An Action Research Proposal for Enhanced Integration of Filipino Employees into an Aging Japanese Workforce

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by

Hajime Kunitachi

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ABSTRACT

The pace of workforce decline in Japan is accelerating while its population is shrinking. Such a rapidly aging population has a direct impact on economic competitiveness, which requires the need to address the ensuing labor shortage.

Although Japan's imbalanced population could be rectified through policy to increase immigration, Japanese companies resist hiring foreign workers because immigration has long been taboo as many Japanese prize Japanese identity, ethnic homogeneity and the notion of an island country (*shimaguni*) culture. Moreover, the Japanese manufacturers do not think that the population decline is a serious issue. Instead, many take a short-term approach by bringing in thousands of foreign workers to help cut labor costs and send them back after their contracts are over. Therefore, the Japanese state finds it difficult to balance its conservative views on immigration although there is a desperate need for younger and skilled workers to boost the Japanese economy.

Once a cornerstone of the economy, the paternalistic relationship between Japan's companies and their salaried employees is also crumbling although the lifetime employment system continues to play an important role in their managerial system. Japanese companies tend to use a patriarchal approach to management, which requires employees showing stronger commitment and loyalty to company goals. As the system is gradually shifting to a neoliberal system, the Japanese organizations face a number of challenges. As an example, my company does business in the Philippines, operates under a patriarchal management system, and, as a result, does not function well within the current global economy.

This thesis addresses a research gap in the literature in how the traditional Japanese organization can adapt and compete on a global scale by integrating Filipino employees. In support of this thesis, an Action Research (AR) was conducted at the Manila office of our company. The AR resulted in developing methods to improve the company's practice and find solutions for the current organizational problems in the Filipino context, in search of gradually shaping a different organizational culture. The AR was designed in four stages to explore a distinct ontology around four empirical questions; (a) What do the Filipinos want? (b) How does that compare with our current practice? (c) What improvements can be made and, (d) What happened? In terms of research methodology, the first AR Cycle invited 140 participants from the Pasig Institute of Science and Technology (PCIST) to understand the character and desires of the Filipino workforce. The second AR cycle analyzed these responses to compare with current practice and decide if there is room for improvement. Finally, the third and fourth cycles planned, acted, observed and evaluated different context-specific actions to enable the development of actionable knowledge to improve organizational practices.

The AR results demonstrate that (a) there are serious communication problems between the Japanese and Filipino employees- and it is not from linguistic barriers- but from a traditional Japanese pessimism that cannot effectively communicate with the Filipino optimism, (b) there is an urgent need of orientation and nurturing among Filipino employees because of their numerous violations of the Japanese corporate spirit although perceived that the practice of increased individuality may have improved organizational practice, (c) there is an issue of commitment among Filipino employees, as they would have become quite disappointed about the patriarchal approach of the Japanese company, and (d) there is a serious concern for material success and rewards among Filipino employees.

This thesis argues that the employment of Filipinos can strengthen the Japanese economy if there is increased awareness about Japanese organizational practices and implementation of a proper screening process to ensure the selected candidates can cope with the challenges of a foreign corporate environment. My narrative suggests that the employment of Filipinos without any understanding about the organizational context may result in high education costs, an imbalance in skills, and increases quality control risks. However, both the pros and cons of Filipino employees could help a Japanese organization to improve its practice and reconsider some of its basic assumptions, which are rooted in the Japanese corporate value system. Nevertheless, as the Japanese companies are driven by a pessimistic cultural thought, they should be mindful about the positive potential of optimistic thoughts and adopt a more individual-oriented approach to remain competitive in an increasingly global economy. What Japanese companies might have been doing wrong is the treatment of "culture" as a separate entity to create a unique Japanese image based on a myth of homogeneity as the key of their success. This thesis suggests that the positive potential of a "collective organizational system" shall be first understood and embraced by the Japanese workforce, because the lack of such awareness might be the main cause of the economic stagnation that has resulted in Japanese companies to battle a perpetual-catch up syndrome.

Finally, the AR cycles also show that the co-existence of both individualistic and collectivist values injures relationships and wellbeing at Japanese organizations. Consequently, it requires a self-reflection on the theory and practice of Japanese cultural relativism and crumbling corporate paternalism. For this reason, this paper proposes a transformation from a hard work/unconditional devotion (*ganbaru*) to subjective easing with both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards offered to both Japanese and Filipino employees as a new firm-as-family concept. This could increase on- and off-screen skills of all. This thesis also argues that the problem is not cultural- but rather personal. The narrative suggests that some people may be resistant to change and reluctant to adopt a new managerial structure and we may not be able to control each individual and their actions. If Japan is to remain economically competitive, it must first transform the patriarchal-based managerial environment to one that allows every individual to search for and attain a self-concordant goal.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Contents

This chapter presents the background of the study, the research questions, and the purpose of this doctoral work together with its intended contributions to both knowledge and practice, and the structural outline of the doctoral thesis.

1.2 Background- the organizational context

The one question at the core of this research is to answer if my (Japanese) company will be able to keep its traditional organizational practice at the edge of a transforming Japanese society from a high- to low-context culture (Hall, 1976) as a result of a strong economic decline because of the dramatic decrease in population from the current 125 to 87 million people by 2050 (Lin, 2015:374).

Hall (1976) proposes that cultures could be divided into two categories- high context and low context. A high-context culture is collective that emphasizes shared beliefs and values while a low-context culture is heterogeneous and individualistic, which allows people to hold different opinions on social norms and values (Zheng et.al., 2018). Kim and Toya (2019) describe Japan as a high-context culture. In this sense, my company has a traditional organizational practice that is of similar high-context and wholistic concerns (Ouchi, 1981) shaped by the unique features of the Japanese culture exhibiting many characteristics of a Confucian-society such as implicit communication, seniority system, lifetime employment, loyalty and devotion.

Our company started as a small-sized enterprise in Tokyo in April 2010 to support Japanese housing companies transferring their construction technologies to developing countries. Although being a foreigner of German ancestry, I was appointed as the manager of the overseas department in the summer of 2010 because I was a trained architect and also possessed the linguistic skills to support the company's mission. In 2012, the company expanded its business services to develop, construct, operate and maintain solar power plants with the new Japanese Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) scheme (Dong and Shimada, 2017). Under the FIT scheme, the renewable energy developers had the right to enter into a power purchase agreement with the utility company and sell electric power at a fixed price over a long term. Therefore, our company established a new division to secure land and obtain the permits for foreign investors as it required negotiation and linguistic skills our partners did not possess. I was in charge of facilitating the communication between our company and its foreign counterparts. Finally, I was appointed as the Executive Director of the company's first overseas branch in Manila from February 2016 to transfer our experience and knowledge in renewable energy systems to profit from a similar FIT program introduced by the Filipino government.

During my first years in business, I felt like a minority while trying to get accustomed to a high-context culture as there were both relationally- oriented constraints (such as the concerns for avoiding hurting the listener's feeling, minimizing imposition, and avoiding negative evaluation) and task-oriented constraints (such as concerns for clarity and effectiveness) (Kim, 2017). I had to transform from an individualist into a collectivist as the Japanese patriarchal approach required employees to show strong commitment and loyalty to company goals rather than pursuing personal goals. Although I experienced very tough challenges by being a foreigner in the Japanese business society, I tried to understand and respect different cultural norms and learn from the collectivist thought that emphasizes group goals and personal relationships. Finally, my respect and appreciation towards Japanese society was rewarded with a Japanese citizenship in the summer of 2016.

Although being a naturalized citizen, my biggest concern today is that I am still an insider and outsider at my own organization (Miyazawa, 2018). In other words, I still observe that many of my Japanese contacts have difficulties in abandoning the myth of (Japanese) homogeneity as the key of their success that purports to demonstrate Japanese distinctiveness rather than integration (McCormack, 2015). All too often, relationships would go sour due to miscommunication as many of my Japanese colleagues would treat such social constructions as if they were objective and immutable facts that end up with limited inter-subjectivity, unwillingness and disability to integrate with the rest of the global world. The Japanese have a term for this called *Galápagosization* – meaning that business, products and relationships in an isolated environment will evolve different from the rest of the world because of a focus on the local market (Tamaki, 2015; Stockwin, 2019).

Within this context, I came to identify my workplace problem as a collectivist organizational structural issue that does not result in a global advantage when working with foreigners in either Japan or in the Philippines. It cannot break free from a conventional wisdom of a pure Japan. I certainly agree that there are challenges for every culture when interacting with the broader civilization due to their geographical, cultural and political boundaries (Taras, Steel and Kirkman, 2016). However, I kept observing that the (Japanese) ethnocentric social construction may have turned into a highly cohesive groupthink mentality (Rajakumar, 2019), which shares an illusion of consensus and invulnerability (Henningsen, et.al., 2017), overconfidence (Bryson et.al., 2016) and control (Riccobono et.al., 2015). Furthermore, such a strong belief in a homogenous collectivist structure turns into an ethnic discrimination of foreigners, and even the marginalization of long-term foreign residents in Japan (Morita, 2016; Tsuda, 2018). It is a fundamental question if such a managerial system could positively meet the challenges in a future where Japan might transform from a high- into a low- context culture in less than 20 years, and that the non-Japanese workers may account for 1/3rd of the total workforce nationwide (MIC, 2017).

For that reason, it is necessary to address an organizational problem that the Japanese patriarchal management system faces a number of challenges when working with foreigners and limits our company's ability to adapt and maintain current trade levels. This does not only threaten our overseas business activities in the Philippines but also the Japanese economy overall, which might have no other option but to rely on foreign labor in very near future to maintain its manufacturing, operation, and maintenance capabilities. To provide solutions to Japan's labor crisis, it can be useful to examine my experience as a foreign workers that has the experience to bridge the gap of understanding between a high- and low context cultures in the organizational structure. Hence, I ask the following four empirical research questions to start challenging how the Japanese organization can reprogram the group mentality and improve its current way of organizational practice so that the organization can successfully work with foreigners and maintain a competitive global economy.

Question 1: What do Filipinos want?
Question 2: How does that compare with our current practice?
Question 3: What improvements can be made?
Question 4: What happened?

In the next section, this paper will introduce the purpose of this thesis and how it is organized in action cycles around each of these four empirical questions with the aim to improve our current practice to successfully employ foreigners within a traditional Japanese collectivist organization.

1.3 Purpose of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate how we can adapt the organization to better integrate Filipino employees. This thesis provides actionable knowledge to initiate immediate responses and find solutions to our organizational problems needed to survive and succeed in the Filipino context so that our organization can learn and improve our practices, and gradually shape a different culture.

Therefore, this thesis proposes an action research (AR) in its overseas offices in Manila through four cycles that (a) understand the personality, character, desires, commitment and knowledge of potential Filipino employees through a workshop conducted at Pasig City Institute of Science and Technology (PCIST), (b) analyze these results to gain insight into the basic assumptions rooted in the Japanese corporate value system and debate whether there is possibility for improvement, (c) plan, act, observe and evaluate specific actions to improve our current practice based on discussions from the previous cycle, and (d) reflect on what happened, what next steps can be planned and what further operational practice can be adopted, and finally what observations were made and this paper evaluated and learned from them.

1.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis recognizes knowledge production as an innovative solution to bridge the research-practice gap (Metz et.al, 2019). It takes a rational approach to my workplace problem that there is a *research gap* rather than a *knowledge gap*. The knowledge gap refers to a wider concept of issues that have not been explored and the facts that still need to be known. However, in terms of knowledge gap, there are various scholar studies presented in this thesis (such as Watanabe, 2016; Morita, 2017; Henrich and Ogara, 2018; Menezes, 2019) that already highlight general issues and present a theoretical perspective about the problems faced by foreigners working for Japanese companies. Therefore, this thesis takes the position that there is more of a research gap between the discovery of knowledge relevant to practice and the methodological approach to put that information into practice in a particular context. For this reason, I use AR as an important tool to create actionable knowledge that shall narrow the knowing-doing gap and fill the insufficient research gap in the literature.

My first focus is to understand the personality, character and desires of the Filipino workforce as there is a research gap in this field except some general perspectives focusing on the negative experiences of Filipino nurses working at Japanese clinics and hospitals (Anonuveo et.al. 2016; Tana and Takagi, 2018). For this reason, I use Hofstede's (2019) cultural compass to clarify whether the Filipinos and Japanese are really the opposite in terms of culture. In a workplace setting, culture is the way to read and interpret my company, and the challenges it faces. My empirical data with 140 participants shows that the Filipinos are actually very close to the Japanese mentality that invalidates both Hofstede's theory and the Japanese belief. Both the qualitative and quantitative data collected during the process fills a research gap. Furthermore, it confirms that a cultural dimensional theory cannot provide a sustainable explanation for individuals, who surely tend to think, feel and act differently from each other apart from their own cultural values. It is evident in my empirical data that these cultural gaps are narrowing and sometimes even do not exist. I argue that the reason for such a behavior might be the multiple masculinities experienced by millions of OFWs (Overseas Filipino workers), who bring back experiences they have gained abroad back home. However, on the other hand, I point out a potential problem if our ethno-centered management system might disappoint Filipinos, whose desire to work for a Japanese company comes from the belief that they would be fairly and equally treated. The second chapter of this thesis provides an extensive summary about the Japanese national context and how it shapes the organizational culture, which may disappoint most of the future Filipino employees as it may not provide a fair and equal treatment as they would expect. This paper is from the position of a facilitator between two different cycles- an internal cycle with Japanese colleagues and an external cycle with potential Filipino employees to increase awareness about each group through the practice of multiple masculinities.

This thesis continues with the assumption that the Japanese collectivist culture acknowledgment of situational forces are not accurate as there is a common bias to explain the causes of others behavior in terms of internal and dispositional attributes although the person's behavior is constrained by external and situational factors (Dean and Konig, 2020). It further argues that the Japanese inward tendency turns into a pessimistic behavior that cannot cope with the challenges of the global world. However, this thesis also recognizes the potential of optimism present among Filipino employees and suggests that this could be the most valuable attribute they could bring into a Japanese organization and, as a result, increase Japanese economic competitiveness.

Next, this thesis suggests that the employment of Filipino workers could strengthen Japanese organizational capabilities only if corporations increase the understanding of current organizational practice and its challenges, and analyze their pros and cons. By doing so, this paper suggests to gradually reshape a different culture by increasing awareness of the genitive impacts of the current corporate paternalism and homogenous firm-as-family concept. Therefore, I use AR as a tool to transform from a passive into an active learning process so that the actionable knowledge created during the process could rebuild a heterogeneous model with an improved way of understanding and dealing with organizational problems using the pros of both the Japanese and Filipino practices. My narrative provides further knowledge on the interaction between the Japanese and Filipino employees at an organization, which helps to understand the real specifics of the problem, how it should be evaluated and revised for actions that result in improved practice by narrowing both the practical and psychological gaps. Finally, I present an important understanding that the improvement of organizational culture is way beyond cultural cultivation but more an individual issue. My research also suggests that it is not possible to control each individual and their actions- but organizations can create the right conditions and environment to increase motivation so that each individual can search for a self-concordant goal that could positively contribute to subjective wellbeing. As a conclusion, my thesis provides an interesting narrative together with a list of principles for both researchers and practitioners, who look for missing knowledge to narrow the research gap of employing foreigners at Japanese companies.

1.5 Contribution to Practice

Reflexivity is a key issue in the AR process. From the beginning of my doctoral research, my purpose is to improve our corporate practice through actions and help the company to change some of its "basic assumptions"; which is rooted in the Japanese corporate value system. Furthermore, I believe that my social status as a naturalized citizen with a European background can provide a unique positioning to facilitate learning between Japanese and Filipino employees so that we can come up with actionable knowledge to improve our current practice.

Therefore, I suggest our Manila office as the perfect place for an AR research because I was already appointed as the branch manager leading an international team of Japanese and Filipinos that I identify as my critical friends (Mc Ateer, 2017). Furthermore, my position allowed me to hire seven Filipino employees on a part-time basis so that we can plan, act, observe and evaluate specific actions to improve organizational practice in the Filipino context.

From a practitioner viewpoint, the results of this thesis suggest that (a) there are serious communication problems between the Japanese and Filipino employees, (b) there is an urgent need of orientation and nurturing among the Filipino employees, (c) there is an issue of commitment among the Filipino employees and (d) there is a serious concern of material success and rewards among the Filipino employees, as explained in detail in Chapter 4. The company faced two challenges. The first one was Japanese corporate paternalism required following an employee guidebook that may not turn into an effective nurturing opportunity as it builds upon a pessimistic approach of low expectations and that most of our employees are likely to achieve or even exceed their expectations (Norem, 2001). The initial action cycles showed that the Japanese employees would not be willing to take additional risks or responsibilities during an AR that might end up with a possible failure of goals and thereby the thought that they would jeopardize their rewards and benefits from a lifetime employment opportunity. On the other hand, the second challenge was that the traditional paternalistic practice of a Japanese company would disappoint the majority of the Filipino employees, who would strongly keep criticizing the lack of opportunity for self-actualization and disconnection with the Japanese employees. Furthermore, I also observed how the empowered Filipinos would not follow the company rules, cancel their appointments with clients without informing the management and keep looking for immediate extrinsic rewards.

Therefore, I came to self-criticize my initial approach that it may not be fair to ask our Filipino employees for hard work and devotion that is expected from Japanese employees if they are hired on a part-time basis and cannot enjoy similar rewards as their Japanese counterparts do. On the other hand, there were serious commitment issues and concerns of materials success among our Filipino employees that showed some lack in self-concordant goals, which cannot be solved by simply offering rewards. The AR put an enormous challenge on our traditional leader-followership relationship as our pessimist employees had to understand and accommodate the thoughts of an optimist foreign employee as a new perception of laissez-faire (Wong and Giessner, 2019). However, it required also a Filipino employee to absorb the values of discipline, hard work and devotion through an organizational followership they have violated numerous times during the previous cycles. Consequently, this presented a challenge in how to balance both thoughts under a new organizational goal.

Our company proposed a three-month free Japanese language training program for those, who would be interested to work for a Japanese company and devote their time and efforts. The company also updated its employee manual and required the Japanese employees to prepare a training program that they would personally teach to an interested foreign audience with the hope it would foster the opportunity to experience multiple masculinities for our Japanese employees. The training program was planned in form of an intrinsic and extrinsic reward package that the successful candidates, who would be able to pass the N5 Japanese Language Proficiency Test, would be awarded with an internship in Japan. Thereby, we aimed to look for a new firm-as-family concept that could provide equal opportunities for both Japanese and the Filipinos in return for their dedication and devotion.

Finally, the thesis also explains how the company sent three successful participants for an internship in Japan but they also quit the company after their internship time was over and accepted a better-paying English teaching job. This urged the company to reflect further on its actions that they are uncontrollable situations that foreign employees, who are engaged in practices in a country with different social, cultural and human management contexts maybe bewildered unless the social-cultural context is properly understood. Therefore, an adaptive management approach is helpful but with limited control as the foreign employees are handed over to recruitment agencies in Japan due to the current Japanese immigration policy laws. For this reason, the company took another important practitioner act and established an internal recruitment agency in 2019. The company further obtained both the international recruitment license and the Japanese registered supporting organization license (*tourokushienkikan*), which enabled the company to choose, educate, organize, deploy and monitor its own employees without relying on any other agency. Then, the company established a partnership with the University of Pasig and a few agencies in the Philippines to gain access into their database of students and graduates in relevant fields. Moreover, the company developed an online career matchmaking app that employers, employees and agents worldwide can register their information while the software would match skilled applicants with relevant job offers. It would also offer online linguistic and online cultural training activities to initiate further AR cycles so that we can continue observing and evaluating further processes.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The first chapter provides a brief overview of the rationale, motivation and topics examined. Chapter 2 summarizes the literature while Chapter 3 introduces the research design. Chapter 4 explains the complete story of the action research and Chapter 5 provides a critical reflection on the story in the light of both theory and practice. Finally, the last chapter summarizes a conclusion to explain the context, the reflection on action research together with a list of principles that were developed during the doctoral research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes a review of the literature about the Japanese context and how it has come to shape its patriarchal corporate practice within a high-context culture. At first, the reader is given an insight into Japanese culture and its organizational practice. I adopt a disciplinary perspective to review both the academic and practitioner literature on general management, national culture, human resources management, organizational and corporate culture using both the E-Resources library of the University of Liverpool and Google Scholar. Next, I identify and discuss about four key issues, which are the (a) the social phenomenon of pessimism, (b) the firm-as-family concept, (c) corporate paternalism and (d) self-concordance. I argue that our traditional collectivist mentality may have turned from a positive into a negative behavior, which requires an improvement in our practice if we want to successfully employ foreigners in an era that Japan is transforming from a high- into a low-context culture

Next, I introduce the Japanese population degrowth trend as an opportunity to reprogram the group mentality. I present the cultural metrics of Hall (1976) to build up a theory upon the idea of high-and low-context cultures and revisit both English and Japanese literature on change management, foreigners and minority problems in Japan, multiculturalism, immigration policies and cultural dimensions to critically reflect on the current context of foreign employees working for Japanese companies. This study will present enough evidence with the existing literature that Japan cannot abandon its ethnocentric social construction and that its patriarchal management structure cannot reorganize to keep up with the incredible pace of change. My argument is based on both academic and practitioner literature that the Japanese patriarchal management might have come to misinterpret the idea of collectivism as a homogenous and inward activity. I argue that such a status quo presents enormous difficulties for Japanese organizations to employ foreigners as the myth of Japanese homogeneity is touted as an underlying cause of its economic miracle (Tsutsui, 2018). I identify challenges that the Japanese organizations cannot easily reorganize for an upcoming social transformation from a high- into a low-context culture as there is a lack of a self-concordant thought while the personal expectations are built on a negative approach of avoiding stressful events as a coping strategy. Within such a context, the foreign workers are generally viewed in Japan as temporary and cheap workers with exclusionary tendencies that they cannot blend in with a different culture. Finally, I suggest that there is a research gap rather than a knowledge gap as my thesis discovers existing knowledge relevant to practice and suggest a methodological approach to put that information into practice in a particular context through an AR.

2.2 The Japanese Context

To set the wider scene before considering the Japanese corporate culture- the reader should first try to imagine how a Japanese person might see things differently as they learn Japanese as their first language, classify the world the Japanese way, and learn to perceive things from a Japanese point of view (Hendry, 2019). Therefore, I start by presenting the basics of the Japanese context. My thesis will not delve too deeply into all aspects of the Japanese society, but to define a basic individual perception that drives the Japanese mind, how it shapes the corporate culture, which results in my workplace problems that leads to a less globally competitive Japan.

Japanese people believe to be a micro-unit community that they are an isolated island-nation (*shimaguni*) in the northwest Pacific Ocean at the far end of East Asia. Horton (2019) discusses that the strength of being an island nation is the culture of self-reliance, independence, and the creativity it fosters. He also points out a great danger, which is the sense of cultural superiority, nationalism, and splendid isolation. In Japan, the *shimaguni* premise is often associated with such a racial and cultural superiority. For example, Ishida (2018) summarizes the writings of Amino Yoshihiko (1928-2004), a highly respected historian in Japan, who explains that the establishment of a wrong Japanese image that associates *shimaguni* with the sense of cultural superiority and uniqueness to create a national identity. Nitobe Inzao (2019), another famous Japanese scholar and philosopher, whose face is seen on the ¥5,000 note, chides his countrymen for their similar tendency to equate "Japanese uniqueness" with the *shimaguni* spirit by writing;

How often do we hear the disparaging term shimaguni, insular spirit, applied to the mental limitations and moral aberrations of our own selves! The expression has become a hackneyed explanation of our lack of sympathy, the restrictions of our intellectual horizon, the smallness of our world-conception. Not only has it become an explanation of, but a stereotyped excuse for, our racial defects (Nitobe, 2019: 52).

Moreover, the embracement of a self-deluding superiority is further strengthened by some genre of texts also known as the *Nihonjinron*- the theory of being Japanese. Vitali (2018) explains such an identity discourse that could be traced back to the Meiji Period (1868-1912) during the encounter with the West, which again flourished and became hegemonic during the identity crisis after the WW2. It does not only suggest the unbridgeable racial and cultural differences between the Japanese and the West, but also the alleged idea that the myth of Japanese homogeneity is touted as an underlying cause of its economic miracle (Tsutsui, 2018). Therefore, the presence of a *shimaguni* premise has a negative influence on the social mechanisms that limit multicultural communications skills. Moreover, another negative side to this attitude is the unconscious tendency to treat foreigners with suspicion and avoid them for fear as if they may cause embarrassment (Kowner, 2004).

Such an ethnocentric Japanese national character is a result of a collectivist society that does not tolerate deviation from behavioral norms. At first, it requires understanding the diversity and dynamics of Japan; such as its components of social classes, regions and sub-cultural groups born from Neo-Confucian thinking (Yamashita, 2018). Szczepanski (2018) explains about the tier social class system in feudal Japan that was first born from a Confucian thinking, which divided the society into four groups of samurais, farmers/peasants, artisans and merchants. She argues that the Confucian ideal emphasized the importance of productive members of the society. As a result, the Japanese manufacturing theories had positive impacts by legitimizing, enriching and inspiring novel ideas worldwide (Westney, 2019). However, the same process developed a nationalistic approach of *monozukuri* (the art of manufacturing) that nurtured *hito-zukuri* (craftsmanship), which eventually resulted in *soshiki-zukuri*, or organization building (Yamazaki, 2018) with market activities of complex and interwoven homogenous organizations (Zaleznik, 2018). Finally, it placed merchants at the bottom of the social order, who were despised as immoral and believed to exist only to skim profits as the middleman between producers and consumers (Holtschneider, 2015; Horide, 2019).

Although the Meiji Restoration abolished the office of the shogun and the four-tier system officially ended, Japan did not destroy the most essential element of their social organization that represents hierarchy, dependence and support. During the transformation from a Confucian to Neo-Confucian thinking in search for a more rationalist and secular form of Confucianism (Yamashita, 2018), the Japanese collectivism has sought for the proper organization of the human society. Angle and Tiwald (2017) provide a detailed explanation of the Neo-Confucian philosophy that harmony is maintained by a reciprocal relationship of justice between a superior, who was urged to be benevolent and a subordinate, who was urged to be obedient. However, the Neo-Confucian thought also defined leadership to cultivate virtue among the people through education rather than strict legal regulations. Therefore, the Japanese leadership assumes to have an ethical responsibility to care for more than just pursuing their own interests within formally designed limits (Sagers, 2018). The importance of leadership is extensively discussed by various scholars as to the key influence for organizational success (Bligh et.al. 2018; Subramony et.al. 2018; Uhl-Bien and Arena, 2018). Ewest and Weeks (2018) explain how the Japanese managers seek working within the rhythms of nature and prioritize the needs of the employees by facilitating organizational activities in forms of a passive leadership. Therefore, it turns out into a different social communication context. Table 1 shows the difference of decision-making process between the Western and Japanese societies (Littlejohn et.al., 2009). It is clear that the Japanese superiors take a passive leadership in form of a virtue ethics to cultivate moral character through education and practice as the most important avenue to moral and just leadership (Sagers, 2018:8). It comes from a Confucian belief that the individuals could search for their own moral principles rather than relying on a divine assistance.

Keyword	Western Society	Japanese Society
Decision maker	The individual is the decision maker in a position to perceive a problem that requires a solution	The role of the leader is to bring up the proposed idea to the group and facilitate the discussion among small groups
Process and nature of discussion	Discussion continues through the stated agenda and agreement is often reached after frank exchange among group members	Somewhat ceremonial or ritualistic. The proposal, mostly agreed through prior consultation among the members concerned, will be presented
Temporal Aspect of decision making	Promptness is the utmost concern; while decisions themselves are made swiftly, chances of the implementation of decision are slow as the members concerned must be persuaded to go along	Collectivist consideration of the proposal, extremely long time to make a decision. However, once the decision is made, its execution is swift because everyone is well aware how to carry out
Mode of arriving at a decision	The leader is expected to explain the decision and to offer the others the reasons for considering such a proposal	Leader as a moderator with no specific knowledge on the topic, presiding to reach consensus on the proposal

Table 1: Differences of decision-making process between the Western and Japanese Societies (Littlejohn et.al., 2009)

The practice of a Neo-Confucian philosophy turns into a different form of Japanese metacognitive interpretation, which is driven by the cultural knowledge and accessible identities (Yan and Oyserman, 2018). Masao Maruyama (1914-1996), a leading Japanese political theorist in the 70s argues (1974) in his book *Nihon seiji shiso shi kenkyu* (translated as Research in Japanese Political Thought) that "Japan's modern democratic revolution never finished and the establishment of a (Japanese) modern individual similar to the Western society has failed as it remains in the thrall of nature (1974:66)". Therefore, the Japanese might not be able to liberalize with the current Western approaches of critical thinking as they are like *shell-less eggs* (Nagatani, 2018) with no hard shell that rigidly separates topics or individuals as a result of Neo-Confucian collectivism and groupthink (Forsyth, 2019). Therefore, I came to criticize that the Japanese do not lack in critical thinking but the appropriate training as the mere emphasis on Japanese differences was used to redefine Japanese identity to promote a strong feeling of "unique us". Kowner (2004) presents an excellent summary on how the miscommunication between Japanese and foreigners began in the past but is sustained by current factors. It focuses on the actual differences between Japanese and foreigners in thought, language and non-verbal behavior, but it also thrives on false images and misperceptions. Moreover, he also refers to the ethnocentric character of *Nihonjinron* writings how it shaped the "we" versus "them" dichotomy so that the Japanese identity can be defined and affirmed (Kowner, 2004:140).

One other Japanese misperception is the belief that their culture is so “unique” so that it cannot be comprehended and mastered by the foreigners. Such an ethnocentric thought creates a huge obstacle for the Japanese society that has to efficiently engage with the global world in an era of degrowth (Heinrich and Ohara, 2019). Hirschmeier and Yui (2019) explain that the Japanese grew early into a homogenous thought while they have developed over time a faith in their superiority over other nations. Such an account could be traced back to Edo era (1603-1868) while much of the current patterns of Japanese interpersonal communication, conformism and fear of strangers were shaped (Kowner, 2004). Nishimura (2016) argues that the ethnocentric notion of *shimaguni* might have gained backs its popularity as a post-war national identity and social coping mechanism for Japanese people to work through their distress after suffering a massive social trauma by the end of the World War II. Although the war is over, the protection of the Japanese identity continues. It has a negative impact on multicultural encounters and creates room for cultural relativists to regain their political popularity (Lim, 2019). Trevor (2019) discusses that such a Japanese ethnocentric thought remains the biggest obstacle for the society to the fair treatment of foreigners and multi-nationalization of personnel (Trevor, 2019). Takaya (2018) criticizes the current Japanese immigration policies that are still based on such discriminatory treatments towards foreigners that comes from such post-war traumas. The system lacks in accepting and establishing the basis of a multicultural social integration environment (Miyajima, 2019). Kamiyoshi (2020) justifiably criticizes Japanese policymakers that the government would yet continue to take a public position that “it will not adopt an immigration policy” as there is a strong negative public opinion toward immigration in Japan. Therefore, the Japan’s socio-legal system still cannot incorporate foreigners into the Japanese logic while it keeps treating non-Japanese as second-class citizens (Tanno, 2010; Tian, 2018; Seiger, 2019).

