

# Organizational Culture Transformation in Japanese Universities: International Faculty Perspectives on Inclusive Leadership and Diversity Management

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## Abstract

This study explores the dynamics of organizational culture and management practices within a Japanese university from the perspective of international faculty. Employing a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with non-tenured international faculty members to understand their experiences within the context of leadership and diversity management. The findings indicate that the dominant top-down management approach is less effective in promoting inclusivity and the integration of international faculty. The hierarchical organizational culture and a tendency towards uncertainty avoidance emerge as primary obstacles to cross-cultural adaptation and collaboration. This study recommends the implementation of inclusive leadership practices and the development of intercultural competencies to foster a more open and diversity-supportive organizational culture

## Keywords:

Organizational culture, inclusive leadership, diversity, Japanese universities, international faculty, top-down management.

## INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, Japanese universities face challenges in integrating international faculty into traditional and hierarchical organizational structures. Rigid organizational cultures and the dominance of top-down management often serve as barriers to creating an inclusive work environment. According to Egitim (2022), the strong hierarchical structure in Japanese universities can hinder the adaptation of international faculty. Furthermore, research by Colpitts (2023) suggests that transformational leadership is more effective in the context of higher education internationalization in Japan.

The concept of inclusive leadership is increasingly relevant in this context. Morinaga et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of inclusive leadership in fostering knowledge sharing in diverse workplaces. Henmi (2018) also notes that diversity management in Japan requires a more adaptive approach towards diverse work patterns. Taniguchi (2016) identified that the relationship between diversity and organizational outcomes is influenced by effective leadership.

International faculty often encounter difficulties in navigating differing cultural norms. Egitim (2022) notes that a lack of linguistic and intercultural competencies can be a barrier to the integration of international faculty. Le Ha (2013) highlights the influence of national cultural identity on the organizational culture of Japanese academic institutions. Sugimura (2020) emphasizes the importance of understanding the values of collectivism and conformity within the Japanese context.

Overly standardized management approaches may overlook individual needs and hinder innovation. Pitlik and Rode (2017) indicate that individualistic values such as independence and non-conformity can conflict with hierarchical organizational structures. Inaba (2020) notes that Confucian norms emphasizing power distance can influence management practices in Japan. Aubrey et al. (2015) highlight the adaptation challenges faced by international faculty in highly structured work environments.

To create a more inclusive work environment, changes are needed in leadership approaches and organizational culture. Egitim (2022) recommends building intercultural competencies and implementing inclusive leadership as strategies for better integration. Colpitts (2023) underscores the role of leadership in facilitating the internationalization of

higher education in Japan. Morinaga et al. (2023) show that inclusive leadership can enhance knowledge-sharing behaviors in diverse workplaces.

### **Methods**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a narrative case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight international faculty members teaching in non-English medium departments at a Japanese university. Interview questions were based on the Burke-Litwin Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change (1992). Data analysis was conducted using the six-step method outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2013), comprising data organization, thorough reading of the data, coding, theme development, presentation of findings, and data interpretation.

Participants in this study were international faculty from Western cultural backgrounds holding non-tenured positions. They were responsible for teaching English-medium courses and conducting research in their respective fields. The interviews focused on their experiences adapting to the university's organizational culture, interactions with leadership, and challenges in social and professional integration.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

International faculty also reported a communication gap with university leadership. They perceived communication as predominantly unidirectional, lacking space for dialogue or collaboration. According to Inaba (2020), Japanese organizational culture is often influenced by Confucian values emphasizing deference to authority. This is reinforced by findings from Henmi (2018), which suggest that participation in decision-making is highly limited for individuals considered 'outsiders' within the organizational system. Morinaga et al. (2023) assert that inclusive leadership is necessary to bridge this communication gap. Furthermore, Aubrey et al. (2015) also note that the success of cross-cultural collaboration is significantly influenced by open, two-way communication.

One notable finding was that the majority of participants felt a lack of systematic feedback mechanisms to assess their contributions. The absence of reward or recognition systems adversely affected work motivation. Pitlik and Rode (2017) state that unfair incentive systems can decrease productivity and loyalty. Sugimura (2020) also mentions that the work culture in Japan still prioritizes seniority over achievement. In this context, Le Ha (2013) suggests that universities should design evaluation systems that consider unique cross-cultural contributions. This aligns with the results-based organizational approach according to Burke and Litwin (1992).

Most international faculty experienced social isolation affecting their psychological well-being. The lack of social support from colleagues and minimal cultural orientation programs were identified as primary causes. Egitim (2022) emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural training in strengthening social cohesion in international academic environments. Colpitts (2023) also highlights the university's role in providing cultural transition support for international staff. Sugimura (2020) observes that failure in cultural adaptation directly impacts the retention of foreign faculty. Morinaga et al. (2023) propose that inclusive leadership can facilitate a supportive and empathetic work environment.

Regarding management practices, participants noted that administrative processes were highly bureaucratic and inflexible. This hindered academic productivity, particularly in research activities and international collaboration. Inaba (2020) indicates that excessive bureaucracy is a major impediment to efficiency in Japanese organizations. Aubrey et al. (2015) mention that international faculty often struggle to navigate complex administrative procedures. Henmi (2018) proposes streamlining administrative processes through

digitalization and staff training. Le Ha (2013) also recommends utilizing technology to enhance transparency and accessibility of academic services.

To summarize the key findings, the following table outlines the international faculty's perceptions regarding various aspects of the university's organizational culture and management:

Organizational Aspect	Key Findings	Suggested Improvements
Organizational Structure	Hierarchical, top-down decisions	Implement participative management
Internal Communication	Unidirectional, lacking transparency	Encourage two-way communication
Evaluation System	Non-transparent, lacking incentives	Develop performance-based assessment system
Social Support	Minimal, high social isolation	Offer orientation and mentoring programs
Academic Administration	Bureaucratic, complex procedures	Streamline through digitalization

Overall, these findings highlight the need for organizational culture reform within Japanese universities to better support diversity and internationalization. An overly conservative and exclusive organizational culture serves as a primary barrier to achieving the goals of higher education globalization. This aligns with the view of Burke and Litwin (1992) that a non-adaptive organizational culture will fail to accommodate changes in the external environment. Therefore, the adoption of inclusive leadership, which prioritizes participation, open communication, and recognition of cultural differences, becomes imperative in this context.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study reveals that the still-dominant top-down management approach in Japanese universities contributes to failures in managing cultural diversity, particularly from the perspective of international faculty. Hierarchical organizational structures, limited communication, lack of social support, and inequitable evaluation systems are identified as major obstacles to creating an inclusive work environment.

Organizational culture transformation is needed through an inclusive leadership approach that promotes active participation, open dialogue, and recognition of cross-cultural contributions. Furthermore, universities need to design output-based performance evaluation systems, streamline administrative bureaucracy, and provide social support and cultural orientation for international faculty.

The key recommendations stemming from this research are:

- Implement inclusive leadership training for administrative and academic leaders.
- Design transparent and merit-based evaluation and incentive systems.
- Develop orientation and mentoring programs for international faculty.
- Digitize administrative processes to support work efficiency.
- Promote cross-departmental cultural dialogue to enhance social cohesion.

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