International Journal of Cross Cultural Management

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International Journal of Cross Cultural Management 2004; 4; 19
DOI: 10.1177/1470595804041523

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CCM International Journal of Cross Cultural Management
2004 Vol 4(1): 19–37

Learning to '*Do* Time' in Japan
A Study of US Interns in Japanese Organizations

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ABSTRACT In this study of the interactions between American interns and Japanese working in Japanese organizations in Japan, the influence of culturally different expectations, perceptions and meanings of time was explored. Through the interviews with interns and their Japanese co-workers and supervisors, five aspects of time were examined: (1) time and expectations; (2) time required for adaptation and productivity; (3) shared space and time, and meaning of socialization; (4) feedback and insecurity; and (5) short term and long-term vision. Through interviews conducted over a three year period, from predeparture throughout the 6–24 month internship period and at its conclusion, the experiences of 19 US interns working in 18 organizations along with 36 of their Japanese supervisors and co-workers were studied. Interns and supervisors differed greatly in their estimates of time needed for intern acceptance. US interns initially described too much idle time, uncertainty about when their workday ended, and anxiety related to the open, exposed, office and laboratory workspaces. Most disturbing to interns was what they saw as a lack of timely and explicit feedback from their supervisors; supervisors felt that they had provided continuous feedback and described a long-term vision for appraising the internship experience, even well after the intern had departed.

KEY WORDS • Intercultural communication • interns • Japanese organizations • perception of time

Learning to '*Do* Time' in Japan: A Study of US Interns in Japanese Organizations

There have been many studies of US–Japanese communication in the context of business, with considerable attention given to Japanese management within the US and American management in Japan (Nishida, 1992; Clarke and Lipp, 1998). Neglected have been studies of the experience of US subordinates working in a Japanese organiza-

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tion in Japan and speaking Japanese, including those expatriate interns who join a Japanese organization for a period of six months to two years (Gercik, 1992; Masumoto, 2000). This is a significant area of study for at least four reasons. First, in recent years, with Japanese government encouragement, the number of expatriate interns and other young professional people working in Japan has grown exponentially, involving thousands each year (Masumoto, 2000); it is a phenomenon affecting Japanese business culture and the broader sociopolitical landscape in Japan's campaign for 'internationalization'. Second, there are relatively few studies of US expatriates in subordinate roles in overseas organizations. Third, in the development of intercultural communication theory, perhaps no two societies have been so often compared for the purpose of contrast as has Japan and the US (Condon, 1984). Finally, at the level of general cultural comparisons, many contrasts between Japanese and the US cultures generally, and the educational and work cultures in particular, are strikingly different, suggesting particular challenges for US workers in Japanese organizations.

In the results of the longitudinal study reported here, tracing the experience of 19 interns from the US and 36 of their Japanese supervisors and co-workers in 18 different companies over a period of 30 months, the theme of 'time' appeared consistently but in different manifestations as a significant source of tension and frustration, and often as a key factor in the transformation of the interns' making their overseas experience significant and meaningful. For these new interns, the invitation to join a Japanese organization meant an opportunity to learn to 'do something in a new setting' and perhaps learn to 'do things in new ways' as part of their professional development. What an analysis of their experiences indicates is that what was often most difficult to learn to *do* was to adjust their thinking about 'time'. This investigation reports on these different manifestations of time in the experience of US interns which they report and as observed and noted by their Japanese supervisors and co-workers. The findings have implications for prospective US interns and employees working abroad and they also illuminate norms and expectations within the cultures of the US as well as the Japanese workplace.

Time and Culture

That perceptions of time differ from culture to culture has been observed by sojourners and well documented by researchers. Studies have described various perceptions of time across cultures but little has been reported about the perception of time as part of the cultural adaptation process (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Levine, 1997). A notable exception appears in the half-century of writings on cultural interpretations and expressions of time by Edward T. Hall. 'Time talks. It speaks more clearly than words' (Hall, 1959: 1). In his classic work on time, *The Dance of Life* (1983), Hall showed that our cultural practices regarding time show the mutual influence of our treatment of time and space, and how each functions as a tacit language of interpersonal relations. A distinction introduced by and extended by Hall (1959, 1976, 1983; Hall and Hall, 1987) is between that which he characterized as 'monochronic time' (M-time) and 'polychronic time' (P-time). M-time is not merely attending to 'one thing at a time,' as its name suggests, but also using time in a linear way by scheduling and compartmentalizing. One's schedule has priority over other considerations, including relationships with other people who are not part of one's schedule. This value of scheduling and task brooks little tolerance for interruptions. P-time is characteristic of a value system that subordinates the attention to task to that of the fulfilment of interpersonal relations, and where attending to more than one thing at a time is the norm. Hall has described M-time as a segment along a ribbon of time,

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and P-time as a dot at which several considerations, including interactions with others, converge. While both orientations appear in one's daily life, typically in the US an M-time orientation is more characteristic of work, while social or personal time may show a more polychronic orientation. The sharp distinction between 'work time' and 'personal time' is itself a cultural distinction characteristic of the US. In the analysis of the research findings this distinction will be useful but also in need of additional distinctions.

Past, Present and Future

Studies of cultural value orientations toward time have frequently given attention to a perceived emphasis on 'past', 'present', or 'future' (Condon and Yousef, 1975; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars, 1993). The dominant value in this aspect of time in the US has consistently seen a future orientation which fits with values associated with 'doing', optimism, and change. These are also consistent with the outlook and motivations of the interns in this study. The role of seniority in organizations is one indication of how this orientation is manifest, as McGrath and Kelly (1986) note in examining seniority and attitudes toward aging. Until the early 1990s, Japanese business organizations were characterized by 'lifetime employment', where loyalty, perseverance, and seniority were rewarded. With the recession and the collapse of some venerable Japanese banking and business institutions and the aftershocks portending an uncertain future, many of these values have come under question. Nevertheless, it may be said that Japanese management culture remains hierarchical, where seniority is rewarded, and where management philosophy is more likely to favor stewardship over innovation. Japan is still known as a society in which age is important as a determinant of one's social status and identity. There is a clear sense of generation gaps, age-peer identity, and life stages in Japan, while the sense of these differences is more ambiguous in the US (Lebra, 1993).

