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Cultural Interaction at a Bicultural Workplace:

The Case of Finns and Japanese

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**ABSTRACT**

Due to internationalization, global relationships have become established in a number of fields of business, education, politics, and culture. The association between Finland and Japan is no exception and in fact, it is expected to continue to develop further. Yet, in reality, as internationalization has grown too rapidly, intercultural workplaces encounter a variety of challenges and confusion as a consequence of the cultural diversity of employees. Hence, this study aims to identify how cultural diversity affects the intercultural workplace.

In this thesis, a qualitative case study method was chosen in order to analyze employees' experiences at a Finnish-Japanese bicultural workplace. Drawing on existing research literature, three cultural differences, namely 1. individualism/collectivism, 2. direct/indirect communication and 3. equal/hierarchical relationships, are discussed, as those differences seem to affect workplace interaction. As organization policy also can influence the workplace culture, the policy of the company studied is analyzed as well.

As the study demonstrates, previous research does not adequately reflect the experience of the participants of this study, five Finns and five Japanese who work together at the same bicultural workplace. In order to capture their experience, they were interviewed applying a semi-structured method, and the interviews were analyzed using categorical-content analysis. The results indicate that generalization of culture is merely impossible, yet cultural knowledge still has an important effect on the intercultural workplace.

Finally, the analysis shows how cultural insights cause a range of impacts on the work environment. Since cultural differences or characteristics exist to an extent and certain impacts are recognized as cultural conflicts, as a final point, possible implications or solutions are indicated, in order to improve or prevent such issues.

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**KEYWORDS:** Workplace culture, Japan, Finland, organization policy, bicultural workplace



## 1 INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has been growing because of easier access to other countries, not only through travelling, studying, working abroad, or immigrating, but also through the media. Regardless of a place of residence, without even visiting the actual places, people are more exposed to information regarding other cultures and become familiar with the environment outside of their societies (Savitha & Rani 2013: 313). Moreover, as a result of increasing globalization, companies grow more internationally in order to keep thriving in global economy. Public organizations such as educational or political institutions also turn into culturally diversified places. Naturally, both companies and organizations have employees from all over the world, and hence workplaces become further international. As a result, employees encounter more cross-cultural interactions in the workplace.

However, “globalization has probably developed faster than our capacity to “digest” all the changes it involves” (Savitha & Rani 2013: 308), and internationalization within the workplace is acknowledged as new phenomena. Work colleagues used to share similar cultural norms or values before internationalization had grown, yet in recent years, employees have been increasingly exposed to new cultural perspectives or behaviors at the workplace. In general, especially if people have similar cultural perceptions, ways of communicating may be more coherent, and thus, understanding in communication might be easier.

On the other hand, at an internationalized workplace, due to the presence of employees with a variety of cultural backgrounds and native languages, workplace communication turns to be different or more complicated than before. Even if some of the shared norms, assumptions, or unspoken cues had been used for the purpose of communication prior, these norms might no longer be valid at an international workplace. Hence, as intended messages may not be interpreted as planned, understanding can be challenging, and work colleagues may

miscomprehend each other more frequently. Those misunderstandings might result in a diminishing trust-bond among employees as well. (Meyer 2015)

Such misconception and confusion in communication were noticeable when I was working at an international workplace with multi-national colleagues for 6 years. I, as one of the Japanese employees, was interacting with a variety of employees from North America, Asia, and Europe. During those 6 years, as a result of misunderstanding or not knowing different cultural perceptions among the employees, my colleagues appeared to ponder negatively regarding each other or to be offended sometimes. Typically, people seemed to interpret others' behaviors based on their own cultural insights. Some manners may not have been coherent with others on occasions, and misperception brought a negative impact on the work environment, such as discouraging work motivation or reducing productivity. In addition, I have a three-year work experience at a Japanese organization in Finland, where there were only Finnish and Japanese employees. Between Finns and Japanese, some similar cultural perceptions at the workplace were discovered, and occasionally, those aspects united them stronger and it accelerated work efficiency as well. As the workplace had only Finns or Japanese, in terms of communication, challenges or difficulties as well as comparable perceptions were visible in their interaction.

Geert Hofstede is one of the most influential professors in the fields of culture and management. He introduced research on how cultures affect workplace values. According to Hofstede, culture is interpreted as “the collective mental programming of the human mind which distinguishes one group of people from another” (Hofstede G, Hofstede G.J & Minkov 2010: 6), and “dimensions of national cultures” (Hofstede G, Hofstede G.J & Minkov 2010: 31) can clarify cultural differences between countries. However, his research can be considered as obsolete and overgeneralized, as the original research was conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970. In recent times, “social and commercial interactions now frequently transcend national borders, which has created new and eclectic cultural ‘hybrids’” (Lewis 2013: 33), and, over a long period of time, culture may no longer be

homogeneous. Thus, the Hofstede dimensions may not necessarily illustrate how modern internationalized societies function. His concept of culture, which interconnects with nationality, may be oversimplified and it needs to be acknowledged as generalization.

Yet, cultural differences play a significant role in communication at an international workplace (Clausen 2006: 17). Therefore, at least, having knowledge of both one's own and other cultures is critical (Clausen 2006: 43-44). As Finns and Japanese are expected to interact even more at the same workplace, acknowledging one's own culture and learning about other cultures may be an initial aspect to apprehend more of the workplace culture of Finland and Japan.

### 1.1 Previous Research

Research on cultural comparison or correlation in a business environment has been published, for instance, between Japan and Denmark by Lisbeth Clausen (2006), and Kazuo Nishiyama (2000) presents Japanese business cultures in constant to western insights. Clausen (2006) focuses on five Danish companies in Japan and addresses the communication issues in intercultural business circumstances. As the Danish companies are located in Japan, the local employees are mainly Japanese, and the communication manners or the organization policies have to adapt to the Japanese subsidiaries to a certain extent. Ultimately, Clausen (2006) indicates how the Danish headquarters and the subsidiaries in Japan learn different cultural insights and adjust their perspectives, in order to operate the company more smoothly. In addition, Clausen (2006) emphasizes the important role of individual competence and knowledge of cultures in cross-cultural communication. The communication models are illustrated in global, national, organizational, professional, and individual levels, and each perspective impacts workplace communication. "Multiple-level analysis provides insight into business encounters in their full complexity" (Clausen 2006: 240) and helps to comprehend intercultural communication.

Furthermore, Nishiyama (2000) introduces the comprehensive Japanese business characteristics and provides cultural understanding, especially in order for western markets to establish a successful business relationship with Japan. Nishiyama (2000) describes how history, politics, geography, education, religion, and culture interrelate to form the Japanese business manners in depth. Japanese communication methods are explicitly illustrated in a variety of business circumstances, such as the decision-making process, sales presentation, or negotiation. Both Nishiyama (2000) and Clausen (2006) justify the complexity of an intercultural workplace and explain cultural issues and challenges particularly in the case of working with Japanese employees or companies.

Finnish workplace cultures have been contrasted to Russia in a number of master theses. For instance, Anna Baranovskaya (2015) and Kaisa Tiira (2007) conducted comparative research mainly in relation to the cultural dimensions of Finland and Russia. Baranovskaya (2015) focuses on the human resources management (HRM) of Finnish companies in Russia, and studies how the HRM can be similar or different between headquarters in Finland and a subsidiary in Russia, and analyzes the impacts of institutional and cultural dimensions in HRM policies. Tiira (2007) also researches how the concepts of national culture influence the Finnish small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Russia and identifies “the role and meaning of business relationships in Russia in internationalization process of Finnish SMEs” (Kaisa 2007: 80). In both theses, the implication of the organization policy and national culture is incorporated into the theory as well.

On the other hand, studies focusing on workplace interaction between Finns and Japanese do not seem to exist yet. Yet, economic relations between Finland and Japan may increase in the future, and therefore, conducting research on how the Finnish and Japanese cultural insights impact on workplace may bring useful insights and a small contribution for cultural understanding, in order to enhance a successful business relationship between Finland and Japan.

## 1.2 Finnish-Japanese Business Relations

At present, Japan has a strong impact on the world economy as the country with the third biggest GDP in the world (World Bank 2017). Because of Japan's influential economy, a great amount of research has been conducted regarding aspects related to "its markets, business and consumer practices and cultural factors in personal communication" (Clausen 2006: 15). According to the European Commission, Japan and the European Union hold more than a third of the world's GDP as of 2016. Additionally, among Asian countries, Japan ranks as 2<sup>nd</sup> most significant trade partner to the EU, as well as being one of the main investors to the EU. (European Commission 2016) Hence, Japan has also played an important role in the EU economy.

Specifically, regarding the Japanese economy, after the Second World War, although Japan was defeated completely, the economy developed so drastically that Japan became the second biggest economy within 50 years after the end of the war. During this period, Japan maintained, "the cultural identity that made its citizens so distinct when compared to the western world" (Miwa & Ramseyer 2006: 113). In fact, in order to have a successful business with Japan, it was the western business market which had to learn cultural specifics of the Japanese market. Even though Japan has incorporated a variety of other cultural factors into its society, Japanese cultural characteristics were distinctively identified in the business world. (Miwa & Ramseyer 2006: 113) Nevertheless, the decline of Japan's economic power and rapid globalization caused economy integration and international cooperation.

As a part of the EU, Finland has sustained a steady economic and diplomatic relationship with Japan. For instance regarding trade association, Finland has exported mainly timber, paper, and cobalt to Japan, while importing industrial products from Japan. In addition, not only to strengthen the diplomatic relationship through Ministers' official visits, but also for the purpose of cultural exchanges, Japanese Imperial Family members and the President of Finland made formal visits to each country as well. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan

2015) In order for an academic relationship to be reinforced, the mobility of researchers, students and artists is emphasized, and as a result, collaboration in the fields of science, higher education, arts, and cultures have been further developed. Specifically, under the “Finland-Japan Programme 2007-2011,” at which Finnish former President Halonen and Japanese Princess Takamado were assigned as honorary presidents, the academic cooperation for scientific research was enlarged. (The Finnish Cultural and Academic Institutes 2015)

In addition, a number of organizations contribute to accentuate business cooperation between Finland and Japan. For instance, for the purpose of endorsing more trade and economic exchanges, first of all, the Finnish Chamber of Commerce in Tokyo organizes seminars or meetings concerning both Finnish and Japanese business practices or workplace culture. Information regarding life in general and social activities are also provided in order for Finns and Japanese to learn more about each other’s cultures. Hence, with the cooperation from the Finnish Chamber of Commerce, business relationships are supported and new business opportunities have been created (Finnish Chamber of Commerce in Tokyo 2015). In addition, according to the Finnish public organization Finpro, which consists of Export Finland, Visit Finland and Invest in Finland, Finnish tourism and foreign investment to Finland are primarily enhanced in order to develop business globally. Finpro perceives Japan as one of the major business partners, and hence, an office was established in Japan, and Finpro encourages Finnish small or medium size companies to build their business in Japan. To encourage business internationalization growth, introducing Finnish strategies to Japan is acknowledged as a vital step. (Embassy of Finland in Tokyo 2015) To conclude, business, academic, and cultural relationships between Finland and Japan have developed, and therefore, further bicultural interaction is expected in the future.

### 1.3 Research Question, Methodology, and Significance

The research questions of this thesis are:

1. How do employees in a bicultural Japanese-Finnish company experience workplace culture and interaction at the workplace?
2. How do cultural differences affect the work environment?

As the topic aims to understand how people interpret personal experiences in cross-cultural interaction at the workplace, a qualitative case study is well suited as the research method, and the research can reveal the complexity of their understanding (Mason 1996: 4). Ten people, five Finns and five Japanese, were selected from a Japanese organization in Finland; the organization has only Finnish or Japanese employees. Those 10 people were interviewed using the method of semi-structured interviews. After the interview, all of the data was transcribed, and the text contents were classified in order that “text can be captured and revealed in a number of text statistics,” as well as comprehending “the latent content and deeper meaning embodies in the text” (Douriau, Reger & Pfarrer 2007: 6). In order to analyze the specific experiences at the bicultural workplace, categorical-content analysis was used, since “deep individual or collective structures such as values, intentions, attitudes, and cognitions” (Douriau, Reger & Pfarrer 2007: 6) can be interpreted, classified, and contrasted as Finnish or Japanese perceptions. Further details concerning the data collection and methodology are presented in chapter 5.

This research can potentially contribute towards building and sustaining the relationship between Finland and Japan. On the other hand, as Japan had been a homogeneous society for decades, it brought more challenges for Japanese to accept foreign manners or insights (Nishiyama 2000: 43). Yet, as a consequence of economic globalization, interaction with Europeans and Americans was increased, and Japan has acquired more “Western business

etiquette” (Clausen 2006: 37). In addition, based on my experiences in intercultural communication at the bicultural workplace, while cultural stereotypes may indicate some behaviors in certain circumstances, the academic theories concerning national cultures cannot simply define their actions as Finnish or Japanese, due to individual changes of perspectives. “Cultural knowledge and personal relationships belong to people” (Clausen 2006: 52) in the end, and hence, new cultural insights may be discovered due to internationalization effects.

However, cultural differences are still present and may influence workplace interaction, and therefore, through researching the employees’ experiences at the bicultural workplace, a range of their insights can be introduced. On behalf of the research object, the analyses may also be used in order to improve an international work environment from a human resources perspective, as it helps to foster cultural understanding among people with different backgrounds. Clausen (2006: 45) indicates that “the individual level of knowledge and accumulated personal experience in intercultural encounters is an essential factor of influence” and, in fact, as the research aims to specifically study the interaction at a bicultural workplace and its impact, the importance of having cultural knowledge regarding Finland and Japan can be highlighted in the end. In summary, as the relations between Finland and Japan are enlarged on various occasions, acquiring such cultural understanding is one of the significant motives in research.

#### 1.4 Outline of Thesis

This study begins with the introduction, which presents the background information and the economic and cultural relationship between Finland and Japan. Chapter 2 discusses the definition of workplace culture in depth. The research continues with three cultural values of Finland and Japan in chapter 3. Since organization policy influences the workplace culture, chapter 4 presents the organization policy of the institution studied. Then, it proceeds to the

methodology and data collection in chapter 5, followed by data and analysis in chapter 6. Finally, this research concludes with the summary and discussion.

## 2 THE DEFINITION OF WORKPLACE CULTURE

Although workplace culture is influenced by a variety of different factors, broadly, it can be claimed that cultural perceptions and company policy both shape workplace culture. More precisely, three main factors are discussed in this chapter. First of all, the general concept of culture is discussed. In the next chapter, the theory of workplace culture is presented and, as stereotype interconnects with culture to a certain degree, it also presents the implication of stereotype. Clausen (2006: 65) states that organization policy is one of the factors that influences employee's behaviors or insights, since distinctive visions, rules, or corporate cultural values can make intercultural communication easier at the workplace and connect employees stronger. Hence, the company policy certainly affects the workplace environment. For instance, if the company is public or private, or if the company has its own explicit rules, workplace circumstances will be different. Therefore, both the organizational policy and employee's cultural backgrounds are incorporated in the workplace culture. The organization policy of the case company will be discussed further in chapter 4.

Moreover, "workplace interactions are also frequently asymmetrical" (Heritage 1997), since a variety of factors such as power, position, or expertise may have an effect on employees' behaviors (Koester 2010: 4). Thus, workplace interaction is never simple, and adding intercultural factors increases the complexity. In this chapter, in order to understand the definition of workplace culture in depth, the possible concepts that influence workplace culture are presented.

### 2.1 General Concepts of Culture

This subchapter discusses the concepts of culture first, and how the concepts are built into cultural perceptions and influence individuals or society, since, in the end, workplace culture is strongly related to the cultural perspectives of employees. The Oxford English Dictionary defines culture as "the distinctive ideas, customs, social behavior, products, or way of life of

a particular nation, society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs, etc.” On account of socialization with others, all human beings have acquired their own cultures. Socialization occurs in the family, among friends, neighbors, or through mass media. Through socialization, people develop their own perspectives, behaviors, and physical activities. “Cultural knowledge includes experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, self-concept, role expectations, use of space, concept of time, and material objects” (Nishiyama 2000: 15-16). And through socialization, people develop patterns of interaction (Nishiyama 2000: 17).

A society produces morality in order to indicate the “code of conduct” (Gert & Gert 2016: 1) to the citizens, and both organizational and societal levels have ethics and morals. (Salminen 2010: 7). Knowledge is constructed socially, and people tend to learn or judge what is acceptable or not, what is reflected as rude or polite in the society; therefore, people know how to behave in the society (Geertz 1973: 5). For instance, while in general, in the Nordic countries, showing too much emotion in public is not necessarily considered as positive, rather immature, while in southern European countries, keeping “poker faced” could be regarded as untrustworthy. Such norms are built into people’ mind through socialization (Savitha & Rani 2013: 311).