As explained above, the Japanese “we” and “unique” thought presents an enormous challenge to integrate foreigners into the Japanese society. The idea of homogeneity started with a possible risk of losing identity during the modernization period in Meiji era (1868-1912) and is still promoted as a post-war identity by the Japanese intellectuals and academic elites to hold a broken nation together. The reconstruction of Japan required a devoted work ethic and collective responsibility to rebuild its economy based on human capital (Ruszel, 2019). The positive outcomes of the work ethic is the national pride, contribution to the global economy and the good reputation on international level as a safe and clean environment. However, what are the negative outcomes of such a work ethic? Do the current social patterns really provide a fair treatment to the members of the Japanese society? (Okamoto, 2019) In order to debate further on this issue, the next section will focus on the Japanese corporate culture to analyze its pros and cons, and to reflect on how the Japanese economy is going to survive during a transformation era from a high- into a low-context culture.

2.3 The Japanese Corporate Culture

Collectivist organizational cultures are discussed by various scholars (Rurkkhum, 2017; Hong et.al, 2018; Lee et.al. 2019) for its group focus on a productive and socially rewarding path (Beauregard, 2018), participative management and distributed responsibility (Farooq et.al., 2019), shared leadership (Zhu et. al. 2018) and constructive conflict (Wong et.al, 2018).

Abegglen (1958) was one of the first, who brought the Japanese collectivist management environment into the Western perspective, followed by Yoshino (1968), Cole (1971), Dore (1973), Vogel (1975) and Ouchi (1981). It is of wholistic concern (Ouchi, 1981) that offers a lifetime employment opportunity with a slow evaluation, promotion and career development process, which exhibits the characteristics of a Confucian-society such as the seniority-system (respect to elders), loyalty to the company, harmony and devotion (Roehl, 2018). There are also many recent scholarly studies focusing on cross-cultural comparisons (such as Ashta et.al. 2018; Park and Hong, 2019) and transfer of Japanese-style management into other countries (such as Natsuda et.al. 2019). The studies discuss the formality, participation and equity/equality issues suggesting Japanese wholistic approach as a successful organizational practice that the Western companies could profit from. Table 2 shows how the Japanese employees are either satisfied or dissatisfied with their collectivist organizational environment compared to Western employees based on such a wholistic approach.

	Western employees	**Japanese employees**
Satisfiers	Opportunity for personal development	Opportunity of lifetime employment
	Achievement	Safety
	Recognition	Non-recognition
	Promotion based on capability	Promotion based on seniority
	Levels of individual responsibility	Levels of group responsibility
Dissatisfiers	Frustration from company policy	Company policy never judged
	Bureaucracy or needless paperwork	Very bureaucratic
	Working conditions not suitable	No opposition to hard working conditions
	Staff feeling not being valued	Individual exists for the greater good
	Poor salary	Salary based on seniority- not judged

Table 2: Satisfiers and dissatisfiers for Western and Japanese employees (compiled from Lai and Gelb, 2019)

The table above shows that the Japanese employees are satisfied with a passive nurturing relationship, hierarchical roles and routines (Malcolm, 2018). On the other hand, the Japanese managers do not exhibit intensive leadership behaviors that might eventually lead to a problematic outcome- such as the Ned Wicker case (Raelin, 2010) that the need for control might short-circuit the team's powerful development. On the contrary, the idea is to harmonically deal with any internal problems and concerns of the organization (Toyoda, 2019).

This behavior is based on a unique cooperative organizational spirit that the Japanese companies are also accepted to be extended families (Watanabe, 2018b). There is a common belief that a Japanese company would continue to exist longer than a foreign company that could be sold or closed anytime. Therefore, Japanese companies extensively invests into their celebratory corporate histories to inspire loyalty on the part of workers (Donze and Smith, 2018) and it is very important to find a "generalist" with no work experience that would culturally fit the company's culture and prosper.

However, this thesis will point out the issue that a shell-less group of individuals cannot turn into "hot-groups" (Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt, 1999) as members of the lower hierarchy would only follow what the top-management provides in terms of rules and a manual (Koo; cited in Pilling, 2014:172). Gordon (2018) explains about the difficulties to survive in the workplaces of contemporary Japan that prohibits variations between Japanese individuals and their personal evolvement as global talents for the sake of a so-called group harmony. Furthermore, Watanabe (2018) discusses how Japanese companies should try to reexamine and reform their current organizational practices as they lack in adapting to a global world. From my view, the current practice seems to challenge individuals to survive within a society of autocratic rules, such as the one described in the book "Prince" of Machieavelli (1952). As a result, it gives birth to a social dichotomy of a dual-identity (Sato et.al. 2018), which is *tatemae* (the behavior displayed in public for collective-interest) and *honne* (one's true desires to achieve individual goals). Watanabe (2018a) discusses that for those, who grew up in an individual culture, it is extremely difficult to adjust to the Japanese society where there is a gap between true intentions and stated words. The phenomenon is "the ability to adjust runs alongside the necessity to make decisions between the front (*tatemae*) for a particular situation and the real opinions (*honne*) that lie behind it" (2018a:182). He further discusses this type of communication to be unique as individuals need to read between the lines while people who are incapable of implicit communication, to sense a situation or understand unspoken information lack in common sense, or are insensitive to others feelings. Although his statement might be partly true, there is no additional discussion whether the implicit communication would paralyze both the managers and employees by lining up with a functionalist view of learned norms that promotes interdependence with solidarity. The common sense of doing something wrong is associated with disrupting the social order or disobeying authorities or seniors while the organization cannot easily reorganize to do something new. For example, Fukutomi et. al (2018) summarize an extensive study of 824 Japanese employees about how they would not adapt well overseas or in an international context because they steadfastly adhere to the learned corporate norms rather than inventing new ones. Moreover, the dilemma of maintaining the balance between *honne* and *tatemae* is a crucial reason that the individuals are traumatized by the cultural configuration of the self in an interdependent society that cohesiveness and social inclusion are emphasized (Yamaguchi, 2017).

Although some agree that the organizational performance is based on the collective contribution of all members, there is a little doubt about the current cultural configuration that fosters hierarchical behavior in search for additional bonds to strengthen a corporate paternalism. It does not turn into a global advantage as the inward-focused practice still prioritizes Japanese uniqueness and keeps focusing on a shrinking local market. Raelin (2010) presents a “Stolen Idea” case study in which one colleague claims credit at a meeting for an idea, which he stole from a colleague who is also at the meeting. Although the case supports using the collaborative style of engagement and suggests that “ideas do not have to be owned by anyone” (2010:40), there is no further debate on the fact that “not owning an idea” makes it difficult to judge who has decided, what has been decided and who is going to take responsibility for the action.

This turns into a paradox at my organization when confronted with important decisions that lead to various shades of gray through an organizational silence (Kaynak and Say, 2016). I think this is a result of Japanese managerial efforts to facilitate order over chaos by handling the issue as a “restricted complexity” (Wells, 2018). It formalizes decisions and actions based on a market culture, in which goals are shared, and outcomes are more or less predicted without any remarkable responsibility for the actions taken. Furthermore, the Japanese culture strongly enforces the idea of social punishment for any individual actions taken (Beauregard, 2018). Therefore, it is quite natural that managers and employees wish to avoid exclusion and trigger of a negative self-concept, which ends up with a generalist view to try keeping up with the Joneses- also known as *yokonarabi* (Davidson et.al. 2018). As a result, it turns into an epistemic community with shared beliefs (Feng, 2018) that has an anti-dialogical position accepting only one (self) version of the story. Such a lack of experience and focus on inward activities limit our competitiveness by creating a barrier to reorganize in the face of external pressures and adapting to the evolving global economy. For this reason, I argue that the Japanese way does not contribute to improve our performance in the Philippines but the departure from it may (Nakagawa et. al. 2018). Therefore, I will further present and discuss four important issues that a previously positive and necessary organizational practice may have altered into a negative and outdated model as it cannot keep up with the upcoming challenges of the global worlds. The first issue is the *corporate paternalism*. Butar et.al. (2019) discuss that leadership is positively related to follower citizenship behavior through a pervasive cultural feature in the Southeast Asian region that is called paternalism. It is a distinguishing characteristic of industrial management in Japan to manage labor force through the provision of welfare facilities by employers, the articulation of familiar corporate ideologies and the use of personal policies that emphasize job security and foster worker loyalty (Tsutsui, 1997, 2019). This patriarchal system also includes the subordination of the unions as a strategy to maintain harmony (Ericsson, 2008).

Corporate paternalism provides one explanation for Japanese economy's high performance due to the dualistic Japanese labor market that is dominated by large firms offering highly-paid and permanent employment opportunities in exchange for the abandoning of any labor mobility (Henry, 1988). The way I see it, the corporate paternalism is a result of the *employee sovereignty* that has replaced traditional capitalistic *shareholder sovereignty* while the managers at the top of a Japanese company do not work for the shareholders, but the benefit of the organization's employees (Sakakibara, 1993). Therefore, it turns into a form of a social contract between the organizational members that foster participation, motivation and co-operation, as well as the long-term outlook for the employee. However, it calls for reform as there is a lack of awareness of Japan's systemic realities that might end up with a winner's curse (Koch and Penczynski, 2018), escalation of commitment (Huang, 2019) and specialization (Zambon, 2016). Eisuke Sakakibara (1993), the former Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs and Professor of Economics at Aoyama Gakuin University, argues that the Japanese system should be more understood and appreciated, first of all by the Japanese themselves. *In Beyond Capitalism: the Japanese model of market economics* (1993), Sakikabara writes that the Japanese corporate culture "lacks a clear awareness of Japanese systematic realities has only led to a subservient Japanese pandering to US and European demands. And precisely this lack of awareness is the main cause of present difficulties and stagnation that the Japanese would find themselves in a perpetual-catch up syndrome" (1993:11). He speaks my mind. The Japanese lifetime employment system has been crumbling and is no longer sustainable. I came to argue that the Japanese do not lack in critical thinking but are lacking the appropriate training and multicultural awareness and experience of non-Japanese. Therefore, I suggest corporate paternalism as one reason that the Japanese labor could not learn from heterogeneous experiences (Dasaratha et.al. 2018) and experience multiple masculinities. While Japanese companies are pressured to examine their paternalistic lifetime employment model (Pudelko, 2017; Rothacher, 2019), the possible transformation requires individuals to rethink their social thoughts and reconstruct a new rationale for acting (Martin, 2018) to learn and profit from an upcoming system diversity. It also urges organizations to improve their practices so that we do not rely on paternalistic techniques, but on dynamic models that could immediately self-organize for any new challenges ahead.

The next issue is the *firm-as-family concept*, which is a distinctive ideological orientation of Japan's post-war new middle class (Samuels, 2019). Gagne (2017) explains such a corporate-centered society that various social services and welfare functions were provided by corporations, which by extension tied workers and their families to specific corporations. Since Prime Minister Abe announced –Abenomics- as a strategy to revive Japanese economy in 2013 (Shibata, 2017), the Japanese companies lost the understanding and trust of their employees as many neo-liberal reforms came without recognizing the efforts and abilities of their own workers (Gagne, 2017).

As evident now, the neo-liberal economic reforms did not transform Japan into a neo-liberal society. However, there have been noticeable improvements that many individuals would start to value entrepreneurship and personal freedom as they would observe Japanese companies taking advantage of financial and employment deregulations and turning their backs on their own employees, aka the firm-as-family concept. I see such increasing individuality as an enormous opportunity for Japan to enhance both domestic- and global-oriented market efficiencies. However, Shibata (2017) discusses Abenomics as a threat to the stability of Japan's future economy as it deregulates its labor market with a growing number of non-regular workers who have been losing protection and suffering from stagnated wages. It looks like another form of unjustifiable paternalism (Kopelman, 2004) to improve the profitability of Japanese businesses, but the failure to distribute wealth to labor and therefore leaving Japan's working poor behind. Furthermore, it is questionable if the policies that support Abenomics can address the Japan's longer term problem of weak demand as Japanese companies are supposed to be creating value-added jobs, but there is a scarcity of Japanese citizens to fill these positions. Therefore, one must consider a new form of firm-as-family concept that incorporates both Japanese and foreign workers into the new Japanese economic model. It shall move away from an unjustifiable paternalism that fosters punitive action and stigmatization through a shaming paternalism if the social order is not followed, which are also discussed by scholars for minorities (De Vos, 2019) and even for rehabilitating criminals (Baradel, 2019). Finally, it should be acknowledged that sometimes; the needs of the employees and goals of the organizations might be different, which would require a new firm-as-family concept of how the future corporations and workers would look like and expect from their employees.

There is another issue at play here that demands attentions as well, which is *the social phenomenon of pessimism*. It may be the result of both corporate paternalism and outdated firm-as-family concept and how it reflected on a Japanese individual. Baumeister et.al. (2016) explain the theory of human pragmatic prospection that people think about the future so as to guide about actions to bring about desirable outcomes. Some individuals are optimistic by imagining what one wants to happen while some other individuals are pessimistic by always considering the obstacles and potential problems, which invokes meaning and uses emotions for evaluating different situations. Shimizu et. al (2019) describe four types of cognitive strategies, which are (a) defensive pessimism (DP); in which individuals have high past recognition but low future expectations, (b) strategic optimism (SO); in which individuals have high past recognition and high future expectations, (c) realistic pessimism (RP); in which individuals have low past recognition and low future expectations, and (d) unjustified optimism (UO); in which individuals past recognition is low but future expectations are high. In other words; optimists approach future events with a positive attitude while pessimists keep lower expectations and are likelier to achieve or even exceed their expectations (Norem, 2001).

I personally recognize the power of optimism. However, some scholars argue to overcome the characterization of pessimism as negative or fatalistic as it is a productive resource to control a social situation and develop world views and forms of scholarly action (Bunka et.al, 2019; Stevens, 2020). Shimuzu et.al. (2016) discuss pessimism within a Japanese context how tendencies consistent with DPs are positively associated with considerable and respectable behavioral intentions toward strangers when compared to others. From a practitioner perspective, Takada-Dill (2019) explains the roots of Japanese pessimism that the culture has had to be rebuilt multiple times over the last century while forced democratization and Western values created a general pessimism towards modernist values. It started from the Westernization during the Meiji Restoration to a fascist military state, then a national tragedy of WW2 following that once a proud warrior culture was forced to endure the shame of defeat and occupied by the American military. Nishimura (2016) explains how Japanese social mechanisms that harbor traumatic memories in such social unconsciousness, in which self-sacrificing commitments, labor and isolation turns out to be virtues in Japan. It results in reifications that Japanese individuals would use as a way to navigate their new social complex world. Hagstrom (2015) argues that Japanese policymakers have used such reifications as a social process, but not as an intellectual practice while they should be scrutinized if we are to appreciate the reality. However, the pessimistic behavior with a passive avoidance style cannot directly confront the problem such as the optimists could do (Kong, 2019). Therefore, this is a considerable amount of doubt whether pessimism could be a positive attribute for an employee as the social trajectories becoming blurred and uncertain except for the elites (Heinrich and Galan, 2018).

After identifying the three issues of corporate paternalism, firm-as-family, and pessimism, I wish to present a final debate on the identity of the Japanese-self, which is *self-concordance*. Sedikikes et.al. (2017) describe self- authenticity as the "sense or feeling that one is currently in alignment with one's true or genuine self" (2017:521). It is a self-concordant thought by positing ideal-self and ought-self as a goal and living in accordance with this aspiration (Fabian, 2019). Ionescu and Iakop (2019) postulate three basic human needs for a self-concordant thought, which are; (a) autonomy; self-generated and pursued actions for goal accomplishment, (b) competence; a person's orientation towards success, and (c) relatedness; the need for good personal relationships. The question is whether the current desperation and condescending behavior of Japanese individuals might be related to an incomplete self-concordant thought. For example, Kim and Toya (2019) discuss how important it is for Japanese companies to initiate a transition by employing charismatic leaders with such a self-concordant thought. It confronts the charisma of a Japanese manager that comes with seniority and *jinmyaku* (personal network) rather than his leadership capabilities (Md Yosof and Othman, 2016). Their work ethics are also questioned in their aim of trying to save a mundane day with modest and self-effacing practices (Kimura and Nishikawa, 2016).

Furthermore, such a passive leadership is criticized to be no leadership at all, as the leader becomes only involved when a mistake is made and the power of subordinates are not enough to solve the situation (Nissinen and Laukkanen, 2018). As a result, the Japanese corporations are rocked by ethical scandals every day (Aizawa, 2018). Unfortunately, such a management practice also allows pinning the blame on a follower in a lower hierarchy (Fukuhara, 2015) and requires therefore reflecting on the sustainability of Japanese weak-labor behavior (Kume, 2018). Such a hierarchical workplace continuously expresses fears that the increasing individualism displayed by young people is threatening the social order (Rear, 2008). It does not end up in an environment for an increased motivation so that any individual within different levels of hierarchy can search for a self-concordant goal (Goordeva et.al., 2019). Therefore, my work demonstrates that it is very important to establish a unique organizational environment (Nagayoshi and Nakamura, 2018) that each individual can search for a self-concordant goal and become a global talent that Japan needs most (Nishimura, 2018).

As a conclusion, the Japanese corporate culture has come to present enormous strengths in total quality management, employee wellbeing, customer satisfaction and human sustainability. However, the global shift into a neo-liberal management system requires Japanese companies to reexamine and reform their current organizational practices (Watanabe, 2018). For this reason, I have identified four important aspects, which are corporate paternalism, firm-as-family concept, pessimism and the lack of self-concordant thought as important challenges to reconsider in our current organizational context. Although there has been some positive progress in identifying these issues, the fault lines run deep and are still active. Therefore, the next section, presents the challenge of improving our corporate practice within a transforming social context from a high- into a low-context culture.

2.4 The Challenge of Improving Practice in a Context of Contraction

The one question at the core of my research is to answer if my company will be able to keep our traditional organizational practice while confronted with a transforming (Japanese) society from a high- to low-context culture (Hall, 1976). In 2010, Japan has already ceded its spot as the world's second-biggest economy to China while the population decline continues to debilitate the Japanese economy. It is assumed that the current contraction will reduce the Japanese population from the current 125 to 87 million by 2050 (Lin, 2015:374).

Therefore, I argue that the contraction trend suggests a paradigmatic re-ordering of values through reaffirmation of social and ecological values (Kallis et.al, 2015). For this reason, my research aims to improve our organizational practice across multiple dimensions and scales concerning individuals, organizations and society as well as practices, lifestyles, power relations, norms and values (Brown et.al, 2013).

Until now, the literature review helped identifying patterns that indicate typical Japanese organizations follow a paternalistic behavior of groupthink that is anti-individualistic, fully emotional and highly cohesive with a lack of a constructivist understanding of the process. At this point, I came to understand that my organization may have ignored the dynamic adaptive development nature of its individual agents, which turns into an Abilene paradox (Singh and Jankovitz, 2018). The Japanese culture is reluctant to reorganize to do something new that has never been done before. Therefore, this research set out to further reviewed literature about the history of groupthink idea (Janis; 1972, 1973, 1982, 1986 and 1989), and understand that the Japanese might have the illusion of invulnerability, tendency to moralize, feeling of unanimity, the pressure to conform and dismissing of opposing ideas as a result of such a groupthink practice. For example, in his book *Group Psychology of the Japanese*, Iritani (2013) describes such a groupthink behavior as "Japanese leaders shared an illusion of invulnerability and fostered a strong sense of wrong optimism while collective rationalization enabled them to ignore warnings to reconsider their opinions" (2013:86). He further argues that currently, nothing has changed in Japan by putting such poorly-functioning hierarchical groups under the spotlight (Iritani, 2013:88). Kobayashi et.al (2018) provide a similar criticism that the Japanese corporations are still unwilling to address internal and external conflicts, employee wellbeing and sustainability in an era both the managers and employees shall turn into global talents rather than poorly-functioning hierarchical groups. This results in a weak-labor behavior (Kume, 2018) whereby the Japanese managers and organizational members contribute to the reproduction of organizational realities. Gorli et.al. (2015) argue the importance of reflexive work in organizations for critical consciousness and becoming open to deliberate reorientation that Japanese culture might have failed to accomplish. Therefore, it is extremely important to look at the current organizational practices from a transformation perspective that the Japanese society is exhibiting the characteristics of mechanical solidarity (Durkheim, 1997). It is powered by homogeneity, and its individuals feel connected through a shared history, race, language, educational and religions training and lifestyle. Besides the socio-cultural factors such as the *shimaguni* premise, there are a lot of critics suggesting that the Japanese education system perpetuates passive learning and lacks in internationalization (Yonezawa et.al., 2018). Kitamura (2019) holds a similar perspective that Japanese educational system requires major reforms because of its rigidity and inflexibility despite rapidly changing environments inside as well as outside Japan. Matsuoka (2019) analyzes such a standardized educational system from a concerted cultivation perspective that the Japanese parents focus more on the academic preparation of their children rather than providing diverse experiences. This is because Japanese companies have always hired employees in a very traditionally-fashioned and Japan-focused mindset (Cock, 2018) based on their potential (i.e. which university they graduated), but not what they can immediately do.

As a socio-economic outcome, the Japanese individuals have come to secure the opportunities and privileges afforded to people within society. It builds upon historical facts that culturally homogenous teams communicate more effectively and create more solutions compared to heterogeneous teams (Marchiori, 2018). In such an environment, the weak-labor behavior is considered to be an ethic quality that comes with an employee of low self-esteem although strengthening people's self-esteem is beneficial for individual, and ultimately, society (Orth and Robins, 2019). However, many came to recognize that the Japanese groupthink mentality may fail to employ a negotiated culture from the beginning as the low-esteem employee centers himself to a particular closed-setting to foster a situated meaning (Bachnk and Quinn Jr., 2019). It cannot consider both business conditions of the company as well as the realities of the existing teams and their obligations either (Cusick, 2018). Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt (1999) provide a completely different perspective into Japanese groupthink techniques that were imported into the U.S. from Japan. They argue that it was easy to incorporate into the existing structure because "they could be designed and controlled from higher up" (1999:66). This is an interesting argument that shall be reanalyzed back at its origins in Japan and whether the current practice of a passive nurturing manager/employee relationship similar to a local oppressor-oppressed relationship (Freire, 1970). Therefore, our collective reflexivity shall concentrate on Japanese groupthink mentality that keeps placing values on reciprocities (Davidson, 2017), promotes organizational silence (Hornstein, 2019) and therefore presents an important challenge to re-order cultural values during periods of economic contraction. It is important to note three current organizational aspects that;

(a) Japanese ethnocentric social construction may have turned into a highly-cohesive groupthink mentality, which is far beyond the control of the management influenced by the physiological traps of the Japanese collective behavior. It shares an illusion of invulnerability, overconfidence and control unwilling to address internal and external conflicts and employee wellbeing,
(b) The traditional leader-follower relationship cannot be perceived by the followers as laissez-faire (Wong and Giessner, 2019) as the expectations are built on a negative approach of avoiding stressful events as a coping strategy. This results in limited inter-subjectivity, unwillingness and disability to integrate with the global world as it is centered to a particular closed-setting strengthened by a situated meaning, such as *shimaguni*, homogeneity, Japanese-ness,
(c) The Japanese society has constructed a different reality while its individuals were raised in a different theological and deontological manner, in which low self-esteem is a virtue in interpersonal relationships. Although there are improvements due to the multicultural interactions, it still presents an enormous challenge for organizational improvement that mistrusts, marginalizes and even discriminates against the other, which leads to low morale and reduced productivity.

2.5 The Challenge of Employing Foreigner Workers in Japan

David Pilling (2014), an Anglo expert on Japan and former Tokyo bureau chief of the Financial Times (2001-2008), writes in his book *Bending Adversity: Japan and the Art of Survival*, "they (Japanese) believe their society is so different that they can adjust to anything while preserving their natural essence. They are capable of sudden explosive changes; they went from feudalism to emperor worship in two or three years and from emperor worship to democracy in three months" (2014:89). To this perfect observation, Kowner (2004) provides an additional insight that the modernization process did not take place for the sake of modernization, but to prevent foreign invasion and the risk of identity loss. He argues that "the Japanese ethnocentrism is characterized by reluctance to engage in any kind of intimacy with the "other", namely foreigners that many Japanese do not hold racist attitudes but still feel threatened by intercultural encounters" (2004:141).

Certain national characteristics related to communication, such as stress on hierarchy and status, as well as excessive politeness and shyness, have made the encounter with Westerners even more stressful. As a result, Japanese enter an encounter with a non-Japanese, as with fellow Japanese whose status is not established, assuming a cautious, respectful, modest, and perhaps introverted manner. Non-Japanese, however, enter, or at least are perceived by Japanese as entering, such an encounter in a much less cautious manner. Japanese perceived this forceful and extrovert manner as resembling the manners of high-status people in Japan, and, thus, it violates their initial expectations (Kowner, 2004:141)

It may be possible that the Japanese are both humble and modest while they do not have a low-esteem, but express self-esteem in a different way or to a different extent depending on the situation (Kimura, 2019). However, there is a clear problem of miscommunication that the Japanese cannot even successfully communicate with their fellow Japanese. For example, Ono (2018) explains about the problem of *kikokishijo*. They are Japanese returning from overseas, who have foreign language fluency, intercultural experience and the ability to shift their identities flexibility, but struggle to fit back into the Japanese society. Vogt (2018) discusses similar discrimination problems for people of Okinawan descent, as well as Lee and Cha (2018) for the Korean minority. This parallels the core question of whether the Japanese society would be able to successfully accommodate foreign skilled workers to solve their labor shortage. It is evident from the existing literature that there is an issue of "emotion", which requires the ability to manage everyone's feelings and regulate one's expression of emotion to ensure appropriate personal interactions between the Japanese and foreigners. It also requires a careful planning as one shall not address the labor shortage by mechanically increasing the number of foreign skilled workers, the way Japanese manufacturers have come to expand their workforce to meet productions targets, without any career growth opportunities and exclusionary tendencies (Morita, 2017)

Therefore, it is useful to first look at literature about the Japanese governmental programs that aim to attract overseas workers to help alleviate labor shortages in certain industries. It first started in 2012 with the "Points-Based Preferential Immigration Treatment for Highly Skilled Foreign Professionals (PPIT). Morita (2017) discusses how the Japanese exclusionary tendencies have diminished PPIT's attraction because of *Nihonjinron* influences, mistrust of foreigners, inequality between foreigners and the Japanese, and the insistence on doing things the Japanese way. Next, the government introduced the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP Program) in 2016 to accept trainees from developing regions so that they can enhance skills that would be difficult to acquire in their home countries (Nix, 2018). Although the training shall not be conducted to adjust labor supply and demand, it was abused by labor-hungry businesses for cheap labor. Japanese giants companies such as Mitsubishi Motors and Panasonic were forced to cancel their TITP Internships as they were treating their foreign laborers inappropriately by leaving them in charge of work they are not authorized (Sato, 2019). Ratnayake and De Silva (2017) explain how the TITP has fallen far short of achieving what it was designed for. They point out problems such as poor government policymaking, inadequate oversight and supervision, and isolation of trainees from their local communities, in addition to a heavy work schedule (2017: 44). Finally, the Japanese government launched the Specified Skilled Visa (SSV) program that sought for bilateral agreements between Japan and 8 Asian countries (including the Philippines) to introduce a new type of visa from April 2019 to accommodate more foreign specialists between one to five years in 74 technical categories (Oishi, 2020). However, none of these programs were able to provide a straightforward immigration policy together with equal and fair policies for foreign skilled workers (Komine, 2018). This inevitability resulted in inequalities among skilled immigrants being forced to sacrifice their dignity while negotiating low morale and dissatisfaction, which leads to a labor force seeking strategies to survive the system rather than thrive within it (Vilog et.al., 2020). Ogawa (2018) argues that if Japan wants a stable and good quality workforce, it needs to provide care for skilled workers and migrants. But the traditional Japanese company does not embrace this notion and neglects to provide a clear career development pathway for the foreign employee or even consider their suggestions (Menezes, 2019). Heinrich and Ohara (2019) indicate that there has been a sharp increase in the number of foreigner registrations in Japan with a record of around 2,5 million by the end of 2017, which is a 7.5 percent increase compared to the previous year despite the absence of an effective immigration policy. Furthermore, Tarumoto (2017) provides an excellent study in four different local Japanese cities arguing that local governments are pressed to implement integration policies for such foreigners without any legal or financial basis. Finally, Seiger (2019) provides an excellent argument to wrap up the problem that "the Japanese multiculturalism does not provide alternative narratives to *Japaneseness* but preserves the myth of Japanese racial homogeneity by recognizing diversity. but maintaining ethnical and racial boundaries" (2019:1).

Japan is far from transforming into a truly international community and open to outsiders. However, the graying population and economic contraction requires the Japanese society to shed its isolationist mentality and depart from its position as a unique but marginal culture (Kowner, 2004). As for the Japanese organizations who want to employ foreign workers, it should be a top priority to equip such a future workforce with a clear understanding of Japanese organizational practice and temperament needed to provide the level of service expected from Japanese workers. Nonetheless, Seiger (2019) discusses that a monoracial, monolingual and monoethnic national approach leaves no space for diversity. Therefore, each company should also search for ways to improve their organizational practice so that it can enhance both the physical and psychological capabilities to profit from diversities. Could the problem outlined above be a result of intercultural miscommunication? In order to gain a better insight into the problems of cultural differences, my thesis first refers to the cultural dimensions theory of Hofstede (2019), the eight-scale tool for mapping cultural differences of Meyer (2016), Prof. Oishi's work from the Montreal Queen University (Oishi, 2012a; Oishi, 2012b) and other scholar works (Morita, 2017; Milly, 2018; Strausz, 2018, Mazumi, 2019). These studies suggest that the culture in a Japanese work environment differs greatly from any other East Asian work environment, and even high-context cultures. Furthermore, I focus on the Hofstede's multi-focus model of organizational culture and country (Hofstede, 2019; Ishige et.al. 2019) to compare Japanese and Filipino cultures from five different dimensions, which are 1) power distance, 2) individualism, 3) masculinity, 4) uncertainty avoidance, and 5) long-term orientation. I note that such dimensions do not exist and thus treated as constructs, while "have proven their usefulness by their ability to explain and predict behavior; the moment they stop doing that we should be prepared to drop them or trade them for something better" (Hofstede, 2002:1358). In the Hofstede model, the scores show a variety for power distance (54/94), individualism (46/32), masculinity (95/64), uncertainty avoidance (92/44), long-term orientation (88/27), which suggests that (a) the Philippines is more hierarchical than Japan, (b) both countries are collectivist, (c) although a much higher score in Japan; both countries are masculine, (d) Japan has a higher preference to avoid uncertainty and is more long-term oriented and (f) both countries are able to control their desires. From a practitioner perspective, I do not agree with these comparisons as I believe that the cultural values are not static and can change over time (Cai et.al, 2020) as it has happened in other high-context Asian cultures, such as China (Zhang and Weng, 2017; Petras, 2018). Moreover, my interactions with the Filipino workforce suggests that they are highly individualistic, and they also tend to avoid uncertainty as much as the Japanese will do with a long-term orientation toward a stable work and private life. In conclusion, I suggest "culture" as a way to read and interpret my own organization and that my research shall focus on how to reprogram Japanese group mentality to overcome the problem of mindset discrepancies so that the Japanese economy can evolve and the country can avoid cultural miscommunication.

