

**Managing People across Cultures
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**Investigating Role Stress Experiences of Local Hired Japanese and Non-Japanese
Staff in Japanese Subsidiaries in Australia**

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines role stress (comprised of role ambiguity and role conflict) experienced by 14 local hired Japanese (LJ) and 23 non-Japanese (NJ) staff in Japanese companies in Australia. Expatriates (N=31) were also interviewed in order to gather information regarding their work relationships with LJ and NJ staff. Both LJ and NJ staff experienced role stress caused by the low level of reliance placed by expatriates and language barriers. NJ staff experienced two additional types of role ambiguity due to their lack of cultural understanding about Japan. LJ staff experienced two types of role conflict which were not experienced by NJ local staff. These were caused by cultural understanding about Australia and their Japanese cultural heritage and understanding of the society and organizational processes. The current study showed that understanding of host country and parent country cultures could reduce role ambiguity. Understanding of host country and parent country cultures could cause role conflict. These findings show a link between culture and role stress experiences, and suggest that cultural understanding could have positive and negative consequences on role stress.

Investigating Role Stress Experiences of Local Hired Japanese Staff and Non-Japanese Staff in Japanese Subsidiaries in Australia

The number of Japanese living abroad has grown exponentially reaching one million for the first time in 2005 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006a). Australia is the fifth most popular country among the various countries where Japanese reside (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006b). As of January 2006, more than 52,000 Japanese were living in Australia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006b). The rapidly increasing number of Japanese residing in Australia indicates an increase of corporate environment where both Japanese and Australian work together on a daily basis within the same company. It has, therefore, become increasingly important to mitigate the problems that have arisen in managing their employees in Japanese companies in Australia.

Overseas Japanese companies experience challenges and problems in managing their white collar employees within the host countries (Byun & Ybema, 2005; Taga, 2004; Yoshihara, 2001). Studies on these issues in overseas Japanese companies have been carried out focusing on the management problems concerning non-Japanese local staff (e.g. Byun & Ybema, 2005; Taga, 2004). No study has been carried out to investigate the challenges and problems of local hired Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. The current study, therefore, explores role stress of local hired Japanese staff and compares them with the role stress experience of non-Japanese local staff.

PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY LOCAL STAFF IN OVERSEAS JAPANESE COMPANIES

Past studies find that white collar non-Japanese local staff experience problems in working for overseas Japanese companies (e.g. Taga, 2004; Yoshihara, 2001). Three types of problems have been identified. First, communication is one of the common problems (e.g. Bamber, Shadur & Howell, 1992; Byun & Ybema, 2005). It involves clashes of communication styles between people in the West and Japan (Hall & Hall, 1987; Peltokopri, 2006) and language competency (Byun & Ybema, 2005; Yoshihara, 2001). Local managers perceive that Japanese managers' explanations or directions are imprecise or ambiguous (Linowes, 1993: 29; Shimada, 1998: 7). Communication problems incur lack of clarity (Linowes, 1993; Shimada, 1998), communication (Takeuchi, Yun

& Russell, 2002: 1237), and information about company's corporate plan and policies (Bamber et al., 1992). The lack of clarity, communication, and information are key components of role ambiguity (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn & Snoek, 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978). The communication problems are thus directly related to role ambiguity.

Another problem involves uncertainty in relation to the scope of one's duties, and the way tasks are distributed among staff (Ishida, 1986, 1994; Hayashi, 1996). Non-Japanese local staff members experience job demarcation as failing to be explicit and authority as being extremely low (Ishida, 1986, 1994; Shimada, 1998: 7). The result is that local staff have to infer what the Japanese manager is thinking and expecting of them feeling uncomfortable and confused (Pucik, Hanada & Fifield, 1989: 45-46). They are unable to grasp what is expected of them (Trevor, 1989).

Similar to the dissatisfaction of local staff, Japanese managers resent the need to repeat instructions every time they wish tasks to be undertaken (Trevor, 1989). Japanese managers are accustomed to a high level of job flexibility involving overlapping jobs and collective authority, with support received from colleagues (Wooldridge, 1995). This job flexibility also includes overtime, and Japanese expatriate managers expect local staff to work longer hours (Byun & Ybema, 2005). Japanese managers are, therefore, discontent with local staff's 'nine to five' mentality where they leave work at the prescribed work completion time (Byun & Ybema, 2005). Understanding expectations on scope of duties is thus elusive and ambiguous matters for local staff. Ambiguity and uncertainty are the central themes of role ambiguity (Hardy, 1978: 82), and their experience is directly related to role ambiguity.