However, Savitha and Rani (2013: 309-310) mention that acquired cultural perspectives make people misunderstand others, unless the cultural perceptions are shared. Moreover, in communication among people with different cultural perspectives, those differences possibly lead to “inaccurate judgments and serious breakdowns in communication” (Nishiyama 2000: 17-18). Therefore, points of view are not merely subjective if they are acquired through socialization. Yet, the truth is that there is no concept of superior status in morality. Cultural norms cannot be indicated as “universal truth” (Benedict 1934: 14-15), as different societies have different views, and in the end, one view is merely one of many others; especially because no objective methods prove what is really right or wrong.

Hence, people with different cultures do not necessarily have to be persuaded by the concepts of ethics which are applied in other cultures (Sweet 2000: 9). Culture can be created by a group through the social construction process, and cultural implication or comprehension relies on the contexts. Nonetheless, even though individuals do not have any right to judge others, they tend to do so according to their morality. As “culture is understood as an internal system of assumptions, values and norms that are held by an organization or nation collectively and which are relatively stable” (Clausen 2006: 50), in the end, knowing other cultures helps people to recognize cultural differences, which might affect workplace culture. On the other hand, as a result of rapid growth in international mobility, it is not possible to indicate what national culture is, and as a matter of fact, understanding national cultures is granted as “imaginary” (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 32-33).

## 2.2 Workplace Culture

In general, employees tend to share or compare their own cultural insights with others, and in fact, similar ways of thinking or common belief about work manners are appreciated (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 31). Those who do not share these values may not only misunderstand the implication of others’ behaviors, but conflict may also occur, as such differences are not expected among colleagues in the first place (Savitha & Rani 2013: 312). Yet, “general cultures do not explain the business characteristics in business contexts” (Clausen 2006: 55-56) and identifying “what constitutes cultures in the workplace” (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 31) is important.

Savitha and Rani (2013: 311) differentiate two levels of culture at the workplace. The first level is categorized as interpersonal relations among individuals, “who belong to the ‘large’ and distinctive cultures of provenance, or to sub- and/or co-cultures as ‘small’ culture.” Sub-cultures are considered as “the variable patterns of thought and behaviour of similar groups of people.” Inside of co-cultures, they have their group perspectives, rules, or faiths which

differentiate them from others. Examples of those groups are women or the elderly, who may be acknowledged as “smaller cultures.” In much larger groups, the groups of women or the elderly tend to possess their ways of thinking or common belief.

At the second level, “culture operates in the workplace at the level of interaction between individuals as members of the same organization” (Savitha & Rani 2013: 311). At this level, people are aware of their organizational cultures; specific values, norms, rules or methods are established as their collective behaviors in the organization. Hence, they tend to follow the organizational cultures and share collective views, and they act accordingly or in similar manners at the workplace, in spite of their own cultural perceptions. Organizational cultures are “emblematic of regularization, standardization and normativity affecting a range of decisions including language choice and use” (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 32). Therefore, the workplace exhibits its own organizational rules and ethics as its culture.

On the other hand, as discussed, although general cultural insights may not be acknowledged at the workplace by reason of company policy, it is important to be aware that some of those insights still affect the workplace culture. This is due to the fact that “organizational culture is partly influenced by the national culture of the country of origin” (Baranovskaya 2015: 32). However, a multinational workplace is possibly defined as “cosmopolitan space in its ‘incorporation’ of the global outsider within the insiderness of locality” (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 32-33). In addition, although the workplace culture is formed out of collective values of the organization, such values are possibly inculcated or changed, in order to meet the needs or wishes from employees and to bring more benefits or achievement to the organization (Clausen 2006: 50).

To sum up, cultures at the workplace may be defined as a complex mixture of organizational policy, national culture, and organizational culture, and can be defined as being unique, yet may be transformed over time according to the company’s demands or goals.

### 2.3 Stereotype

Stereotypical thinking may be a source of conflict, too. In order to comprehend workplace culture as whole, the concept of stereotypes needs to be incorporated, as both general culture and workplace culture can be interconnected to stereotype. “A stereotype is an individual’s set of beliefs about the characteristics or attributes of a group” (Judd & Park 1993: 110). As discussed, within society, certain concepts are taught to individuals and therefore, the same perspectives or values can be shared as stereotype in a group. Some of those stereotypes can be even recognized by a large part in the society. (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 15) Stereotypes are gradually established based on interconnected conceptions; this enables a society to perceive certain groups in a particular way. Under social influences, people consistently “become more similar to or more different from each other” (ibid: 6-7), on the account of the “coincidence of common experience or the existence of shared knowledge within society” (ibid: 7). Some stereotypes are likely to be “normative beliefs just like other beliefs” (ibid: 7) in the society.

In addition, “stereotypes are consensual” (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 15). Unless the majority of the members of a society agree to believe in the same way, stereotypes do not exist. For instance, if there is a stereotype towards the unemployed: “*unemployed people are lazy*” then this statement cannot be accepted nor spread if only a small number of individuals possesses this view. Lönnqvist, Jasinskaja-Lahti, and Verkasalo (2012: 765-766) claim that national stereotypes, defined as “beliefs about the characteristics of people from different countries” have been considered as very stable. Furthermore, sophisticated stereotypes have been collected according to a variety of research and therefore, classified as theoretical conceptions.

Why do individuals use stereotypes? Although there is a number of reasons, the majority tends to rely on stereotype for the purpose of sense-making (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 3). Since it is not possible for individuals to understand or experience the whole world

on their own, stereotypes possibly make it easier to figure out others or different societies. As confronting something completely new is exhausting or confusing, having stereotypes as knowledge may be helpful to illustrate the phenomena (Lippmann 1922: 59). Moreover, in encountering unfamiliar circumstances, people have a tendency to use knowledge gained in the past. Yet, since it is challenging to comprehend different societies, “we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (Lippmann 1922: 81). In order to save time efficiently in apprehension, stereotypes can be defined as “aids to explanation” and “energy-saving devices” (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 2). Furthermore, stereotypes are used not only for defending the position of one society from another (Lippmann 1922: 64), but also, distinguishing one from others, through finding the differences in other groups (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 3).

Stereotypical knowledge is considered as consistent, and to some extent, proved as true (Lippmann 1922: 60). Hence, stereotypes can be validated to a certain extent. They enable individuals not only to apprehend others to a certain degree, but also to predict some behaviors (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 5). Nevertheless, stereotypical thinking treats individuals as group members and the diversity or complexity within the individuals may be neglected. When stereotyped knowledge is used for the purpose of interpretation, descriptions often become too simple without taking details into account. Therefore, it is also important to acknowledge that stereotypes are generalized beliefs, and may oversimplify nations or cultures (Clausen 2006: 55).

In addition, stereotypes can turn into biases. Such negative stereotypes become “the received wisdom” (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 3-4) over time. When the negative stereotypes are stirred in the society, a specific group of people, for example, a specific ethnicity, is blamed for the growth in crime rate, and prejudice, discrimination, and repression towards the group can be created in the society (Cox 2015: 1). Consecutively, these prejudices may produce additional negative stereotypes from the stereotyped group towards the stereotyping

group. Hence, negative perceptions towards certain groups in the society encourage each other not only to be hostile, but also to create another negative stereotyped perception of the other (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 11).

At the intercultural workplace, generalization of other cultures may prevent from discovering new insights of others, since individuals may focus too much on stereotyped behaviors. Yet, because of globalization, individual's perspectives have gradually changed, and the stereotypical insights possibly transform over the long term. In addition, generalizations may not provide any insights (Clausen 2006: 55-56). However, learning and acquiring other cultural views provide individuals with useful insights and some knowledge may help people understand others with different cultural backgrounds. Those who are more acquainted can be less biased towards others, and workplace communication goes more smoothly (Clausen 2006: 60-61). Having "basic background knowledge on the potential impact of national culture" (Clausen 2006: 55) can be the starting point to apprehend others at the intercultural workplace.

In summary, to an extent, having knowledge of stereotypes may help individuals to comprehend others, especially in case of interacting with other cultures. Although there is a possibility that negative stereotypes become prejudices or discrimination towards others, stereotypes are used "for explanatory and justificatory purposes" (Yzerbyt, Spears & McGarty 2002: 17), in order to illustrate something unfamiliar. In the end, the concepts of stereotypes are validated to a point.

### 3 CULTURAL VALUES AND BELIEFS OF FINLAND AND JAPAN

In this chapter, both Finnish and Japanese cultural perceptions are separately discussed. Particularly, three aspects, namely individualism/collectivism, direct/indirect communication and equal/hierarchical relationship, are discussed, as these three aspects impact workplace interaction, and these three characteristics are prominently contrasted between Finns and Japanese. Before discussing the three aspects further, historical and socio-geographical implications in cultures are introduced, as history or geography also influence the formation of culture. In an internationalized society, national identities have been transformed, yet maintained to a certain extent (Häkli 2008: 11).

#### 3.1 Impacts of Historical & Socio-geographical Dimensions

This sub-chapter presents how the past wars, the history and the occupation by two neighbors, yet also the geographical situation impact on Finnish identities. Then, the history of Japan and the impact of the geographical circumstance on the cultural identity are discussed.

##### 3.1.1 Finland

As one of the Nordic countries, Finland is located between Sweden and Russia. As Sweden ruled Finland from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to 1809, and Finland did not possess “a self-standing political-territorial status” (Häkli 2008: 11), Sweden greatly influenced the establishment of Finnish education, and the legal and social welfare systems (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 20). From 1809, the Grand Duchy of Russia governed Finland, yet provided them with expanded autonomy. Hence, Finnish local officials could create the registrations in their own Senate or Diet, and the Grand Duchy of Russia allowed Finland to build the Finnish state. (Kangas 2001: 58-59) Finnish national identity can be defined specifically on account of the fact that Finland turned into a self-governing Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire in

1809 (Häkli 2008: 11). As the Grand Duchy of Russia had a relatively tolerant policy towards the Finnish language or cultures, Finnish nationalism, known as the Fennoman movement, emerged (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 20). Even though the Grand Duchy of Russia controlled Finland, the “legacy of Swedish rule” (Häkli 2008: 11) remained, and hence, the laws, education, or social welfare institutions continued to function as before.

In addition to being colonized and ruled by two other countries, Finland went through a fierce civil war in 1918 and famine, which caused a great number of casualties, and deep wounds were shared among Finns. On account of the fierce experiences through the civil war, the Winter War, and the Second World War, strong nationalism was established among Finns, and Finnish society was indicated to possess a homogeneous cultural perspective (Kivimäki 2012: 496). Such experiences encouraged Finns to work hard in order to achieve a different future. Additionally, confronting the wars including the Second World War against Russia, led Finland to strive for the elimination of class (de Oliveira Andreotti, Gert & Cash 2015: 248-249).

Jutila (2014: 936-937) states that identity has been established not only through “contemporary events and actions,” but also based on “historical events” as well, and those pasts allow people to “explain how we have come to be who we are at the moment.” Historical facts have possibly inspired Finns to form a collective cultural identity as Finnish citizens. Yet, since it is not possible for young generations to experience such pasts, history as myths are educated narratively at school, as one of the socialization processes, and it may help them to construct similar identities. (Jutila 2014: 936-937) In fact, according to the Finnish National Core Curricula for Basic Education, in history courses, the relationship among the past, the present, and the future is taught, in order for students to gain “multiperspectivity” as well as identities as “active citizens” of Finland (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 194). Moreover, education helps not only to heal the wounds from the past, but also took Finnish people out of “ignorance and poverty towards a shared collective future” (de Oliveira Andreotti, Gert & Cash 2015: 249).

In addition, it can be stated that the environment may have an impact on culture (Lewis 2004: 15-16). Finland is “the most densely forested land in Europe” (Lewis 2004: 20), as almost 70 percent of the land is forested. Surrounded by the forests, according to Lewis, people can turn to be less outgoing or prioritize their privacy. As of 2014, according to the Central Intelligence Agency, the ratio of Finnish population per kilometer was ranked as the 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest in Europe, and such a low density of population may influence Finnish people to establish an independent personality (Lewis 2004: 20). Since it is believed that geographical traits associate with “cultural identity,” within Finnish education, geography is acknowledged as an important subject to learn at a school. Children start learning geography from the age of 7, as the geography is described as “a stronger stature” among the school subjects. (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 190-192)

### 3.1.2 Japan

As Japan is an island and geographically isolated from other parts of the world, it made it more challenging to be exposed to other countries, and allowed it to have “a high degree of cultural and racial homogeneity” (Nishiyama 2000: 2). In fact, since 1616, Japan cut direct contacts with other countries for more than 250 years, and as a result, the population turned out to be more homogeneous (ibid: 84). Due to a governmental closed-door policy, which shut down any contacts with the outside of the world, Japan developed “uniform cultural patterns” (ibid: 2). Meanwhile, inside of Japan, the high density of population encouraged Japanese people to prioritize others’ feelings or needs first in social or business interaction (ibid: 85). Hence, to a certain degree, the Japanese were able to grow “their own cultural identity, distinctive personality traits, social skills, and artistic achievements” (ibid: 2).

It is important to acknowledge that Japan also learnt and took a variety of cultural traits, including languages, arts, or customs, as well as technology from other countries, and Japanese society also appears to be westernized. Yet, even though Japan acquired elements from abroad, a Japanese identity was maintained as under the slogan 和魂洋才: *wakon-yōsai*

(Japanese Spirit, Western Technology). According to the concept, Japanese work ethics as “dedication and self-sacrifice” (Nishiyama 2000: 3-4) must be retained as the workplace tradition. Hence, Japan has developed as a more homogeneous country in terms of “race, language, culture, and, informal ties among individuals” (Clausen 2006: 256). Clausen adds that an “‘island’ mentality” as ethnocentrism was established in Japan over history, and such a mentality may be recognized in business circumstances as well.

In addition, as one of the cultural components, religion reflects in behaviors within society to some degree. For instance, religious perception such as a “Buddhist compassion toward all living beings” (Nishiyama 2000: 7) influences cultural views in Japan. Qin (2013: 140) states that Japanese ethical insights originate from “the Confucian philosophy of filial piety,” which teaches a society to respect the elderly and the parents. The religious views appears to impact people’s insights in order to prioritize others in the society (Qin 2013: 140). Regardless of internationalization, a number of aspects such as geographical location, a homogeneous nation, religious view, history, politics, or education, are all interrelated to form “a hierarchically structured society and culture with complex rules for interpersonal relationship” (Nishiyama 2000: 8).

### 3.2 Individualism / Collectivism

This sub-chapter discourses one of the cultural contrasts between Finns and Japanese. Not only on account of historical occurrences, but the Finnish education have an effect on forming some level of individualistic insights among the Finns. In comparison, the group mentality is established among Japanese through socialization process in both schools and home, and it also indicates how such cultural insights can be recognized in a work environment.

### 3.2.1 Finland

As discussed, as a result of socio-geographical circumstances surrounded by nature with low population density, it can be said that individualism is rooted in the Finnish personality (Hautala-Hirvioja 2011: 189). In addition, in Finland, education is highly valued and respected, and thus, the society encourages the individual citizen to be more educated. Sahlberg (2007: 155-156) claims that as one of the educational policies, schools do not focus on competition among students. Until 5<sup>th</sup> grades (10-11 years old) in basic education, numerical grades are not given to students, as giving numbers defines only comparison with each other. The more important factor is how much each student has individually achieved in class; therefore, each teacher is able to pay attention to the individual accomplishment. Especially in basic education, the purpose of education is to develop students' curiosity for learning, and students are encouraged to learn voluntarily. Hence, Finland puts emphasis not only on individual achievements through learning at school, but leadership and responsibility are also given to individual teachers in order for them to make education curriculums with flexibility and creativity, in relation to students' needs. (Sahlberg 2007: 165-166) The Finnish education system has also been created uniquely for each circumstance. In the end, "schools deal with social inequality" (Sahlberg 2007: 159), and as a result, education enhances both individuality and equality among students.

In addition, Finland does not consider external testing as important since independent learning is more emphasized (Sahlberg 2007: 155-156). In fact, Finnish students take the national standardized achievement test only in 12<sup>th</sup> grade as "matriculation examination" (Savolainen 2009: 285). Sahlberg (2011: 23) states that "personalized learning and creativity" is highly valued in order that "individual development and abilities" are enhanced in education. Finland has aimed to place school as an "individualised learning centre" (Simola, Rinne & Kivirauma 2002: 258). Therefore, on account of such an education system, students are not accustomed to compare their status with others, yet naturally focus on their individual achievement.