Long term vs. Short term

In business and political worlds, people sometimes joke that a long-term plan in the United States is a short-term plan in Japan. In the US 'a long time' might be a year, or four quarters of a fiscal year. In Japan it is not uncommon for 'a long term' to be at least 30 years, which has been the normal cycle for one employee to work for a company.

In terms of taking a long-term view in business, of 31 countries surveyed, Japan ranked first, followed by Sweden; the United States ranked 19th (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993). This long-term view may characterize the overall outlook or managerial philosophy of an organization and also more limited programs and projects within the company.

Calendar and Clock in Japanese Business Culture

A Japanese seasonal events calendar shows 24 time markers, including the first day of spring, and the times of solstice and equinox; several many such seasonal markers are national holidays. The most important time-marker and holiday in Japan is the first day of the new year for it marks the beginning of a new cycle which is apparent socially and psychologically. In the last days of the old year, one makes every effort to bring into balance both social and financial indebtedness. Not coincidentally, this is a time when bonuses are paid.

The business world also schedules events according to this seasonal calendar. New employees are hired each April, part of the rhythm of the year, with employees entering as a class, comparable to school matriculations. This hiring system creates an invisible organizational stratification by age, with or without title, across divisions. Thus a person's age and seniority are closely related, making for greater predictability in maintain-

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ing harmonious interpersonal relations in an organization. It is into this pattern and rhythm that expatriates enter the organization, including interns, whose ages may be different from their Japanese counterparts, and whose point of entry is almost always 'out of synch' with the rest of the newly hired.

Time and Activity

Many cultures do not distinguish between 'active' and 'idle' time (Levine, 1997). That distinction is made in both the US and Japan, but what constitutes each differs (Condon, 2003). The dominant value system in the US has been characterized as a 'doing orientation', and in much of the US one's self-image is defined to a great extent by what one 'does' (Condon and Yousef, 1975; Stewart and Bennett, 1991), with recent demonstrable individual achievements valued most. The Japanese emphasis on working within harmonious group relations mitigates against attention to individual achievements; rather, greater value is placed on the process in which many people can make their contribution.

Talk in the US has also been associated with 'doing', so that the absence of talk or the consciousness of silence within a gathering is often experienced as 'dead air', or a void needing to be filled. In contrast, the Japanese concept of *ma* is a meaningful pause, or a space which may contain deep feelings or a time to reflect on relationships, including power differences. It is a thoughtful pause, a time to process information, and a time to consider tactful responses. Thus silences within a meeting, which for many Americans are awkward moments when 'nothing is happening', are regarded in the context of a Japanese meeting as necessary and valuable.

Time and Relationships

Kume (1986) described how the Japanese prefer to use 'group time' with the people with whom they are familiar, while Americans prefer to use 'individual time' even within a group in order to expand their personal networks. Kume also noted the importance of rituals in Japan, where doing things together without questioning is important. Sharing group time and consistently spending time with the same people forms a social tempo or rhythm for the group. Thus in Japan, being present when people gather is often valued more than contributing individually at work.

Most Japanese people do not separate work hours from afterwork hours in the way that many Americans do (Condon, 1984). Americans normally differentiate between co-workers and personal friends, just as they distinguish work time from private time. In contrast, during workdays, Japanese spend time with other co-workers during, and after, work time. Japanese also spend much more overtime at their workplace than do most Americans, usually without expectation of additional compensation. Working beyond the official end of the workday is the norm, not the exception. In some cases a job simply requires 'overtime', but in other cases relationships require 'staying overtime'. This sense of obligation, '*giri*', also explains the Japanese spending time with co-workers after work time, creating collective feelings of shared time together. It is not that Japanese employees are eager to spend extra hours with co-workers, but rather it is the recognition that this personal effort is appreciated as contributing to the group effort and morale, and as such is a valued personal quality.

US Interns in Japanese Organizations

Even in the midst of a prolonged economic recession, many Japanese companies and organizations welcomed interns from the US, as well as other countries, to come to Japan to work for them for a period of six to 18 months. For many business organizations this was a novel experience undertaken for a variety of reasons including government incentives, the desire to have a native English speaker in the office, as part of the national

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push toward 'internationalization' in Japan, and in some cases out of a desire to introduce some potentially useful variation in well-established routines (Masumoto, 2000). It is worth noting that there is no word in Japanese that is equivalent to 'intern', and almost no previous history of welcoming foreign engineers, scientists and administrative personnel to join Japanese companies for the purpose of gaining experience. Most of the interns had some preparation in the Japanese language and had attended some seminars on management, intercultural communication or other aspects of Japanese cultural practices, but most interns had little or no direct and extended experience with aspects of Japanese culture, national or organizational. Some of the host organizations had welcomed interns previously, but for many, this was their first time of working alongside an engineer or a member of the office staff who was new to Japan and unfamiliar with the society as a whole and Japanese business culture in particular.

Method

Participants

A total of 19 interns (15 males, 4 females) and 36 supervisors and instructors[1] participated in this study. Of the 19 interns who were followed during the 30-month period of this investigation, six selected six-month internships, nine took one-year internships, one selected an 18-month internship, and three extended their internships to 24 months. Three interns had MBA degrees, one had a BA degree, and all others had undergraduate or graduate degrees in the sciences or in engineering. Ages ranged from 23–42, with the median age 28. The interns were enrolled in programs in four major universities in the east, midwest, west and southwest of the US, with all programs conducted in cooperation with an agency of the Japanese government to facilitate internship placement. The supervisors for the interns had worked for their organizations for 10 to 20 years and so held leadership positions such as Section Chief or Lab Coordinator. The ages ranged from mid-30s to mid-40s.