Third, non-Japanese local staff are disgruntled with the lack of participation in the process of information sharing (Bamber et al., 1992) and decision making (Simon, 1991; Yamanaka, 1991). In some cases, even senior non-Japanese local managers and or executives are excluded (Simon, 1991). Consequently, non-Japanese local managers experience feelings of estrangement and frustration (Bamber et al., 1992; Simon, 1991; Lincoln, Kerbo & Wittenhagen, 1995: 435; Yamanaka, 1991). Their stressful experiences indicate that there is little correspondence in expectations between Japanese expatriate managers and non-Japanese local staff. Role conflict involves unmet expectation between role sender and focal person (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

Thus, the experiences of non-Japanese local staff in overseas Japanese companies are connected to role conflict (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978).

JAPANESE COMPANIES IN JAPAN

In relation to the problems in overseas Japanese companies reviewed above, Japanese companies in Japan have contrasting features. In Japanese companies in Japan, intense communication among staff including after work hours at both inside and outside workplace is emphasized (Ala & Cordeiro, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1996). In decision making process, many important issues are discussed in the informal communication (Ala & Cordeiro 1999). The process involves a high degree of staff participation from lower rank employees to top management (Ala & Cordeiro, 1999; Davies & Ikeno, 2002). Job demarcation in Japanese companies is vague (Ishida, 1994; Shimada, 1998: 7). This is because there is an informal mechanism where multiple staff require participating autonomously in the duties not explicitly described in their job description (Ishida, 1994; Shimada, 1998: 7). The mechanism entails communication among staff (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1996: 14). It also facilitates to build common cognitive grounds and increases a level of information sharing among staff (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1996: 14). Hence, this intense communication reflects high level of information sharing. It indicates high level of participation among staff in making decisions and sharing information in Japanese companies in Japan.

In communication among Japanese, '*sasshi*' (inferring) is indispensable (Ishii, 1996). Japanese people use inference to understand what is not articulated (Ishii, 1996). Decision making process in Japanese companies also involves inferring, which assists to develop new ideas and directions (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1996). Explicit instruction is not necessary in Japanese companies in Japan (Hayashi, 2004: 364). It indicates that Japanese staff is skilled in understanding about each other without clear and explicit articulation. Thus, communication problem found in overseas Japanese companies does not exist among Japanese staff in Japanese companies in Japan.

Communication (Taga, 2004), unclear job demarcation (Ishida, 1994), and lack of non-Japanese local staff's participation in sharing information (Bamber et al., 1992) and making decision (Lincoln et al., 1995) are problems of non-Japanese local staff in overseas Japanese companies. The review in this section shows that the three types of problems in overseas Japanese companies do not exist in Japanese companies in Japan.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Sources of the three problems stated above are acknowledged as involving culture. In relation to communication problems, Hall (1989) distinguishes culture according to context. Literature describing communication styles in the West and Japan demonstrate Hall's cultural classification (1989) where Western style communication is described as direct, straightforward, and explicit in contrast to the Japanese style of communication (Hall & Hall, 1987; Peltokopri, 2006; Yashiro, 1998). It, thus, illustrates that the communication problems in overseas Japanese companies is related to culture.

The problem on uncertainty about one's scope of duties is also explained linking to culture. Job distribution is unclear, and heavy reliance is placed on implicit rules in Japanese companies (e.g. Hayashi, 1996; Ishida, 1994; Shimada, 1998: 7). Ishida (1994) explains that there are broad or shared duties in which peers, senior staff, or groups participate. This requires a high level of flexibility. In contrast, the duties of staff members are explicitly described in Western companies, and there is a clear demarcation of duties (Ishida, 1994). The broad or shared duties found in Japanese companies are thus ambiguous for Western staff, and they do not recognize that they are expected to carry out those broad duties (Ishida, 1994).

Hayashi (1996) asserts that the role ambiguity of non-Japanese local staff in overseas Japanese company occurs due to cultural difference. He explains that the duties which require the involvement of multiple personnel to carry them out are clear from perspectives of Japanese staff. However, the duties are not clear from the perspective of Western staff. Correspondingly, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1996: 14) as well as Murayama (1984) claim that there is a fundamental difference in the understanding as to what constitutes 'sharing' between Western and Japanese people. These arguments suggest the non-Japanese local staff's problem involving one's scope of duties has a linkage with culture.

