IMPORTANCE OF JAPANESE CONTEXT-SPECIFIC INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the effect of administering Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training to reduce communication uncertainty in a specific situation. Gudykunst, Nishida, and Chua (1986) suggest, “Uncertainty Reduction Theory is one of the few interpersonal theories systematically extended to explain cross-cultural and intercultural communication” (p.39). The study uses the film *Visas and Virtue* to present a specific situation for participants to observe and comment. The study provides insight into stage three, context specific training, of the three-stage intercultural communication development process proposed by Gudykunst and Hammer (1983). The study applies a qualitative interpretive social science approach to achieve its goal to support the theory; culture may be learned and in doing so may improve intercultural communications competence.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Problem and Goal

Advancements in computer mediated communication are accelerating the proliferation of intercultural interaction and communication. These technology advancements have also prompted the acceleration of face-to-face intercultural communications; this essentially captures and collects everyone into the new realm of global citizenship. Language barriers are crumbling away under the construction of technology-based language translators. The following question has been explored and will be examined in this study, “Do certain skills beyond language knowledge assist the process of intercultural communications amongst culturally diverse communicants?”

Importance of the study.

Global politics and enterprise have seen a significant economic rise in Asiatic countries such as China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. Asiatic countries represent cultures that may be quite different than Anglo-American culture. This may translate into intercultural communication challenges beyond language knowledge alone. This shift in global economic positioning will require competent communication between members of Anglo-Americans and Asiatic countries to avoid such disasters as trade or currency wars and the possible extreme of military actions.

The study examines intercultural communication knowledge beyond language skills with the assumption that additional intercultural communications skills can be taught and learned by individuals outside the target culture. This idea is an extension of an agreed upon aspect of culture by anthropologists; culture is learned (Hall, 1976). Success in learning intercultural
communications skills beyond language may provide positive indication that cultural nuances can be understood and applied outside of one’s native culture.

The study defines and examines near-extreme cultures as viewed through the theoretical lens of Hall and, Caputo, Hazel, McMahon and Dannels (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002). Hall provides two broad categories for cultures: high-context and low-context. Caputo et al. (2002) provide additional dimension into this concept of high-context and low-context cultures. Caputo et al. (2002) suggest, “Individual cultures place emphasis on individual goals, while group goals are more important to collective cultures” (p.305). Combining these two concepts the study has aligned individualism with low-context cultures and collectivism with high-context cultures. The study examines intercultural communication between the Japanese high-context and collectivist culture and the Anglo-American low-context individualistic culture. Studying two extreme cultures may provide greater insight than examining two cultures with closer cultural alignment.

**Statement of the problem and the opportunity.**

The current state of global economies has altered not just the economic landscape, but the positioning of countries within the landscape. This shift may heighten the level of communication competence required. The three largest economies of the world now include two Asian countries; China and Japan (Chen, Chang, Levanon, & Van Ark, 2011). It is anticipated that this trend will continue and economic power will shift from Anglo-Americans to Asiatic countries. As Anglo-Americans move away from a position of absolute economic authority; negotiating and other communication formats may take on new meaning and greater importance. The elevated importance of intercultural communication competence between the high-context
Asiatic countries and the low-context Anglo-Americans may create a learning environment rich with rewards.

**Goal of the study.**

The study applies Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training to examine Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). It is the goal of the study to show results which will support the theory that culture may be learned and in doing so may improve intercultural communications competence.

**Definition of terms used.**

- “*Intercultural communication* occurs when you interact with someone from a different cultural background from your own” (Caputo et al., 2002, p.289).

- “*Interpersonal communication* is an ever-changing transactional sharing that develops between people who find meaning with each other” (Caputo et al., 2002, p.289).

- *International communication* relates to analysis of nations, world systems, and group communications (Inoue (2007)).

- *Cross-cultural communication* involves comparing and contrasting the communication patterns of people of one culture with the communication patterns of people in another culture (Levine, Park, & Kim, 2007).

- *Communication dissonance* occurs when communicants disagree either due to language, culture, or non-verbal behavior. It forms incongruent communication.

- *Communication uncertainty reduction* involves the ability to predict the behavior of both oneself and others in the interaction.
- **High-context cultures** are typically tradition bound and very aware of surroundings. Verbal communication is not the only source of information. The culture is typically more predictable.

- **Low-context cultures** are typically not tradition and are easy to adapt or change. The culture is typically less predictable.

- **Collectivism** places priority on group goals or objectives.

- **Individualism** places priority on personal goals or objectives.

- **Coding** for qualitative data involves the researcher to, “organize the raw data into conceptual categories and create themes or concepts” (Neuman, 2006, p.460).

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

The remainder of this study is organized into four chapters. In Chapter 2, “Review of the Literature,” secondary research is conducted and presented. The literature review provides the theoretical basis for the study; suggesting intercultural communication competence is a learning and developmental process. Chapter 2 then frames intercultural communication to provide definition and a position similar to interpersonal communication. From this concept of similar context Chapter 2 introduces the Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) and applies it to intercultural communication. Chapter 2 continues to provide additional insight: understanding culture, how cultures differ, and approaches to improve intercultural communication. The chapter closes with several new research questions and a summary.

Chapter 3, “Scope and Methodology,” provides details of the research to be performed. The chapter describes: the film *Visas and Virtue* to be reviewed, the participants, the research design, instrumentation and data collection, measures, and procedures.
Chapter 4, “The Study,” explains the completed research body of work. The chapter presents the qualitative research results of the seven participants in both table and written format. The chapter explains in detail: data collection methods, data analysis methods, and results of the research. Chapter 4 presents information about the difference between the trained versus untrained group of participants. The chapter closes with comments regarding the significance of direct contact with the Japanese culture and the possible effect on the results of the study.

Chapter 5, “Summary and Conclusions,” steps forward to connect theories and concepts presented in the Introduction Chapter 1 and the Literature Review Chapter 2 with results of the research in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 provides insight into the limitations of the study and recommendations for further study on the subject matter.
Chapter 2. Review of Literature

Introduction

To answer the research question, “What is the importance of limited Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training,” it is important to frame it, provide an understanding of culture, suggest how culture differs, review approaches to improve it, and review the positive and negative aspects of culture-specific training. The review of literature will frame intercultural communication as an extension of interpersonal communication theory. The study will consider interpersonal communication theories of: symbolic information transfer, uncertainty reduction, communication dissonance, and coorientation (Cushman, 1974; Smith, 1984; Tominaga, Gudykunst, & Ota, 2003).

Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Basis

How did a world filled with strangers become acquaintances then possibly friends? Human socialization enables individuals to adapt and become members of a group where commonalities replace uncertainties. The reduction or elimination of uncertainty replaced with commonalities is necessary for humans to bond and build a sense of belonging (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Historically, we had reasonable time to absorb and adapt to such changes or requirements. An example is migration from the spoken word to the printed word. Introduction of the Gutenberg printing press took place immediately, but its effects spread relatively slowly. This process allowed us time to absorb then accept this communication evolution. Words were no longer lost to possible inaccuracy due to faulty memories or misspoken syllables. Words were captured and enslaved to moments in time while entombing underlying thoughts or beliefs. The process of printing words and capturing language aided our ability to communicate across diverse cultures by learning and using different languages.
Moving beyond words and language; differing cultural behaviors and customs hold secrets only unlocked after careful observation, contact immersion, trial and error, and cross-cultural acceptance. Understanding a foreign language is definitely helpful and aids communication with someone of a different culture, but what limit does it place on communication? In high-context cultures where the spoken or written word does not provide complete communication, sending and receiving messages, what is needed?

This study relies on the concept that human communication facilitating relationships are never really possible without understanding the other person’s culture. In turn, this implies that the individual must understand their own culture (Hall, 1976). This study will focus on the Japanese high-context culture where less is more and small amounts of spoken words contain large amounts of meaning (Hall, 1976). This study provides insight into providing Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training and its possible benefits to improving intercultural communications with the Japanese.

Learning intercultural communication competence is a developmental process. This research will view intercultural communication competence through the theoretical lens of Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) who suggested a three-stage approach which included: an intercultural perspective framework, interaction with another culture, and context specific training. This research will focus on stage three of their approach: context-specific training.

Intercultural communication is sometimes confused with international communications; the two are different areas of study. Inoue (2007) provides a clear definition differentiating the two areas of research, “intercultural communication researchers focus on the individual as the unit of analysis, whereas international communication researchers work at the macro level using units of analysis such as nations, world systems, and groups” (p. 4). Intercultural
communications has been labeled synonymous with cross-cultural communication. The two areas are very different. Levine, Park, and Kim (2007) have developed working definitions for the two areas of study:

Cross-cultural communication research involves comparing and contrasting the communication patterns of people of one culture with the communication patterns observed in people from a different culture. Alternatively, intercultural communication research deals with the interaction between people of different cultures. (p. 208)

**Framing Intercultural Communication**

Historically intercultural communication has been conceptualized and defined differently with no concise parameters (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, & Wiseman, 1991). Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Wiseman (1991, p. 272) cite several early definitions of intercultural communication:

- “an exchange of meaning between cultures” (Maletzke, 1976, p. 410)
- “communication between groups with different value structures” (Jain, Prosser, & Miller, 1974, P. 33)
- “cultural variance in the perception of social objects and events” (Porter & Samovar, 1976, p. 4)
- “interaction between people from differing cultures” (Sitaram & Cogdell, 1976, p. 18)

Caputo et al. (2002) provide a current and concise definition, “Intercultural communication occurs when you interact with someone from a different cultural background from your own” (p. 289).

Framing intercultural communication similar to interpersonal communication provides context from which improvements may be borrowed and developed. This framing also provides
the opportunity to view it as a challenge to promote interaction between strangers (Caputo et al., 2002). Caputo et al. (2002) suggest, “In discussing the difference between interpersonal and intercultural, Gudykunst and Kim (1992) explain that the underlying communication processes are the same” (p. 289). Similar to the process of interpersonal communication with a stranger; intercultural communication attempts to reduce uncertainty with strangers which is made more difficult due to language and other cultural expectation barriers (Caputo et al., 2002). The following paragraphs will explore various aspects of interpersonal and intercultural communication.

Arguments to frame intercultural communications as a standalone area of study have been challenged (Gudykunst, 1983). Gudykunst (1983, p. 49) cites Sarbaugh (1979, p. 5), “one begins to identify the variables that operated in the communication studied, however, it becomes apparent that they are the same for both intercultural and intracultural settings.” The argument which follows is that intercultural communications research should be an extension of interpersonal or intracultural communications research and should also use classical cross-cultural research (Gudykunst, 1983).

Gudykunst (1983, p. 49) cites Berger and Calabrese’s (1975, p. 100) theory of interpersonal interaction or communication and the necessity for further interaction to take place, “Central to the present theory is the assumption that when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction or increasing predictability about the behavior of both themselves and others in the interaction.” To move forward and perpetuate interpersonal or intercultural communications uncertainty must be reduced to a level where communicants perceive adequate information has been shared (Gudykunst, 1983). A core strategy to achieve adequate transfer of
appropriate information and to reduce uncertainty between communicants is the use of interrogation and self-disclosure (Gudykunst, 1983; Gudykunst, Nishida, & Schmidt, 1989).

Interpersonal communication and intercultural communication share issues of communication mismatch which may be referred to as dissonance. Caputo et al. (2002) suggest that under ideal conditions some form of communication dissonance may occur and cite anthropologist linguist John Regan (1977) who says dissonance can occur on three levels:

1. Language and nonverbal behavior – the information people use to understand themselves and others through symbols
2. Functions of communication – what the communicants are trying to accomplish with their communication
3. Cultural level – the bulk of a person’s awareness of identity; may be actually below the level of awareness (p. 290).

Communication dissonance is typically present in all intercultural communication and increases the complexity to reduce uncertainty between the communicants.

**Understanding culture.**

Framing intercultural communication in context with other communication challenges provides insight into communication solutions. The unique nature of intercultural communication competence requires the understanding of diverse cultures as well as obtaining skills which may improve communication. Caputo et al. (2002) offer this insight into culture:

Anthropologist Edward Sapir has referred to culture as a ‘seamless web’ that is interconnected in many ways. It is both seen and unseen, and yet exerts an undeniable influence in daily life. Because culture is both overt and covert, people often don’t even recognize its influence. (p. 296)
Culture is mostly unseen, exerts powerful influence, and guides individual behavior.

“Culture is shared and sets the boundaries of a group” (Caputo et al., 2002, p. 297). Collectively culture represents a common body of understanding, feelings, and ways of viewing and responding to the world. Culture is a learned set of beliefs. It is passed on from generation to generation through the processes of enculturation and acculturation (Caputo et al., 2002).

Enculturation is the process of learning culture as it is passed on from generation to generation (Caputo et al., 2002). “Acculturation is the process of learning a culture not your own” (Caputo et al., 2002, p. 297). These comments that culture is learned and that it is not limited to persons of the native culture provides the foundation theory that culture can be passed on through teaching.

