Japanese Managers' Experiences of Learning:

What Individual and External Factors Affect Learning Dispositions of Japanese Managers?

Thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Social Science

to the School of Business

at the University of Leicester

by

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MBA with Merit (University of Leicester), BSc in Pharmacy

School of Business

University of Leicester

2019

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on understanding the experiences of learning in life for managers in Japan. The thesis also explores the relevance of largely Western-derived theories for understanding managers' learning in Japan. The subject is timely because the Japanese government is actively undertaking policy reforms to promote new directions in education and adult learning with the aim of transforming learning practices to meet the changing demands (MEXT, 2017a,b). Data was gathered using qualitative interviews with 20 managers who work or have worked in Japan.

The findings reveal the critical role of an individual's disposition as an essential basis for learning in the continuous process of interactivity with individual and social factors. Key dimensions of personal interactions, exposure to overseas culture, and career choices in schools, the workplace, and social communities are identified by each biography related to the learning experiences. It also shows the significant influence of the Japanese educational system, companies' attachments to learning, opportunities for communities of practice, and female managers' struggles. The results also show that Western-derived social theories of workplace and adult learning are becoming more applicable as the tacit style of gaining knowledge in Japan is becoming more Westernised. Non-Japanese managers' perceptions of Japanese ways are aligned with the findings.

This thesis has three key contributions. Theoretically, it promotes further understanding of the importance of individuals' dispositions and biographies through the development of a model of influences on Japanese managers' learning. This has important implications for attempts to promote learning within ongoing learning-related policy development. Examples of communities of practice in the results indicate the potential for the use of the theory of communities of practice in conjunction with Illeris's (2004) model of learning in working life. The final contribution is the empirical exploration of these issues within a Japanese environment, which has been relatively under-explored.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Dr Katharine Venter, for her continuous support, invaluable advice, and encouragement throughout my academic journey towards a Doctor of Social Science degree. Her guidance helped and encouraged me during my research and the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank my first supervisor, Dr Daniel Bishop, for inspiring and supporting me to pave a solid path for this unique research question. My sincere thanks also go to Dr Nikolaus Hammer, who was my first academic advisor and welcomed me to the doctorate in social science. When I visited him in 2011 to ask if my research question could be interesting, academically contributive, and useful for managers in Japan, he encouraged me to pursue this interest. That day was my first step walking into this critical academic journey. I also thank the excellent administrative managers in the Doctorate College Office and the School of Business for their dedication and timely support to particular problems for international doctorate students throughout my time of the study. I would like to especially thank Professor Knud Illeris for his encouragement on my research referring to his excellent academic work about a holistic model of learning in working life.

Secondly, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the Japanese and non-Japanese managers who participated in this research project for their precious time and their willingness to share part of their life stories with me. Their incredible passion for learning and their trust in me undeniably helped me to accomplish the research.

Furthermore, I want to thank my supporters in the company, Dr Glenn Gormley, Mr Toshi Sai, and Dr Atsuo Inoue for continuously cheering me on throughout the last seven years to ensure a right balance between my company work and academic research. I would also like to thank my special friends, Professor Ursula F. Ott of Nottingham Trent University, and Professor Terry Wu of the University of Ontario Institute of Technology for following my research journey with their timely academic advice when I faced difficulty thinking about and writing the thesis.

Lastly but not least, I would like to thank my family for their utmost encouragement to continue my work: my parents, Hatsuko and Itsuo, and my brother, Ryusuke. My special thanks go to Jeffrey Hahn, who has given me his unconditional support and love through the most difficult times of this study.

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The List of Abbreviations

BoP: Base of Pyramid

CoPs: Communities of Practice

EC: European Commission

GGGR: The Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum

ICT: Information Communications Technology

J-MNCs: Japanese-Multi-National Corporations

MEXT: Ministry of Education, culture, sports, science and Technology, Japan

MNCs: Multi-National Corporations

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organisations

Non-J-MNCs: Non-Japanese Multi-National Corporations

OECD: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

SMEs: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

UNESCO: The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

VET: Vocational Education and Training

1. Introduction

As complex changes in progressing globalisation, technology and increased life expectancy continue to define the 21st century learning in life is becoming ever more critical (Trilling and Fadel, 2012; Gratton and Scott, 2016). In Japan, the continuous low-growth economy, globalisation, and the progress of information communications technology since the 1980s are stressors facilitating change in Japanese social and business systems (Cargill and Sakamoto, 2008; Carlile, 2010). Progressive ageing, along with a low birthrate, have been posing fundamental challenges to the educational system along with working style reform, gender equality, and the expansion of recurrent education for adults in Japanese society (Nippon.com, 2016; The Economist, 2010; MEXT, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2017; Gender Equity Bureau Cabinet Office, 2017; Nikkei News Paper, 2017; The Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, 2017a). The educational policies followed since the Meiji Restoration was effective for the production of general-purpose products that characterized Japan's economy during the 1970s to 1990s, but after the 1990s that no longer was the case. Changes in education to address a changing economy and society were discussed, but no action was taken, resulting in, essentially, a decades-long stagnation. This stagnation has resulted in the realisation that policies surrounding learning in life need to change drastically (MEXT, 2017a;2017b).

An individual's need for learning was rarely focused on or discussed theoretically and empirically in the past because learning has not been the primary objective in most organisations (Hodkinson et al., 2004). Research emphasising individual workers and learners is relatively small because working practices, and the influential factors on those working practices have been the focus of broader social research (Hodkinson et al., 2004). Individual learning dispositions are the complex combination of evolving behaviours and characteristics, in which learners join and actively participate in the learning process in a social and economic environment. This is their so-called 'social heredity' (Illeris, 2007: 176) that has been developed through their experiences and practices in life. Furthermore, Western theories of

learning in life have been lacking a social theory that extends beyond human capital theory. Human capital theory is 'conceived as the product of individual calculation and active choice' (Rees et al. 1997b:1). This means that it is not sufficient to consider a society of learning as a goal to be achieved in the future, but that we should also take account of the changing processes of learning occurring in reality that might help create a diverse learning society (Coffield, 1996; Rees et al. 1997a; 1997b).

Social and cultural backgrounds and influences as emerging social contexts on the Japanese educational system have also brought industrial-based thinking (i.e., learning in a didactic way) and a dualistic perspective (i.e., learning using both thinking and experiencing) to the learning system and to individual learning in Japan (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Akao, 2004). A focus on individual learners, an examination of the interrelationship of an individual learner in a social context, and the relevance of learning theories in Western society and Japanese society are factors that have not yet been well researched.

This thesis examines the transitional learning environment Japan is now experiencing. It focuses on Japanese managers' learning throughout their lives during this transitional period using biographical data along with the interrelationship between individual learning disposition and influential societal factors. Using qualitative data collected from managers in Japan, the research focuses on illustrating managers' learning in life in light of the influence of related Japanese policy reforms.

Historically, the lifetime employment system and the seniority system for promotion and wages have been factors in the Japanese workplace for a successful Japanese economic recovery (Hattori and Maeda, 2000; Ono, 2005). Hattori and Maeda (2000) suggest that the Japanese employment system has been supported by four prerequisites: a balanced age composition of workers, high economic growth, a reliance on the future existence of firms, and stable economic growth and industrial structure. Employees have not paid strong attention to individual lifelong learning, as they receive almost guaranteed work until retirement. As the

business environment changes, however, interest in improving skills and learning is gradually transforming. The Nikkei newspaper (2017) reported that a survey conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that 71% of 6,000 Japanese male and female workers answered that skill improvement is a personal responsibility, not a company one. Alternatively, Kambayashi (2015) reported that key features of the Japanese employment system are still alive and well in the Japanese labour market. Therefore, Japanese managers' learning is now in transition.

The Japanese education strategy and social structure, pre-and post- World War II, was affected by a bureaucratic system and a company-centred lifestyle (Sugimoto, 2014). For employees to achieve a reasonable return on a self-learning investment has not been easy, as companies did not value these efforts or reward them with promotions (Sugimoto, 2014; Shirayama, 2016). Ever since the burst of the Japanese economy in the 1990s, and since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2008, Japan experienced a devastatingly long economic recession (Yu, 2010). Raised awareness of the need for Japanese managers to change has become the critical requirement to meet the recent rapid progress of globalisation led by multinational companies (MNCs), achieved diversity in the workplace, increase human resource mobility, and avoid severe economic stagnation (Brislin, MacNab, Worthley, Kabigting and Zukis, 2005; Dalton and Benson, 2002). As a political reaction to the previously listed changes, the Japanese government declared policies to expand the capacity of the educational system for adults, along with programs to encourage adult learning (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Japan, 2008; 2012).

Japanese society is also now facing an ever-growing issue of a 'super-ageing' society (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2001: 425) with a continuous low economic growth rate (Yu, 2010).

> 'Japan has the highest proportion of older adults in the world. Ageing is not only an immediate personal issue but also a salient factor in crucial public policies, such as pensions, health, and long-term care' (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011: 425).

This situation impacts a Japanese society that is declining in size at the same time it is ageing. Figure 1.2 shows that in 2030, the majority of the population will be close to age 60 or older based on the medium estimate from past trends and future prerequisites (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011). 'Japan is experiencing population ageing that is unprecedented in the world' (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011: 426).
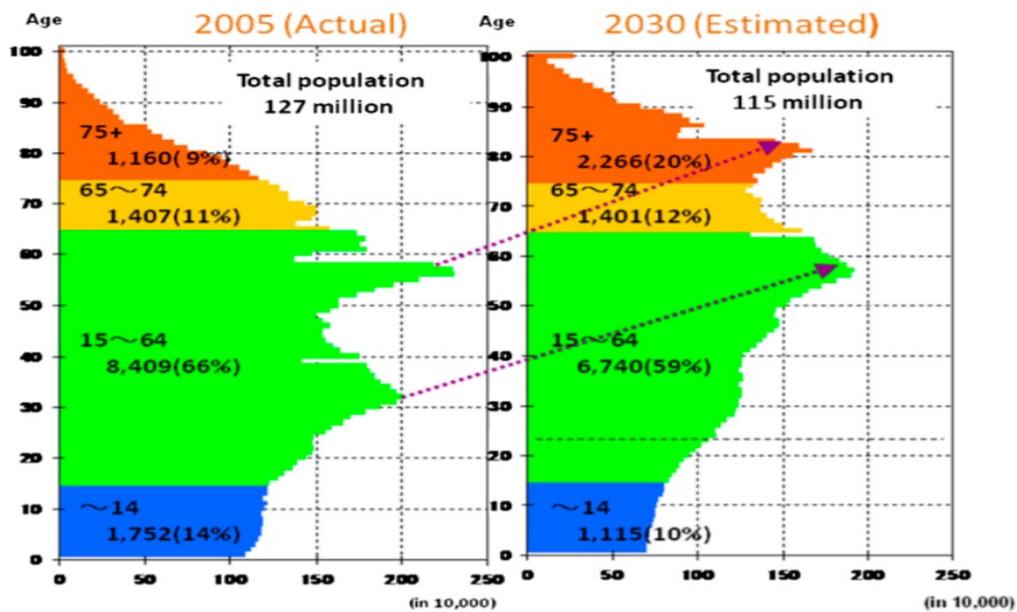
Figure 1.1 Population Pyramid of Japan: 2005 and 2030.

Notes: The 2005 data are based on the census. The 2030 data are based on the medium estimate. Source: National Insitute of Population and Social Security Research.

