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How Can An Organization Use the Differences in Behavior and Perception of Its Members to Build Collaborative Relationships? - A Case Study on an Ethiopia-Japan Cross-Cultural Organization for Development -

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HOW CAN AN ORGANIZATION USE THE DIFFERENCES IN BEHAVIOR AND PERCEPTION OF ITS MEMBERS TO BUILD COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS? A CASE STUDY ON AN ETHIOPIA-JAPAN CROSS-CULTURAL ORGANIZATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

Akie Nawa

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Abstract

This study explores differences in behavior and perception between the Japanese and Ethiopian staff members of a small development Non-Government Organization (NGO) based in Japan. Eight categories of difference are identified: ways to get work done, the value of money, pride, positive attitude and cheerfulness, attitude towards work and learning, openness and informality, sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and humaneness. In order to supplement the findings, a previously conducted study on this subject was consulted; this helped to identify additional differences. This study also explores ways to use these differences in behavior and perception effectively to build a more collaborative relationship in the organization.

1.   Introduction

I first met the Ethiopian president of a small NGO in the spring of 2010 in Tokyo, Japan. He was the founder of an NGO, Ethiopian Future Children (EFC), based in Ibaraki prefecture in the north-east of Japan. Since its establishment in 2001, EFC has helped small-scale farmers in Ethiopia through supporting the development and modernization of agriculture. I have been working closely with EFC on a development project since then.

During the past two years with EFC, I have been inspired by the positive impact it has made to communities in the country. Groups of young farmers have been formed, a series of training courses on farming techniques have been conducted, and 5-kilometer paved road and an agricultural waterway have been constructed. These have greatly improved the farmers' farming activities and the quality of their lives. The representative received an award from the Japanese government in May 2010. This is conferred by the Japanese emperor to foreigners who have made a notable contribution to enhance bilateral relations.

Despite the organization's achievements, however, I have also seen many internal conflicts in the organization. Some of the conflicts seem to be caused by the lack of an effective management system. Others appear to have resulted from a lack of mutual understanding of different behavioral and thinking patterns between Japanese members and Ethiopian members of EFC, and the resultant distrust among the members of the organization. I believe that EFC could overcome many organizational challenges, and therefore contribute a lot more to the development of Ethiopia, if it could govern these differences more effectively and

innovatively. In addition, given that EFC wants to expand the organization, its members need to be able to respond to increasing organizational diversity.

Although I am not a member of EFC, I have had an opportunity to be deeply involved with it. I would like to contribute to EFC and help make the organization better and more effective. Therefore, I decided to study the differences between EFC's Japanese and Ethiopian members, which seem to be a main cause of the organization's dysfunction, and to find ways to utilize these differences.

Ideally, both sets of differences should have been identified: the differences in behavior and perception that the Japanese members found in their Ethiopian colleagues, and those that the Ethiopian members found in their Japanese colleagues. It was felt, however, that it would be difficult to contact the Ethiopian members during the research, as two out of three of them were staying in a remote village of Ethiopia with poor communications. Thus, I focused on the Japanese members of EFC in this study. I identified which behavioral and thinking patterns of the Ethiopian members of EFC they perceived as differences. In addition, I explored how members could take advantage of the perceived differences for better collaboration in the organization.

2.   History and Profile of Ethiopian Future Children

2.1   History of Ethiopian Future Children

The president of EFC was born in the late 1940s near the northern border of Ethiopia. After

he finished high school he moved to the United States of America, where he graduated from South Illinois University. In 1975 he got a scholarship from UNESCO, and moved to Japan to study ceramics. Since then, he has lived in Japan in Ibaraki prefecture for more than thirty years. When a devastating famine hit Ethiopia in 1984, he promised himself that he would do all he could to eliminate hunger and poverty in his country. After some years of trial and error, he finally set up his own NGO, named Ethiopia Future Children, to help the younger generation in the country.

It has difficult for him to expand the organization after establishing it with his passion and ideals. Proposals for development projects in Ethiopia submitted to the Japanese government were turned down many times. He put a lot of effort into identifying board members, many of whom joined the organization but left some time afterwards due to internal conflicts among various stakeholders. After these challenging periods, EFC finally got a lot of funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) under the Grassroots Technical Cooperation program. EFC launched a three-year project, aiming to promote water-saving irrigation techniques among small-scale farmers in Yaya Gulele district, Oromia region in Ethiopia.

2.2   Organizational structure of Ethiopian Future Children

EFC was established with a vision of "improving the life of the local community by transferring farming technology and by implementing such necessary infrastructure as feeder

roads, water supply, and technical information in the form of books" (EFC's website).

As of 2012, EFC has three senior managers: the Ethiopian president, a Japanese vice president, and a Japanese managing director, who mainly supervises the finance and administration of the organization. In addition, there are ten Japanese board members in Japan, all of whom are part-time volunteers in EFC activities. EFC has its local office in Fiche, a small town in Yaya Gulele district. It is 120 km north of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. This office comprises two young Ethiopian staff and the Japanese vice president, who has been stationed there as project manager of the JICA project.

3.　　Research Questions

Similar to most small NGOs all over the world, EFC has many organizational challenges. These include chronic lack of funding, difficulty in hiring capable staff, and some members' low commitment to EFC's activities. The most serious and fundamental issue in the organization seems to be distrust, and the resultant internal conflicts between the members. Hearing them complain about each other, it appears that the distrust comes from differences in the ways that Ethiopian and Japanese members behave and think .

On the one hand, one Ethiopian member does not appear to trust his Japanese colleague, complaining about his "Japanese style of proceeding things, namely, always negative and pessimistic attitude, and unnecessary intervention to the organization", to quote his words. On the other hand, one Japanese member often expresses his distrust to one of the Ethiopian

staff with a comment that "Ethiopians are mean about money." There are many other examples that manifest the mutual distrust between the members in the organization.

Some of these different patterns of behavior and thinking could be attributed to cultural differences between Ethiopia and Japan, while others might just be differences in individual characteristics or personalities. Whether they are cultural or personal, these perceived differences should not remain as seeds of distrust. EFC is hoping to expand its operations both in Japan and Ethiopia, and this is expected to bring more diversity into the organization. Moreover, it would be beneficial if members of EFC could take advantage of the differences as a resource for better organizational performance.