Understanding a culture is a messy task. Embedded within a culture are elements which form a culture’s bedrock: language, slang, co-cultures, gender, religion, age, social-economic situation, education, political affiliation, art, philosophy, and history. This partial list reflects the complexity to learn culture; either as a member of the in-culture group or the out-culture group. Anthropologists grapple with this complexity and formulate approaches which may provide useful techniques.

Cultural anthropologists look at culture as a set of behaviors and thought patterns. Using these models anthropologists hope to predict actions or events for a given culture under given circumstances. Adding to this static approach is the dynamic movement of social economics. Graham (2007) adds insight to this dynamic positioning, “People can change their social class in various ways, and in ways that people cannot change their race or gender…socioeconomic class impacts the communication and standpoint of people” (p. 3). Removing researcher bias is
difficult and places limits on these culture models. What anthropologists do agree upon are the following three aspects of culture (Hall, 1976):

1. Culture is learned
2. All facets of a culture are interrelated
3. Culture is shared and defines boundaries for different social groups

**How cultures differ.**

Understanding how cultures differ and the ability to discuss them is critical for the development of intercultural communication training materials (Gudykunst et al., 1991).

Gudykunst et al. (1991) cite:

> There are several different conceptualizations of how cultures differ (Kluckhohn & Strodtbecks, 1961) five value orientations: human nature, humanity-nature, time activity, and relational; and Hofstede’s (1980) for dimensions of cultural variability: individualism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and masculinity…most useful for understanding similarities and differences in communication across cultures are individualism-collectivism and low- and high-context communication. (p. 274)

Gudykunst et al. (1991) emphasize the need to include in training materials dimensions of cultural variability to explain communication differences and similarities. Applying and understanding cultural variability dimensions assist students conceptualize ways in which to interact with people from different cultures.

Hall (1976) suggests that cultural differences are in part due to emotional awareness in the brain where experience is synthesized but not verbalized. Lack of verbalization adds to inconsistent individual interpretation of behaviors molded by culture. All cultures include multiple facets which are required to fully understand it. Adding to this complexity is the need
for an individual to understand their native culture to understand another persons’ culture (Hall, 1976).

Aggregating and modeling each of the fine elements of culture may be logistically impossible. Offering an alternative, anthropologist Edward T. Hall developed the concept of organizing cultures along a scale of cultural dimensions: high-context to low-context cultures (Caputo et al., 2002). “For Hall, the level of context is the base of all human behavior and largely determines communication” (Caputo et al., 2002, p. 306). High-context cultures are typically unified and bound by tradition which makes change a slow or gradual process. Low-context cultures are fluid, lacking traditions, flexible, and unpredictable (Caputo et al., 2002). The beauty of this approach is that cultures may be placed into two broad categories for analysis.

Aligning with Hall’s proposal of high-context and low-context cultures is the concept of individualism and collectivism. Caputo et al. (2002) provide insight into this concept, “individualistic cultures place emphasis on individual goals, while group goals are more important in collectivist cultures. In collectivist cultures, the individual must fit into the group” (p. 305). Specific to the Japanese culture, Caputo et al. (2002) cite Cathcart and Cathcart (1985):

Japanese have an expression “Deru kugo wa utareru” (“The nail that sticks up is hit”). They go on to explain how important the role of group membership and solidarity is in Japanese society, and that one must practice giri-self-discipline used to repress or channel personal desires and feelings. (p. 190)

Review of the two concepts surfaces an alignment of individualism to low-context culture characteristics and collectivism to high-context culture characteristics. In individualistic and low-context cultures a preference for clarity and directness bonds with an environment of loose social and family connection. In contrast, in collectivist and high-context cultures it is important
to “save face” and avoid harming others which lends to a community and strong group support environment. Similar to the concept of high-context and low-context cultures, the concept of individualism and collectivism provides two broad categories from which differences in cultures can be studied, compared, and modeled.

**Approaches to Improve Intercultural Communication**

Education and training is one approach to improve intercultural communication competence. Gudykunst et al. (1991) suggest the following understandings to be included in any training materials and instruction:

(a) “increasing participant’s understanding of how culture…influence communication” (p. 277)

(b) “increasing participant’s ability to explain cultural similarities and differences in communication” (p. 277)

(c) “increasing participants’ understanding of cultural issues that affect communication effectiveness’ (p. 277)

(d) “increasing participants’ ability to determine when cultural issues are influencing communication in general and the development of interpersonal relationships in particular” (p. 277)

(e) “increasing participants’ understanding of the role of communication in intercultural adaptation” (p. 278)

(f) “increasing participants’ cultural awareness” (p. 278)

The underlying fundamental to this is, “stay in touch with the other person’s feelings…knowing how to empathize – is a helpful technique when your aim is effective communication based on mutual trust” (Lehman & Taylor, 1994, p. 31).
The infinite culture differences elevate the need for codification or development of a thoughtful roadmap to understand intercultural communication. Hurdles to overcome can be translated into areas of analysis and practice to achieve competency. Caputo et al. (2002, p. 308-310) cite communications professor LaRay Barna (1976) who has suggested six hurdles to overcome to improve intercultural communication:

1. Assumed similarity - although people may appear similar in appearance and dress this does not mean they have similar cultural values or tendencies.

2. Language – learning a second language assists intercultural communication, but falls short of immersion into the culture. Understanding and appreciating such things as: dialects, idioms, syntax, accents, vocabulary or local slang are critical.

3. Nonverbal communication – play an important part in all cultures and especially high-context and collectivist cultures.

4. Preconceptions and stereotypes – help us frame people per our internalized images or notions about people. Stereo typing someone may help frame them, but it may also constrict an objective view of that person.

5. Tendency to evaluate – rather than listen to comprehend sometimes we listen to disapprove. Positive or negative feelings based on personal evaluation may be biased due to ethnocentrism.

6. High anxiety – is often borne from the difficulties of communicating between different cultures. This anxiety may increase the degree of difficulty to communicate effectively.
After overcoming the hurdles and increasing understandings, communication effectiveness is a key element of competence. Tominaga et al. (2003) suggest coorientation communication theory, which addresses the simultaneous accurate understanding, may increase congruence between communicants and greatly improve intercultural communication competence.

**Literature supporting culture-specific training.**

Culture-specific intercultural communication training may need an expert in the specific culture to be effective. Gudykunst et al. (1991) suggests, “We do not mean to suggest that the culture-specific approach is without merit. If the instructor is an expert…culture specific courses can be valuable” (p.274). Adding dimension to this comment, Horan (1976) studied the difficulty in removing ethnocentrism from non-expert trainers. Accepting instructor capability and knowledge variability, Gudykunst et al. (1991) suggest three key components to teaching intercultural communication: cognitive component, affective component, and behavior component.

