An Evaluation of Journal Article in Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

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Abstract. This essay evaluates a journal article which is “learning to do time in Japan”. It contains five main parts. In the first part, the essay introduces and gives the main idea of the journal article. Secondly, it evaluates the main theoretical frameworks, and prior research studies which used by the researchers in developing their paper. Then, the essay briefly explore the research design and methods employed, before turning to a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of this approach as a way of illuminating the research questions posed by the researchers. After that, evaluate the main findings, and the conclusions which are made by the researcher in this essay. Finally, the last section presents in what ways the article resonates with the conclusions I drew from my group-work experiences and whether it has anything to add to my broader considerations of intercultural working.

Introduction

The journal article “Learning to do time in Japan” is about a study of the interactions between American interns and Japanese working in Japanese organizations. The researcher first explores the influence of culturally different expectations, perceptions and meanings of time. Then, it examines five aspects of time which are time and expectations; time required for adaptation and productivity; shared space and time; feedback and insecurity and short term and long-term vision. The research approach in this article is mainly through interview. A total of 19 interns and 36 supervisors participated in this study and the interviews conducted at four intervals: pre-departure; after one or two months working in Japan; at the midpoint of their sojourn; and upon or immediately after their return. Finally, the researcher analyses the data and make his discussion and conclusion on the five aspects which have been evaluated.

Theory & Literature

A theoretical framework is a collection of interrelated concepts, like a theory but not necessarily so well worked-out. A theoretical framework guides your research, determining what things you will measure, and what statistical relationships you will look for (Vincent A., Jr. Anfara. 2006). This journal article has a well-organized theoretical framework. It gives the descriptive theory which is describing the characteristics of different time orientation between US and Japan. Furthermore, this journal article also uses theoretical issues like long-term versus short-term and individualism versus collectivism. However, although some theories are used in exactly way in this article, but there are still some models which relevant to the topic have not been adopted.

Masculinity and Femininity It is essential to do some researches on masculinity and femininity because it is also a very important theoretical underpinning. Spence (1984, 1993) suggests that gender phenomena are multifactor. In his view, there are numerous attributes, attitudes, and behaviors that culturally distinguish between men and women but these are not bound together as a single underlying property such as gender schematization (Spence and Sawin 1985). The important underlying construct is gender identity or one’s sense of being masculine or feminine. Culturally defined personality traits, physical attributes, abilities, and occupational preferences among other things, all contribute to one’s gender identity in unique and individualized combinations. Individuals take advantage of these gender characteristics and choose those qualities that are
compatible for them as they define themselves as masculine or feminine and ignore other gender qualities. Thus, while societal members may agree on the representation of masculinity and femininity, one’s own masculinity and femininity tends to be more variable and special in nature.

Therefore, the model about masculinity and femininity is necessary in this article. The researcher should not only uncover the different time attitude; different ability for adaptation and different expectation between Japanese and US interns but also need to clarify the difference between males and females. In this way, this research study could be more integrated.

**Cultural Contrasts in Value.** Cultural contrasts in value are also an important theoretical underpinning. The value American culture places on independence and individual freedom of choice naturally leads to the idea that everyone is equal regardless of age, social status, or authority. Japanese cultures, however, place more value on age and seniority and Japanese individual will always give way to the feeling of the group (Elashmawi, Farid. 2000).

There is not too much information about the cultural value in this research study. In American culture, the phrase “time is money” is commonly accepted as a framework for the desire to finish a task in the shortest amount of time with the greatest profit and American tend to be oriented toward the present and immediate gains. The Japanese, by contrast, view time as a continuum and value high quality over immediate gain. This cultural contrast in value is also relevant to the journal articles topic which I think is necessary. Members take part in a culture even if each member’s personal values do not entirely agree with some of the normative values sanctioned in the culture. This reflects an individual’s ability to synthesize and extract aspects valuable to them from the multiple subcultures they belong to and also influence individual’s time vision and expectation during working.