In order to find some ways for EFC to take advantage of its organizational diversity, I put my research questions as follows, focusing on the Japanese members as mentioned in Section 1:

1) How do the Japanese members of EFC describe differences between themselves and their Ethiopian colleagues in terms of their patterns of behavior and thinking?

2) How can the EFC staff members turn these differences into opportunities for greater collaboration and organizational effectiveness?

This study is limited to a small case study of a specific Japanese development organization, with a few research subjects. It is difficult to draw generalized conclusions for a broader setting that goes beyond the organization. The study, however, could contribute to Japanese

who are or will be in projects or organizations where they work with Ethiopians, and to Ethiopians who work with Japanese.

Most of the studies that deal with organizational diversity in the context of Japan are related to women's empowerment, more or less ignoring other aspects of diversity (Mercer Japan, 2008; Magoshi, 2011). The few studies that cover organizational diversity in or about Japan in terms of nationality and race refer to Americans, Europeans, or Asians (Hall, 1987; Kawatani, 2010). Most studies comparing specifically between Japan and Ethiopia are either medical or biological research, or on international relations and politics. No literature of cross-cultural comparison between the two countries has been found except for one developed by Levine (2005), which discussed the difference in the spirit of warriorhood and its influence on the army system in both countries.

Therefore the findings from this study, which explores perceived differences between Japanese and Ethiopians, and ways to use them effectively for better collaboration, could contribute to Japanese and Ethiopians who work together, or those who live in the same community.

4.   Literature Review

4.1   Cultural comparison between Ethiopia and Japan

Ethiopia and Japan have many things in common. Neither country has been colonized, unlike their neighbors. They both have old, long-lasting systems of royal family. They are

both isolated from other countries by the natural environment - the high mountains in Ethiopia and the ocean in Japan. The personality of both peoples also seems to have some common characteristics. Both bow when they meet others, are rather reserved, and have respect for elders. These similarities do not mean, however, that both cultures are similar. Looking at research comparing cultures in Ethiopia and Japan, there are clear differences.

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a research study comparing national tendency of behavior and perception. The original form of the WVS was the European Values Survey, developed in the early 1980s by Departments of Divinity at six European universities in order to survey the religious values of their countries' population. In 1981, a U.S. sociologist, Ronald Inglehart, transformed it substantially into the World Values Survey. This covers more countries and values than the European Values Survey. The WVS has been conducted regularly in approximately 50 countries, including both Ethiopia and Japan. The sixth round was started in 2011. It has been used for reference by many prestigious international media and other institutions, such as *The Times*, *The Economist*, and the World Bank.

The WVS consists of more than two hundred questions relating to the following areas: *perceptions of life*, *environment*, *work*, *family*, *politics and society*, *religion and moral*, *and national identity*. The most recently completed survey, the fifth round, covers both Japan and Ethiopia. By reviewing all the data of both countries, some categories were identified that show interesting differences between Japanese and Ethiopian perspectives, which did not

show up from my interviews. I will refer to the differences between the two countries in Section 6, and discuss their implications in the context of this study.

4.2 Framework of organizational analysis

In order to manage organizational diversity effectively and promote collaboration among people with different backgrounds, an organization-wide approach to addressing the differences is required (Magoshi, 2011). There are some empirically-derived models and frameworks for an organization-wide approach to the management of organizational diversity.

Cox (1991) developed a conceptual framework for organizational analysis for effective integration of culturally diverse personnel, and listed various tools to achieve integration. Mercer Japan (2008) also developed a framework for managing diversity with seven components, through case studies of Japan-based organizations. Although these frameworks give us concrete and useful suggestions for how to address organizational diversity and effectively use it, they are more helpful in the context of large-scale organizations. They do not fit so well into small organizations like EFC, which do not have a clear organizational structure or a large number of personnel.

Cox proposed the integration of organizational diversity through systematic means, such as career development, affirmative action, and mentoring programs. These will be necessary for EFC as well when, but only when, it becomes an organization of a certain size. Mercer

Japan's framework includes a management way of middle managers, small-group activities and cross-functional collaboration beyond organizational division, all of which hypothesize that the organization is large enough to have an organizational hierarchy and division system.

In this study, I will use the McKinsey 7S Framework as a framework of organizational analysis. This is a highly popular framework of organizational analysis, which was developed by two consultants at the worldwide business consultancy firm, McKinsey & Company, in the early 1980s. The basic concept of the 7S Framework is that an organization needs to address seven internal aspects simultaneously in order to achieve a specific organizational goal, whether it be improving organizational performance, aligning business processes during a merger or acquisition, or speculating on the likely effects of future change in an organization.

The framework has been used in countless studies and projects on organizational issues and forms of organization. Despite the relatively long time since it was developed, its efficacy has not been lost (Michalski, 2011).   The seven aspects of the 7S Framework enable comprehensive analysis of any scale or form of organization, and, therefore, it is appropriate to use the 7S Framework in the context of this study.

Each factor of the framework is defined below. In addition, the implications of the framework to this study are explained, to explore effective ways of using perceived differences between members of the organization with different nationalities for better

collaboration. These implications will be considered later in Section 6, in order to discuss concrete measures and actions for effective collaboration in EFC.

The framework consists of seven factors: *strategy, shared value, structure, system, skill, staff, and style*.

4.2.1   Strategy

Strategy is defined as "the plan devised to maintain and build competitive advantage over the competition" (Mind Tools Ltd., 2012). In the context of EFC as a development NGO, "competitive advantage over the competition" can be interpreted as unique organizational strengths to make the organization competitive in acquiring funding from donor institutions' limited resources to implement projects in Ethiopia. EFC's organizational diversity, in terms of staff members' nationalities, could be a competitive advantage if it is managed effectively. The organization needs to build a strategy that can release the full potential of its diversity.