The US–Japan Industry and Technology Management Training program (JIMT program) was established by the National Defense Authorization Act of 1991. The Air Force Office of Scientific Research (AFOSR) was assigned to administer this program through universities, colleges, and nonprofit centers, to study Japanese methods for industry and technology management. The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) which is a governmental organization became the coordinator for finding Japanese organizations which would host interns.[2] As this research project was funded by the US government and supported by the Japanese government, the researcher could contact both the interns and the Japanese host organizations for their help. In this research all interns who were interviewed came through this JIMT program in the US.

The smallest host organization had only 50 employees; the largest employed over 10,000 people, with several branches overseas. The median company size employed approximately 2000 people. Despite the range of organizational size there were common features. With three exceptions, all invited interns to work in their Research and Development divisions, and all supervisors and instructors for the interns had previous experience in working with foreigners either in Japan or overseas.

Procedure

On the basis of the results of a preliminary survey of 56 interns already working in Japanese organizations (Masumoto, 2000), an interview protocol was developed for the present study to investigate the experiences of interns during the period from 1997–1999, with interviews conducted at four intervals: pre-departure; after one or two months working in Japan; at the midpoint of their

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sojourn (usually six months); and upon or immediately after their return (or for two interns, at the time when they chose to extend their stay with their organizations). In Japan, the interviews with interns were obtained at the workplace, with only the researcher and the intern present.

In the pre-departure interview, interns were asked about their motivations for applying to the JIMT program, their expectations from their internship, the strategies that they would use to adapt to the new environment, and their preparations before departure. In the first interview after departure (after one or two months working in Japan), they described their experiences of working in Japan: difficulties that they ran into and their perceptions of the causes of them. They told us about some critical incidences from which they suddenly learned/realized something very important (e.g. cultural difference) for the first time. In the third interview (mid-point of their sojourn), they were asked to compare their experiences with their expectations in three areas: job, interpersonal relationships at work, and living in Japan in general. Again, they described critical incidences and their strategies to cope with difficulties at work. In the final interview (immediately after their term is over), they told us about their overall experiences and difference and similarities they observed between their country of origin and Japan.

All interviews were tape-recorded. Interviews were conducted in both English and Japanese, and transcribed in both languages. Interviews with supervisors and co-workers were conducted similarly. The interviews consisted of explaining the purpose of the study (in the initial interview), assuring anonymity in the treatment of the interviews, and then asking descriptive questions (Spradley, 1979). In addition, the researcher's position was explained. The interview protocol consisted of general questions about the intern's experiences with follow-up questions as appropriate. In some cases interns provided additional comments via e-mail. Interviews were semi-structured. A total of 70 hours of interviews were conducted, in English and in Japanese. All were transcribed for analysis.

Data Analysis

The transcripts were examined to identify recurrent themes that appeared in individual transcripts, in the sequence of transcripts of the same intern (and supervisor or co-worker), and across all of the interview transcripts. The analysis of transcript data was conducted by the researcher who is a Japanese national with work experience in Japan, and independently cross-checked by two others: an American with work experience in Japan, and a Japanese national employed in a Japanese government agency associated with the internship programs in Japanese corporations. Closely related themes were grouped together following a cluster analysis (Tesch, 1990). Time-related themes were grouped together (for example, 'lack of privacy' was included in the larger category of 'shared space and shared time'). The major themes were identified as: (1) time and expectations; (2) time required for adaptation and productivity; (3) shared space and shared time; (4) feedback; (5) short-term and long-term vision. In addition, all reports that either explicitly or through tone of voice and emotional intensity were identified as 'critical incidents' for further investigation. In some cases an incident reported by an intern was later described from the perspective of the intern's supervisor, providing additional insights for analysis and interpretation.

Results and Discussion

Time and Expectations

Prior to departing for work in Japan, all interns said that they had no specific expectations about their lives during the next six to 18 months. In general, however, they hoped that their experience would be positive, both

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personally and professionally. They hoped that their internship would benefit them in some as-yet-undefined ways in their future careers. Internships are often sought during transitional times, as between undergraduate and graduate studies, or between MA and PhD programs or between graduation and employment. The expectations, usually characterized as hopes, were that the experience in Japan would be helpful in these post-internship years. In addition to or as part of these personal hopes, nearly all interns before departing for Japan indicated that they hoped to contribute something positive to the organization which had accepted them.

From the perspective of the host organization, there were few expectations that the intern would be able to contribute very much professionally because even a two year stay was considered too short a time. Expectations by the host organizations were more specific for those of their staff, chiefly to gain experience of working with foreigners. In addition, some supervisors expressed the hope that the interns would provide new stimulation for fresh ideas and stimulation to routine activities.

Lack of confidence in their ability in speaking and reading the Japanese language affected both the interns, especially after arriving in Japan, and the host organizations. Supervisors expressed concern, and in several cases surprise, when they discovered the gap between their own expectations and the abilities which the new interns brought. However, one theme that interns consistently described from the beginning of their sojourn was of the patience and helpfulness of their co-workers regarding language difficulties as well as other aspects of adjustment.

Throughout the first six months, nearly all interns indicated difficulties in identifying their role, for despite their indicating that they entered without particular expectations, it was clear that they did expect that they would be able to *do something* that would both enact that role and also be an accomplishment that would confirm to them that they had made a contribution to the organization. They were also keenly aware that they had a limited time in which to do something.

