001). Social support itself is an abstract term, and details as to what is entailed in providing social support are required to alleviate role stress (Sand & Miyazaki 2000).

The current study identified the strategies required to develop positive personal relationships as located in strategies of relationships building (see section 7.4). The strategies, which were perceived as effective by both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff, involved the treatment, care, and respect of others. These connect with feelings, senses, emotions, and mind. The creation of unity among staff in overseas Japanese companies is absolutely necessary. Transcending the existing mentality of ‘you’ and ‘I’ and moving towards an understanding of ‘we’ and ‘us’ is vital for the development of integrated companies. The strategies of relationships

building can erase the mentality of 'you' and 'I'. As claimed by Cox and Blake (1991, pp. 52-54), training is crucial to transforming a mono-cultural company into a successful intercultural company. Japanese management should, therefore, provide all staff with training on interpersonal skills thereby enabling them to understand how to treat others, and how to show care and respect to other staff members of a different cultural background.

Alternatively, the company should provide local staff with learning opportunities concerning their company's corporate culture, policies, and practices through sending them to Japan. This is suggested by Ishida (1988, pp. 78-79) who states that sending local managers to Head Office on a short trip to participate in training and attend meetings is an effective way to familiarize them with Japanese corporate culture and work practices. The strengths of the practice of sending local managers to Japan to develop an integrated organization have been identified by Paik and Sohn (2004). In a fashion similar to that of Paik and Sohn (2004), local staff could be sent to Japan for a few years as a part of an international assignment and returned home afterwards. This would enable non-Japanese local staff to learn and understand Japanese corporate culture and practices, and reduce intercultural misunderstandings between local managers and Japanese managers.

### **10.2.3 Communication Problems**

The current study has confirmed that communication problems still exist between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. These problems are also identified in a number of studies on white collar management in overseas Japanese companies (Byun & Ybema 2005; Paik & Sohn 2004; Taga 2004; Yamanaka 1991). Non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriates experience difficulties in understanding what other staff are trying to specify and what they are thinking (Bamber et al. 1992; Byun & Ybema 2005; Farid 1990). This leads to non-Japanese local managers experiencing uncertainty including how explanations, instructions, or directions are imparted by Japanese managers (Linowes 1993, p. 29; Shimada 1998, p. 7; Yamanaka 1991).

The current study has also revealed that the language barrier is a major stumbling block in intercultural communication, and has a negative influence on role ambiguity, role conflict, and fruitful implementation of coping strategies (see section 9.4.1.1). For instance, the language barrier impedes understanding in communication, and leads to communication difficulties, one of the role ambiguities. Similarly, the language barrier develops demarcations between local staff and Japanese staff, and local staff feel excluded from participation in information sharing and decision making. The language barrier, thus, influences the occurrence of role exclusion (a type of role conflict).

The implication is that no serious attention has been paid to language and communication issues by management of companies. This is supported by claims that little attention is given to studying language barriers in relation to intercultural management (Feely & Harzing 2004, pp. 5-6; Welch, et al. 2001, p. 193), and management's commitment to tackling the communication problem and improving communication skills is low (Pucik et al. 1989, p. 77; Saka 2004). Language competence is essential for successful management of intercultural companies (Feely & Harzing, 2004, p. 8; Takeuchi et al. 2002, p. 1237; Welch et al. 2001, p. 198). It is, therefore, imperative for Japanese management to acknowledge the gravity of the negative influence of communication problems in overseas Japanese companies, and direct their attention to overcoming the problems.

To overcome communication problems, management could provide both Japanese and non-Japanese local staff with training to assist them in intercultural communication skills, socio-cultural skills, and cultural understanding. Language training can also be provided to Japanese expatriate staff. This is supported by the claim of the importance of providing staff with training for enhancing both communication and intercultural skills for overseas Japanese companies (Yamanaka 1991).

Furthermore, overseas Japanese companies should be encouraged to improve their levels and frequency of communication, especially, between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. To achieve this, the development of a mechanism

where they are required to interact frequently is ideal. The effectiveness of such a mechanism is demonstrated by the findings that non-Japanese local managers, who carry out Japanese style informal talks in decision making processes, found the process to be beneficial. This is because it provided them with greater interaction opportunities with Japanese expatriate staff and they received a greater degree of information. It also raised their understanding of each other and assisted in developing positive relationships. The current study revealed that there were few spontaneous opportunities to interact informally between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff, and their level of communication was perceived to be imperfect. These findings indicate that, unless a mechanism for enhancing communication is provided by a company, it will not be possible to raise the level of communication and communication skills, understand each other, or build positive relationships. A communication mechanism which induces communication between local staff and Japanese managers is also recommended and it was explained that it provides powerful assistance in creating hybrid organizations for overseas Japanese companies (McNamara & Hayashi 1994). Hence, developing a communication mechanism is essential.

