

Developing Cultural Sensitivity: Building Intercultural Trust between Japanese Expatriate Managers and Australian Supervisors

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Abstract

This research explores a trust building process through intercultural communication between Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors. Particular attention is paid to how participants experience and resolve misalignments in communicating trust cues in cross-cultural encounters. Based on constructivist grounded theory, the paper argues that resolving misalignments entails developing cultural sensitivity, which involves building two types of cultural knowledge: etic and emic understandings of culture. Developing cultural sensitivity is critical to building intercultural trust, and types of cultural knowledge affect the kinds and depths of trust.

Introduction

It is commonly agreed that trust is critical to successful business (Gibson, Maznevski, & Kirkman, 2009; Huff & Kelley, 2003; J. J. Li, Zhou, Lam, & Tse, 2006). Additionally, more attention should be paid to trust when organizations face complex, uncertain business situations (Sydow, 1998). Furthermore, increased international business activities also call for greater attention to cultural factors that might affect the meaning, roles, and processes of building and developing trust (Dietz, Gillespie, & Chao, 2010; Ferrin & Gillespie, 2010; Huff & Kelley, 2003; Saunders, Skinner, & Lewicki, 2010). Accordingly, business professionals and researchers are urged to understand how trust affects organizational practices and management (Gibson et al., 2009).

This paper first addresses trust from a communicative perspective, followed by the management practice of Japanese multinationals that provides this study's context. As a methodology, the study adopts constructivist grounded theory, arguing that developing cultural sensitivity is critical for building and developing intercultural trust and that the process entails "hitting a wall;" that is, facing conflicts and challenges, and acquiring two types of cultural knowledge.

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Trust from a communicative perspective

In organizational contexts, trust refers to positive expectations that individuals have about organizational members' intentions and behavior, based on their roles, relationships, experiences, and interdependencies (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis, & Winograd, 2000). Diverse disciplines have researched trust in organizations, including economic (Williamson, 1993), psychological (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998), and sociological perspectives (Korsgaard, Pitariu, & Jeong, 2008; Sztompka, 1999). While the economic perspective sees trust is based on calculations, the psychological perspective involves predictability of behavior and motivation to trust others (Doney et al., 1998). The sociological perspective addresses socially shared norms and values as bases of trust (Korsgaard et al., 2008). Some other scholars have addressed trust and other related concepts, such as uncertainty and risk (Dietz et al., 2010; P. P. Li, 2007; Möllering, 2005). Distinguishing these concepts is essential for understanding the conditions and antecedents of trust, trust itself, and the outcomes of trust (Doney et al., 1998; P. P. Li, 2007).

Considering where trust occurs, uncertainties also always occur, since it is impossible to take everything about future contingencies and consequences into account (Bottery, 2003). Other than in situations, there is also uncertainty and risk in interpersonal relationships. Uncertainties arise from future contingencies related to how counterparts respond to situations, of particular significance in interpersonal trust (P. P. Li, 2007).

For interpersonal trust in organizations, P. P. Li (2007) identifies three different risks: system, ability, and intention. System risk refers to "imperfect predictability of the macro level systems, including the unintended outcomes of legal and moral institutions", and this type of risk is partially calculable (P. P. Li, 2007, p. 424). In developing interpersonal trust relationships, how individuals act with free will in responding to system risk becomes important (Dietz et al., 2010; Möllering, 2005). Ability risk and intention risk involve risks regarding a trustee. In general, trust relationships assume situations in which a person needs to rely on others (Lane, 1998; Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, & Werner, 1998) and entails possible risks regarding the counterpart's intentions and consequences of his or her actions (Bottery, 2003; Doney et al., 1998; Lewicki, Tomlinson, & Gillespie, 2006; P. P. Li, 2007; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998). Ability risk and intention risk are a trustor's two major concerns for evaluating the trustee's trustworthiness (Six, Nooteboom, & Hoogendoorn, 2010).

In building and developing trust, reducing risk or perceived risk and enhancing trustworthiness is necessary. People are likely to assess a counterpart's trustworthiness based on attitudes and behaviors, given that others' abilities and intentions cannot be directly observed (Nooteboom 2003, p.22; Six, Nooteboom, & Hoogendoorn, 2010). In other words, a counterpart's attitudes and behavior are cues for trust, and trust cues are communicated and interpreted in a trustor's evaluation

process. In this sense, how people judge whether a counterpart can be trusted is cognitive in nature. Therefore, exploring incidents about how people interpret counterparts' actions and behaviors as trust cues is beneficial for understanding the process and dynamics of initiating and developing trust relationships.