2.6 Conclusion

Jackson (2018) argues that if one studies ideology (i.e. culture) and debates on that ideology, a critique needs to be incorporated into its scholarship. My critique is that Japan and its organizations may lose their global competitiveness except for a few major monopoly corporations who rely on state-corporate relationships (Ikeda, 2018) unless they acknowledge that the graying population has a direct impact on the economic contraction and there is an urgent need to address the labor shortage.

In his book, *Hidden differences: doing business with the Japanese*, Hall (1990) uses his own high- and low-context cultural metrics to provide a reliable and perceptive intelligence on how to deal with Japanese mindset discrepancies as the most formidable trade and communication barrier of all. He argues that it is difficult for Japan to break away from such notions as this ideological terrain has been so powerfully structured by its previous history. Furthermore, he offers logical approaches for foreign businesses to work with the Japanese (Hall, 1996) although he does not provide arguments about how the Japanese society could deal with a transformation from a high- into a low-context culture, as there was no graying population problem at the end 1990s. Therefore, my thesis builds upon the theory of Hall's (1976) high- and low-context cultures, and how the Japanese companies should reprogram their groupthink mentality to deal with a possible transformation of the society. I suggest that we need to improve our organizational practice and change some of our basic assumptions to move away from a patriarchal approach. For this reason, I first reflect on the *shimaguni* (Horton, 2019) and *Nihonjinron* (Vitali, 2018) ideologies to explain the idiosyncratic character of the Japanese personality, such as seniority, group-orientation, devotion, organizational silence, harmony and sensitivity to hierarchy. Next, the reader is introduced to the Neo-Confucian philosophy (Yamashita, 2018) that establishes the Japanese metacognitive interpretation around an ethnocentric national identity, which is driven by the cultural knowledge and accessible identities (Yan and Oyserman, 2018), and is unfortunately still powered by nationalism. I present an extensive review on how such a Japanese identity shapes the organizational culture, while I point out to corporate paternalism, firm-as-family concept, defensive pessimism and the lack of a self-concordant thought as important aspects to be reconsidered if we are to remain economically competitive. I also put a negative gloss on the Japanese groupthink mentality and suggest that the Japanese leaders share an illusion of invulnerability and foster a strong sense of wrong optimism (Iritani, 2013:86). The Japanese corporate culture fails to employ a labor-friendly culture from the outset as the Japanese individual centers himself to a particular closed-setting to foster a situated meaning (Bachnk and Quinn Jr., 2019). Such a situated meaning with strong top-down directives and hierarchies (Ito et.al 2018) ends up with the myth of Japanese homogeneity as an underlying cause of Japan's economic miracle (Tsutsui, 2018) and presents an enormous challenge to successfully employ foreigners at Japanese organizations.

I continue explaining that there is an annoyance and inconvenience Japanese feel at the presence of foreigners. I refer to the excellent study of Kowman (2004) to reflect on the ethnocentric Japanese identity that there is a miscommunication between the Japanese and foreigners, which began in the past but still continues today. It concerns actual differences between Japanese and foreigners in race, thought, language and non-verbal behavior, but also thrives on false images and misperceptions (Kowman, 2004:140). The presence of such sociological processes limits self-organizing and complex-responsive processes for mixed-motive interactions (Shaerer et.al. 2018) in search for multiculturalism. There are critics from both the Japanese and foreign academics that the Japanese multiculturalism cannot not provide an alternative against an ethno-racial approach (Tarumoto, 2017; Vogt, 2018; Seiger, 2019). Therefore, it ends up with the implementation of problematic immigration programs with no straightforward policies to successfully accommodate foreign labor (Morita, 2017; Komine, 2018; Oishi, 2020). Such a wrong introduction of foreign workforce to Japanese organizations comes with the risk of stereotyping, compartmentalizing, commodification, and devaluation of work (Wright, 2019; Vilog et.al, 2020). Finally, I believe that the current practice does not offer a sustainable solution for Japanese companies to survive the economic decline.

Therefore, I argue that the problem is the intercultural miscommunication. Hence my literature review suggests that there is a research gap rather than a knowledge gap. There are various studies in the literature that highlight general issues and present a theoretical perspective about the problems faced by foreigners working for Japanese companies (such as Watanabe, 2016; Morita, 2017; Henrich and Ogara, 2018; Menezes, 2019). However, there is a research gap as the current studies focus only on developing generalized assumptions using cross-cultural comparisons (such as Ashta et.al, 2018; Natsuda et.al, 2019; Park and Hong, 2019), some of them even using Hall's metrics (Bai, 2016; Hornikx and Le Pair, 2017). For this reason, my literature review urges to fill in an urgently needed research gap between the discovery of knowledge relevant to practice and the methodological approach to put that information into practice in a particular context.

Therefore, I suggest using "culture" as a way to read and interpret my own organization so that we can avoid cultural miscommunication and overcome the problem of mindset discrepancies. At this point, I revisit my four research questions and suggest developing a narrative by first understanding the thoughts and desires of our future workforce, compare these results with our current practice and debate on what improvements we can make, through an AR. The next chapter explains how the research was designed around my four research questions so that we can adapt our organization to better integrate Filipino employees.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces how I designed my research so that we can adapt our organization to better integrate Filipino employees. At first, I recognize Action Research (AR) as a methodological tool to investigate and improve our practice. I provide a short AR literature review and see it as a promising opportunity to solve an immediate and specific workplace problem by generating reasons about the relevant causes of the problems, co-design actions to ameliorate the problems, take actions and evaluate these results to implement further cycles and actions until these problems have been addressed (Greenwood, 2019). Next, I develop a philosophical stance to improve our practice by changing the attitude of both our Japanese and Filipino employees through four action cycles at our overseas office in Manila. The first cycle invites 140 participants from the Pasig City Institute of Science and Technology (PCIST) to understand the character, commitment, and desires of our future potential workforce. The second cycle analyzes how these responses compare with our current practice and if there is room to improve. The third cycle uses a construct-plan-act-evaluate process and implements actions that could improve our organizational practice. Finally, the last cycle reflects on the actionable knowledge from the previous cycle and suggests further improvements to depart from our usual practice.

3.2 Action Research as a Methodology

Action research (AR) is an interactive inquiry process through one's actions and the effects of these actions for joint learning, dialogue and participation in which applied behavioral science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge to solve organizational problems (Coghlan, 2019). It does not only focus on *iteration* to develop deepened understanding and more effective action; but also on the *simultaneous layering* of the methodology upon itself to contribute to the body of knowledge and trigger change in various organizational environments towards an envisioned future of personal, professional and social change through a broad range of different methodological and professional forms and standards/modalities (Coghlan, 2019:124). AR works on a cyclical four steps process of consciously and deliberately: planning, taking action, observing and reflecting, first coined by Lewin (1946). It provides a comparative research on the conditions that could later turn into a social action by analyzing the effects of various forms within the community of practice through social emancipation (Cook et al., 2019). Sexton (2008) argues that actionable knowledge is developed to fuse the expectations of academia and practitioners. Coghlan and Coughlan (2002, 2010) discuss the difference between AR and other research methodologies that (a) it's a research *in* action rather than *about* action, (b) members of the system are not subjects of the study; but actively participate in the cycle, (c) research concurrent of action and (d) is both a sequence of events and approach to problem-solving.

Moreover, Riel and Lepori (2011) conceptualize AR having three outcomes on; (a) *the personal level:* that the researcher reflects inward on changes in skills knowledge and identity, (b) *the organizational level:* that the researcher understands that control change and result in organizations and (c) *the scholarly level:* that the researcher generalizes findings and shares with the bigger community. Table 3 shows the difference between a basic and action research.

CRITERIA	BASIC RESEARCH	ACTION RESEARCH
Objective	Develop and test theories to derive generalizations	Find solutions to problems in a specific context
Training	Intensive training necessary in research methodology	Limited training
Selection of Problem	A wide range of methods used to select a problem	Problems are identified during the learning process
Hypothesis	Highly specific hypotheses are developed	Specific statement of the problem
Review of Literature	An extensive review of all related literature	Review of relevant literature
Sample	Large sample	Identified participants
Research Design	Experimental design to maintain comparable conditions to reduce errors and bias	Cycles planned in general terms and let them self-involve
Analysis of Data	Complex	Simple
Statistical Treatment	Descriptive and inferential stats are required	General grouping of raw data using descriptive stats
Conclusions	Generalization and develop theories	Local specific
Application	Broad applicability	Context-specified

Table 3: Basic Research vs. Action Research (Correos, 2018)

The first thing that attracts me to AR is that it aims to solve an immediate and specific workplace problem rather than developing a general theory. The AR hypothesis helps me to reflect on my previous stance that I might have been initially driven by generalizations to find solutions for my workplace problem turning into a mismatch and stereotype threat in the debate over affirmative action (Whitt, 2018). Furthermore, it provides a possible explanation about our failure to adapt to Filipino market because we did not focus on the specific context. In this regard, the AR starts with a simple but good question to introduce a change in a social context, and it gives the opportunity to establish a collaborative learning community with critical friends (Mc Ateer, 2017). It generates reasons about the relevant causes of the problems, co-design actions to ameliorate the problems, take actions and evaluate the results to implement further cycles and actions until these problems have been addressed (Greenwood, 2019).

Moreover, the simple analysis of data with limited training increases the probability to immediately identify various approaches for my workplace problem. The credibility of an action researcher depends on someone's ability to reflect on and be transparent about the methodological issues faced (Ong, 2019). Therefore, it challenges every practitioner to apply the general empirical method to himself by being attentive to data, intelligence to understand, making reasonable judgments and be responsible in making interventions (Coghlan, 2019). Balogh and Getz (2019) describe how the curiosity of an action researcher turns to processes of questions and practice by constructing the "social" through the lens of dreaming by setting up collective, rather than individual meanings to dreams. Moreover, Price et al. (2018) call action researchers as design innovation catalysts, noting "the notion of how to develop design capability demands an action-oriented inquiry with an emphasis on creating practical knowledge that is accessible and repeatable" (2018:12). It requires that the action researcher develops a philosophy of learning (Caughlan et.al, 2021) in how to design, execute, and drawing conclusions about research, and to learn from that experience.

3.3 Development of a Philosophical Stance

A generation ago, Kerlinger (1959, 1960 and 1977) proposed that there were three specific myths- the methods, practicality, and statistics myths- that pervaded educational research. He referred to philosopher Charles Peirce (cited in Bartol and Bartol, 2012:11) how people tend to acquire beliefs and knowledge; which are (a) *method of tenacity:* the beliefs they have always believed to be true, (b) *method of authority:* something is true because individuals and institutions proclaim it to be so, (c) *priori method:* reach the truth through free communication and interactions and (d) *method of science:* testing a statement through systematic investigation.

Watanabe (2019) discusses Japanese geopolitics between the mid-1930s and 1945 as an idealistic, anti-intellectual and anti-scientific theory for a limitless expansion of a borderless nation, which may have accepted an objectivist account of justification of a belief to turn on its accuracy. In the previous chapter, I explained about the Japanese organizational context as an objective entity that both the managers and employees have prescribed duties and procedures to follow in a hierarchical order with people reporting to them and they in return report to more senior managers. Therefore, I take an objectivist ontological stance that the aim of my research is to discover the laws governing our management behavior so that I can predict how the management would act in the future (Saunders et.al, 2019). It emphasizes the traditional structural aspects of my organization that acquires beliefs through the methods of tenacity and authority due to the epistemic and core beliefs the collective community holds about knowledge (Darwin and Barahona, 2017; Brownlee et. al., 2017). It also criticizes the Japanese current behavior that professes to offer a casual account of apparently a goal-seeking behavior (Maze, 2019)

Littlejohn (2018) describes this situation as “hopeless”. The Japanese objectivist account shapes a consciousness that its individuals` perceptions lack in personal skills for a multicultural coexistence. Moreover, the knowledge people have is related to their social and cultural content, as well as the community’s recommended stage of life situations (Ultanir, 2012). Therefore, it suggests the necessity of a constructive approach for new understandings and knowledge that could arise in and out of an individuals` engagement with which they come into contact. Demelius (2020) argues that the minorities and foreign residents in Japan should change their positions “from being the recipients of services to becoming the contributors who influences norms from within, residents of Japan might finally carve out a vital and vibrant definition of coexistence (2020:176)”. As a naturalized Japanese citizen, I agree with her argument pointing out to a constructivist approach emphasizing new understandings and knowledge could arise in and out of an individuals` engagement with which they come into contact. Reflexivity is a key issue in AR. As an AR researcher, I am aware of my own ideological positioning that the Japanese have a great and understandable pride in their society, and that I cannot insist on reforms to completely change our current practice as no one can promise that changes will work or offer better opportunities for organizations on terms they can accept. Moreover, I am also aware if the attempt for a change comes from a foreigner –even naturalized-, the objection within the organization may escalate to unexpected levels. Although a radical example, we can look at what happened to Mr. Carlos Ghosn, ex-chairman and CEO of Nissan and Renault, once a role model global leader in Japan but later jailed in November 2018 (Dey et.al., 2019). Ikegami and Maznevski (2019) revisit Ghosn’s leadership style arguing that his downfall was the result of mismanaging social dynamics. However, they do not discuss the fact what the Nissan executives and seniors, with an objectivist account, really thought about having a foreign CEO.

For this reason, I adapt a constructivist epistemology as a facilitator to encourage learners to question, challenge, and formulate their own ideas and opinions (Ultanir, 2012). My philosophical stance is that the research should not aim to completely transform from one stance to another, but to improve our organizational practice. It requires changing the personal attitudes of both our Japanese and Filipino employees for a joint construction. One risk I see at this point is that the Japanese administrators with an objectivist account may categorize or criticize AR as an uncontrolled, localized, solitary, invalid, informal, non-generalizable, biased and unscientific approach to solve an organizational problem (Hinkelman, 2018). For this reason, I suggest that the research shall be shaped by the identity and positionality of everyone involved (Mason-Bish, 2018) –that I call my critical friends (Mc Ateer, 2017)-, who cannot be separated from their autobiographies and will bring in their own values to the research (Lumsden, 2019) for an organizational goal to survive and succeed in a different cultural context, such as the Philippines.

Figure 1 shows my intended positioning as a facilitator between two employee cycles- an internal dimension with our current Japanese/Filipino employees and an external dimension with our future Filipino employees in form of a reflectivity cycle. It urges to learn from the potential of *the priori method* that my critical friends can reach the 'truth', because their natural inclinations tend toward the truth (Kerlinger, 1979). Furthermore, it builds upon the idea of reflexivity so that we can reflect on our own values, beliefs and even biographies (Evans et.al. 2018) with a constructivist thought.

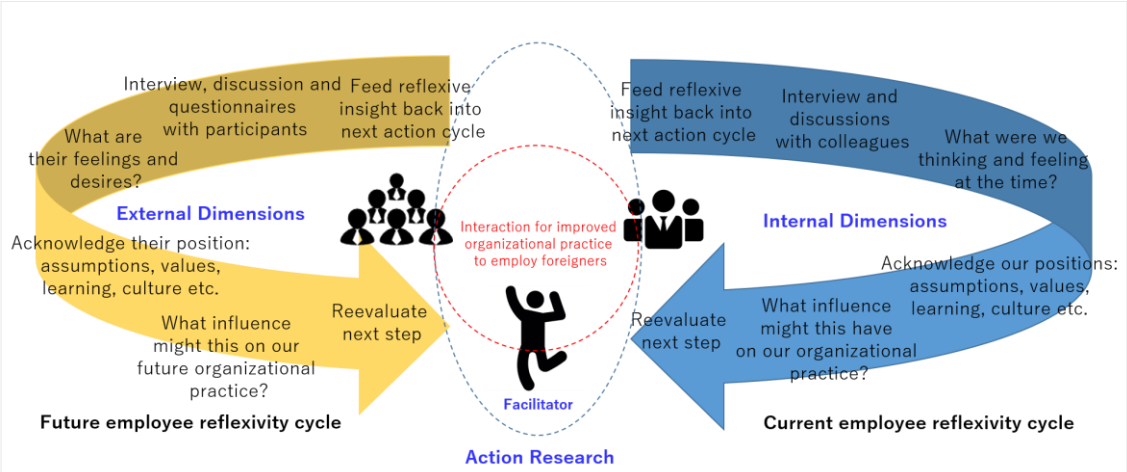

Figure 1: My AR positioning to facilitate reflective cycles in both internal and external dimensions

At first, I believe that my multi-cultural background and experience could facilitate employees from both cycles to investigate their challenges and desires in both personal and organizational levels, similar to examples discussed in the literature at organizations with mixed backgrounds and ethnicities (Kam, 2018; Sattari, 2018). Tan (2019) argues that homogenous cultures encourage teamwork, have a clear vision and enhance organizational performance. However, we should take it one step further and discuss whether globalization would turn us into one big homogenous world culture. Therefore, the reflective cycles challenge our current organizational economics that conceptualizes homogenous organizational culture as a shared belief through a constructivist epistemology. By doing so, I can finally look for an improved practice how it could help my company change some of its basic assumptions, and by changing practice, it could gradually shape a different culture.

AR is a social construction, where we can create our own boundaries around what the system is that we want to study (Coghlan, 2019). At this point, I see the issue of a collaboration team –my critical friends- as the most important aspect to achieve both internal and external validity. This is because the challenge of AR does not only lie at the point where a reflective process is developed through exposing espoused theories and actions. It also depends how the team's interiority shapes the methodology so it successfully advances knowledge production (Coghlan, Shani and Dahm, 2019).

Therefore, it requires the right social environment with a direct access to a natural and interested audience. For this reason, I propose to conduct the AR at our overseas offices in Manila. As the Executive Director of this branch office, I thereby aim to create my own boundaries with a direct access to both insider/outsider critical friends. Furthermore, it aligns with the original purpose of AR, that the potential of different actions could be observed, evaluated and redesigned in a context-specific environment for our successful survival in a global market.

3.4 The Action Research Cycles

My research starts with understanding and evaluating my own methodological position, which could be either qualitative or quantitative. Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) explain the difference between quantitative and qualitative research using the analogy of making a cup of coffee or tea. Quantitative research is about *measure* (the amount of water and coffee mixed to make a cup of coffee) while qualitative research is about *perception* (the length of time a person leaves a tea bag in a mug).

At first, I study both the literature on the quantitative and qualitative research methods (Hammersley, 2017; Flynn and Korcuska, 2018; O`Grady, Clandinin and O`Toole, 2018; Nardi, 2018; Bryant and Charmaz, 2019; George, 2019). I understand that the quantitative methods -as a mainstay of doctoral dissertations- constitute the majority of published research and attach importance to statistical systems and measurements (Rostek, 2015). In that sense, my first opinion about quantitative methods is that the outcomes might be limited as the truth in a way that is based upon how you ask the questions with priori speculations only about some aspects of a population that might generalize the problem rather than providing a context-specific solution. It leaves unaddressed questions with the purpose of just testing existing theories in practice. Furthermore, I also think that such complex results might be difficult to understand from a non-specialist perspective as it requires the complex analysis of collected data, which is a criterion for basic but not the action research, focusing more on the simple analysis with a limited training. On the other hand, qualitative research focuses on perception. The analogy of making a cup of coffee or tea (Rutberg and Bouikidis, 2018) helps me to self-reflect on my own perception that I might have been focusing more on *measuring* the problem rather than p*erceiving* it. Figure 2 shows a zigzag process I have prepared about the issues and problems our company is facing. It shows how the problems are inter-related with no way to measure it as there is no starting point or a single solution for all. Therefore, I believe that the qualitative method might help perceive the problem by providing a holistic picture of the whole so that it could turn into different learning experiences (Merriam, 2018; Radelescu et.al. 2019). Finally, the nature of knowledge produced through action cycles is not quantitative but qualitative. Therefore, I focus on a qualitative approach while I limit the use of quantitative methods to collect, summarize, and evaluate initial data only.

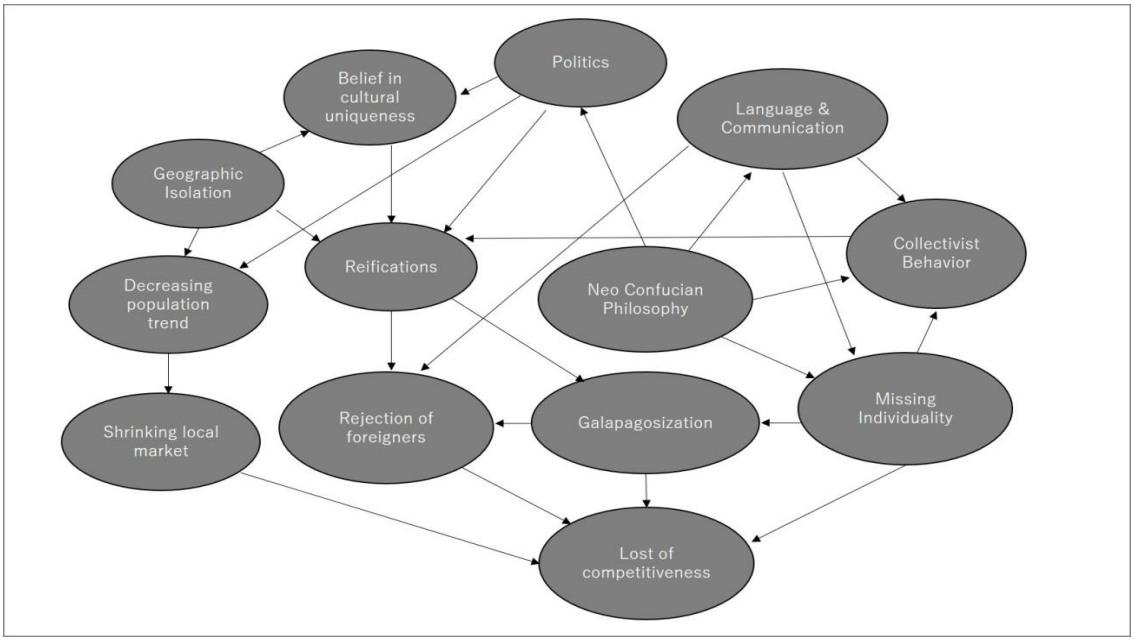

Figure 2: Zigzag process between problems and issues within our organization

The AR cycles are designed in the following order as shown in Figure 3:

a) **Action Cycle 1 (***What do they want?);* the first cycle invites participants from the Pasig Institute of Science and Technology (PCIST) to join a one-day workshop so that we understand the character, feelings, desires and emotions of our future potential employees;
b) **Action Cycle 2 (***Where do we stand?);* the second cycle invites participants from our Manila office to discuss and summarize our findings from the previous cycle, how it compares with our current practice and if there is room to improve;
c) **Action Cycle (3) (***What improvements can we make?*); we hire 7 part-time Filipino employees at our Manila office and propose a list of actions based on our learning from the previous cycles for a possible improved practice. We implement these actions, observe and evaluate the results;
d) **Action Cycle (4)** (*What happened?*); we reflect on the previous cycle and revise our actions in search for a more heterogeneous model of improved practice.

The cycles are built around an idea to construct actionable knowledge and the distinction between explicit and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge can be easily communicated in words and numbers. However, tacit knowledge is highly personal and hard to summarize as it is deeply rooted in an individual's action and experience, as well as ideas, values, and emotions (Chandler et.al, 1999). Therefore, my AR looks for constructing meaning through the acquisition of both explicit and tacit knowledge from the participants, and how to turn them into a learning opportunity in individual, group, organizational and inter-organizational levels (Chandler et.al, 1999:217).

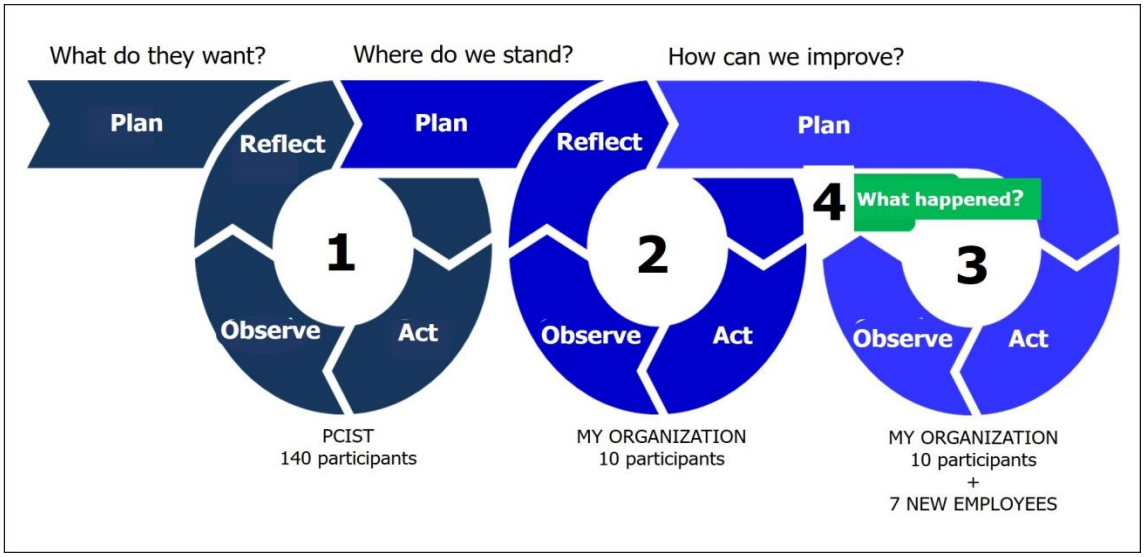

Figure 3: Overview of AR Cycles

3.4.1 Action Cycle 1- What do they want?

The first AR cycle is a one-day workshop with 140 participants (76 females, 64 males) from the PCIST technical training programs. The purpose of this cycle is to understand the character, feelings, desires and emotions of Filipino skilled workers as the first step of a constructivist approach to construct knowledge. It also aims to raise awareness among our participants about the Japanese organizational culture through an active learning process (Mizokami, 2018) so that I can observe if they are able to understand and cope with the challenges of a new work environment.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, I believe that it is very important to understand the real thoughts and desires of such a potential workforce as their wrong introduction to a traditional Japanese organization may come with the risk of pre-characterization, commodification, and devaluation of work (Wright, 2019). However, I came to identify a research gap that there are no detailed studies in understanding the necessities and needs of Filipino skilled workers conducted by governing organizations, such as TESDA (Technical Education and Skills Development Authority), JETRO (Japan External Trade Organization) or the Japanese/Philippines embassies. Furthermore, the available scholar studies addressing similar issues were limited in number and focusing only on some specific contexts (Ratnayake and De Silva, 2017; Sato, 2019; Vilog et.al, 2020).

Therefore, the first cycle also aims to fill a necessary gap in the literature by offering a quantitative study with participants from the PCIST so that we can have an idea about the character, desires and feelings of the Filipino individual. The reason I invite graduates and trainees from the PCIST is that;

(a) it is a municipality-funded tech-voc school that provides free training and education for low-income Filipinos in 16 different technical skill set programs. Their skills closely fit our company's current manpower needs; and,
(b) it is also a TESDA-accredited institution, whose graduates fulfill the basic requirements to be deployed to Japan under the TITP or SSV visa program (Komine, 2018). Moreover, they are trained as on-site practitioners- such as welders, electrical technicians- so they possess the immediate skills to work for our organization, as well as, provide the potential workforce to fulfill the gap in the Japanese manufacturing and construction industries.

For this reason, I sent an official letter to the City of Pasig with my intended purpose to conduct my first AR cycle at the PCIST. The permission was granted two months later. Next, I prepared a Participant Information Sheet together with a Consent Form and posted it to the PCIST administration. At the end, I received 140 positive replies from the PCIST graduates and trainees, who agreed to join voluntarily. Finally, the first action cycle was scheduled a month after the permission was obtained, however I had to delay it for another ten days as some of the consent forms did not arrive on time. It was a one-day event in which the participants watched a presentation about the Japanese organizational context, joined a roundtable discussion session and filled out a questionnaire later (see Appendix A). The questionnaire aimed to understand the background of the participants, as well as their character, dreams, and desires. The later part of the questionnaire presented questions using Hofstede's (2019) five cultural dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, masculinity, and long-term orientation, then the participants were asked to make a context-specific choice between two extremes on a 5-point scale. If the participant agreed with the Japanese extreme statement (which is our current practice), he/she chooses 1. If the participant agreed with the opposite extreme statement, he/she chooses 5. If they are leaning in one direction or the other, then they choose the 2 or the 4, or if they are evenly split between the two extremes, they choose 3. The responses were combined and evaluated on a 100-scala. Finally, the quantitative results were visualized as an interactive graph that compares participants` responses with Hofstede's original assumptions so that it could provide the groundwork for the next cycle, and how it compares with our current practice.

3.4.2 Action Cycle 2: Where do we stand?

The second cycle invites 10 of our local employees at Manila office (six Filipinos, three Japanese, and one German) to debate on our current organizational practice and how we can improve by understanding the character, dreams, and desires of our potential future workforce based on the actionable data produced from the previous cycle.

Triandis (2018) defines culture is to society what memory is to individuals, which includes the things that have "worked in the past". He also argues "unstated assumptions" as an important aspect of culture, and that these assumptions may not be universal once we encounter people from other cultures (Triandis, 2018:5). In that sense, the purpose of this cycle was first to invalidate such unstated assumptions so that we can self-organize (Laurate Education Video, 2012) in a different cultural context. Our future practice should be situationally-defined, organic, and shifting (Bachnick and Quinn Jr., 2019). Although there were ethical challenges of overlapping relationships and role duality (Heslop et.al. 2018), this cycle initially aimed to inform each participant about the basics of the organization and establish an effective communication flow and feedback process (Menezes, 2019). Thereby, we could make "sense" of our workplace problem and construct our "proposed actions". Furthermore, we can implement these actions, and the deviations from the course could be hindered through further corrective actions. This process could help us judging whether the personal actions and values of our future employees are "good" for our organization because they fit our organizational purpose, or "bad" because they are too personal, emotional and sometimes not ethical.