While organizational diversity can be utilized as a source of strength if the organization's strategy addresses the diversity effectively, the strategy itself also determines what kind of organizational diversity would work in the organization. Richard's (2000) research on the relationship between organizational racial diversity and organizational performance in a bank showed no direct positive correlation between the two. But it also concluded that the strategies an organization pursued, and the organization's response and management of its racial diversity, decided if the diversity would bring a positive impact to the organization.

Thus, it is important for EFC to consider what kind of diversity the organization requires in the light of its strategy.

4.2.2   Shared value

Shared value refers to the central values of the organization that appear clearly in the organizational culture and the work ethic. Many researchers in the fields of diversity management and cross-cultural studies point out that it is absolutely imperative to promote organizational values of respecting the differences between people and to avoid stereotypes (Cox and Blake, 1991; Miller, Fields, Kumar & Ortiz; 2000; Hofstede, 2011; Magoshi, 2011). These values must be clearly expressed in the organization's mission or vision statement (Cox, 1991). In the context of effective collaboration among people with different nationalities in a small organization like EFC, all the staff members should make a commitment to accept this positively and respect their differences. The collective commitment must be repeatedly expressed.

4.2.3   Structure

The *structure* is the way the organization is structured and who reports to whom. This means the roles and responsibilities of each member, as well as groups of members in the organization, and the route and process of official communication between members and groups. For better collaboration in a nationally diverse organization, it could be effective to reconsider members' roles and responsibilities based on the strengths and preferences

promoted by their national culture, so that they can perform better. Moreover, the route and process of official communication should involve representatives of all the different nationalities, in order to reflect and address the differences between them. This communication can be strengthened through the organizational system mentioned next.

4.2.4 System

The *system* is defined as "the daily activities and procedures that staff members engage in to get the job done" (Mind Tools Ltd., 2012). From the perspective of collaboration in a culturally diverse organization, communication (in person or virtual, one-to-one or collective), problem solving and decision making, and conflict management are important elements of the organizational system (Halverson & Tirmizi, 2008).

Regarding communication, open communication with cultural sensitivity is key, and the capacity for effective inter-cultural communication needs to be enhanced. In addition, in cross-cultural organizations like EFC which cannot avoid virtual communication due to the members' separate locations, frequent communication through multiple channels using advanced communication technologies is required (Griffin, 2008). In virtual communication, it is necessary to have somebody who takes full responsibility for initiating, monitoring and completing the communication, as virtual communication can easily create misunderstanding or fade out without achieving its initial goal.

With respect to problem solving and decision making, Gobbo (2008) developed a problem

solving model for multicultural teams and organizations that consists of six steps: developing problem awareness, gathering information, identifying alternatives, selecting a solution, implementing the solution, and evaluating the outcomes. Although this does not sound like a new approach, she emphasizes that all six steps need cultural considerations to be brought in. For instance, when developing problem awareness, members of the team or organization should be aware of the cultural bias or interpretation that they attach to their description of the problem.

Japan is known for practicing a unique approach to decision making. The basis of the approach is *paternalistic participatory decision making*, prevalent in Asia and the Middle East, in which the superiors in an organization have the power to take decisions. The Japanese way of decision making has two unique practices. These are semi-official consultation with stakeholders prior to the official occasion for decision making, and bottom-up approval before management sign-off (Gobbo, 2008). For both problem solving and decision making, in the context of the target organization in this study, it is important to understand the typical approaches of both countries, and to explore common ground that can be shared.

For conflict management, the members of diverse organizations need to develop their understanding of each others' cultural styles for addressing and dealing with conflict, They need to be more skillful at various approaches for conflict resolution, from interpersonal

communication, to dialogue, to negotiation, to third party intervention, compared to

homogenous organizations (Ungerleider, 2008). The development of capacity for conflict

management is a necessary factor for effective collaboration.

4.2.5　Skill

Skill means actual skills and competencies of the members of the organization. In the

discussed context, skill means the members' abilities to address and use their differences in

behavior and thinking. All the organizational activities mentioned above, namely,

communication, problem solving and decision making, and conflict management, require

capacity building of the members through training.

Watanabe (2003) suggests three aspects to address cross-cultural situations, based on

previous research on cross-cultural education: *cultural awareness*, *cultural assimilation*, *and*

cultural synergy. C*ultural awareness* is to delve into each other's assumptions and cognitive

frameworks. *Cultural assimilation* is to make sense of the reasons for certain behavior and

thinking caused by someone who is from a different cultural background. *Cultural synergy* is

to create a brand-new solution to cross-cultural issues. This is done by, first, describing the

issues from the perspective of each cultural party, then looking at the cultural assumptions

that exist in the background of the issues, and exploring a solution that can value all the

cultural assumptions. The skills in these three approaches must be acquired and enhanced

through continuous practice in daily activities in organizations, as they are the essence of

collaboration in a diverse setting.

4.2.6   **Staff**

The *staff* is defined as "the organization's human resources; refers to how people are developed, trained, socialized, integrated, motivated, and how their careers are managed" (Vaidyanathan, 2005). In the discussed context, a system to encourage the people with differences to socialize might be worth considering. It can be helpful for the organization to have opportunities for members to socialize with each other informally outside the organization. Knowing each other as individuals, as opposed to colleagues, brings a positive impact into organizations (Kawatani, 2010).

4.2.7   Style

The *style* refers to the leadership style employed by the organization. Williams (2008) suggests *shared leadership* as an effective style of leadership in a multicultural organization. This is ultimately aimed at "[getting] team members to share leadership functions, with no one person being designated as the leader and with decisions being made through consensus". On the other hand, research on the relationship between organizational performance and leadership style in a demographically diverse organization conducted by Kearney and Gebert (2009) concluded that *transformational leadership* could be a key factor in fostering performance in diverse teams. With this there are clearly designated leaders, who focus on followers' internal motivation and engage them through their ideas, such as vision, commitment, or fulfillment of higher-order needs.

Combining with the perspective of organizational growth, Halverson & Tirmizi (2008) mentioned that a diverse organization in its early stage of the development tends to require more directive leadership. As the organization grows and becomes mature, the effective leadership style may change to shared leadership. In the discussed context, members of the organization first need to look at differences in their preferred leadership style, and then explore common ground for effective leadership.