Especially in intercultural encounters, misplacement of trust is likely to occur (Dietz et al., 2010). For instance, consequences of an individual's relationship to a counterpart might disrupt the counterpart's positive expectations (Marsh & Dibben, 2005) or lead to more favorable outcomes (Sztompka, 1999). Marsh and Dibben (2005, p. 30) argue that investigating incidents involving misplacement of trust is beneficial to decide "who to trust next time" or to understand "what went wrong" in the dynamic process of trust relationships. In intercultural encounters, misplacement of trust is likely to occur through miscommunicating or misinterpreting trust cues (Gibson et al., 2009) because cultures greatly influence communication in forming expectations and interpreting messages (Dietz et al., 2010). Given increased business activities across nations and cultures, addressing issues of intercultural trust building and development is urgent.

Management of Japanese multinationals

Japanese organizations are argued to have a "unique" management model compared to western or American management styles (Farrell, 2008). The traditional Japanese management model includes lifetime employment and a seniority system, which affect organizational members' expectations, practices, and behavior (Abe, 2010; Dwivedi, Bali, Naguib, & Wickramasinghe, 2008; Nicholas & Purcell, 2001; Wolff, 2010). Under this management model, people assume long-term career development within an organization (Abe, 2010; Wolff, 2010). The seniority system entails vertical relationships between senior (older) and junior (younger) organizational members, as well as constant promotion to a certain position based on careers within an organization. In the vertical relationship, junior members owe loyalty and respect to senior members, and senior members owe advice and guidance to junior members (Keizer, 2009; Pudelko, 2006). Accordingly, the seniority system enables junior members to learn the organizational way of doing things from senior members (Yoshimura & Anderson, 1997) and senior members to maintain authority and control (Abe, 2010, p.4). This system offers a safe environment for senior members because it reduces risks derived from promotion of junior members to positions above senior members (Abe, 2010; Pudelko, 2006). These expectations and assumptions form bases of system risks, and how people respond in the context can affect trust relationships among organizational members. Therefore, the management style of Japanese multinationals provides this study's context for exploring an intercultural trust building process.

These two characteristics of Japanese management, lifetime employment and a seniority system, also affect management of subsidiaries. A growing number of multinationals confront

varied and complex issues involving cultures (Moon, 2010). For Japanese multinationals, some scholars argue that the Japanese management model can impede local employees' commitment and contribution; it may limit local operations' autonomy (Watanabe, 1998), which is described as a “blocking mechanism” (Wong, 2005) and a “rice-paper ceiling” (Kopp, 1999). Along with increased international business activities, however, the traditional Japanese management model is under threat by the diverse expectations of employer-employee relationships (Raz, 2006). For example, an evaluation system based on the traditional Japanese management model conflicts with short-term and “fair” standards (Takahashi, 2006), which are more apparent in western business practices. However, adopting a western management style requires a paradigm shift and can lead to a “fundamental clash” in Japanese organizations (Pudelko, 2006). Although the literature maintains that the traditional Japanese management model is collapsing owing to international business expansion, some also argue that psychological and social discourse based on the traditional Japanese management model remains (Raz, 2006). Of course, mismatches in assumptions and expectations can damage reciprocal relationships between an organization and its employees (Granrose & Baccili, 2006).

Japanese multinationals face challenges and conflicts in managing employees who do not share the cultural norms and values, practices, and assumptions based on the traditional management model (Pudelko, 2009). Understanding how such conflicts, challenges, and discourse influence the expectations of organizational members with diverse backgrounds is critical, particularly in overseas operations. Since expectations are important factors that affect trust building, developing theoretical understanding of intercultural trust building processes is beneficial for enhancing competitive advantage in international operations.