(Source: Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011: 427)

Super-ageing seriously impacts pensions, health, long-term care, employment and the educational system as well as critically impacts public policy reforms (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011; MEXT, 2016). The impact of this shift in demographics is resulting in a decrease in the population of 18-year-old students entering higher educational institutions as Figure 1. 2 shows (MEXT 2016). Educational institutions including both compulsory education and higher education, are necessary to reform the vision and structure needed to meet societal demands (MEXT, 2016; 2017a; 2017b; Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017).
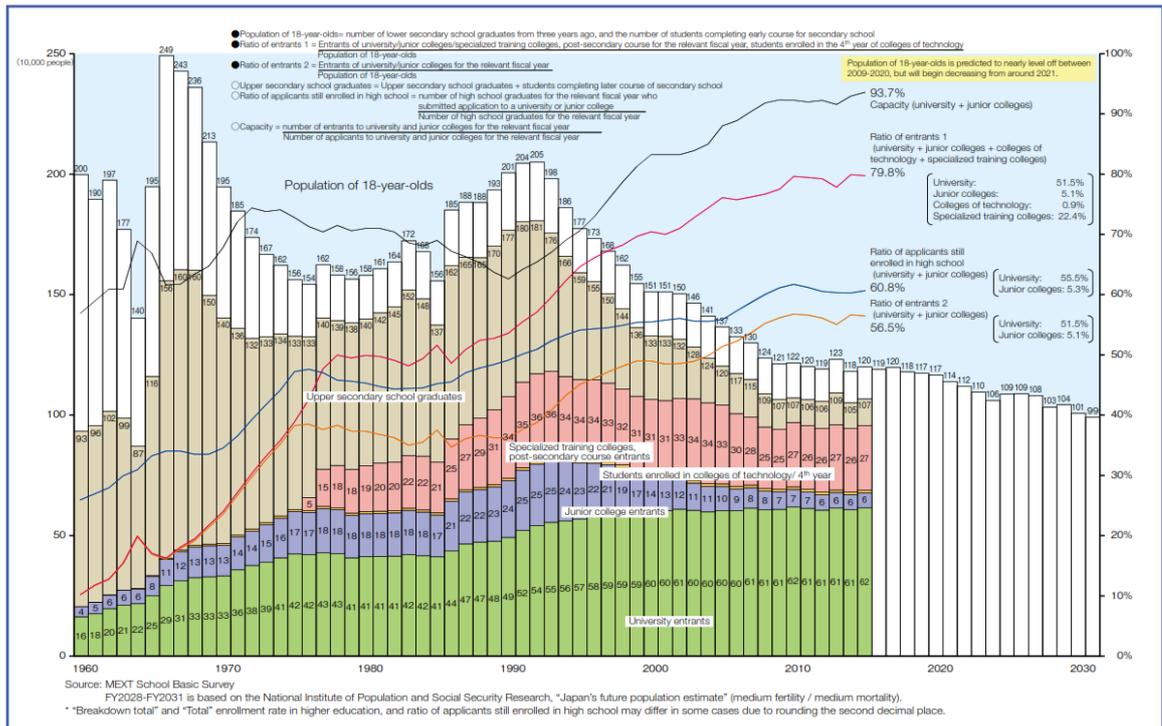
Figure 1.2: Ratio of the Population of 18-year-olds to Students Entering Higher Educational Institutions (Source: MEXT, 2016: 33)

Figure 1. 3 shows a continuous increase in the number of registered aliens coming to Japan. The total number as of 30th June 2017 is 2,471,458 people (Ministry of Justice, 2017) and growing The official statistics of the number of registered aliens in Japan is still less than 2%, in comparison to the average in OECD of 8% in 2014 (Ministry of Justice, 2017; OECD, 2014). Globalisation is slowly affecting Japanese lifestyles and workplaces. Multi-National Corporations work across countries, and Japan is a key market (Oum and Park, 2004). Work opportunities in Japanese MNCs and non-Japanese MNCs are increasing in the Japanese labour market. Knowledge transfer in Japanese-MNCs is recognised as 'a part of "line" management rather than top-down stimulated activities' (Strach and Everett, 2006: 60). As such, there is a need for research that examines managers' learning in MNCs.
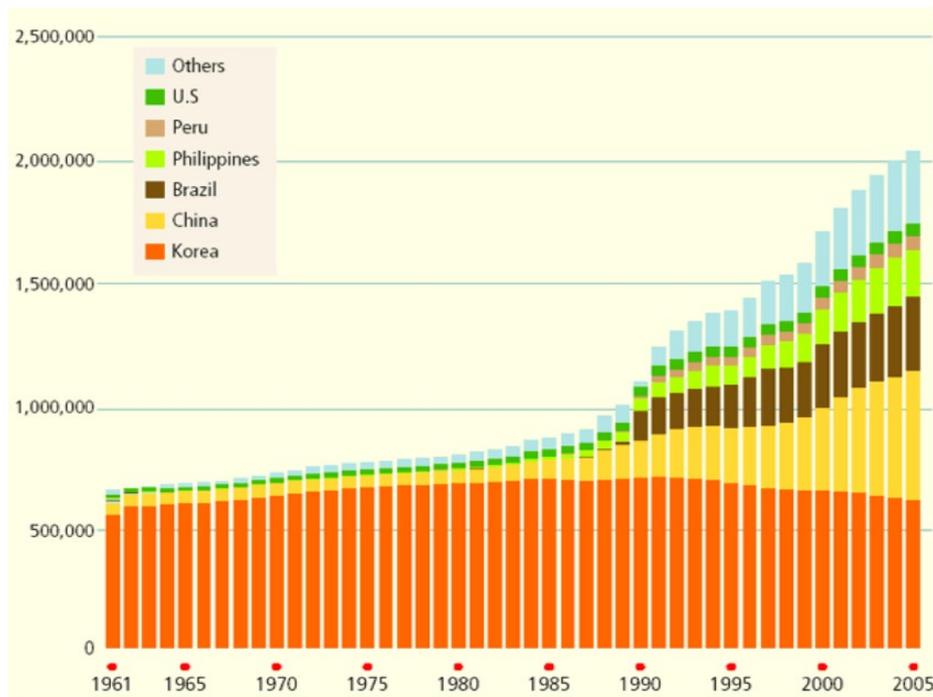
Figure 1.3: Trend of the Number of Registered Aliens in Japan

(Source: The Japan Forum, 2006, based on the annual report on statistics on legal migrants, Ministry of Justice, 1961-2005)

A visual history of Japanese education reform is shown in Figure 1.4. The Japanese government, with the help of experts, considered, introduced, and implemented an integration of 21st century 'competencies' and practices since trying to catch up with the West following the Meiji reformation in 1890 (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017). As of today, curriculum reform at schools has not shown remarkable progress in terms of fostering competencies in the classrooms (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017). Manufacturing and automation led Japan's rapid growth and success in the 1950s through the 1970s. Information communication technology also drove economic expansion. Recent changing contexts in Japan demand a drastic transformation of mindset and skills, education, public needs, and business processes. The Japanese government is trying to reform the educational system and curriculum to be focused on 'active learning (interactive classroom)' and 'career education' (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017; MEXT, 2017).
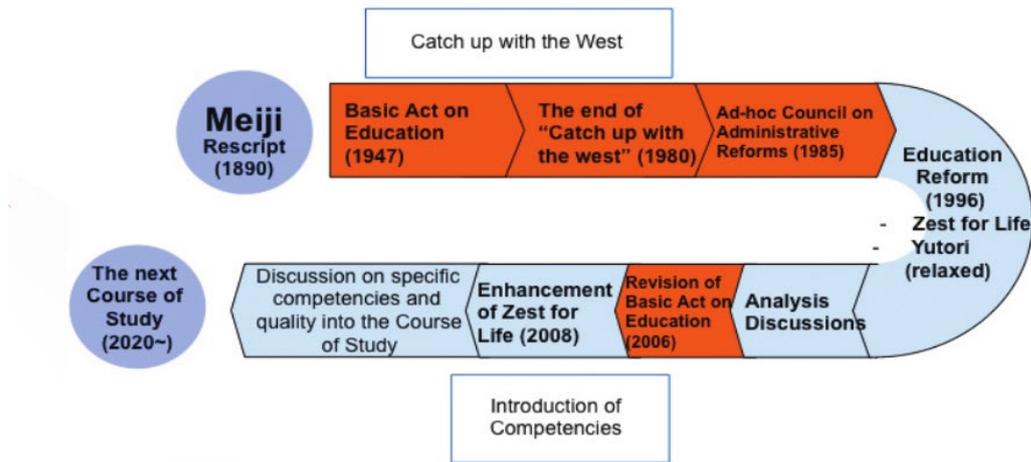
Figure 1.4 Transition of Education Reform in Japan (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017: 2)

Japanese companies achieved the highest quality of manufacturing with great success, based on the knowledge and skills of those in the manufacturing field who understand the entire workplace and management as the whole (Koike, 1995; Yoshida, 1997). The Japanese management style for companies like Toyota, Honda, Panasonic, and others in 1970-1980 was to encourage employees to feel like the company is a family. These Japanese strengths, however, later lost some power with 'non-innovative products' (commodity products like Liquid Crystal Display (LCD), and so on. Japan could not maintain competitiveness with just Kaizen-type learning (continuous improvements in the fields). As such, there were two faces of Japan's achievements from 1970 to 1990.

The importance of lifelong education and learning was argued by Lengrand (1969 and 1970) and has been supported by international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank and European Commission (EC) (OECD, 2001; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016; The World Bank, 2003; Panitsidou et al. 2012). The concept of lifelong learning has been acknowledged by many as an essential educational reality and vision, and it is a crucial component to allow flexibility to adjust to life changes (Field, 2000). The Japanese government introduced a public policy to foster adult learning for those looking for a second career (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2008). Moreover, Prime Minister Shinzo

Abe publicly presented a message that he is proactively promoting recurrent education for adults. Adult learning has not been popular in Japan because Japanese companies generally have a lifetime employment system, but this lifetime employment system is beginning to change. Discussion as to how to privatise lifelong learning and to integrate it into national policy is ongoing.

> 'In order to build a society that offers opportunities for re-learning and starting over in life to everyone, including senior citizens, people from single-parent family, people who couldn't complete compulsory education, people who didn't advance to high schools and universities on their own will, people who left jobs due to childbirth and child-rearing, "freeters" (part-time workers without permanent jobs), NEETs, young people who have withdrawn from society and people with diseases and physical disabilities, the government will ensure the opportunities for re-learning and new challenges' (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, December 2017b:2-10).

Looking at Western theories about adult learning may help Japanese society recognise the benefit of adult learning and workplace learning which is now more complex, beyond just lessons or training paid for by the employer that people receive at the workplace (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004b). In Japan, a more entrenched and cooperative working style than in Western countries has been based on a lifetime employment system and lower labour mobility. As a result, social research in adult learning and workplace learning has not been very active compared to Western countries (Matsuo, 2012). In part because of the progress of information communication technologies (ICTs), workplace learning is becoming more familiar in the Japanese workplace, and adult learning is also becoming a higher priority for the Japanese government. For example, Jarvis (2006) pointed out that adult learning is a complex activity and a process influenced by individual and social contexts. In particular, factors such as background, experiences, and disposition influence learning behaviours, together with social, environmental factors (Bourdieu, 1984; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a). The workplace can also be a venue for learning through experience and practice as well as a place for working (Billet, 2004a and 2004b: Hodkinson et al.,

2004: Bottrup, 2005). The theoretical learning concept of 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) is also introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) as one of the key workplace learning formats where 'groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 2011:1). Qualitative research supporting workplace learning and the social interactivity with workplace learning and social environment in a business field is, however, still insufficient, particularly in a Japanese multinational corporation's setting. A history of empirical research on adult learning in Japan is behind that of Western countries. Further research on examining these factors in Japan will be important to illustrate the actual status of adult learning in a business context.