The third problem, lack of participation of local staff, is also regarded as having a cultural linkage. Head Office heavily relies 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, Gibbons &

Schoch, 2006; Yoshihara, 2001). Ishida (1988: 65) argues that Head Office relies on local staff who have a good understanding of the organization's corporate culture, Japanese culture, and language. 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: 67).

Haitani (1990: 247), on the other hand, claims that 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. He explains that expatriate managers from 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. These characteristics require cultural understanding about Japan. Ishida (1988: 65) and Haitani (1990: 247) claim that insufficient participation in decision making by local staff is linked to their understanding of the parent country and organizational cultures. In sum, the three problem types in overseas Japanese company, therefore, are related to cultural differences between the West and Japan, and lack of cultural understanding can bring about problems among local staff in overseas Japanese companies.

Lack of cultural understanding of the host country has a negative impact on expatriate assignments (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Pires, Stanton & Ostefeld, 2006). Success or failure of managing overseas subsidiaries is affected by understanding about culture (Elenkov & Tonya, 2006). Culture and communication co-exist and the two are inseparable (Ishii, Okabe & Kube, 1996 : 58-59; Haslett, 1989). In intercultural communication, understanding another party's culture is crucial (Ishii et al., 1996; Yashiro, 1998). Communication influences business practices (Haslett, 1989) and understanding about cultural difference is important for business negotiation between Japanese and American (Brett & Okumura, 1998). The literature suggest that culture influences business and management, and lack of understanding about culture can incur negative impact on cross cultural management. In other words, those who have a good understanding about culture have less problem comparing with those who lack understanding about culture. Applying it to overseas Japanese companies, local hired Japanese staff is equipped with an excellent understanding of the societal and organizational culture in Japan, similar to the understanding of Japanese expatriates. In this instance, local hired Japanese staff experience less problem comparing with that of non-Japanese local staff under the overseas

Japanese companies.

People sharing the same cultural background have common understandings and people of different cultural background interpret the same incident differently (Hoecklin, 1995: 24-25). Similarly, people sharing the experience tend to have the shared thinking patterns (Schein, 1997). These claims suggest that local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff experience different types of problem working for overseas Japanese companies. Our literature review has not found any study which has examined the problems experienced of local hired Japanese staff in overseas Japanese companies. Therefore, further research is required to provide better understanding of the organizational experience of this group of employees in overseas Japanese companies.

ROLE STRESS

Role stress can be explained by using Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978) and it is comprised of two constructs, role ambiguity and role conflict. Role conflict is defined as incompatible expectations between role sender and focal person (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Latack, 1981). Role ambiguity is defined as lack of information or clarity (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1978) as well as uncertainty in relation to one's role (Katz & Kahn, 1978; King & King, 1990). Role stress examines role occupant's subjective feelings to understand patterns of behavior within given contexts (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Thomas & Biddle, 1968). Exploring role stress of staff in organization thus enables to understand how they work and what they perceives as frustrating and why.

Among the numerous studies applying Role Theory, the majority have been conducted in a mono-cultural context (Kahn et al., 1964; Siegal, 1992). Studies examining Role Theory in an international or intercultural context are limited (Peterson, et al., 1995; Shenkar & Zeira, 1992). Among the limited studies, cultural influence on role stress is identified from a study exploring role stress of CEOs in international joint venture (Shenker & Zeira, 1992). Understanding about culture is also important for expatriates managing overseas subsidiaries (e.g. Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Pires et al., 2006). These claims thus suggest the existence of a link between role stress and culture. Little is known about role stress in international and intercultural situations (Peterson et al., 1995; Shenkar & Zeira, 1992). In particular, there is little research on locally hired parent country nationals (that is local hired Japanese staff), and whether they experience similar or different role stress in comparison to host country

national staff. Hence, the current study seeks to address the following research question:

Are there any similarities and differences in the level of role stress between local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff in Japanese companies in Australia? If so, what are they? Why do such similarities and differences exist?