The cognitive component of intercultural communication may include materials which develop students’ awareness of issues and theories behind intercultural communication competence. Materials may include readings, videos, and computer files which provide insight into intercultural communication issues (Gudykunst et al., 1991).

The affective component focuses on exercises and assessment. Exercises may include such activities as: “language orientation exercises, ESL, global sensitivity exercises…simulations, culture assimilator, self-awareness inventories…case studies, and group exercises” (Gudykunst et al., 1991, p. 282).

The behavior component focuses on role-playing and the use of self-assessment questionnaires (Gudykunst et al., 1991). Role-playing may provide the opportunity for
participants to “experience” environments of different cultures attempting to communicate while both observing and participating with the activity. Collecting then analyzing participants’ behavior is an important teaching mechanism for participants (Gudykunst et al., 1991).

**Literature questioning culture-specific training.**

Culture-specific training centers on the approach of teaching intercultural communication skills which address information about a given culture (Gudykunst et al., 1991). Gudykunst et al. (1991) suggest pitfalls of culture-specific training in relationship to instructor skill-sets:

Using a culture-specific approach requires that the instructor be an expert in the culture used as the focus for the course. Given the vast majority of people teaching intercultural courses have not even had undergraduate or graduate courses in intercultural communication (Beebe & Biggers, 1986), it is unlikely that many instructors will be area experts…The understanding of culture and ethnicity and how they influence communication that emerges from a culture-general approach can help students improve their communications in a wide variety of situations. (p. 274)

This argument continues with culture-specific stereotyping which is often used in teaching intercultural communications (Gudykunst et al., 1991). Stereotyping is a useful and incomplete methodology used in understanding non-native communicants. The use of stereotypes in intercultural communication courses creates demand for culture subject matter experts. Removing the useful tool of stereotyping is not realistic, but providing in-depth analysis of both the role and limitations of culture-specific stereotypes is important (Gudykunst et al., 1991).

Personal attributes beyond stereotypes may affect intercultural communication competence. Culture-specific training may be hampered by such factors as communication apprehension. Allen, Long, O’Mara, and Judd (2003) define communication apprehension as,
“an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person” (p. 131). This may be linked to the attribute of self-disclosure. Allen et al. (2003) suggest, “self-disclosure depends on reciprocity from others, it is perceived as relational…self-disclosure as the key concept in relational development” (p.134).

In high-context or collectivist cultures such as Japanese culture, where verbal communication is less prevalent than non-verbal communication, it becomes difficult to build relationships and develop intercultural communication competence without special training. That training may need to include non-verbal communication such as body language. “The failure to interpret correctly hidden dimension of body language for integration of thought diversity, dissenting points of view, and open group communications management is creating a crisis with technology leaders in decision-making roles” (Fisher-Blando, Robinson, & Lentz, 2010, p. 181). Fisher-Blando, Robinson, and Lentz (2010) cite Kottak and Kozaitis (2009, p. 68), “All of us wear different hats, presenting ourselves sometimes as one thing, sometimes another.” Under these conditions body language assists verbal communications (Fisher-Blando et al., 2010). Adding complexity to intercultural communication is body language clues which may include: facial expressions, physical positioning, use of -time, or even physical touch (Fisher-Blando et al., 2010; Tang, Yuequin, Daiga, Toshiki, & Toshiyuki, 2001). Culture-specific intercultural communication training excluding these elements is suspect in producing an effective result. Gao (2010, p. 99), who refers to beliefs of McEnery and DesHarnais (1990), provides the comment, “It is believed that international expertise can only be learned through experience.”

Workshops have been developed to inform and train participants in intercultural communication. Dubbed as ICW’s or intercultural communication workshops, initial hopes
were that these workshops would improve intercultural communications. General assumption was the workshop format was appropriate to deploy participant immersion into the subject matter and increase likelihood of internalization (Gudykunst, 1979). In specific research conducted by Gudykunst (1979) this assumption was not supported, putting into question the value of culture-specific intercultural communication workshops and training.

**Rationale for culture-specific training.**

Historically only large international companies provided some form of training for expatriate employees before an international assignment. Typically absent from this training was intercultural communication skills. Selection of expatriates typically was not based upon intercultural communication skills, but more on technical competence and fire-fighting skills (Gao, 2010). Gao (2010) refers to Black and Mendenshall (1990) to provide the benefits of such training, “intercultural training is a necessity, not a luxury. Studies on the effectiveness of intercultural training have shown that such training can bring about cognitive, affective, and behavioural changes” (p. 100). Gao (2010) continues with additional supportive comments about intercultural communication training, “The Global Relocation Trends survey…reported that 80 percent of companies responding found that training had a great or high value in terms of the success of expatriate assignments” (p. 100).

Specific to this study, two elements drive and support the current need for culture-specific intercultural communication training when interacting with Asia. First, the field of communication has recently evolved out of journalism education and into its own academic field of study in Asia and this has provided fresh and current research (Kim, 2010). Second, more individuals, outside of international companies, have become global citizens through increased usage of the world-wide web and global small business activity.
Research Questions

Selecting two cultures to study which are near the limits of context, high versus low and Japan versus Anglo-Americans, has generated the following questions to answer:

RQ1 – Can Japanese context-specific intercultural training reduce communicant uncertainty?

RQ2 – Japanese culture is a set of behaviors and thought patterns; can this be taught?

RQ3 – Does training by gender make a difference in Japanese intercultural communication competence?

Summary

The review of literature provides a framework from which both supporters and non-supporters of culture-specific intercultural communication training voice respective theories. Framing intercultural communications as an extension of interpersonal communication theory enables the study to focus on Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) to improve communication. Applying Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) to answering the research question, “What is the importance of limited Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training,” will provide the opportunity to support existing literature and theory either in favor or not in favor of training.
Chapter 3. Scope and Methodology

Scope of the Study

This study was limited to examining Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) as it pertains to Japanese intercultural communication. The research focused on reducing uncertainty between strangers in a high-context culture, Japanese, and a low-context culture, Anglo-Americans (Participants were labeled Anglo-Americans and shared European origins). Gudykunst (1983, p.49) cites Berger and Calabrese (1975, p. 100), “Central to the present theory is the assumption that when strangers meet, their primary concern is one of uncertainty reduction.” To move communication forward and achieve desired sharing of information requires communicants to reduce uncertainty (Gudykunst, 1983).