In addition to the education system, religious aspects have an impact in Finland. Christianity is a major religion in Finland, and the biggest community is the Evangelical Lutheran Church. According to Statistics Finland, in 2016, 72 percent belong to the Lutheran National Church. The second biggest is the community of the Orthodox Church of Finland and the members of the Orthodox Church are composed by a little bit over 1 percent of the entire population (Statistics Finland 2017). Even though the majority is affiliated with a religious group, secularisation has influenced society. “Scepticism towards the authorities, weakening religious socialisation and criticism of close state-church relations” (Poulter 2016: 5) indicate a declining connection between society and church. The concept of self-recognition replaces devotion towards religions. The freedom of individual choices over religious beliefs is respected, and results in reassuring more individualism especially among the Lutheran Finns. (Poulter 2016: 12-13)

In theory, “individualism stresses independence and self-reliance” (Schimmack, Oishi & Diener 2005: 25). Hence, on account of this aspect, in order to make a decision, people tend to refer their own experiences and to value independency for “maximizing one’s own well-being” (Schimmack, Oishi & Diener 2005: 26). These concepts reflect on business manners as well. Baranovskaya (2015: 21) claims that Finland prioritizes more on “flexibility” in business, and each individual is respected for who she/he is. Finnish employees have a tendency to focus on accomplishing their duty individually. Hence, work tasks are conducted independently according to each employee’s accountability, and their private life can be separated from the workplace in general (Tiira 2007: 47).

The fact of having independency means that employees are expected to complete the tasks on their own. Individual employees are aware of being responsible for making a decision, and it is not necessary for them to ask for permission from supervisors all the time. It is possible for employees to consult with supervisors when facing problems; however, as a general rule, the workplace expects the employees to complete their work in exchange for

providing independency and flexibility. (Clausen 2006: 151) In summary, it can be said that individualism is appreciated in business context as one of the Finnish characteristics.

### 3.2.2 Japan

In Japan, since elementary school, students are commonly expected to join group activities after school. As a school principle, most of the students play sports after classes are finished. Naturally, as one of the group members, they spend most of the time together on a daily basis, and collective perceptions can be developed. In addition, it is believed that success in life comes from the efforts accomplished by a group, not by individuals. (Nishiyama 2000: 18) Since childhood, people are educated not to stand out nor express their desires in order to keep harmony in interpersonal relationships (Nishiyama 2000: 101). If people are distinctive from others even positively, they need to be hammered down, and everyone acts as the same or similar with others. In this regard, Japanese people believe that they maintain harmony in a group, as well as being a team player (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 254).

According to the literature, these ideas re-appear in business environments as well. Since group identity is more emphasized, the business attainment is acknowledged as group success. Nishiyama (2000: 103) claims that people may be afraid of reaching an individual accomplishment, as others possibly see it as a “selfish personal achievement.” “Group-centeredness and mutual assistance” (Nishiyama 2000: 103) have been highlighted through education. On account of emphasizing a group identity, individual or distinct desires tend to be suppressed. Such a way of thinking encourages people to be concerned about what others think of you, since they believe that being similar with others is more “normal” (Nishiyama 2000: 7).

Nishiyama clarifies further that confrontation should be avoided, and restraint, known as 遠慮 (*Enryo*), is required. 遠慮 (*Enryo*) is defined as one of the significant social virtues in interacting with others in Japan. Under the concept, being unique or a minority, and

disagreeing with the majority need to be avoided. This “social conformity” is not seen as “a sign of being a weak-willed yes-man;” yet, it represents “inner strength and self-discipline” in Japan. (Nishiyama 2000: 19)

Such perception appears in a variety of business circumstances. For instance, individuals find it challenging to express or present their ideas at a meeting, and thus, in order to reach a major decision, the process takes a relatively long time, especially because more people need to be engaged in the final verdict as well (Clausen 2006: 96). Generally, consensus from the group is required in a decision-making procedure (Clausen 2006: 58). On the other hand, taking leadership or responsibility in the decision-making occasion can be perceived as “ego-centric” (Clausen 2006: 21) in Japan, which makes it more difficult to conduct a meeting efficiently. In order for the decision to be made, in addition to an open meeting, on occasions, employees commit to “intense behind-the-scene negotiations” (Nishiyama 2000: 5). Such a process is called 根回し (*Nemawashi*). 根回し (*Nemawashi*) defines an informal discussion before the formal meeting when a proposal is discussed again and again in advance (Nishiyama 2000: 123). For the purpose of implementing a proposal, many unofficial meetings or discussion may be required to assure group consensus. Decision-making is based on a collective consensus in order to displace responsibility from individuals. In principle, a group shares the work responsibility together. (Nishiyama 2000: 118)

Due to this collective perception, as Japanese are more likely conscious of others’ opinions, workplace attitudes also need to be cautiously taken into consideration. Not only being hard-working, but appearing to be engaged in work can be significant. For instance, keeping a good physical posture, such as sitting straight up on a chair, is one of the methods to show dedication towards work. The fact that employees look “respectful, obedient and wishing to be of service” to others, is meaningful as “a form of authority” in Japan (Clausen 2006: 151). In addition to being aware of others’ perception, how you act towards others is also important. In order to respect others’ feelings or to keep a harmonious relationship in a group, the concepts of 本音と建前 (*Honne and Tatemae*) are used on many occasions in

Japan (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 254). 本音 (*Honne*) defines real feelings or desires of individuals, while 建前 (*Tatemaie*) is what society expects or requires you to say, depending on circumstances. Therefore, 本音と建前 (*Honne* and *Tatemaie*) can be opposite concepts. Under collectivism, people are required to follow the concepts of 建前 (*Tatemaie*) as “the general consensus of a group” (Shimizu & Levine 2002: 10), even if they do not wish to behave accordingly.

Yet, in general, individual people are willing to comply with 建前 (*Tatemaie*) as long as their 本音 (*Honne*), which are private feelings or thoughts, are kept a secret. For instance, under the concept of 建前 (*Tatemaie*), politicians may claim their agenda to citizens, by “changing the truth to suit their audience, garner support or deflect criticism and responsibility” (Arudou 2011). They may already know the agenda is not possible to be achieved; yet, they inform what society wants to hear. Such concepts, more or less, can exist in every culture. However, since the concept of 本音と建前 (*Honne* and *Tatemaie*) is often used in business communications in Japan, acknowledging them is rather beneficial at the workplace. Japan prioritizes conflict avoidance especially in face to face situation, and thus, Japanese may hesitate to express negative opinions to others. For instance, in the case of closing the deal for a business contract, although a Japanese company may tell that they are, very much, fond of the idea and look into the possibility under very positive attitudes; Japanese may merely act accordingly, only to keep the harmony at once, in order to not provide an explicitly negative response for others, following the concept of 建前 (*Tatemaie*). Nonetheless, as 本音 (*Honne*), they are certain that making a contract is impossible. (Nishiyama 2000: 96-97) These attitudes possibly confuse other parties, and in fact, waste their time.

In Japan, work is prioritized over private life. First of all, once the Japanese are hired by a company, they feel that they belong to the group in the company. In fact, Japanese were used to be employed under lifetime contracts and jobs were principally secured until retirement.

Especially if companies offer life-time employment, they expect their employees to become family members of the company; thus, engaging to work for longer hours, in spite of official working-hours, is taken for granted. (Nishiyama 2000: 34, Clausen 2006: 58) As a result, connection and commitment towards work are strong.

On the other hand, when Japanese have a family, they belong to a family group. As the group member, the responsibility to provide financial support encourages them to commit in working harder. In the end, the responsibility as a family group member interrelates with the concept *work comes first* as well. Yet, in recent years, lifetime employment has no longer been common; hence, contribution or connection towards the workplace is naturally changing. Nonetheless, those who have a family are required to work dedicatedly as responsible group members (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 254). As a matter of fact, it seems contradictory that Japanese people do not take more vacation at work and end up sacrificing their time with the family. Yet such a hard-working ethic possibly derives from the collectivism insight that ‘if I have a family and I belong to a company as a group member, I need to be responsible for both groups, and working long hours without much personal time cannot be avoided when providing a living for a family’.

In addition, if other colleagues have such work attitudes, since Japanese are conscious regarding how one is perceived by others, behaving differently may be challenging. As 本音 (*Honne*), they might wish to work shorter hours and take more holidays; as 建前 (*Tatemae*), they do not mention it, yet work like the others. Moreover, the work commitment also interrelates with after-work relationships among colleagues. After-work socialization is not mandatory, but it is also important for building relationships and it may impact on future promotion or allocations. An employee who does not attend this mode of socialization is regarded as “aloof and unsociable” (Nishiyama 2000: 37). Overall people avoid acting in a way that makes them unique. On the other hand, although people socialize after work against their will, they rarely invite their colleagues to their home, since they prefer to separate their private time or space from work circumstances (Clausen 2006: 58).

### 3.3 Direct / Indirect Communication

In addition to cultural values in individualism and collectivism, differences in communication can be observed between Finns and Japanese. This sub-chapter discusses how the literature presents communication in Finnish and Japanese business contexts.

#### 3.3.1 Finland

Tryggvason (2006: 1796) claims that, according to cross-cultural research, Finnish people are described as “straightforward, easy to work with, and open-minded” in contrast to other cultures. These characteristics reflect the workplace communication as well. In business circumstances, Finns tend to express precisely and to get straight to the point in the discussion, and they avoid small talk (Tryggvason 2006: 1797). In meetings, Finns tend to state directly what needs to be revised or implemented specifically, even though they are not asked to speak up (Baranovskaya 2015: 93). In the Nordic countries in general, in order to convince others for the purpose of work accomplishment, disagreement or criticizing comments can be indicated explicitly (Clausen 2006: 151). Commonly, direct communication and accurate expression are appreciated at the workplace in Finland. On the other hand, Finns rather describe indirectness as impolite behavior, and stating unclear without providing answer by *yes* or *no* explicitly can be seen as a negative communication method (Parrott 2012: 98). Hence, at the workplace, efficiency is more emphasized in order to maximize the work result, and Finnish people tend to give more emphasis to work progress (Baranovskaya 2015: 95-96).

In addition, “demands for intimacy or mutual validation” (Wilkins 2006: 105) in communication is not esteemed highly, and acting or speaking in order that others get to like you, can be just considered as empty or shallow actions. In general, the main point needs to be indicated explicitly in speaking. Not only is the expression more direct, but the statement is also normally chosen sincerely and carefully (Alho 2010). In Finland, explicit expression

is more preferred, and the communication style is more direct. Hence, it can be stated that low-context communication is more common in Finland.

Yet, as a matter of fact, Finnish communication is considered to be a mixture of both low-context and high-context, since Finns tend to state explicitly, but, at the same time tend to remain silent. Such manner is acknowledged as a more typical Finnish communication style. As a general rule, in high-context communication, silence is used in order to deliver certain meanings, such as, disapproving, being reliable, or feeling uncomfortable, while in low-context communication, silence brings uncomfortableness, and it should exist as least as possible in communication. These behaviors may be acknowledged as negative politeness in cross-cultural communication (Tryggvason 2006: 1796), and in Finland, silence in communication is recognized as respectful, since being silent defines that people pay attention to others in conversation (Parrott 2012: 35-36).

At the international workplaces, Finnish employees are rather seen as “poor speakers, but good listeners” (Tryggvason 2006: 1796). Finnish attitudes are rather more passive, yet the main points are stated clearly, and Finns rarely cut off the discussion and provide minimum responses during the conversation (Tryggvason 2006: 1796). Hence, although Finns have a tendency to stay silent, mainly to indicate respect to the other, it does not deliver specific meanings implicitly. In the end, direct expression is more likely chosen in communication, and therefore, implied conceptions may be challenging to be understood correctly by Finns. (Parrott 2012: 41)

### 3.3.2 Japan

In Japanese business communication, direct expressions tend to be avoided (Nishiyama 2000: 18). For the purpose of maintaining harmony in interpersonal relationships, individuals try to behave humbly and focus more on respecting others’ feelings. Such insights of humbleness and prioritization of others derive from Confucian philosophy (Clausen 2006:

12-13). Especially when someone provides some compliment for others, humbleness is acknowledged in interpersonal communication. The receivers are supposed to deny the compliment and to put themselves down in order to show modesty. Compliments are sometimes given to people as a form of “ritualistic communication,” although there is no actual implication in such “social compliments.” (ibid: 189)

Nishiyama (2000: 13) claims that not only to emphasize “interpersonal harmony,” but also to protect “each other’s “face” in face-to-face encounters,” indirect communication can be used on many occasions. There are four tactics in indirect communication: “anticipatory communication,” “self-communication,” “understatement,” and “acting as delegate” (Nishiyama 2000: 13-14). In *anticipatory communication*, listeners are expected to assume a speaker’s intension or wish without directly asking. This approach is taken particularly in order to save the other’s “loss of face,” and at the same time, not to make them feel embarrassed for asking. For instance, when a colleague cannot complete tasks at work because their capability is not high enough, they may say something like *I have so much other work to do*, instead of directly asking for help from colleagues. In *self-communication*, if a speaker mutters something, listeners are expected to listen and “either acknowledge it or pretend they did not hear anything.” This happens when speaker wishes something. For instance, “the speaker mumbles loud enough, *this room is too cold*, instead of asking someone to adjust the thermostat.” Yet, listeners do not necessarily have to accommodate the wishes. *Understatement* is used in order to avert affirmative or binding statements. This manner interconnects to Japanese language, which “allows subtle and open-ended understatements.” For instance, in business meeting, depending on the listeners’ response or reactions, the speaker changes the continued statement. Adopting the technique of *acting as delegate*, the speaker talks to listeners as if messages come from someone else. For instance, when making a negative comment on a business plan, the speaker may say something like “*I personally don’t care, but my supervisor will never allow this,*” regardless of the fact the supervisor is not involved in the decision at all. (Nishiyama 2000: 13-14)

These examples indicate that indirect communication seems to be preferred in Japanese interpersonal communication, and the communication method is more “high-context”. Under high-context communication, “the context and situations, much more than the words themselves, influence the creation of meaning” (Clausen 2006: 53), and expression is more likely implicit, since implication should be assumed based on surroundings or circumstances.

In business occasions as well, in spite of words mentioned, nonverbal cues need to be taken into consideration, and such cues can be tones of the voice, body language, or gestures, such as “avoiding eye contact, prolonged silence, and scratching the head” (Nishiyama 2000: 96). For instance, at business meetings, even though the Japanese people appear to be engaged, nodding for proposals and smiling respectfully do not necessarily indicate an agreement on the agenda at all. They act in this way only to keep harmony. (Clausen 2006: 37) Hence, Japanese people may have a disagreement on a proposal, yet behave as if an agreement was reached, and they may expect others to understand that the proposal is already declined in the meeting (Nishiyama 2000: 9-10).

As stating “no” is dispreferred, “yes” may not necessarily be interpreted as consensus. Instead, what Japanese people mean to tell can only be “*yes I hear what you are saying*” (Nishiyama 2000: 11-12). As direct refusal or disapproval is commonly avoided, such implication is used in various circumstances. First of all, after confirming with “yes,” the statement continues with “*but...*” then some explanation is given for about half an hour, only to say “no” in the end. In addition, on occasion, expressions are too uncertain to make it possible to recognize what is being discussed. Lastly, questions may simply not be answered and left up in the air. Those manners can be indicated as a sign of “no” in interpersonal communication in Japan. (Nishiyama 2000: 12)

Nishiyama (2000: 22) clarifies that, although unspoken cues exist in different cultures to an extent, it may be more challenging and complicated to interpret Japanese nonverbal behaviors.

For instance, interpreting a behavior like *nodding with a smile* may be difficult in business interactions because in Japan, people may smile or laugh in order to dissemble negative feelings, such as anger or embarrassment. Particularly negative feelings are expected to be kept inside on account of “self-control over the public display of emotions” (Nishiyama 2000: 23). Smiling in public is encouraged in Japan. Thus, when Japanese decline important decision in a meeting while smiling at the same time, their smiles are possibly interpreted as disingenuous or even insulting from another cultural perspective. Hence, business consultant provides such advice: “never take ‘yes’ for an answer. Don’t take a smile for ‘yes,’ when doing business with the Japanese” (Nishiyama 2000: 23). To conclude, across different cultures, the same nonverbal behaviors can be interpreted differently. Moreover, it is always dangerous to overgeneralize; these are examples from business interactions, and it may well be that Japanese are much more direct in other contexts (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 266).

### 3.4 Equal / Hierarchical relationship

As a final comparison, the concepts of equality and hierarchy are discussed. History and education appear to be connected with the formation of equality in Finland, while hierarchy is a pervading concept in Japanese society.