The group met on a monthly basis at our office in Manila, as well as continued their daily communication through an online chat room and mailing group. As the facilitator of the whole process, I first presented the idea of AR as a research methodology (Coghlan, 2019), and we next focused on a qualitative data analysis that used a five step process of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). At first, we prepared and organized both the quantitative data from the questionnaires and qualitative data from the roundtable discussions. We reviewed the responses to the questionnaires and watched the videos from the roundtable discussions several times until we get a sense of what explicit and tacit information they contained. We kept notes about our thoughts, ideas, and any questions that might come out during our discussions. Next, we created initial codes based on the Hosftede's cultural model and identified recurring themes, language, opinion and beliefs. Finally, we prepared a roadmap for the next action cycle to present emerging themes in a cohesive manner to best tell the story of our data, as shown in Table 9.

3.4.3 Action Cycle 3: What improvements can we make?

The third cycle aimed to drop Hofstede (2019) dimensions and replace them with context-specific actions, after recruiting seven Filipino employees at our Manila office. The purpose was to invalidate our current unstated assumptions (Triandis, 2018) by proposing actions through a construct-plan-act-evaluate cycle (Coghlan, 2019) in search for an alternative heterogeneous organizational model to improve our current practice.

This cycle also used a five step qualitative approach of compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Castleberry and Nolen, 2018). At first, we used our roadmap from the previous cycle to prepare and organize for our actions. Next, we disassembled each topic and reassembled the framework to identify a list of context-specific actions by working closely with our seven new employees. There was a one-month nurturing period that we met with our new employees' every day and discussed how we can improve our practice so that they would feel more comfortable working with us. We conducted private interviews and held roundtable meetings to extract both explicit and tacit knowledge from our participants. Both the interviews and round table meetings were recorded so that we can watch them later and look for additional thoughts and ideas. Finally, we used our notes from these discussions and prepared a list of actions that were later implemented, observed, and evaluated with our new employees, as shown in Table 9. Finally, we evaluated these actions that there were serious problems in communicating, nurturing, commitment, and the wish for immediate material success, which provided valuable actionable knowledge for the next cycle.

3.4.4 Action Cycle 4: What happened?

The final qualitative cycle first compiled a list of problematic issues from the previous cycle, and looked for basic observations and patterns. I revisited my literature review to identify the issues that can be answered through the collected data. Next, I developed a new framework by assigning codes to the broad ideas and observations from the previous cycle. Finally, I revised the existing themes by preparing a list of new actions, implemented and observed their results, as shown in Table 10.

My evaluations suggested that our Filipino employees lack a sense of fitting in within the Japanese corporate culture and experience extreme difficulties communicating with the Japanese. Although the cycles aimed to encourage individualism and recognize the unique skills of the Filipino employee, the results suggested that increased individuality damages our company unless the foreign employees are extensively nurtured to understand the Japanese work ethics and organizational practice. However, the nurturing process also had problems as the Japanese pessimist could not cope with the optimist Filipino. As a result, some Filipino employees left the company to look for better extrinsic rewards. It was a turning point in my research when I realized that self-concordance explains participants' actual goal selection. Sheldon et.al. (2019) argue that intrinsic goal content predicts higher self-concordance, as does matching between goal content and participant values and motives. Therefore, if we want to adapt the organization to better employ Filipinos, we had to self-reflect on our current practice to look for encouraging intrinsic goals that could satisfy the human needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ionescu and Iakop, 2019) so that it boosts self-concordance for all participants, regardless of the nationality.

3.5 Ethical Issues

This section summarizes my understanding and opinions about the ethical issues, such as collaboration, power, confidentiality and anonymity, authorship and ownership, representation, and voice, benefits and sustainability issues (Cascio and Racine, 2018; Coghlan, 2019; Lawrence, 2019).

Collaboration. The emerging context of contemporary organizations emphasizes collaboration and dialogical inquiry (Shani and Couhlan, 2018). In my literature review, I already explained how Japanese prefer implicit messages in communication and direct expressions tend to be avoided (Watanabe, 2018a). Such an indirect and far less verbose communication had a direct impact on the collaboration that raised tensions, stereotyping/professional biases, and the Filipino participants had problems in understanding the Japanese shared sense (Hansen, 2017). Moreover, the Filipino sense of collaboration and dialogue would gradually lessen as people move away from their nuclear families and develop bonds with their associates (Steinberg, 2018). Therefore, as a facilitator, I had to intervene many times and clearly explain to the Filipino employees about the Japanese dual-identity that there is a gap between true intentions and stated words (Sato et.al, 2018). Furthermore, I tried to increase formal and informal contacts through events and gatherings, such as lunch events, coffee networking meetings, and Japanese *nomikai.*

Power is linked to pre-established roles, positions, and relationships that are associated with control, and it is important to determine whether to criticize the effects of domination or examine those of emancipation (Negura et.al. 2019). Japanese companies rely on a traditional senior-based career development which power comes with age and experience. On the other hand, power is associated with money and wealth in the Philippines. Rafael (2018) traces the origins of the Philippines nation-state to the overlapping histories of Spanish, North American and Japanese, who all sought to establish power over social life. Even today, Filipino families with Spanish ancestry are highly respected and own the most powerful conglomerates in the country. Also, power is usually associated with having a stable job and financial wealth. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2019); the gap between rich and poor widens even more which suggests the careful examination of how the scramble for getting appointed and performing the job may cheapen the quality of service. During the AR cycles, we experienced problems that the empowered Filipinos would change their attitudes and look down on their fellow citizens. Vice versa, the Japanese participants would unconsciously judge the Filipino in terms of perceived achievement (Hioks, 2019). Philippines, as a less successful country compared to Japan in terms of achievement, would rate lower. This presented an ethical issue as the Japanese attitude toward Filipinos may include an unconscious bias that would influence power balances and hinder effective communication.

Confidentiality and anonymity are usually addressed as respect for participants and informed consent. Whittington (2019) discusses ethical governance processes around risk and sensitive topics suggesting that there is an equal need to develop robust participation and engagement strategies together with the protection of the participants and their information. However, researchers continue to raise questions about the ethical considerations of the issue (Wilson et.al, 2017). For example, Banagas and Villacanas (2015) discuss if confidentiality and anonymity are delusions as the concept of AR is supposed to be local and context-responsive. Notwithstanding, as an AR researcher, I followed the ethical guidelines of the University and properly informed participants with information sheets and asked them to sign a consent form so that their personal information would be treated with high confidentiality, or anonymity if necessary. All invited participants agreed to join the research without any opposition. However, I had to delay the first cycle for around 10 days as most PCIST participants did not return their signed consent forms on time, which suggests that there was no wide understanding and recognition about confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, I was also worried that in some cases both confidentiality and anonymity could not be achieved because participants could be easily traced through the context of the research and author(s).

In terms of authorship, ownership, representation and voice, Pienimaki and Kotilainen (2018) criticized how we should shield the privacy and confidentiality of the participants although we are encouraging them to participate in public and allow their voices to be heard. In this sense, I experienced some issues with the PCIST participants, who wished to be named in the research and discussions rather than to remain anonymous. Walford (2018) argues that for ethnographers, who study the people and their cultures, it is impossible to offer anonymity as a result of social media growth and other forms of digital communication. Although I did my part to keep personal information confidential as required, I have seen pictures and videos from our first AR cycle on social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, uploaded and tagged with real names by the participants. It could be argued that the research ethics committees shall not make too strict rules that limit the possibility to conduct innovative studies (Pienimaki and Kotilainen, 2018). Nevertheless, I relentlessly followed the rules of the ethical committee and contacted each participant to remove posts from social accounts.

Finally, as for benefits and sustainability, I believe that both the Japanese and Filipino participants transformed from a passive into an active learning state to understand the character, desires and values of each other (Allen et.al, 2019). The Filipinos learned more about the Japanese company while the Japanese learned more about the Filipino employee. The AR cycles were guided by the most favorable circumstances of transparency, representation of all parties, and procedural fairness to be achieved (Carrier, 2019), and it offered some great benefits and sustainability for all.

3.6 Conclusion

As a conclusion, I see AR as a strategy for a "social research that combines the expertise and facilitation of a professional social researcher with the knowledge, energy, and commitments of local stakeholders in a particular set of organizational, community, political, or environmental problems" (Greenwood, 2019:75). It adds additional roles to my practitioner position that has to confront challenges of pre-understanding, role duality and organizational politics (Graham Cagney, 2015; Coghlan, 2019). Coghlan and Brannick (2014) identify such a complex and challenging nature of an individual, who has to maintain an action researcher role together with their normal functional role. Fleming (2018) also discusses the importance of awareness about potential conflicts of being an academic and researcher within the same context.

For this reason, I position myself to enact and observe *improvement* through different stages of practical interventions taking a critical and systematic approach to explore the problem at my organization and draw possible conclusions from the cyclic actions taken (Hearn et.al. 2019). Therefore, I position myself as a facilitator between an internal (company employees) and external (future employees) dimension to seek for a sustainable practice in how we can successfully employ Filipinos. My proposed facilitator role aims to make use of my own personal experience as a naturalized Japanese citizen but born to a German immigrant family, and in how I experienced, perceived, succeeded and also failed in the Japanese society as a foreigner. I understand that this position requires a dual role of how I engage with the problem and how my environment reacts. The logic of AR urges me to self-reflect on my personal experiences, which has led me to think that being a minority or suppressed member at my own organization could influence my engagement with the workplace problem. The AR process suggests that I am both the subject and object of my workplace problem. Therefore, I shall continue with critical reflection and self-study so that I can encourage others to participate in improving our practice as well. Therefore, I suggest an AR in four different cycles at our overseas office in Manila with the aim to understand the character and desires of our future employees, compare that with our current practice, analyze a set of actions that can be implemented to improve our current practice, and finally, act, observe and evaluate possible actions. The research looks for the possibility of social awareness to accommodate macro-scale cultural diversities and how practitioners could profit from them. It focuses on the inter-level processes of combining individuals, teams, groups of different cultural backgrounds, and the effective organization of learning, strategic thinking, and acting. Moreover, it points out to the challenges of interiority- how the participants` thoughts, emotions, feelings, and inner struggles were shaped through cultural, educational, family, and personal experiences. The cycles aim to critically reflect on our unstated assumptions (Triandis, 2018) and reality misperceptions (Avison et.al, 2018).

Finally, the cycles suggested taking a closer look at the self-concordant thought as a possible reason why my workplace problem arises. Therefore, I moved away from my original approach to interpret the company through “culture” but suggest that we cannot improve our practice unless our organization provides the conditions for each participant to search for their own self-concordant thought, regardless of their race, ethnicity, and nationality. In the next chapter, I explain the story of the AR- how we aimed to understand the individual personality of a Filipino employee and provide freedom to explore their own ways of completing the tasks. It was clear that the co-existence of both individualistic and collectivist values injured relationships and wellbeing at our organization. Therefore, we adapted an approach that the participants stepped outside of their comfort zone, interact with others, and speak openly and honestly so that we can sketch the future for an improved practice. As a conclusion, the AR cycles suggested that our organization has to align its strategic goals with intrinsic participant values so that we can move away from a corporate paternalism to a higher employee engagement.

CHAPTER 4: THE STORY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the four action cycles. At first, I present the quantitative results from the first cycle that aims to understand the character and desires of the Filipino participants. We review the data, create initial codes and combine them into themes using Hofstede's five dimensions of power distance, individuality, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation (2019). The second cycle summarizes how we compare our findings with our current organizational practice and discussions with participants if there is room to improve. The third cycle drops Hofstede's cultural dimensions and replaces them with a list of context-specific actions in search for an improved practice. Finally, the fourth cycle reflects on our findings from the previous cycle, and how we further revise our actions based on our evaluation what has happened.

4.2 AR Cycle 1

Figure 4 shows the results from the first cycle with 140 participants at the PCIST in order to have a basic understanding about the character, desire, and commitment of Filipino employees based on Hofstede's (2019) cultural dimensions of power distance, individuality, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation.

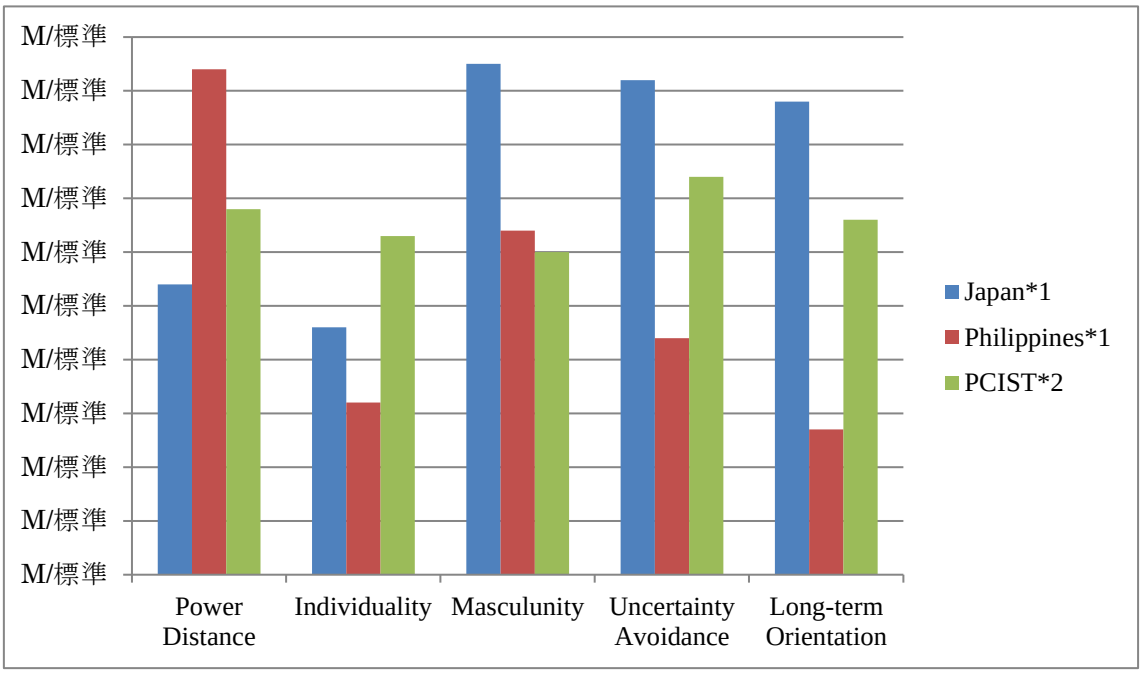

Figure 4: Results from AR Cycle 1 based on Hofstede's (2019) Country Comparison Model of Cultural Compass

(*1: Variables from the Hofstede Model, *2: Variables from the Action Cycle)

The following is a summary of the survey results.

In terms of power distance;

POWER DISTANCE	According to the Hofstede methodology (2019), is the extent of which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally.	
Japan	54	Although the Japanese are conscious of their hierarchical position in the society, the intermediate score explains Japan to be a meritocratic society that there is no one top manager who can make decisions like in hierarchical societies (Hofstede, 2019).
Philippines	94	Philippines is a very hierarchical society, where people accept their order, everybody has a place and there is no need for further justification (Hofstede, 2019).
PCIST (AR1)	**68**	**The results show that participants accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. The roundtable discussions suggest following Filipino individual characteristics ideal for our organization; dependent, hierarchical, superiors often inaccessible and the ideal boss is the father figure.**

Table 4: Comparison of results for Power Distance from AR Cycle 1

In terms of individuality;

INDIVIDUALITY	According to the Hofstede methodology (2019), is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members.	
Japan	46	Japan is a collectivistic society but not as collectivistic as most of her Asian neighbors because they do not have an extended family system. They are experienced as collectivist by Western standards and individualistic by Asian standards (Hofstede, 2019).
Philippines	32	Philippines is a very collectivistic society with a long-term commitment for the “group”, such as family or a company (Hofstede, 2019) .
PCIST (AR1)	**63**	**The results show that participants are truly individualistic. The roundtable discussions suggest that there is a strong belief in the ideal of self-actualization, loyalty based on personal preferences as well as duty and responsibility. There is also a strong commitment to the family that takes care of them in exchange for loyalty.**

Table 5: Comparison of results for Individuality from AR Cycle 1

In terms of masculinity;

MASCULINITY	According to the Hofstede methodology (2019), is the fundamental what motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine).	
Japan	95	Japan is one of the most masculine societies in the world but we do not see competitive individual behavior as a result of a mild collectivism. What we see is a severe competition between groups (Hofstede, 2019).
Philippines	64	People in the Philippines live in order to work, managers need to be decisive and the emphasis is on equity, competition and performance (Hofstede, 2019).
PCIST (AR1)	**60**	**The results show that the participants are masculine. However, the roundtable discussions suggest that there is a disagreement with the practice of masculinity at the Filipino companies that actually do not place emphasis on equity, competition and performance. Moreover, the participants are motivated by liking what they do, which suggests a feminine rather than a masculine pattern.**

Table 6: Comparison of results for Masculinity from AR Cycle 1

In terms of uncertainty avoidance;

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE	According to the Hofstede methodology (2019), is the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous and unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these	
Japan	92	Japan is one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world, which is why changes are so difficult to realize in Japan (Hofstede, 2019).
Philippines	44	The Filipinos have a low preference for avoiding uncertainty. The practice counts more than principles and deviance from the norms are tolerated (Hofstede, 2019).
PCIST (AR1)	**74**	**The results show that the participants have a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty. The roundtable discussions suggest that there is an emotional need for favoring rules, laws, and regulations to have a secure job and be as productive as other cultures. The common sense is that the rules never work in the Philippines. Therefore, they have a great respect for the Japanese culture with an inner urge to be busy and work hard, discipline, and precision.**

Table 7: Comparison of results for Uncertainty Avoidance from AR Cycle 1

In terms of long-term orientation;

LONG-TERM ORIENTATION	According to the Hofstede methodology (2019), is how the society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future.	
Japan	88	Japan is one of the most long-term oriented societies. Notion of one almighty God is not familiar to people while they live guided by virtues, practical good examples, and the desire to serve for the durability of their companies (Hofstede, 2019).
Philippines	27	Philippines is a normative society rather than a pragmatic one exhibiting great respect for religion, traditions, family, and quick results (Hofstede, 2019).
PCIST (AR1)	**66**	**The results show that the participants are pragmatic believing that "truth" depends very much on the situation, context and time. The roundtable discussions suggest that the participants can easily adapt to changing conditions, a strong propensity to save and invest, thriftiness, and perseverance in achieving results although they value their links to traditions and religion, but wish to be flexible.**

Table 8: Comparison of results for Long-term orientation from AR Cycle 1

The results from the first cycle help me understand about the character, desires and personality of the Filipino participants and compare them with the thoughts of existing cultural dimension theorists (such as Hofstede, 2019; Trompenaars, 2019) to validate their presumptions if the Japanese and Filipino cultures are really different. My understanding is as follows;

- In terms of power distance, the Filipino participants accept a hierarchical order. There is great respect for Japanese discipline and hard work. However, the Japanese miscommunication (Kowner, 2004) could have a negative influence on such current positive emotions that play an important role in their decision making. Therefore, it is extremely important to raise awareness about the traditional Japanese organizational practice among the Filipino participants. Moreover, it requires the ability to manage emotions to ensure appropriate personal interaction between the Japanese and the Filipinos.
- In terms of individuality; the participants are truly individualistic and our company could profit from such individual talents. However, we need to strike the right balance between individualism and collectivism by exploring ways to integrate Filipino individualistic character with Japanese teamwork and collaboration so that it does not turn into a chaos.

- In terms of masculinity; the participants are masculine. However, I recognize from my personal interactions that there is a very strong tendency toward femininity and that the participants want to enjoy what they do. This presents an enormous challenge for our organization that is very masculine, and requires further discussion in how we can accommodate feminine thoughts.
- In terms of uncertainty avoidance; the participants have a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty. Hofstede (2019) argues Japan as one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world. However, I have already discussed in the literature chapter that there are uncertain policies and feelings about the immigrants (Morita, 2017; Komine, 2018) that might create deep uncertainty among the Filipinos if they are not well explained and properly understood.
- In terms of long-term orientation; the participants have a pragmatic belief that truth depends very much on the situation, context and time rather than a normative belief, as Hofstede argues (2019). On one hand, it promises their potential to easily adapt into our organization. On the other hand, the roundtable discussions confirm their great respect for family and religion. We need to take into account that such emotions would play a great role in how our organization would communicate within itself and to the outside world.

In conclusion, the results from the first cycle suggest that the Filipino participants are indeed much closer to the Japanese mentality, which is the opposite of what Hofstede (2019) argues. My first thought is that the Filipinos would be able to adapt and work at our organization without any problems. However, it is evident from the roundtable discussions that their knowledge and respect toward Japanese culture comes from a passive learning state, such as what they have heard from their friends, or read in the media. Therefore, it is necessary that we increase their awareness about Japanese traditional organizational practice as the wrong introduction may come with contesting their dignity of labor, negotiating their experiences of deskilling and seeking strategies to survive the system (Vilog et.al, 2020). Moreover, each individual comes with their pros and cons. For this reason, the next cycle aims to extend our discussions about what we have learned from this cycle, as well as seek improved practices on how we can accommodate their individualistic and unique values through improved practices.

4.3 AR Cycle 2

The second cycle starts with ten employees from our Manila office, who seek to understand the individual character of a Filipino employee and compare that to our current practice. At first, we sat through weekly meetings to prepare, organize, review and explore the data from the previous cycle. We also created an online chat room and mailing group to continue exploring our thoughts, ideas, and questions. Next, we created initial codes based on Hofstede's cultural compass and identified recurring themes, language, opinion, and beliefs together with a roadmap, as shown in Table 7.

CODE	DISCUSSIONS	THEME
POWER DISTANCE *What could be the Japanese organizational practices that would make participants think it unfairly treated them? *How much would our organization be willing to give up on the traditional hierarchical order?	- Our Japanese management sees homogeneity as an essential element in its national ethos and power distance. They do not necessarily regard others as inferior but judge them in terms of perceived achievement. Therefore, the Filipinos have been rated low, and their contribution to our organization is expected to be limited, i.e. as part-time or low-salary workers. - Our high power-distance organizational practice presents a huge challenge to psychologically connect with our future Filipino employees, who are mostly not aware of the Japanese homogeneous identity thought, discrimination of foreigners, and strict hierarchy. - Could it turn into an organizational problem if our potential employees start to believe that they are not actually equally and fairly treated by the Japanese organization? Can they adapt to such a hierarchy? Will they seek for alternative empowering strategies to survive the system? Or, would they simply quit?	*How comfortable would our future employees be with deferring to greater authority, hierarchy, and social classification within a Japanese organization?*
INDIVIDUALITY *How far can we tolerate individuality within our collectivist organization? *To what extend could we tolerate personal emotions within our *tatemae* environment? *Could we develop an updated organizational practice to profit both from increased individualism and self-actualization?	- We are a very collective organization. Our employees would sacrifice personal desires for the well-being of the group from which they drew their identity. Moreover, this identity was shaped by Japan's geographical and cultural isolation, linguistic barriers and implicit communication style. Therefore change is slow and time-consuming. - The Filipinos show a great desire for self-actualization and present highly individualistic characteristics. They are desperate to show and prove their capabilities to add profit to our organization. However, the presence of both individualist and collectivist values injures relationships and well-being at our organization. - We do not need to develop our scientific and technological skills. What we need is a soft innovation- a new managerial approach with a more innovative approach to develop creative skills. - Could we increase our competitiveness through emphasizing individuality? Could the individualistic behavior tendency among the Filipino candidates turned into an opportunity for our company?	*Which do our future employees believe in more; give up your individuality to adjust to the Japanese community and organizational values or being personally responsible for their own success and achievements?*

MASCULINITY

*Would the participants be able to cope with the masculinity practice of our company?
*Do our managers like what they do? Are they happy in terms of their expectations?
*How could we offer our potential employees the opportunity to do something they would sincerely like to do?

- The Filipino market requires us to shift from the earlier emphasis of Japanese hegemonic masculinity of "salaryman". We need to nurture individuals possessing specific skills with immediate profit for the organization, which also calls for the redefinition of the Japanese masculinity.
- The employment of Filipinos at our organization may provide the opportunity for the Japanese to practice multiple masculinities and break the chains of corporate paternalism, which might be one of our most important organizational challenges.
- The Filipino participants do not agree with the current practice of Filipino masculinity that people should accept the existing order and that there is no need for further justification. They show a great desire toward femininity- to simply like what they do.
- The Filipino participants strongly criticize Filipino organizations not fairly treating and recognizing their skills and performance. This is an important aspect to be considered at our organization that does not consider the "feelings" of its future employees but assumes work as a social obligation.

What kind of leader/manager do our future employees want to work with at our Japanese organization?

UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

* Does uncertainty avoidance have a negative effect on cross-cultural relationships?
*Is the employment of foreigners a risk we cannot understand and manage?

- Japan is one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world due to their geographic, social, and cultural conditions.
- However, we cannot categorize uncertainty in Japan the same way as uncertainty in South Korea. We can define Japanese uncertainty more as the tendency to avoid ambiguous situations.
- One ambiguous situation is the employment of foreigners within Japanese corporations which might cause communication problems and trigger deviation from norms, and thereby lead to uncertainty.
- Our data shows that the Filipinos participants have also a high tendency to avoid uncertainty. They respect Japanese discipline and hard-work, and favor rules, laws, and regulations instead of deviating from the norms. However, the Filipino participants also favor quick results while they see no problem with bending the rules if they are going to profit from it.

Would our future employees be comfortable to become a member of an organized and well-planned Japanese organization, or do they feel more attracted to spontaneous and even chaotic situations to challenge their own knowledge, capabilities, and desires? Are they comfortable with surprises or do they insist on an organized chain of events?

LONG-TERM ORIENTATION * Is Japan really a pragmatic society? *Do we understand the Filipino concept of family? *Is “faith” an issue?	- Japan is one of the most long-term oriented societies. The idea behind our company is to serve its stakeholders rather than shareholders for many generations to come. - Long-term oriented societies are pragmatic (Hofstede, 2019). However, does our company have a normative approach when dealing with organizational problems, such as maintaining traditions, and long-term business contacts? - Our Filipino participants score high on long-term orientation with a pragmatic belief that the truth depends very much on situation, context, and time. On the other hand, they have a great respect for religion, traditions, and family. - The Filipino participants put importance on their family than anything else. Most of female OFW workers leave their family and children behind for many years to feed and provide for their family. - The Filipinos have a different kind of fatalism based on a Christian thought when compared to Japanese, who live by virtues and practical good examples. The Filipino thought searches for a clear line between God (good) and Evil (bad). Moreover, Christianity is a very important social infrastructure in the Philippines that should not be disregarded with its pros and cons for our organization.	*Do our potential employees feel that an adult should be assertive and energetic to acquire material comfort, social status, and prestige, or do you think on the contrary that you could be able to become a member of a Japanese organization, which is a community of an extended family known to be tolerant, relaxed, loving and non-aggressive?*

Table 9: Roadmap for the next action cycle

As the facilitator, I start each topic by raising two questions; “Where do we stand?” and “How can we improve?” The first question focuses on our current practice with our negative managerial assumptions of hiring foreign employees, while the second question urges participants to step outside of their comfort zone, interact and speak their hearts so that we can sketch the future for an improved practice. The next section summarizes how we treated each issue using Hofstede’s (2019) cultural dimensions as initial codes, which we finally revised and combined into a single theme.

4.3.1 Power Distance

Where do we stand?	How can we improve?
Our company thinks that foreigners (including Filipinos) cannot understand Japanese organizational culture and adapt into the “unique” hierarchy. There is also a miscommunication issue that the foreign employees are treated with suspicion and often avoided for fear they may cause embarrassment. Hence, Japanese companies see foreigners as a temporary source of labor.	Filipinos show a great desire to understand and follow the Japanese hierarchy as they believe to be well-treated, respected, and accepted by the Japanese society. However, they are not entirely aware of the traditional Japanese context. Therefore, it is necessary to increase awareness about our organizational structure among our future Filipino employees.

The Japanese establishment regards homogeneity as an essential element in its national ethos and power distance. Zhang et.al. (2016) explain that managers with such high-power distance paired with low-status low-power counterparts experience more anger, place less emphasis on cooperative goals, use less priority information exchange, and gain fewer profits. Kowner (2004) explains how the Japanese treat foreign employees with suspicion and avoidance for fear they may cause embarrassment. It might be one reason why Japanese companies came to import foreign workers as a cheap source of labor. Another important point is argued by Hioks (2019), who discusses that the Japanese insist on their uniqueness, but do not necessarily regard others as inferior, but judge them in terms of perceived achievement. Successful Western countries rate high while Asian societies, seen as less successful than Japan, rates lower. Therefore, the Japanese look up to the West (as a successful example) but unconsciously rejects and looks down on the East. Finally, it turns out to be a problem that our Japanese management feels intense stress to work together with foreigners.

At this point, we understand from our data that the Filipinos accept a hierarchical order. There were comments such as “*all people in an organization have clearly defined roles*”, “*children should be taught to accept the authority of older and important people*”, “t*he boss makes all decisions and everyone in an organization respects him*” that confirms hierarchal behavior in the Filipino society.

The acceptance of hierarchy in the Filipino society is a positive aspect for our collectivist organization. Furthermore, Yu and Alcid (2019) discuss that the Filipino overseas workers have a great capability to adapt into any cultural environment as they believe to have a better chance at overseas, which might explain their desire to work for a Japanese organization. Our understanding from the data is that they believe to be well-treated, accepted, and respected by a Japanese organization. However, I have already explained in the literature review chapter that the Japanese management does not feel comfortable with foreigners (Kowner, 2004). There is a risk that the Japanese management might feel intense stress to employ foreigners as there is a common thought that they do not understand the Japanese culture and present a low level of loyalty towards their organization. We agreed that there is a necessity to increase awareness about the traditional Japanese organizational structure among the Filipinos so that our future employees do not have to search for alternative empowering strategies to survive the system (Wright, 2019; Tigno, 2019; Vilog et.al, 2020), or simply quit their job. Therefore, as shown in Table 9, we prepared five themes and asked the same PCIST participants to fill out an online Google questionnaire. Figure 5 shows the response of 113 participants (out of 140 invited), *how comfortable they would be with deferring to greater authority, hierarchy, and social classification within a Japanese organization* after joining the seminar and rating themselves between 1 and 5.