Communication mechanisms can include setting up a small group meeting where local staff and Japanese expatriate staff are able to interact in an informal and relaxed atmosphere. For Japanese people, saving face is important and expressing negative feelings or criticizing others in open communication is 'taboo' (Davies & Ikeno 2002, pp. 9-15). Communication in an informal and private atmosphere is crucial for people expressing '*honne*' (true feeling) as well as for conducting effective communication (Imai 1981, pp. 12-13). Given that the Japanese espouse a preference for one-on-one meetings rather than large group settings for overseas Japanese companies (Clark & Lipp 1998, p. 24), regular small group meetings should be set up in companies.

Overseas Japanese companies expect staff to spend time together after office hours, and this is crucial for building harmony and personal relations (Selmer 2001a, p. 237). Communication can enhance reciprocity and positive personal relationships, and in particular, informal communication is essential for Japanese companies

(Goldman 1994, p. 33). These claims suggest that management should make an effort to encourage informal communication to occur between local staff and Japanese staff. Organizing social gatherings, such as Friday drinks, would enhance informal communication between them.

Furthermore, introducing a mentoring system between Japanese managers and local staff would develop communication between them, and raise understanding about each other and the corporate culture. Thus, it would assist in establishing personal relationships. A mentoring system is recognized as effective for enhancing relationships between local staff and Japanese managers of overseas Japanese companies (Lincoln et al. 1995, p. 432). A mentoring system is, thus, a promising method not only for increasing communication but also for developing positive relationships between local staff and Japanese staff.

### **10.3 LIMITATIONS**

The current study aims to identify methods for improving people management in Japanese companies in Australia through exploring role stress and those coping strategies perceived as effective by both non-Japanese local and Japanese staff. It, does not, however, provide generalizations applicable to all overseas Japanese companies. As discussed in section 3.2.2, a lack of generalization of findings is a major challenge in qualitative studies (Zalan & Lesis 2004, p. 520). Hence, limitations exist in the generalization of the findings of this study. The limitations are discussed in this section.

### **10.3.1 Sample Size**

The number of participants in the current study was 68 of which 23 were non-Japanese local staff and 45 were Japanese staff. Among the non-Japanese local staff, there were 10 managers and 13 employees in non-managerial positions. Among Japanese staff, there were 31 expatriate staff and 14 local staff. The majority of local Japanese staff (11 out of 14 informants) held non-managerial positions. Thus, the sample size of each staff type (e.g. manager versus non-manager) was not sufficiently large to reveal any significant findings. However, it was reported in the Findings chapters that local Japanese staff experienced some form of information shortage (a type of role ambiguity, see Chapter 5), and role exclusion (a type of role conflict, see Chapter 6), and that they held the perception that Japanese expatriate staff are abrasive (see Chapter 7). While these findings were reported in the thesis, they cannot be generalizable due to the small number of local Japanese staff who expressed these concerns. Hence, future research should examine the above issues from a larger sample set of locally hired Japanese staff.

### **10.3.2 Level of Analysis**

The current study involved an individual level of analysis and analysis at an organizational level was not conducted. It is, therefore, unknown whether the findings would yield the same results if the individual analysis was compared to the culture of the organization and included a perspective from Head Office level.

Moreover, the level of analysis in the current study examined role stress from the perspective of the informant. This, the analysis was conducted from the perspective of only one of the parties comprising a role set (role sender and focal person). It is, therefore, uncertain whether the perceptions of one side of the pair would match those of the other.

Dyadic analysis has been recommended for investigating employee attitudes and performance (Chenhall 1986) and service satisfaction using Role Theory (Solomon et al. 1985). Analysis relying on a single party may restrict generalizability of the

findings (Homburg & Stock 2004), and research focusing on dyadic relationship can assist in increasing the generalizability of the findings.