METHOD

The current study investigates the level of role stress experienced by local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff working in Japanese companies in Australia. This study is closely affiliated to induction, exploration, and description to answer the research questions. Thus a qualitative approach has been selected. Data were collected from multiple sources including in-depth interviews, archive records, direct observation, documentation, and field notes. This is to assist in expanding evidence and corroboration and to increase reliability and validity (Yin, 1994: 86-92). An effective way of verifying a hypothesis and reducing researcher bias is to count the number of phenomena (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 215-216). This approach is adopted in this study, and data are analyzed by counting the frequency of text segments under the code and making comparisons.

In-depth interviews were conducted on white collar local hired Japanese and non-Japanese staff holding managerial and non-managerial position in Japanese companies in Australia. In total, 68 interviews were carried out from 25 organizations. We interviewed 31 expatriates, 14 local hired Japanese staff (4 male and 10 female). Only three local hired Japanese staff held managerial position, and they were all male. The total number of non-Japanese local staff participated in the current study was 23 (14 male and 9 female), and 10 of them held managerial position. Among the 10 non-Japanese local managers, seven informants were male. All local hired Japanese staff were born, brought up, and educated in Japan. They also had work experience in Japan. They were thus familiar with Japanese corporate life. They were either permanent residents of Australia or held a work permit visa sponsored by their employer when they were locally hired in Australia.

FINDINGS

This study revealed that role ambiguity and role conflict were experienced by both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff. Both local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff experienced two types of

role ambiguity, resulting from insufficient English competence and information shortage. Insufficient English competence refers to communication difficulties between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff. About 51 percent of local hired Japanese staff admitted they have insufficient competence in English. Non-Japanese local staff also acknowledged the problem. In particular, 40 percent of non-Japanese managers experienced communication difficulties due to the language barrier.

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 clear argument. But may be if I am asking English speaking person I might be able to argue a bit more clearly. But sometimes it's a bit hard.

(Non-Japanese Local Employee: JTRIA, Date: 13/06/2002)

The second type of role ambiguity, information shortage, involves lack of information given to local staff from Japanese expatriate staff. This resulted in feelings of unrest, annoyance, and uncertainty. The results found that 35.7 percent of local hired Japanese staff and 47.8 percent of non-Japanese local staff were dissatisfied with the level of information they received. Correspondingly, approximately 55 percent of Japanese expatriate staff showed acknowledgement about the lower level of information sharing with staff in their companies in Australia. Nearly 33 percent of Japanese expatriate staff expressed their own hesitation in imparting information, especially important information, to local staff (local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff). This was due to Japanese expatriate staff's fear that local staff would 'leak' company information to outsiders. The reason was related to the high turnover of local staff.

It will be problematic if they (local) leak the information somewhere, other companies, you know. If they find out what we are thinking, then, we have to work hard to blot it out. It's a really troublesome.

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

In addition to the two types of role ambiguity presented above, non-Japanese local staff experienced additional two types of role ambiguity. These were caused by differences in communication style and cross-cultural understanding. About 50 percent of non-Japanese local staff admitted that there were stumbling blocks to being

able to conduct a candid conversation with Japanese expatriate staff. 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 of such as 'harmony', 'accepting', and 'avoidance'.

Basically because Japanese people are not confrontational, and if someone comes up to them and want 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: 28/2/2002)

Approximately half of the non-Japanese local staff participated in this study admitted to having an insufficient understanding of Japanese culture, including corporate culture and customs. 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.

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 ah blend in immediately. There are a number of cultural challenges.

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

Correspondingly, more than half the Japanese staff interviewed mentioned this issue. This lack of understanding about culture and companies gave rise to annoyance, misunderstanding, and uncertainty for both non-Japanese local staff and Japanese staff.

In role conflict, both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff experienced role exclusion, especially in relation to the insufficient opportunities to participate in decision making. The results revealed that 47.8 percent of non-Japanese local staff expressed their discontent about this. In contrast, 21.4 percent of local hired Japanese

staff experienced role exclusion. Among local hired Japanese staff, however, there was a large gap between local hired Japanese managers (66.7 percent) and employees (only 9.1 percent). This study found that local hired staff, in particular non-Japanese local manager (50 percent), had a strong desire to be allowed to participate more fully in business activities, especially decision making.

