

Cross-Cultural Learning: How Japanese Managers and Foreign Subordinates Learn from Each Other.

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Abstract (254 words)

Cross-cultural researchers tend to analyze how a certain country is culturally different from other countries. This approach might be appropriate when you consider employees in a certain country as one group. However, if you have a foreign employee in your workplace, country-based cultural characteristics seem less significant than his/her own talent and capabilities. Adler (2007) pointed out that a diversity organization works well for innovative tasks, and that is because of “synergy”. Synergy means cross-cultural learning in a diversity organization. One learns from another member with a different culture, and through that process they create new ideas. However, cross-cultural learning in workplace has not been often studied.

Japanese traditional companies have recently recruited young foreigners just after their graduation, although proportion of them to total new employees is quite small. However, human resource divisions in most companies have not offer special training or support for their foreign workers and they don't know well how the foreign employees work.

In this study, 10 foreign young employees and their Japanese managers in seven traditional Japanese companies were interviewed. It was found from the survey that synergy occurred if a Japanese manager consider his/her foreign subordinate not as a foreigner coming from a certain country but as a unique individual. Foreign workers are minority in traditional Japanese companies and they struggle with a feeling of loneliness. If their managers see them just as foreigners, their sense of loneliness are increased. On the other hand, if they are regarded as individuals, their managers can realize and reduce their feeling of loneliness.