#### 3.4.1 Finland

Finland has always put a strong effort on maintaining equality among people (Baranovskaya 2015: 19). Following the Swedish welfare system, four aspects are valued in Finnish society: “citizens’ equal rights, the public authority’s responsibility for the welfare of all citizens, the narrowing differences in income and gender equality, and the goal of full employment” (Savolainen 2009: 284). After Finland was restored from the World Wars in the 1950s, in order for the society to become more equal, education became very important and has been highly valued (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 20). Basic education, tuition, education

materials, meals, and transportation are provided free of charge. Hence, education is given equally to all citizens. (Niemi, Toom & Kallioniemi 2012: 23)

Finland also ranks as one of the most gender equal societies in the world, and women are expected to be treated equally. Menard (2016: 736) claims that after the World War II, for the purpose of “offering all citizens the same provisions, supporting the traditional family unit and achieving equal participation of the sexes in the labor force,” the Finnish politics aimed to develop “the standard of living and reducing class distinctions.” In 2015, Finland was ranked 3rd on the gender equality index of the World Economic Forum. In the last 10 years, Finland has maintained its status in the top 3 ranks (World Economic Forum 2016). According to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland, gender equality is highly valued in the Finnish national policy, and the Equality Act was established in the Finnish Constitution in order for gender equality to be both attained and sustained (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2016). In Finnish society, women can be as financially independent as men (Tiira 2007: 47-48).

In fact, female participation in full-time work is one of the highest in the world. Finland aims for women to be “economically independent” (Petäjaniemi 1996: 48). Equality in Finland defines that “women and men should be able to play an equal role, and influence society, work, and family life on their own term” (Petäjaniemi 1996: 42). Moreover, the concept of “genderless gender” (Lahelma 2012: 2) can be acknowledged broadly in Finnish society. Women have the right to decide their life style. In addition, educational institutions tend to eliminate gender segregation in occupations (Petäjaniemi 1996: 46). The importance of gender equality is emphasized through education, and it helps to construct a more equal Finnish society.

Equality is also greatly respected at the workplace. Regardless of gender, employees must be evaluated by their individual competence, work commitment, and accomplishment, and this principle can raise work productivity in the end (Petäjaniemi 1996: 46). Since all opinions

and ideas are taken into consideration regardless of the employee positions, employees are often encouraged to write feedback. Workplaces highly evaluate feedback, both negative and positive, in order for employees to enhance their individual work skills and to improve the workplace. Additionally, since Finland considers openness at the workplace as important, a “bottom to top approach” (Baranovskaya 2015: 102) is recommended ordinarily, so that employees can talk or share opinions irrespective of status differences.

In addition, according to Baranovskaya (2015: 40), hierarchy at the workplace is rather flat, and individual employees are expected to take initiatives and conduct work independently under their own responsibility, and hence, superiors do not constantly watch over their employees. In general, work is assigned to employees in meetings, and in case there is any difficulty or problem concerning projects, employees can freely express or even disagree with their superiors. In Finland, “equality in the working and decision-making process is valued” (Baranovskaya 2015: 45). Supposedly, as long as the statement is logical and reasonable, and the purpose is to bring more benefits to company, employees are encouraged to convince their supervisors.

To conclude, the flat hierarchy at the workplace allows individuals to conduct work independently, to take more responsibility, and to express their opinions freely (Baranovskaya 2015: 41). Interaction between employees is rather straightforward and relatively casual at the workplace (Tiira 2007: 46-47). Alasoini (2012: 257) quotes Green (2006) that, as “allowing employees to have an influence on the content of their work leads to increased job satisfaction and internal work motivation, creating preconditions for well-being at work,” it can be stated that the flat hierarchy at Finnish workplaces makes it possible for employees to increase both work efficiency and satisfaction at the workplace (Alasoini 2012: 252).

### 3.4.2 Japan

From childhood on, Japanese people act in accordance with hierarchy in the family and in school, and the concept of hierarchy is important in business situations as well (Nishiyama 2000: 19). According to Confucian philosophy, in interpersonal relationships, the status of individuals can be recognized on account of “age, sex, education, or occupation” (ibid: 85) and these factors influence the hierarchy (ibid: 7). Especially age is a significant element to determine status. In Japan, seniority represents more knowledge and experiences in a variety of circumstances, at least in theory, and older people deserve respect from others (ibid: 55). Although they may not have enough capability to be assigned to certain positions, senior employees tend to hold higher positions in a company (ibid: 118).

In business interaction, the graduation year, years of employment, and the company’s rank are taken into consideration (Nishiyama 2000: 18). Therefore, a business card is a critical resource, since the titles are clearly indicated, and this defines the interpersonal relationship. However, business cards need to be exchanged in order of hierarchy. Lower positions may not be allowed to receive or give out the cards to higher ranks, since someone of a lower status does not “deserve to be recognized as an equal” (Nishiyama 2000: 50-51). It is common that an organization chart is handed out for new employees to learn all of the other titles and understand the hierarchical structure in the organization (Clausen 2006: 181).

Hence, Nishiyama (2000: 67) claims that the Japanese need not only be aware of their own “status in relation to that of others,” but also adjust behaviors according to “respective social positions.” This implies that Japanese people are required to act formally or reservedly, or even allow others to behave condescendingly or arrogantly, in interpersonal communication. In contrast to Finland, since the status is important, people address other’s names with titles, especially at the workplace. Although some people were good friends before being employed in the same company, the factors of age or year of employment may not permit them to act

in the same way as before. Thus, they need to start addressing each other with titles and speak more politely to each other at the workplace (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 259).

On the other hand, despite the vital concept of maintaining harmony or peaceful atmosphere, a person with a higher status may use a “flat no” towards lower status at the workplace (Nishiyama 2000: 96-97). These differences in attitudes derive from the concepts of 外面: *Sotozura* (face towards outsiders) and the opposite concept: 内面: *Uchizura* (face towards insiders). People may act condescendingly or disrespectfully to a person of a lower position inside the company. (Nishiyama 2000: 67) In addition, although “being on time is of the utmost importance and is an important part of the national identity” (Clausen 2006: 197) in Japan, in hierarchical relationships, using other’s time may be understood differently. A higher executive may keep younger people and people of a lower position waiting for more than an hour without providing any reason (Nishiyama 2000: 28). Even under the concept of collectivism, which prioritizes others and harmonious relationship, such importance of the hierarchy in Japanese society, may make it challenging or confusing to understand interaction for outsiders.

In addition, the status has an influence on the decision making process. As introduced before, collectivism prioritizes group responsibility, yet proposals also need to be consented in “many different layers of the hierarchy” (Clausen 2006: 217) according to a chain of command. Hence, Japan prefers to spend enough time to assure that the hierarchical process is not neglected, as violating such norms may cause inharmonious interpersonal relationship (ibid: 217-218). The observation of hierarchies complicates decision making processes and makes it much harder to achieve consensus (ibid: 177). Moreover, “flexibility, creativity and a sense of individual responsibility” (ibid: 218) are not appreciated. As a result, employees typically discuss or communicate with someone of a similar status, and hierarchy possibly prevents innovative ideas from being presented in a company. Even if new young employees have the best possible business plan for the company, it is challenging for the plan to be delivered through to top (ibid: 184).

In business meetings, more rules are related to social status. For instance, seating needs to be arranged in hierarchical order. There is a seat of honor and a place of least honor, and the seating plan explains hierarchical relationship and positions (Nishiyama 2000: 26). In addition, when a company president starts speaking in a meeting, the employees of lower status are required to behave in an “extremely controlled manner” (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 259). During a meeting, who may speak up or not depends on the position within the company. Commonly, the highest position’s opinion is asked first. Speaking up or asking questions randomly is restricted, as the order of speaking reflects the status (Nishiyama 2000: 128). Thus, in a meeting, participants tend to listen almost all the time, and rarely make any comments (Clausen 2006: 220). In the end, ordinary employees may not be permitted to take initiative or participate in the discussion, and only persons with higher status make a decision (Clausen 2006: 99).

In summary, group consensus, group responsibility, and a certain level of formality, as well as a “meeting structure and protocol” (Clausen 2006: 251) are incorporated in a decision-making process. Disregarding hierarchy may break the harmony in interpersonal relationships, and hence, actions are chosen carefully (Nishiyama 2000: 123). As presented, Finns tend to focus on outcome and efficiency in meetings, which requires active participation of all participants. In contrast, Clausen (2006: 220) clarifies that Japan values more “the formality and symbolic importance of meetings,” and the status of attendants matters the most and the meeting itself is regarded as “a formal ritual to reinforce business relationships.”

In addition, the Japanese language clearly indicates hierarchical relationships. “Japanese is a highly status-oriented language” (Nishiyama 2000: 187), and there are more than a few different ways to express politeness. How you speak defines who is in charge, or who is of superior or inferior status. In order to respect others, not only honorific or respectful ways of speaking, but also humble manner as, for example, 謙讓語 (*Kenjougo*) exist. 謙讓語

(*Kenjougo*) is spoken to show modesty, as well as clarifying that you are lower than others (Paulston, Kiesling & Rangel 2012: 260).

Nair-Venugopal (2015: 30-31) quotes Hall (1959: 186) that “culture is communication and communication is culture,” and language is fundamental in communication and speaking manners become cultural behaviors in the community. “Language is not only used as a means of communication, but also as a marker or indicator of the speaker's cultural identity” (Luoma 2005). Since this research aims to study the workplace interaction at the Japanese company, and the employees tend to choose Japanese as the working language at the workplace, it is important to acknowledge that the Japanese language represents the hierarchy as a cultural value, and it can greatly influence workplace communication. Yet, in intercultural communication, language norms may not present or deliver the intended implication to others, and result in misinterpretation (Salo-Lee 2006). There is a variety of challenging aspects for language use depending on which language to speak, and this is further discussed in chapter 6.

#### 4 THE POLICY OF THE ORGANIZATION STUDIED

As discussed, communicating with people with different cultural backgrounds can be challenging or confusing, and Clausen (2006: 56) emphasizes that trying to understand those individual cultural perspectives and incorporate into the workplace may be draining and ineffective. Hence, in international organizations, company values can help employees to integrate and “create a common communication platform” (Clausen 2006: 65). In general, an organization tries to establish a common ground in order to achieve its goals and functions (Turner 1991: 29-30). The organization defines codes of conducts, which employees are required to follow. An ideal situation would be if all employees adjusted their behaviors to the policy of the organization. Yet, not everyone is capable of adjusting. (Meyer 2015)

For instance, Clausen (2006: 150) mentions that it may be necessary for foreign-affiliated companies in Japan to incorporate Japanese cultural perceptions into their company policies. Although their organizational policies originate from their home countries, as the majority of the employees can be Japanese, it is significant to understand Japanese work ethics or cultural differences (Clausen 2006: 150). In order to operate a company efficiently, the personal relationships among employees need to be well maintained, and hence, knowing other cultural angles is helpful.

Due to protection of respondents’ confidentiality, the name of the company studied in this thesis is not revealed. It is a Japanese-capitalized company and located in Finland, hence, Japanese cultural perspectives are incorporated in the organization policy and the management style. This workplace has only either Finns or Japanese, and the number of employees is approximately equal. Employees are hired as either local employees in Finland or relocated from Japan, and higher positions are all held by Japanese. Although Japanese cultural factors can be perceived in the company’s value, in order to meet the legal requirement in Finland and on account of the Finnish employees, Finnish insights are also integrated into the policy.

First of all, according to the Company Contract Document 2014, official working hours are assigned and no flexibility is applied. Even if the work task is completed, everyone is required to stay during the office hours. Second, employees respect hierarchy at the workplace, for instance, through calling others by their last name with *Mr.* or *Ms.*, and even adding *sir* or job titles in case of addressing Japanese superiors. In principle, proposals, suggestions, or problems have to be presented first to the direct superior due to the chain of command. Generally, the hierarchical structure has to be maintained and communicating straight to the top position is not appreciated. Even when some small decisions need to be made, it is essential to notify or ask permission from the direct superior. In order to reach a final decision, authorization not only from colleagues and supervisor in the same department, but also from top positions is required in written form. The decision can be turned over by the top position, even if the majority have agreed. In addition, even a request for vacation has to be consented with the signatures in the written application forms from all colleagues in their department, direct supervisor, as well as the top positions in the organization.

A dress-code applies to all male employees strictly, as wearing a suit jacket and tie is mandatory. For female employees, semi-formal clothing is recommended, which prohibits them from wearing jeans, for instance. On the other hand, in Finland, except for certain professions such as lawyers or bankers, dress-codes at the workplace tend to be more casual, yet in general, Japanese companies commonly require male employees to wear a suit or a jacket regardless of occupations. In addition, employees are informed that it is indispensable to work overtime and on weekends, if required. This indicates that a work-oriented mentality is also expected from Finnish employees. Finally, on account of group responsibility and consensus, meetings are mostly organized several times. Yet again, carefully approved decisions can be turned down by the top position.

There is no official working language in this workplace, and instead, the language is chosen depending on situations or language proficiency. Regarding Japanese employees, most of them do not have Finnish nor Swedish language proficiency, and the English proficiency of

some employees is not advanced either. Some Finns speak Japanese, yet their proficiency levels differ, but all in all, all Finns have good English language skills. Hence, communication can take place in English, and the languages most likely used are either English or Japanese.

Since this organization is located in Finland, it has to observe Finnish law and customs. Although it is uncommon in Japan to take a 3-week continuous vacation or to spend all paid holidays, the organization acknowledges those rights, and Finns generally take all of their vacations. Additionally, as the Japanese organization recognizes that Finns prefer to separate work and their private life, overtime is requested in advance and paid according to Finnish law and regulation, while, in Japan, overwork is commonly expected as normal, and some employees are not even paid for it. In summary, it can be seen that even though the core of policy originates from Japan, some important features are adjusted.

## 5 DATA COLLECTION AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

As discussed, the interviews were conducted for the purpose of reflecting the employees' experiences on academic theories concerning workplace cultures. This chapter discusses how data was collected and analyzed. As this research aims to study interaction at a bicultural workplace, five Finns and five Japanese were chosen as interviewees from the Japanese organization in Finland. The case organization has less than thirty employees in total, yet an almost-equal amount of Finns and Japanese are employed. Interviewees were selected from different departments in the organization in order to include different perspectives. All interviewees have worked at the organization for more than 2.5 years. Almost half of the Finnish employees have knowledge in Japanese culture and language due to previous studies or work experiences. Some Finns had no relations with Japan or Japanese culture until they started working at the organization. Regarding the Japanese interviewees, all of them were sent from Japan and for most of them, it is their first time working with Finns, or they had never even visited Finland nor met Finns before.

In terms of the methodology, semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted, as the purpose of the interview was to collect experiences. Each individual has a unique perspective, and moreover, they work in different departments, and hence their experiences were diverse. One question regarding the organization's policy was asked only to Finns in order to learn if there was anything confusing or difficult. Two interviews were conducted over Skype. On average, the interviews lasted between 1 to 1.5 hours, and some interviewees shared their experiences for more than 2.5 hours. All the data was recorded with consent from the interviewees. Regarding the language, English was used in interviews with Finns and Japanese in interviews with Japanese. All the interview questions in both English and Japanese can be found in the appendix.

As this qualitative research focuses on finding out more about individual experiences at the workplace, as well as comprehending how people interpret their experiences, it was

important to create a comfortable atmosphere for the interviewees to open up. In order for them to feel more relaxed and talk openly, a relatively quiet café was chosen as the interview place. All interviews went smoothly and interviewees seemed to be willing to share their perceptions and experiences without feeling nervous or stressed. Positive feedback was provided, in which they pointed out that they enjoyed the conversation during the interview.

The interview data was transcribed and Japanese data was translated into English at the same time. The text data consists of over 120 pages, and compound point of views and experiences from ten interviewees were categorized as Finnish and Japanese insights. As this study aims to analyze specific experiences of Finns and Japanese and to develop “general knowledge about the main themes covered by participants in their stories” (Iborra 2017: 3), categorical-content analysis is well suited. In order to interpret the data, DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2010: 138) state that coding is an essential process in analyzing interview data. The process started off by coding raw data, which “enables the researcher to begin examining how their data supports or contradicts the theory that is guiding their research as well as enhances the current research literature” (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch 2010: 138). This process results in both understanding and comparing the actual experiences between Finns and Japanese as well as making “connections between ideas and concepts” (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch 2010: 138), and in the end, the collected interview data can be patterned to a certain degree.

In the analysis, F1 to F5 are symbolised as Finns, and J1 to J5 are Japanese respondents. Information related to their detailed work responsibility is intentionally eliminated for the purpose of keeping their identity hidden. “Due to ongoing partnerships and professional relationships between participants” (Lancaster 2017: 99), their confidentiality has to be prioritized. Regardless of the fact that some respondents have already left the workplace and no longer work there, their connections may be traced. Moreover, “by guaranteeing confidentiality to participants, participants are protected and may more confidently offer rich description and detailed accounts” (Lancaster 2017: 102). The respondents offered their

honest insights, which include negative experiences and perceptions towards other colleagues. All interviewees' experiences are enclosed in the analysis, in order to maintain the reliability and accuracy of the research, as well to illustrate their experiences at the bicultural workplace correspondingly.