5.   Research Methodology

5.1   Data collection

This research is a case study based on in-depth interviews with a small group of selected interviewees. The interviews were conducted in March 2012. Two groups of people were interviewed: (1) four Japanese members of EFC who have been relatively active in the organization and were available at that time; and (2) four Japanese development consultants or experts who have been working with EFC in development projects during the past two years. Although the focus of the study is on the perceived differences in behavior and perception that Japanese have vis-à-vis their Ethiopian colleagues, an interview with one Ethiopian, the president of EFC, was also conducted to elicit insights from the Ethiopian perspective that may shed light on how the members of the organization can utilize the perceived differences (for the interviewee profile, see Appendix 1).

5.2   Interview questions

The questions of the in-depth interviews are given below. In order to avoid the interviewees of EFC not being 100% truthful in what they think/feel, being afraid of creating further internal conflicts in the organization, the interviews were made with anonymity.

Question 1) Individual's background (name, age, sex, length of time working in/with EFC).

Question 2) How do you describe salient differences between you and your Ethiopian colleagues at EFC in terms of ways of behavior and thinking?

Question 3) Describe your impression of the best collaboration between the Ethiopian and Japanese members of EFC.

Question 4) Describe a situation(s) where you, as a Japanese member of EFC, effectively collaborated with your Ethiopian colleagues. When and how was this done? Why do you think you collaborated effectively with them?

Question 5) Regarding the differences in behavior and thinking you recognize between Ethiopian and Japanese members, how do you think you and/or EFC could build on these differences positively to achieve the best type of collaboration that you described? What kind of individual and organizational efforts must be made to deal with the differences?

5.3   Data analysis

In Section 6, the interviewees' perceived differences in behavior and thinking are

categorized with the narratives brought up during the interviews. Regarding the categorization, I adopted an *inductive analysis* rather than a *deductive analysis* approach. The inductive analysis approach uses categories expressed by the research subjects, while a *deductive analysis* approach uses categories developed by the researcher through relevant literature or his or her own previous experience. It has been critiqued that the analytical categories developed by researchers may well reflect their worldviews rather than the subjects' (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). After categorization, empirically defined differences in behavioral and cognitive characteristics between Japanese and Ethiopians were explored through a data source, in order to find some additional possible differences. (Research Question 1).

Then, organizational factors and individual and organizational efforts that were considered by the interviewees as important in the best collaboration between Ethiopian and Japanese members of EFC are listed. (Research Question 2).

6.   Findings

6.1   Differences perceived by the Japanese interviewees

During the interviews, the Japanese interviewees gave various narratives about the differences in behavior and thinking they had found in their Ethiopian colleagues. The chart below shows the categorization of differences and the number of interviewees who referred to

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each category.

Table 1. Categorization of the differences in behavior and thought the Japanese interviewees perceived vis-à-vis their Ethiopian colleagues

No.	Categories	Total number of interviewees referring to category
1	Ways to get work done	8
2	Value of money	5
3	Pride	4
4	Positive attitude and cheerfulness	4
5	Attitude toward work and learning	2
6	Openness and informality	1
7	Sense of "insider" and "outsider"	1
8	Humaneness	1

Below are the relevant narratives on each category given by the interviewees.

6.1.1 Ways to get works done

　　All eight Japanese interviewees referred to the same three things regarding the way Ethiopian colleagues get their work done: (A) putting little or no importance on planning when they work; (B) making little or no communication about important issues in the organization; and (C) lack of punctuality and little concern with time.

> (A) "*When I worked with my Ethiopian colleague, he <u>never made a plan for the next day</u>. When I asked him if all the scheduled tasks would be completed in such an unplanned manner, he kept saying that everything would be alright at the end*."
>
> "*The Ethiopian staff <u>does not make necessary appointments until the last minute</u> that made my work severely inefficient.*"
>
> "*I once developed a strategic plan for EFC, having been worried that the organization wouldn't be able to achieve its goal if the staff would work in the same*

way as they have done so far. The Ethiopian staff, however, did <u>not even read the</u> <u>strategic plan carefully and think twice.</u>"

(B) "*The president does <u>not give us clear explanation on what is going on in the</u> <u>organization even if it is a strategic issue</u>. For instance, EFC has been desperately looking for a project manager who can carry out a new project in Ethiopia. The president assured us last August that he had some person in his mind and was sure of having contact with him. Since then, however, no communication about this matter was made to us. Recently, I asked him how the thing has been going and he did not clearly answer about it. After some trials, I ended up with giving up.*"

(C) "*Our Ethiopian colleagues <u>don't keep time at work</u>, whether it is for a meeting or a field trip. Even if they are blamed against the delay, they <u>don't seem to care about</u> <u>it.</u>*"

The way to get work done is the most fundamental element of collaboration in organizations. The fact that most Japanese in this study mentioned the difference negatively suggests that the organization might be facing substantial degradation of its productivity and performance. The organization should either set up a standard work process applied to everybody, or explore ways in which members can respect each other's way of getting work done positively without losing productivity and effectiveness.

6.1.2   Value of money

Five interviewees said that their Ethiopian colleagues valued money much more than other things, such as rational explanation, friendship, and technical input.

"*When I proposed the Ethiopian staff the rate of their daily allowance, they <u>directly</u> <u>and aggressively opposed to it</u> and <u>any rational explanation about it could not</u> <u>convince them</u> at all.*"

"*When it comes to money, the Ethiopian members <u>change their attitudes enormously</u>. Before they knew how much I got paid as a technical expert of agriculture, we had a good friendship each other and they were showing great appreciation to what I had*

done in their country. Since they knew that accidentally, however, they have not been as they used to be and <u>our good relationship seemed to be broken forever</u>. Now, they even tell me sometimes, "We don't need any foreign experts as we have Ethiopian experts here" or "It doesn't make sense to pay a big amount of money for Japanese experts. We can use that money for purchase of agricultural equipment or construction of local infrastructure."

"The local Ethiopian staff does not value knowledge accumulation and technical transfer but <u>value only monetary input and assistance</u>."

The perspective towards money would be greatly influenced by a country's current economic situation and its history of economic development, and may not be considered as a factor of cultural or organizational diversity. However, particularly in the context of development, money plays a big role in work performance. It would be helpful for those who are involved in development work to understand how to handle different perspectives of people towards money.