Japanese workers have been perceived to be passive about learning (Nakata, 2011). Wilson also describes Japanese culture as 'mono-cultural' (Wilson, 2001:299). Hofstede (1991, 2001) identified features of Japanese culture, such as a tendency towards high levels of uncertainty avoidance, low individualism, and high long-term orientations. Other characteristics of a Japanese business environment are lower labour mobility (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal affairs and Communications, 2017) and utilisation of tacit knowledge in the workplace as explained by Nonaka (1991). Cultural influence on learning attitudes and behaviours is one of the key aspects of this research.

The research question evolved from background information gathered when investigating Japan's recent ongoing societal transition and the theoretical gap in the existing literature of learning in life. The significance of individual learning dispositions and social interactivity with surrounding contexts influenced by recent changes structure the theoretical underpinning of the research questions. The primary objective of this research is to explore what individual and external environmental factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers, utilising their biographies and learning histories as a supplemental information instrument.

Japanese MNCs still tend to maintain a traditional Japanese 'collective' organisational structure, management style and mindsets to maintain a lifetime

employment system (Black and Morrison, 2012; Schaaper, Amann, Jausaud, Nakamura and Mizoguchi, 2012). In contrast, non-Japanese MNCs establish their businesses based on a Western-style integrated management system, process, organisational structure, and mindset. Human resource management and development is different in character in these two types of MNCs. This research also examines how current Western theories of learning and understanding are relevant in a Japanese context based on the current change of labour mobility in Japan.

Literature in human resource development, education, psychology, cross-cultural behavior, and motivation indicates that self-direction, transformation, critical reflection, experiences, and interaction with others, or networking are essential components in the adult learning process (Cranton, 1992, 2006; Dewey, 1916, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; McGregor, 1960). In motivation theories, Deci and Ryan (1990, 2000) constructed the self-determination theory for employees based on research of the difference and impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, emphasising the importance of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Having this psychological understanding is quite helpful to the broader understanding which mechanisms this learning is taking place.

The focus of this research is on managers in multinational companies (MNCs) in Japan. This study primarily seeks to identify learners' learning dispositions at the individual level in social factors, examining how they are formed into learning behaviours. Learning includes various forms such as higher education, vocational training and learning, skill development, and any other opportunities of informal learning as informal learning is also a major part of lifelong learning (Scribner and Cole, 1973). This study examines the impact of individuals' subjective attitudes towards learning. They are the product of social background, the learner's biography, and the extrinsic dimension of the social and organisational structure. Influence of management by headquarters in the home country is also one of the social factors that have an impact on organisational learning.

Based on the above, the following sub research question will also be explored: to what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning explain the learning behaviour of Japanese managers?

Thus, **the Central research question** is:

- What individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?

The **secondary research question** is:

- To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning explain the learning behaviours of Japanese managers?

This thesis research provides contributions to knowledge in social theories of learning in life that focus on the influence of learning dispositions interacted on by social contexts. Theoretically, social studies focusing on workplace learning and learning in life are rarely conducted at the individual level. This thesis aims to achieve an important role in bridging the empirical perspective, and the practical perspective.

This research is the first comprehensive qualitative study to investigate what individual and external factors affect learning dispositions, utilising the biographies and learning histories of Japanese managers from a socio-cultural perspective. This research is also the first study to empirically investigate managers' learning behaviour and its composition of influencing factors referencing academic theories such as education, psychology, cultural research, lifelong learning and organisational science.

This thesis consists of five sections. Following this section (1. Introduction), the second section (2. Literature Review) explains the relevant literature, knowledge, and empirical literature, which are essential for answering the research questions. Then the section examines the theoretical and research issues related to learning in life and workplace learning, explaining the path to propose the theoretical framework and the research questions. The third section (3. Research Methodology) outlines the research methodology, theoretical justification of applying qualitative research methodology, explains how the research is

implemented and describes the data collection and analysis process, as well as ethical considerations. The fourth section (4. Presentation of Findings) presents the representation of the findings from analysing the data, focusing on the main themes relevant to the concepts identified in the literature review that emerge. It also presents unanticipated findings that were identified through the data analyses process. The fifth section (5. Analysis and Discussion) examines a deeper level of interpretation and consideration and presents a critical evaluation of the findings alongside the issues raised in the literature review. It also discusses and interprets answers to the research questions, presents meanings of the findings and provides a theoretical model for the future. The sixth section addresses the overview of the thesis and the summary of the findings, then presents research contributions and implications. Lastly, the limitations of this thesis research, and suggestions for future research, are addressed.

2. Literature Review

This section explains the theoretical underpinnings and debates surrounding the concepts and factors that influence work-related learning and learning through life, examining knowledge gaps and theoretical justification by the literature. As the socio-anthropological approach in theories of learning has overtaken the empiricist approach toward learning at work, current and recent theories have focused on socio-cultural ways of understanding learning (Billett and Choy, 2013; Hodkinson et al., 2004). At the same time, research focusing on the role and significance of individual workers and their agency and identity has become more prominent (Billett, 2004a). A drive to pay more attention to the need to identify individual workers' perspectives alongside their socio-environmental perspectives of work and life, has become an increasingly prominent part of the relevant literature (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008). Furthermore, another prominent theme has been a focus on cross-cultural influences of organisational learning in multinational corporations (MNCs), typologies of cultural and organisational difference, and the uniqueness of each regional perspective and their influences upon learning behaviours and activities. In Japan, recent progress in governmental policies, including those related to learning through life, gender equality, educational reforms, and changes in work style, are also key influences on learning (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2017a; 2017b). This thesis involves the integration of historical background and arguments of theories related to learning with critical Japanese contexts and environments.

Thus, to provide a conceptual background, this section starts with the history of several theoretical perspectives on adult learning in the sociological and psychological literature as they relate to work-related learning and managers' learning in life. The definition of managerial work and managers' learning, how it is different from non-managers' learning, and the specific work and learning environment in a Japanese context and its meaning are also articulated. Next, the section explores later sociological approaches focusing on how individual

manager's own dispositions impact learning behaviours and activities as argued by Phil Hodkinson (2003; 2004a; 2008). Individual learning dispositions are stable inner characteristics but also the complex combination of behaviours and characteristics in which learners join and actively participate in the learning process in a social and economic environment, the so-called 'social heredity.' as defined by Illeris (2007: 176), that has been developed through their experiences and practices in life. Individual learning dispositions can be said to be 'the individual person's capacity for learning' (Illeris, 2007:196) and 'can be altered and developed' (Illeris, 2007:196). Learning dispositions can expand skills, participation, commitment and understanding. They can also explore recent analyses of learning that attempt to move beyond social/ individual dualism. The wider environmental influences on managers and work-related learning will also be explored, including in the cultural context. Previous studies of workplace learning have been conducted and enhanced across the Western world, given the Western-focused nature of most learning theories. This thesis research was conducted in Japan, where workplace learning, learning dispositions, and learning in life have not been well explored theoretically and empirically, and therefore particular attention is given to the Japanese sociocultural context for managers' learning.

In attempting to integrate these external (environmental) and internal (individual) influences upon learning, the theories of Knud Illeris (2004, 2007, 2009) are presented as a holistic model of learning in a working life framework. As will be seen, Illeris's theory factors, such as biology, psychology, social science, and core learning structures, types and barriers, are all presented as having combined influences on workplace learning. Furthermore, specific internal elements, such as individual disposition, and external elements like organisational and cultural environments that influence and support applications of actual learning, are all seen as being necessarily interrelated (Illeris, 2009). Therefore, using Illeris's theory as an orienting framework, the five themes of the individual, the environment, work identity, working practice, and their interrelationships will be highlighted to

illustrate their logic and contribution to the research questions identified at the end of the literature review.

2.1. History of Theoretical Perspectives on Learning through Life

In this section, the key theoretical concepts and debates on adult learning in social and psychological theories examined include how the significance of adult learning differs from learning in childhood, how autonomy is critical for adult learning, and the implications of adult learning.

To understand the origins of current theories of learning, to briefly considering the tradition of theory and research in the field of lifelong learning is instructive. It is increasingly an orthodoxy that, willingly or not, workers of all kinds are required to restructure their working lifespans. Earning throughout one's lifetime, including in the workplace, is increasingly seen as crucial support for this process by enabling people to adjust to changes (Field, 2000). In pursuing this analysis, Jarvis (2006) suggested following the definition of lifelong learning:

> 'T*he combination of processes throughout a lifetime whereby the whole person – body (genetic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses) – experiences social situations, the perceived content of which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual person's biography resulting in a continually changing (or more experienced) person' (Jarvis, 2006: 134)*

Learning in this view is therefore seen as the cognitive and non-cognitive processes of development that occur continuously through explicit and implicit life history. These processes are also impacted by organisational and/or social perspectives. In other words, workers have learning opportunities in the workplace, outside of the workplace, and in any life experiences; if they recognise their importance and possibility, they can then utilise them (Jarvis, 2006; OECD,

2001; UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2016; World Bank, 2003; Panitsidou et al. 2012).

This approach to learning has its origins in Dewey's psychological approach to adult learning (1916 and 1938). He suggested that all learning is generated from direct experiences and learning is a lifelong process. Likewise, andragogy (how adults learn) has been used to identify adult learning separately from pedagogy (how children learn) as 'the art and science of helping adults learn' (Knowles, 1970: 43). For a further structural understanding of adult learning, five crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners are illustrated by Knowles: 'self-concept, experience, readiness to learn, orientation to learn and motivation to learn' (see, for example, Knowles & Associates, 1984:12). Furthermore, Knowles & Associates (1984) suggested that adult learners need to be self-directed, and self-directedness as an aspect of the learner's disposition is one of the key characteristics of successful adult learning. Similarly, Brookfield (1986) illustrated that the concept of autonomy is integral to effective self-directed learning among adults. In line with such a view, and in developing his well-known 'experiential learning' theory, Kolb (1984) described the learning style model composed of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation,d further suggesting each learner prefers a particular single learning style based on their experiences or learning needs/goals. Following a similar experiential approach to Kolb, Mezirow (1977, 1991, and 2000) developed the concept of transformative learning for adults that is a different concept from children's formative learning. He suggested that transformative learning is the process of reflecting upon oneself critically and questioning one's assumptions and philosophies as their basis of viewing the world. Particularly, Cranton (1992, 2006) expanded Mezirow's theoretical framework into the practical, transformative learning process, implementing real-world measures to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Cranton suggests the effectiveness of life history through journal writings and case studies with a question to foster transformative learning (Cranton, 1992). Yorks and Kasl (2002) point out that affect and emotional behaviour that relates to learning-

within-relationship, is a still undertheorised key concept in adult learning, as well as one of the drivers to fill the gap between learning theory and practice in the North American literature on adult learning. The work of the above theorists demonstrates the influence of individual-focused psychological and cognitive theories on the development of adult and experiential learning theories. Psychological theories and perspectives focus deeply on the individual's inner world, and the degree of examination the interrelationship with the social world is not at a similar level of social scientific theoretical approach.

There is also a set of debates and theories that are based more on sociological thinking, and which emphasise the impact of organisational and environmental factors on learning. The definition of lifelong learning is a progressive, self-motivated, and autonomous orientation toward obtaining knowledge and skills in life (Illeris, 2007). Not only schools but other formats such as informal and self-directed learning promote learning in life. Lifelong learning is becoming more effective and more utilised, according to international comparisons (Illeris, 2007; OECD, 2001; European Commission, 2000). For example, the concept of lifelong learning has raised controversy due to the ambiguity of the term and the division of roles by employees, employers, educators, trainers, teachers, and government officials or policymakers. The debate around lifelong learning was started by Lengrand (1969), who focused on whether how lifelong education and learning should be led by policy- or by the learner's autonomy. Lengrand (1969, 1970) claimed that nurturing autonomy and initiative to motivate learners would be the most critical philosophy of lifelong learning rather than providing knowledge and information. On the other hand, Tight (1998a, 1998b), Rees et al. (1997a and 1997b), and Coffield (2000) also provided opinions about whether lifelong learning is a compulsion or an opportunity, emphasising more vocational education and training elements while also mentioning that lifelong learning is both a compulsion and an opportunity. Some ambiguity still characterises this debate, and there is a need for more empirical research. Other lifelong learning theorists who have been influenced by a broader sociological perspective include, for example, Billett, Illeris and others, and these theories are discussed in depth in later sections.