> In a lot of ways I really didn't know what to expect. I really don't see what skills I possess that would be useful to a Japanese company. I didn't know what my job duties would entail. I still don't feel I have a clear idea of what my role is other than to provide some international flavor to the office setting. I know I am here to provide English conversation lessons since in my welcome to the company the general manager said that everyone should talk to me in English. (A male intern, after 3 months)

> My job became a bit of a disappointment to me . . . when I realized that it was very task-oriented and I will often go for long spans of time with nothing being asked of me and nothing to do but to be idle. I took those opportunities to try to be useful or at least try to learn more about the work being done, but it could be frustrating at times. (A male intern after 3 months)

In Japanese organizations, even for *kenshusei* (new Japanese employees), the first three to six months is regarded as a time for learning about the organization and becoming socialized within the organization. New hires do menial tasks, such as sorting and delivering mail or making copies, which is part of the process through which they come to understand how things get done and begin to learn about the formal and the personal relationships within the organization. Supervisors for the interns chose not to give such responsibilities to the interns – both reducing the likelihood of intern frustration in performing jobs they would have regarded as unprofessional but at the same time adding to an awareness that the interns were being treated differently from their Japanese co-workers. One supervisor said that he purposely chose a project which the intern could complete within the limited time he would be working for the organization, aware that such a sense of accomplishment was important for the intern's development and sense of self-worth.

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	Job skills	Part of a Group
Intern's estimate	3 weeks to 3 months	Several months to 'never'
Supervisor's estimate	3 years to 5 years	1 week to a few weeks

Figure 1 Perceptions of time needed for an intern to integrate into the organization to time needed to learn job skills

Time Required for Adaptation and Productivity

Just how long does it take for an American intern to become integrated into a Japanese organization? How long does it take to become an effective and contributing worker in the organization? Answers to these questions which emerged from the interviews showed some of the sharpest differences in expectations of interns and supervisors.

When supervisors were asked how long it would take for an American intern to become integrated into the organization, they gave answers that ranged from 'about one week' up to 'a few months', depending, they said, upon the intern's personality. In interviews during the first six months, supervisors described their interns as generally getting along well. From the supervisor's point of view the crucial factor was that the interns had been introduced and approved by the appropriate administrators involving a government agency. As one put it, 'They are part of our organization because they entered through the correct gate.' This also means that a number of individuals and institutions outside of the host organization were regarded as part of the process and thus also partly responsible for whatever transpired during the intern's stay. (Permission to conduct this research similarly required the approval and support of these authorities.) In short, from the supervisors' point of view, the interns by the very fact of their entry through the proper channels were part of the organization. The supervisors also made it clear in the early interviews that they cared about the interns and saw their relationship with the interns in terms of a teacher–student or as a parent–child relationship. Their time context was in terms of the intern's development rather than acceptance, which they took as a given.

From the interns' point of view, however, the immediate concern was with becoming accepted by their co-workers. When asked how long they thought this would take, the most optimistic interns said several months. Two said up to a year. In later interviews, nearly half of the interns doubted that they would ever feel a part of a group. As reasons they cited their status as an intern and the daunting challenge of the Japanese language. Even more than that, they felt that because of their appearance and that they were not Japanese, they would always be treated 'as foreigners and as interns' (the two categories

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most often came together in the interns' comments).

Thus what was a short-term concern from the supervisors' point of view, acceptance, was a long-term or even an insurmountable challenge as seen by the interns. Comparing comments of interns and their supervisors during the first six months it was clear that they were operating on very different calendars, with the interns describing an uphill struggle for acceptance as they tried to adjust to their new situation, while their supervisors saw them as already accepted and well into their professional development.

When the question was asked about how long it would take for one to become an effective worker in the organization, however, the time estimates were reversed. The interns' estimate was minimal, the supervisors' considerably longer, with an expectation gap of as much as five years.

American interns said it would take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months to get used to a job and to work as a productive member of the organization. Japanese supervisors, both those in engineering and in business, estimated between three and five years. According to the supervisors, even Japanese engineers require at least one year just to learn technical terms. Supervisors in research laboratories said that it would take a Japanese employee from three to five years' preparation to work as a researcher.

> It will take one year to master the language, including technical words. In the second year, a new researcher will learn about the organization. In the third year, they will find out their role in the organization. Then they can start their own research and see results around the fifth year.

If the new researcher is a foreigner whose native language is not Japanese, he or she will take longer. All supervisors said that even for newly hired Japanese, it would take at least three years before they could effectively work as a member of the organization. All agreed that the first year was regarded as a training period and that the shortest project would require at least two years to complete.

For interns who do not have a technical background, the importance of language proficiency weighs even more heavily in job performance. A supervisor who had overseen an intern in his marketing section described the different expectations in language skills between interns in engineering and in business.

> If an intern is not in the engineering field, the intern has two language problems: one is technical terms and another is the Japanese language. An engineer can find a position in the front line of the business but the positions for an intern without technical background are very limited, such as in translation and interpretation. If someone wants to be active in business it is necessary to be fluent in the Japanese language. I don't even let a new Japanese college graduate work with our clients. Those young Japanese who only speak colloquial words and use abbreviations heard on television programs have to learn appropriate Japanese for four or five years before they do business with our clients. Even if an intern has an advanced degree, coming to our company is not the beginning of a career, but just the first step toward a career. For Japanese new employees, too, it will take at least five years.

What is apparent is that the interns interpret effectiveness primarily in terms of task accomplishment, with the challenge of acceptance and adjustment as barriers to job performance. In general, American interns perceived their job in terms of portable skills that they were responsible to learn individually, though with the help of others, and to apply wherever appropriate. Their Japanese supervisors see job effectiveness as contingent upon learning the context in which one will perform various tasks. The Japanese supervisors saw one's job as part of a total package of professional abilities, interpersonal relationships that can be developed only over a period of time, and learning how to play an effective role in the organization.