The limitation of this study is that the interviews were conducted with employees from one organization, which was Japanese-capitalized. Some of the local Finnish employees were already familiar with Japanese culture, while the Japanese had no previous knowledge or experiences in Finland. Although this needs to be taken into consideration in analyzing data, previous cultural knowledge or experiences may not precisely be consistent with the experience at the workplace. Yet, in order to analyze possible effects of individual prior experiences, the interview started off by addressing background information.

## 6 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, with a contrast of academic resources discussed in chapter 3 concerning Finland and Japan, the experiences and perspectives of ten participants are presented. Concerning the structure of this chapter, first of all, as background information, the interviewees' previous knowledge and expectation are introduced. Next, the effects of language choice and proficiency are presented. Then, the chapter focuses on interaction at the workplace and discusses how cultural differences influence experiences at the workplace. In the end, the role of the organisation policy and the implication of cultural knowledge are discussed.

### 6.1 Previous Experiences and Expectations

As briefly introduced, this workplace is a Japanese-capitalized organization, and thus, many Finnish employees had studied or lived in Japan for a few years. As such, they are more accustomed to Japanese culture and speak Japanese, although proficiency levels may vary. Among the Finnish interviewees, only one has not lived in Japan. On the other hand, since all Japanese employees were hired in Japan and relocated from the Japanese headquarters, most of them were not familiar with Finnish culture when they came to Finland, and they have no proficiency in Finnish in order to conduct workplace communication. In terms of the chapter structure, first, Finnish experiences are presented, followed by the discussion of the Japanese data; finally, the different views are contrasted.

The Finnish employees had created certain images or perceptions of the Japanese based on their prior experiences with Japanese people, or through living in Japan and studying Japanese culture. It is evident that the more experiences they had, the more concrete their perception was. F3, however, has a specific perspective on stereotypes. As a result of having met many Japanese people in Japan, she acknowledged that people were different and hence, specific images should not be made at all.

F1, however, mentions that although she felt content to know Japanese culture, people, and language, after having worked with Japanese, the stereotypes of them being workaholic, precise, and punctual turned out to be a half true. F2 and F4 also point out that the images they had of Japan before working in a Japanese company were different from the reality at the workplace. This turned out to be something completely different, and the positive images changed, especially because of the hierarchical relationship at the workplace:

- (1) I had a good picture of the Japanese people before working here. [...] Friendliness, kindness, helpfulness can be characteristics of individual Japanese. But those were the images before working here, as being a bottom of the hierarchy, the experiences are totally different here. In Japan, when I have meetings with Japanese, the status were on the same level, and they really like us and see westerners as special persons. Here, they treat us like the bottom of people. (F2)

However, overall, the Finnish employees who previously lived in Japan emphasize that having even stereotypical information helps them to understand the Japanese or predict their behaviors better, at least in comparison with other Finnish colleagues who have no such experiences and thus no knowledge of Japanese culture. Especially due to the hierarchical structure at the Japanese workplace, those Finns seem to struggle or get surprised quite often since certain Japanese behaviors cannot be comprehended.

On the other hand, none of the Japanese participants had many opportunities to have met or communicated with Finns before moving to Finland. They had only met a couple of Finns in Japan. Even though they wondered what characteristics could be regarded as typically Finnish, they knew that their knowledge was too limited to even generate any stereotypical images. Hence, due to lack of experiences of communicating with Finns, the Japanese did not generate any images of Finns. In this respect, they differ from the Finns who had studied or lived in Japan and even worked with Japanese before.

## 6.2 Language Choice and Proficiency

As the organization does not have a language policy, the tendency is that if Finns have Japanese language proficiency, they try to speak Japanese. Yet, the language choice can change depending on the person whom they speak to, or the situations or contents of discussions. All of them seem to evaluate which language is the best for communication. As long as communication can be conducted, it appears that people also tend to take others' preferences into account. In Japanese, expressions indicate the status and, hence neglecting speaking manners may make Japanese feel uncomfortable (Nishiyama 2000: 67). Therefore, in some occasion, this keeps Finns from speaking Japanese. Because it is not necessary to indicate status when speaking English or Finnish, F2, F3, and F4 intentionally avoid using Japanese at times, as honorific expressions do not only show respect to others, but the status is also clarified. As most Japanese employees have no Finnish language proficiency, either English or Japanese is most likely used at the workplace. On the other hand, one Japanese employee has a full command of Finnish proficiency, and all Finns prefer speaking to him in Finnish as communication can be more direct and it is easier to connect with others.

### 6.2.1 Language Proficiencies

Finns who have Japanese language proficiency state that they feel more included at the workplace thanks to their language proficiency. Especially because some Japanese employees do not have advanced English proficiency, through speaking Japanese, communication becomes more profound. In their opinion, it seems that Japanese colleagues approach them with greater ease or even ask small things. Even though none of the Japanese interviewees speaks Finnish, J1, J2, J3, and J4 believe that having professional language proficiency has a positive effect on communication because some things cannot be completely translated and thus, the level of understanding suffers. Every language has its own rules and customs, yet more importantly, the language reflects the cultural code of conduct in communication (Salo-Lee 2006). For instance, F4 states that if Finns speak Japanese, they are able to comprehend the way the Japanese act through the language,

through all the nuances, and the small things, as how politeness is expressed or implicit messages are conveyed.

Regardless, Finns and Japanese emphasize that language alone does not make the difference, but that cultural differences matter in communication:

- (2) For instance, I noticed the Japanese people speak indirectly or vaguely, and this reflects the same in speaking English. For me as well, if Japanese ask me something and I cannot do the favor for them, I would say directly, “No I cannot do it, I am sorry” to Japanese-coworkers. And even if I could speak Japanese language, I would probably still say it in the straightforward way in Japanese. On the other hand, whichever language Japanese use, they might start expressing “hmm, it’s maybe difficult for me...” to avoid saying ‘no’ after all in Finnish or English as well. Maybe how to explain something still stays the same in any language. [...] In the end, language itself does not matter, and with whichever language, we can get things done at work anyway. (F5)

Hence, in addition to language, cultural aspects are more important. J5 points out that even if Finns try to use honorific expressions in speaking Japanese, their expressions are more straightforward. F5 also assumes that Japanese with full command of Finnish or English speak in a Japanese manner and are indirect or provide supportive responses in conversation; therefore, only speaking a language would not directly correlate to comprehension of cultural aspects.

Yet learning the other’s language can be an initial step towards understanding other cultures. All Finns with Japanese language proficiency emphasize that the more they learn a language, the more they can learn about that culture and the people. All Finns feel that Japanese with Finnish language proficiency would understand or accept the Finnish work ethic, such as the importance of having holidays and private life, better, and that speaking Finnish would make them feel closer to others, as it reflects on equality in spite of the positions in the company. Hence, in general, having proficiency in another language provides more impressions or expectations for each other to be understood culturally.

Japanese are also aware that cultural knowledge plays an important role in making communication smoother. J1, J2, and J3 sense that when Finns know the Japanese language and culture, they tend to read the atmospheres or understand implicit meanings in either Japanese or English, and it is less stressful and more relaxed or natural to talk to those Finns. They believe that those Finns would understand not only the Japanese communication style, but also work styles or organization structures. Moreover, J3 and J4 indicate that language proficiency can create an opportunity to get acquainted to others, since it makes it easier to assume the other's interest in certain topics or to have a common subject to talk about.

To conclude, both Finns and Japanese feel the same way that having language proficiency is an advantage, as an initial communication tool to be included to others. However, only speaking the language is not enough, and understanding cultural aspects around language is more significant in communication, since language itself does not always bring the problem; rather, differences in communication. Therefore, having both language proficiency and cultural understanding renders communication natural and smooth.

### 6.2.2 Communication Difficulties

A number of challenging aspects for language use are identified depending on which language is spoken. First of all, in terms of speaking English, since not all Japanese have full command of professional proficiency, all Finns find it challenging to understand what exactly they mean to convey in specific occasions, especially in cases where the contents of discussion are complicated. Additionally, J1 mentions the fact that English is not the native language for neither Finns nor Japanese brings more difficulty into communication. If the sentences are translated from Finnish or from Japanese, it may not provide the same meaning or intent in English

In addition, the Japanese indirect manner in communication reflects on speaking even in English, and hence, all Finns encounter confusion in varying degrees when trying to

understand the intended message. Due to the characteristics of English, the expression has to become more direct and implicit messages have to be replaced through gestures on occasion.

- (3) When I need to ask something in English, although I need to speak more directly, I try to use facial expressions or body language, in order to show that I feel hesitated or feel sorry for others. The Japanese language contains those expressions in itself, and therefore, only speaking is enough. Yet, in English, with those gestures, I try to start expressing, such as “I am sorry to say,” or “it is difficult to ask...” to make it sound softer. (J2)

On the other hand, all Finns emphasize that the relationship would be much more equal in spite of position differences in the Finnish work environment, and Finns generally use direct expression.

- (4) While Finns express how it is, Japanese express really vaguely because they maybe want to be polite. In simply asking me to do something at the workplace, they start with “I wonder if it is possible or...maybe it is not possible, but anyway...” and I needed to ask to clarify their meaning in detail. I would just say “I need you to do this by this deadline. Is it ok?” (F5)

Moreover, there are many behaviors pointed out as different from Finns, which relates to Japanese indirect expression. Especially because the Japanese do not want to say “no” directly or express negative feelings explicitly to others, for instance, F1 claims that they make some noise like a hiss, which means *no*. All Japanese emphasize on expression manners as a difference between Finns and Japanese. They believe that Japanese read between the lines or sense other’s intention without being put in words. For instance, J5 uses more abstract words such as *that*, *this*, or *it* in sentences, assuming others would understand, yet this manner does not function with Finns. J4 and J5 find that Finns tend to consider only what is stated explicitly. Moreover, in spite of hierarchical differences at the workplace, J1, J4, and J5 notice that Finns choose to speak more straightforward regardless of whom they speak to, and on some occasions, it could sound too strong or harsh as J4 and J5 claim:

- (5) When you cannot comprehend something such as work instructions, Japanese

would say something more like “I am sorry, it is because of my lack of knowledge” or “I am sorry but did you mean...”, while Finns say things directly like “I don’t understand you” or “I don’t get what you are talking about”. When I receive those reactions for the first time, I found it a little bit shocking, but as I got used to it, I take it simply as they just don’t understand what I am saying. (J4)

A Japanese manager was directly told by a Finnish colleague that his way of speaking was complicated:

- (6) My Finnish colleague said to me “your Japanese is difficult and unclear for me to understand.” (J5)

In another circumstance, especially in case of disagreeing or turning down something, J2 mentions that they usually avoid explicit expressions and instead state *but* or *well* without saying *no*, or use facial expressions to show that it is difficult to say or they do not want to answer. On the other hand, Finnish employees focus more on logical thinking, adding reasons to justify their position. J2 feels that Finns try to convince others to agree with them, while Japanese probably would reconsider or at least pretend, and express how sorry they are, in case of refusing something or being unable to work on weekend, for instance. Yet, it is emphasized that manners of expression are different among Finns, whether they have prior Japanese cultural knowledge or not. For instance, in case of asking the Finns without those prior knowledge, to work on something, the answers could be straightforward without hesitation: *I cannot do it, or it is not possible*.

According to F1, F2, and F3, as one of the Japanese implicit expressions, anger is never directly shown. If someone is unsatisfied with the work of others, Japanese become quiet and show their anger by not saying anything. Instead of being directly addressed, someone may be left out or not given some tasks when the superior is not happy with their accomplishment. In contrast, they claim that superiors would point out directly and correct the problems at the Finnish workplace, in order to improve the work outcome. Even Finns with prior cultural

knowledge point out that Japanese sometimes communicate indirectly and that the real intentions cannot be interpreted.

- (7) [...] as Japanese try to deliver the meaning implicitly, especially for their anger, I cannot notice even though they express it in the implied way to me. In Japanese culture, I know smiles can mean anger, and sometimes, they smile at me, and again I know it could mean they are actually angry. But I cannot tell the real meaning behind. (F1)

Smiling is not only used to show happiness, but also to express anger. F1 adds that Japanese tend to smile or laugh when they do not understand English, while generally Finns would not smile if something is unclear and rather ask back. As a clear contrast with Finns, F1 and F5 point out that Japanese often nod, give supportive responses, or even overreact quite often during conversation, while they just listen silently without saying anything when the other person is speaking. It appears to them that Japanese try to fill the silence. From their perspectives, giving excessive supportive response may interrupt the speaker and they consider it as rude behavior.

In comparison, J1 and J4 notice that most Finns do not really give responses when they are speaking to them. To the Japanese, providing such responses supports speakers and hence, they say silence makes them feel anxious. When Finns need to take a moment to think, they just become silent, and they look completely serious. Such pauses could be really long. This results in waiting uncomfortably in silence, since among Japanese, if they would pause in conversation, statements or gestures to excuse the moments would be given in order for the others to know what is going on. When the Japanese speak without receiving responses from Finns, they also wonder whether Finns really understand them.

In addition, Japanese highlight that Finns show less facial expressions, and J1 and J2 find it a bit intimidating or scary every now and then. In their opinions, Finns do not smile that often or their facial signals are relatively plain in general, and at times they wonder whether Finns are angry for some reason. They contrast it with the fact that Japanese smile to soften the

atmosphere. They believe that facial expressions, especially smiles, would help to build a relationship with others. Yet, as J3 and J4 point out, even though Japanese think that the facial expressions are not given that much in communication, it would not necessarily mean that Finns are less expressive or scary.

In intercultural communication, misinterpretation might happen because of differing norms of communication (Salo-Lee 2006). Therefore, for Finns, communication in Japanese is challenging, too. Even though all Finns are aware that messages can be delivered implicitly and Japanese expect them to read between the lines, accurate understanding appears to be very challenging. In addition, as it is considered difficult to apply Japanese honorific expressions correctly, some Finns refrain from using the Japanese language. F2 and F4, for example, are afraid of misusing honorific expressions with superiors. Those who studied Japanese language are fully conscious that the way of speaking and the use of words need to change according to the hierarchical status. According to F2 and F4, when speaking with superiors, you have to lower yourself, which makes Finns feel unequal or they feel rather distant to Japanese.

On the other hand, F1 and F4 point out that, despite the fact that using such expression is important to respect others, being a foreigner could make an exception. As a matter of fact, all Japanese also mention that they never expect Finns to command honorific expression perfectly, and in speaking Japanese with Finns, they change speaking manners consciously to a certain degree, even though Finns have an advanced Japanese language proficiency. For instance, not only avoiding difficult terms, but more explicit or straightforward expressions are also used intentionally.

In summary, when communication is conducted in a language other than their native language, to a certain degree, everyone naturally encounters the difficulty in expressing or understanding, as a result of different communication manners related to cultural aspects and lack of vocabularies as well.

### 6.3 Cultural Similarities and Differences at Workplace

In this chapter, perspectives on similarities and differences at the workplace are presented. Although similarities are discussed first, all respondents tend to find more differences than similarities between Finns and Japanese.

#### 6.3.1 Similarities

F5, J1, and J5 point out that unless you have already known other cultures, it is not easy to find similarities. If perspectives or behaviors are similar to you, then, usually you will not notice them, since it is so normal that you do not pay attention. This aspect is very intriguing. Hence, during the interview, most of the interviewees tend to mention other cultures to compare similarities and differences with.

Except for F5, who does not notice similarities, all Finns indicate that generally, Japanese and Finns are more reserved or quieter and personal space is respected.

(8) At the workplace, we are more focused on the work task and quieter as well, and it is nothing like Americans. (F1)

(9) We are not like Italians, speaking with hands or always saying something or very open. (F4)

F1, F3, and F4 describe the office as a very quiet place, and both of them like to follow the rules in order to conduct work in certain ways. Hence, in contrast to other cultures, those work attitudes are mentioned as similarity between Finns and Japanese.

Japanese also discover similarities with Finns. J1, J2, and J3 agree that shyness or quietness are traits they share. In addition, J2, J3, and J4 say that both are hard-working and responsible, and work styles tend to be organized. A sense or value of time is indicated as a similarity in

general or at the workplace, compared to other countries, where there might be different perspectives on time.

- (10) For instance, if we are invited to someone's house at 16.00, Finns and Japanese arrive around 16.05. In addition, to both Finnish and Japanese perspectives, keeping the deadline is a must if promised in a contract. Yet, some Finns stated that the perception towards time was totally different in Italy. Based on their experiences, the Italian companies rarely fulfilled their promises. When Finns and Japanese work together, we stick to the deadline, and we can expect each other to work in a similar way, while to Italian companies, the expectation would be different and Finns would be satisfied if 3 out of 10 tasks could be completed. (J4)

J4 adds that earnest or serious characteristics are similar between Finns and Japanese, compared to Latinos. Again, in order to discover similarity, other cultures are mentioned. Yet all respondents emphasize that it is hard to make a generalization regarding similarity between Finns and Japanese, since individuals are different in spite of their culture.