Another strand in the lifelong learning research looks at how such learning is motivated, and this issue has generated some studies that are empirically focused on psychological aspects of the Western world (Bempechat and Elliot, 2002). More broadly, motivation theory in the workplace has been discussed widely as a common interest in social research (Latham, 2012). Research on motivation has shifted focus from fairly simplistic behaviourism to more intrinsic and individual factors, as well as environmental influences (Latham, 2012). The roots of such theories have a long history, going back, for example, to the X-theory and Y theory (McGregor, 1960), which in turn are influenced by the needs hierarchy theory (Maslow, 1943). They are also connected to the importance of intrinsic motivational factors in the workplace, such as employees' participating in a decision-making process, self-evaluation, and environmental factors that foster employees' growth. Building on this early work, the positive effects of workers' dispositional factors for motivation to improve work through learning was examined and supported by empirical data (Naquin and Holton III, 2002). In particular, organisational changes, such as downsizing and restructuring the company, often create an incentive for employees to enhance their employability by learning new skills (Carbery and Garavan, 2005), which has become a more common phenomenon in a more globalised society and industry.

Other writers have further probed the relationship between motivation and learning. For example, Deci and Ryan (1990, 2000), through their research on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation at work, developed their self-determination theory, which posits that freedom of choice for employees accelerates their confidence, autonomy, and interest to the subject. This, they argued, went beyond simple behaviourist principles as it illuminated the link between motivation and *subjective* dispositions to learning, which is specific to the individual. While such theories have done a lot to identify a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can motivate individual learning behaviours, these theories have been primarily developed and observed in Western cultures and workplaces. The Eastern - and

more specifically, the Japanese -context has been ignored in such theories. This is an issue to be explored in greater depth in later sections.

Turning more specifically to research on workplace learning, the theories that have been developed in this area have illustrated that such learning can occur in a variety of ways. For example, workplace learning includes formal learning, informal learning, incidental learning, vocational training, on- and off-the-job training, and higher education beyond the original form of vocationally oriented learning and qualifications (Evans, et al. 2006; Illeris, 2007). In particular, researchers have consistently argued that many informal learning opportunities are generated through, and embedded within, workplace practices, activities, and relationships (Zuboff, 1988; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Garrick, 1998). This understanding has led to a gradual shift in emphasis from 'training' to 'workplace learning', which has promoted a transition in theory, and to some extent, in practice (Polidano and Tabasso, 2014). It also has led away from a focus on formal, structured approaches to employee development, and towards more informal modes of learning (European Commission, 2001: Evans et al., 2006). In this view, most learning is invisible and tacit, and in reality, learning is normally at best a second-order activity within the workplace. The workplace is where the primary focus is generally on producing products and services, business continuity, and sustainable growth to make a profit in competitive national and global markets (Rainbird, 2000; Hodkinson et al., 2004; Illeris, 2007). Consequently, the learning that occurs within organisations - whether formal or informal, recognised or unrecognised, incidental or intended - is generally shaped by the wider context, activities, and goals of the organisation.

The theoretical concept of 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) was introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (2011) describes that 'communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 2011:1). Lave and Wenger (1991) point out that opportunities for learning are located almost everywhere, in

and out of the workplace, especially if a person participates in a group that has a mutual objective.

Another prominent trend in the workplace learning literature over the past 20 years concerns 'learning organisation' and 'knowledge management'. These concepts, however, have often been criticised, particularly regarding how they have been applied in practice. For example, Evans and Rainbird (2002) identified a number of barriers that tend to prevent the rhetoric of the learning organisation model from being applied to practice. Evans et al. (2006) pointed out how a compromise, apart from a desirable learning organisation between society and learners is necessary for working practices.

In an attempt to construct more robust accounts of how workplace learning occurs, writers have developed constructivist and sociocultural theories that aim to acknowledge cultural, contextual, and individual factors as important in shaping learning processes (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These theories, however, are still not a completed project, and as noted above, they have commonly been constructed drawing on, and with reference to, a Western context.

In sum, adult learning has become an expanding field of study in recent years, as researchers have begun to understand the ways in which adult learners' dispositions and cognitive modes differ from those of a child. In conjunction with motivation theories, these approaches have promoted an emphasis on adult learners as an autonomous subject with specific preferences and sources of motivation. At the same time, theories of workplace learning that view learning as a by-product of organisational processes, activities, and relationships have also been developed. Finally, writers have added to this analysis the need to acknowledge the importance of individual dispositions and the significance of cultural influences. The next section addresses one of the other key foci of this study: the issue of managers' learning.

2.2. Manager's Learning: How is it Different from Non-Manager's Learning?

A manager is an individual who is responsible for accomplishing certain tasks or overseeing a certain group in an organisation (Mintzberg, 1973, 2005 and 2009; Hales, 1986 and 1987). A manager often leads business and has control or direction of the business, together with a team. A manager often drives business, and managers' learning is key to solving complicated problems in business. In this section, managers' learning is defined, as well as exploring how it is different from non-managers' learning.

The definition of managerial work has been discussed by scholars in various ways; however, there is a relatively little consensus because of its ambiguous characteristics and varying requirements across ages. For example, Mintzberg defines management as consisting of art, craft, and science in consideration of its highly diverse nature (Mintzberg, 1973, 2009). Mintzberg points out that 'most management is craft, meaning that it relies on experience-learning on the job.' (Mintzberg, 2005:10). This suggests that the manager's work is structured around complicated, experienced, and time-consuming tasks and abilities that are of a quantitatively and qualitatively different level of work from non-managerial staff. In Mintzberg's view, the characteristics of managers' work would be a high workload, accompanied by an unremitting pace of work, varied and fragmentary activities in the short term, and generally occupied by time-consuming communications. Managers are thought of as officially empowered to achieve efficient exploitation of specific resources and services for which their division is responsible in order to contribute to the overall strategic objectives of the organisation. In general, managers are expected to make decisions within conditions of ambiguity, as well as manage changes, information, communication, and resources, all while recognising their responsibility and learning from their self-reflection (Mintzberg, 1973).

Increasingly, researchers in the social sciences field have begun to ask whether, given the specific characteristics of managerial work, managers are required, expected, or able to learn in different ways than other employees. This has led to a growing body of research on management learning, or 'management development.' For example, research on managers in the nursing profession by Cathcart et al. (2010) explained the significant role of hidden leadership through the experiential learning of nurse managers. Hill (2003) points out that the experiential learning embedded in the prevailing management learning narratives reinforces the notion that management development is a long-term process based on continuous exposure to diverse experiences, and is both an intellectual and emotional exercise. Baldwin and Padgett (1994) also suggest that management learning in informal or on the job settings has made remarkable advances in terms of management development compared to the previous five years of research. Cullen and Turnbull (2005) mentioned that Baldwin and Padgett (1994) identified 'three emerging areas of management development as a competitive advantage, self-directed management development, and management education in degree-granting institutions' (Cullen and Turnbull, 2005:346). Furthermore, Mintzberg (1973) pointed out that skill development for managers is primarily based on cognitive learning, simulation learning (including feedback on role-playing performance), and on the job learning that is constructed by continuous self-reflectiveness and constructive feedback from others.

Turning specifically to the issue of management learning in Japan, Japanese companies have historically applied a unique human resource management system, as well as development and internal union system that occupies a position very close to the organisation (Abegglen, 1958; Yoshida, 1997; Sugimoto, 2014). The Japanese human resource management approach focuses on experiences in a broader range of expertise in the lifetime employment system, a seniority-based salary scheme, and longer working hours than Western countries (Gill and Wong, 1998; Sugimoto, 2014). Sugimoto (2014) defines the lifetime employment system as follows:

'This is the system under which employees are expected to remain with the same company or enterprise group for their entire career; the enterprise in return provides a wide range of fringe benefits' (Sugimoto, 2014: 92).

The Labor Standards Act, which was amended in 1993, regulates working hours in Japan; in reality, however, Japanese companies have a cultural practice of service overtime working that is not paid work (Gill and Wong, 1998; Sugimoto, 2014). Therefore, the Japanese promotion system has been based on slow promotion, and opportunities for promotion in the later period, to continuously maintain employees' motivation (Holzhausen, 2000).

Empirical research on workplace learning has a few implications from results obtained from Japanese managers' learning practices (Matsuo, 2012; Matsuo and Nakahara, 2012). Matsuo (2012) identified the existence of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2011) in Japanese workplaces through his qualitative research on the experiential learning process among IT consultants. He also pointed out that IT managers in Japan acquire individually specific knowledge in each career step. Senior managers experienced non-stepped learning to get things done in a very challenging project, while usual project managers experienced a stepwise learning process across divisions and departments in the workplace. Matsuo (2012) also suggested that the particular human resource management and development structures that prevail in Japan provide a context for managerial work and careers that is quite different from that found in the West. As Yoshida pointed out, for example, the job tenure is longer, and the sense of company loyalty is normally higher in Japan than in the West (Yoshida, 1993 and 1997; Sugimoto, 2014). At the same time, the status and trend of the labour situation based on the 'strong collective culture' (Black and Morrison, 2012: 564) and 'Japan's group-oriented approach to employee involvement' (Gill and Wong, 1998: 117) have been influenced by globalisation, diversity, and changes in the age composition of the workplace (Swierczek and Onishi, 2003; Black and Morrison,

2012). This may have provided an added incentive for Japanese managers to develop new skills and expertise to enhance their employability (Matsuo, 2012).

There are also a few studies that have sought to clarify the exact nature of managerial work and learning in Japan (as opposed to working and learning in general). Typically, job descriptions are ambiguous in traditional Japanese companies in the collective management setting (Sugimoto, 2014). In one of the few studies to attempt such an analysis, Matsuo and Nakahara (2012) observe that recently Japanese managers face difficulties, such as fewer opportunities to experience gradual exposure to managerial work, due to the growing ambiguity surrounding managerial roles in Japan. The significant need to improve workplace learning based on further managerial reinforcement, such as manager's reflective communication and empowerment, as well as quality management of managerial work, are suggested (Matsuo and Nakahara, 2012). Furthermore, the results of the research by Matsuo and Nakahara (2012) show a lack of a clearly defined boundary between managerial and non-managerial roles, plus an increasing trend towards appointing younger employees as managers. Such patterns and trends may present a requirement for greater managerial adaptation and learning, and Matsuo and Nakahara (2012) respond to this by prescribing the adoption of formalised reflective learning practices (e.g. the 'Plan-Do-Check-Action' or 'PDCA' cycle) to assist managers in dealing with these increasing pressures and developments.

In sum, managers' work is conventionally described as being more complicated, fragmented, time-consuming, and requiring a different approach to communication from non-managerial staff, as Mintzberg (1973) pointed out. The skills that managers are required to develop are therefore characterised as being different from those of non-managers, and consequently, so is their learning. For example, guided experiential learning is seen to be of particular importance. A final issue is that the specific work and learning environment of the Japanese context may mean that the learning experiences of Japanese managers are different from those found elsewhere in the world. There is, at present, little research on this issue.

2.3. The significance of Individual Positions and Dispositions on Learning Behaviour

Next, sociological approaches focusing on how individual managers' learning dispositions influence their learning behaviours and approaches to learning are explored. The theoretical underpinnings and recent analyses of the significance of individual learning dispositions and biographies as well as sociological discussions on social and individual dualism, are examined.