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)

Beside role exclusion, local hired Japanese staff experienced two additional types of role conflict, namely, role incompetence and role overload. Role incompetence concerns the perceptions of both local hired Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff on the role competence of non-Japanese local staff. Approximately half the local hired Japanese staff participated in this study regarded their fellow non-Japanese local staff's level of competence as unsatisfactory. It is nearly 15 percent greater than the ratio of Japanese expatriate staff. The reasons for the occurrence of role incompetence were associated with job flexibility, especially conducting tasks promptly, keeping a deadline even if it necessitated local staff to stay back late. Japanese staff (both local hired Japanese and expatriate) regarded keeping deadline and punctuality as critical. They thus made an effort to be on time especially with request from Japan.

People in the Head Office are very Japanese. So, their expectations of us (local hired Japanese staff) are also Japanese. For instance, keeping the deadline properly. After all, we need to do things in the Japanese manner.

(Local hired Japanese Staff: JFUA, Date: 6/04/2002)

This study revealed that Japanese staff has high job flexibility. Approximately 78 percent of local hired Japanese staff understood that if necessary, they might have to take on a job other than what is described in their job

description, or a job that might not be directly related to their areas of responsibility. This illustrates that the work attitudes of local hired Japanese staff were similar to Japanese employees in Japan.

Role overload was experienced only by local hired Japanese staff. It is about the degree of overload in role expectations. Results revealed that 64.3 percent of local hired Japanese staff felt that Japanese expatriate staff place higher expectations on them compared with the expectation they place on non-Japanese local staff. This caused role overload. Local hired Japanese staff also said that they sometimes had to take over a task from a non-Japanese local colleague. This occurred partly because non-Japanese local staff did not carry it out promptly. This is related to role incompetence where Japanese staff regarded non-Japanese local staff as lacking of flexible work attitudes.

Everyone [local hired 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 hired Japanese staff feels this way more or less.

(Local hired Japanese Staff: KOTI, Date: 20/05/2002)

This study identified two findings which explain why this was happening. First, nearly half of the local hired Japanese staff (42.9 percent) mentioned that Japanese expatriate staff preferred to ask them extra tasks instead of non-Japanese local staff. Second, although the ratio was not high, 16.1 percent of Japanese expatriate staff specifically admitted this. The reasons why Japanese expatriate staff found it more comfortable to ask local hired Japanese staff were their ease in using Japanese language and the convenience of a shared cultural background. Expatriate staff were cognizant that local hired Japanese staff had work experiences in Japan and understand how companies operate in Japan. This indicates that Japanese expatriate staff assume that local hired Japanese colleagues will understand the Japanese expatriates' expectations and their expectations will be accepted by local hired Japanese staff.

I have a Japanese secretary over there (in addition to non-Japanese local secretary). She takes care of different areas, but you know. Because she is Japanese, it's easier to ask her things. ... There is a

language problem (with non-Japanese local staff), you see. I can't tell my 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: TTSUO, Date: 16/08/2002)

The findings suggest that Japanese managers tended to have higher expectations of local hired Japanese staff in terms of work commitment and job flexibility. They expected local hired Japanese staff to demonstrate a similar work attitude to employees in Japan. It includes doing overtime and beyond whatever was outlined in the job description.

In sum, role ambiguity and role conflict were experienced by both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff. Although they have some shared experiences in role ambiguity and role conflict, their overall role stress experience did not coincide.

DISCUSSION

This study identified role stress types experienced by local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff. The findings revealed similarities and differences in their role stress experiences between them. The following table displays summary of the findings. It compares the characteristics of local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff including work attitudes and other areas which illustrate their characteristics. As illustrated in Table 1, some role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) types are experienced by both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff. While, other types of role stress (role ambiguity and role conflict) are experienced by either one of them.

(Table 1 goes about here.)

Similarities

There are two role ambiguity types experienced by both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff. It includes communication difficulties due to insufficient English language competence and information shortage. In role conflict, role exclusion was the only shared role conflict type between them.

The experiences of information shortage (a role ambiguity type) and role exclusion (a role conflict type) illustrate that Japanese management have a certain extent of hesitation to allow local staff to participate in the company's business activities. It suggests that the level of reliance Japanese management place on both local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff is low. The findings support the previous studies stating about the low level of reliance on local staff (e.g. Chung et al., 2006; Taga, 2004; Yoshihara, 2001). The 'local staff' of these studies refers to non-Japanese local staff. The results confirm that the low level of reliance on non-Japanese local staff identified in the previous studies (e.g. Chung et al., 2006; Taga, 2004; Yoshihara, 2001) is applicable for local hired Japanese staff.