In summary, both find similar general characteristics or some tendencies of behaviors at the workplace. F3, J2 and J3 state that it feels easy and comfortable working with each other, as a result of having something in common, which they are not consciously aware of.

### 6.3.2 Differences

All Finns notice that communication and relationships are certainly differently organized from Finnish workplaces. The status difference becomes noticeable in the way superiors communicate with others. The expressions can become very direct. For instance, F4 experiences that instructions of superiors tend to be straightforward, while in casual conversation outside of work, expression turns to be implicit. F5 mentions that when overwork is required, instead of asking, some managers order or command it, which is upsetting the respondent. Yet, in case of having issues at the workplace, it appears to all Finns that the Japanese could not mention or complain to higher positions.

(11) CEO seems to live in a totally different planet, so that no one can really talk to him, and higher positions cannot be friendly to others as well. (F1)

(12) In Finland, having status as CEO is not an excuse to act certain way such as being arrogant. We do not worship people because of social status. (F5)

F2 notices that some younger Japanese colleagues seem to be afraid of going into the offices of top positions especially. On the other hand, from a Finnish perspective, if employees have an important message to be delivered or to be discussed, since working hours are limited and they need to go home, they would not hesitate to go and talk to the superiors in their offices. All Finnish interviewees indicate that it would be easier to approach superiors at a Finnish workplace, also when it comes to complaining.

To Finns, in general, the Japanese pay too much attention to details and Japanese are too hesitant to make a decision. For instance, according to experiences of F1 and F5, when high-ranked guests visit Finland, you are not allowed to ask them directly about their wishes, and the workplace has to assume what the guests would prefer to do, and then a variety of plans are prepared “just in case.” They feel that such “just in case” preparation wastes resources, money, and time of employees, since sometimes this well-planned schedules change completely upon the guest’s arrival, as a result of receiving their real requests concerning where they would like to visit or what they prefer to do instead of the planned schedules.

F4 claims that such work style could be maintained due to the large population in Japan; more human resources would be available to work on one project. In addition to “just in case” preparations, for instance, F4 finds it frustrating to make seating plans for two guests, as it does not seem to matter, and very small details have to be shared and reported to colleagues. Additionally, F3 mentions that, since strict instruction is given in such tasks, for instance, the Japanese tell specifically where to stand at the event site or where to put some glasses on the table, it feels like as if they are treated like small children, and F2 and F3 believe that they should be trusted in order to decide on their own. From a Finnish perspective, this is a just

uselessly excessive process. Yet F4 is fully aware that in Japanese culture, such tasks might have significant connotations. In fact, F4 also explains that when important people visit from Japan, failures are not acceptable at all. Thus, just in case to minimize the risks and to show respect to the guests, Japanese believe that those precautions arrangements are indispensable.

In addition, F1 points out that too many meetings are arranged even though the higher position has already made a decision and only notifies the decision written on paper, and it appears that attendants are not supposed to have a discussion or an opinion in the meeting. F1 adds that since anyone can read the paper on their desk, holding the meeting seems to be only inefficient. Decision making processes appear to be complicated to all Finns, since it involves many people receiving permission, and it takes a long time to approve one decision. According to F1, F3, and F5, this seems as if nobody wanted to take responsibility at work. They perceive this is ineffective, but they recognize that this is part of Japanese work culture.

F5 also points out that Japanese take others' perceptions into consideration, and Japanese only want to look hard-working to others. By running in the corridor, they want to show off how busy they are. How others see you at the workplace seems to matter to Japanese.

- (13) When some problem comes up, although everyone actually knows the problem and solution, no one stands up and say. Instead, they gather around and discuss continuously. After a long time, one person hesitated yet started speaking very indirectly, "Well...could this be the problem, maybe or maybe not?" It appeared that people are afraid of making a mistake or looking stupid because of the mistakes. [...] In Finland, if there are five people and they know what to do, then someone would take an initiative. Japanese do not seem to think efficiently at the workplace. (F5)

Correlated to the concept of being hard-working, the habit of working overtime is questioned.

- (14) Even if they have nothing to do at the workplace, you must look like you are busy working, which looks strange to me, because Finns want to finish work as fast as possible, go home, and enjoy our life. I wonder how this long working hours affect with their family, since they literally have no enough time to spend

together. (F5)

All Japanese mention that if other employees stay at work, it just makes it harder for one person to leave the office as they are concerned about how to fit in a group.

All Finns emphasize that a Finnish workplace would provide more individual responsibility and power for employees, and hence, an individual employee could make small decisions without asking superiors for their permission. F5 describes this as follows: at the Finnish workplace, after having one meeting, jobs are conducted individually, and the focus would be on maximizing work efficiency. F2, F3, and F4 notice that Japanese managers generally do not appreciate if Finns take the initiative to present ideas to them. On some occasions, if the ordinary employee's ideas are good, F2 feels that Japanese managers could steal the ideas and take the credit as their achievement. J1 and J5, on the other hand, claim that work is commonly conducted as a team at the Japanese workplace, and thus work accomplishment can be represented under a team leader's name.

All Japanese interviewees point out that, due to hierarchy, instructions and decisions made by higher positions are considered as something employees must follow without questions. J1 states that even going for after-work drinks could be mandatory if the superior asks the ordinary employee to join, since this may affect the promotion or work relationship. In addition, all Japanese emphasize the importance of clear work-life separation for Finns. As soon as the official working hour is finished, they leave the office immediately and rarely work overtime, and all paid-holidays are spent. Thus, the Japanese think that Finns prioritize their private time.

Finnish mentality is described as cold-hearted or very business-like by J2 and J3. Since work is prioritized over personal time according to Japanese work ethic, Japanese would not leave the office if work is still unfinished. As a result, working overtime is common to Japanese. It can be stated that the perspectives towards work responsibility seem different between Japanese and Finns. To Japanese, work responsibility means spending their free time at work,

while to Finns, focusing on work productivity and outcome matters the most. All Japanese acknowledge maximizing work efficiency as one of the significant Finnish work styles. According to J2, Finns tend to concentrate on completing tasks individually without consulting the teams, and work progress is rarely reported to each other until the task is finished. J1, J2, J4, and J5 indicate, employees are usually unified as a team at the Japanese workplace and accomplish the goals together. Yet, they claim that it is more natural for Finns to divide work tasks to individuals and to work under their own control and responsibility.

F4, J3, and J4 explain this by referring to the smaller population in Finland. They claim that the number of employees is much smaller and thus, a great responsibility or power could be provided to individual employees, which results in being more productive. On the other hand, at Japanese workplaces, ordinary employees would not have the authority to make a decision, and this difference can cause challenging situations.

- (15) In case of having a meeting with Finns, they suggest to make a decision during the meeting, because that is more common practice at the Finnish workplace. At the Finnish workplace, ordinary employees have an authority to make a decision. However, since I am an ordinary employee at the Japanese workplace, I am not allowed to state anything related to the final decision. So, I asked the Finns to give me the meeting subjects or topics, which need to be discussed, in advance, in order for me to talk to my boss and receive some approvals beforehand. Then, I can tell in the meeting whether the decision can be made or not. Yet, the Finns said to me, “then what is the point of having the meeting with you?” I always feel frustrated in encountering this situation, because I understand why they make such comments. (J4)

In this case, the Japanese way of reaching an agreement has to be explained constantly, as well as telling the Finns in the meeting that they would receive the final answer later on. It seems difficult for those Finns to understand this process, yet this process is very essential in Japan. The final decision has to be approved by top positions, regardless of the fact that an ordinary employee conducts the projects as a whole. But here, it is interesting to see that the Japanese employee seems to take the side of the Finns when she says that she understands why they make these comments. It seems to be very inefficient to her, too. J4 also points out

that it is sometimes difficult to really know who is in charge and responsible for a project since many people are involved, and thus, reasons for failure or problems tend to become unclear, and in the end, mistakes could be repeated. Nonetheless, even though such ineffectiveness is pointed out as a negative Japanese work style, bringing work efficiency does not necessarily result in a work-life balance.

(16) If we finish work efficiently in 6 hours, instead of 8 hours, others see you as not-hardworking. Even if you conduct work effectively, and thus have more time, that does not mean that you can go home. Instead, you need to stay at the workplace and you are expected to work as much as possible. (J3)

In the end, it is impossible for employees to concentrate on working hard for such long hours, and therefore, if staying at the workplace for long hours is obligatory in any case, effectiveness only exhausts employees severely.

Yet, even though Japanese are aware that Finns may describe the Japanese work style as inefficient, J4 and J5 point out that the Japanese focus on the finest details, have consideration for others, and hospitality is important. From a Japanese perspective, such aspects are not seen in Finnish work styles. J2 notices that, in case that a mistake occurred in your team project, in spite of the fact it is not your mistake, Japanese would apologize sincerely on behalf of group members in such a situation, due to group responsibility. In contrast, it appears that Finns would not apologize unless they made the mistakes. Instead, they focus on explaining why the problems happened and clarifying that they are not the ones to blame.

In summary, both Finns and Japanese highlight that dealing with hierarchy is very different. Even though Finns believe that hierarchy exists in the Finnish workplace, it is flatter, and thus communication at this Japanese workplace appears to be much more formal in contrast to a casual style of communicating at the Finnish workplace. In general, Finnish direct expression and Japanese indirect expression are contrasted, with the exception of some situations in which superiors give order to their subordinates. Hierarchy is also reflected in

Japanese collective work styles, as manager's instructions are followed and their approvals are required to make a decision, while Finns prefer to conduct the tasks individually.

Hence, Finns find these differences rather frustrating, as it requires quite a lot of time to proceed. Yet they are aware of hierarchy in Japanese culture, and therefore, even though Finns appreciate the Finnish way of working, they would not suggest to change it. All Japanese highlight that work mentality differs tremendously between Finns and Japanese. To Japanese, working overtime is like a habit and firmly ingrained and to them, it looks as if Finns prioritize their private life over work. Yet, Japanese generally appreciate the cooperative and responsible work attitudes of Finns, and the differences are seen in a positive light.

As illustrated in chapter 4, one important implication is that at this workplace, the company divides work responsibility and authorities clearly between Finns and Japanese. All managerial positions are held by Japanese, and Finns are hired as local employees to generally assist them. According to the Finnish interviewees, the strict hierarchy makes the workplace feel different from Finnish workplaces. Yet if this workplace would have an equal amount of Finnish and Japanese managers, F4 believes that the employees' perspectives could change.

To conclude, all Finns and most Japanese strongly stress that regardless of differences between Finns and Japanese, these differences would also depend on the person. In addition, F3 indicates that behaviors vary among generations.

(17) Younger Japanese generations are more similar to Finns, because in a way, it is easier to communicate informally and more directly. (F3)

F3 claims that Japanese employees have changed tremendously even in the last 5 or 6 years. It appears to Finns that the old generation of Japanese has completely different work manners or perspectives from the younger generation.

## 6.4 Interaction at the Bicultural Workplace

The previous chapter contrasted Finn's and Japanese's perspectives on cultural differences and similarities; this chapter discusses how the interviewees cope with differences and difficulties which they attribute to cultural differences.

### 6.4.1 Negative Experiences

As illustrated, some of the cultural differences were considered as challenging. All Finns mention that the Japanese way of communicating often necessitates clarification. On the other hand, Finns are careful of being direct to Japanese and hence, they use "maybe" quite often. In addition, due to the hierarchy in Japanese business culture, they take into consideration to whom they speak and what they can say. Yet as F1, F3, F4, and F5 claim, even if they try to avoid straightforward expressions, it appears that if something affects them negatively, they point this out.

When Japanese ask Finns to execute an order, they simply tell them what to do without adding the reasons why it should be done or how it would be related to the entire project. To Finns, this is not enough. F2, F3, and F4 find work less interesting or meaningful if they do not know the details or the content of the whole project, which results in more confusion and low motivation.

According to F4's experiences, in case of having a disagreement concerning work tasks, Japanese expect Finns to continue working on it despite existing disagreements, yet they would not ask directly. As a result, the tasks end up being delayed. However, due to the hierarchical relationship, if repeatedly asked by superiors, on some occasions, they feel that they have no choice but to complete even seemingly pointless tasks. F4 claims, as Japanese work styles pay attention to the finest details, some of the tasks turn out to be very difficult to follow. It is interesting to see F4 point out that prior to working at this workplace, she admired this attention to detail of Japanese culture. Yet when this comes to working in an

environment where this attention to detail is necessary, it seems to bring challenges. In addition, although Finns who studied Japanese culture believe that they could read more between the lines, some of the attitudes seem to be just purposeless in their opinions.

(18) I feel sometimes that Japanese can be overly humble [...] but it is so hard to find why you are trying to be so humble even though there is no reason to be. There are certain types of people that are like saying sorry, all the time, for example. [...] so sometimes I just want to say to them there is no reason to apologize. But I know they don't mean to apologize, and it is just a habit maybe. These things are a little bit sometimes weird to me. (F4)

On the other hand, all Japanese are aware that Finns separate work and their private life clearly, and thus, that makes it harder for them to ask Finns to work overtime or come to work during holidays, or reach them outside of working hours. J1, J2, and J4 experience that even though when working overtime is unavoidable in their opinion, Finns provide a straightforward answer, *no*, justifying their positions, rules, and facts. This creates a cold impression on Finns, especially because the Japanese already feel bad yet hesitate to ask cooperation in such an inevitable situation. Instead of being turned down directly, they would appreciate some attitudes of pretending to consider for a moment, or giving implicit responses by saying things such as *it may be really difficult*.

Another issue is the individualistic work mentality; J1, J2, and J4 find it challenging.

(19) In Japan, team mentality is built at a workplace in general and we always cooperate together at the workplace, and if others in the same department work longer, they take more consideration and try to be helpful. In the case of very busy seasons, I stayed at work really late every day; however, Finns went home on time every day and they did not seem to care. (J1)

They point out that they have to convince themselves that this is only a cultural difference and not personal, since if this starts upsetting them, they would have difficulties to concentrate on work. In addition, in case some problems occur in a work project, J4 states that Japanese have to make sure and ask what time Finns need to leave office the latest. Such

questions would not have to be asked to Japanese employees, as Japanese believe that in general, their work responsibility is assured till the end, and thus they would spend their personal time to accomplish their work, especially if it is necessary to solve problems immediately.

In summary, to Finns, implicit communication causes difficulty in understanding on occasion, and even though they are cautious of their expression manners to Japanese, it appears that Finns normally tend to clarify their opinions in the end. On the other hand, although Japanese consider the Finnish attitude to leave work on time without exception as emotionless, they try to accept it as a difference between Finns and Japanese, and do not expect them to work like the Japanese. J1 describes that, due to cultural differences, employees should anticipate encountering new perspectives and experiences, and respect them at the same time. Especially for work-life separation, all Japanese claim that as their life seems to be occupied primarily by work, they are envious of such work style and mentality. However, as mentioned as an important note, at this workplace, Finns are locally hired and have lower positions, and Finns generally assist Japanese managers. This aspect may be the reason why Finns separate work and private life. All Finns emphasize that even if maintaining personal life is essential, higher positions have more responsibility, and thus they work more as you would expect.

#### 6.4.2 Positive Experiences

Not only are difficulties found in working together, but both Finns and Japanese also make positive experiences with each other. First of all, even though indirect expressions are problematic to understand, F3, F4, and F5 recognize that they could be suitable in some circumstances, particularly in the case of rejecting or stating negative comments to others, as they believe that it shows politeness and respect. It makes Finns realize that they complain too much and express too directly what they think.

- (20) The fact is that you take others into consideration and you always think about the other person's feelings, or you do not want to make others look bad or you

don't want insult others in any way in general, are really nice. (F3)

On the other hand, while Finns see indirect expression more considerate, Japanese point out that showing real emotions on faces makes communication easier in a way.

(21) When talking to Finns, I can know instantly if they agree or not, based on their facial expressions, so I don't need to read between the lines. We cannot know what Japanese really think or feel from their facial expressions. During a discussion, Japanese smile or they put a good face on, but later on, they complain a lot. Instead, Finns show their honest emotions on faces when they do not like it. If they agree with you, they look satisfied and state something positive. [...] facial expressions tell everything, which makes it much easier for me to understand what they mean. So, both as friends or colleagues, Finns are easy to get along with or communicate with. (J4)

J4 also admires the combination of Finnish seriousness and the sense of responsibility as well as their work-life balance. In fact, all Japanese emphasize the importance of having a private life. J2 states that such a work style can increase work motivation or energy, since staying long hours at the workplace never reflects positively on work productivity. However, in reality, all Japanese are aware that it would be a completely different story whether those aspects could be incorporated in the Japanese workplace. Since they are Japanese employees after all, they would hesitate to leave on time, and they feel it would be impossible to work like Finns in Japan. Having private time should be a right for employees, yet in the Japanese workplace, this is not the case. They address that Japanese society may see work-life separation as laziness. J3 mentions that although Finnish employee's willingness to present ideas or to take initiatives are ideal, in truth, it would not function at a Japanese workplace because of hierarchy.