6.1.3 Pride

Four interviewees mentioned in similar expressions that their Ethiopian colleagues "had much pride". When asked what they meant, they mentioned two things: (A) not taking actions that they do not like even if they would help to achieve goals; and (B) not accepting criticism and feedback even if it is constructive.

(A) *The president likes very much a Japanese proverb 'Bushi wa kuwanedo taka-yoji'"* ("even being hungry, samurai pretends to be full using toothpick in his mouth". It implies that even if you are poor and your life is severe, you should not show the poverty and hardship you are facing and should live with self-esteem and pride). *When I gave the president an opportunity to sell his ceramic works at a co-op, he didn't like the idea although it would bring him some money. In addition, he has*

never accepted my suggestion to make ceramic works that would meet preference of *Japanese people in order to make a living.* He has kept making only something that *he wants to make, although his life has been very severe.*"

"*The president keeps his attitude of "welcome the coming, speed the parting guest."* *He never does his best to hire or retain a staff member even if s/he is helpful to the* *organization.*"

"*He doesn't make any effort to raise funding in any EFC's organizational events. He* *even invites his friends to the events free of charge so that he can be looked well* *from them.*"

(B) "*When I had a conflict with one of the Ethiopian members over his attitude* *toward and management of the organization, he didn't listen to me at all and kept* *saying that they were alright.*"

"*When the Ethiopian staff is denied what he said or did, he easily gets angry and* *doesn't listen to what other people say.*"

"*A local staff never admits that his organization is under governance of its* *headquarters in Japan.*"

The situations described above to show the Ethiopian members' "high pride" may not necessarily be actual manifestations of their pride. For instance, the president may have kept his attitude of "welcome the coming, speed the parting guest" not because he has much pride, but because he may think that those who really want to work for the organization should become members.

6.1.4 Positive attitude and cheerfulness

Three interviewees pointed out their Ethiopian colleagues' positive attitude and cheerfulness as positive distinctive characteristics. One interviewee, however, expressed the irritation she had felt when the positive attitude did not have any foundation.

"*The representative has never shown his anger or dissatisfaction in front of us. The* *local staff also seems to be always positive and cheerful and try to make a good*

atmosphere among people, except in a situation where they are dealing with money."

"*Compared to people who I met in the other African countries, the Ethiopian staff is overall cheerful.*"

"*Even when the ongoing project has got stuck, the Ethiopian staff keeps saying that everything would be fine without concrete strategies for improving the situation. That irritates me so much.*"

The Ethiopian members' positive attitude and cheerfulness would be definitely necessary for better collaboration in the organization. Japanese tend to avoid uncertainty, and feel extremely uncomfortable without a concrete strategy and clear rules and procedures (Hofstede, 2001). The positive attitude and cheerfulness could be used effectively in EFC only when they are accompanied by a concrete organizational strategy being steadily implemented in order to avoid vagueness and uncertainty.

The following three categories were mentioned by only one or two interviewees, and may be less important as data compared to the above-mentioned categories.

6.1.5   Attitude toward work and learning

Two interviewees mentioned that their Ethiopian colleagues had a different attitude towards work and learning.

"*One of the Ethiopian staff was taking a nap while I was interviewing some farmers for an agricultural study. Although his role at that moment was just a coordinator and he was not obliged to be fully engaged in the interview, he would have learned a lot from it if he actively participated in it. If I were him, I would have listened carefully to what the farmers were saying as I could understand them better and that would contribute to work.*"

"*At the beginning when I started the technical guidance and consulting regarding agricultural cooperatives, the local Ethiopian staff didn't seem to be interested in*

them at all. As the work moved on, however, <u>they had gradually come to recognize their importance</u>. Maybe as they are still young and inexperienced, <u>they might not be able to value what is really important</u>."

Given that the local staff had come to recognize the importance of what the expert had provided, as shown in the second narrative, there may also be the underlying difference in what they think is important under their perceived difference in attitude toward work and learning.

6.1.6   Openness and informality

One interviewee spoke about the Ethiopian president's open communication with anybody as a difference between them. Even though this characteristic might be the president's unique personal trait, it should be utilized strategically as a precious organizational resource.

> "*The president speaks to and chats with unfamiliar people without hesitation everywhere and gets friends with them easily. His ability to <u>create a network through open and informal communication</u> is outstanding.*"

6.1.7   Sense of "insider" and "outsider"

One interviewee pointed out as a difference a sense of "insider" and "outsider" that Ethiopian colleagues seemed to have.

> "*When I tried to involve in the ongoing project a Japanese expert who has been living and working in Ethiopia for a long time and therefore has substantial experience in the country and related fields of the project, all the Ethiopian staff refused to accept him, saying, 'He is outside EFC. Why does he have to be involved?'*"

From this narrative, it could be expected that the Ethiopian members value how to maintain a secure and comfortable group more than how to make things work better, compared to the Japanese members. If so, the interviewee could have done something to involve the Japanese expert, proving to the Ethiopian members that the expert was actually a supporter of the organization and by no means brought a negative impact on to their perceived group.

6.1.8 Humaneness

One interviewee expressed a perceptual difference using a Japanese word that can be translated into "humaneness".

> *"However big quarrel I have with my Ethiopian colleagues at work, they become friendly after some time."*
> *"When a key of my room in a hotel didn't work, one of the Ethiopian staff took care of it until he got sure that there wouldn't be any more problems."*

6.2 Differences perceived by the Ethiopian interviewee

As mentioned in Section 5, despite the fact that this study is focusing on differences perceived by Japanese members of EFC, I also interviewed one Ethiopian, the president of EFC, regarding the differences he had perceived between the Ethiopian and Japanese members. This was to supplement the findings from the interviews with the Japanese members.

He referred to three differences: pride, volunteer culture, and all-or-nothing mentality.

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6.2.1 Pride

He mentioned Ethiopians' pride in contrast to other Africans.