Ishida (1988: 65) claims that a good understanding of the company's corporate culture, Japanese culture, and language are essential for local staff in order to receive reliance by Head Office. Haitani (1990: 247), on the other hand, argues that the employment status of being employed by Head Office determines the level of reliance placed by Head Office. He addresses the needs of knowledge about the company, its people, and corporate culture in Japan. These types of knowledge are held by expatriates and are not obtainable unless they had worked in Head Office (Haitani, 1990: 247). Local hired Japanese staff participated in this study did not have the knowledge as they did not have work experiences in Head Office. They, however, satisfied the requirements of understanding about Japanese culture and language (Ishida, 1988: 65). They also had general understanding about workplaces of Japanese companies as all of them had work experience in Japan.

The findings thus suggest that understanding about Japanese people, culture, language, and workplaces of Japanese companies are not sufficient enough to obtain reliance by Japanese management and Head Office. It requires the knowledge about their company, its people, and the company's corporate culture in Japan. Hence, work experiences in Head Office or other branch offices in Japan are closely related to information shortage and role exclusion.

Differences and Cultural Influences

In addition to the role stress types experienced by both local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff, each

party experienced different types of role stress. Non-Japanese local staff experienced two additional types which were not experienced by local hired Japanese staff. These were (1) communication difficulties due to different communication style and (2) cultural understanding. The two types of role ambiguity were experienced only between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriate staff. Local hired Japanese staff did not experience them.

Culture and communication are interrelated to one another and the two are not separable (Ishii et al., 1996: 58-59; Haslett, 1989). Communication style differences are related to cultural differences (Hall, 1989). Local hired Japanese staff did not experience the two role ambiguity types (cultural understanding and communication difficulties due to cultural differences). It illustrates local hired Japanese staff not only have understanding about Japan but also have understanding about Australia, its people, culture, communication style, and work environment. The findings suggest that cultural understanding about host country and parent country could reduce the types of role ambiguity.

Local hired Japanese staff experienced two additional types of role conflict which were not experienced by non-Japanese local staff. These were (1) role overload and (2) role incompetence. Role overload involves the Japanese style work practices, flexible work attitudes and work commitment. Japanese expatriates admitted that they felt more comfortable asking a favor of local hired Japanese staff than approaching non-Japanese staff. This is because local hired Japanese staff have the same understanding of Japanese culture and how Japanese companies work. Local hired Japanese staff will, therefore, follow the Japanese ways of doing things when requested. Expatriate Japanese staff placed a higher level of expectations toward local hired Japanese staff to work similar to employees in Japan. Since local hired Japanese staff had understanding about Australian corporate culture, they were aware that the level of expectations placed by Japanese expatriate staff was not common at workplaces in Australia. Local hired Japanese staff thus frustrated about the fact that they had to work following the Japanese way even when they were in Australia. They were also discontent with the situation where they had to work harder than their colleagues, non-Japanese local staff. This has resulted in role overload which is consistent with the characteristics discussed in the literature (Hardy, 1978; Kahn et al., 1964).

Despite the fact that local hired Japanese staff were discontent with the higher extent of expectations placed by Japanese expatriates comparing with the expectations placed on non-Japanese local staff, local hired Japanese staff were accepting the requests by Japanese expatriate staff and were displaying flexible work attitudes similar to Japanese employees in Japan. Furthermore, local hired Japanese staff perceived non-Japanese local staff as being incompetent. Their way of judging competence of non-Japanese local staff was also similar to those of Japanese expatriate staff and was based on the Japanese style work practices in Japan.

Organizational practices and culture are interrelated to one another (Kanungo, 2006; Wood, 1997). National culture influences on management of organization (e.g. Elenkov & Tonya, 2006; Hofstede, 1991). Hoecklin (1995: 24-25) explains that the deepest level of culture ingrained in human is how one perceives things. It is learned in childhood, and what one learned during this period is the most difficult to change (Hoecklin, 1995: 24-25).