Research questions

This paper discusses one aspect of a research project that explored intercultural communication between Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors. The overarching research question is “What patterns of intercultural communication are prevalent in interactions between Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors?”. In the research, trust appeared to be the central concern of research participants, and this paper focuses on a communication process of resolving misunderstanding of trust cues. To examine trust by focusing on its initiation and development from a communicative perspective, the following sub-research questions are posed:

1. How do participants experience a process of building trust in intercultural encounters?
2. What is a process of building intercultural trust?
3. How do people develop communication skills relevant to initiating and developing intercultural trust?

Methodology

To pursue these questions, this study employed a grounded theory approach from a constructivist perspective. Grounded theory enables researchers to explore relationships, processes, and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) and generate a theory grounded in research data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It offers a systematic approach for theorizing a phenomenon in a social reality (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It also provides a flexible guideline for conducting research (Charmaz, 2006, 2009), while maintaining “core tools;” namely, theoretical sampling, coding, theoretical saturation, and the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2006, 2009; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Outcomes include concepts, categories, properties, hypotheses, or “generalized relations among the categories and properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 p. 35), and, finally, a theory (Bryman, 2004).

A constructivist paradigm embraces interpretive orientation, and constructivist grounded theory facilitates exploring assumptions, implicit meanings, and rules from participants’ perspectives (Charmaz, 2003). Unlike a positivist approach, which assumes that data represent objective facts already existing and merely waiting for a researcher to “discover” them (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992), a constructivist approach appreciates subjective and multiple realities and assumes that research outcomes are co-constructed by the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2006). By adopting constructivist grounded theory, this study explored what is shared and taken for granted by participants in a process of perceiving and understanding realities (Locke 2001; Charmaz 2006), paying specific attention to a trust building process through intercultural communication.

Sampling

The sampling frame of this study was (1) Japanese expatriates in Japanese multinational companies operating in Australia and (2) Australian employees who had daily interactions with the Japanese expatriates in their companies. Information sheet and interview guide of this research project were sent to potential participants; for instance, managers in HR departments and those in charge of public relations.

Sampling methods included purposeful sampling and a snowballing technique. Purposeful sampling is a typical strategy for qualitative research in selecting samples of direct relevance to research questions (Bryman, 2004; Punch, 2005). The snowballing technique identifies and recruits participants who can provide meaningful insights; this is particularly useful for gaining access to the field in practical settings (Patton, 2002). Obtaining information-rich data is critical for a grounded theory study (Charmaz, 2003), and these sampling techniques are beneficial.

Data collection

The research project invited 38 participants (22 Japanese expatriate managers, 4 locally employed Japanese non-managerial/supervisory staff members, 16 Australian managers/supervisors,

and 2 Australian non-managerial/supervisory staff members) from five Japanese multinationals operating in three states (New South Wales, South Australia, and Victoria) in Australia. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, non-participant observations, and e-mail communications.

Interviews were audio recorded with participants' permission. Observations were conducted at four participating companies, at meetings, in informal settings such as coffee breaks and lunchtime, and during tours of companies. The researcher took notes during and after observations. E-mail was used for receiving additional comments from participants, sharing initial findings with them, and receiving their feedback.

Data analysis

The data analysis process involved multiple phases of coding that entail constant comparison of data, concepts, and categories (Bryman, 2004; Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout the process, a research journal and memos were maintained as "informal analytic notes" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). In grounded theory research, memos play a critical role in promoting theoretical understanding of data and facilitating the process of generating and developing concepts, categories, and a theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Audio-recorded interview data were transcribed verbatim. Information that might identify a specific organization or an individual was replaced by a company code (Company A, B, C, D, and E) and initials ("A" for Australian; "J" for Japanese). For individuals, numbers were assigned based on interviews' chronological order. For example, the first Australian interviewee at Company A was assigned the code "AA01," and the first Japanese interviewee at Company B was assigned code "BJ01."

Transcribed data were coded in two phases, open coding and focused coding. The open coding phase aims to explore theoretical possibilities and analytical directions by comparing data with other data (Charmaz, 2006). To engage closely with participants' concerns and taken-for-granted assumptions, data were coded line by line (Charmaz, 2006). Inspired by Charmaz's (2006, 2014) interpretations of grounded theory, participants' perspectives were examined for action and coded using gerunds as much as possible. In vivo codes were also used in the analytical process because they could illuminate participants' implicit meanings (Charmaz, 2000, 2006) and captured metaphorical expressions that reflected participants' personal experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The second phase, focused coding, aims to articulate codes, develop categories and their properties, and synthesize them into a theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). This phase entails developing theoretical categories by using the most significant codes from the open coding phase (Charmaz, 2006).