Future research, therefore, should be conducted on dyadic analysis of role stress and perceived effective coping strategies among all staff in overseas Japanese companies. This would provide comprehensive understanding of their role stress experiences and coping strategies perceived as effective. For example, it would provide an understanding of whether one side of the party, side A, impacts on the other side of the party, side B of a role set in the manner described by side A. A dyadic study also enables the behavior of role occupants to be assessed from self and from others simultaneously. In doing so, the dyadic study can minimize bias.

### **10.3.3 Gender of Expatriate Staff**

The current study revealed that to be an expatriate staff member was a source of role stress in itself (see section 9.2.4). Japanese expatriate staff who participated in the current study were all male, and the findings of this study, therefore, are not necessarily applicable to female Japanese expatriate staff. Differences between female and male expatriates have been identified (Fisher 1998; Tung 2004; Varma et al. 2006). In comparison to male expatriates, American women expatriates are better able to develop good personal relationships with host country nationals and clients (Fisher 1998). Host country nationals in India prefer female American expatriates to male American expatriates (Varma et al. 2006), and Tung (2004, p. 251) states “*so-called feminine characteristics and traits might render them particularly suitable for relocations to particular countries.*” Hence, if the current study had investigated both female and male Japanese expatriate staff, different findings may have resulted. However, it would also be of interest to see what results were obtained from a study investigating female Japanese expatriate staff in overseas Japanese companies.

#### **10.4 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

In association with the limitations presented in the previous section (see section 10.3), the findings of this study highlight the need for future research to address more specific aspects of the findings for further elucidation. This section discusses directions for future research.

First, as stated in the previous section (see section 10.3) there are limitations to the findings of the current study. These are sample size, level of analysis, and the gender of expatriate staff. Future research should consider improving these areas when researching white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies.

Second, future study should be carried out in a different intercultural context. In particular, they should focus on Japanese companies in Asia where Japan's overseas direct investment has shown a significant increase in recent years (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2005). In contrast to the cultural distance between Australia and Japan in the current study, the cultural distance of two Asian countries such as Hong Kong and Japan, or Taiwan and Japan, which are closer in the level of collectivism and power distance (Hofstede 1991), should be studied in future research.

A feature of collectivism is reflected in the importance of maintaining '*wa*' (harmony) in Japan (Kobayashi 1997; Tudor et al. 1996). Developing group harmony is crucial in Japanese society (Clarke & Lipp 1998, p. 29; Kagawa 1997, pp. 54-61; Kobayashi 1997; Tudor et al. 1996; Whitehill 1991, p. 51). In this situation, individuals behave in compliance with their seniors (Doi 1989, 2004; Mroczkowski & Hanaoka 1997; Nakane 1970). This is reflected by employees' subordination to corporate goals (Whitehill 1991, p. 51) and long working hours in Japanese companies (Byun & Ybema 2005). Japanese managers on international assignments, who are accustomed to a work environment of long working hours, experience dissatisfaction with local staff who do not show collaborative work attitudes by working overtime (Byun & Ybema 2005). In this manner, the expectations between Japanese managers and local staff in overseas Japanese companies do not coincide. These unmet expectations relate to the feature of collectivism, the maintenance of



'*wa*' (harmony). Unmet expectations between role sender and role occupant refer to role conflict (Katz & Kahn 1978; Gross et al. 1966, p. 288). Hence, role conflict in an intercultural interaction context could result in role stress.

The current study found that both local Japanese staff and expatriates expect non-Japanese local staff to exhibit similar work attitudes as Japanese employees in Japan. This led non-Japanese local staff to be regarded as being incompetent in playing their role, namely, role incompetence (a role conflict type). This role conflict may not be applicable for overseas Japanese companies in Hong Kong or Taiwan as employees in these countries have a closer cultural distance with Japan. Therefore, findings from the current research may not be applicable in these countries. Furthermore, the current study did not include non-Australian local staff, such as third country nationals, as informants. Inclusion of Asian local staff could further enhance understanding as to staff's role stress experiences and the coping strategies they perceive as effective.

Third, the current study identified a lack of integration among staff along with ambiguities in Japanese companies in Australia. Cultural diversity in an organization is regarded as providing a company with advantages (Cox 1991; Cox & Blake 1991; Miroshnik 2002; Pablos 2004) such as enhancing marketing, expanding organizational flexibility, improving creativity and problem-solving skills (Cox & Blake 1991). Similarly, ambiguity can also provide significant benefits to a company (Alvesson 2001; Mukaidono 1988, pp. 202-205). It is a source of knowledge creation and allows for the development of innovation (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1996). Ambiguity is, therefore, extremely important. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996) state that it is possible for overseas Japanese companies to introduce the Japanese company's practices of making efficient use of ambiguity. They, however, do not explain how this could be achieved. Hence, future research should investigate ways to develop subsidiaries into innovative and creative organizations.