The study selected the film *Visas and Virtue* for participants to use as a vehicle to experience the interaction between Japanese and Anglo-Americans. Rather than just imagining a scenario the film provided an intense visual and oral portrayal of Japanese intercultural communication for the participants to witness. The film is based upon the true events of a Japanese diplomat stationed in 1940 Lithuania post-invasion of Poland by Nazi Germany. During his tenure in Lithuania the Japanese diplomat, Sugihara, writes thousands of unauthorized visas enabling Polish Jews to flee the country and escape the deadly wrath of Nazi Germany (Toyama & Tashima, 1997). This intense and emotional film provided raw material for: participants to observe interaction between Japanese and Anglo-Americans and enabled the researcher to assess the Japanese intercultural communication competence of the participants.
Methodology of the Study

Research design.

Learning intercultural communication is a developmental process. Beamer (1972) wrote about Gudykunst and Hammer’s three stage approach, “(a) the psychological framework of intercultural perspective followed by, (b) interaction with members of another culture, and (c) context-specific training” (p. 290). This study’s research will focus on stage three of their approach: context-specific training.

To address the research question this study applied a qualitative interpretive social science approach. An interpretive social science approach emphasizes social interaction, socially constructed meaning and value, and therefore is appropriate to answer the research question (Neuman, 2006). To simulate real-life social interaction the study used a film as a learning medium. The film depicted an actual act of Japanese leadership, in a group setting, during an intense time in history.

The study used ethnographic methods as an extension of the interpretive social science field work approach mentioned in the previous paragraph. Neuman (2006) describes ethnography field research, “…is strongest when a researcher studies a small group of people interacting in the present” (p.414). Specifically, the study used the film Visas and Virtue as the catalyst providing both the presentation of a small group of people interacting and details into the Japanese culture from the perspective of a native, Sugihara, through the actor portraying him, Chris Tashima (Toyama & Tashima, 1997). Neuman (2006) defines Ethnography, “Field research that emphasizes providing a very detailed description of a different culture from the viewpoint of an insider in the culture to facilitate understanding it” (p.381).
Consistent with other interpretive researchers who use participant observation to collect information (Neuman, 2006) this study will use a combination of non-trained, and context-specific trained participants on the subject of Japanese intercultural communication. This research will study the ability of United States citizens to improve their understanding of the Japanese culture and reduce communication uncertainty with limited context-specific intercultural communication training. Neuman (2006) comments to the purpose of conducting this form of research, “For interpretive researchers, the goal of social research is to develop an understanding of social life and discover how people construct meaning” (p.88).

**Sampling.**

The study selected seven individuals to participate. All participants were non-paid volunteers. They were friends of the researcher and all were domiciled in California. They were selected based on availability and the following criteria:

1. Anglo-Americans: defined as Americans with European origins,
2. No prior Japanese-specific intercultural communication training,
3. Did not speak the Japanese language,
4. Have not lived in Japan,
5. Are not of Japanese ancestry, and
6. Have worked or traveled internationally.

No participant was under the age of 18 and age was not a factor considered in participant selection. Participant ethnicity was captured, but not disclosed.

**Instrumentation and data collection.**

The study collected participant verbal and physical responses to the film. Participant responses were based on a questionnaire administered by the researcher. Verbal responses were
interpreted and written down by the researcher during the interview process. The researcher captured observed physical expressions during the interview using codes to reduce writing time and provide a level of interpretation consistency.

The questionnaire consisted of nine questions; three were structured to collect background information and six were structured as open-ended questions to garner information on intercultural communication competency and solicit observable reactions (Ericksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The six intercultural communication competency questions focused on: 1) Attributes of the high context Japanese culture, 2) The Japanese decision making process, 3) Japanese face-to-face meetings, 4) Japanese personal side to interaction, 5) Japanese cultural sensitivity and awareness, 6) non-verbal communication, 7) facial expressions, 8) eye contact, and 9) silence (Appendix C).

**Measures.**

The primary measure of the research addressed the correlation of Japanese-specific intercultural communication training to Japanese intercultural communication competence. Secondary measures were limited in scope and included:

1. How did the trained male versus trained female compare?
2. How did the untrained males versus untrained females compare?
3. How did participants who speak a foreign language compare?
4. Did age have an effect on participant results?
5. Did Japan-specific contact, without Japanese intercultural communication training, have any effect on participant results?
Reliability and validity.

Typically in qualitative research the principles of reliability and validity are applied differently when compared to quantitative research (Neuman, 2006). Quantitative researchers view standard and fixed measures for dependability, consistency, and reliability (Neuman, 2006). “Qualitative researchers want to be consistent” (Neuman, 2006, p.196). The structure of qualitative research may cause variability or change over time and possibly affect consistency and reliability. Methods such as clearly conceptualizing all constructs and improving the levels of measure were considered in this study to assist increasing reliability of the research.

There were several types of validity for measurement purposes in this study. Neuman (2006) provides insight into the meaning of validity for research work, “When a researcher says that an indicator is valid, it is valid for a particular purpose and definition” (p.192). Pertaining to this study, the research may be an indicator for improved Japanese intercultural communication competence given Japanese-specific intercultural communication training. The correlation may not be an exact empirical alignment, but it may be estimated. This study focused on face validity. Neuman (2006) suggests, “It is judgment by the scientific community that the indicator really measures the construct. It addresses the question: On the face of it, do people believe that the definition and method of measurement fit” (p. 192).

Procedures.

Participants were divided into two groups: the first group received no Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training and the second group received approximately one hour of Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training. The Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training was instructor-led with instruction centered on a PowerPoint slide set (Appendix A).
The training session for the second group was comprised of: a thirty minute lecture based on a PowerPoint slide set, twenty minutes of questions and answers, and instructions on how to use take-away guides. The second group received a Japanese context-specific intercultural communication quick reference guide which captured the key points of the instructor-led training. The second group referred to this guide while watching the film and during their interviews (Appendix B). The training was completed within 15 minutes prior to participant viewing of the film.

Due to participant availability and respective time constraints, the film was viewed on a laptop computer at locations stipulated by the participant. Each participant viewed the film with the interviewer present. During the viewing of the film participants, at certain spots, requested it to be stopped and replayed. Immediately after the film was viewed the interviewer interviewed the participant. The interviewer captured both verbal and physical reactions from the participant during the interview. No recording device was used during the interview process. All interview information was captured on the interview form (Appendix C).