For the interns, developing good inter-

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personal relationships meant getting to know other people and getting along with them. Many of the interns talked in terms of friendships. For the Japanese supervisors, however, the importance of interpersonal relationships means something different. It includes coming to understand which person is located in what part of the organizational network. When a newcomer wants to ask a question about the job or a general question about the company or seek advice for his or her career or even ask for advice regarding one's personal life, the newcomer needs to know the right person to ask for each question. More than that, one also needs to know what other people might think if he or she chooses to ask person A rather than person B, or what meaning might be conveyed by failing to ask a particular person. For Japanese employees, this is one of the basic job skills they need to develop. It is something that cannot be learned in advance, and something that cannot be learned in a week or two. Japanese probably develop such consciousness and learn how to use their interpersonal antennae throughout their school days. It is so much a part of the culture that it may be difficult for those who are supervisors or co-workers to appreciate the difficulty of even being aware of this challenge that the interns face, let alone the difficulty in developing these skills.

This difference is consistent with descriptions of the respective cultural values, the more individualistic, doing orientation on the one hand, and the more collectivist and relational orientation on the other. It would be an exaggeration to look only at these broad cultural differences. At the very least, however, these cultural differences may only amplify the different perspectives of a younger person in a transitory position working in another country and foreign language who is supervised by an older person with many years of working for an organization in a cultural environment in which he or she is most comfortable.

Shared space, shared time and socialization

By about the six month period, most interns were indicating a growing awareness of the importance of learning about, becoming more adept at, and feeling more comfortable in the interpersonal network of the organization in which they worked. Their comments in interviews showed a noticeable shift from their concentration of defining their role and performing their assignments, in research or within the office, to socialization within the organization. Task was still important, but in their comments the process and the context of their work came to the fore. They arrived at this stage after struggling with two challenges: the spatial arrangement of the office or laboratory, and the time frame for working. During the first weeks and months of joining their host organization, all interns reported that the arrangement of the office and laboratory left them feeling exposed and vulnerable with no sense of privacy. Moreover, many spoke of preparing to leave when the clock announced the end of the work day, only to discover that almost all of their co-workers remained.

A culture's symbolic treatment of time is reflected in the use of space (Hall, 1983). One sees this in the differences of work spaces where the independent, individual 'private' space is a feature of US offices in contrast to the typical Japanese office floor. In the US, people function well in their own private workspaces, such as cubicles separated by partitions. Generally, the higher their status, the more privacy workers have in the US. People also divide individual work spaces with a partition when a new person joins the group (Hall, 1959). In Japan, people traditionally work together in a large common open space. Managers sit at desks on the same floor with their subordinates so that they can see what is happening. When a newcomer joins a company, he or she will sit next to someone who is a mentor. The new

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person's desk might purposefully be set in front of a manager so that the manager can supervise the newcomer.

All interns, with one exception, remarked about their initial reactions to the open space in which they worked with the resulting loss of privacy that they had known at home.

> Here we have two groups working in the same lab. Each group has its own *shima* [island] of desks. There are no obstructions in between the desks of supervisors and lab workers. The questions and answers are heard by all and when the group leader wishes to say something she merely has to stand up. Private conversations are held in a small meeting room. (A male intern after 6 months)

All interns changed in their attitudes about the physical space of their work environment after about six months or at the midpoint in their internships. From their initial feelings of anxiety because of the lack of privacy, they began to describe the setting in positive terms.

This intern's comments are representative of most of the others whose early anxiety about the open office space changed to positive feelings for the support the arrangement provided.

> When I worked in the US I needed to make an appointment to see my boss. Here my boss is sitting at a desk right across from mine. At first I felt like I was watched all the time but now I am getting used to it. I can see how he is doing this morning and he knows what I am doing for the day without saying a word. I like the fact that I am not isolated from everyone else. Whenever I look up from my computer I can see everyone in my section. I think that this leads to more interactions between co-workers. It is easier to exchange information. If I need help, I don't have to travel too far to get it. Lack of privacy gave the interns a hard time to get used to the office arrangement. Japanese offices are different. Right in front of you there is everybody. No cubicles and all desks and everyone are in one big space. It took a lot of getting used to but I think after working in that environment I can work anywhere. But it was really difficult to get used to, a desk right here and a desk right there, people right next to you. (A female intern after 7 months)

The orientation toward monochronic time, the value of individualism, and a desire for privacy are interrelated (Hall, 1976). In the case of the intern, the initial discomfort with the loss of privacy which changed to an appreciation of the arrangement which required constant involvement with others, had its parallel in the initial discomfort the interns experienced when they would prepare to leave work after five o'clock and discover that they were the only ones clearing off their desks.

The experience described by this intern is representative of those of other interns. She said that she still thought about this experience even after completing her internship. Her assigned work hours were from 9 am until 5.15 pm. It was several weeks before she realized that nobody else left when she did at 5.15.

> I think I'm doing something wrong because everyone looks at me funny when I leave. I didn't want to do anything wrong and I wanted to be more like the others in the group. I asked someone what I was doing wrong and why nobody else was leaving when I was leaving. They explained, 'Well, it looks better if you stay until 6.00 pm. Tomorrow, just stay until six and you'll notice that everybody leaves at six.' Actually, some of the women do leave right after 5.15 pm but [I later discovered] they were working in some other division. In my division people stay until six. I felt bad because I thought the others thought I wasn't working as hard. (A female intern after 6 months)

Another intern also left the office as soon as he finished his work. Later he realized that other people stayed a little longer, although his section leader did not allow his staff to work overtime unnecessarily. He noticed that after the regular work hours the office atmosphere changed, people were more relaxed and talked about various things informally. In Japanese organizations this is a transitional time, no longer regular office hours but not yet completely informal and personal. From then on he stayed later, sometimes working on his project and other times talk-

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ing with others about job-related matters. Sometimes he just studied Japanese language at his desk. He discovered that during this period other people approached him, talked with him easily, and he soon came to know more about the group and began to feel a part of the group. What had initially seemed like a waste of time came to be appreciated as an essential part of his integration into the workforce. Near the end of his internship his supervisor said in an interview that he had admired the intern's work ethic, including the fact that he talked little during regular work hours – 'we [members of the division] often say that we chat too much. This smoothes our work flow [even though it takes us longer to complete some tasks]. To compensate, we stay a little longer than regular work hours.' The supervisor also noted that his intern did not talk much when he was working, and the supervisor expressed appreciation for such professionalism, even though it was not the norm in the organization.