## **10.5 CONCLUSION**

Management of overseas Japanese companies is recognized as successful, and this is referred to as the 'bright side' of Japanese management overseas (Yoshihara 1989). It is usually applied to the management of blue-collar employees in manufacturing industries; the management of white collar employees in overseas Japanese companies, in contrast, is considered to be a failure and is referred to as the 'dark side' (Yoshihara 1989). This contradictory phenomenon was the starting point for the current research, and the dissertation reflects the researcher's search for effective management principles that could shed light on the 'dark side' of Japanese management. By doing so, the unsuccessful elements of Japanese management overseas can be elucidated and employed to transform failure into success. This was the aim of this study.

In pursuing the above aim, management and non-management white collar staff of Japanese companies in Australia were chosen. Investigation was carried out on all types of staff including non-Japanese local staff, Japanese expatriate staff, and locally hired Japanese staff. Role Theory (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz & Kahn 1978) was adopted as the theoretical lens for this study.

This research has provided in-depth understanding of role stress and the coping strategies perceived to be effective in overseas Japanese companies. It has also offered an understanding as to why and how role stress was experienced and the coping strategies perceived as effective. It has also made a number of theoretical contributions.

First, the current research has identified role stress types which had not been acknowledged in the literature on Role Theory in an intercultural context. These include language competency, the need to guess, and lack of cultural understanding in role ambiguity. In role conflict, role exclusion and liaison role conflict involved junior Japanese expatriate staff's influence over matters for which their non-Japanese local superiors were officially responsible. Similarly, coping strategies that had not previously been identified as effective were discovered. These are indirect active coping and hiring bicultural staff.

Second, sources of role stress in Japanese companies in Australia were also uncovered. These are communication problems, work culture, cultural distance, and expatriate positions. These sources are peculiar to companies in an intercultural context and to companies that have a Head Office overseas. The findings, thus, suggest that sources of role stress in a mono-cultural context are not necessarily applicable to an intercultural context. The findings support the argument that the applicability of Role Theory developed in a US based context is questionable in international or intercultural contexts (Peterson et al. 1995; Shenker & Zeira 1992).

Third, the current study has also demonstrated that role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) induces feelings of discontent about other staff, and that role stress influences the occurrence of fragmentation among staff in Japanese companies in Australia. This was revealed by the findings that Japanese companies in Australia are composed of four groupings of staff.

Fourth, as mentioned above, Japanese companies in Australia were composed of four groupings of staff. This result differs from the recognition that overseas Japanese companies are composed of two groupings, local staff and Japanese expatriate staff (Dedoussis 1990, 1994; Kidahashi 1987; White & Trevor 1983). It demonstrates that overseas Japanese companies have been evolving, and it is imperative for management to consider these four groupings when planning and implementing new management practices and organizational changes.

Fifth, this research has identified a link between role stress and coping strategies whereby role ambiguity, role conflict, and coping strategies are inter-related. Thus, the implementation of coping strategies must be made in association with the experiences of role ambiguity and role conflict.

This research has also provided practical applications for management and future research directions. These provide clues for improving white collar management of overseas Japanese companies, which has been recognized as the 'dark side' as opposed to the successful blue-collar management known as the 'bright side' (Yoshihara 1989).

In contrast to the 1980s, research interest in white collar management of overseas Japanese companies has decreased. It is hoped that this doctoral dissertation provides an impetus for researchers and practitioners to conduct further investigations into management and non-management white collar staff in overseas Japanese companies. It is the hope of the researcher that eventually all employees and managers in overseas Japanese companies will be incorporated into the 'bright side'.