The information captured on the interview form was coded to analyze the verbal answers and personal expressions of the participants. Neuman (2006) defines this as the first-order, “Interpretations from the point of view of the people being studied” (p.160). This study then developed a second-order interpretation as defined by Neuman (2006), “Qualitative interpretations from the point of view of the researcher who conducted the study” (p.160). Last, the study moved to a broader third-order interpretation where general theoretical significance was applied (Neuman, 2006).
Ethics.

Research involves assessing and analyzing participants. It is important that research is conducted in such a manner that no harm is invoked upon participants (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, & Piele, 2010). This research considered and respected the rights of participants while taking steps to eliminate possible physical, mental, or emotional harm.

All participants were willing volunteers who provided informed consent. Informed consent for this study included proper disclosure of the intended use of results. To protect the privacy of the participants this study took proper steps to provide confidentiality. “Confidentiality means that researchers will protect and not reveal the names of participants” (Rubin et al., 2010, p. 205).

Gonzaga University conforms to the Institutional Review Board’s (IRB) requirements for approval of any research involving human participants. This study was performed under conditions which were deemed to be at minimal risk to the participants. Minimal risk, for purposes of this study, was defined as not inducing any risk greater than what might be encountered during the participants’ normal day-to-day life. The Communication and Leadership program has been granted exemption to IRB approval for research that meets minimal risk.
Chapter 4. The Study

Introduction

This study explored context-specific training which may improve Japanese intercultural communications through uncertainty reduction. Using the film *Visas and Virtue* as the vehicle to observe a small group of people interacting, this study applied ethnography field research techniques. The film *Visas and Virtue* is based upon true events post-invasion of Poland by Nazi-Germany. The intercultural communication challenges within the film are intensified by the emotional nature of the story thus providing an excellent vehicle for study.

Seven individuals participated in this study. All participants were volunteers and personal friends of the researcher. They are all domiciled in the state of California. Interviews were conducted over a one week period. Each interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. There was no sharing of ideas or responses by the participants. The film was viewed as a group by participants 5, 6, and 7. All other participants viewed the film individually. The table below summarizes background data on each of the seven participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Travel Rating</th>
<th>Japan Contact</th>
<th>Japanese Specific Training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>AA-Education</td>
<td>Sales-RE</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>BS-Business</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>BS-Accounting</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>PhD-Marketing</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>BS-Physics</td>
<td>Grad Student</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>BS-Health Sci</td>
<td>Dental Hygienist</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>BS-Elec Engr</td>
<td>Executive – CEO</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The travel rating was a points-based approach whereby each qualified country accounted for one point. Additional background data included any foreign languages spoken (all participants spoke English as a primary language):
The participants shared the following characteristics:

1. Anglo-Americans: defined as Americans with European origins,
2. No prior Japanese-specific intercultural communication training,
3. Did not speak the Japanese language,
4. Have not lived in Japan,
5. Are not of Japanese ancestry, and
6. Have worked or traveled internationally.

The first two interview sessions took over two hours each – participants 1 and 2. These two sessions included Japanese-specific intercultural communication training. The Japanese-specific intercultural communication training used an instructor-led approach supported with visual aids such as PowerPoint slides (Appendix A), a film viewing reference guide (Appendix B), and an open question and answer session. The training took about 60 minutes to administer, viewing the film took about 30 minutes, and completing the interview took about 30 minutes to complete. At the request of several participants, videotaping and audio recording devices were not used. All data was collected by hand and captured on the paper copy of the questionnaire. The next five interview sessions took just over one hour each. No training was provided.
During the interview process: answers, dialogue, and facial expressions as well as limited body language were captured on the paper questionnaire sheets. The limited scope of the study, with six open-ended questions, led to the development of five themes through the open and axial coding process. Participant performance measured by these five themes formed the basis to address the research question, “What is the importance of limited Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training?” This data was further sliced to address five secondary measures:

1. How did the trained male versus trained female compare?
2. How did the untrained males versus untrained females compare?
3. How did participants who speak a foreign language compare?
4. Did age have an effect on participant results?
5. Did Japan-specific contact, without Japanese intercultural communication training, have any effect on participant results?

This study captured qualitative data through seven one-on-one interviews. Data collected was structured in such a manner that concepts were formed then analyzed. To enable the analysis of the collected qualitative data this study applied methods suggested by Neuman (2006), “Coding data has a different meaning and role in qualitative research. A researcher organizes the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts” (p.460). The chart on the next page summarizes the process used in this study:
Data Analysis

Typically qualitative research searches for concepts or themes buried inside collected data (Neuman, 2006). Under the typical approach open coding is used to surface themes then the next step of axial coding typically connects major codes to themes (Neuman, 2006). For this study these two coding steps resulted in the following flags or codes and five themes. Due to the limited scope of this study, the themes or concepts were very closely aligned to the six open-
ended questions on the questionnaire. The detailed criteria for: coding, categorizing, and analyzing each of the five themes is listed below:

1. **Theme**: Meaning of face-to-face meetings

   **Label** - Did the participants understand why Sugihara issued the Visas; knowing they were not telling the truth?

   a. *(Theme relates to question #4)* – Maps to the concept of trust and formality. Could Sugihara be trusted and be consistent? If the participants could anticipate with some degree of accuracy Sugihara’s actions, then a reduction of uncertainty has been achieved.

   b. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara was empathetic to the applicants providing a life-saving mechanism. From the perspective of Sugihara, the decision had been made and the meetings were just a formality.

   c. **Codes** – predetermined, rubber-stamp, formality, scripted, fixed meeting outcome

   d. **Qualification** – comments & observations from the interviews

   **Label** - Did the participants understand why Sugihara’s wife prepared the applicants before meeting with Sugihara?

   e. *(Theme relates to question #5)* – Maps to the concept of trust and non-verbal communication present in higher context cultures.

   f. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara was empathetic to the applicants providing a life-saving mechanism. From the perspective of Sugihara, the decision had been made and the meetings were just a formality.

   g. **Codes** – Save-face, look official, avoid conflict during meeting, predetermined, scripted, by the book
h. **Qualification** – comments & observations from the interviews

2. **Theme**: Silence is a Virtue

   **Label** - Did the participants understand the nature of silence for Sugihara?

   a. (Theme relates to question #6) - Maps to the concept of decision making and tradition. If the participants could anticipate with some degree of accuracy Sugihara’s actions, then a reduction of uncertainty has been achieved.

   b. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara may have appeared distant or distracted. From the perspective of Sugihara he was thoughtful, reflective, serious, and polite.