Learning dispositions are the stable inner characteristics, and also the complex combination of behaviours and characteristics through which learners join and actively participate in the learning process, which has been developed, and may be altered, through their experiences and practices in life (Illeris, 2007). Learning dispositions expand skills, participation, commitment, and understanding, while also being interwoven with an individual, unclear pattern with social, cultural, ethnic, economical, educational, and environmental factors; the so-called 'social heredity' (Illeris, 2007:194).

When we think about individual workers' dispositions and identities, Giddens (1984 and 1991) pointed out that worker identity is partly self-constructed and partly attributed by others in the current or previous workplace. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define 'dispositions' as having a tacit and unconscious nature, which are oriented with thoughts and actions in any circumstances in the social structure, with individual subjectivity as being the base of individual behaviours. Dispositions are the potential vector to regulate iterative individual conventional behaviours (Boudieu, 1984 and 1990). In general, identity and dispositions are largely identified and developed throughout one's life, and are hard to transform and change (Boudieu, 1984 and 1990). These identities and dispositions are not, however, perfectly fixed, and are rather ever-evolving in through efficient environments and individual reflection (Boudieu, 1984 and 1990). Here again, balanced attention and examination of the interrelationship between individual

workers' dispositions, subjectivity, and workplace environment, culture, and other external factors are the stepping stones for a better understanding of learning in life. This is also another significant frame of this research and the points that need to be identified in it.

Although the importance of individual factors towards learning behaviours has already been stressed in the discussion of learning theories, this concept at length, due to the weight of research on this subject in recent years, is worth expanding (Hodkinson et. al., 2004, Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a; Coffield, 2000; Rees et al., 1997a and 1997b). As Bourdieu (1984) suggests, individuals are oriented towards action through their 'habitus,' a battery of subjective dispositions built up over time as they interact with structured social situations and structures, and a sort of methodology to produce conventional human behaviours. Drawing on Bourdieu, Hodkinson et al. (2004) explain that 'people are influenced by and influence the social structures around them, more than those structures are represented through individuals in their habitus, as well as through the various "fields" to which they belong and participate in' (Hodkinson et al., 2004: 9). Habitus is one's definite existence that influences human behaviours that cannot change easily with the individual's history in society (Boudieu, 1984 and 1990), so it shares some aspects of the similar group, culturally and unconsciously.

Such a view of learning builds on wider sociological thought concerning the nature of socially constructed subjectivity and its relationship to individual thought and action. For example, Mansfield (2000) argues that subjectivity is:

> 'primary on experience, and remains firmly in inconsistency, contradiction and unselfconsciousness. Our experience of ourselves remains forever prone to surprising disjunction and that only the fierce lives of ideology or theoretical dogma convince us we can be homogenied into a single consistent thing' (Mansfield 2000: 6).

Consequently, sociological accounts (e.g. individual experience, identity and history) of learning by Orbuch (1997) have emphasised the role of individual subjectivity and agency in influencing orientations towards learning and development. At the same time, the productivity discussion that has informed the most recent public policies on lifelong learning has focused mainly on an economic model of learning behaviour, which involves little assessment of individual factors beyond simple economic motivation (Lynch, 2008; Bansel, 2007). The sociological research on lifelong learning has shown that individual life stories and biographies allow researchers to find insight into how and why learners display particular orientations towards learning (Lynch, 2008; Weber, 1999). There are also a growing number of Western studies adopting this perspective. In a Japanese context, there are some, though fewer, qualitative research studies to examine learning practices (Matsuo, 2012) and cross- country comparisons in Asian countries (Yamazaki and Kayes, 2010) in an indirect way. In the Western context, Billett (2010) and Illeris (2004) deepened the framework of interaction between the individual, the socio-environment, subjectivity, learning, and work. There is no study, that qualitatively and sociologically utilise the biographies and life stories related to managers' learning in a Japanese context.

There has historically been a gap between theories that explore individual-level influences on learning and those that focus on more structural and/or organisational level influences. (Hodkinson et al., 2004). In particular, academic perspectives on individual internal subjectivity and disposition have been left behind throughout theoretical debates emphasising an organisational and social context, a social-psychological perspective, and an anthropological standpoint (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Engestrom, 1999 and 2001). In the complex relationships between individual context and social and organisational practices and cultures, significant individual factors need to be examined by detailed assessments such as methods that centre learners' biographies and life histories (Hodkinson et al., 2004: Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a; Lynch, 2008; Weber, 1999).

Reflective ways that workers influence and reshape their lives and their biographies of learning obviously impact institutional and even social structures (Alheit and Dausien, 2002). Recent research on this subject has suggested that adults develop their learner biographies and dispositions throughout their life, not just in work or through formal education or training. For example, people develop through various life experiences, such as those learned in the household, from educating children, community contribution, and different travel experiences (Reinbird, Fuller and Munro, 2004). Beyond this, however, the individual develops a sense, however tacit, of how learning relates to their life, their identity, and their aspirations through these experiences. They may turn away from particular types of learning (e.g. formal schooling) and develop preferences for other learning modes (e.g. informal learning). These broader influences upon managers' learning approaches will also form one of the foci of this study.

At the same time, there is a concern that employees' influence and agency may be exaggerated when the research is conducted with individual employees in a specific setting. The researcher must not lose sight of other factors, such as the structure of the organisational environment, and the economic and social structures beyond that (West and Choueke, 2003). While acknowledging this imperative, Billett (2010) returns to the central argument that researchers need to further understand: the ways in which workplace learning for the future is shaped, whether complex, expanded, or limited, and structured alongside education, biography, and workplace environment. We need, Billett claims, to illuminate how individual workers are shaped differently by their particular biographies, and how in turn, they base their response to learning requirements and opportunities upon the subjective dispositions that are constructed through that biography (Billett, 2004b). This study aims to address this issue.

In providing a framework for analysing this issue, Hodkinson et al. (2004) observe that biography influences learning dispositions in the following four ways: 1)

workers can utilise a series of prior experiences and gained knowledge in practice for future work and learning opportunities; 2) the learning and work disposition of a worker is a key driver to influence that worker's behaviours for workplace learning; 3) the communities of practice can be the product of an individual worker's disposition and value in practice; and 4) participating in a workplace community can help develop a worker's identity (Hodkinson et at. 2004).

Thus, the individual's prior experiences in life, work, and learning play a central part in shaping their attitudes towards, and participation in, future learning. Further illuminating the complexity of the relationship between the individual and the influence of the workplace, Hodkinson et al. (2004) restated that there are four overlapping types of the interrelationship between individuals and their workplace context that explain the complexity of structure and agency within the workplace and learners. Again, they are: 1) bringing former experiences and skills to the present working place; 2) approaches by which individual dispositions can interrelate with circumstances and practices; 3) approaches for individual workers to play a significant role in the workplace's circumstances; and 4) approaches through which a worker's identity can receive influence from the learning practice (Hodkinson et al., 2004).

As such, Hodkinson argues that individuals' biographies shape their engagement with workplace learning in a variety of ways, from their existing knowledge base to the connection between learning and wider identity. For example, Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004a) suggested that the significance of a close interrelationship between individual biographies, dispositions, or approaches to learning within the particular workplace context can be explored through case studies, in this case, for two teachers by qualitative interview.

> 'Their dispositions within that habitus to learning, to work, to career etc. develop and evolve through their experiences and interactions within the life course, both inside and outside work' (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a: 177).

As noted above, some researchers, including Hodkinson, draw on Bourdieu's concept of habitus to understand this connection between an individual's social background and biography, and their subjective orientation to (for example) learning. The concept of habitus, as described by Bourdieu (1984), is based on the idea that the social structures we inhabit influence our thoughts and actions and are therefore reproduced through them. Some authors have argued that this represents an overly deterministic view. For example, Alheit argues that biographical knowledge can be termed as 'biographicity' (Alheit, 1992: 18), which can be the source of redesigning and reshaping the structure and colour of life within the specific contexts a person inhabits (Alheit, 1992). Therefore, as Alheit argues, we should think instead of the two-way relationships between the macro-level perspective, as policy for education and training, the meso-level, as concerning the organisation, environments and agencies, and the individual micro-level perspective of individual biographicity to understand how individual action is embedded in wider structures. In the absence of such insight, argues Illeris (2009), we are missing a structured theory of biographical and situated learning: 'in which learning cultures and dependencies of supra-individual patterns, mentalities and milieus do individual learning develop? What implicit learning potentials and learning processes and shown in social milieus and groups (e.g. within families and between generations)?' (Forschungsmemorandum, 2000; 5: in English by Illeris, 2009: 127).

Building on this view, Hodkinson et al. (2008) argue that learning behaviour should not be seen as either individual *or* social, but rather a product of both combined. Hodkinson et al. (2008) claim that we should view learning 'culturally' to understand that it is a product of context and agency combined. Therefore, understanding managers' learning in a Japanese setting, as well as 'practical, embodied and social' (Hodkinson et al., 2008: 38) contexts, may enable a particular way of viewing learning culturally.

Furthermore, personal epistemologies are currently introduced as actors that play a core role in learning through practice. Personal epistemologies are individuals' overall views of learning when individuals commit to producing knowledge from their practice and experience with working (Billett, 2014). Billett pointed out the necessity of establishing a science of learning through practice, accumulating informed and evidence-based accounts of how circumstances of practice shape individually so that learning through work to re-legitimate and promote learning through practice is effectively 'learning in the circumstances of practice' (Billett, 2014:674). Billett also suggests that 'a need for practice settings to be legitimised, understood more fully and on their own terms as environments in which individuals come to participate and learn' (Billett, 2014: 690). Individual learning and practice in the workplace can flexibly interact, sometimes in parallel, and sometimes mutually intersecting in a more explicit and cooperative way.

In sum, as described, sociological research on workplace learning has emphasised the role of both context and agency in influencing what and how learning occurs in the workplace. In particular, recent studies have focused on the internal factors at the individual level that are constructed through biographical experience, and that shape the individual's attitude towards, and engagement with, workplace learning opportunities and learning in life. There is a theoretical gap; however, between theories that focus on learning at the individual level and those that focus on more structural influences; the extant literature involves little assessment of individual factors. There is also little research about the significance of individual learning dispositions and biographies or environmental factors' influences upon managers' learning both qualitatively and sociologically. The next section focuses on the external, contextual factors impacting workplace learning and learning in life.

2.4. Societal Context and Influence on Learner's Dispositions

In this section, theoretical discussions on the environmental influences for managers, their learning dispositions, and workplace learning are examined.

Theories focusing on social context including cultural differences, organisational factors in multinational corporations (particularly in a Japanese environment), and the debates and theoretical gaps in surrounding environments are explored, as are theoretical implications that are different from Western environments and theories. Theoretical work on the interrelationship between the above societal contexts and individual learning dispositions are also discussed.

Recent years have seen enormous interest in the changes brought upon organisations particularly MNCs by the process of globalisation. Many European human resource development research projects have explored the sociological aspects and psychological issues in learning activity in MNCs and their efforts to become learning organisations as a means of meeting the constant need for change (Sambrook, 2002; Argyris and Schon, 1978; Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Bartlett and Ghoshal, 2002; Senge, 1990). Others have focused on the cultural issues brought into prominence by globalisation, with Hall (1976), for example, suggesting that modes of communication differ fundamentally between 'high context' and 'low context' cultures. Nonaka proposes that tacit knowledge in Japanese organisations can be transformed into explicit knowledge and utilised in value creation (Nonaka 1991). In high context cultures such as Japan, China and France, non-verbal attitudes are considered far more important than they are in low context cultures.