It appears that Japanese acknowledge straightforwardness or honesty in communication as positive, as it does not only make communication easier, but makes relationships also more profound. Finns realize that indirect expression can sound kinder and more polite to others in certain circumstances, yet they point out that they would rather receive a straightforward statement since it is easier to understand, and they do not consider direct expressions as rude.

### 6.4.3 Growing Together and Constructing a New Workplace Culture

As discussed, what Finns and Japanese discover and point out about each other turns out to be quite similar. Yet it seems that Finns regard their work styles as more positive, while Japanese recognize their own work styles as rather negative and something to be changed. Even though it appears that culture influences workstyles in a bicultural workplace, in order to respect others and cooperate together, all employees tend to change their ways of thinking or working whether consciously or not.

First of all, when Finns communicate with Japanese, they take hierarchy into consideration. Hence, the choice of words and behaviors become more polite especially when they speak Japanese. If Finns speak English or Finnish to the Japanese, expressions turn more direct, assuming others to understand cultural differences. Yet as F4 mentions, they are still more polite compared to speaking with other Finns. In case of speaking with Japanese in any language, direct expression is deliberately avoided particularly when asking a favor. F2 illustrates that statements tend to start with, *“if it is possible..., or it is hard to say but...”*, and body gestures are supplemented to show hesitation, such as bowing many times with hands rubbing together in front of the face.

On the other hand, in case Finns encounter a problem understanding implicit messages, all Finns who studied Japanese language and culture state that in case of communicating with top positions, they avoid direct questions; instead, they discuss and consult with their colleagues what the intended meanings could be. Yet the other Finns have no problems asking for clarification. In addition, when the Japanese superiors ask Finns to work overtime, F1, F2, F3, and F5 do not hesitate to turn the request down.

Yet, as Finns are aware that the hierarchical relationship has to be maintained at the workplace, they seem to have changed their perspective towards work.

(22) I have probably started, just not to think too much. So it is like, ok this is the things I have to do, so, don't think too much how it could be done in a more efficient way or better, because that is not what is expected from you. It does not help me in any way if I would go and say those, because it just makes thing more difficult. But this is not a good thing. (F3)

As it is acknowledged that ordinary employees are not expected to suggest or express opinions, work orders are simply accepted by Finns. F1 and F4 point out that regardless of the fact that it would be easier and faster to conduct work individually, they share work-achievements. Even though it is considered as more inefficient, F1 also finds it easier to receive advice or help from colleagues while working on a project. Although indirect expressions or work manners are adjusted only when interacting with Japanese, F2 also mentions that they got used to the concept of hierarchy regardless of whom to speak with.

(23) I was so used to working under hierarchical relationship, and I even acted to my Finnish boss in the same manner through using honor expressions. My Finnish boss seemed unpleasant, so I told him that I thought he was in much higher position and needed to have a distance from me. He was shocked and told me that he was just more experienced in this work field, yet we are all equal. (F2)

In contrast, Japanese believe that they talk indirectly only to Japanese and expect only Japanese to read between the lines, while in case of communicating with Finns, their requests or statements are more direct.

(24) Japanese can be in sync with each other in communication, and we can understand what others look for, without being openly mentioned. So, for instance, if we are asked to do a certain task, we can assume another task should be additionally done, then we will complete both naturally, even though it was not explicitly requested. Yet, this does not work with Finns at all, and it's more like they work on what I ask only. If I expect them to work something supplemental, then everything needs to be stated directly, from the beginning. (J4)

In addition to deliberately providing explicit statements for Finns, the order of speaking is consciously differentiated as well.

- (25) I try to start speaking from conclusion or state first what I need to ask to Finns. On the other hand, if I speak to Japanese, I just explain for a while regarding a project or background information and, in the end, I state the conclusion. In talking to Finns, it depends on the person, yet I feel like their reaction ends up mostly like ‘what do you want to say after all?’ unless I mention the conclusion first. This does not matter if I speak Japanese or English to them. (J4)

It is recognized that purposes and reasons have to be stated to Finns, as this does not only clarify the importance of work, but also appears to increase their work motivation.

- (26) The Japanese would just accept the work task without asking any reasons, when your boss tells you to complete. We would not question the aims or purposes of the job task, as long as these orders come from your boss; we have this type of organization culture at the Japanese workplace. On the other hand, Finns would like to identify those aspects, and if they are convinced regarding the significance of work tasks, they would conduct it immediately. I cannot just tell them that headquarters in Japan needs us to do this work. Unless convinced, this might depend on the person, but on some occasions, some said to me something like, “this work is not necessary to do,” and it looks like they are not willing to work on it. (J4)

In order for Finns to grasp the work projects and engage in work, J3 and J4 came to realize that they need to explain the whole picture. Yet to all Japanese, such differences are rather acknowledged as facts, not as issues. As a matter of fact, they do not expect Finns to follow exactly the same communication manners as Japanese, and instead appreciate Finns’ efforts to adjust their attitudes according to Japanese cultural norms.

In addition, as a result of interaction with the Finns, communication with colleagues has changed and become more sincere:

- (27) I became more sincere towards workplace relationships. I used to focus more on avoiding conflicts or keeping harmony at the workplace, and I did not state clearly nor face the problems directly, and rather left it up in the air or just smiled away sometimes. However, since I have learnt to be more earnest to others, and look into the problems openly in person. (J1)

As J1 also mentions, what matters more for Finns to build a relationship, seems to be connected to other's capability or personality rather than their status.

Yet, J4 states that, although in the beginning, she did not deliberately distinguish a communication manner between Finns and Japanese, the more she communicated with Finns, the more negative reactions were given by Finns, and as a result, she recognized that there was something wrong in the communication method. Both Finns and Japanese seem to adjust their attitudes in order to fit into situations suitably at the workplace, although they express that it took some time to get used to different manners. According to J1 and J4, in the first year of employment, more confusion or difficulty was encountered, yet in the end, their attitudes or insights turn to change accordingly.

Overall, to a greater or lesser extent, everyone differentiates the communication styles whether they interact with Finns or Japanese. However, although Finns believe that they are intentionally using indirect expressions when communicating with the Japanese, the Japanese still feel their speaking manners are more explicit. At the same time, even though Japanese claim to be more direct to Finns, Finns still think that Japanese are indirect, which makes it harder to understand the intended messages. Hence, it can be described that both of them try to adjust or change their communication manners, yet their culture still influences their behaviors. In addition, most importantly, a strong emphasis is put on the fact that communication behaviors change on account of whom they communicate with, instead of nationality or language differences.

Moreover, since Finns appear to be more willing to take initiative or responsibility, J3 tries to entrust projects to Finns without interfering or asking about their work achievement before the project is completed. On the other hand, J2 mentions that since Finns tend not to share information about their work progress, the situation has to be checked carefully.

To conclude, Japanese consider Finnish insights and work manners as being more positive than the Japanese work style, and they wish to incorporate such aspects into their work styles. Most importantly, “work comes first” mentality is recognized as a great problem in the Japanese workplace. Hence, all Japanese learn to respect personal time and they try to focus on increasing work efficiency and productivity, according to J1, J2, and J4, for instance, through having efficient discussions with colleagues regardless of their positions in the company. J2 points out that as far as working in Japan is concerned, these insights could not be discovered, since in Japan work commitment is naturally taken for granted.

## 6.5 Position and Role of the Organization Policy

The workplace policy is illustrated in chapter 4, and hence, this chapter discusses how Finns and Japanese perceive the organization policy. Since this organization is Japanese but located in Finland, the policy is complex. However, due to working at the Japanese-capitalized organization, Finns tend to encounter more difficulties with the policy. In this chapter, in addition to the impact of organization policy, the interviewees’ perspectives on the policy are presented.

### 6.5.1 General Impressions of the Organization Policy

First of all, both Finns and Japanese agree that Finnish laws are taken into consideration in the company policy. Yet all managers are from Japan and all Finns are locally hired as ordinary employees; Japanese managers give orders and Finns follow the instruction according to the chain of command. General practices seem to be outdated to most of the Finns, especially in terms of not having flexible working hours or a workstation. The policy seems to follow the books only, which appears to F5 that empathy, humanity, or flexibility are lacking. Both believe that this workplace policy stands for Japanese work style and culture.

On the other hand, J4 points out that the workplace expectation or company policies apply differently to Finns and Japanese. Finnish laws or work style are observed and Finns are not forced or expected to work according to Japanese manners. Therefore, although Finns may think that this organization represents Japanese culture, the Japanese believe that Finnish work style is never accepted by Japanese employees.

### 6.5.2 Impacts of the Organization Policy

As a consequence of the reshuffling of top positions, rules or policies, especially the small details related to holidays, working hours, or lunch break can change every now and then. F2, F3, and F4 indicate that they are more united among Finns since it is unpredictable how the work conditions can be amended and in the end, they share the same problems. In addition, due to the hierarchical structure, all Finns see the concepts of policy as being rather problematic. For instance, holiday application has to be approved with many written signatures, and in case of requesting something from a different department, it needs to go through the other department's superiors first. Moreover, not providing flexible working hours may result in the employee's lower commitment towards the workplace.

(28) With non-flexible working hours, we can only leave the specific time exactly, which seems ridiculous for normal Finnish office. But this is a kind of mental thing, like if you don't get anything from the workplace, we do not want to give in return. As they told us to come to work on specific time, then I would leave exactly on time. [...] On the other hand, if I were in the Finnish workplace, I would feel more easily, like it doesn't matter, even if I work half-hour more, because I know they are more flexible to me. (F3)

In addition, the position only reflects work responsibility, not individual competence.

(29) I feel like no one seems like looking at the employee's capability and, simply the work tasks are given to the person. As I have understood that in Japanese working life, it does not matter what you have studied in the university; instead, they just go to the workplace and they told you what to do. But this does not fit in Finnish mentality that well, and that is why Finnish workers are

sometimes a bit frustrated as we are not given a responsibility of anything in a way we should really do something. (F3)

In addition to working on tasks without knowing the bigger picture, neither negative nor positive feedbacks are given. Yet, still F3 feels that what the superiors instruct has to be followed. F2, F3, and F4 point out that their suggestions or ideas are not appreciated as Japanese managers do not seem to be interested. Such frustration may only reduce work motivation, regardless of the fact that they wish to have more work responsibility. In fact, J2, J4, and J5 are also completely aware that this hierarchical structure keeps Finns from engaging in work proactively. In addition, J5 indicates that due to the company structure, Finnish perspectives towards work styles cannot be clearly recognized.

(30) As this organization policy is more like virtual, and Japanese and locally hired Finns are separated; therefore, it is not like all employees work on the projects together. So, I cannot really experience working with Finnish colleagues, because it is like Japanese provide instruction for Finns, and they follow accordingly. If I would work together with Finns at some workplace, in which there is no such hierarchical structure, I would understand more Finnish work styles or perceptions. (J5)

To conclude, although hierarchy has an enormous effect, the difference in position between Finns and Japanese seem to make Finns feel distant from Japanese and decrease their work incentive, and moreover, the policy itself prevents Finnish cultural insights to be presented to the superiors as well.

### 6.5.3 Essential Adjustments in the Organization Policy

As discussed, since the Japanese-capitalized organization is run in Finland, cultural insights towards work styles are mixed. Both Finnish and Japanese employees have their visions. First of all, all Japanese believe that as this is a Japanese organization, the final decision has to come from Japan. However, since Finns are vital employees in the operation, company policy should be adjusted according to their opinions or cultural insights as much as possible

in order to provide a pleasant working environment for the employees. If a Japanese company forced Finns to work according to the Japanese work style, then the company would not function well. The work environment influences work motivations and Finns can maximize their capability and bring benefits and productivity to the organization if they enjoy the environment.

All Finns also agree that it is understandable that Japan rules the organization and Japanese culture influences the workplace culture. Yet in their opinions as well, if a company locates abroad, it should not make it challenging for local employees to follow foreign systems. If company policy adjusted more to the work style of the physical location, it would be also easier for the company to understand the local cultures. F1, F2, and F3 also indicate that the local employees certainly have more knowledge of the society or local business, and the company could gain from listening to their opinions. On the other hand, in reality, the hierarchical structure powerfully affects the workplace, and hence, the capabilities and expertise of Finnish employees are neglected. Yet, all Japanese strongly acknowledge that such aspects should be more valued and incorporated in order for the Finnish local employees to have more authority or responsibility for work projects. As a result, the local employees could feel content.

However, J4 thinks that Japanese pay too much attention to the fact that the employees are Finns. Even though this is a Japanese organization, in the end, it is a workplace where the employees receive compensation over work. Hence, the nationality of the employees should not matter, and the company needs to make an effort on explaining their work styles or work tasks to Finns in order to reach a compromise. The Japanese organization would not expect Finns to work like the Japanese, yet it is just wrong for the company not to ask them to work as much only because they are not Japanese. In fact, J4 believes that Finns would understand the importance of tasks and feel even motivated towards work responsibility.

It seems as if this Japanese workplace differentiates expectations of Japanese and others, as it assumes that non-Japanese employees would not understand Japanese work styles. In fact, F4 points out this aspect as well. This workplace incorporates Finnish laws related to holidays and working overtime into the policy. However, F4 thinks that Japanese are not satisfied with the facts that Finns have long holidays and shorter working hours, while Japanese employees are expected to work all the time even until late at night. In addition, although an ideal situation is to integrate the Finnish culture, F3 and F4 emphasize that introducing flexibility to the policy would never work in reality as this workplace is a Japanese organization.

To conclude, the problems of organization policy seem to be mutually recognized among Finns and Japanese. Both of them believe that, first of all, foreign capital companies must follow the local rules and regulations, and local cultural insights should be incorporated into the company policy as it brings benefits to both local employees and the workplace. Hence, it requires both Finns and Japanese to compromise and adjust to different work styles and perspectives. Finnish employees mainly find more negative effects in the company policy, yet they are aware that this workplace has to be controlled by the Japanese and as a result, there are certain work manners that could not be changed.

## 6.6 Means to Improve Understanding

This chapter discusses how the employees think such problems can be solved or even prevented from happening. All interviewees point out that discussing openly or writing feedback could be the first possible step, since to begin with Finns and Japanese need to understand each other's perspectives and possible reasons behind the difficulties or confusion at the workplace. J2 mentions that especially this workplace lacks an opportunity to open up to each other. In addition, J2 also indicates that Finns and Japanese have similar perceptions or personalities, which results in assuming each other's feelings or perspectives, or hinders them from communicating.

Yet Finns and Japanese acknowledge that some would struggle to open up completely at this Japanese organization. F2 and F3 state that, according to their experiences, they believe that presenting problems would not be helpful or constructive at a Japanese workplace, since Japanese consider those who express issues as difficult or troublesome persons. J1, J2, J3, and J5 also point out that the strong hierarchical structure hinders direct communication to persons above you. In addition, J5 mentions that unless a manager recognizes it as a real problem, the problem can be left in the air without any action being taken. F3 emphasizes that certain aspects such as hierarchy are so profoundly rooted in the work style, and thus, only having a discussion cannot change something so fundamental.

Finns who lived in Japan or studied Japanese language and culture put emphasis on the fact that prior knowledge and experiences help them to understand Japanese behaviors better. If Finns are acquainted with Japanese cultures in advance, they can take the differences as facts, and dissimilarities would not become a big stress or problem. For instance, since hierarchical relationship is recognized as part of Japanese culture, certain work styles are expected from the beginning. All Japanese also agree that knowledge in advance is useful in order to avoid experiencing a big shock when facing differences.

On the other hand, J1 and J3 are aware that previous knowledge may possibly provide more biased perceptions towards others, and J2 and J4 point out that people can slowly but surely learn to understand each other's perspectives when working together. Nevertheless, both Finns and Japanese acknowledge that differences exist and cause negative experiences or impacts on the workplace. For instance, due to differences in perspectives on work-life balance and separation, J2 mentions that her Japanese manager created a negative evaluation of some Finnish employees in the beginning, as the manager thought the Finns would not accept to work on holidays. Eventually, by becoming familiar with Finnish work styles, the manager realized that it was wrong to have asked Finns to work during holidays in general. Therefore, as this case indicates, the negative conflict or tension could have been avoided if the Japanese would have recognized such cultural aspects in advance.

On the other hand, as discussed, especially in case of being in a lower position at the Japanese workplace, Finns recognize that it is harder to accept the status than expected. Having a theoretical knowledge and practicing is different. Yet, in their opinion, not knowing anything in advance, they would run into much more frustration and negative surprises. Hence, in the end, having knowledge is helpful in order to anticipate dissimilar perspectives and work styles.