The iterative process of coding revealed that trust appeared to be participants' major concern. To develop trust between Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors, they

needed to acquire knowledge of the counterpart's culture to develop their cultural sensitivities. A counterpart's cultural knowledge facilitates resolving miscommunication of trust cues. The next section illustrates how participants developed their cultural sensitivity and how that development affected trust between the two cultural groups.

Findings and discussion

This study explored how Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors built and developed trust. The study found that “developing cultural sensitivity” was critical for building and developing intercultural trust. The process involves “hitting a wall” and “acquiring cultural knowledge.” “Hitting a wall” represents participants' experiences of facing conflicts or challenges, which include “external walls” (conflicts or challenges in relationships outside the organization) and “internal walls” (conflicts or challenges within the organization). “Acquiring cultural knowledge” involves two types of cultural knowledge: emic and etic understandings of culture. Through experiences of “hitting a wall” and coping with “walls”, participants developed either of two cultural knowledge types that differ in depth. Developing cultural knowledge facilitates acquiring more effective communication skills, which, in turn, contribute to reducing miscommunication of trust cues between two cultural groups and to assisting in making sense of the experiences of “hitting a wall”. The remainder of this section illustrates how participants developed their cultural sensitivity in a communication process of building and developing trust.

Hitting a wall

The term “hitting a wall” was used by some participants to explain their experiences of cultural conflicts and challenges arising from cultural differences. AA06 explained that if “people come here and try to treat it [a task] just like the last company, any other Australian companies they worked for, and then they'll crash.” This comment suggests that Australian supervisors are likely to experience cultural conflicts at Japanese multinational companies that do not commonly occur in local organizations. “Hitting a wall” can generate potential sources of distrust, but at the same time, if participants cope with the walls, their experiences can be opportunities to learn and ultimately positively influence their interpersonal relationships.

Data suggested two types of walls: external and internal. “External walls” refer to external factors, including institutional factors such as legal and social systems in national cultures. These external factors influence individuals' propensity to trust and also the target quality of trust relationships (Child, 2001; Zaheer & Zaheer, 2006) since they are related to system risks. On the other hand, “internal walls” refer to internal factors, particularly workplace conflicts and challenges derived from cultural values and social norms in relationships in an organization. Internal factors influence organizational culture and the organizational trust climate because they depend on expectations (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2000), satisfaction, and organizational members'

commitment and performance (Gould-Williams, 2003). Data suggest that participants deepen their cultural knowledge of a counterpart through experiences of hitting walls. Such an experience becomes a first step in developing their cultural sensitivity. By coping with walls, they develop communication skills that contribute to reducing misunderstanding of trust cues.

External walls. External walls largely relate to the system of a parent company or local legal systems, regulations, and practices, including communication practices with customers in Australia. To address external walls, participants had little room for negotiation, particularly in relation to local legal systems. Therefore, participants were required to accept situations and modify their strategies. Japanese expatriate managers were likely to hit “Australian walls” with local rules, while Australian supervisors tended to hit “Japanese walls” with their parent companies.

With regard to Australian walls, for example, AJ06 explained an incident whereby he “deteriorated the working relationships” with a local customer owing to lack of local knowledge and competencies. He further commented:

I made a mistake then. ... It was different from Japan. ... I had a style of negotiating with Japanese customers, but when I did it here, I put the local customer in a bad mood. ... So I thought I kind of made a mistake. It was a mistake or the way to handle the situation was different really. ... From then on ... I let the local supervisor handle all [of the local situations].

From an Australian supervisor’s perspective, major walls related to communication with the parent company. Participants at all participating companies noted that important decisions were made in their parent companies. Owing to Japanese parent companies’ strong control over subsidiaries, Australian supervisors were likely to hit Japanese walls. BA03 commented:

If we can’t get some information from [the parent company of Company B], sometimes we go through them [Japanese expatriate managers]; sometimes that helps because if we want something from [the parent company of Company B], and came back and said no, sometimes it’s easy if we explain it to the [Japanese] person who is at [Company B]. He [a Japanese expatriate] has a better understanding [about a local situation] because he’s been in Australia for a little bit and he understands the [local] market more, and so he can go back to [the parent company of Company B] and he can explain things, and sometimes that works. Sometimes we could have a solution that way.