All local hired Japanese staff participated in this study were born, raised, and educated in Japan. They also had work experiences back home. The findings indicate local hired Japanese staff, who lived in home country till they gained work experiences, still carry 'Japanese-ness' even when they are placed in an Australian work environment. Their cultural heritage, therefore, has an impact on experiencing role incompetence which has similarities in the characteristics described in the literature of Role Theory (Hardy, 1978).

The two role conflict types (role overload and role incompetence) were experienced exclusively by Japanese staff. Role overload was experienced due to their cultural understanding about host country and parent country. Role incompetence was experienced due to their cultural understanding about parent country. This study suggests that cultural understanding of host country and parent country could increase the level of role conflict experiences.

Overall, this study identified two types of influence in cultural understanding. First, understanding about the cultures of host country and parent country could reduce role ambiguity. Second, understanding about the cultures of host country and parent country could induce role conflict experiences. This study, therefore, suggests that cultural understanding not only has positive influence but also has negative influence on role stress experience.

Acquiring cultural understanding has been recognized as crucial for improving the management of overseas Japanese companies (Ishida, 1988: 65; Peltokorpi, 2006), cross cultural management (e.g. Elenkov & Tonya, 2006; Hofstede, 1991), cross cultural communication (Hall & Hall, 1987; Ishii et al., 1996; Yashiro, 1998), and expatriates managing local operations (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; Pires et al., 2006). This study, in contrast, identified negative influence of cultural understanding on role stress experience. This study therefore suggests the needs to re-examine the role of understanding about the culture of host country and parent country.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the level of role stress experienced by local hired Japanese and non-Japanese local staff of Japanese companies in Australia. The findings revealed both similarities and differences in their role stress experiences. Similarities are that both parties experienced three role stress types due to the low level of reliance placed by Japanese expatriate and language barriers. Differences are that in addition to these, non-Japanese local staff experienced further two role ambiguity types due to their lack of cultural understanding about Japan. Local hired Japanese staff, in contrast, did not experience role ambiguity types due to their lack of cultural understanding about Australia and Japan. They however experienced two additional role conflict types which are not experienced by non-Japanese local staff. These experiences were caused by cultural understanding about Australia and their Japanese cultural heritage and understanding of the society and organizational processes.

This study contributes to the literature by establishing the link between role stress and cross cultural management. The current study supports the findings of Shenker and Zeira (1992) that culture has an influence on role stress in intercultural context. We extended the literature on role stress in intercultural situations by identifying two types of influence on role stress during cross-cultural interactions. First, cultural understanding of host country and parent country could reduce role ambiguity experience. Second, the cultural understanding of host country and parent country could result in an increase in the level of role conflict experience.

Lack of cultural understanding, as identified in the current study, has resulted in role ambiguity. The reduction of role ambiguity requires a reduction in the level of uncertainty as well as an increase in the provision of clear information (Kahn et al., 1964). Since local hired Japanese staff have the cultural understanding of both host

country and parent country, they did not experience uncertainty or lack of clarity in relation to the cultures of both host country and parent country. They therefore do not experience this type of role ambiguity. It, thus, shows that cultural understanding of parent country and host country has an impact of reducing role ambiguity.

The positive influence of cultural understanding on role ambiguity, in contrast, influences negatively in terms of role conflict experiences of local hired Japanese staff. The results found that Japanese expatriates expected local hired Japanese staff to work similar to Japanese employees back home. Since local hired Japanese staff were familiar with Japanese corporate culture, they were able to understand the expectations placed by Japanese expatriates. Simultaneously, they were also familiar with Australian corporate culture. Local hired Japanese staff were aware that the expectations placed by Japanese expatriate staff were beyond the norms in Australian workplace. They thus felt pressure of working hard, and the expectations between local hired Japanese and Japanese expatriate staff did not meet. As a result, they experienced role overload (a type of role conflict). It shows a link between role overload and their cultural understanding about both countries, Australia and Japan.

Local hired Japanese staff's way of judging one's role competency is influenced by Japanese corporate culture. It caused unmet expectation between local hired Japanese staff and non-Japanese local staff. In consequence, local hired Japanese staff experienced role incompetence (a type of role conflict), similar to the characteristics identified in the Role Theory literature (Hardy, 1978). It thus indicates that their cultural heritage is related to their role incompetence experience.