   c. **Codes** – Virtue, Reflective, Absorbed, Thinking, Regroup, Collecting himself, Internalizing

   d. **Qualification** - comments & observations from the interviews

3. **Theme**: Laughter or a smile is typically a cover for angst or discomfort

   **Label** - Did the participants understand the nature of Sugihara’s laugh when his wife called him *Samurai*?

   a. (Theme relates to question #7) – Maps to the concept of facial expressions and culture related behavior. If the participants could anticipate with some degree of accuracy Sugihara’s actions, then a reduction of uncertainty has been achieved.

   b. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara may have just been shrugging off the comment – it really did not apply to him. From the perspective of Sugihara he was uncomfortable with the comment – downplayed it.

   c. **Codes** – Discomfort, Uncomfortable, Masks concern, not to offend, in disbelief

   d. **Qualification** – comments & observations from the interviews
4. **Theme**: Importance of Honor, Tradition & Relationships

   **Label** - Did the participants understand why Sugihara continued to help the Visa applicants?

   a. (Theme relates to question #8) – Maps to tradition, honor, and relationships. If the participants could anticipate with some degree of accuracy Sugihara’s actions, then a reduction of uncertainty has been achieved.

   b. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara reflected compassion. From the perspective of Sugihara he dishonored his superiors – yet, Japanese tradition of the Samurai suggests he must help the visa applicants who come in need.

   c. **Codes** – Honor, Tradition, Relationship, Reciprocity

   d. **Qualification** – comments & observations from the interviews

5. **Theme**: Eye contact avoidance

   **Label** - How accurate were the participants’ decoding of eye-contact avoidance by Sugihara?

   a. (Theme relates to question #9) – Maps to respect, pride, and politeness. If the participants could anticipate with some degree of accuracy Sugihara’s actions, then a reduction of uncertainty has been achieved.

   b. **Definition** – From the perspective of the participants, Sugihara may have appeared rude or uncaring. From the perspective of Sugihara he was showing respect.

   c. **Codes** – Respectful, not rude, polite, show of sincerity, show of pride

   d. **Qualification** – comments & observations from the interviews
Participant rating for each theme was based upon accurate codes cited. Each correct code cited and captured during the interview process accumulated points earned. The point scale is listed below:

- Excellent rating – 2 points (maximum of 3 points allowed)
- Fair rating – 1 point
- Poor rating – 0 points

A higher rating is translated as greater participant understanding of Japanese intercultural communication and competence in Japanese intercultural communications within this specific context.

Following the open and axial coding, the study examined the themes to determine selective coding – examining themes which directly apply to the research question. All five themes generated by the open and axial coding can relate directly to the research question. The study then rated each individual participant against each theme and calculated an average score to determine an overall Japanese-specific intercultural communication competence rating.

**Results of the Study**

Applying the described rating methodology for the five themes produced the following results for each participant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>F-2-F Meeting Theme 1</th>
<th>Silence is a Virtue Theme 2</th>
<th>Smile covers discomfort Theme 3</th>
<th>Honor Tradition Relations Theme 4</th>
<th>Avoid of Eye Contact Theme 5</th>
<th>Avg Score</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Japanese Specific Training</th>
<th>Japan Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Excel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Excel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Excel</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional information and relationships:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>P</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Travel Rating</th>
<th>Prior Culture Training</th>
<th>Avg Score</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>AA-Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>BS-Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>BS-Accounting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>PhD-Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>BS-Physics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>BS-Health Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>BS-Engineering</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1.6+) Excellent / (0.7 – 1.5) Fair / (0.0 – 0.6) Poor

**Group trained in Japanese intercultural communications.**

Participants 1 and 2 were trained in Japanese context-specific intercultural communications. Their respective average scores were 2.8 and 3.0 which represented the two highest average scores for all participants. Both participants 1 and 2 never had direct contact with the Japanese culture, yet they outscored participants 4, 6, and 7 who did have direct contact with the Japanese culture. Both participants 1 and 2 expressed confidence they could read Sugihara’s body language, mannerisms, and actions better after the training. Both participants 1 and 2 commented they experienced less stress when watching Sugihara and understood his silent decisions. When asked if they were confident in anticipating Sugihara’s actions in the future; both participants 1 and 2 said, “yes,” if circumstances were similar to conditions in the film. Participant 2 scored slightly higher than participant 1; specific difference was due to the “avoiding eye-contact theme.” Participant 2 spoke Indonesian and spent several years living in Indonesia. This prolonged exposure to Southeast Asian culture may have instilled deeper insight into this theme producing greater sensitivity and awareness.
Group not trained in Japanese intercultural communications.

The group not trained in Japanese context-specific intercultural communications struggled with the questionnaire with the exception of participant 7. Excluding participant 7, the remaining four participants produced two “fair” and two “poor” scores. The two “fair” scores were produced by female participants 4 and 6. Both had direct cultural contact with Japan and participant 4 did receive prior intercultural training. Both displayed good insight and awareness regarding themes 2, 4, and 5. Both lacked knowledge of themes 1 and 3; the meaning of face-to-face meetings and the meaning of laughter or a smile. Participant 7 excelled with these two themes and with this incremental awareness produced an “excellent” score. Participant 7 had direct contact with the Japanese culture for extended periods of time and at very high business echelons. This exposure may have created a heightened level of Japanese cultural awareness in participant 7. Male participants 3 and 5 produced two “poor” scores. Together they lacked direct contact with the Japanese culture and no formal intercultural communication training. The untrained group did not produce any significant relationship of scores to age.

Significance of direct contact with Japanese culture.

The untrained group that had direct contact with Japanese culture performed better than the untrained group that did not. The untrained and no-contact with Japanese culture group, participants 3 and 5, displayed very little insight into Japanese intercultural communications.

Discussion

Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) proposed learning intercultural communication is a developmental process with three distinct stages. The study applied the third stage of context-specific training with the intent to address Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory. The primary purpose of Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) theory was suggested by
Gudykunst et al. (1986), “The major assumption of the theory is that individuals try to reduce uncertainty about others when others can provide rewards…or may be encountered in future interaction” (p.13). The following paragraphs analyze this study’s results as it pertains to context-specific training and Uncertain Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) as well as other communication theories presented in chapter 2.

The study included a total of seven participants: two trained and five not trained in Japanese context-specific intercultural communication. The two trained participants, 1 and 2, displayed a stronger understanding of Japanese intercultural communications when compared to the other five participants. Based on data collected from the seven participants the results of the trained participants 1 and 2 were much higher. Participants 1 and 2 respective average scores were 2.8 and 3.0 where potential top score was 3.0. The average score was calculated by adding the total points scored for each of the five themes then dividing this total by the number of themes. The remaining five participants’ average scores ranged from 1.6 to 0.0 points. The average scores of the study produced results which support comments from Gudykunst et al. (1991) regarding culture-specific training, “culture specific courses can be valuable” (p.274).