These experiences of hitting external walls suggest that such situations require participants either to trust their counterparts and rely on them or to change approaches and manage situations themselves. Since managing the situation successfully from the beginning is difficult, participants must trust a counterpart. If they do not rely on and trust a counterpart, their attitudes and behavior can be perceived as distrust.

Internal walls. Internal walls refer to facing conflicts and challenges derived from cultural norms and values within an organization. AA03 described the root of internal walls as disagreement about “what two people think right and wrong.” Such differences affect building and developing intercultural relationships, including trust relationships, because valued and prioritized trust cues likely differ between cultural groups (Gibson et al., 2009). Trust cues related to internal walls were attitudes and behaviors regarding seniority or hierarchical organizational structure. While Japan maintains a high power distance, Australia has a low power distance (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Australia is also likely to have flatter relationships and to appreciate a high level of egalitarianism (Sarros, Cooper, & Hartican, 2006). Differences in power distance influenced organizational members’ assumptions, expectations, and communication practices.

Japanese expatriate managers had difficulties communicating expectations or stimulating Australians’ enthusiasm since they were likely to use autocratic or paternalistic approaches even in local contexts with less power distance. EJ02 suggested that enthusiasm was a basis for evaluating whether a junior member was committed to an organization and thus could be trusted. He commented:

We are told that we can't speak harshly here. If [I] say something like “Why can't you achieve this!” or “[I] told you to do this!” ... [I] would be told to say it politely a little more. It isn't an issue in Japan whatever [I] say. I don't mean whatever at all, but [we are] allowed to speak [harshly] to some extent, and indeed, if we don't, we cannot inspire [Australian subordinates'] enthusiasm, how much we want them to do [a particular task] ... so [I] cannot share that [with Australian subordinates].

From an Australian supervisors’ perspective, Japanese expatriate managers’ attitudes and behaviors in the seniority system were perceived as though “the [Japanese] managers perceive[d] themselves to know everything” (AA07) and did not trust local employees. While dealing with such attitudes and behavior, Australian supervisors found it difficult to inform or make a suggestion to Japanese expatriate managers without it being perceived as a “personal insult”. Owing to the seniority system or hierarchical organizational structure, “superior is absolute.” Therefore, a junior organizational member’s suggestion risks breaching social norms and values, and this can disrupt trust. At worst, such misunderstanding and miscommunication can result in resignation. AJ11 observed that an Australian supervisor left the company even though he was committed to his role. AJ11 noted:

What he [the Australian supervisor] said in the end was that what he did or a lot of things he proposed to improve the company were all knocked back by a senior director. So, [he said] his pride had been ruined when he left the company.

As illustrated above, incidents of hitting a wall stimulate participants to reconsider methods,

strategies, and styles of communication. Although hitting a wall provides opportunities to promote awareness and learn cultural assumptions and perspectives, if diverse employees cannot cope with walls and amend their approaches, disruptions of trust are likely to occur.

Two types of cultural knowledge

Data suggest that two cultural knowledge types were apparent in cultural learning: etic and emic cultural understandings. By hitting a wall, participants come to understand what works and what does not. Such understanding involves analyzing a situation within one's own cultural frame of meaning or applying the other culture's frame of meaning. In exploring these two different types of learning, the concepts of single-loop and double-loop learning proposed by Argyris (1977, 2005) and different types of cultural knowledge described by Shapiro, Ozanne, and Saatioglu (2008, p. 75) were informative.

Proposed by Argyris (1977), single-loop learning involves a circulating process of methods and strategies to achieve objectives without changing organizational policies. Conversely, double-loop learning requires questioning underlying assumptions, for example, organizational policies and ones' own frame of meaning. In cultural learning, learning another culture within a frame of meaning in a home cultural context entails single-loop learning. Some participants attempted to understand the counterpart's culture beyond their frames of meaning. This involved questioning their cultural assumptions. These participants achieved double-loop learning. In this study, I identified cultural knowledge acquired through single-loop learning as "etic understanding of culture" and that acquired through double-loop learning as "emic understanding of culture." These types of cultural knowledge contribute to developing cultural sensitivities and resolving misalignments of trust cues, facilitating the creation of a common frame for communicating trustworthiness (Dietz et al., 2010; Johnson & Cullen, 2002).