Generally, throughout their time in Japan, the interns thought of work hours as the time to complete their individual tasks. For the Japanese co-workers, too, work hours are the time to do their jobs, but they also see value in this as a shared time, starting at the same time, having lunch time together, and chatting and relaxing as they do their work. All this strengthens interpersonal relations. It should also be noted that as the interns adjusted to the physical and temporal constraints and expectations of their workplace, their integration into the organization, their personal comfort and satisfaction, and their competence in the Japanese language all increased.

Timely Feedback

All interns expressed anxiety from not receiving clear and timely feedback on their work performance. More than one intern, after completing their work in Japan, returned to the US still uncertain about how their performance on particular tasks and projects was regarded by their Japanese hosts and uncertain even about their overall evaluation. From the research interviews it is clear that their supervisors were not aware of these concerns, nor that the interns had expected such feedback, including constructive criticism so that they could learn and improve. Even after interns made formal presentations to their co-workers and supervisors about projects on which they had worked, the response from supervisors were, to the interns, surprisingly brief and thus sometimes a cause for even more uncertainty and anxiety.

This perceived lack of feedback has been described by others who have examined US–Japanese communication. Clarke and Lipp (1998) state that feedback has been one of the most frequently cited areas of frustration for Japanese managers and their American subordinates in Japanese companies in the US They point out four major areas where cultural conflict regularly occurs in the giving of feedback: negative feedback, positive feedback, in the timing of feedback, and where the feedback is given. Japanese managers are perceived by Americans as giving too much critical feedback, not giving enough positive feedback, and being too vague. American managers, on the other hand, are viewed by Japanese as not giving enough critical feedback, not being expected to receive it, and giving as well as expecting too much positive feedback. Timing and location when giving feedback are also crucial. Japanese tend to delay giving feedback until what they regard as an appropriate time in a more informal setting. On the other hand, Americans expect to have feedback immediately in the workplace, preferably in a private one-to-one setting (Clarke and Lipp, 1998).

The frustrations that the interns described about the lack of feedback arise in part from conditions specific to the situation of a foreign intern in a Japanese organization. Japanese supervisors indicated that because they did not expect the interns to contribute much to the organization, but rather that the

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interns should learn for their own benefit, they (the supervisors) saw less need to give the kind of criticism they would to their regular employees. A more important reason may be in different culture-based views of feedback, and indeed of communication in general. As Kunihiro (1976) has remarked, 'In the US words are *the* means of communication; in Japan words are *a* means of communication'. In the context of the workplace, 'no news is good news.' If one is doing a good job, one's co-workers and supervisors feel no need to say anything. Americans in general, however, expect more verbal reassurance, and those in a new and foreign work environment may feel an even greater need for verbal affirmation. From a Japanese perspective, Americans seek explicit, verbal, positive feedback when none is called for because things are going well. From an American perspective, the absence of explicit feedback is not only frustrating, it is even worse because they interpret the absence of comment as the Japanese choosing to avoid saying anything negative and hence not telling the interns what they really think.

Japanese supervisors indicated that they thought that they were always giving feedback just through their behavior, even though it was not often verbalized. Initially, when asked in interviews, supervisors indicated that they regarded 'feedback' as no different from what occurs in any conversation or when giving instructions. Several recalled particular conversations with their interns, and about the ways in which they tried to instruct, indicating to the interviewer that they had expressly tried to be supportive. In later interviews when asked to say more about feedback as an evaluation of an intern's performance on the job, the supervisors pondered. Then most answered to the effect that 'in that sense we did not give feedback to the interns.' One supervisor mentioned talking with the intern after work when they went for a drink together. He said that he had talked about various things related to the job and the intern's future career. In interviews the intern also recalled these conversations. She indicated that she appreciated those after-hours talks, but she did not regard them as feedback.

One case that reflects this conflict in the meaning and timing of feedback was described in detail and considerable emotion by one intern; the intern's supervisor also talked in detail about the intern, words that the researcher was later able to convey to the young man after he had returned to the US. In the first interview during his internship, the intern wondered about his performance. During subsequent interviews it was clear that he was conscientious and felt good about the internship experience though he was not sure how he was evaluated by his supervisor. He spoke of particular satisfaction when, at the end of his stay, he made his final presentation on his research in Japanese. Yet all this was tempered by his uncertainty about how the presentation was received because his supervisor said almost nothing about it. This researcher was aware from interviews with the supervisor that he, the supervisor, was most impressed by the intern's presentation and his high standard of performance through the internship. When I reported this to the intern months after his return to the US he was pleased but also surprised. He said he had never heard anything like that from the supervisor directly. Only later did he learn that his supervisor had been instrumental in helping get a job in the US with a company affiliated with the Japanese firm at which he had worked.

Short-term vision vs. long-term vision

The previous incident reflects a final theme relating to time which in some ways runs through many of the issues explored here – a theme which also may highlight some of the broader cultural distinctions regarding time: short-term vision and long-term vision.

As noted earlier, the interns and super-

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visors had significantly different views on the time needed for one to become an effective worker. These same views were also reflected in the observations by supervisors about the interns' attitude toward jobs when the interns would ask if the intern's work would be directly related to the development of new products. One supervisor summarizes these differences clearly.

> He [the intern] wanted to know if the assignment would be used for a product. Our division is Research and Development. We do various kinds of research. We don't know which results may be used for products. Some of the research we do is never used for a product. Other research work may be left for a few years and then it might be used to develop a product. We realize that such work is necessary, too. We need to spend time and energy to cover all kinds of research, often for small results. That's our job. The intern is very practical. He wants to know for what purpose he is doing the research. He wants to know how it will be used. He works hard with the research when he thinks the results will be used for sure, but he is not willing to do jobs which are not feasible to lead to products. [I can see that] the speed of his work and his effort on the job is different if it's a short-term project [with immediate application] or if it's a long-term project about which nobody knows if the research would be utilized in the future.