> *"The Japanese members don't accept the Ethiopian's pride. We Ethiopians have a mentality of "Bushi wa kuwanedo taka-yoji" and sometimes even refuse a project which could bring some money into the country if we don't like something about the project. Japanese people seem to have an idea that poor Africans should accept whatever money is given to them and follow whatever advice provided to them. They consider all the African countries as just one 'Africa', but we Ethiopians have never been colonized and are something different from other African countries."*

Although this is the opinion of only one Ethiopian, and does not represent all the Ethiopians in EFC, given that half of the Japanese interviewees referred to pride as the difference between themselves and their Ethiopian colleagues, it can be anticipated that pride does play a role in their collaboration.

6.2.2 Volunteer culture

He referred to the Japanese members' lack of "volunteer culture".

> *"They have no volunteer culture. When we had a fundraising event, some Japanese members asked me if lunch boxes were provided to them. We are all volunteers. A volunteer is a person who provides free service. How can volunteers get lunch boxes?"*

One Japanese interviewee expressed his frustration toward the president, saying that he invited his friends to fundraising events without charging them the admission fee. Now, the president referred to a fundraising event where the Japanese members asked about lunch boxes. This might not be about whether there is a volunteer culture or not. It might be a

different understanding of fundraising events.

6.2.3   All-or-nothing mentality

He said that Japanese have an "all-or-nothing mentality" and expressed his frustration

against some Japanese members' tendency to give something up quickly when a situation

becomes difficult.

> *"Some time back, one Japanese member tried to bring in some woman to the*
> *organization. Despite of his effort, she ended up with not accepting the offer because,*
> *according to the member, I was rude to her. He was upset with that and angrily told*
> *me that he would leave the organization. That was his second time to say that. Since*
> *then, he has said that he would quit his job in this organization whenever he faced*
> *difficult situations."*

Given that the president did not think that he was rude to the woman ("according to the

member, I was rude…"), there might have been a difference in what the Japanese member

and Ethiopian president considered as "rude" in terms of either communication or process to

move things forward.

6.3   Insights from an existing study on the differences between Japanese and

Ethiopian behavior and perceptions

As mentioned in Section 4, the World Value Survey provides quite comprehensive data

regarding people's value and perspectives in about fifty countries for the past thirty years.

The most recently published survey, conducted from 2005 to 2007, covers both Japan and

Ethiopia. In Japan, a major advertising agency collected data from 1,000 samples through a

mail survey between July and August 2005. In Ethiopia, a local research and marketing

institution collected data from 300 samples through personal interviews between March and

April 2007.

By reviewing all the data of both countries, some categories were identified that show

differences between Japanese and Ethiopians' perspectives on religion, work, commitment to

and pride in own country, and other important traits.

6.3.1   Religion

The survey result indicates that Ethiopians put more substantial value on religion compared

to Japanese, as shown in Table 2. More than 90 percent of the Ethiopian respondents think

that religion is important in their life, and about 80 percent of them attend religious services

once a week or more. Many of them also believe that churches would give answers to various

problems and their spiritual needs.

Table 2. Comparison between Japan and Ethiopia from perspective of religion

Question		%		
		Japan	Ethiopia	Gap
1. How important religion is in life	Very important	6.5	81.0	74.5
	Rather important	13.1	13.2	0.1
2. Member or not of church or religious organization	Active member	4.4	29.8	25.4
	Inactive member	7.6	49.2.	41.6
3. How frequently attend religious services	Once a week or more	3.3	77.2	73.9
	Only on special days	42.1	4.1	38.0
4. Churches give answers to*:	Moral problems	23.7	79.0	55.3
	Family life problems	17.2	72.6	55.4
	Spiritual needs	36.6	76.4	39.8
	Social problems	7.6	74.2	66.6

In the context of EFC, no interviewees mentioned the differences between the Japanese and Ethiopian members in their religious practices or perspectives. The significant differences shown in this survey, however, suggest that, as the number of Ethiopian members increases, conflict may occur due to differences in religious practices or perspectives between the Japanese and Ethiopian members. At the same time, the differences could be used positively for the organization's activities. For example, when EFC enhances or expands its activity in Ethiopia, the organization could appeal to churches or religious communities and ask their members for cooperation towards EFC's activities.

6.3.2   Perception of work

Two kinds of difference related to the perception of work between Japanese and Ethiopians are identified. First, the extent to which they consider work as important and a high priority is different as shown in Table 3. Questions 1, 2, and 4 ask about the importance of work, and Question 3 refers to the priority given to work as opposed to spare time. The results of all the questions suggest that more Ethiopians perceive work as important and a high priority in their lives than Japanese. Second, the answer of Question 5 indicates the difference in what they expect from their jobs. While about 60 percent of the Ethiopian respondents answered that a good income was the most important, only 13.7 percent of the Japanese respondents did. They considered job safety, quality of colleagues, and importance of the job more important

than income.

Table 3.　Comparison between Japan and Ethiopia from perspective of work

Question		%		
		Japan	Ethiopia	Gap
1. How important work is in life	Very important	49.2	89.6	40.4
	Rather important	39.0	8.7	30.3
2. Work is a duty towards society	Strongly agree	16.8	50.7	33.9
	Agree	46.4	36.7	9.9
3. Work should come first even if it means less spare time	Strongly agree	2.6	53.1	50.5
	Agree	17.9	34.2	16.3
4. Important quality for child to be learned at home: Hard work*		32.7	54.5	21.8
5. Most important if looking for a job	A good income	13.7	58.2	44.5
	A safe job with no risk	35.9	28.5	7.4
	Working with people you like	26.0	7.5	18.5
	Doing an important job	24.5	5.7	18.8

* The respondents were asked to select up to five qualities out of ten: independence, hard work, feeling of responsibility, imagination, tolerance and respect for other people, thrift savings money and things, determination perseverance, religious faith, unselfishness, and obedience.

Source: This table was made by the author based on the data of the World Value Survey available online from http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/index_html).

Two implications could be drawn from this result - one positive, and the other potentially negative. First, Japanese have been frequently described as "workaholics" due to their long working hours and the importance they sometimes put on work, even at the expense of their private lives. In addition, one of the conflicts often pointed out in the context of cross-cultural collaboration between Japanese and foreigners is that Japanese complain about their foreign colleagues' "low commitment to their work" (meaning no overtime work). The positive implication from this is that the Japanese and Ethiopians in EFC may have fewer conflicts of

this kind, as the Ethiopians may also show their strong, even stronger, commitment to work. If so, that could be a precious resource for the organization.