**Research Approach**

This article’s research approach mainly uses qualitative research. A total of 19 interns and 36 supervisors and instructors participated in this study with interviews conducted at four intervals: pre-departure; after one or two months working in Japan; at the midpoint of their sojourn; and upon or immediately after their return. Generally speaking, the research approach in this article is quite good, but there are still many blemishes inside.

Researcher’s bias can bias the design of study and can enter into data collection. It is a common disadvantage of qualitative research method. We can notably see that the researcher has already got too much information about the different time orientation between Japan and America. Almost every aspect has been defined before research in this article. For example, in time and activity aspect, the researcher make a definition that the dominant value system in the US has been characterized as a “doing orientation”, but the Japanese emphasis on working within harmonious group relations militates against attention to individual achievement. In this way, the researcher has already got bias before the research and bias the design of study and the conclusion. As we can see, there is no strong evidence for researcher to make conclusion in several aspects like time required for adaptation and productivity and timely feedback. What the researcher only does in these parts is just repeat the foundation of the difference time attitude between U.S and Japan and then put the bias in the data collection.

Lack of ethnographic studies and in-depth interview. Ethnography is in itself not so much a method as a category of human-computer interaction research. This kind of research has been adapted from sociology and anthropology, where it is a method of observing human interactions in social settings and activities. It can also be described as the observation of people in their cultural context. The goal of ethnography study is to understand an individual’s or group’s interactions within the culture. The data gained from ethnographical research is almost entirely qualitative. On the other hand, it is the improvement of a system in use in the culture by finding the problems in the way it is currently used. This involves observing users’ interactions with the system as well as the effects the system has on the culture of the workplace. McCleverty (1997) states, “The goal of an ethnographic study is to identify routine practices, problems, and possibilities for development within a given activity or setting.”
In this article, however, ethnographic studies have not exactly been used. Although there is only a small group of interviewers in this research, some ethnographic studies are also essential and need in-depth interviews. For instance, the people in this research should be divided into groups according to their age, gender, and status. Because American interns with different age, gender, and status in a Japanese company have different expectations, time required for adaptation, and attitude towards socialization. The research could not just analyze only a few of interviewers’ answers and make the conclusion. Some in-depth interviews and ethnographic studies should be used in this research. In this way, there is a strong evidence to show the different expectation and attitude between American interns and Japanese.

Lack of quantitative research method. It is important for researchers to realize that qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in conjunction with each other. According to Miles and Huberman's 1994 book *Qualitative Data Analysis*, quantitative researcher Fred Kerlinger is quoted as saying, “There’s no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0” (p. 40). To this another researcher, D. T. Campbell, asserts, “All research ultimately has a qualitative grounding” (p. 40). Qualitative research is appropriate to answer certain kinds of questions in certain conditions and quantitative is right for others.

As we can see from this journal article that there is not any quantitative research method used in it. It is also a drawback of this research. Researchers should use tools such as surveys and questionnaires to collect numerical data and seek precise measurement and analysis of target concepts. Individual interview could not give enough support for this research because it is only reflect few people’s viewpoints. Quantitative research generates statistics through the use of large-scale survey research. Questionnaires which related to time and culture are necessary in this research so that we can see every interviewer’s opinion through the feedback. It is much easier to make a justice conclusion.

Researchers’ Findings & Conclusions

This research article shows that distinction between past, present, and future as differentiating Japanese and US cultures are simplistic and potentially misleading. However, some parts of the conclusion are not valid and over-ambitious according to the research method.

The researcher makes a conclusion that all interns made the adjustment to remaining with the co-worker after the regular hours and came to appreciate the resulting change in the workplace atmosphere and interpersonal interactions. In my point of view, it is an over-ambitious conclusion because we cannot gain any information from the research. In addition, the responses of two American interns’ interview have not demonstrated that they came to appreciate the different kinds of environment and working hours.

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