Since not everyone can live abroad and experience cultural differences on their own in advance, in order for employees to acquire some cultural knowledge, all interviewees agree that having some lectures or introduction concerning workplace culture would be beneficial for employees. For instance, J4 illustrates that relocation orders may be given on very short notice and Japanese managers may not have time to prepare themselves for the new environment. Moreover, they may not understand why Japanese work style cannot be maintained abroad, since, regardless of the company's physical location, it is still a Japanese organization. In that case, they may end up encountering difficulties or confusion, yet they need to manage challenges step by step through gaining experiences. Endowed with some cultural knowledge, they may not necessarily go through such a trial and error process.

Both Finns and Japanese indicate that, in spite of the fact that a few sessions would not be enough to understand the cultures, acquiring even a small amount of cultural knowledge is beneficial. In addition, J4 believes that intercultural workplaces should implement seminars in order to develop intercultural understanding among employees and to prevent conflicts.

- (31) I think Japan is still a mono culture and, for instance, in case we need to work on a certain project together, all employees can recognize the necessity of taking a specific action instantly. Yet, if there are Finns at this particular situation, we may have to take a moment to explain the importance or meanings of work actions. Hence, I think the cultural differences make a huge difference.  
(J4)

On the other hand, according to J4, it is doubtful whether Japanese companies would be willing to invest their money in cultural training, since in the end, Japanese top positions do not particularly face cultural conflicts at the workplace. Their work responsibility tends to be more paper work in order to approve decisions, and thus, they might not see the importance of comprehending cultural differences nor taking preventive measures. In addition, ordinary employees are not typically heard due to the hierarchical structure. Yet, at the same time, it is emphasized that bringing new cultural insights into the workplace can cause positive effects, as each culture has progressive work styles to be learnt. Therefore, the key task is to convince managers to invest in cultural training sessions.

Yet, F3 points out that there would be no solution to solve such problems, and employees just have to tackle the issues themselves. Cultural knowledge would be helpful only in understanding background information, not in resolving matters.

(32) I think it will be only better with new generations, who are more open, learn more about the world, speak more languages, and know more about technologies. I think, in a natural way, it is going to change a little bit. But I think Japanese cultures or ways of being, and especially, the office cultures for the older generations are deeply rooted. So I don't think it would change easily.  
(F3)

It is believed that since the older generation is normally in charge of the society or companies due to hierarchical structure in Japan, nothing would change as long as they are in control. However, it appears to F3 that a younger Japanese generation has a variety of different perspectives and once the new generation is in charge at the workplace, things may change.

Moreover, F3 claims that younger Japanese who are more exposed to other cultures or have worked abroad over the years, tend to use a straightforward communication method, to focus more on work efficiency, and to be more open to other insights. Hence, Finns do not hesitate to state more directly and they can have a more flat relationship with those younger superiors.

Workplace communication is contrasted with the older Japanese superiors, who prioritized traditional Japanese workplace manners or communication in the past.

(33) [...] now at the workplace, the bosses are quite young so I can see that is totally a new generation of Japanese people working at the office. So, the older generation's way of working, or way of being with other people, were totally different. (F3)

In addition, J1 also agrees that the level of intercultural experiences is diverse among individual employees at the workplace, which appears to differentiate their workplace relationship or communication.

(34) I feel like that Finns, who have more international experiences, tend to smile or provide supportive responses in conversations, and I noticed that their behaviors changed according to whom they speak to. The reason might be also that they are aware that I am Japanese and they know more about Japanese culture in communication. If I meet those Finns in other occasions, the differences appeared to be much clearer. [...] it indeed makes me feel comfortable and relieved. (J1)

J1 mentions that, commonly, people who are more exposed to other cultures can adjust to the different situations in cross-cultural communication, and hence, it can be stated that intercultural competence or experiences may bring an effect on building a better relationship or communication with people with different cultural backgrounds.

## 6.7 Discussion

This research presents how cultural differences and similarities influence a Finnish-Japanese bicultural workplace, and workplace interaction is the primary focus, in order to compare the experiences of employees with prior academic research. As the interview data shows, the employees' experiences and insights can be related to theories. Due to the socialization process, insights, norms, or actions are formed and these cultural perceptions define

“emotional backpack as a fallback guide” (Nair-Venugopal 2015: 30). During the interviews, both Finns and Japanese often claim “*We, Finns are...*” or “*Because we are Japanese, that is why...*” and continue to present their behaviors as their exclusive cultural practices. Therefore, it can be said that the concept of national culture still exists in their mind. “Ethnic culture is so deeply ingrained in people” (Clausen 2006: 259) and hence, such insights cannot be removed. This indicates that cultural differences may cause problems or challenges at the workplace.

Work styles or ways of thinking seem to be stretched out especially among different generations of Japanese employees at the workplace. The older generation tends to follow traditional Japanese work styles or communication manners, while Finns find a younger generation more open-minded to other perspectives, which makes it easier to work with. International experiences also seem to be connected to the employee’s recognition and respect towards different cultures to an extent. Yet, strong emphasis is put on that individuals are so different that nothing can be simply generalized. Overall, at this workplace, whether employees have previous international experiences or not, all employees adjust or change attitudes to some extent through learning from other cultures. Even though most of the Japanese had no previous knowledge or experiences in Finland, they learned to accept or adopt the differences slowly but surely by interacting with Finns.

Mostly, Japanese find more positive aspects in the Finnish way of thinking or work styles, and Finns consider Japanese indirect expressions more polite. These insights are learnt through interaction with each other and are incorporated in their perspectives or practices to a certain degree, and therefore, “a new common culture” (Clausen 2006: 59) is created uniquely at this workplace. Regardless of the fact that cultural differences can be seen as a challenge, such dissimilarities possibly turn to be “positive factors and as essential ingredients for growth” (Clausen 2006: 49). In the end, as a result of intercultural communication, cultural distinctiveness is acknowledged, and as the Japanese mentioned, problematic aspects of Japanese work styles which need to be improved, are explicitly

recognized. Yet, at the Japanese workplace, even though some cultural insight such as hierarchy is considered as an obstacle to maximize work efficiency or productivity, without hierarchy, the Japanese company cannot function smoothly, and hence hierarchy may not be eliminated from the work style. However, learning new perceptions appears to bring positive effects in mind at least, which may be put into practice in the future.

In addition, as an important acknowledgement, organization policy does not only contain cultural insights, but also indicates company operation and rules, and hence it influences communication manners among employees (Clausen 2006: 239). Yet, as both Finns and Japanese emphasize, in case a company moves abroad and hires local employees, the company policy should incorporate both Finnish and Japanese perspectives and work styles, in order to make the most of the company function. As introduced, since the concept of workplace culture is interconnected to cultural perceptions and organization policy, the implication of the organization policy has a significant role in this research.

All interviewees mention that knowledge of other cultures is helpful to workplace communication. As discussed, language also represents some cultural values, and communication is conducted with the language, and therefore, if employees can decrease “cultural and linguistic gaps” (Clausen 2006: 199), the chances of miscommunication may be diminished. In addition, unless employees have prior cultural knowledge, it may make it more challenging for certain ways of thinking or work styles to be shared (ibid: 196). Yet, cultural differences can be accepted as facts, and the more knowledge people have, the more objectively they may deal with various situations in intercultural encounters (ibid: 61).

As a final point, facilitating cultural lessons could be supportive for employees in intercultural understanding. Identified as a difficulty in the Japanese workplace, top positions may not experience a cultural conflict nor perceive it as an issue, yet higher positions have to recognize the power of cultural understanding in order to help their employees adjust to new cultures (Clausen 2006: 223). Therefore, the company could implement intercultural

education for employees, for instance, through human resources training programs (Clausen 2006: 255). Baranovskaya (2015: 66) quotes (Liu 2004: 508) that such programs do not only educate employees concerning the organization policy and culture, but it also enables employees to “exchange practices and experiences.” Another strategy can be employing a cultural interpreter, who comprehends both cultures and languages, and cultural complexity can be taught to employees (Clausen 2006: 197). This may prevent cultural conflicts at the workplace and improve the intercultural work environment. “The language and cultural adaptation were appreciated” (Clausen 2006: 133) at intercultural workstations, and therefore, such advantages may develop further cooperation and provide benefits in international workplace and global business.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how employees experience workplace culture at the bicultural, Japanese-Finnish, company and how cultural differences influence the workplace. A qualitative case study method was selected, and in a semi-structured interview procedure, a variety of perspectives and experiences from Finns and Japanese, who worked together at a Japanese organization in Finland, were collected. The workplace had only Finnish and Japanese employees, and the workplace interaction between them was limited. Hence, the data highlighted a bicultural experience and indicated more precise and valuable resources to answer the research questions. Data was analyzed using categorical-content analysis and, in chapter 6, the data showed how the cultural perspectives of the employees had both positive and negative effects at the workplace as well as how employees adjusted to the workplace culture.

As a result of rapid internationalization, theories on national culture may not illustrate people accurately anymore. Hence, in order to contrast academic research with actual experiences or perceptions of Finns and Japanese, as well to comprehend the cultural backgrounds of Finland and Japan, first, the study discussed three cultural values, individualism/collectivism, direct/indirect communication, and equal /hierarchical relationships, in chapter 3, since those values are used in theory to explain workplace interaction. As cultural perspectives and organization policy uniquely shape workplace culture, the organization policy was presented in chapter 4. Ultimately, the research resulted in identifying a specific workplace culture of the Japanese institution in Finland.

The analysis showed that although generalization of culture is no longer possible because of individual differences, cultural values of Finland and Japan are still present, and cultural differences cause challenges at the workplace. Therefore, despite the fact that an organization policy certainly affects workplace cultures, it can be stated that to a certain extent, having

cultural knowledge, even if it is stereotypical, may be important. Having cultural knowledge helps people to develop at least the idea that cultural differences exist. Moreover, as relations between Finland and Japan are expected to develop further in a variety of fields, this research may contribute to cultural understanding between Finland and Japan.

Concerning the limitation of this study, in contrast to Japanese business culture or workplace communication, research on Finnish workplace culture seems to be rather limited. Compared to the Japanese economy and population, Finland is much smaller and the amount of literature referring to Finnish cultural values was scarcer.

As a final point, since each organization develops a specific workplace culture, focused research on one organization can be more coherent. Yet, since this research studied the workplace interaction at the Japanese-capitalized workplace in Finland, the organizational culture reflected the Japanese culture more than the Finnish culture. It needs to be acknowledged that the data is specifically extracted from a Japanese organization in Finland. Therefore, it could be expected that interaction or experiences of employees would be different in the case of researching a bicultural workplace of a Finnish company in Finland or a Finnish company in Japan. In addition, due to the clear status distinction between Finns and Japanese, the perspectives of the Finnish employees were very specific. Hence, if Finns were also in managerial positions, experiences or perspectives would have been different even in the same organization.

As the organization policy appeared to impact the workplace culture to a great extent, in future research, a Finnish company which has only Finnish and Japanese employees may be selected in order to study how a Finnish organization policy can affect the perspectives of Japanese employees. According to this study, the Japanese employees found Finnish work styles more positive and they wished to incorporate Finnish work manners into the Japanese workplace. Hence, it would be interesting to see how Japanese cultural values would be retained in a Finnish work environment.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix 1. Interview Questions English Version

1. Background Information
  - 1.1 Have you ever worked with Japanese before? (If so, how long and where?)
  - 1.2 Before you started working at the workplace, do you think you were familiar with Japanese culture and people? Was there any image or stereotype towards Japanese? (If so, why and what?)
  - 1.3 Was having such knowledge or image helpful to work with the Japanese? (Yes or no? why?)
2. Language
  - 2.1 Which language do you speak to Japanese colleagues? How do you choose the language?
  - 2.2 In speaking with Japanese colleagues, do you have any challenges? Do you feel different if you speak in different languages with them? (If so, what and why?)
  - 2.3 Do you feel that having Japanese language proficiency makes it different for communication? (If so, how and why?)
  - 2.4 How do you feel to those who speak (or try) Finnish language? Do you feel different from others who do not speak Finnish at all?
  - 2.5 Do you recognize whether Japanese use non-verbal communication? (If so, what?)
3. Differences and Similarities
  - 3.1 How do you think about the similarity between Finns and Japanese in general and at the workplace?
  - 3.2 How do you think about the differences between Finns and Japanese in general and at the workplace?
4. Through Interaction or Communication with Japanese
  - 4.1 Is there anything you do not understand or find it difficult in communicating with Japanese? (Is there anything you are careful in communication with Japanese?) (If so, what?)
  - 4.2 (If answered yes on 4.1) When facing something different or difficult to understand in communicating with Japanese, what would you do?
  - 4.3 Do you find anything positive, impressive, or appreciating from Japanese communication manners? (If so, what?)
  - 4.4 Do you feel your attitudes or behaviors change in case of the interaction with Japanese, compared with the communication with Finns? (If so, how and why?)
  - 4.5 Do you think you have changed certain work style because it has influenced by Japanese? (If so, what and why?)

- 4.6 Have you ever felt left out among Japanese colleagues? (If so, how and why?)
5. How do you describe Japanese colleagues and their work styles?
  6. How do you describe Finnish work styles?
  7. Company policy
    - 7.1 (Only asked to Finns) Is there any company rules, which are difficult to understand? (If so, what?)
    - 7.2 (Only asked to Finns) Is there any company rules that you find it impressive? (If so, what?)
    - 7.3 How do you feel towards the company policy? (How is the company policy represented? Do you think the Finnish laws and insights are incorporated?)
    - 7.4 Do you think the company policy should change in some way? (If so, how?)
  8. What is the best way to solve these problems or difficulties you have encountered at the workplace?
  9. Do you think that acknowledging other cultural insights in advance can be useful, in order to work at the workplace? How do you think if the workplace provides such cultural lectures to employees, in order for them to get familiar with other cultures?

## Appendix 2. Interview Questions Japanese Version

1. 経験・知識について
  - 1.1 以前フィンランド人と一緒に仕事をした経験はありますか？
  - 1.2 フィンランドで働く前にフィンランド人または文化について、何か知っていましたか？フィンランド人に対してのステレオタイプはありましたか？
  - 1.3 実際にフィンランド人と働く上で、知識やステレオタイプとして持っていた情報は役に立つと感じますか？
2. 言語
  - 2.1 何語でフィンランド人同僚と話をしますか？（その言語を使用する理由）
  - 2.2 日本語、英語、それぞれフィンランド人と話す際、問題点や困難と感ずることはありますか？
  - 2.3 もしフィンランド語が話せたら、何かコミュニケーションが変わると思いますか？
  - 2.4 日本語が話せる、または日本文化の知識があるフィンランド人と、そうではないフィンランド人同僚間での、コミュニケーションの違いはありますか？もしそうであればその理由は？
  - 2.5 フィンランド人とのノンバーバル・コミュニケーションについて気付く点はありますか？
3. 相違点
  - 3.1 フィンランド人と日本人の似ている点についてどう感じますか？（一般的なこと・仕事の仕方）
  - 3.2 フィンランド人と日本人の異なる点についてどう感じますか？（一般的なこと・仕事の仕方）
4. フィンランド人とのコミュニケーションを通して
  - 4.1 フィンランド人と職場で一緒に働いていて、理解しがたいことや問題に感じたことはありますか？またはフィンランド人と働く上で何か心がけていたことや注意した点はありますか？
  - 4.2 もしフィンランド人と働く上で何か問題が生じたり、理解しがたいことがあった場合、どのように対処していましたか？
  - 4.3 フィンランド人と一緒に働いていて、感心した点はありますか？
  - 4.4 同じ同僚でも、日本人同士でのコミュニケーションと、フィンランド人とのコミュニケーションをとる際、何か意識的に行動を変えていた点はありますか？

- 4.5 フィンランド人と働き始めた後で、何か学び自分の行動や勤務の仕方、考え方に変化がありましたか？
- 4.6 フィンランド人だけと一緒にいる際に孤立を感じたことはありますか？
5. フィンランド人同僚・働き方について全体的にどう思いますか？
6. 日本人の仕事に対する文化的考え方とは何だと思えますか？
7. 企業方針
- 7.1 企業方針についてどう感じますか？日本企業であっても、フィンランドの法律や制度を取り入れていると感じますか？フィンランドにある日本企業の企業方針はどのようにあるべきだと思えますか？
- 7.2 現企業方針で修正すべき点はありますか？
8. 現職場にてフィンランド人と働く上で、問題点が生じた際、どのように解決することが出来ると考えますか？
9. フィンランド人の文化や考え方などを事前に学ぶことは役に立つと思えますか？例えば、異文化研修プログラムが会社にて提供されることをどう考えますか？