When the researcher later talked about this with the intern, after he had returned to the US, he expressed surprise. He said that from his limited work experience in the US he thought that the Japanese supervisor's explanation would be unusual in the US because of pressures to show a profit each quarter term or at the least by the end of each year.

The difference in time orientations appears more subtly in how work itself is regarded. While most interns were pleasantly surprised to discover that they could have their own research projects, many also remarked on how there was also 'lots of time when I didn't have enough to do.' From their supervisors' point of view, however, one's learning is never limited to one's own project. Rather, the supervisors value learning by observing, assisting senior workers over the years, and doing various menial jobs which might not seem directly relevant to their professional development. What the interns sometimes referred to as 'idle time', the supervisors saw as opportunities for observation and learning.

This distinction in what is regarded as a productive time for learning has its counterpart in the interns' concerns about job differentiation, an issue which often appeared in comments in the interviews and about which there were some strong feelings on both sides. From the intern's perspective, there are clear distinctions between 'researcher', 'assistant', and 'administrator', and several interns balked at being asked to do jobs that they felt were 'not part of the job description'. In Japan, however, newly joined researchers assist senior researchers in order to learn the job. The US interns expressed pride in being 'researchers', and they resented being asked to do what appeared to be outside of that role. Their supervisors, in their comments in the interviews, indicated their irritation with that attitude and instead emphasized that from a long-term view of one's development, even someone with a PhD is not a competent researcher until one has learned about the whole organization, a process requiring many years of assisting and observing.

It was mentioned earlier that supervisors welcomed the interns but without expectations of any production benefit from their contributions because even a two-year stay would be too short. But several supervisors spoke of the possibility of benefits far in the future which could not be clearly anticipated right away. They often used the word *'en'* which means a kind of 'connection by destiny', or a relationship which is beyond any rational explanation (Ishii, 1998). Whatever might happen in the future regarding these interns and their former supervisors or co-workers would be because of *en*, something 'that was meant to be', though just *what* could not be anticipated. Thus while the interns

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may want to evaluate their experience at the end of several months or years, their supervisors are imagining effects that may not be recognized for perhaps 20 years or more. Japanese supervisors do not talk to the interns about their long-term vision, though even if they did it might not alter the American interns' focus on much more immediate and demonstrable results.

Summary

Much of the literature on US–Japanese communication has emphasized general contrasts between the two cultures, with less attention to the actual process that an individual from one culture experiences in negotiating the adjustment to work in the other (Gercik, 1992). Where individual effectiveness is the focus, the 'results' or 'goal orientation' is emphasized, while the long term 'process orientation', is not fully appreciated as being fundamental to working in a Japanese organization.

In this longitudinal study the interns understood and adjusted themselves to many aspects of working in a Japanese organization. From about four months into their internship, most interns adjusted to the Japanese use of office space which offered much less privacy than in the US. They also came to appreciate the social support and opportunity to integrate further into their group that resulted from time shared with others, even after their official work day was over. After around six months, interns spoke less about wanting more private or personal time. The interns could adjust to and even came to appreciate those cultural values.

However, there were other issues they could not figure out until the end of the internship. Almost all interns expressed frustration with which they regarded as the lack of feedback. Similarly, interns did not share the long-term vision which most supervisors described. As they were in Japan for a limited time, they wanted to see the results of their work and wanted to be given some kind of explicit evaluation of their contribution. However, when an organization is assigned an intern to work on serious projects, the projects struck the interns as long-term projects, extending over a year or more rather than projects of just a few months to which the interns were accustomed.

From the results, of this research it is clear that the American interns could adjust themselves to many aspects of the Japanese work environment. They could accept different work styles on a daily basis, and they could try to be a part of a work team or an organization. However, they had difficulty in changing their mindsets when it came to their individual achievement which deeply related to their self-esteem. Joining an organization as an intern, it might be difficult to see him/herself as making a contribution which would extend well beyond one's actual presence in the organization.

Conclusion

This research shows that distinction between past, present, and future as differentiating Japanese and US cultures are simplistic and potentially misleading. While the Japanese organization values years of experience within the organization as essential to one's professional development, there is also the belief that a full appreciation of 'the past' may not be realized until well into 'the future' at a time that cannot be precisely anticipated. In this regard the Japanese supervisors show a greater value for a distant future than do the US interns for whom the present is most meaningful as it affects the foreseeable future. These differences in outlook may be expressed as a 'long-term vision' and a 'short-term vision'.

As noted, US interns join their host Japanese organizations at different times throughout the year, thus being 'out of synch' with the rhythm of regular newly-hired Japanese who all enter in April. The result of this in itself creates a conflict for the

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interns as their assignment and expectation differ from regular newly-hired Japanese in so many other ways as well.

Regarding the daily clock time, 'clock time', within four months nearly all interns made the adjustment to remaining with the co-worker after regular hours. Indeed, most came to appreciate the resulting change in the workplace atmosphere and interpersonal interactions. Greatly facilitated, the interns feelings are comfort and inclusion.

Also at this time earlier indications of frustrations at a loss of 'personal time' were no longer mentioned. There was a comparable shift in comfort with a greater appreciation for the open area of Japanese work space which was initially a cause of anxiety for its lack of privacy.

Similarly, the perception of 'too much time with nothing to do' decreased after about six months, though it was not clear if the interns perceived this time as an opportunity for professional growth and redevelopment of interpersonal relationships as their supervisors saw them. Overall, the results indicate interns gradually shift from a more individual, task centered, shorter-term definition of the internships to see this as more integrated, contextual and relational. Though no intern expressed it this way, it may be that even what they perceived as 'absence of feedback' from their supervisors led some interns to imagine a longer range and less definable benefits from their experience.