This may have implications for different approaches to learning. Similarly, Hofstede's (1991) widely- used method of cultural differentiation has connections to the learning theory. Hofstede conducted a series of empirical cultural comparison studies in a large group of global IBM workers to see specific cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1991). His objective for the study was mainly to explore the national culture, and he was not focused on differences in culture because these differences are categories that divide people in social systems, not in the integrated system (Hofstede, 1991). Five factors - Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity vs Femininity, Individualism vs Collectivism, and Time

Orientation - are presented, arguing multiple diversities of culture (Hofstede, 1991). Although Hofstede received criticism for his methodological approach and objectivist approach to viewing people and culture, it is still widely acknowledged and used because of its easily comprehensible product and concept. Furthermore, Hoppe (1990) observes that members of cultures with high 'uncertainty avoidance' are more likely to be averse to what Kolb describes as experiential learning, which lacks the predictable and transparent structure of more formal modes of learning.

In Japan, the progress of MNCs' activity and human resource development style has sometimes been seen as being behind Western companies (Hattori and Maeda, 2000). Adherence to traditional models of management and development, such as simultaneous recruiting of new graduates, ranking hierarchy with seniority wages, and lifetime employment practices remain stubborn (Hattori and Maeda, 2000; Dalton and Benson, 2002). In recognition of this, the Japanese government created various policies of lifelong learning, (Lee, 2006). With regard to government policy (Rausch, 2003; Lee, 2006), in 2008 the Central Education Council, established by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and technology proposed a policy paper (Lifelong learning policy bureau, 2008) to highlight the importance of establishing more of a culture of lifelong learning in Japan. This report, however, placed more importance on expanding existing opportunities, programs, and infrastructures rather than fostering individual learners' autonomy as is advocated, for example, in Western theories of adult and lifelong learning. (Yamada, 2002).

On the other hand, and somewhat paradoxically, in Japanese organisations, managers' career development has depended mainly on their self-responsibility and awareness (Jarratt and Coates, 1995; Ministry of health, labour and welfare, 2006; Sakai, 1998). Given the apparent dislocation between established theories of lifelong learning and Japanese learning policies, considering cultural influences on learning activity around managers in eastern countries, including Japan, is

pertinent (Hofstede, 1991, 2001; Hofstede and Bond, 1988). The specific cultural features of Eastern and, more specifically Japanese organisations, working styles, and employment structures have been quite widely researched (Swierczek and Onishi, 2003; Takata, 2003; Yamazaki, 2005; Hong, Snell and Easterby-Smith, 2006) Yet, rarely have such issues been considered in relation to managers' learning.

Aside from the issue of culture, questions of political economy at the national level have also shaped the broader context within which workplace learning occurs. For example, in the United Kingdom, the government decided to abolish ITBs (Industrial Training Boards) in the 1980s (Evans et al., 2006). The government devolved critical decision making for learning and human resource development to the employer without any regulatory requirement of spending a proportion of resources and costs on training and development activities aimed at meeting the demands of the growing knowledge economy (Evans et al., 2006). This is an early example of the practice of utilitarianism of education in action.

Furthermore, in the UK, the government chose to encourage students to remain enrolled in primary education longer, while encouraging employers and the workforce to invest in vocational skills (Department for Education and Skills, 2003). Evans et al. (2006) argue that these actions were partly successful in the public sector, due to its homogeneous nature, but much less so in the private sector. Evans et al. (2006) also point out that the ingrained working and management practices of employers in the UK (and other countries) focus more on cost reduction than on adaptation, and on high-quality output based on investment in the skills of the workforce. This problem has led some researchers to explore ways in which workplace practices and relationships can be organised to provide more learning opportunities. Looking at the impact of the rapid change of business systems in different countries, Whitley (2000) suggested his concept of social structuring of business systems, which is characterised by differences in work, jobs, and the reward system in employees relationships in different

countries. Therefore, the rapid transformation of the current business system in any society will be limited by the extent to which work system characteristics are integrated with institutional arrangements (Whitley, 2000).

To visualise the structure of the multiple processes and dimensions of learning, Illeris (2004) introduces a more holistic model for learning in working life that illustrates the inter-relationship between the social and the individual level of learning, and the overlapping position between the working practice of the organisation and the work identity of the employee as an auxiliary tool to understand the context as Figure 2.1 shows (Illeris, 2004: 438). This model is structured by two triangular models that connect the individual with social levels of learning in their working life. Drawing on earlier research by Jorgensen and Warring (2001), Illeris adjusted and combined two models that consist of the working place as a learning venue and essential elements to define social and individual factors of learning, including individual working identity and working practice (Illeris, 2004). His model proposed an interrelationship between individual and social, cognition and emotion, and technical organisational and social-cultural elements, which combine in complex and dynamic ways to produce different workplace learning outcomes across the individual's working life. This holistic model promotes an interest in analysing the interaction between individual and contextual dynamics in specific cases to highlight how this interaction operates in and is shaped by, particular environments. Furthermore, Illeris (2004) points out that the central overlap between work practice and work identity, by shaded in this model, indicates the most important place for generating 'the practice of the community' (Illeris, 2004: 439).
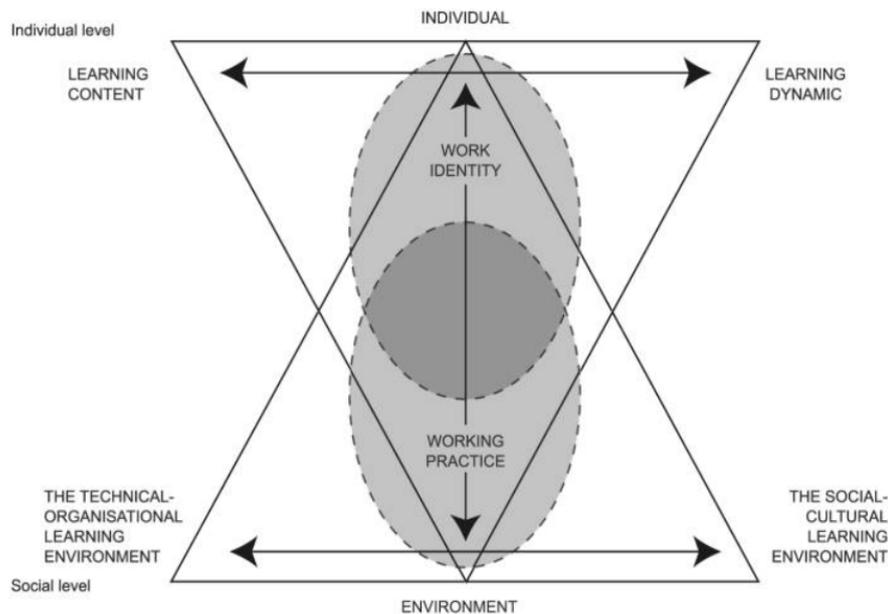
Figure 2.1 A Holistic Model of Learning in Working Life (Illeris, 2004: 438)

Ashton (2004) distinguished three types of national systems regarding vocational education and training (VET) - the free market (e.g. US, UK Canada), the corporatist (e.g. Germany, Denmark, Austria), and the developmental state (e.g. Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea). Japan was distinguished as the developmental state based on the case of Japanese *Zaibatsu*, which was an indigenous company model with the power beyond the government or the VET system. Writing in 1995, Koike noted that large Japanese companies developed their own internal skill formation systems; however, after the Japanese economy's performance over the last two decades and the financial crisis precipitated by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers in 2008, the situation around companies in Japan has dramatically changed (Koike, 1995; Yu, 2010). In the most recent Japanese economic recession, Japanese companies strategies on VET became to reduce VET budgets and resources, beginning to rely on individual workers' autonomy and cost value, similarly to other countries' models (Yokoyama and Nilsson, 2016, Sugimoto, 2014). In light of this on-going change, Ashton's assessment of the Japanese system may need further modification as Japanese business conditions are now closer to those of Western countries. For example, as Fukao (2013) and Miyagawa (2013) indicate, company-specific human resource investment in Japan has been rapidly decreased after 1991

particularly in non-manufacturing industries. At the same time, however, OECD (2013) emphasised that investment in intangible assets such as skills and learning have contributed more to recent growth in Japan than in comparable OECD countries.

At the level of the workplace context, the literature in recent years has been dominated by accounts of the workplace as a learning environment, and by questions of how that environment can be configured to maximise learning (e.g. Engestrom, 1999, 2001; Fuller and Unwin, 2003). For example, Ashton and Sung (2002) and Rainbird et al. (2003) argue that learning within the workplace is often stimulated by change or crisis of some sort (e.g. financial or technological), and that the individual's inclination and ability to respond to that change is crucial in shaping the learning that occurs (or not) as a result. More generally, Evans et al. (2006) suggest that workplace learning can be in a more formal way to reinforce qualities, beyond informal means and methods (Evans et al., 2006). This illustrates the current importance placed on favourable workplace conditions for enhancing learning opportunities.

Thus, theoretical discussions about external and social (e.g., organisational, economic, political, and cultural) influences and their interaction with internal individual learning dispositions, learning behaviours, and attitudes have grown in recent years, culminating in the holistic models outlined above (e.g., Illeris, 2004). Yet, such theoretical discussions have relatively little to say about managers' learning specifically, and in this respect, more research is needed. Furthermore, these theories have generally been constructed in a Western context; Eastern and Japanese contexts have remained largely absent, and it is this issue to which the next section turns.

2.5. Learning through Life and Japanese Culture, Economy and Policy

This section provides further examination and theoretical discussion on socio-contextual influences by recent governmental policies in Japan while exploring the corresponding economic and cultural contexts to learning in life and workplace learning.

There are relatively few studies that examine managers' lifetime learning and individual dispositions to learn and their influence qualitatively in detail in a specifically Japanese context (Sambrook, 2002; Farndale and Paauwe, 2005; Pudelko, 2006; Black and Morrison, 2012; Schaaper et al., 2012; Matsuo, 2012; Cormier-MacBurnie, et al. 2015). Matsuo (2012) quantitatively examined the leadership of learning and reflective practices of nursing managers in Japan. Matsuo et al. (2008) also qualitatively examined the processes of IT professionals' experience-based learning in Japan, highlighting the interrelationship between skills and knowledge acquisition and job experiences at different career stages. These two research studies focus on two specific kinds of managers in Japan who need continuous vocational training and learning: nurse managers and IT professionals. Further research on managers in various fields and their learning is needed to more fully examine Japanese managers' learning experience.

Japan can be a forerunner in finding answers for emerging issues that result from an ageing society, and learning in the workplace and life would be one key aspect to improve conditions in the workplace and society (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011; Sugimoto, 2014; MEXT, 2016). Further examinations on the interrelationship between individual learning dispositions and social contexts in recent or current Japanese managers can be a theoretical and empirical contribution to those emerging issues through the learning perspective. Implications from this examination can be expanded theoretically and practically to other countries where ageing is also critical.

One of the recent critical factors affecting organisational and managers' awareness of learning was the serious global financial crisis of 2007-2008. After the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami in 2011, many Japanese MNCs perceived the urgent need to expand their overseas business operations and accelerate the globalisation of their businesses due to a rapid shrinkage of the domestic business in Japan, as it was impacted by a serious disaster as well as a nuclear plant accident (Abe, 2013). This, the government and firms felt, would bring with it increased human resource capacities such as mobility, adaptability, and cultural awareness, which began to be reflected in governmental policy reforms (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

In parallel, continuous discussion about and efforts towards Japanese educational reform and lifelong learning were already in progress. Recurrent education for lifelong learning was decided to be an urgent political agenda in promoting lifelong learning to meet societal needs. In general, lifelong learning has had a degree of social and political prominence in Japan, with learning through the course of life traditionally being highly valued (Kawachi, 2008; Rausch, 2003; Wilson, 2001). Historically, the Act for Adult Education in 1949 was the first Japanese governmental action to formally articulate the principle that learning occurs throughout people's lifespans. Real reform to the public education system, however, was slow to implement. Then, UNESCO's Faure Report identified the crucial concept of lifelong education in 1972, but still, the Japanese system was not keeping pace with the growing national consensus of lifelong learning beyond the primary school educational system (Faure et al. 1972).