Etic understanding of culture. In acquiring cultural knowledge from an etic perspective, participants accommodated their communicative methods and tactics to overcome walls, while maintaining their assumptions and frames of meaning to understand cultural cues. This is a superficial solution and a "smart" approach to resolving an issue without changing cultural assumptions and the frame of meaning for interpreting trust cues. For example, DA01 commented:

We are not gonna' change that [the Japanese way of operation] overnight. So we've gotta' be smart to understand their [Japanese] management style and their decision making style and be smart enough to say, "OK."

To a certain extent, etic cultural knowledge can assist in achieving goals and communicating cues. However, it has the limitation that people cannot act in advance based on a counterpart's expectations. Furthermore, etic cultural knowledge can provide only a relatively short-term solution. In other words, etic understanding of culture is rather like learning survival skills.

Emic understanding of culture. Emic understanding of culture entails double-loop learning that, to interpret trust cues, requires questioning one's underlying assumptions and frame of meaning. Data suggest that it also contributes to fostering a positive organizational trust climate. By acquiring this type of cultural knowledge, participants can refer to a counterpart's frame of meaning to interpret trust cues. Therefore, they understand cultural groups' expectations, thus building and developing trust (Costa & Bijlsma-Frankema, 2007; Dietz et al., 2010; Zucker, 1986). AA02's comment is illustrative:

First up, it can be quite frustrating as to why you see things done, but once you start seeing the logic out of it, it's all the end of it. Once you see that, it isn't an issue.

The phrase "start seeing the logic" suggests that he understood Japanese culture based on an emic perspective. He came to understand Japanese expatriate managers' intentions and expectations and developed a frame of meaning through which to interpret communication cues.

Despite the positive influence of acquiring emic cultural understanding, it requires patience, commitment beyond tasks, and more time. Moreover, not all participants were committed to acquiring emic cultural knowledge, and some participants noticed that some employees understood other cultures better than others. A Japanese expatriate manager CJ02 tried to understand Australian subordinates better and commented:

When doing a job, I tend to focus on tasks and often cannot think like that [thinking from another person's perspective], but when I look back, I feel "it is not working, not communicating properly." I think I try to think about how other people see things more often now.

Unlike acting superficially based on an etic perspective, acquiring emic understanding of culture requires effort beyond daily tasks and operations. Furthermore, Australian supervisor CA02 suggested the importance of empathy:

Empathy is basically being able to understand another person's perspective or view, and so even if you are making some strong negotiation or some discussion or some argument, it's always beneficial to or helpful to understand the person you are talking to. So I think empathy from a local member point of view is very important to try to make a successful communication with Japanese members.

Similarly, AJ03 noted that if people did not have the attitude of learning from each other, cultural conflicts would not be resolved. She commented, "It is not a matter of which party is right or wrong, but situations cannot be improved without the attitude of listening from others." Acquiring cultural knowledge, particularly emic cultural understanding, can form a common base for interpreting communication and trust cues. It assists in building and developing trust through understanding a counterpart's intentions and expectations.

Conclusion

This paper argued that building and developing intercultural trust requires simultaneous development of cultural sensitivity. As the literature suggests (Dietz et al., 2010; Johnson & Cullen, 2002), resolving misalignments in expectations and misinterpretations of trust cues contributes to building intercultural trust. This study supports that argument and further identified that acquiring etic or emic cultural knowledge can positively affect the process. This study's data also illustrate Japanese expatriate managers and Australian supervisors' differing assumptions, which contribute to likely misinterpretations of trust cues. Communication styles, strategies, and behaviors have important implications, particularly in multicultural workplaces. Communication tactics affect work environments by leading either to productive or counterproductive consequences (Ayoko, Härtel, & Callan, 2002). Acquiring cultural knowledge is critical to building fruitful interpersonal relationships, including trust relationships in international situations.

Finally, this study revealed that developing emic cultural knowledge required more motivation, commitment, and time than the other type. Investigating motivations to acquire emic cultural knowledge and how having emic cultural knowledge particularly affects organizational trust relationships would be a meaningful line of investigation for future research.

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