It is crucial to understand that the American interns and their Japanese supervisors and co-workers have different perceptions of time in the workplace. These are manifest in different expectations of what can be achieved within a six to 24-month internship – how much time is needed for acceptance and to become productive in the organization, the extent to which one gives attention to fostering interpersonal relationships in the context of the particular task undertakings, the timing and character of what constitutes feedback on performance, and the overall philosophy of how one views time, with attention to short-term accomplishments or continuous learning and work fulfilment that may be years or decades long. It is important to recognize that the perception of age and timing when one enters a company create an invisible interpersonal network in an organization, and that though the intern initially sees his or her role as learning to do something of importance while in Japan, for the host organization this is possible only through devoting time to learning more about these interpersonal networks and the context of the organization as a whole. Long-term and short-term visions influence not only organizational business plans but also daily individual work, including the kind of communication that is more apparent after the formal workday is over. Frustrations regarding feedback arise not only because of different expectations of what constitutes feedback, but also from different perspectives toward time.

When attempting to adapt to or work with people with different cultural and organizational backgrounds we must not ignore our different perceptions of time. Like breathing, the influence of time is constant and mostly non-conscious. And, like breathing, it is also vital.

This qualitative study with a limited number of US interns (19) and their Japanese co-workers and supervisors (36) over a three-year period showed common patterns of attitudes and behavior regarding time. Interns coming from other nations or those whose academic and professional backgrounds might reveal different results. While all interns had some preparation in the Japanese language prior to arriving in Japan, overall their ability was less than their supervisors had hoped for. Though the interns interviewed for this study appear to be typical of US interns in Japan, a study of interns who arrive with greater language competence might indicate some different results. Also a larger sample of interns who all work in com-

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parable positions might yield more detailed findings about some aspects of their experience than those found in this study that looked at a variety of positions in office and laboratory settings and in organizations of different sizes.

With reason to expect that expatriate internships in Japanese companies will continue into the future, continued research on the internship experience will benefit those participating in these programs as well as adding to the literature on cross cultural management. Future studies may examine some of the following.

1 Internship experiences from other nations, particularly non-Western nations, should be studied. Of special importance will be the experience of interns from China and Korea, nations with which Japan is actively pursuing much closer ties.
2 A longitudinal study of Japanese supervisors who have the experience of overseeing and mentoring a variety of interns over a period of many years may be especially beneficial. Just as interns learn from their experience, so too do supervisors. Unlike most interns, since supervisors may have the opportunity to repeatedly work with such expatriate interns, insights gained through these experiences may prove to be of continuing value.
3 This longitudinal study was limited to three years. It will be important to follow up on the participants in this study and with other former expatriate interns to see what influence they believe their internship experience has had in their lives and in their contributions in the workplace.

Notes

1 In some organizations several Japanese participated, such as a supervisor (usually *Kacho*, a Section Chief) who had full responsibility for the intern, a manager (*Bucho*) of the division which hosted interns, and an instructor (usually *Kakaricho*, a group leader) who worked with interns on a daily basis.
2 The JIMT program was originally started in the US In the late 1990s, more countries including Canada and England started internship programs with Japanese organizations. JETRO, the official Japanese coordinator, now refers to all of these internship programs as JIMT programs. Once a year JETRO hosts a two day workshop for all interns who work in Japan.

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Résumé

Apprendre la relation au temps au Japon : une étude des stagiaires américains dans les organisations japonaises (Tomoko Masumoto)

Dans cette étude des interactions entre des stagiaires américains et des employés japonais travaillant dans des organisations japonaises au Japon, on explore l'influence des attentes culturelles, des perceptions et des significations du temps différentes de part et d'autre. A partir d'entretiens conduits avec les stagiaires et leurs collègues et superviseurs japonais, 5 dimensions temporelles sont apparues: (1) le temps et les attentes; (2) le temps requis pour s'adapter et être productif; (3) l'espace et le temps partagés avec les autres et les significations de la socialisation; (4) le feedback et le sentiment d'insécurité et (5) la vision à court ou long terme. Les entretiens se sont déroulés sur une période de 3 ans, depuis la période précédant le départ, jusqu'à la période de 6 à 24 mois de stage et sa conclusion. Ils retracent les expériences de 19 américains travaillant dans 18 organisations avec 36 collègues et superviseurs japonais. Les stagiaires et les superviseurs ont des estimations très différentes du temps nécessaire au stagiaire pour être accepté. Les stagiaires américains ont avant tout décrit trop de temps sans occupation spécifique, l'incertitude quant à l'horaire de fin de leur journée de travail, et une certaine anxiété liée à l'environnement de travail totalement ouvert. Le plus dérengeant pour les stagiaires a été le sentiment de n'avoir pas reçu suffisamment de feedback explicite de la part du superviseur, alors que ceux-ci avaient le sentiment d'avoir apporté un feedback continu et décrivaient une vision à long terme pour évaluer l'expérience de stage, parfois même longtemps après le départ du stagiaire.

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摘要

在日本学习"时间观念"— 对日本公司实习生的调查

Tomoko Masumoto

此项研究通过对在日本的公司中美国实习人员同日本员工交往的调查，针对文化差异所引起的期望，认识及时间观念的不同进行了探讨。研究者对美国实习人员以及他们日本同僚和上司进行了面谈调查，就有关时间概念上的五个方面进行了探讨。

实践与期待值
适应及生产所需的时间
分享的时间与空间以及社会交往的意义
反馈和不安全感
短期与长期观

面谈持续了三年时间，对19位美国实习人员同他们在18个日本公司的36个日本上司进行了调查。他们的实习期从开始到结束，从六到二十四个月不等。实习人员同他们的上司在对待完成实习所需时间的估计上存在着很大的不同，美国的实习人员基本上认为他们有太多的空闲时间，不知道他们白天工作应该什么时候结束，对这种开放式的办公室和实验室有焦虑感，上司们却认为他们已经提供了连续的反馈并且具备了对实习经验进行检验的长期观念，即使实习人员已经离开很久。

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