Participants 1 and 2 stated, when asked, they were confident in anticipating Sugihara’s, or someone like him, actions in the future if circumstances were similar to conditions in the film. This confidence suggests the newly acquired Japanese intercultural communication skills reduced communication uncertainty and suggested improved communication between communicants. Participants 1 and 2 displayed behavior which supported Gudykunst (1983) concept that the ability for communicants to move forward in a conversation or interaction requires communication uncertainty to be reduced to a level where communicants are comfortable with the amount of shared information. The Japanese context-specific intercultural
communication training promoted awareness in participants 1 and 2 which appeared missing in the untrained participants and provided a comfort of understanding.

A by-product of the research provided a positive result relating to the second stage of the three stage intercultural communication development process which relates to interaction with a foreign culture. Participant 7 was the only participant, besides participants 1 and 2, who displayed awareness for each of the five themes. Participant 7 did not perform at the depth of understanding and scored lower than the trained participants 1 and 2. Background information on participant 7 indicated he had significant exposure to the Japanese culture. His knowledge gained through immersion into the Japanese culture appeared to have improved his intercultural communication skills as indicated by his research results. Participants 4 and 6, who had direct contact with the Japanese culture produced higher research results when compared to participants 3 and 5 who had no direct contact with Japanese culture. The results of participant 7 were much higher than participants 4 and 6 which indicated that significant immersion into the Japanese culture may have a positive effect on intercultural communication skills. Participants 4, 6, and 7 interview results indicated alignment with Gudykunst and Hammer’s (1983) second stage of intercultural communication competence which included interaction with members of another culture.

In summary, the study produced results in support of Gudykunst and Hammer’s (1983) proposed theory that learning intercultural communication is a developmental process with specific attention to stage three: context-specific training. The results of participants 1 and 2 who were trained in Japanese context-specific intercultural training were much higher than the five participants that were not trained. Additionally, the results of the study provided support for the second stage of Gudykunst and Hammer’s (1983) theory which suggests that contact with a
foreign culture aids in understanding it and improving intercultural communications. Results of the study based on comments of confidence from participants 1 and 2 supported the importance of Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory as needed to insure continued communication for strangers.
Chapter 5. Summary and Conclusions

Summary

The literature review in the study presented a philosophy that obtaining personal intercultural communication competence was a learning and developmental process. The literature review provided insight into the three-stage intercultural communication development process of Gudykunst and Hammer (1983). The study narrowed its focus to address only one of the three stages; context specific training (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983). The study further limited its research to Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training and Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975) as it pertains to intercultural communication competence.

The study addressed intercultural communication competence between the members of the high-context Japanese culture and the low-context Anglo-American culture. The qualitative research performed indicated that Japanese context-specific training may have a positive effect on an individual’s ability to reduce communication uncertainty and improve intercultural communication competence. An unintended outcome of the research was the effect of immersion into the Japanese culture which is stage two of the three stage intercultural communication development process (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983). Research results indicated this may have positive effects on improving intercultural communication competence as shown by the results of participants 4, 6, and 7.

Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The narrow scope limited the results of the study to be applied as indicators for the effectiveness of intercultural communication training to intercultural communication competence across a broader cultural spectrum. The small sample size and the randomness of the sample
limited broader application of the research results. The narrow scope of Japanese-specific intercultural communication training did enable this study to focus its efforts. The focused approach enabled a tighter view and supported face validity that the indicator may measure the construct.

The research was limited by a number of specific factors. The study was limited by its narrow focus on one of the three stages of the intercultural communication development process suggested by Gudykunst and Hammer (1983). The research was further limited by its narrow scope of focusing on Japanese intercultural communication competence and the limitation of only examining Uncertainty Reduction Theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). The study included only seven participants with no consideration given to selecting a representative sample for any given group or population. The film used to observe Japanese intercultural communication behavior was limited in the number of issues presented as well as the depth of each incident. Only one researcher administered interviews; limiting data collection of verbal and physical observations and responses to questions.

Future research should address all three stages of the development process and include other intercultural communication theories beyond uncertainty reduction. Future research should consider including several key components suggested by Gudykunst et al. (1991): cognitive components, affective components, and behavior components. To broaden the scope of future research different cultures should be studied to address multi-cultural diversity issues. Representative samples of participants should be selected, trained, and interviewed to provide results which may be used to develop meaningful intercultural communication behavioral models. Future research should consider participant interactive activities providing emotional, intellectual, and sensory data collection opportunities.
Conclusions

The acceleration of globalization and the resultant requirements for intercultural communications competence places strain on global human interaction and understanding. Our ability to communicate effectively, sending and receiving understandable messages, is being aided by technology and training. Technology is developing tools to address language barriers and face-to-face physical limitations. Currently cognitive and behavioral technology tools are lacking. The void is being filled with training.

Training is currently limited. More research is needed to develop training materials and methods which will prove effective for different cultures and under differing conditions or contexts. Current training contains many pitfalls; Gudykunst et al. (1991) suggests shortfalls in instructor skill-sets, incomplete methodologies, and limited content. This study has shown that Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training can result in improved intercultural communication competence for a given context-specific situation and supports literature promoting culture-specific training to improve intercultural communication competence.

The results of the study provided a limited challenge to comments from Gao (2010) who suggested that international communication expertise can only be learned or gained through experience. The trained participants 1 and 2 of the study had no direct contact or experience with the Japanese culture yet scored higher than participants 4, 6, and 7 who had direct contact. These results indicate that context-specific training may provide stronger intercultural communication skills than direct experience or contact without training.

Use of the film Visas and Virtue provided a non-intrusive catalyst and open forum where participants could minimize anxiety and improve learning. Using the film as a learning
mechanism appeared to reduce participant apprehension as they appeared at-ease or comfortable during viewing and during interviewing. This technique appeared to reduce possible communication apprehension which Allen et al. (2003) deemed destructive to the intercultural communication learning process.

The philosophy that human communication is never really possible without understanding the other person’s culture was addressed by the study as it looked beyond spoken words and the use of language alone. The study supported Caputo et al. (2002) comments that culture is often unseen yet exerts powerful influence and guides behavior. The study results supported one key aspect which anthropologists agree upon in that culture can be learned and in doing so intercultural communication may improve.


Appendix

A: Japanese context-specific intercultural communication training material

B: Japanese context-specific reference guide

C: Participant questionnaire