5	*I accept total deference both as an individual and as a foreigner. The old, powerful and successful people of the Japanese companies have every right for extra social privileges. These people have earned their positions through hard work and by providing value to the Japanese society. People should, in general, respect and obey their superiors.*
4	*I would feel more comfortable with total deference.*
3	*Evenly split/ Can't decide*
2	*I would feel more comfortable with lack of deference.*
1	*I don't accept deference. No one is better than anyone else and everyone should be respected according to their own knowledge, experience, and capabilities rather than their age, race, or seniority.*

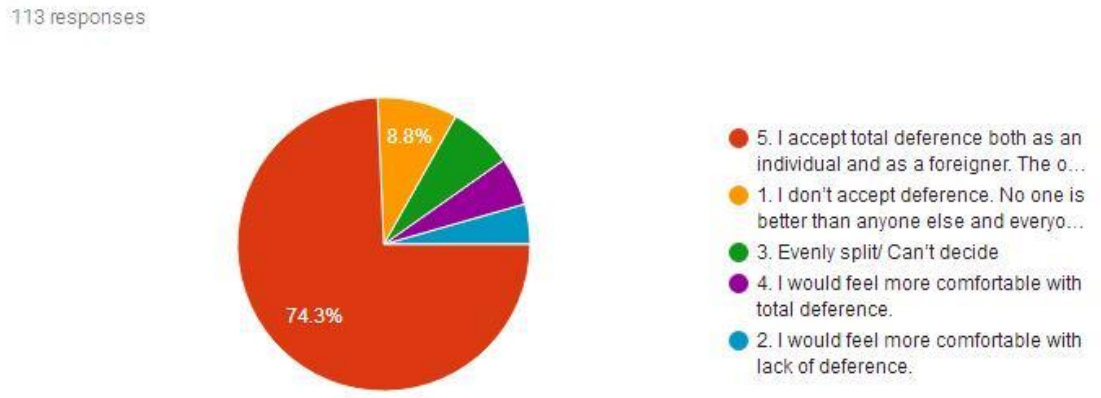

Figure 5: Employees' response to power distance theme

Despite all the challenges of Japanese workplace explained, 74.3% of the participants would still like to work in Japan and accept total deference for the same reason to earn money and support their families. Moreover, there is great frustration with the inefficiency of their government to secure a better future for its citizens that many Filipinos chose to seek better opportunities overseas, even if they have to suffer for money and family. As frustration often causes desperation, it is important to clearly understand this aspect and manage their feelings.

4.3.2 Individuality

Where do we stand?	How can we improve?
Japan is a very collective society that does not tolerate individuality. The members of the organization would sacrifice personal desires for the well-being of the group from which they drew their identity (Pyle, 2018). Moreover, this identity was shaped by Japan's geographical and cultural isolation, linguistic barriers, and implicit communication style (Kowner, 2004).	Although Hofstede (2019) argues Philippines to be a collectivist society, the participants are truly individualistic. There is an enormous desire for self-actualization. Could we increase our competitiveness by emphasizing individuality? Could the individualistic behavioral tendency among the Filipino candidates turned into an opportunity for our company?

The collective "Japan" lacks in individual talents. Japan has already ceded its spot as the world's second-biggest economy to China in 2010, and the South Korean companies have started to overtake their Japanese competitors. The participants discussed that we have already lost many business opportunities in the Philippines as Chinese, Korean and European competitors simply act faster than Japanese. Their leaders would be considered as global talents. It is clear that our organization not only lack global talents, but also lack in confidence and self-esteem to make decisions rapidly.

Therefore, we discussed that the immediate need is to put pressure on our management to react quicker. On rare occasions, Japan is capable of sudden explosive changes. Japan went from feudalism to emperor worship in two or three years and went from emperor worship to democracy in three months" (Pilling, 2014:89). However, this process did not take place for the sake of modernization, but to prevent Western conquest at the risk of identity loss (Kowner, 2004). At the edge of Japanese contraction, we can no more focus on protecting an identity in a local shrinking market. In fact, our organization should look for ways to establish a new corporate identity that integrates individual talents into a collective manner. However, this is difficult, for example, Ogihara (2017, 2018) discusses that as the Japanese social values became more individualistic, but the collective values remain, the co-existence of both injures interpersonal relationships and wellbeing.

This idea goes back to the Japanese nationalist orthodoxy promulgated by the government that found individualism colliding with the collective values, and built a national ideology based the loyalty to the state over personal and private interest (Pyle, 2018). It developed into a patriarchal corporate culture that individualism is no longer tolerated to maintain harmonious relations. However, we recognize from our data that the participants are truly individualistic. It collides with the Japanese collective approach as there were comments such as *"people should choose their friends based on common interests*", *"I have full personal freedom"*, and *"people should be promoted based on competence, no matter their age"*. Although there is a clear wish to self-actualize, the participants also present a clear understanding about the Japanese collectivism. Therefore, we came to agree that the presence of a strong individualistic behavior could profit our organization if it is well nurtured and integrated with the organizational goals as a new corporate identity. However, the question was whether the Filipino participants would insist on the practice of their own individualistic values or give up their personal freedom so that they can adjust into the Japanese collective behavior. Figure 5 shows the response of Filipino participants, *which they believe in more; give up their individuality to adjust to Japanese community and organizational values or being personally responsible for their own success and achievements?*, after joining the seminar and rating themselves between 1 and 5.

5	*I have my own career plans, priorities and dreams that I cannot give up for the sake of the group. I should not exist for the group but the group should exist to fulfill my plans and extend my career opportunities. Every person has the right to do whatever they want with their lives. No one can judge me.*
4	*I believe more in the importance of individualism*
3	*Evenly split/ Can't decide*
2	*I would feel more comfortable with collectivism*
1	*My colleagues are my extended family, I love working in teams and I am ready to give up all my individualistic priorities, dreams and career plans for the sake of the group. I need to be strongly judged or nurtured to become a valuable member of the society. We must all succeed or fail together.*

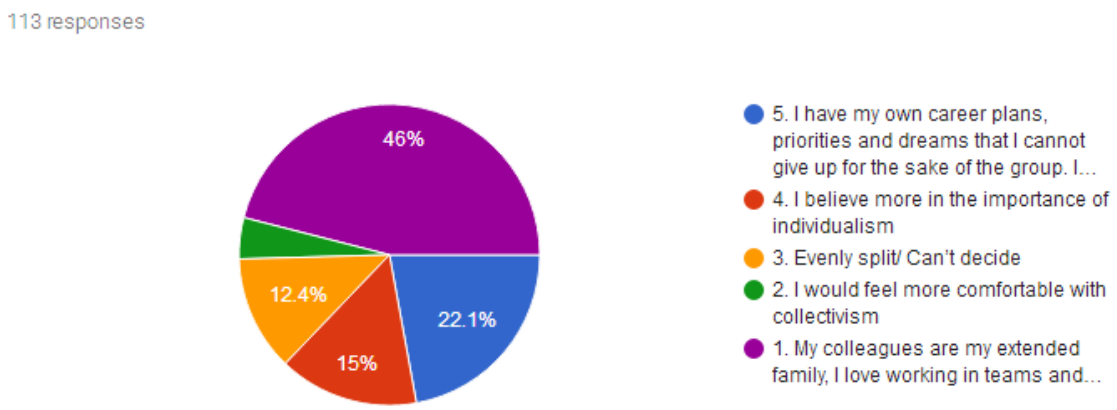

Figure 6: Employees' response to individuality theme

It is clear from this figure that 37% of participants do not feel any necessity to hide their interest practicing their individuality. Furthermore, the roundtable discussions suggested that 46% of the participants agreed to give up their individual priorities as there is a strong concern about what others would think about them and the desperation to earn money for the family. Nevertheless, the identification of participants` opinions and beliefs suggested that there is a strong individualism among our Filipino participants, which may profit our organization if well nurtured and integrated with the collectivist thought.

4.3.3 Masculinity

Where do we stand?	How can we improve?
Japan is one of the most masculine societies in the world with severe competition between groups (Hofstede, 2019). The ubiquitous *salaryman* came to signify Japanese masculinity and corporate culture as a gendered construct (Dasgupta, 2017). The model of such an archetypal citizen is crumbling as Japanese companies are forced to reexamine their lifetime employment model.	The Filipino participants appear to be masculine. However, they strongly disagree with the Filipino masculinity that does not place emphasis on equity, competition, and performance. Our data also indicates that they are motivated by liking what they do, which suggests a feminine rather than a masculine pattern. Both patterns suggest the reexamination of Japanese masculinity.

Masculinity is wanting to be the best while femininity is to like what you do (Hofstede, 2019). Hofstede acknowledges both Japan (94) and the Philippines (64) as very masculine societies, as well as our participants (60) showing a similar trend. However, the Japanese masculinity is different from the Filipino masculinity that looks for power and wants to be the best. Dasgupta (2017) provides an excellent introduction to the hegemonic masculinity of "*salaryman*" that signifies Japanese masculinity in general, and more specifically, the Japanese corporate culture. They are "fulltime white collar permanent employees of organizations offering benefits such as lifetime employment guarantee, salaries with promotions tied to the length of service, and an ideology of corporate paternalism characterizing relationships between the employee and organization" (2017:36). This pattern has continuously translated to economic and financial security for the Japanese male and his family (Henry, 1988). Such titles and business cards still carry heavyweight in the Japanese business world. However, the Japanese companies are pressured to reexamine their lifetime employment model (Rothacher, 2019), which also requires the reexamination of the Japanese masculinity. Therefore, the participants came to discuss that it has to shift from the earlier emphasis to nurture a generalist into individuals possessing specific skills with immediate profit for the organization.

It is important for our organization to understand what our employees want instead of nurturing them into what we want. The *salaryman* is a gendered construct of an archetypal citizen that represents a national orthodoxy propagating a unique homogenous social harmony and selfless devotion. They are inexperienced in their racial contacts, and therefore they became shy and look very reserved around foreigners (Kowner, 2004). Moreover, they represent the fundamental Japanese social institution that cannot integrate foreign employees into the Japanese corporate culture as it was evolved around a national homogenous identity.

Our data shows that although the Filipino participants appear to be masculine, they are motivated by liking what they do, which suggests a feminine rather than a masculine pattern. There were comments such as, *"I seek love and mutual affection"*, "*I want to be happy in my life no matter what I do"*, and *"I have sympathy for those who cannot win"*. Furthermore, they strongly criticized Filipino masculinity that does not place any importance on equity, competition and performance. These thoughts and opinions present a huge challenge for our organization that has a logical approach toward work as a social obligation, but might have not considered the "feelings" of its employees (Ewest and Weeks, 2018). Therefore, we asked our participants, *what kind of leader/manager they want to work with in a Japanese organization*, as shown in Figure 6.

5	*One who constantly intervenes, verifies, evaluates and corrects the work of subordinates. If employees don't work with a demanding boss and someone who knows the local culture, they get lazy and sloppy.*
4	*Supervises up to a normal level*
3	*Evenly split/ Can't decide*
2	*Supervises only when necessary*
1	*One who trusts employees and intervenes only when asked or when there is a major problem to solve. If left alone, people will try to learn more.*

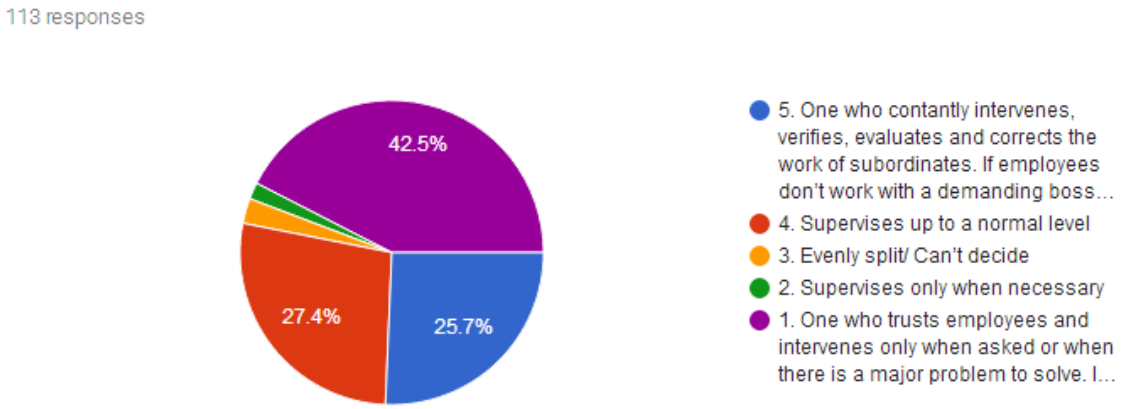

Figure 7: Employees' response to masculinity theme

Although the figure suggests that there are two dominant groups desiring either a passive or active leadership, we did not focus on debating further on the leader-follower relationship. Instead, our discussions revolved around how to experience multiple masculinities. For example, we looked into the notion of "*Freeters*", which emerged as an alternative to the stereotypical idea of Japanese masculinity during the Bubble era. It is a combination of the English word "free" and the German word "arbeiter (worker)"- a Japanese expression for 11 million freelance workers in Japan. Uno and O'Day (2020) discuss that by 2027 more than half of the Japanese population is expected to be freelance workers that indicates a sharp departure from the traditional lifetime employment system. It gives birth to a new type of masculinity. Cook (2016) presents a wonderful study about the Freeters. She refuses to look at masculinity as a static type and suggests the potential of "how individuals draw on different aspects and dimensions of masculinities in different spheres of their lives—at the level of both discourse and practice—that shape their adult masculine identities in particular ways at particular points in time as they age" (Cook 2016:6). We gain a wonderful perspective from her study that one challenge for our organization could be how the experience of multiple masculinities could positively influence the character of all our employees and shape the future of our organization, similar to freeters. Finally, we also agreed to look into alternative employment patterns as inspiration rather than restrictive masculinity experiences.

4.3.4 Uncertainty Avoidance

Where do we stand?	How can we improve?
Japan is a one of the most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world (Hofstede, 2019). Our organization believes that employing a foreigner is a risk we cannot understand and manage, so we cannot tolerate it. On the other hand, the foreign employee, with a lower degree of uncertainty, may misunderstand our management's bureaucratic attitude and experience anxiety.	The Filipino participants have a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty. There is also an emotional need for favoring rules, laws, and regulations to have a secure job and be as productive as other cultures. Therefore, their employment may pose a minimal risk to our organization as they present attributes favorable for the Japanese practice,

Hofstede (2019) describes uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous and unknown situations and have created beliefs and institutions that try to avoid these. He ranks Japan as one of most uncertainty avoiding countries in the world (with a score of 94) referring to the geographic, social, and cultural aspects that I have already presented and discussed in my literature review chapter.

On the other hand, he ranks Philippines having a low preference (with a score of 44) for avoiding uncertainty. The schedules are flexible, punctuality does not come naturally and innovation is not a threat (Hofstede, 2019). However, our Filipino participants have a very high preference for avoiding uncertainty (with a score of 74), who show an emotional need to favor rules, laws and regulations that could secure them a long-term job. They believe that the rules never work in the Philippines, and the deviations from the norms are tolerated for short-term profits. There are further opinions such as *"there are rules and customs in the society that everyone has to respect"*, *"children must be taught to avoid ambiguity"* and *"people should always carry an ID"* showing their tendency toward avoiding uncertainty. They critically express their outrage over inefficient government that has failed to provide certainty for its citizens. Moreover, there is also the acceptance of predestination and fate that comes from a strong Christian belief. Therefore, we asked our participants, if they *would be comfortable to be a member of an organized and well-planned Japanese organization, or feel more attracted to spontaneous and even chaotic situations to challenge your own knowledge, capabilities and desires? Are they comfortable with surprises or do they insist on an organized chain of events*, as shown in Figure 7.

5	*I wish to have the next several years of my life meticulously planned. My daily schedule should run like the punctuality of a Japanese train. Life has basic rules of discipline that civilized people must adhere to. Everything should be organized in alphabetical order.*
4	*I would feel more comfortable with a high degree of organization and planning.*
3	*Evenly split/ Can't decide*
2	*I would feel more comfortable with some spontaneous, free-wheeling situations.*
1	*I should never waste time to plan my days and my life. People who plan too much always end up disappointed. I should not worry much about the future, accept luck and chance and try to live life in the moment and enjoy every bit of it.*

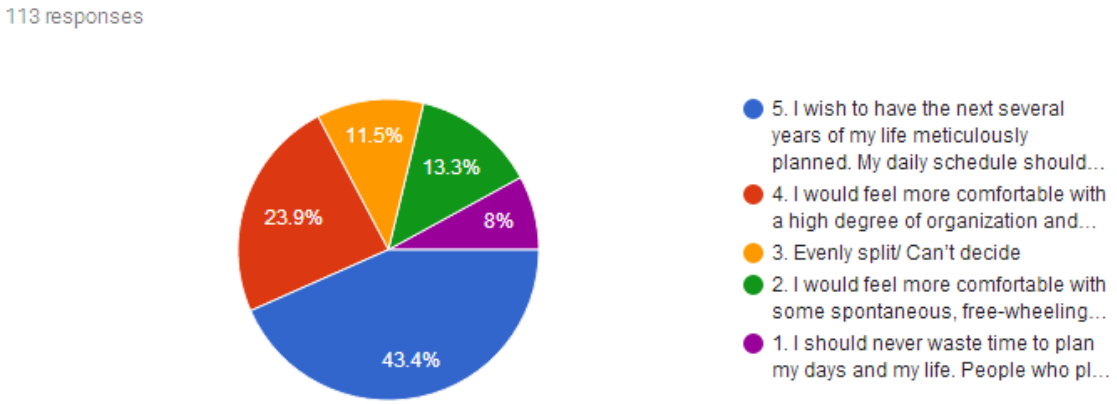

Figure 7: Employees' response to uncertainty avoidance theme

In today's uncertain business world, the success of our organization depends on more flexible and rapid responses to external changes. In the Filipino market, speed and flexibility are essential when making decisions with our partners and customers. However, the Japanese uncertainty avoidance is often misunderstood by others, who have a lower degree of uncertainty, which results in anxiety. Moreover, our current philosophy is built upon the wrong idea of Confucianism that purports nationalism and homogeneity, as well as focuses on traditional business tools with high levels of avoiding uncertainty. Therefore, I believe it is essential that we refer back to the origin of our Confucius philosophy to search for a new harmonic alignment between the organization and its diverse individuals. In this regard, I understand that change is a difficult process in Japan. However, the potential of our Filipino participants suggest that we can look for an improved practice with minimum risks acceptable even for an uncertainty avoiding Japanese organization.

4.3.5 Long-term Orientation

Where do we stand?	How can we improve?
Japan is one of the most long-term oriented societies (Hofstede, 2019). The pragmatic philosophy behind our company is to serve its stakeholders rather than its shareholders for long generations to come. However, we also exhibit some normative features, such as honoring norms and traditions, long-time business connections and viewing societal change with suspicion.	Although Hofstede (2019) argues Philippines to be a normative society, our Filipino participants are pragmatic believing that "truth" depends very much on the situation, context and time. They have an enormous capability to be flexible and adapt into any difficult context. Their commitment toward family proves how well they could commit into our organizational goals.

Hofstede (2019) describes this dimension as to how every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the future while he rates Japan as one of the long-term oriented societies taking a pragmatic approach (with a score of 88). On the other hand, our Filipino participants also show a similar pragmatic approach that their truth depends also on time, situation and context although Hofstede (2019) has rated Philippines as the opposite- a normative society.

At first, our discussions focused on the fact that Japan might not be as pragmatic as it seems. According to the Cambridge dictionary (2020), pragmatism is "solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now rather than obeying fixed theories, ideas, and rules". For example, we discussed if our company really takes a pragmatic approach when dealing with organizational problems as we still deeply value time-honored traditions with serious difficulties to think about the future of our organization and how to change (Platt, 2020).

We further discussed about the philosophy of our organization that serves its stakeholders rather than its shareholders. If the future of our company depends on hiring Filipino employees, it is essential that we prepare to provide utility for them as well. In that sense, our Filipino participants give us the assurance that they are also long-term oriented, with comments such as *"I will commit all my time and efforts to the organization", "my company would be my new family"* and *"I will treat each and every colleague of mine as if they were my family"*. The roundtable discussions helped us gain an important insight that they put importance on their family before anything else. Their straightforward expression of love and affection is adorable for an implicitly communicating society, such as Japan, that has to hide their real feelings and thoughts in order not to offend the other. For example, if you have a wonderful family life and you share it explicitly with your Japanese colleague but if he does not have the same love and affection coming from his family- he might feel offended. Another issue that has to be considered is that Japanese prioritize work while the Filipinos prioritize family. The pros and cons of both thoughts shall be carefully analyzed before taking an action.

Furthermore, there is also the issue of fatalism. The Filipino participants are Christian Catholic believing mostly in predestination and fate. Vice versa, the one and only mighty God notion is not familiar to the Japanese, who are guided by virtues and practical good examples (Hofstede, 2019). However, this is not a problem for a future employee as the Japanese have a great respect for any religion as long as it does not interfere with their work schedule. I already mentioned that the emotions play a great role for a Filipino when making a decision. For example, we asked the Filipino participants how they would feel if their boss would ask them to work on Sunday even if it is not written in their contracts. Six out of ten participants responded that they agree to work if they were told, but they would be slightly disappointed to miss the Sunday mass. These emotions should also be considered. Finally, we came to understand that they have a strong devotion to their families and traditions, as well as present favorable attributes to adapt to our organizations` work etiquette and expectations. Therefore, we next asked our participants, if *an adult should be assertive and energetic to acquire material comfort, social status, and prestige, or on the contrary be able to become a member of a Japanese organization, which is a community of an extended family known to be tolerant, relaxed, loving, and non-aggressive*, as shown in Figure 8.

5	*I have a strong need for material success and professional prestige even if I develop enemies or become estranged from other people in the group.*
4	*Have assertive drive for material comfort or status*
3	*Evenly split/ Can't decide*
2	*Being part of a community and not striving too much for money or status is best*
1	*I don't care about money and status. What's important is being loved and helping other people.*

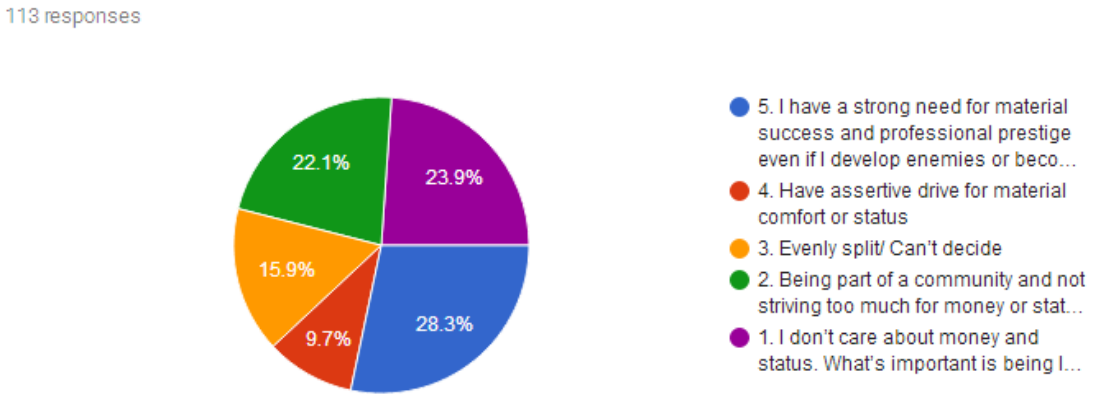

Figure 8: Employees' response to long-term orientation theme

Although the responses varied among five choices, we understand that the Filipino participants come with a pragmatic thought and flexibility that demonstrates adaptability in the workplace and the ability to respond effectively to work conditions. The attitude is primarily driven by the fact that they must work in order to feed and provide for their family. Therefore, it is important that the employment opportunity should come with material rewards and professional prestige. Moreover, it shall also satisfy the needs of a Filipino individual that values love and respect.

4.4 AR Cycle 3

The third cycle aims to drop cultural dimensions and replace them with specific actions, based on our understanding from the previous cycle. For this reason, we first hired seven part-time employees to promote our commercial solar investment model in the Philippines. This service offers potential clients the opportunity to install rooftop solar systems at zero cost. We design, finance, build, operate and maintain the system. In return, the clients sign a Power Purchase Agreement with our company and agree to buy the produced electricity for a fixed price and period. Our new employees are hired to promote this business model to potential clients and close deals on commission.

At first, we look back to what we have learned from the previous cycle. Maslow (1943) classifies five human needs in a sequence that has its significance, which are psychological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. According to Maslow (1943), psychological needs must be first met before the safety needs, and when these two needs are met, individuals move to seek love and belongings needs and so on (1943: 375). We recognize that the hierarchy of needs in the Philippines is different in that it starts with love and belonging needs, and moves to psychological needs, safety needs, esteem needs and self-actualization later. It considers family to be the foundation of social life, as well as familism as a defense against a hostile world and eternal source for food, home and love.

The Filipino psychology is based on a core construct of *Kapwa,* which is the recognition of a shared identity, an inner self shared with others such as family members, friends, acquaintances, or even strangers (Javier et.al, 2019). It urges a Filipino to obey the authorities, ability to adapt, participation in the community, and being united with the group. Ng and Riviera (2018) argue the most important part of a group is the "meaningfulness of the experience, that is, people talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative, what *Kapwa* is all about" (2018:140). Tiu et. al (2017) explain how Filipinos survive by managing tensions between making ends meet and sustaining a public idea of living a simple life. The familist behavior increases Filipino loyalty and productivity unless the goals are not in conflict with his/her family's goals. It values authority but presents a conflict with the individuality as many Filipinos may conform to rules and standards so that they give up their personal dreams for the favor of others. Moreover, it looks for a fair and nurturing boss. Iwashita (2019) defines the Japanese manager as a nurturing boss with a family logic, which may satisfy Filipino employees as the manager's strength comes from his/her knowledge and experience, which may sound feminine in terms of care and benevolence. However, the Japanese boss also represents the ideology of a homogenous corporate paternalism (Dasgupta, 2017) that struggles to remain as a positive identity during the large scale, on-going instability of Japanese men's lives, as exemplified by the decline of lifetime employment and its concomitant effects on marriage, household and self-worth (Miles, 2018). For example, such masculinity tolerates workplace bullying or the practice of sexist or homophobic jokes by superiors toward subordinates (Kizuki et.al, 2020). It builds upon a Japanese patriarchal approach that does not work well overseas. Suzuki et.al (2019) present a context-specific example how Japanese managers/employees struggle to adopt into the Filipino work environment. There are potential conflicts such as struggling with English, managing local people, build interpersonal relationships, getting used to the local style as the way of thinking and dealing with work is different from the Japanese style (2019:186). Their argument is that such conflicts arise because the Japanese employee is forced for on overseas assignment without having proper time to prepare. I believe that these conflicts arise because of a struggling homogenous Japanese hegemonic masculinity, who was nurtured in a collective and paternalistic environment. Such a muscularity presents extreme pessimism and cannot cope with the optimist Filipino, who has a great desire for self-expression, self-assertion, and self-development as an individual that shall give more purpose to their life as a result of someone's own life awareness (Zaslavskaya et.al., 2019). The previous cycle showed that the Filipino participants present unique qualities we can profit from. However, it requires our organization to change some of its basic assumptions, rooted in the Japanese corporate value system. We shall look for alternative patterns to change certain practices so that, by changing the practice, the company can gradually shape a different culture. For this reason, Table 10 shows a list of actions we have implemented with our new employees and our observation.

Action	Observation
Filipinos clearly express their respect and desire for Japanese authority and discipline as a key aspect for self-actualization. Therefore, we introduced a hierarchal work order with strict working hours and overtime work requiring full commitment, and sacrifice from personal time.	The employees could not cope with the traditional practice of Japanese hierarchy as they do not fully comprehend the organizational context. They certainly have good intentions to contribute to our organization. However, the Japanese miscommunication presented a number of challenges in terms of belonging and nurturing.
We took one more step to see if we can shift the value of belonging from the nuclear family to the company. We asked our employees to contact and present our proposal to their target clients on weekends, whose representatives are mostly booked with regular business meetings weekdays.	Although Japanese employees would follow managements` suggestions and work on the weekends, the Filipino employees preferred not to make any appointments with clients on Saturday and Sundays, but spend time with their family and/or go to church.
Traffic in Manila could be devastating. Therefore, we did not require Filipinos to join our company's ceremonial morning meetings so that they can directly head over to their client. Being late to a business meeting is not acceptable from a Japanese perspective and can damage the reputation of our company.	There was a big problem with the punctuality that our employees would not show on time for their appointment. When confronted, they would refer to the notion of "Filipino time" and argue to be acceptable from any Filipinos perspective.
If we do business in the Philippines, we have to do it the "Filipino way". Therefore, we allowed our employees to prepare their own daily schedule the way they believe it is going to be most efficient. Furthermore, in search for profiting from increased individuality, we gave permission to the Filipinos to practice their own promotion style.	From time to time, our employees would call their managers after work or late midnight and ask for help/support showing devastation, hopelessness, and strong emotions. Moreover, some employees would make personal promises without consulting their managers and show strong negative emotions if confronted about their decisions.
In order to experience multiple masculinities, we planned a series of Japanese paternalist social bonding events- such as *nomikai* as an alternative communication opportunity outside the office. We also invited the families of Filipinos in search for a mutual bond. There were also special lunch meetings once a month to listen to Filipinos` suggestions and concerns so that we can provide support and feedback for any issues they are facing.	There were some serious misunderstandings due to the communication barriers between the Japanese and Filipino employees. The Japanese were always hesitant to talk in English, which could risk delegitimizing our group. There were also issues Filipinos had to deal with some nationalist, racist or sometimes, sexist jokes, suggesting some serious masculinity and communication problems.
The Filipinos were employed on a success-fee basis that they were paid a commission for successfully closing a deal. It was one proposed action to increase their loyalty and devotion toward work.	The failure to close deals and receive a commission-based success fee urged some employees to quit the job without informing the management.

Table 10: Actions and Observations during AR Cycle 3

The third cycle clearly dropped the cultural dimensions and looked for some context-specific actions. It became obvious that actually all dimensions are somehow connected. For example, when we were talking about our Japanese managerial practice (power distance), it certainly required considering also the individuals' collectivist character (individuality), hegemonic masculinity, risk-avoiding management practice (uncertainty avoidance), and normative approach (long-term orientation). On the other hand, if we were talking about the possible attitude of a Filipino employee within the Japanese hierarchy, it again required the consideration of the individuals' individualistic character, the desire to love what he does (femininity), the value of quick results (uncertainty avoidance), and probably a pragmatic approach (long-term orientation). Therefore, we decided to look for possible patterns that would unify these dimensions through specific actions. For instance, we planned and implemented specific actions that would assert some sort of hierarchy, but also provide individualistic opportunities for the Filipinos so that we can observe and evaluate if such actions are good for the organization. Moreover, we looked for alternative practices to increase the interaction between the Japanese and Filipinos, and if the experience of multiple masculinities could help us recognizing some improved business patterns.