Later in 1990, the Japanese government established the Lifelong Learning Promotion Law and provided national and prefecture-level supports to lifelong learning. Then, a decade later in 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) was established as part of a ministerial restructuring. MEXT established the Lifelong Learning Policy Bureau, which

remains today as the central organisation to lead lifelong learning in Japan. The impact of this on the learning of the workforce, and particularly managers, remains unclear (Ogden, 2010). Arguably, further structural changes could provide an added impetus for lifelong learning, in consideration of ageing, and community identity, for example. In respect to these factors, Rausch (2003) argues for greater clarity and direction from the central government in Japan regarding the knowledge and skills that require increased attention and investment. Young and Rosenberg (2006) also observed that the traditional valuing of lifelong learning and older learners in Japan has not been widely reflected in government policy, and that adult learning opportunities have suffered, relative to the USA for example, as a result. Therefore, Japanese workers, including managers, are largely responsible for directing their own learning and development. Relatively little, however, is know about how they do this. As such, more research is required to illuminate the subjective basis of Japanese managers' learning behaviour.

Recently, remarkable progress has been made with the official announcement for the advancement of equal employment opportunity, which was the new 'provisional Japan's plan for dynamic engagement of all citizens' led by Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe in 2017. MEXT and the Japanese government think that now is the time to make this change, based on the open collaboration between schools and society. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expresses his action plan for promoting adult learning as follows:

> 'We will promote "recurrent education (continuing education)" enabling people to continue to learn, whatever their age. We will advance reform of universities and other higher education institutions, in order to meet the demand for practical education, such as addressing the diverse needs of working professionals and providing the education required as IT personnel. Though these measures, I intend to implement bold policies that amount to two trillion yen' (The Prime Minister of Japan and His cabinet, September 25th, 2017b).

Returning to the issue of culture, Hofstede's well-known study (1991, 2001) identified some features of Japanese culture (e.g. a tendency towards high levels of uncertainty avoidance, low individualism and high long-term orientations). Many scholars, however, such as Huff and Kelley (2003) and House et al. (2004), question his study's generality, validity with a longitudinal perspective, a reflection of diversity, and conceptual validity. In particular, rapid changes in Japanese society because the cultural impact may not have been considered in Hofstede's updated work.

A number of later studies have examined cross-cultural influences on organisational learning in MNCs focusing on typologies of cultural differences, the uniqueness of Japanese culture, focusing on self-criticism and the role of wider global influences on learning styles,which is still 'obedient, passive and teacher-dependent' (Nakata, 2011: 902), as well as the headquarters and subsidiary perspective within the MNC (Swierczek and Onishi, 2003; Takata, 2003; Yamazaki, 2005; Hong, Snell, and Easterby-Smith, 2006). Other studies also explain Japanese cultural features of not only self-criticism but also modesty, portraying a people who are never proud of themselves, stoical, and eager to self-improve. (Takata, 2003; Leuyers and Sonoda, 1999). Wilson describes that 'Japan is, nevertheless, strongly, mono-cultural.' (Wilson, 2001: 299).

Based on the above studies concerning national culture, there seems to be a common trend towards identifying Japanese culture as having strong collective tendencies, as well as a self-critical aspect. Yet, to draw any connection between these features and learning behaviour would at this point be entirely speculative. As such, there is a need for more research that seeks to illuminate any connection between cultural values and managers' learning in the Japanese context.

At a more fundamental level, various writers have identified more philosophical differences between Eastern and Western cultures. Hmeljak-Sangawa (2017) describes a historical aspect of Japanese learning policy, which occurred after the

Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Meiji Restoration was the event that restored practical imperial rule wielded by the Tokugawa military government in 1868.

> 'Indeed, after the end of the Tokugawa regime and the advent of the Meiji restoration in 1868, when rising the literacy and educational level of the whole nation, seen as a prerequisite for building a strong centralised nation that could withstand the pressures of Western colonial powers, became one of the priorities of the Meiji government (Visočnik 2015 and 2016; Ichimiya 2011)' (Hmeljak-Sangawa, 2017:164).

Historically, two-way interaction learning has been unsuccessful in Japan. For example, Tweed and Lehman (2002) suggest a distinction between a Confucian approach and Socratic approaches within a cultural, religious, and philosophical context. The Socratic approach focuses on questioning 'others beliefs and his own beliefs' (Tweed and Lehman, 2002: 90), whereas 'Confucius valued effortful learning, behavioural reform pragmatic learning acquisition of essential knowledge and respectful learning' (Tweed and Lehman, 2002: 91). For example, traditionally Socratic and interactive approaches in the classroom and organisations would be a popular format encouraged in Western countries. Nakata (2011) also explains that 'East Asian learners, whose educational context are to a greater or lesser extent influenced by *Confucius*, are generally obedient, passive, and teacher-dependent' (Nakata, 2011: 902) based on a substantial amount of evidence on learner autonomy in East Asia.

In comparison, generally speaking, a Confucian approach in Japan would be with much less interactivity between the teacher and student, with more single directional communication from superior or older teacher to lower teacher or younger student based on a high degree of respect for the teacher can be seen from elementary school, according to Tweed and Lehman. They also claim that in the workplace, the communicational direction from higher positioned managers to lower positioned employees is still often seen in Japan, although Western influence has been making its way into Japanese organisations and society, with the more

interactive way of communicating being encouraged, particularly in Western MNCs. Both approaches, they say, have disadvantages, such as concerns of less critical thinking, premature criticism, and rejection of others' ideas using the Socratic orientation, in comparison to the inflexible Confucian approach to learning (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). In spite of such evidence concerning the reported cultural and philosophical differences between East and West, sociological and socio-environmental analyses of the differences in managers' learning orientations between Japan and Western countries is still scarce and insufficient. The following section expands upon this point.

In summary, learning through life and manager's learning have been promoted by the government, organisations, and individuals in Japan. The process and speed are historically dependent on Japanese social, economic, and cultural changes. The Japanese mono-cultural environment, influenced by the Confucian approach, and generally obedient, passive, teacher-dependent learning attitudes still exist in Japanese society, even though research suggests that there are significant influences from different cultures and the educational styles of Western countries. After 1990 the Japanese government's announcement of the 'Lifelong Learning Promotion Law,' policy reforms on lifelong learning, recurrent education, and human resource capabilities were progressed because of more influence from Western policies on learning. Japanese attitudes toward learning, with historically established cultural and social behaviours, however, remain in various forms. Japan can be a forerunner in finding answers for emerging issues, especially for an ageing society with a higher demand for learning in life (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011; Sugimoto, 2014; MEXT, 2016). Further empirical research of managers' learning in a Japanese setting would be beneficial to explore the influencing factors of learning on changing societal practices in Japan to contribute to the identification of Japanese environmental distinctions from those in Western-derived social learning theories.

2. 6. Japanese Social Contexts: Challenges and Changes

In this section, recent challenges for Japan, based on changes in society, culture, and organisations along with globalised business practices and an ageing society, including gender equality issues related to workplace learning and learning in life, are examined. In addition, recent theoretical debates surrounding these challenges are discussed.

While there has been little research specifically on the issue of Japanese managers' learning, there has been a large and growing body of research that seeks to identify, in a more general sense, the nature of management, and 'knowledge management,' within Japanese organisations. For example, Strach and Everett (2006) describe in their research of knowledge transfer in Japanese MNCs that activities to acquire and share knowledge in Japanese firms became an embedded agenda for general business management as a top-down effort (Strach and Everett, 2006). Strach and Everett also mentioned that 'Japanese companies deal with networks at a qualitatively different level from Western companies' (Strach and Everett, 2006: 64). This appears to suggest the possibility that knowledge management activities in Japanese firms are more tacit, implicit, organic and embedded in broader organisational structures and relationships than is the case in Western organisations.

A similar point was made by Nonaka and Takeuchi in their work on the importance of managing tacit knowledge through collective engagement and solidarity in Japanese companies (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Hodkinson et at. (2008) argue that learning is more holistic, rather than dualistic as either individual or social. Similarly, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) also highlight the Japanese management model of SEKI (Socialisation-Externalisation-Combination- and Internalisation), which promotes knowledge creation from people beyond rational dualism such as body and mind, and rationale and emotion.

Research by Hong et al. (2006) suggests that this trait lies at the heart of differences in knowledge management practices between Japanese and Chinese organisations; we must, therefore, be careful not to generalise too far about 'Eastern' approaches to work and learning. A similar difference between Japanese expatriate managers and Thai managers were also reported by Swierczek and Onishi (2003). Even in Asia, the Japanese management style, negotiations, and model are seen as unique, specific and unconventional (Ott and Kimura, 2016).

Historically, geographically, practically, and culturally Japanese MNCs have maintained unique particularities in their business management systems and have maintained a large domestic market share in contrast to Western countries (Adler, et al. 1999, although some writers have observed that this may be changing). For example, Yoshida (1997) points out that Japanese management systems have traditionally placed importance on interdependence, mutual trust, and the centrality of human relationships. In turn, claims Yoshida, this has fostered rational behaviours to assign great value on maintaining human relationships and close family-like inter-relationships between employees and employers as opposed to the more arms-length and short-lived relationships found in the USA and, to some extent, in Germany. Yoshida (1997) explains this using the concept of *holon* developed by Koestler (1967) and Shimizu (1978) which he claims can be adapted to investigate the Japanese management system's characteristics as an island nation that has historically kept Japan apart from foreign invasion.

> '*Holon* is an important concept for grasping the Japanese-style system .....Holon contrasts parts against the total and the total against parts. It constructs a total body through self-organising behaviour and cooperative action with other *holons* at the same level' (Yoshida, 1997:91)

Koestler first created the term of *holon* from the Greek word *holos,* meaning total body and, *on,* meaning a child, to define this notion, opposing elemental

reductionism as a traditional Western theory. Holon constitutes parts of the total and the total of parts. Yoshida (1997) states that 'This duality of "being parts as well as total body" produces stability in the system' (Yoshida, 1997: 92). Shimizu (1978), also using this analogy, explains the feedback between the part and the total body accelerates the self-organisation of *holon* itself. Based on this holographic paradigm which uses the concept of *holon* for understanding the Japanese-style management system, each part has the information of the entire body, and each element has the information to the entire organisation. As such, co-operation between the various parts to work towards the objectives of the whole can be facilitated. Different from American and German management systems that are (claims Yoshida) based on observation of an individualistic society in traditional social science in Western societies, Japanese management systems have not been based on functional and occupational ability, but on a more collective approach to personnel management and the assumption that each employee generally understands the company.

> 'When thinking along the concept of the holographic paradigm, it is understood that in the Japanese-style management system, each element has the information on the whole body, or a part has the information on the whole body; and, this very fact enables the element to cooperate with respective elements, and to perform the function for the whole body. Attention should be directed to the idea that the shared information plays the fundamental role' (Yoshida, 1997: 94)

On the other hand, the possible drawbacks of such cultural characteristics might include the amount of flexibility in the Japanese system (Sugimoto, 2014). Flexibility might be seen as one of its merits, but it also has some faults, such as low speed of decision-making, insufficient human resource development, and too much pressure on employees in a homogeneous organisational culture (Sugimoto, 2014).