The two role conflict types, role overload and role incompetence, strongly involve cultural understanding. These role conflict types are not experienced by non-Japanese local staff who do not have sufficient understanding about parent country's culture. People of the same culture tend to have common interpretations (Hoecklin, 1995: 24-25). These shared interpretations and thinking patterns develop common understandings of acceptable and appropriate behavior (Paik & Sohn, 2004). Local hired Japanese staff had cultural understanding of both host country and parent country. It is possible to say that local hired Japanese staff's cultural understanding about both countries led to experience role overload. Similarly, cultural heritage of local hired Japanese staff induced role incompetence. Hence, there is flexibility in applying their cross cultural understanding for their thinking patterns.

Cultural understanding about host country and parent country thus can increase their role conflict experience.

This study has two managerial implications. First, in order to increase the level of reliance placed by Japanese expatriates on local hired Japanese staff, these local staff would have to be given the opportunity to learn about the parent company. What they lack, however, is knowledge about the company, its people, and corporate culture (Haitani, 1990: 247). The solution is to send local hired Japanese managers to Head Office to become familiarize with the Head Office. For those who occupy non-managerial positions, they could acquire the knowledge through in-house training or pair with other staff (such as expatriates or local hired Japanese staff) as part of a formal mentoring system.

Second, non-Japanese local staff should be provided with opportunities in learning about Japanese culture, as well as knowledge about the company, its people, and culture. Increasing their understanding regarding Japan will therefore facilitate to increase the level of reliance as well as mitigate their role ambiguity experiences. To do so, cross cultural training should be provided to non-Japanese local staff. Organizing a mentoring system between non-Japanese local staff and local hired Japanese staff or between non-Japanese local staff and Japanese expatriates is another possible solution.

There are limitations in the current study. First, the findings of this study are applicable to local staff of Japanese companies in Australia. The majority of local hired Japanese staff participated in this study were female and were of non-managerial position. Local hired Japanese male holding managerial position may experience different type of role stress. Second, the analysis of this study 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. Third, proportions of local hired Japanese staff in companies vary according to the company. Some of them are a minority group, and some are not a minority group. A minority group is more likely to experience role conflict (Richard & Grimes, 1996). Hence, whether the cause of role stress of local hired Japanese staff is related to their minority group status or not is unknown.

As stated above, there are limitations to the findings of the current study. These involve gender and position of

local hired Japanese staff, level of analysis, and proportion of local hired Japanese staff in companies. Future research should consider improving these areas. In concrete form, investigating local hired Japanese male holding managerial position should be carried out. Future cross cultural study should examine only one organization to explore role stress of Japanese and non-Japanese local staff in overseas Japanese companies. In this instance, dyadic analysis of role stress should be conducted. A dyadic study enables the behavior of role occupants to be assessed from self and from others simultaneously. In doing so, the dyadic study can minimize bias. Furthermore, future study should examine whether dominant culture influences the role stress experience of minority group.

This study identified two types of influence in cultural understanding on role stress. We also discovered cultural understanding not only has positive influence but also negative influence. This study revokes the recognition that cultural understanding is crucial to improve cross cultural management (e.g. Elenkov & Tonya, 2006; Paik & Sohn, 2004; Peltokorpi, 2006). The current study hence sets a springboard to re-examine the role of cultural understanding.

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**Table 1 Summary of Work Practices and Role Stress of Local Hired Japanese Staff
and Non-Japanese Local Staff**

Items	Local Hired Japanese Staff	Non-Japanese Local Staff
WORK PRACTICES		
Flexible Work Attitudes	Higher	Lower
Japanese Expatriate Expectations	Higher	Lower
Japanese Expatriate Staff's Hesitation to Ask Favors	No	Yes
ROLE AMBIGUITY		
Communication Difficulties(between JS and NJLS): -Differences in communication style	No	Yes
Communication Difficulties(between JS and NJLS): -Insufficient English Language Competence	Yes	Yes
Information Shortage	Yes	Yes
Cultural Understanding (between JS and NJLS)	No	Yes
ROLE CONFLICT		
Role Exclusion	Yes (Lower)	Yes (Higher)
Role Incompetence (about NJLS)	Yes	No
Role Overload	Yes	No

Legend:

JS – Japanese Staff (expatriate and local hired Japanese Staff)

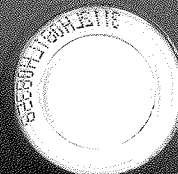
LJS – Local hired Japanese Staff

NJLS – Non-Japanese Local Staff

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