Second, the fact that more Ethiopians than Japanese selected good income as the most important factor of the job, suggests that EFC has a potential problem in keeping its current and future Ethiopian members, as they may leave the organization and move to another that provides them with a higher income.

6.3.3 Commitment to and pride in own country

The survey result shows stark differences between Japanese and Ethiopians in their commitment to and pride in their own countries. More than 75 percent of the Ethiopian respondents are willing to fight for their country, while only one quarter of the Japanese respondents are willing to. In addition, about 70 percent of the Ethiopians are proud of being Ethiopian, in contrast to the Japanese, of whom less than one quarter feel proud of being Japanese. The implication from this result in the context of this study is that it may be effective to appeal to Ethiopian members' national sentiments if the organization wants to carry out some activities.

Table 4. Comparison between Japan and Ethiopia in perception of own country

Question		%		
		Japan	Ethiopia	Gap
1. Willing to fight for country	Yes	24.6	76.9	52.3
	No	75.4	23.1	52.3
2. How proud of nationality	Very proud	22.2	69.5	47.3
	Quite proud	38.8	27.1	11.7

6.3.4   Important traits

The survey contains a question that asks respondents which qualities they think are important to teach their children at home. They were asked to select up to five qualities out of the ten shown in Table 5 below. In addition to no. 8, religious faith, which has been already referred to, four qualities show large differences between Japan and Ethiopia: feeling of responsibility, tolerance and respect for other people, determination/perseverance, and obedience.

Table 5. Comparison of important qualities that the respondents want to encourage their children to learn at home

Important child qualities	% of the respondents selecting each quality	
	Japan	Ethiopia
1. Independence	80.7	79.2
2. Hard work	32.7	54.5
3. Feeling of responsibility	91.4	47.2
4. Imagination	31.1	39.1
5. Tolerance and respect for other people	75.2	36.1
6. Thrift, saving money and things	52.7	52.5
7. Determination/perseverance	67.8	30.5
8. Religious faith	5.6	41.3
9. Unselfishness	50.7	36.2
10. Obedience	5.2	38.9

Most of these listed qualities are traits that may also be seen in vision statements in organizations. The fact that the level of the importance of each quality varies between the two

countries implies that the values an organization expects its members to embody may also be different between Japan and Ethiopia. In the context of a cross-cultural organization like EFC, members need to discuss what kind of qualities they respect as collective organizational values. They need to keep sharing the values whenever possible, otherwise members may begin behaving based on their own values, which may cause the performance of the organization to deteriorate.

In addition, the relatively low ratio of the Ethiopian respondents who selected "tolerance and respect for other people" as an important quality may suggest a potential risk in the organization. Effective collaboration in an organization requires tolerance and respect to people with a different background (Cox, 1991; Halverson and Tirmizi, 2008; Magoshi, 2011; Hofstede 2001). EFC must place this quality as one of the important organizational values, and keep promoting it through communication and management.

6.4 Discussion on the behavioral and perceptual differences between Japanese and Ethiopians

First of all, among the eight categories of perceived differences mentioned by the Japanese interviewees, five categories were expressed in a negative manner (ways to get work done, value of money, pride, attitude toward work and learning, and humaneness). In addition, one of the three positive responses (positive attitude and cheerfulness) also has some negative comments. It seems that the interviewees took for granted their own patterns of behavior and

thinking, and felt uncomfortable or frustrated when they faced the different patterns of their Ethiopian colleagues. Although it has been said that Japanese are not accustomed to work with heterogeneity (Magoshi, 2011), and the Japanese members of EFC may not be an exception, as long as they are committed to work for Ethiopia and its people they have to be ready to accept the differences between themselves and Ethiopians, and be willing to use the differences for the better performance of the organization.

Secondly, by reviewing the interviewees' narratives regarding the differences, it seems that they sometimes interpret the perceived differences rather superficially, and do not delve into what is behind the differences. For instance, as mentioned previously, one Japanese interviewee mentioned the Ethiopian president's "high pride", referring to his attitude of "welcome the coming, speed the parting guest". Some, however, may interpret, the situation completely differently: that the president may want to be as inclusive as possible, but not want to keep people who do not have a strong commitment to the organization.

It is very important for members of EFC to first accept that there is always a rationale or background by which the difference has been formed on both sides, however unreasonable or inappropriate it seems. When members can interpret their differences with cultural sensitivity and a positive mindset, the conflict caused by their differences will decrease at least to some extent, and new possibilities in the organization may be generated.

As a first step for better collaboration, EFC members should share the findings of this

study on their perceived and anticipated differences, and the implications for the organization, and discuss what they can learn from it. Necessary actions based on the findings should be taken, which I discuss below.

6.5   Actions to be taken for building collaborative relationships between the Japanese and Ethiopian staff

6.5.1   Interview results

In order to explore how members of EFC could utilize their differences for better collaboration, I asked three questions during the interview: 1) their impressions of the best collaboration between Ethiopian and Japanese members using their differences effectively; 2) any situation when members from both countries actually collaborated successfully; and 3) ideas on how to build on their perceived differences for better collaboration in the organization.

Impressions and experience of the best collaboration between the Japanese and Ethiopian members

Unfortunately, only one Japanese interviewee gave an answer to the first question, and no one for the second. The rest of the Japanese interviewees mentioned that they had been too unsatisfied with, and frustrated by, their Ethiopian colleagues to remember previous good experience of collaboration, if they had ever had any, or to have positive suggestions of how they could work together. The answers given by the Japanese interviewee about the

impression of the best collaboration are as follows:

- Important organizational factors are shared among all the members

   The purposes, feasibility strategies and activities of the organization and each member's role and responsibility are clearly defined and shared among everyone. In addition, all the members play their own roles and take responsibility perfectly.

- Coordination in the organization is carried out regularly

   The strategies and activities of the organization and each member's roles and responsibilities are not only shared among the members, as mentioned above, but also reviewed regularly and appropriate coordination takes place.