The evaluation of our actions and observations were as follows;

- *There is a serious problem of communication among the Japanese and Filipino employees*- Our Japanese employees see speaking English as the most difficult communication skill to acquire (Suzuki et.al, 2019) and an important barrier to communicate with their Filipino colleagues. However, the Japanese miscommunication is a complex issue and cannot be solved by approaching a single factor (Kowner, 2004). Nevertheless, it is necessary to involve greater awareness by both sides, combined with real-life experience, to alter the actual differences or deal with the perceptions.
- *There is a serious need of orientation and nurturing among the Filipino employees*- Although one can master a foreign language, yet communication skills need long contact and experience with people of another culture. As Kowner (2004) explains, "Japanese enter an encounter with the non-Japanese assuming a cautious, respectful, modest and introverted manner. On the other hand, non-Japanese, enter, or at least are perceived by Japanese as entering, such an encounter in a much less cautious manner" (2004:141). We observed that our Japanese employees felt threatened as they perceived this forceful and extrovert manner as a violation of their Japanese spirit. Moreover, the stress on hierarchy and status, as well as certain collective employee behavior patterns such as *deru kui wa utareru* (the stake that sticks up gets hammered down) or *yokonarabi* (keeping up with the Joneses) (Yee, 2017) had a negative impact on orienting and nurturing our Filipino employees. As a result, there were numerous issues that the empowered Filipino employees misinterpreted implicit messages and violated the company regulations.

Therefore, we came to understand that we have to transform the behavior of either side to overcome the problem of a situation-specific anxiety (Marcial, 2016). At first, the Japanese should depart from its isolationist mentality and accept the fact that a non-Japanese is capable of understanding the way Japanese do things. They should not hide behind an outdated corporate paternalism of organizational silence as a Japanese eloquence (Kaynak and Sai, 2016) and leave things in a gray area as it has negative implications during intercultural encounters. On the other hand, the Filipino employee should be willing to learn and understand the Japanese distinct patterns of communication and organization without focusing on short-term profits.

- *There is a serious problem of commitment among the Filipino employees*- In Japan, a work contract is traditionally viewed as an expression of willingness to work together rather than a specific set of promises and limitations to be rigidly abided (JETRO, 1999). Therefore, many Japanese employees would even work on a Saturday or Sunday if necessary although it is not mentioned in his/her contract. As a result, their families have different expectations about the time the father spends with his family. This became an issue with the Filipino employees as they would choose family over work although their clients would be available for a meeting on weekends only. Furthermore, we also observed that our Filipino employees would sometimes not even appear for a weekday appointment or arrive many hours later referring to a culture of "Filipino time"- that people seldom come to occasions on time. It urged us to reconsider how we can improve the devotion and commitment of our Filipino employees through an updated version of a firm-as-family concept.
- *Finally, there is a serious concern about material success and rewards*- The Filipinos were employed part-time on a commission basis. We were aware about the risk that the horizontal inequality in the Philippines with lack of access to basic services and social protection requires households to adopt flexible strategies and tend to pursue better opportunities and incentives (Parrenas, 2016; Mina and Reyes, 2017; Tigno, 2019). Four out of seven employees hired quit in three months. Although our original approach was to increase both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, it was determined that the Filipino employees were mostly driven by an extrinsic motivation of compensation and reward. Although intrinsic motivation is personal, its characteristics are related to a self-concordant thought of autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ionescu and Iakop, 2019). Therefore, it urged us to understand how to further foster employees` feelings for a self-concordant thought to increase intrinsic motivation.

As a conclusion, we became aware about the Japanese communication problem that has a negative impact on nurturing Filipino employees, who show less devotion to the company's goals and focus on immediate extrinsic rewards. Based on our evaluation, the next section explains how we have constructed, planned, implemented, and evaluated a new cycle to overcome these problems.

4.5 AR Cycle 4

The previous cycle identified many problems such as communication, insufficient nurturing, devotion, and extrinsic motivation. Our final evaluation determined that there is a serious communication problem between the Japanese and the Filipinos that results with many interpretive misunderstandings and insufficient nurturing. Furthermore, the failure to understand our company's homogeneous organizational policy created mistrust among our Filipino employees, and urged them to pursue better opportunities and incentives.

Therefore, when constructing this cycle, I asked, "whose fault is it?" Is it the fault of the Japanese company or employee, who cannot depart from its chosen position as a unique, but marginal, organizational culture? Moreover, does the Japanese establishment really recognize the fact that the needs of the employees and goals of the organization might be different (Ewest and Weeks, 2018)? Or, is it the fault of the Filipino employee, who has a different hierarchy of needs that places familism before all else, and that his devotion toward work might be interpreted insufficient? Is it quite natural for an individual to pursue better opportunities and wind up somewhere else?

The turning point at my research was that I came to recognize that the problems we encountered are not cultural, but personal. Every human is driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. So any approach to motivation should take the individual into account. The differences in values come from differences between individuals rather than nationality or culture. It means that the individuals shall first understand their own motivators so that they are capable of understanding the others. At this point, the self-concordant thought becomes extremely important. Once we recognize our motivators, we can then understand what others value and how it reflects on our own preferences. Furthermore, it is evident from the previous cycle that the culturally-determined aspects of motivation do not work well with a team of members from different backgrounds. The organization of the future should be an establishment that can adjust the style of communication based on a company culture that gets the best out of every individual.

For this reason, this cycle took self-concordant thought as a uniting element between individuals of different backgrounds. At first, we changed our approach in how to hire Filipinos. Up until that point, we have been focusing on potential Filipino employees, who already fulfill the Japanese immigration requirements to work or to be deployed to our Japanese headquarters in the future. We changed our recruitment model for those, who would be willing and capable to fulfill the immigration requirements after they have been imposed to our organizational culture, understand the basics, and desire to build a career. By doing so, we looked for a self-concordant thought that the Filipino employee is both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to work for a Japanese organization.

Our first priority was to increase the awareness among the potential employees through meaningful support and guidance to our current way of practice and let them decide if they are willing to join and contribute to our organization despite such intercultural challenges. There is clearly a need of an educational process for employees working for the Japanese establishments, which if not performed, results in an identity and social crisis (Maca, 2019; Miller et.al. 2019). For this reason, we asked our Japanese employees to prepare and present a series of lectures about the Japanese organization and culture. By doing so, we encouraged the opportunity that they experience multiple masculinities and identify their own motivations when communicating with their Filipino colleagues. Finally, we also reflected on the previous cycle in that there should be some sort of reward for the Filipino participants in order to achieve higher employee creativity and satisfaction (Nigusie and Getachew, 2019). Table 11 shows the actions we took and our observations.

Action	Observation
The establishment of a reward-based organizational employment program invited potential employees, who wish to devote their time and efforts to learn about the Japanese organizational culture. We did not necessarily focus on participants whose background already fulfills the conditions to be deployed later to Japan. Instead, we looked for participants with a strong intrinsic motivation to work for a Japanese company and fulfill the requirements of the Japanese immigration later.	The reward-based organizational employment model gained huge popularity and we started with 259 participants. Due to our approach, we were able to meet and connect with participants, who have a strong intrinsic motivation to work for a Japanese company, either to take care of their family or to enhance their careers. It gave us the opportunity not to select from a pool of candidates, but to create our own pool of candidates whom we can continuously educate, observe and evaluate.
A three-months free Japanese language class (360 hours) was offered to participants with the opportunity for an internship later in Japan if they pass the N5 Japanese language proficiency test.	This extrinsic reward opportunity to learn a language for free helped increasing participants` motivation to devote their time and efforts. Out of 259 participants, 35 took the test and 6 passed.
At the same time, a cultural training program was initiated simultaneously to increase participants` awareness about the Japanese culture and how it shapes the organizational context. The contents were prepared and presented by our Japanese colleagues, as well as other Japanese partners and advisers sharing their experiences during the weekly seminars.	The prioritization of cultural training before recruitment had a positive influence on increasing participant awareness. Furthermore, the Q&A sessions challenged our Japanese employees and advisors to adjust their style of communication. There was a very positive feedback from our Japanese team that they have come to learn and recognize many positive issues about the Filipinos.
The establishment of an online classroom system to continue educating, observing, and evaluating our current and future candidates. Later, this classroom was upgraded to an online matchmaking site, as our company decided to obtain a division to become a licensed recruitment agency.	The system had initially focused on training and communicating with participants online due to the Corona outbreak. However, our Japanese partners started showing interest into our manpower pool with high levels of Japanese cultural understanding. We ended up establishing a recruitment agency to supply companies in need.

Table 11: Actions and Observations during AR Cycle 4

4.6 Conclusion

The AR process helped us recognize to shift our attention from culture to person. At first, the current TITP or SSV visa programs (Komine, 2018) required us to focus on a predefined group of participants, who completed their training, passed the Japanese government's skill test, and finally, the Japanese language test. Still, there is a need to look behind the fancy façade of these programs as most of these programs are abused by labor hungry businesses for cheap labor (Sato, 2019). In the literature review chapter, I already discussed how skilled immigrants are forced to contest their dignity of labor, negotiate their experiences of deskilling, and seek strategies to survive the Japanese system (Vilog et.al., 2020). Therefore, my intention from the beginning of the AR was to understand the desires and dreams of the Filipino participants, and improve our practice to successfully employ them. The process helped me identify and confirm that there is different hierarchical need for the Filipino employees. They consider family to be the foundation of social life, as well as familism as a defense against a hostile world and eternal source for food, home, and love. Therefore, they are extremely motivated to work for the family, but not necessarily for a Japanese company, as long as their physical and financial needs are met. Moreover, the AR cycles also pointed out to the fact that most of the Filipino participants are driven by extrinsic rewards and cannot cope with the Japanese organizational citizenship behavior (Negoro, 2016). There is already the Japanese miscommunication problem (Kowner, 2004). One line of action is to involve greater awareness by both sides as to the mutual aspects of cognition, affect and behavior that determine communication in each (Kowner, 2004:142). Therefore, the problem is not cultural, but personal. Moreover, the AR spotlighted the lack of a self-awareness and self-concordant thought on both sides as one way to define the problem and search for a solution.

Furthermore, the AR process touched on a very important aspect. *What motivates us?* Japanese are highly motivated by being included in a group. The traditional lifetime employment system has guaranteed generations of Japanese worker's financial security and a comfortable standard of living (Roehl, 2018). However, the global age started to challenge the Japanese thought that they might be generalizing their thinking by using stereotypes to simplify things. Moreover, the Japanese might not be aware of their own motivations caught in a perpetual-catch up syndrome (Sakakibara, 1993). Therefore, the AR cycles focused on the greater awareness of foreign behavior, combined with real-life experience so that our Japanese participants adjust their style of communication and learn from multiple masculinity experiences. Once they recognized that the problem in miscommunication is not the linguistic, but the on- and off-screen skills, there was a change in motivation to effectively communicate with the Filipinos. Furthermore, it provided a valuable multicultural experience for the Japanese participants and laid the groundwork to establish a recruitment division, explain the potential of foreign skilled workers, and finally, to introduce them later to companies in Japan.

As for the Filipinos, the AR identified similar motivation problems while the process sought for increasing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We developed our reward-based employment model to provide both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards to potential employees who show a strong motivation to work for a Japanese company. The turning point during the process was that we shifted from selecting from a pool of candidates to establishing our own pool of candidates. Although the first group came with no cultural training, the study with the second group prioritized multicultural understanding and organizational citizenship long before recruitment. In that way, we were able to reach out to the right individuals.

Eventually, the AR process involved action, observation, and evaluation of our findings that emerged as each action developed. At no point, were they conclusive and absolute. The participants gathered evidences at each cycle, and the reflection based on the interpretations helped us by creating actionable knowledge at the point of application within a participative and collaborative environment. This chapter summarized in narrative in how such cycles were developed, implemented, observed, and evaluated in search for an improved practice. The next chapter will reflect on the story in the light of both theory and practice.

CHAPTER 5: REFLECTION ON THE STORY IN THE LIGHT OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the story in the light of both the theory and practice. The first section summarizes a theoretical discussion around the issues of Japanese pessimism, corporate paternalism, firm-as-family, and self-concordance. The second section provides a summary and self-reflection on the practitioner outcomes.

5.2 Reflection on the Story in the light of Theory

5.2.1 Japanese pessimism vs. Filipino optimism

Baumeister et.al. (2019) explain about the human pragmatic position that individuals tend to be either optimistic or pessimistic (Baumeister et.al. 2019). The literature review criticized that the Japanese tend to be defensive pessimists (DP) having high past recognition but low future expectations (Shimizu et.al., 2019) as a result of their cultural cultivation.

My negative perception toward pessimism comes from my own experience that the Japanese keep lower expectations to psychologically prepare for the possible negative outcomes. In many occasions, surprisingly, I would be criticized for my optimist approach toward future events as my positive attitude would be considered distracting, harmful and not being serious from a pessimistic view, which believes in virtues such as suffering, high-work load and isolation (Nishimura, 2016). The above literature review also discussed how Japan fits the most to embody pessimism as the culture has had to be rebuilt multiple times over the last century, and the forced democratization and Western values created a general pessimism towards modernist values (Takada-Dill's, 2019). Furthermore, the *shimaguni* premise has affected the history of Japan by preventing extensive contacts with foreigners and establishing a different social mechanism (Kowner, 2004). To that end, I was assuming that the Filipinos, also as an island nation, would show a similar pessimist behavior as their country also had a long history of Spanish and American colonization and had to rebuild their culture multiple times. Therefore, I considered the risk that in a multicultural environment, the unconditional acceptance of pessimism could be a serious issue for the future of any company.

The previous chapter explained that our Japanese employees could not efficiently engage with their Filipino colleagues, which resulted in serious communication and nurturing problems. Kowner (2004) provides an excellent explanation about the Japanese miscommunication problem that "concerns actual differences between Japanese foreigners in thought, language, and non-verbal behavior, but also thrives on false images and misperceptions" (2004:140).

However, he does not mention about the pessimistic thought that drives the Japanese mind. During the AR cycles, there were particular notable Japanese concerns such as "*It is not going well*", "*I cannot explain myself* ", "*We shall prepare to fail*", "*Maybe we did wrong*". These pessimistic thoughts would revolve around the individuals' lack of English as the main reason for miscommunication. It would sound like a typical task-based conversation as if the participants were trying to save a mundane day (Burch, 2017). It would also highlight the attrition of both on- and off-screen social skills driven by negativism and noncompliance to protect a so-called homogenous group harmony.

However, on the contrary, we had one Japanese advisor (Participant MK), who has been working for our organization as a consultant and living in the Philippines for around 37 years. He would present excellent communication skills with the Filipinos, not necessarily in English, but with an optimist and positive approach *willing to communicate* with the Filipinos. He would say, "*Filipino people usually look up to their superior while they would not volunteer information on how they view the Japanese company unless directly informed that we are open to suggestions. We need to engage and empower them so they will be to speak openly with you*". His motivation would be the friendly and humble Filipinos, who kept him in this country more than half of his life. Furthermore, he would present a perfect example of experiencing multiple masculinities (Cook, 2016), in contrary to his Japanese colleagues, who would hesitate to communicate with their Filipino colleagues.

I see optimism a resource of our efficacy to reach an extended version of group harmony (Toyoda, 2019) instead of the practicing a pessimist-driven Japanese collectivism. Although I discuss pessimism as a negative aspect for the lack of intensive communication among our Japanese and Filipino employees, there are scholars arguing pessimism as a productive resource for developing world views and forms of scholarly action, and that we shall overcome its characterization as negative or fatalistic (Shimuzu et.al., 2016; Bunka et.al, 2019, Shimuzu et.al, 2019; Stevens, 2020). I do not agree with these arguments as the AR showed that the Japanese DP behavior cannot maintain a sustainable group harmony with the Filipinos. For example, Toyama (2016) presents an interesting study conducted with hundreds of Japanese children in the 4th to 6th grades of an elementary school, suggesting that optimism and pessimism have independent roles with different coping strategies. He argues that "optimists tended to take an approach type of coping strategy to deal with stressful events and, as a result, experience beneficial positive school adjustment benefits, whereas pessimists tend to use an avoidance type of coping strategy to deal with stressful events and, as a result, experience psychological distress" (Toyama, 2016:317). Such a psychological distress was present during all AR cycles suggesting that the pessimist-style avoidance does not turn into an advantage for our organization as long as we do not transform into an approach type of coping strategy.

Furthermore, the AR cycles showed that our Filipino employees were unjustified optimists (UO). Shimizu et.al., (2019) describe UOs having a low past recognition but extremely high future expectations although the reader might have expected them also as being a DP, or a realistic pessimist (RP), due to low future expectations as a result of their social and economic structures at home. They principally present the complete opposite character when compared to Japanese, as resilient, jovial, affable and forward-looking people, even in the face of most horrible economic conditions and disasters. Participant MK would say "*these are precious optimist attributes, which makes it more fun in the Philippines. Do you consider yourself having fun in Japan?*"

At this point, I see two options to combine these groups within our organizational context. As a first option, we could combine Japanese DPs with Filipino RPs (who are low in number but still present in our AR cycles). They both have defensively low expectations and are likelier to achieve or even exceed their expectations (Norem, 2001). However, the literature already suggests that the combination of pessimistic individuals does not turn into hot groups and accommodate the social and psychological needs. Even the strongest optimist turns into a pessimist by contesting their dignity of labor, negotiate their experiences of deskilling and seek strategies to survive the pessimist Japanese system (Vilog et.al, 2020). Therefore, I chose the second option to combine Japanese DPs with Filipino UOs so that it turns into the clash of pragmatic prospects. This is because I see the UO character of our Filipino employees as a huge opportunity to understand how business is done in the Philippines and how we shall improve our organizational practice. The literature review already discussed that there are similarities in how Japan and Philippines have rebuilt their cultures throughout their history. Although I would have assumed to see a pessimistic behavior on both sides, the AR cycles suggested that the Filipino tends to self-actualize at any means, while the Japanese tend to self-depreciate at all times. These are two complete different behaviors coming from two isolated Asian island nations. One might argue that the Philippines was colonized much longer than Japan suggesting that they had more opportunities to live and communicate with foreigners. However, on the other hand, the American forced opening of Japan did not lead to a shift in the attitudes of Japanese held toward foreigner, but on the contrary it intensified fear of them (Kowner, 2004). The culture shuns overt displays of emotion, recognizes suffering, and isolation as virtues, and requires behaving in a modest lower-status. Such a socially imposed archetype of a Japanese citizen turns into a distress turns into *ichiritsu ichiyou ni negatibu*- that the Japanese people are *uniformly or perpetually negative.* On the other hand, the Filipinos were *uniformly positive*. This term should not be confused with the theory of positivism that knowledge regarding on matters of fact is based on positive data and experience (Green, 2019). It simply means to be an optimist person with a positive prospection toward the future.

For example, during the roundtable discussions, when I asked Filipino participants how they can make a living with only around 4,000PHP ($100) per month, one participant would say "*if I don't have the money, I would go to my friend's place and we will sing Karaoke all night and forget about it*" while another participant would say "*I believe that every morning is a new beginning of life and there are lots of positive surprises, which could change my unfortunate life*". One other participant said "*I have 5 kids at the age of 28 and my boyfriend left me. My kids are the reason why I need to have a positive image about future and I learned to enjoy every second of it without feeling miserable about myself*". On the other hand, the possibility to work for a Japanese company would further fuel their optimism such as *"So many people say, living in Japan is hard for a foreigner. I would work at a factory… I would do laundry... I can go walk your dog… but still can make a decent living"*. I am sure that the reader would imagine how my Japanese colleague would always respond to a similar question with a negative prospection that something can go wrong, and it will.

Therefore, I believe that the Filipino optimism is the most important aspect that should be considered as a precious gift from our Filipino employees. It should be our responsibility to feed the optimistic thought so it never runs dry. The optimist Filipino is a chance for the pessimist Japanese to experience multiple masculinities by understanding his/her motivations and search for their own. Therefore, it is the management's responsibility to create the right work environment to search for a self-concordant thought so that each employee could explore his/her authentic self so that we can overcome cultural barriers and establish neo-cultural relationships. If we cling to pessimism, it would only lead to a feeling of being fatigued from the effort of considering and respecting the reactions of others (Shimizu et.al., 2018). Although the Japanese society values negative self-esteem as modesty; my question is whether one's lack of self-respect is completely against the Confucian values as well and thus will not result in favorable impressions even in the East Asia (Yamaguchi et.al., 2019).

Finally, the AR cycles made us aware that the pessimistic thought puts a lot of unnecessary pressure on both our management and employees. Therefore, if we want to improve our organizational practice to become a more foreigner-friendly work environment, we should first start by rethinking about our pessimism and search for opportunities to gradually shift into an optimistic organization. That is the only way to cope with the challenges of the global markets. For this reason, we need to reevaluate our corporate paternalism that gives birth to a pessimistic thought, as explained in the next section.

5.2.2 Corporate Paternalism

The definition of *paternalism* according to the Cambridge Dictionary (2020) is that the "thinking or behavior by people in authority that results in them making decisions for other people that, although they maybe those people's advantage, prevent them from taking responsibility for their own lives". On the other hand, corporate paternalism is the employment system and labor-management model with both employers` priorities for low labor turnover and the affirmation of managerial authority and labor's demands for employment security and respect as full members of the firm (Tsutsui, 2019). The key features are lifetime employment, seniority pay, promotion system, and the subordination of the labor unions as a strategy to maintain harmony (Ericsson, 2008).

The Japanese corporate paternalism was regarded as the most vital element for the success of Japanese economy that abandoned labor mobility in return for a lifetime employment opportunity (Henry, 1988). The average Japanese company would look to hire a "generalist" with no work experience that fits the company's culture (Donze and Smith, 2018) so that the authority can nurture them for their own purpose. The literature review criticized this model through simple narratives of cultural determinism, slavish imitation and inevitable convergence (Gordon, 2018; Watanabe, 2018), as well as our organization having a similar leader-follower relationship, which is based on a collectivist idea and in search of communal goals that turn into a paternalistic behavior (Butar et.al, 2019). For this reason, the AR cycles challenged to disaggregate the monolithic conceptions of my thoughts by moving beyond persistent stereotypes and expedient assumptions. The purpose was to modify and improve our managerial practice using a landscape of disruptive market change, demographic shifts, and volatile political winds both in Japan and the Philippines, as Tsutsui (2019) suggests. Therefore, I planned actions that would challenge our classic corporate paternalism so that we can observe, evaluate, and redesign new actions in an era where Japanese companies are pressured to reexamine their lifetime employment model (Rothacher, 2019).

In the previous chapter, I summarized how we failed to maintain Filipino employee loyalty and engagement. Our new employees would not show up at their client appointments, or disappear from the job without any notice, which is a violation of what is usually considered as a Japanese employee behavior of company paternalism. At first, we considered this matter as a difference between Catholic and Confucian familism with different hierarchical needs. There is a Filipino familism with strong family ties characterized by the existence of a traditional family solidarity. On the other hand, the Japanese Confucian familism, to some degree, has been utilized by governmental and economic powers to take advantage of individuals` tendency to emotionalism and security, and restrain personal thoughts and freedom in the name of corporate family interest.

The experience with Filipino employees urged us to reflect on our current practice. There are broad shifts in the Japanese society that threatens to break such prejudicial bonds that have tied people together, and held companies together for millennia. At this point, what I see as an eminent issue is that the increasing globalized economic rationalist environment requires us to shift from an earlier corporate paternalism. The increasing number of people living alone, nuclear households, and divorce rates in Japan shows a shift toward greater individualism as a social progress (Ogihara, 2018). Yet individualism remains at the most fundamental level demographically and socially unstable in Japan. For example, Japan would question the increasing number of freeters as an unstable form of a paternalistic employment (Uno and O'Day, 2020), yet it would not self-reflect on the fact that there are difficulties to survive in the workplaces of contemporary Japan (Gordon, 2018).

Furthermore, I see one problem of *indebtedness*. A lot of my Japanese colleagues and friends would express their indebtedness to their organizations for all they have done. After all, the company has provided them with a lifetime employment. However, the Japanese companies today, with their paternalistic employment practices fading out and gradually shifting to more global standards of employment, demonstrate grace toward their Japanese employees by hiring them on the lowest-salary scheme possible without providing any benefits they did for their lifetime employees. What would happen with foreign workers? In an era of graying population, Yoshida (2021) presents a study how the TITP trainees are inserted into the restructured Japanese labor market, and how the state and employer manage the silent workers by using paternalistic labor management and *on* (grace) ideology of indebtedness. This discussion is not limited to migrant workers, but also to Japanese silent workers that the paternalistic labor management forces to accept employer practices without voicing their rights (2021:85). The term TITP stands for Technical Intern Training Program, while the term "intern trainee" gives the Japanese employer the opportunity to infantilize and look down on an Asian worker, and treats them as second-class citizens with no opportunities to have the same benefits of a Japanese worker (Morita, 2017; Komine, 2018). Therefore, I see programs like TITP as another form of paternalism offering no long-term solution for a graying population. I argue that the traditional Japanese corporate paternalistic behavior cannot provide a solution to combine both the domestic and overseas sectors into one organic sector and work out an equal management strategy for the multi-nationalization of personnel. Unless our material health can successfully be turned into a sense of organizational identity and mental well-being on a multi-cultural level, the Japanese organizations will find themselves in a perpetual catch-up syndrome (Sakakibara, 1993). Therefore, in the next section, I wish to search for a theoretical perspective to further reflect on our current practice that has reinvented the institutions of capitalism, in particular for deploying the distinctive institutions and ideology of "firm-as-family" as a corporate paternalism (Samuels, 2019).

5.2.3 Redefinition of the firm-as-family concept

The firm-as-family is another patriarchal rhetoric emphasizing that the Japanese management, compared to Western countries, is more human because everyone is counted as the member of one family. Ericsson (2008) explains such a rhetoric "focused on a family united with strong bonds of trust and love, a family in harmony that the history has created, something that already was shaped in ancient times, something that one did not, like in the Western countries, need to invent (2008:34).

The Japanese corporate paternalism is a reciprocity ideology that there is a social contract between the employer and employee, who will work hard for the company to repay their indebtedness or debt of gratitude (Yoshida, 2021). The debt, as emphasized by the management, is so enormous that one should sacrifice his entire life for the company (Motozawa, 2019). It again takes advantage from a Japanese individual's tendency to emotionalism to strengthen his loyalty to the organization by referring to nationalistic ideologies or familism that was presumably shaped in the past, which were never present in Western societies, and therefore cannot be understood. These are very dangerous ideologies today when Japan needs foreign workers to sustain its manufacturing capabilities. When Japan first opened its borders to skilled workers in 1990 and allowed foreigners with Japanese ancestry to work in Japan, the native community never accepted Brazilian, Peruvian or even Filipino returnees (*kikokushijo*) to be ethnically Japanese. My personal experience with kikokushijo was that they do not develop a transnational identity, but feel more associated with their home country that reduces their attachment to Japan. It is evident that the current Japanese paternalism cannot even accommodate kikokushijo as a member of so-called firm-as-family. Therefore, I doubt the sustainability of the current firm-as-family practice in an era that Japanese population is graying and the necessity for foreign workers is increasing. In the literature review, I already explained that the Japanese companies lost the understanding and trust of their employees as many neo-liberal reforms came without recognizing the efforts and abilities of their own workers (Gagne, 2017). The Japan-specific corporate family concept is continuously evaporating during the prolonged economic crisis as employers started to hire less full-time employees or kept them on a low payment scheme (Rothacher, 2019). It leaves behind a confused and pessimist DP young generation without any self-trust to start their own family, which may also be the reason of increasing single households and a decreasing population. Hence, the ones who were able to find a full- or part-time job have to deal with the traditional assumptions of a firm-as-family collectivism, such as a strong hierarchy, organizational silence, and giving up personal freedom for the company's welfare. As most freeters may not wish to start from the bottom of the hierarchy and accept negativism and noncompliance necessary for their personal development (Ujie, 1997), it may explain why there is a lack of manpower in certain occupations that require hard physical work with abeyance to hierarchy, but with a low payment, such as healthcare, manufacturing, agriculture and hospitality sectors.

Furthermore, the necessity to employ foreign migrant workers also contradicts the understanding of paternalistic labor management in Japan. If the firm-as-family concept fosters the idea of collectivism and to deal with problems in a family-like manner, it shall be rescued from the cultural relativists, who rely on the power of uniqueness, homogeneity, hierarchy, and a pessimist follower's psychology. The previous sections already discussed that there is a strong familism among our Filipino participants. There are quotes in my research diary from our roundtable discussions such as *"I have the determination to work in Japan for the sake of my family*", "*I will fully contribute myself to my organization so that I can earn money for my family*" and "*If I work for a Japanese company, I will do my best for my family and children.*" On the other hand, when the same question was asked to our Japanese participant, he would reply "*an individual first has to have a full-time stable job so that he/she can think about marriage and creating a family*". It points out to a great difference in mentality that the Filipinos are family-centered, while the Japanese are work-centered. In other words, Filipinos would see family-as-firm while the Japanese would see the firm-as-family.

The roundtable discussions suggested that the Filipino optimism is powered by familism. The family is considered to be the foundation of social life and there is a great respect to their elders at all times. For example, the Filipino participants would make fun of the why an old foreign guy should marry a Filipina woman so that he can experience the Filipino warmth and properly taken care, as he would be the member of the family. Such emotions play a great role in an individual's life and should be properly managed. For example, I always considered the Filipino warmth, in contrast to the cold Japanese care workers, as a positive aspect when hiring care givers. Yoshida (2021) argues that my behavior gives a sense of superiority to Filipino workers and convinces them to accept being placed in a lower position in the workplace compared to Japanese workers (2021:75). This completely true statement urges our organization to develop alternative strategies on how we can integrate Filipino familism into the firm-as-family concept. For this reason, I did some further reading in how different practices can compare with the outcomes from our AR cycles and found two articles. The first article was written by Ueda (2019), who discussed the management of ASEAN workers and provided an analysis for the Vietnamese employees working for a Japanese company in Vietnam. He pointed out to differences in vision, attitude to work, communication gap, welfare benefits, wages, overwork, and information leakage, and argued that the Vietnamese workers believed not to be equally treated as Japanese in terms of payment, work mismatch, and lack of welfare benefits (Ueda, 2019:6). The reader would recall that we had similar issues with our Filipino employees by the end of AR Cycle 3. The second article written by Nakamori et.al (2019) discussed how foreign workers characterized by such individualism would be willing to make contributions to a collectivist organization, and argued *collective mato* (an employee's cultural acceptance of collectivism) and *secure climate* (to cultivate the employee's sense of attachment to the company) as the most important factors.