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol: Questions for the Interviews with Local Staff

1. What are the decision-making processes?
  - Are there any other processes or methods besides formal processes? If so, what are they?
  - What can you suggest to improve the current situation?
2. How is information shared in your company?
  - Do you obtain information other than by the formal processes? If so, how?
  - What can you suggest to improve the current situation?
3. What are your official duties as described in your job description?
  - Are there times when you conduct jobs which are not described in your job description?
  - Is there anything that you want more clarification about in order to know exactly what you are required to do? If yes, please explain.
  - Please recall any incidents where you felt uncertain, confused or unhappy about conducting your duties.
  - What can you suggest to improve the current mechanisms for carrying out jobs?
4. Are there any things that you want to have a clearer understanding of regarding what people in this company expect of you? If yes,
  - What are these things?
  - Please provide examples.
  - How do you cope with them?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
5. Are there any things that you find difficult or that make you feel unhappy when working with Japanese? If yes,
  - What are these things?
  - Please provide examples.
  - How do you cope with them?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
6. Tell me the things about working at a Japanese company that were different from what you had expected.

7. Which of their ways of doing things did you find difficult to accept, or difficult to understand why they were done that way?
  - Do you have any examples?
  - How do you feel about this?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
8. In communicating with Japanese,
  - What are the common modes of communication? e.g. e-mail, face-to-face
  - Where do you usually communicate?
  - Do you think you communicate with Japanese sufficiently?
  - Are there times when you find it difficult to get your ideas across to the Japanese? If yes,
    - What are they?
    - Do you have any examples?
    - How do you cope with it?
    - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
9. If you were to give advice to someone (non-Japanese) who is going to work for a Japanese company for the first time, what advice would you give to them?

## **Interview Protocol: Questions for the Interviews with Japanese Staff**

1. What are the decision-making processes?
  - Are there any other processes or methods besides formal processes? If so, what are they?
  - What can you suggest to improve the current situation?
2. How is information shared in your company?
  - Do you obtain information other than by the formal processes? If so, how?
  - What can you suggest to improve the current situation?
3. What are your official duties as described in your job description?
  - Are there times when you conduct jobs which are not described in your job description?
  - Is there anything that you want more clarification about in order to know exactly what you are required to do? If yes, please explain.
  - Please recall any incidents where you felt uncertain, confused or unhappy about conducting your duties.
  - What can you suggest to improve the current mechanisms for carrying out jobs?
4. Are there any things that you want to have a clearer understanding of regarding what people in this company expect of you? If yes,
  - What are these things?
  - Please provide examples.
  - How do you cope with them?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situations?
5. Are there any things that you find difficult or that make you feel unhappy when working with non-Japanese staff? If yes,
  - What are these things?
  - Please provide examples.
  - How do you cope with them?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situations?
6. Tell me the things about working with non-Japanese staff in this company that were different from what you had expected?

7. Which of their ways of doing things did you find difficult to accept, or difficult to understand why they were done that way?
  - Do you have any examples?
  - How do you feel about this?
  - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
8. In communicating with non-Japanese staff,
  - What are the common modes of communication? e.g. e-mail, face-to-face
  - Where do you usually communicate?
  - Do you think you communicate with Japanese sufficiently?
  - Are there times when you find it difficult to get your ideas across to the non-Japanese staff? If yes,
    - What are they?
    - Do you have any examples?
    - How do you cope with it?
    - What do you think is the best way to improve the situation?
9. If you were to give advice to a Japanese person who is going to work for a Japanese company in Australia for the first time, what advice would you give?



## **Appendix B**

### **Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project “Challenges in achieving an integrative approach to people management in Japanese companies in Australia” being conducted by Kazue Okamoto, a PhD student in the School of Management at the University of Technology, Sydney.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore how Japanese firms in Australia manage local white collar employees in adapting or synthesizing their concepts and approaches when they operate in Australia.

I understand that my participation in this research will involve participating in a semi-structured interview of approximately 40 minutes, as well as giving the researcher access to non confidential documents relating to the organizational activities. I further understand my identity will remain confidential in any publications or outputs arising from the research, and that the interviews will be audio-taped for later analyses.

I further understand that I can contact Kazue Okamoto, telephone number (02) 9385-3749 or her supervisor Associate Professor Graham Pratt, telephone number (02) 9514-5167, if I have any concerns about the research or wish to discuss any issue related to the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason.

I agree that Kazue Okamoto has answered all my questions fully and clearly, and I understand that issues of participant privacy and confidentiality will be stressed throughout the research project. I agree that this participation is completely voluntary, and will not affect employment in any way. As a participant in this research, I understand that the researcher will offer me the transcript of this interview for verification at a later stage upon request, to ensure that it reflects my true understanding of the phenomenon.

I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Signed by

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Witnessed by

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer, Ms Susanna Davis, telephone number (02) 9514-1279. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

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