- Any conflicts in the organization are solved through open discussion

   When members have any kinds of conflict, they solve them effectively by discussing the issues openly. They do not just leave them, putting down each other as they have done in the past.

Individual and organizational efforts to be made for utilizing perceived differences for better collaboration

   Six ideas were suggested by two interviewees for how to use the differences effectively:

- Redefining and sharing the organizational purposes, strategies, and activities

   It is important for any organization to clearly define these organizational factors and share them with all the members. This is more important in an organization with higher

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diversity.

- Informal communication and networking

    The Ethiopian members' ability, particularly the president's, to communicate with people informally and to build a good network is a precious resource of the organization. It should be maintained and utilized effectively.

- Effective system of internal communication

    Both informal communication and official communication must function in an organization. An effective system of communication in EFC has to be established, through which its vision, strategies, and activities are shared and discussed.

- Positive attitude accompanied by action

    If the president uses his positive attitude effectively, EFC would become stronger than an organization that has only Japanese staff. It would have a broader vision than Japanese culture tends to have. The president needs to put what he talks about into practice positively.

- Appointment of a new president

    The current president should be a symbol of the organization, not a decision maker. A leader who has an ability to get things done should be assigned as president of the organization.

- Roles that fulfill pride

When their pride is dealt with effectively, they work hard and are effective. A good

solution might be to rethink their roles and responsibilities so that they can maintain their

pride.

6.5.2   Actions to be taken for better collaboration

Paradigm shift and a new president

Based on the literature review and the findings, I will now propose action that could be

taken by EFC to promote the collaborative relationship in the organization.

First and foremost, the organization desperately requires a fundamental paradigm shift. The

organization is full of frustration and the distrust, to the extent the interviewees in this study

could not envisage a successful collaboration. It may be difficult to achieve a collaborative

relationship between the Japanese and Ethiopian members even if the organization does

introduce some changes. EFC has to be reborn as an organization with a strong commitment

to growth and expansion through effective collaboration. This should be based on using its

organizational diversity as a unique source of competitive advantage.

In order to bring this paradigm shift, I would propose a drastic reform of the top

management in the organization. In a small organization like EFC, the influence of the few

top leaders is tremendous. The current president has achieved a lot, and the organization

could not have become what it is without him. It might be time for EFC, however, to

welcome a new leader who can bring a new direction into the organization without feeling

restrained by past bonds. EFC could either have two presidents, "co-presidents", or the new leader could be a president and the current president becoming an honorary advisor. The new president might be young, in his or her twenties or thirties. They should be open to the differences among people and have experience of living in culturally diverse circumstances.

As the organization cannot afford to provide a salary, the new president should be financially well-to-do or should get a part-time job. He or she also should be interested in intellectual and practical learning, and experience from managing the NGO, rather than financial gain. The organization could recruit through the network of JICA volunteers or graduate or undergraduate students. Senior members can make up for the new president's lack of experience and knowledge.

Once the new president has been appointed, the style of effective leadership must be discussed among board members, taking account of the current situation of the organization. At the same time, current members who do not have or cannot create their commitment to the organization and its change must be encouraged to leave. Although there might be some emotional dispute among the members during this process, the organization must go through it to strengthen itself.

Redefining strategy, vision, values, roles and responsibilities

After the appointment of the new young president, the organizational strategy, vision, values, and each member's role and responsibility must be redefined, based on collective

commitment to a strong organization with rich diversity. As the organization is still small, all

the available members can attend these discussions. Since these topics are central to the

organization and will be hard to define, an external professional, such as an organizational

development consultant, might be invited to the discussions.

In terms of organizational values, as discussed previously, the important values for the

Japanese and Ethiopian members might be different. They first need to identify what kind of

values they respect, and, then, discuss which to select as common organizational values.

Needless to say, the value of "tolerance and respect for others (with the differences)" must be

selected. After the values are defined, they should be visible everywhere - on the

organization's website, brochures, newsletters, and posters - so that members can always be

aware of them.

Establish work procedures

Official communication systems must be established, both for face-to-face and virtual

communication, through which important messages and daily reports will be conveyed. It

might be effective to assign a member to manage all communications. He/she would develop

the communication system, set the agenda of meetings, and monitor the quality of internal

communication. For virtual communication, members should be willing to use advanced

communication technologies such as Skype, whatever their age or computer literacy. Regular

virtual communication will be essential in building a collaborative relationship between the

Japanese members and the local staff in Ethiopia.

Develop cross-cultural ability

As discussed previously, capacity in inter-cultural communication, problem solving, decision making, and conflict management with cultural sensitivity must be developed through training, and be practiced in daily activities in the organization. When the organization hires new members, they also need to be given training to improve their cross-cultural abilities.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the perceived differences in behavior and thinking between the Ethiopian and Japanese members of a small NGO were explored through in-depth interviews, and eight categories of difference were identified from their narratives. In addition, four categories of difference were identified through a review of previously conducted research. The study also tried to identify individual and organizational efforts that could be made by members of the organization in order to utilize their differences for better collaboration. It turned out that members had been too frustrated by the mutual differences and the resultant misunderstandings, and the organization seemed too full of distrust, to expect its immediate transformation. A paradigm shift through a new leadership must take place. Following this, continuous, organization-wide efforts will be needed to achieve effective collaboration.

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World Values Survey <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

Appendix 1.   Interviewee Profile

No.	Age	Sex	Nationality	Position	Working experience with EFC
1	Early 60s	Male	Ethiopian	President of EFC	More than 10 years
2	Early 70s	Male	Japanese	Member of EFC	More than 10 years
3	Late 60s	Female	Japanese	Board member of EFC	More than 10 years
4	Late 60s	Female	Japanese	Member of EFC	More than 10 years
5	Early 60s	Male	Japanese	Board member of EFC	More than 10 years
6	Early 70s	Male	Japanese	Agricultural expert	Approximately 5 years
7	Late 50s	Male	Japanese	Cooperatives expert	2 years
8	Late 40s	Female	Japanese	Development consultant	2 years
9	Late 30s	Female	Japanese	Development consultant	2 years