The AR cycles suggested that the Filipino participants had no problems with accepting the *collective mato* as they were desperately willing to contribute into our organization. Therefore, it was necessary to critically review our paternalistic labor management model and if it provides a *secure climate* for our Filipino participants. We came to self-reflect on our initial approach that the part-time employment and success-fee basis was just another unsuccessful corporate pattern to extrinsically reward our new employees without focusing on the intrinsic needs of our Filipino employees. Therefore, from the AR Cycle 4, we came up with a reward model that does not only focus on extrinsic rewards (such as financial rewards); but also on intrinsic rewards such as the possibility of a career enhancement through an internship program in Japan. Thereby, we tried to provide an alternative organizational management model for our new employees who might have lacked any career growth opportunities and experienced exclusionary tendencies if they have worked for another Japanese company. Finally, it highlighted the lack of a self-concordant thought as a challenge to turn into a real firm-as-family, as explained in next section.

5.2.4 Self-Concordance

Since the beginning of my doctoral research, I put a special emphasis on the profits that could come from an increased individualistic behavior. It was based on my negative evaluation of the groupthink psychology (Janis, 1973) that turns our Japanese management into an illusion of invulnerability, tendency to moralize, feeling of unanimity, the pressure to conform, and dismissing of opposing ideas. My original approach was that the possibility for an increased individualistic practice may help our company to move away from a winner's curse (Koch and Penczynski, 2018).

Moreover, I felt caged in a paternalistic organizational environment that emphasizes collectivist over individualistic values with no visible profits in the Filipino market. During our four year presence in the country, we were not able to close a single transaction as our collectivist corporate practice required the confirmation of each and every act with the headquarters. Therefore, I believed that our organization could be only saved by global talents, if we were able to nurture them and give them the opportunity to act in the Filipino market. For this reason, I first allowed our Filipino employees to practice their own individual skills without providing any strict rules or regulations that an average Japanese company would do. They were not placed at the bottom of a hierarchy, but rather powered by the management to go to potential clients and close deals the "Filipino way", except that they had to obey the collective organizational goals and strictly consider the business ethics. As the reader would remember, it turned into chaos and the Filipino employees would not appear at their appointments, make promises on behalf our organization without consulting their colleagues, and sometimes even get paid under the table.

We were surely aware about the high corruption in the Philippines, which may force its individuals to take similar actions. However, there was also another emerging pattern that the Filipino employees would not respect each other, such as one employee gossiping about his colleague "*unappreciative of privileges, give someone a free burger, he will ask for fries; they will compare, complain and be ungrateful. Once you stop giving and they cannot take advantage of you; they will claim you are a bad person*". I had similar experiences, which maybe the lack of power of the authorities to force laws and regulations on individuals, such as how the taxi drivers do not respect the traffic rules, people sing Karaoke outside at late night, jump queues, litter, and sometimes even urinate on busy public streets in front of others.

There was one other cultural ideology that the Filipinos referred as *Filipino time*- that people seldom come to occasions on time. However, does it mean that all Filipinos would be late to their appointments because their culture allows them to do so? During the AR cycles, we recognized that culture might provide a general path for the individuals, but it is the choice of each individual wants to believe and how to act. It is strongly connected to a self-concordant thought that postulates three basic human needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ionescu and Iakop, 2019). Therefore I argue that the problem is not cultural, but personal. The AR cycles showed that Japanese miscommunication had a crucial role in nurturing and communicating with the Filipino employees. On the other hand, the desperation of Filipino employees to make easy money in short-time violated the Japanese corporate spirit as they cannot cope with the Japanese organizational citizenship behavior (Negoro, 2016). Although these might be considered as cultural issues from a general perspective, we came to understand that the main issue is the motivation of each individual, regardless of nationality. The Japanese participants were motivated by being included in a group. However, they acquired their beliefs and knowledge through methods of tenacity and authority (Bartol and Bartol, 2012) that generalizes their thinking by using stereotypes to simplify things. This is the reason I would often hear *"in Japan, it wouldn't happen like this"* or, *"in Japan, we would do it differently"*. As a result, we would do business with foreigners only if the circumstances are favorable from the Japanese point of view. It highlighted the need for greater Japanese awareness of foreign behavior, combined with real-life experience so that our Japanese participants can adjust their style of communication by learning from multiple masculinity experiences (Kowner, 2004). It demonstrated a similar lack of self-concordant thought among our Filipino employees that they are motivated to work for the family, but not necessarily for a Japanese company, as long as their physical and financial needs are met. I argue that one line of action is to involve greater awareness by both sides as to the mutual aspects of cognition, affect, and behavior that determine communication in each (Kowner, 2004). It points out to the lack of a self-awareness and self-concordant thought on both sides as one way to define the problem and search for a solution.

As a self-reflection from the AR cycles, I came to realize that we may not be able to control each individual and their actions. However, we can create the right conditions and environment to increase motivation so that the individual can search for a self-concordant goal that could affect subjective well-being, mediated by optimistic attributions regarding goals successful completion, and optimistic attributions regarding the failure of goals (Goordeva et.al., 2019). Notably, the self-concordant thought turns into a melting pot for all my thoughts and discussions. On one hand, it explains why an average Japanese employee would turn into a DP as the work conditions are set up to benefit the organization through an unjustified paternalism. Such a work environment emphasizes the importance of effort (*ganbaru*) that I criticize because it focuses on the negative aspects of life as a virtue to learn from dramatic and difficult events. It develops into a negative self-concordant thought, which is not accurate as there is a common bias to explain causes of others behavior in terms of internal and dispositional attributes although the person's behavior is constrained by external and situational factors (Dean and Koenig, 2020). On the other hand, the self-concordant thought of a Filipino develops around their basic need of familism. The current political, social and economic conditions in the Philippines do not support an individual's desire to achieve higher levels of intangible needs. Therefore, they see their family as a defense against a hostile world and eternal source for food, home and love. It is their cultural acceptance of collectivism (*collective mato*) in search for reciprocity and social acceptance. Despite the challenges, Filipino people are never hopeless and always capable of managing tensions between making ends meet and sustaining a public idea of living a simple life (Tiu et.al, 2017). However, they lack a secure climate. For this reason, it is extremely important for any Japanese organization to cultivate their sense of attachment so that they share their love for family and, their company.

How can this be achieved? At first, we should depart from a corporate ideological perspective and adjust our style of communication. The first step for managers and employees is to understand our own motivators, so self-concordance becomes extremely important. Since the beginning of my doctoral study, I am very motivated to narrow the gap between Japanese and Filipino employees. The AR cycles helped me understand what our Filipino participants' value and how those values reflect on their preferences and motivation. For example, they ranked high on individuality and femininity. Although I had positive intentions to profit from such values, the AR cycles forced me to self-reflect on my initial approach that hiring Filipinos on a part-time and success-fee basis is another form of corporate paternalism. It does not provide a secure climate for the Filipino employee. Furthermore, the Japanese miscommunication with a negative organizational conditioning of Japanese virtues, such as effort (*gambaru*), or suffer in silence (*gaman*) does not recognize the differences between Filipino individual values and needs.

If we want to improve our practice, we should first depart from such an ideological corporate practice, and look for alternative ways to utilize the skills of each Filipino employee. One line of action is *subjective ease*, but not effort or suffering, which could meditate the relation that people are more likely to successfully accomplish more self-concordant goals because pursuing these goals is perceived as being more effortless and not because more effort was exerted (Werner et.al, 2016). It is one way we can eliminate the miscalculated balance between one's skill and the challenge. Furthermore, we can reach out to a true potential of future Filipino employees, who sincerely wish to work for a Japanese organization not only because of familism, but also because they want to move on to higher levels of intangible needs. In return, our organization should provide a safe climate to eliminate the risks of procrastination, commodification, and devaluation of work (Wright, 2019; Vilog et.al, 2020). It requires our collective organization to rethink about sayings such things as *deru kui wa utareru* (the stake that sticks up gets hammered down) or *yokonarabi* (keeping up with the Joneses) (Yee, 2017), that someone who is different or outspoken should not be viewed as a potential threat to the rest of the group, but an opportunity for the practice of different masculinities.

5.3 Reflection on the Story in the light of Practice

5.3.1 Reflection on the ideal practice

Triandis (2018) provides an interesting example in how our basic assumptions play an important role in understanding the world around us by comparing the case of Japanese biologist Imanashi, who argued that it is not individuals who struggle for survival, as Darwin stated, but species. He explains this phenomenon as "Darwin, as a Westerner used the individual as the obvious unit of analysis while Imanashi as a collectivist, used the species" (2018:5).

In that sense, Japan is like a family with people sharing the same collective language, beliefs, and values. Just like family members, they do not have to define concepts or ideologize their thoughts because people in a high-context culture are expected to sense and understand implicit messages. From a foreigner's perspective, working for a Japanese company is like marrying into a Greek family. The friction with the family relations is unavoidable, and you need to adjust to a new life. Your in-laws would never expect you understand their culture and lifestyle. No matter how hard you try, you would always be considered as an outsider. As a child of an immigrant family in Germany, I have faced injustices such as discrimination and social prejudice all my life. I came to understand that there are challenges for every culture when interacting with the broader civilization due to their geographical, cultural and political boundaries (Taras, Steel and Kirkman, 2016). When an ethnocentric culture is threatened by foreigners, the typical aversive racist walls himself off and turns away, in contrast to the typical dominative racist who turns to aggression (Kowner, 2004). Many Japanese do not hold such attitudes but still feel threatened by intercultural encounters (2004:141).

It is an unavoidable fact that the Japanese family has no choice, but to accept foreigners. The Japanese population is graying and the country relies on foreign skilled workers. However, the mixed attitude to foreigners of admiration, annoyance and apprehension, also referred to in Japan as the “gaijin complex” (Kowner, 2004), has a strong impact on our practice. For over 20 years, I tried to understand the reasoning behind the gaijin complex, and used every opportunity to interact with the Japanese people and help them understand the foreign culture. I established valuable friendships that, vice versa, also helped me understand more about the Japanese culture and finally became naturalized. However, after working some years in different organizations, I came to realize that just because the Japanese collectivism calls for being friendly to everyone; it does not mean that your colleague is your friend. As explained in the previous chapters, most of the Japanese would use the homogenous nature of the country as an excuse for their actions. Although the main goal of most people at work is individual progress, the Japanese work environment calls more for the organizational progress that a foreigner, with individual values and personal egoism, is not expected to fit in. Japanese have a unique understanding of a collective homogenous work environment that does not even accept Japanese returnees or their own Japanese colleagues, who have worked for long years at the company’s overseas branch. For example, I have a Japanese friend, who was sent abroad to a bank’s foreign office for over 10 years, but not accepted when he was back because “he could speak better English than his seniors”. Such presumptions of collectivism and harmony are a major setback for all Japanese organizations who wish to be a part of the global economy.

When beginning the doctoral program, I had similar presumptions that my collectivist colleagues have never considered me as one of their own because of my foreign ancestry. Since the establishment of our Manila branch in February 2016 and my appointment as the director of the new office, I have been struggling under the continuous pressure from our headquarters to provide successful results in a limited time. Although I sincerely appreciated the trust that they put in me, I was aware about the homogenous groupthink idea that could pin the blame on an employee in a lower hierarchy. Yet being a foreigner would make this process much easier. Things started to go wrong once Mr. Rodrigo Duterte took the office as the President of the Philippines in just less than six months after our branch office was established. He cancelled the solar FIT program, and our on-going development process for 200MW projects stopped. As the reader would imagine, our traditional corporate paternalism took over and started to search for a scapegoat. Finally, it turned into a drastic narrative of events that we came very close to closing the Manila office. For this reason, I honestly admit that my initial motivation to write a doctoral thesis was to criticize the Japanese organizational practice so that I can establish a stronger practitioner position at the office and prove to my colleagues that “I am right and they were wrong”.

However, the more I become accustomed to AR, the more I understood about the challenges to become an action researcher. It was about a practitioner individual to apply the general empirical method to himself by being attentive to data, intelligence to understand, making reasonable judgments and be responsible in making interventions (Coghlan, 2019). It required constructing the "social" through social dreaming (Balogh and Getz, 2019). I came to recognize that intelligence comes with the right positioning by first eliminating of any prejudices I have for my work environment and colleagues. Furthermore, if I was aiming to construct the new societal understanding through social dreaming, I should be encouraging others to take the journey together. At this point, the self-recognition of my unique background and experience helped me moving away from negative side of the story, and position myself as a facilitator.

However, how can you suddenly change your negative mindset to positive? For example, I have noisy neighbors. Although they are loud, I completely understand that they may not even be aware that they are causing social disruption. Although the issue could be simply solved by having an actual conversation with my neighbors, the Japanese society disapproves direct confrontation for the sake of societal harmony and asks us to contact the landlord. Once, when I contacted the landlord and complained, the landlord informed the neighbors and contacted me back with an opposite claim that my neighbors were also annoyed that I would call my parents (in Germany) once a week at night. I ended up bearing the guilt as the landlord suggested I should call my parents during daytime (which is late midnight in Germany). Today, my neighbors are louder than before. The reader might consider my experience as a stereotype. However, it is a fact that many landlords would refuse renting apartments to foreigners because they assume that we cannot understand the rules. The foreigner, even naturalized, always bears the guilt. I have various experiences with such gaijin complexes. Therefore, during the AR, my challenge was how to overcome my negative perceptions about the Japanese culture and its influences on our organizational practice. The literature review helped me to gain a very important insight about the paternalistic labor management that I came to recognize that many Japanese workers likewise accept situations in which they cannot voice their rights (Yoshida, 2021). For many Japanese, the need to behave in a modest and lower status like manner without the reciprocation of the other is distressing enough (Kowner, 2004). It helped me to notice that I might not be the only one suffering. I came to develop new approaches that the increase of single households, graying population and manpower shortages in certain sectors are results of the Japanese paternalistic labor management practices emphasizing suffering, isolation, devotion, and learning from negative experiences. Furthermore, I came to recognize that I was surrounded with pessimist co-workers, who have no way out of their cages. At this point, I realized that I was not on the wrong side of the table. In fact, we were all on the same side since the beginning.

Therefore, I started with a demographic fact that the current Japanese contraction trend would trigger a Japanese social transformation from a high- into a low- cultural context (Hall, 1976). My father went as a migrant to Germany in 1964 when a similar social transformation began. Today, around 15% of the German population consists of immigrants or their descendants. Therefore, it would not be surprising that we would see foreign faces carrying Japanese passports in not less than 10-20 years. However, the Japanese society would have difficulties in understanding such a social transformation as there is a negative public opinion toward migrants due to the strong belief in homogeneity. The government would yet continue to take a public position that "it will not adopt an immigration policy", although Japan is advancing a de facto immigration policy (Kamiyoshi, 2020). Furthermore, the Japanese business leaders would still not acknowledge the graying population as an important factor they have to employ foreigners in very near future to meet their manpower demands. Instead, they would make use of governmental programs, such as the TITP or SSV, to mechanically increase low-cost workers and send them back home once their contracts are finished. These are not sustainable practices for the future of a graying Japanese society.

In academics, "reflexivity" is a key issue, and as an AR researcher, I am aware of my own ideological position. In my case, I understand and respect that there are different cultural norms, including the Japanese culture. I understand that I am not in a position to change or transform the current patriarchal model to a neo-liberal system. However, my literature review suggests that there are powerful ethnocentric issues, such as *shimaguni* and *Nihonjinron*, as well as the Japanese miscommunication with foreigners, which may put the future of our company in danger. For this reason, I used AR as a context-specific tool to create a narrative in how we can accommodate foreign workers within a traditional context. Through my actions, I aimed to improve our practices and help the company change some of its basic assumptions. At this point, our Manila office presented the perfect opportunity for an AR as we already had Japanese and Filipino critical friends. The change in renewable energy policies and cancellation of our FIT contracts required us to reorganize with a new business model so that we do not have to shut down the office. The first idea was to shift from governmental to private projects. At this point, it required the establishment of a local sales team to promote our solar business model to potential clients, and our headquarters agreed to hire seven Filipino employees. The process started by inviting 140 participants from the PCIST, who had both the technical and practical skills for promoting solar systems. The first cycle aimed to understand the dreams, desires and emotions of our potential workforce as part of my own epistemology to extract the tacit knowledge from our potential employees in search for our own distinctive ontology. As the facilitator, I let the optimist Filipino and pessimist Japanese clash with each other so that they practice multiple masculinities, critically reflect on those intercultural experiences and search for their own ontology.

When one lands at the Manila airport, there is a billboard by the end of runway saying: “it is more fun in the Philippines”. You will fall in love with the people and the dynamic cities. The thriving communities are built on a foundation of optimism with its people having an open mind and curious nature. The Filipino people believe that defeat is not their fault. There are unavoidable circumstances, bad luck, or other people caused their suffering. Our company, which is confronted with the challenges of the Filipino market, thinks about misfortune the opposite way. Our pessimistic managers and employees are stressed because our corporate paternalism endorses learning through negative events through effort, suffering and unconditional surrendering. There is an organizational silence to show gratitude to the company and avoid any social punishment. Therefore I believe that the optimistic thinking is critical to success and could help us to be more productive. It is the greatest gift from our Filipino employees to our company.

However, optimism alone does not advocate that people should avoid taking responsibilities for their actions. The AR cycles suggested that the Filipinos have different hierarchical needs that are desperate to make quick money for their family. However, they may choose to pursue the goals that do not serve them well because they are typically unaware of their implicit motivations and potentials. I also argue that there are similar motivational issues for the Japanese, who might also have been caught in a perpetual catch-up syndrome. At this point, I revisit the self-determination theory and suggested that there is a lack of a self-concordant goal selection, which shall be enhanced by intercultural communication, interpersonal contexts and individual variables so that we can promote accurate self-insight and personal autonomy. We understand that the employment of Filipino will enhance our organizational capabilities. However, it is necessary to reach out to the right workforce with the necessary motivation to work for a Japanese company. In return, it should be our organizational priority to establish a work environment that every individual could search for a self-concordant thought. The next section provides a summary towards an improved practice based on our learning and understanding from the AR cycles.

5.3.2 Towards Improved Practice

In light of the matters discussed above, the AR cycles suggested that although the Filipino employees exhibit great characteristics to match with the Japanese organizational context, we should overcome the problem of Japanese miscommunication. On the Japanese side, it requires the adjustment of communication and a greater awareness of foreign behavior combined with real-life experiences, so that we can get over the Gaijin complex. On the Filipino side, we also need an increased awareness about the Japanese distinct communication patterns and organizational practice so that they learn how to attenuate acts perceived to violate the status of their Japanese counterparts (Kowner, 2004).

Moreover, we came to understand that we were initially misguided by the Japanese foreign labor management programs, such as the TITP or SSV, which is another paternalistic ideology to negotiate the unequal treatment and severe working conditions of foreign labor (Yoshida, 2021). Although the AR cycles looked for increased individualistic opportunities rather than the practice of paternalistic techniques, we recognized that most of the Filipino participants do not necessarily have a motivation to work especially for a Japanese company, but for any other company if their financial needs are met. It is a self-concordant problem when individuals are motivated by extrinsic rewards. Therefore, it was a turning point for our organization when we shifted from "choosing from a pool of candidates" to "establishing our own pool of candidates". By doing so, we aimed to reach out to the right workforce, who has a strong intrinsic motivation to work for a Japanese company and willing to devote their time and effort to understand the Japanese organizational practice.

Therefore, at first, we prioritized cultural education over job qualification. The cultural education consisted of learning the Japanese language, and understanding the Japanese customs and behavior. We offered a three-month free Japanese language class together with a cultural program for any participant, who wished to join. We understand that learning the Japanese language is very difficult. To increase the participants' motivation, we additionally offered a three-month internship in Japan as a reward for those who would pass the N5 Japanese Language Proficiency Test. There were no limitations for the participants to join the cultural program if they hold a valid college or TESDA-accredited degree. Our purpose was to offer an intrinsic and extrinsic reward package for the Filipinos, as we do for the Japanese, so that in return we can increase their motivation, and have the right to ask for their time and devotion. We started with around 259 participants, many of them dropped out due to personal reasons and time constraints, and finally 35 participants took the test and six of them passed. They were surprisingly all nurses. Finally, three participants dropped out again because of personal reason. The remaining three participants were sent to Japan to work as a concierge for a VIP Ski lounge resort at Nagano prefecture.

As our cultural training program provided an equal opportunity for all participants, we did not necessarily require participants having specific skills matching our company needs. It came as a surprise that the three finalists were all nurses. Therefore, we started to investigate the health sector for internship opportunities that also has serious labor shortages. We encountered two problems. The first one, logically, was that the Filipino nurses are not legal nurses in Japan until they pass the necessary exams. Tana and Takagi (2018) explain the challenges of Filipino nurses, who need to work as a trainee first and will only become registered nurses in Japan if they pass the language and license exams. These exams were all in Japanese. In 2015, only 55 Filipinos had passed the exams while there were only 138 Filipinos officially qualified as caregivers in all of Japan (2018:317).

Furthermore, Anonuveo et.al (2016) point out another risk that the Filipino nurses could feel deskilled if introduced to a medical facility by engaging menial jobs that are otherwise rendered by non-nurses due to the legal restrictions and linguistic limitations such as distributing tea and meals to patients, dusting, mopping and cleaning toilets. Such a paternalistic behavior urged us to look for an alternative internship opportunity so that our participants could efficiently engage with their work environment, prove their personal capabilities and increase their linguistic abilities. Thereby, we could also observe how they fit into the Japanese work environment and create actionable knowledge to further improve our practice. Finally, we ended up introducing them to a VIP Ski Resort in Nagano prefecture that was looking for bilingual staff to improve their international hospitality to attract more foreign visitors.

The Filipino employees started their internship at the end of December 2019 under a three-month contract. We obtained a one-year working visa for all three employees so that we can foster their feeling of firm-as-family to further increase their motivation. We received weekly feedbacks from both the employer and employees. There were minor issues raised by the employer that our employees would perform quite well, but they would not understand the Japanese organizational citizenship behavior (Negoro, 2016). For example, one complaint was that our employees were welcoming ski resort guests at some temporary tents that were constructed in front of the ski lift entrance. They would put their hands into their pockets while waiting for the guests to arrive. Such a behavior is quite natural as the temperatures would go below -10 degrees Celsius. However, the Japanese employees would keep their hands out of the pockets as it is an inappropriate service manner from the guests' perspective. It has its origins at the *gambaru* complex- the noteworthy continuation of a cultural code of an organizational citizenship behavior by devaluating the self in terms of respect to the other despite continuous social and cultural change (Ben Ari, 2017).

From our employees' perspective, there were minor concerns such as the salary, isolation, and sometimes the miscommunication with their managers. However, it did not turn into a problem as they were properly informed about such issues long before they were employed. We came to understand that the cultural training helped increasing awareness among our Filipino participants so that they could cope with the Japanese behavior. However, something unexpected happened by mid-March that the recruitment agency, which is legally required to be involved in the employment process, informed us that they have offered an English-teaching job to our employees, and they accepted. That was quite a shock for our organization, as we already arranged them another full-time job opportunity in Tokyo. The reason they would choose the English teaching job was that it was paying $400 more than the job in Tokyo. Finally, we let them accept the offer in Kyushu as it seemed the safest area not affected from the Corona outbreak (by the end of March 2020).

Nonetheless, this practical outcome urged us to reconsider our approach toward employing Filipinos and further examine our current way of practice. There are uncontrollable situations that foreign employees, who are engaged in practices in a country with different social, cultural and human management contexts may be bewildered unless the socio-cultural context of such practices is properly understood (Anonuveo et.al., 2016). Although the cultural training had a positive influence in narrowing the communication gap between the Japanese and the Filipinos, we came to understand that we may not be able to control the psychology of our foreign employees unless we come up with a more professional manner to educate, deploy and establish a soft-control on our future employees. We would lose control on our Filipino employees once the recruitment agencies were involved as required by Japan's foreign labor policies. The next section explains how we decided to become a recruitment agency ourselves.

5.3.3 Establishment of a recruitment agency

Pursuant to the laws of the Philippines, all foreign employers who wish to employ Filipino workers are required to work with a licensed Filipino recruitment agency. It also requires the involvement of a Japanese recruitment agency to handle the paperwork, and a Japanese supervising organization (*kumiai*) or a monitoring organization (*tourokushienkikan*) to report the employees` process to the Labor Bureau depending on the type of the employment visa (Menju, 2019; Nadeau, 2020). The process is very complicated and costly.

There are a lot of recruitment agencies in the Japanese market that practice unethical ways to rotate Japanese employees between different companies to increase their commission-based fees. For example, a Japanese recruiter would introduce a licensed pharmacist to a pharmacy and sign him up for six months. The agent would receive 35 percent of the pharmacists` salary as a success fee. The agent would then contact the pharmacy and terminate the pharmacists` employment contract on the third month. He will return to the pharmacy half the fee he received as a penalty and introduce the pharmacists to the next pharmacy. By rotating a pharmacist four times a year, he would earn around $50,000. Such recruiters with a clear lack of ethics and self-awareness present a great risk for the Japanese graying population. We see pop up businesses to take advantage of fleeting opportunities with a paternalistic approach to introduce foreign migrants as disposable cheap workers for labor-hungry businesses to earn more money. They do the same mistake we made during the beginning of the AR cycles that they contact Filipino recruiters to access their existing pool of candidates. However, they do not consider the lack of a self-concordant thought among these potential employees that have different characters, feelings and desires. Moreover, they rely on the *on* (grace) ideology (Yoshida, 2021) to oppress and inject fear on Filipino employees.

Our experience with the interns showed that once the recruitment agencies are involved, there is a risk that we might gradually lose control of our foreign employees. We understand that we cannot change the foreign labor laws. However, we came to recognize that both the recruitment and supervising agencies are essential for a sustainable employment process. Their improper involvement could jeopardize the future of any organization that depends on foreign labor.

For this reason, we established a new company in Tokyo and received our own licenses as both a recruiter (June 2020) and supporting organization (September 2020). By doing so, we eliminated the risk that may come from the involvement of another recruiter. *We also transformed from a business that looks for foreign employees to a business that provides employees*. The AR cycles helped us to develop a business strategy that the cultural education is the most essential element before hiring a foreign employee. As the Corona Virus outbreak limited the opportunities for face-to-face personal interactions, we first established an online matchmaking app that allowed employees to register their personal information. It went online in December 2020. We used the same online app to continue to improve the cultural training program with our registered participants. The registration and education for the employee was free of charge. We later integrated another module that allowed both employers and agents to post jobs so that the system can match them with potential employees that went online in March 2021. As the facilitator of the complete process, we looked from learning opportunities from such interactions and increase awareness among all parties involved. We also started providing online seminars and articles for employers to increase their awareness about foreign employees. The registration and education for employers was also free of charge. In that way, we looked for the most ethical way to match employers with employees, and to narrow the gap of miscommunication. Finally, we started with the recruitment process of 20 Filipino employees for a poultry farm in Kagoshima under the SSV program. The factory owner sincerely welcomed our proposal that the Filipino employees should receive the same wage and social rights that a Japanese worker has. It proves that even the most traditional Japanese businesses do not necessarily wish to rely on paternalistic techniques anymore. It is essential that the employer has a greater awareness about the advantages that comes with a foreign employee as they certainly wish to avoid uncertainty. Everybody understands that a foreigner would never be able to speak Japanese the same way native Japanese can. It is important that we narrow the gap of between the thoughts of different individuals. Once Japan can depart from a nationalistic and homogenous idea, they can sincerely profit from the migrant workers. Eventually, the prioritization of our cultural training program helps the Filipinos to understand the Japanese culture and successfully cope with its challenges. Finally, the recognition of a self-concordant thought becomes the essential element bounding the Japanese and Filipinos individuals for a Japanese sustainable future.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1. The Context

The traditional Japanese company is of wholistic concern (Ouichi, 1981). My research provides an extensive summary about the Japanese organizational culture and suggests improving the current practice in an era when Japan is transforming from a high- into a low-context culture (Hall, 1976). We are proceeding toward multiculturalism as a result of degrowth (Heinrich and Ohara, 2019). The traditional Japanese company has a patriarchal management system of hiring and educating new employees still in a very traditionally fashioned and Japan-focused mindset (Cock, 2018). I point out the fact that most of the Japanese companies would prefer to employ a "generalist" (Donze and Smith, 2018) with no work experience so that they could be trained and culturally fit into the company's collectivist culture. However, there are difficulties for Japanese workers to survive in the contemporary Japanese corporate culture (Gordon, 2018). The paternalistic labor management is strongly connected to *on* (grace) ideology of indebtedness that Japanese employees turn into silent workers (Yoshida, 2021). Furthermore, the Japanese collectivism and groupthink acknowledges homogeneity as an essential element for the Japanese success. Therefore, the Japanese company cannot accommodate and provide a clear career development path for a foreign employee (Menezes, 2019). For this reason, I believe that we must reexamine and reform the current organizational practices (Watanabe, 2018).

My workplace problem is that the Japanese patriarchal management faces several challenges when doing business in the Philippines as it does not contribute to improve our performance. However, the departure from it may be the correct course of action (Nakagawa et. al., 2018). It requires to go way beyond cultural comparisons (such as Ashta et.al. 2018; Park and Hong, 2019), or look for supportive arguments to transfer Japanese patriarchal management into other countries (such as Natsuda et.al. 2019). I argue that the Japanese management concept is still built upon traumatic negative memories from the Second World War that encourages *ganbaru* (effort), suffering, high workload, and isolation as virtues. The status quo is strengthened and protected with the notion of an island nation (*shimaguni*), or writings such as *Nihonjinron* to purport Japanese uniqueness (Nitobe, 2019). I further discuss that the Japanese companies may have manipulated the Confucian fundamentals of the Japanese organizational practice (Roehl, 2018) for their own gain so that they can fully control their employees and eliminate their mobility. I am critical of such collectivist culture acknowledgment of situational forces may not be accurate as there is a common bias to explain causes of others behavior in terms of internal and dispositional attributes although the person's behavior is constrained by external and situational factors (Dean and Konig, 2020).

There are various scholars discussing Japanese collectivism as a positive attribute (Rurkkhum, 2017; Beauregard, 2018; Wong et.al, 2018; Lee et.al. 2019). However, I agree on a different perspective that the Japanese collectivist realities have only led to a subservient Japanese pandering to the U.S. and European demands (Sakakibara, 1993). The lack of such awareness is the main cause of the current difficulties and stagnation that Japanese would find themselves in a perpetual-catch up syndrome (Sakakibara, 1993:11). Although Japanese companies may have succeeded in transforming from a traditional capitalistic "*shareholder sovereignty"* into an "*employee sovereignty"*, my thesis criticizes the collectivist culture of groupthink (Janis, 1973) cannot provide alternatives to Japanese multiculturalism (Tarumoto, 2017; Vogt, 2018; Seiger, 2019). There is a Japanese miscommunication that presents a lot of challenges when communicating with foreigners (Kowner, 2004). The Japanese employee would be mostly dysfunctional once they are out of their ethnic-centered and context-specified environments (Fukutomi et.al.m 2018).

Therefore, I use AR as a tool to plan, act, observe and evaluate different actions that may help us depart from a paternalistic behavior and increase our competitiveness in a foreign marketplace. The research is conducted at our overseas offices in Manila by bringing together Japanese and Filipino employees and facilitating the process to experience multiple masculinities (Cook, 2017). My philosophical approach is to first to understand the character, desire, and emotions of the Filipino participants. The questionnaire and roundtable discussions aimed to distinct explicit and tacit knowledge. Although explicit knowledge can be easily communicated, I see the extraction of tacit knowledge (Chandler et.al, 1999) from the Filipino participants as an extremely important aspect to search for our own distinctive ontology. Once we understand what our Filipino participants value, we can than look for alternative actions. For this reason, I first used culture to read and interpret the participants and trade them later with specific actions. I use Hofstede's cultural dimensional theory (2019) and invalided his assumptions that the Japanese and Filipino people are different. In fact, the AR cycles show that the Filipino participants are quite like their Japanese counterparts in terms of cultural constructs. It suggests that cultural values are not static and can change over time (Cai et.al, 2020). Based on our understanding, we then replace cultural dimensions with context-specific actions, observe and evaluate them. The results suggest that the Japanese and Filipinos have different hierarchical needs. It requires involving greater awareness by both sides as to the mutual aspects of cognition, affect and behavior that determine communication in each (Kowner. 2004). I argue that the problems of communication are not between different nationals but between individuals. The Japanese, like shell-less eggs (Nagatani, 2018), are mostly not aware of their own motivators as they are cultivated to fit into a harmonic society without any individualistic attempts to question or change the system. The members of the lower hierarchy only follow what the top-management provides in terms of rules and a manual (Koo; cited in Pilling, 2014:172).

Therefore, I revisited my original argument that the Japanese do not lack in critical thinking but lack the appropriate training, environment, and experience. Their cultural cultivation results in a learned-pessimism and a perpetually negative thought. Eventually, such a pessimist and negative Japanese mindset cannot present multicultural on- and off-screen social skills to communicate with the foreigner. It points out to a lack of a self-awareness and self-concordant thought. At this point, the optimist Filipino presents a great chance to learn from multiple masculinities and explore individual motivations in a multicultural environment. However, there is also a lack of a self-concordant thought among the Filipino participants as their relatedness is evolved around the idea of familism and cannot proceed to higher levels of needs. They see their nuclear family as the most important element in their lives for love, food, and protection. Therefore, their actions are driven by the basic need to take care of their family because of the Filipino culture. It is a great challenge for any Japanese company how to accommodate a Filipino so that they would share their love and affection to their family also with their company. The AR results suggest that the empowered Filipino could misuse the power that they have been vested with, and if confronted, they would avoid taking responsibility for their actions. It suggests that the Filipinos may also pick wrong goals that do not serve them well because they are typically unaware of their implicit motivations and potentials. Therefore, the AR looked for increasing opportunities for a self-concordant goal selection for both parties, enhanced by intercultural communication, interpersonal contexts and individual variables. The results suggested that once we shift from a paternalistic organizational culture to the needs of individual, the problem is not the differences between nationalities, but the differences between participants. These differences can only be narrowed by reflecting on our self-awareness and search for a self-concordant thought.

Although the academia has a critical role to develop knowledge, it sometimes does not satisfy the need of practitioners as there are cultural, motivational, and organizational differences between the two communities (Sexton, 2008). Moreover, my research problem points out to a research gap rather than a knowledge gap. There is already scholar knowledge about the challenges of employing foreigners in a transforming Japanese society (Watanabe, 2018; Henrich and Ogara, 2019; Menezes, 2019). However, there is a gap between the discovery of knowledge relevant to practice and the applied research to put that information into practice. The AR aimed to fill such a research gap by starting with one simple question- how can we improve?

The following section provides a list of principles in form of actionable knowledge with the purpose of fusing expectations, contributions, and outputs of both the academia and the practitioners. I further reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of my study, limitations, and my considerations for future research.

6.2 The Principles

Following is a list of principles that summarizes the actionable knowledge that could be relevant to improving the Japanese organizational practice and employing Filipinos.

Principle 1) The Filipinos are one of the largest diasporas in the world with an estimated 10 million working abroad, which could be the best fit for Japanese companies hit by a shrinking population. My personal experience with the Filipinos is that they are optimist, kind and hard-working individuals. They can easily adapt into any cultural context, such as in the U.S., Europe, and Middle East instead of establishing their own closed communities like other dominant migrant groups in Japan such as the China Town or Korean Town.

Many Filipinos are successfully finding work abroad as they possess both the technical and linguistic (English) skills. However, these are not advantages for the Japanese market as the Filipinos must pass both technical and linguistic exams in Japanese. Moreover, there is a subconscious assessment from the Japanese that a foreigner cannot be truly accepted into the society as one must have the (Japanese) blood, speak the Japanese language, and be from Japan (Vitali, 2018). Furthermore, there is a strong public opposition to immigration that forces the Japanese government to play the honne/tatemae card that “they would not adopt an immigration policy” (Miyajima, 2019). Eventually, it turns out to be an important discussion about how to build a better system to employ foreigners.

The AR cycles showed that the Filipinos have extremely positive characteristics toward work. My results invalidate Hofstede`s (2019) cultural dimension theory that the Filipinos and Japanese are different. In fact, they show quite the similar attributes when it comes to work. I argue that “culture” should not be treated as a separating identity because such values are not static and are changing over time (Cai et.al, 2020) as a counterargument to what other cultural dimensions theorists claim (Meyer, 2016; Milly, 2018; Strausz, 2018, Hofstede, 2019; Mazumi, 2019).

Principle 2) The treatment of culture as a separate identity is what Japan has done wrong to create an image associating *shimaguni* (island nation) with cultural superiority and uniqueness (Ishida, 2018). My thesis criticizes the Japanese identity which is based on a myth of homogeneity touted as an underlying cause of its economic miracle (Tsutsui, 2018). Although Japan’s distinct and fascinating culture might leave a lasting impression on the foreigners, the Japanese socio-legal system cannot incorporate foreign thinking into the Japanese logic that treats non-Japanese as second-class citizens (Tanno, 2010; Tian, 2018; Seiger, 2019). It tends to look up to the West as a successful practice while it looks down on the East, i.e. the Philippines, although it does not necessarily regard them as inferior but judge them in terms of perceived achievement (Hioks, 2019).

As a result, the Japanese immigration programs results in poor government policymaking, inadequate oversight, supervision, and isolation of migrant workers from their local communities with a heavy work schedule (Ratnayake and De Silva, 2017). It is designed to provide low-cost workers for labor-hungry businesses. The same Japanese paternalistic labor management system places Filipino workers in the bottom of status hierarchies and they work for minimum wages or less (Yoshida, 2021). I argue that such an approach is not a sustainable solution for a graying population. Sakakibara (1993) discusses the fact that the Japanese organizational system should be more understood and appreciated, primarily by the Japanese themselves. I agree with his argument that the lack of awareness is the main cause of present difficulties and stagnation that the Japanese would find themselves in a perpetual-catch up syndrome (1993:11). There are a lot of emotions involved. My facilitator role during the AR urged the need of understanding the high levels of "emotions" on both sides. For a sustainable progress, it requires the ability to manage everyone's feelings and regulate one's expression of emotion to ensure appropriate personal interaction between the Japanese and Filipinos. Otherwise, we cannot address our labor shortage by just mechanically increasing the number of low-cost Asian workers without any career growth opportunities and exclusionary tendencies (Morita, 2017).

Principle 3) Japanese companies are driven with a pessimistic thought, which believes in virtues such as suffering, high-workload, and isolation (Nishimura, 2016). Moreover, many scholars discuss pessimism to be a productive resource for developing world views, forms of scholarly action and group harmony (Shimuzu et.al., 2016; Bunka et.al., 2019; Stevens, 2020).

However, I argue that Japanese companies with a high DP level need to be mindful about the positive potential of optimistic thoughts and adopt a more-individual oriented approach if they seek to conduct business in a country, where people do not prefer authoritarian managers and driven by the conditioning effort (*gambaru*). My research reveals a great amount of optimism that comes with our Filipino employees. I believe that their optimism could be the greatest contribution to our organization that is driven by a perpetually negative thought towards future events. I came to criticize the pessimistic and paternalistic environment, which has not comprehensively articulated attributes and abilities expected from both the manager and employee. Eventually, the AR cycles show that the pessimist Japanese employee cannot efficiently communicate with the Filipino. Although the Japanese miscommunication is considered to be a cultural issue (Kowner, 2004), I believe that differences in values and attitude appear to come from differences between individuals rather than nationality. Therefore, the optimist Filipino is a chance for the pessimist Japanese to experience multiple masculinities in a multicultural context to search for his own values and motivation.

Principle 4) Butar et.al (2019) argues that leadership is positively related to follower citizenship behavior through a pervasive cultural feature in the Southeast Asian region- that is called paternalism. Tsutsui (1997, 2019) explains that the distinguishing characteristics of Japanese paternalistic labor management program as the employer's policy- the provision of welfare facilities by employers, the articulation of familiar corporate ideologies and the use of personal policies that emphasize job security and foster worker loyalty. In return, there is the employee's commitment of hard work and loyalty, and not to switch jobs until they reach their retirement age (Ouichi, 1981; Henry, 1988).

Japan's paternalistic employment system is in transition. Japanese companies have come to reexamine their lifetime employment models by hiring less fulltime employees or keeping them on a low payment scheme (Rothacher, 2019). The number of non-regular employees, workers who fall outside the Japanese full-time employment system, is growing. Japanese companies should be aware that the difficulties to secure adequate staffing will only increase in the years ahead, as Japanese population is graying. The AR cycles showed that the inequality between Japanese regular employees and Filipino non-regular employees has sharply polarized participants. Moreover, the Japanese miscommunication (Kowner, 2004) presents further challenges in addressing various conflicts and providing solutions for them. We could not prevent Filipino employees from complaining. It is an inevitable result that the millennial generation would bring their opinions and ideas to the workplace and the management should carefully look for a delicate balance between the opposites.

Yoshida (2021) argues how the Japanese state and employer used paternalistic techniques and the *on* ideology of indebtedness to manage "silent workers". However, the current rise of freeters in the Japanese society also suggests the departure from a traditional silent ideology that there is a Japanese desire for more time and flexibility, and the dissatisfaction with the culture and lifestyle attached to a salaryman. Therefore, it is not fair to place a Filipino in the bottom of a hierarchical status and ask him/her to be a silent worker, which could vitiate the workplace balance. As the lifetime employment guarantee is fading, we need to value high-performing non-regular employees under long-term contracts regardless of their nationality. The AR cycles suggest that the Filipino participants are highly productive when they are empowered. Once they can speak their thoughts, shape their own decisions and feel equally treated, they present positive follower behavior. However, the good behavior on part of the followers may psychologically free leaders to engage in subsequent unethical behavior (Ahmad et.al, 2020) Therefore, I suspect the success of Japanese foreign labor management programs, such as the TITP or SSV, which is another paternalistic attempt to place foreign migrants under managers of labor-hungry businesses in a society which is already transforming.

Principle 5) Ogihara (2017) points out to an important social problem that as the Japanese social values are becoming more individualistic but the collective values remain, the co-existence of both injures interpersonal relationships and wellbeing. He discusses a year later that the Japanese collectivist culture is moving toward greater individualism by investigating the indicators of family structure, such as the increasing number of people living alone, nuclear households, and divorce rates (Ogihara, 2018).

The rise of non-regular employment might be a reason for increasing individualism as there is little or no job security for an individual to establish a family, pay a housing loan, or expect a good pension. Eventually, lower income results with fewer people marrying and having fewer children, which leads to a declining population. The Japanese state and employer should reflect on their unjustified paternalism whether they have left behind a pessimistic young generation with such uncertain and blurred social trajectories (Heinrich and Galan, 2018). It is an unfortunate fact that the older generation, who is enjoying all the profits of a lifetime employment, cannot provide the same regular opportunities for their younger generation. They would look down on them believing that they have rejected the responsibilities of adulthood. At first, it is essential that the older generation reflects back on their own values to understand their real motivators. Many people admire Japanese modesty as a virtue. However, we should ask the question if it is a sustainable self-concordant goal to learn from negative events or *gaman-* suffer in silence. At this point, I argue that the Japanese self-awareness has developed like a *shell-less egg* (Nagatani, 2018) with no hard shell that rigidly separates topics or individuals because of Neo-Confucian collectivism and groupthink (Forsyth, 2019). The positive aspects are the capabilities of adaption, patience, endurance and self-control. However, the negative aspect is that it develops into an incomplete self-concordant thought that expects every member of the group to accept the predefined rules of the society. Once the society starts to transform, the incomplete individual cannot understand what others value and how it reflects their preferences. Moreover, when the graying population requires accepting more migrants, the Japanese incomplete self becomes completely dysfunctional or looks back to old paternalistic methods. Therefore, my research suggests that there are no cultural differences- but rather individual. The Japanese managers should prioritize the establishment of a work environment where everyone can seek a self-concordant goal (Fabian, 2019). By doing so, they should first reflect on their own self-awareness and try to understand the thoughts, desires, and emotions of the foreigners rather than hiding behind stereotype examples. On the other hand, in case of the Filipinos, they should also look for similar self-concordant goals rather than hiding behind their traditional familism. The purpose for all should be to poses an ideal-self and ought-self as a goal and living in accordance with this aspiration to foster open-mindedness and creativity so that we can become the next generation firm-as-family.

The AR results show that we may not be able to control each individual and their actions. It is not fair to expect an already established self-concordant goal from every participant. However, we can try creating the right work environment to increase motivation so that the individual can search for a self-concordant goal that could affect subjective well-being, mediated by optimistic attributions regarding goals successful completion and optimistic attributions regarding the failure of goals (Goordeva et.al., 2019). For this reason, my research suggests the practice of subjective ease (Werner et.al, 2016) rather than focusing on our traditional practice of effort (*gambaru*). Only by doing so can depart from focusing on the negative aspects of life as a chance to learn from dramatic and difficult events as it turns into a negative self-concordant thought. Fostered by optimism, it shall be the challenge for both the Japanese and Filipino participants to posit a self-concordant goal.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

The empirical results reported herein should be considered in light of some limitations in terms of study design, data collection, analysis, and study results (Ross and Zaidi, 2019). The first limitation comes from the study design that the participants were selected from the PCIST with a specific educational background to narrow the focus of study. The sample bias might not reflect the general population concerned. The second issue is the data collection. During the roundtable discussions, the participants may have provided answers they believe are favorable to the researcher, or hided their true intentions and feelings when they are knowingly being observed. Furthermore, the sudden spread of the Corona virus may have influenced my ability to gain access to the real thoughts of the participants as some of the weekly meetings had to be conducted online rather than face-to-face. Another limitation might come from the data analysis, which uses convenience sampling rather than employing probability sampling from the target population. Furthermore, the responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using the Hofstede (2019) metrics so that the results would be distributed between 0 and 100 and compared with Hofstede's original findings. Culture does not exist, nor values or dimensions. For my work, culture is a way to read and interpret the participants. My original approach might have limited the collection and analysis of data, although I have tried to overcome this problem through intensive discussions with both the Japanese and Filipino participants to extract the tacit knowledge.

Finally, there might be also some limitations rooted in the internal and external validity of the results that I evaluate with an alternative terminology of truth value, consistency, neutrality and applicability (Noble and Smith, 2015). In terms of truth value, I depart from a research question about how we can adapt the organization to better employ Filipino employees. My personal experiences and viewpoints might have resulted in methodological bias, although I believe that I have clearly and accurately presented participants` perspectives.

The next issue is about consistency that another researcher should be able to arrive at similar findings although consideration should be given to whether findings can be applied to other contexts, settings and groups (Noble and Smith, 2015:3). In order to assure trustworthiness of the data, I presented a narrative of a continuous record keeping and rich verbatim descriptions of participants` accounts to seek similarities and differences between the Japanese and the Filipinos to ensure that each one is accurately presented. Finally, my philosophical position to facilitate the prolonged engagement between participants looked for the neutrality of the findings that my own experiences and perspectives do not skew the interpretation of what the participants said to fit a certain narrative.

6.4 Future Research

Japan is at the edge of a huge social transformation as the population is shrinking. Japanese companies are trying to adjust to such demographic changes by hiring fewer lifetime employees, diversifying their products, and reevaluating their manufacturing processes. On the other hand, the government seeks for alternative solutions to increase fertility rates through programs, support young couples in raising children, and encourage retired elderly people and women to play more active roles in the labor force. Such governmental incentives looking for impossible increases in fertility rates or encouraging old people to go back to work does not provide any sustainable solutions for the future of the country. We shall not sweep the fact under the carpet that Japan has entered an inevitable social transformation process from a high- into a low-context culture. Therefore, I argue in my thesis that there should a shift from such ethnocentric-thoughts, or at least start sincerely considering the fact that Japan has no choice, but to accept high numbers of migrants into the country if they wish to keep their manufacturing strengths.

At first, the future research shall consider in a macro-scale how the Japanese negative perception toward immigration could be changed. The academia shall focus on the social contexts of other migrant countries, as well as the Japanese misperceptions in foreign labor policy making and management. The purpose should be to provide a straightforward immigration policy for migrant workers and increase awareness among the Japanese public. Next, the researchers should look more into the problem of Japanese miscommunication. This problem cannot be solved by approaching a single factor, such as the lack of English or the modesty of Japanese people. Kowner (2004) argues that such an account contains a historical perspective starting from the Edo era (1600-1668) based on fear toward foreigners. There should be further studies to increase greater awareness of foreign behavior among the Japanese. My research argues that the problem is not cultural, but it is individual. It requires Japanese scholars to focus on the human elements of the problem rather than comparing it to a cultural perspective to avoid bias.

One other problem with the Japanese academia is that they strictly separate research from practice. Therefore, the future research shall look for more collaborative approaches between the Japanese academia and practice to provide critical arguments on the homogenous and paternalistic behavior of the society and its organizations. My research has focused on the practice of a small-scale company. Therefore, there is further research necessary to look for similar (or different) patterns at mid- and big-scale companies, or multinational Japanese organizations to confirm the validity of my arguments. Moreover, my sample size makes it difficult to determine if the outcomes are true findings in a specific context. For this reason, there should be future studies to address the employment of foreigners in a different context, location, culture, and among different sizes and types of organizations considering different patterns, such as if being the first foreigner to work there together with the organizational role and seniority.

Finally, the social scientists should revisit the Neo-Confucian philosophy of the Japanese people and critically reflect on the fact on if the state and employers have misused these virtues. There should be more scholar studies analyzing the pessimistic behavior of the Japanese people and its influences on the society, as well as discussions for an increased individuality within a collective society for the reestablishment of a self-concordant thought.

6.5 A final self-reflection on the Action Research

AR is an interactive inquiry process through one's actions and the effects of these actions to solve problems and enact change (Coghlan, 2019). Change is a complex process. My research provides a detailed analysis of the Japanese traditional organizational practice and discusses that such collective organizations struggle to adapt to change. Many companies rely on practices through apprenticeship with vague job responsibilities shared among many employees. As a result, there is neither a leader nor a follower to emerge and trigger change programs as the collectivist culture discourages individualistic behavior that could be perceived as negatively affecting someone else.

Therefore, my purpose is not to change the practice of our company. Instead, I look to find immediate solutions to improve our organizational practice to adapt the organization to better integrate Filipino employees at our overseas offices in Manila. It starts with a change story based on my four empirical questions. *What do the Filipinos want? How does it compare with our current practice? What improvement can we make? What happened?* I invite my critical friends (Mc Ateer, 2017) to join improving our practice so that their interactions could turn into role models for leaders and employees of the organization to reconsider some of its basic assumptions rooted in the Japanese corporate value system. I engage in improving our practice not by fighting a collectivism-oriented culture but by focusing greater effort on the individuals.

Reflexivity is a key issue in AR that requires the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research and how those may influence the outcomes (Coghlan, 2019). In the AR process, I understand that I am both the subject and object of the research. I should adapt into the proposed action through critical reflection and self-study so that I can encourage others to participate also. It requires me to eliminate my negative perceptions about the workplace problem and take a neutral position. However, this is an enormous challenge for a foreigner with experiences of social marginalization, and sometimes even discrimination in the Japanese society. I would like to admit that I had a personal bias before starting the research to find proof that the Japanese system was wrong. I had an extreme negative image about the Japanese collectivity with a myth of homogeneity and the personal experience that it does not tolerate foreigners entering their society. Hence, the AR required a neutral stance and the ability to judge without bias (Ong, 2019). It urged me to reflect on my first years in Japan about how my multicultural background helped battling stereotypes. I might have come to judge people later by their group membership rather than individualizing them by thinking about what goes on in their individual mind. Once I left my vulnerability behind and became self-aware after understanding my strengths and limitations, I undertook the AR with the purpose to orchestrate a shift from our traditional practice to an expanding and self-sustaining wave throughout the organization. I facilitated the process by focusing on the characteristics of individuals, rather than the collective identity so that we can maneuver around misperceptions that end up with miscommunication. It was a perfect fit for my own multicultural background and experiences to facilitate an inquiry process by distinguishing what has been done and what needs to be done (Mc Ateer, 2017). I recognized that there was a research gap rather than a knowledge gap. Although there were numerous discussions about the challenges of employing foreigners (Watanabe, 2018; Henrich and Ogara, 2019; Menezes, 2019), there is clearly a gap between the discovery of knowledge relevant to practice and the applied research to put that information into practice. My research aimed to fill this gap by discovering actionable knowledge relevant to our practice in the Philippines and AR as a method to put that information into practice through action cycles, observe and evaluate them. One weakness of the AR was the necessity to bend the company rules, which are often accompanied by some personal angst as there is a fear of jeopardizing our jobs, damaging the reputation of the company, and creating unwanted precedent (Veiga et.al, 2004). However, it helped us identify important factors, such as corporate paternalism, pessimism and the lack of a self-concordant thought as important barriers to improve our practice. Finally, it prepared the groundwork for many more action cycles to come. If you ask me, did I change the culture of my company? I would say, I helped the company to realize that they have to change some certain practices, and by doing so, the company would gradually shape a different culture.

At the end, there is no culture. There are powerful individuals, waiting to be awakened…

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Version 1.0

QUESTIONNAIRE

in conjunction with the academic study of

INCREASING AWARENESS AMONG THE FILIPINO/FILIPINA TECHNICAL SPECIALISTS ABOUT THE JAPANESE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

1. Please indicate day and place of event
   Date: _____ Campus: _____

2. Please type your name
   (All personal info will be treated anonymously while each participant would be assigned a participant code for classification and communication purposes only)
   SURNAME: _____
   NAME: _____

3. Please select your gender
   (a) Male
   (b) Female

4. Please select your age
   (a) 18-22 (b) 22-26 (c) 27-30
   (d) 31-34 (e) 35-39 (f) Over 40

5. Please select your current place of residence
   (a) Metro Manila
   (b) Outside Metro Manila (please specify) _____

6. Please select marital status
   (a) Single (b) Married (c) Widowed
   (d) Divorced (e) Don't prefer to say

7. Do you have kids?
   (a) Yes (if selected, please specific how many?) _____
   (b) No

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

8. Please select your field of specialization

(a) Motorcycle/Small Engine Servicing NC II	(b) Welding Smaw NC II	(c) Beauty Care (Nail Care) NC II
(d) Food Processing NC II	(e) Cookery NC II	(f) Massage Therapy NC II
(g) Dressmaking NC II	(h) Electronics Products Assembly & Servicing (EPAS) NC II	(i) Food & Beverage Services NC II
(j) Bread & Pastry Production NC II	(k) Computer System Servicing NC II	(l) Housekeeping NC II
(m) Electrical Installation Maintenance NC II	(n) Ref and Air-Con Servicing NC II	(o) 2D and 3D AUTOCAD

(p) Other (Please specify) _____

9. What is the primary reason you are enrolled at PCIST?
(Please select one only)

(a) To start my own career	(b) To help my family	(c) To earn more money
(d) To live in another country	(e) Other (please specify) _____	

10. What's the most important thing for you in life?

(a) Career	(b) Happiness	(c) Welfare
(d) Family	(e) Other (please specify) _____	

11. Do you think you have a good chance to find a job after graduating PCIST?
(a) Yes
(b) No (Please specify your concern) _____

12. Do you have work experience?
(a) Yes in my specific field (if selected, please specify how many years?) ___
(b) Yes but in a different field (if selected, please specify field and years?) _____
(c) No

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

WORKING IN JAPAN

13. Would you like to work at overseas?
    (a) Yes
    (b) No (if selected, please specify reason) _____

14. If you had the chance to work at one of the following countries/territories, what would be your primary choice? (please select one only)
    (a) United States/Canada (b) Europe (c) Australia
    (d) South America (e) Asia (f) Middle East
    (g) Other (Please specify) _____

15. Would you like to work in Japan?
    (a) Yes
    (b) No

16. What's the primary reason you would want to work in Japan?
    (please select one only)
    (a) To improve my career
    (b) To support my family
    (c) To be close to the Philippines
    (d) To earn more money
    (e) Other (please specify) _____

17. How long would you be willing to stay in Japan?
    (a) From 1 up to 5 years with a technical training program/ come back to Philippines after
    (b) From 1 up to 5 years with a technical training program/ stay in Japan after
    (c) From 1 up to 5 years with a skilled visa program/ come back to Philippines after
    (d) From 1 up to 5 years with a skilled visa program/ stay in Japan after
    (e) I am not interested in going to Japan.

18. Would you be willing to give up your Filipino nationality and acquire Japanese nationality in the future even if you knew you are going to lose all your civil rights in the Philippines?
    (a) Yes
    (b) No

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

19. How do you think you need to improve your own chances to work in Japan?
(Please select one only)
(a) I need to acquire the TESDA certificate
(b) I need to find a work and gain experience in my career before deployment
(c) I need to learn Japanese
(d) I need to learn about the Japanese culture

20. Have you ever been to Japan?
(a) Yes
(b) No

21. How do you know about Japan? (Please select one only)
(a) Through conventional media (such as TV, newspapers)
(b) Through social media (Internet)
(c) Through family and friends
(d) Through personal interactions with Japanese

22. Do you think Japan and the Philippines are similar? (Please specify reason)
(a) Yes
(b) No
Reason: _____

23. Do you think it's easier to communicate with an Asian rather than a non-Asian?
(a) Yes
(b) No
(c) Doesn't matter

24. What do you respect most in Japan?
(a) hard work of employees
(b) economy
(c) technology
(d) people
(e) security
(f) Other (please specify) _____

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

For the following questions, you are asked to rate yourself on a 5-point scale between two extreme statements. If you agree with the extreme statement, choose 1 or 5; if you leaning in one direction, choose the 2 or the 4; if you are evenly split between the two extremes. Choose 3.

25. Power Distance (Ref: Hofstede)

Children should be taught that their opinion is as important as their parents	1 2 3 4 5	Children should be taught to never question their parents' authority
Children should be taught to not take things for granted in the family or other institutions	1 2 3 4 5	Children should be taught to accept the authority of older and important people
In a company/organization, people must be able to create their own place/function	1 2 3 4 5	All the people in an organization or company have clearly defined roles
People must not take the boss decisions for granted. Always questions the actions of the boss	1 2 3 4 5	The boss makes all decisions. Everyone in an organization/company accepts and respects him
The most effective way to change a political system is through public debates and free elections	1 2 3 4 5	The most effective way to change a political system is to replace those in power through drastic means

26. Uncertainty Avoidance (Ref: Hofstede)

Children must be taught to cope with chaos and ambiguity	1 2 3 4 5	Children must be taught to be organized and to avoid ambiguity.
People who can move in different environments are appreciated in the society	1 2 3 4 5	High competence and expert leadership are appreciated in the society
People should not have to carry an ID	1 2 3 4 5	People should always have an ID
It is improper to express feelings in public	1 2 3 4 5	It is OK to show feelings in public, at the right place and at the right time
Society has rules but they could be bend if there is a reason or good result	1 2 3 4 5	There are rules and customs in the society that all people must respect

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

27. Individualism/Collectivism (Ref: Hofstede)

People should have strong royalty to the group(s) they belong to	1 2 3 4 5	People should choose their friends based on common likes/dislikes/interests
The rules of the group I belong should influence my behavior	1 2 3 4 5	I have full personal freedom
I am concerned with what others think about me	1 2 3 4 5	I am concerned only with my own rules and objectives
People are promoted and recognized based on their loyalty and age	1 2 3 4 5	People are promoted based on competence, no matter their age
It is immoral for a boss not to offer a job to a relative	1 2 3 4 5	It is immoral for a boss to offer a job to a relative

28. Masculinity/Femininity (Ref: Hofstede)

I have a sympathy for those who do not win and I envy other for their success	1 2 3 4 5	I admire winners and I think those who lose must be punished
At work, I am motivated by a relaxed and friendly atmosphere	1 2 3 4 5	At work, I need to have clear objectives and an evaluation system for what I accomplish
Decisions at work must be based on consensus	1 2 3 4 5	Conflict is positive and productive
A good quality of life is important for both men and women	1 2 3 4 5	Men should focus on material success while women should be concerned with the well-being of others
I seek love and mutual affection in a partner	1 2 3 4 5	What I want from my partner is support in difficult situations

29. Confucian Dynamism (Ref: Hofstede)

People know very clearly what is good or bad	1 2 3 4 5	People work on common goals without being so much concerned what's good and what's bad
People value personal stability and contunity	1 2 3 4 5	People think everything is relative and always changing
Children must be taught to ask WHY	1 2 3 4 5	Children must be taught to ask WHAT and HOW
People's behavior is always influenced by their roots	1 2 3 4 5	People project their actions into the future
People want coherence in the information they receive	1 2 3 4 5	People can live with contradictory information

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)

30. Please explain your general thoughts about working in Japan, how you feel you could contribute into the Japanese society and what difficulties you expect to experience if you had to work in Japan in terms of cultural differences.

[Participant Code]:_____ (for official use only)