Thus, there has been much research pointing to the distinctive nature of management, communication, and interaction in Japanese firms. As noted above,

however, increased globalisation since the 1980s has led to greater cross-fertilisation of people, products, and ideas across national boundaries (Sugimoto, 2014). Therefore, investigating the extent to which traditional Japanese ideas about work and learning still influence managers' subjective attitudes, and whether the primarily Western models of learning that have dominated the workplace learning literature can have a role in explaining Japanese managers' approach to learning, would be worthwhile. Yoshida (1997) pointed out that 'It often happens that factors regarded as too unimportant for analysis in Western societies are found to be essential for analysing Japanese society and may, in fact, constitute central issues' (Yoshida, 1997: 100). Applying this observation to the issue of managers' learning in Japan is one of the key motivating concerns of this study. Interpretation of workplace learning in practice, theoretical examination and theory development, transparency of learning in a visible way, and promoting an open system in society would help further this discussion in recent social research.

Gender equity, in particular, has been a serious issue in Japanese society (Osawa, 2005; Shiota, 2011). Inequity for females in Japan has existed for more than 100 years. After the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan created a new working model to catch up to Western countries. After World War II, Japan sought an even more efficient working model to exceed those of Western nations. These industrial models were supported by separating of duties of husband and housewife (Shiota, 2011: Sugimoto, 2014). The Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women in Employment was executed in Japan in 1986. Fundamental improvements, however, such as punitive clauses for when a company does not follow the law, were not included. Furthermore, the Basic Act for Gender-Equal society was enforced in 1999, but still, also had many issues (Shiota, 2011). Governmental policies also have been weak in supporting gender equity, and the preferential tax system for full-time housewives remains, even though Japan is struggling with a lower birth rate in an ageing society. In particular, challenges in employment, taxation and social security are the fundamental issues standing in the way of drastic improvement in gender equality

in Japan, as well as for improving awareness of gender equality in both societies and women themselves (Shiota, 2011).

Looking at latest data of global gender equity indicators such as HDI (Human Development Index), GDI (Gender Development Index), GII (Gender Inequality Index), and GGI (Gender Gap Index), Japan has been and is still behind other developed countries (Shiota, 2011; Sugihara and Katsurada, 2002). However, the Japanese government expressed aggressive numerical targets and updated figures for their four basic plan for gender equity in May 2016 (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2016). As Lam pointed out (Lam, 2002), historically, the modern Japanese society and workplace has been male-dominated and given leadership is given to males who are expected to work long hours, and a limited number of female senior positioned leaders could receive such opportunities and survive in the workplace (Shiota, 2011; Sugimoto, 2014).

The Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society by the Japanese government in 1996 was the first official public policy to promote gender equality in Japan. Still, Japanese working style reform, focusing on work-life-balance and transformation of the working method for male workers, was not promoted or accepted during the period of high economic growth in the 1990s. The implementation of the law is, however, rapidly progressing, beginning with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's leadership beginning in 2012. After the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami in 2011, he prioritised gender equality as a government agenda (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2017c). This action is making progress in the implementation of strategies and tactics for improving gender equality intended to make dramatic changes in the empowerment of women, as well as introduce work-style reform for workers of both genders, with some positive actions to promote female workers.

Overall, Japanese organisations have developed their own somewhat unique and efficient business models to support the steady growth of the economy based on the importance of interdependence, mutual trust, and the centrality of human

relationships in cooperation with the Japanese homogeneous organisational culture. As globalised business becomes more prevalent in Japan, Japanese- specific social features that were not previously capturing social attention and had not been addressed, such as the Japanese management model, gender equality, and the Japanese issue of working long hours, has been illuminated. The Japanese government is trying to improve this through policy reforms, but their efforts are not yet generally recognised as successful.

Empirically and practically there is enough space for research in a Japanese setting to understand better the changing Japanese society, organisations, and workplaces, which therefore influence future learning in life.

2.7. Conclusion

The comprehensive literature about: workplace learning and learning in life; the influence of the national culture to Japanese workers' learning attitudes; the relationship between individual learning dispositions and social context; and the historical investigation of policies of education, learning in life and workplace learning by the Japanese government, was presented. A review of the existing literature shows the following knowledge gaps and limitations: few investigations on managers' learning in the globalised workplace and in life in a non-Western environment; little theoretical attention to individual dispositions in learning through practice, such as communities of practice together with social interactivity with surrounding environments; and a scarcity of critical examinations on rapidly changing Japanese social contexts and challenges and their influence on managers' learning.

As noted at the outset of this section, interest in all types of work-related learning (e.g., both formal and informal, tacit and explicit) has grown rapidly in recent years. Therefore, the literature on work-related learning has evolved into a very varied, still developing research field, which is discovering how external (e.g. economic,

cultural, organisational) and internal (subjective) influences upon learning behaviours and approaches of individuals can be understood. As Evans et al. (2006) point out, the different stakeholders in the workplace learning - governments, organisations, and workers - all have different perspectives on learning, its purposes, and its uses. There is a consensus among all parties that it is important, especially regarding competition in an increasingly globalised world.

As Mintzberg (1973, 2005 and 2009) and Hales (1986 and 1987) suggested, managers' work is diverse and complicated with lots of communication and strategic organisational objectives. Managers need to utilise tacit knowledge in the workplace, and this is different in nature to necessary learning from non-managerial staff. Little research on managers' learning in the Japanese context exists.

As such, there has also been an expansion of theory and research on workplace learning. In the literature related to workplace learning and adult learning, socio-anthropologic perspectives have historically been dominant in the research of learning, which was mainly done by Western sociologists and social scientists. Recently, these fields have started to focus on the subjective dispositions that drive individuals' learning behaviour.

In particular, researchers in the field of workplace learning are increasingly confident in the assertion that the individual biography of each person highly impacts their commitment and pursuit of knowledge in their learning environments via their dispositions and subjectivity. In this increasingly popular view, learning is located at the intersection of the individual learning disposition and subjectivity and their social conditions. Some critics suggest that this view contains a problematic dualism between the individual and the social. To avoid this problem, some theorists have argued that we need to understand learning from a cultural perspective, utilising the concept of 'habitus' and 'field' (Bourdieu, 1984),

where habitus is constructed through, and leads to the reproduction and evolution of, the field. In essence, this approach suggests that both internal (individual) and external (social, cultural) factors work together to shape workplace learning and learning through life that occurs in one's lifetime. Perhaps the most notable proponent of this perspective is Phil Hodkinson (e.g. Hodkinson et al., 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008).

Most research and theory concerning work-related learning, however, has been based on studies by Western researchers; an Eastern, and specifically Japanese, perspective is very much lacking.

This section also highlighted the importance of acknowledging the impact of Japanese culture. Japanese culture has been widely recognised as being of a particular nature because of its geographical features, its historically developed homogeneous nature of society, and lower diversity than Western countries. The Japanese approach to work and management, for example, has often been studied. In this respect, researchers point to common features of Japanese work organisation as one of the key social contexts in Japan. Examples of these features include the importance of tacit knowledge, and interdependence in the organisation supported by employer and employee. Other studies have argued that Japanese employees have a greater understanding of their organisation as a whole than their Western counterparts (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Yoshida, 1997). Changes brought by globalisation may be reducing these country-specific traits, but the current evidence base allows us to draw no firm conclusions about workplace learning practices in Japan.

To visualise the structure of the multiple processes and dimensions of learning Illeris introduces a more holistic model for learning in working life that illustrates the inter-relationship between the social and individual levels of learning, as well as the overlapping positions between the working practice of the organisation and

the work identity of the employee as an auxiliary tool to understand the context (Illeris, 2004). This model is useful in this research to understand key individual and social factors around working life learning, as well as the consideration of learning in life more generally. A detailed qualitative examination of the attributions and conditions would help to elaborate interrelationships between individual learning dispositions and social contexts. Thus, this research will seek to illuminate learners' individual dispositions at the individual level, together with external factors such as organisational environment and sociocultural influences. It also looks at the recent policy reforms and how they shape attitudes and approaches to learning in managers through formal and informal learning in Japan. Through the investigation of external factors, the extent to which Western theories of learning (e.g. as constructed by Illeris, 2004, and Hodkinson et al., 2004; 2008) can be applied to learning behaviour in the Japanese context will be examined.

The primary research question is, therefore:

- What individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?

The secondary research question is:

- To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning (e.g. Illeris, 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008) explain the learning behaviours of Japanese managers?

The next section outlines the research methods and methodologies used in this research, explaining the justification for the reason to utilise a qualitative methodology. The section explains how the research is implemented, and how the data was collected and appropriately analysed, including the interview process, trustworthiness procedures, and ethical issues; considerations to solve these issues are described.

3. Research Methodology

The principal research objective of this thesis is:

- what individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?

This research question was identified by a comprehensive literature review on learning through life, workplace learning, and social contexts in Japan. Also, the secondary research question is:

- To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning explain the learning behaviour of Japanese managers?

This section explains the theoretical justifications for the selected research design, methodology and methods used to answer the research questions. In social science, researchers need to understand and question how to recognise human society from an ontological perspective (Grix, 2002). Researchers also need to recognise how they know what they know about human society from an epistemological perspective (Grix, 2002). Therefore, researchers in social science are required to recognise the ontological and epistemological differences in each stance of their research, as well as to maintain the theoretical consistency in their research (Nomura, 2017). According to Bryman (2008), Crotty (1998), Grix (2002) and Nomura (2017), ontology (what social reality is) is a more fundamental theoretical concept than epistemology (what it means to know) although these two are mutually connected. Research methodology logically shows ontology, epistemology, research questions, research design, and research methods. Based on the above, this section starts a discussion on the selected ontological and epistemological stance and addresses the logic for the selected qualitative methodology used to conduct this research. It then explains the data collection and method of analysis. How to mitigate the limitations of the selected methodology and methods used is also explained. Finally, ethical considerations are discussed.

3.1 Selected Research Methodology: Theoretical Justification

There are two ontological positions to answer the question of 'what is the nature of the phenomena, or entities, or social reality' (Mason, 2002:14): objectivism and constructivism (Bryman 2008). Objectivism is the position that argues that social phenomena and meanings exist independently from any human consciousness and that knowledge stands on fundamental truths (Crotty, 1998). On the other hand, constructivism asserts that social phenomena and meanings are achieved through a constant revision in interactions with social actors (Bryman, 2008; Nomura, 2017).

Constructivism is adopted over objectivism in this thesis for the following reasons. First, this research focuses on examining the individual social reality of learning through life for each respondent in a Japanese social context. It implies that respondents' phenomena are not independent of social actors. Second, constructivism can facilitate the exploration of what interactions occur between internal and external factors related to learning activities, as well as how researchers interpret complex social realities in the social world. Rather than being objectively defined as a definitive existence, a constructivist approach can facilitate the cross-cultural interpretation of social phenomena related to managers' learning in a constant revision through time.

'How what is assumed to exist can be known' (Blaikie, 2000:8) can be answered by two contrasting positions from an epistemological perspective: positivism and interpretivism (Grix, 2002). The purpose of positivism is to produce a hypothesis that can be tested in objective social realities in a natural scientific field (Bryman, 2008). Alternatively, interpretivism 'requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action' (Bryman, 2008:16). Interpretivism focuses on

the understanding of human behaviour compared to positivism's emphasis on the explanation of human behaviour (Bryman, 2008).

To answer the research questions in this study, interpretivism is selected over positivism for the following reasons. First, this research aims to explore Japanese managers' experiences of learning. An interpretivist approach can allow the researcher to understand a respondent's thoughts, activities, and attitudes to learning, along with the subjective meaning and social context around a respondent using in-depth interview questions. Second, an interpretativist approach argues that the natural scientific approach used by a positivist approach cannot allow researchers to comprehend human society objectively (Nomura, 2017). Instead, to grasp the subjective meanings of human social behaviours, research methodology based on an interpretativist stance is emphasised because of its careful investigation that uses interview and discourse analysis (Nomura, 2017). Researchers can see the subject only subjectively through the researcher's context and do not have freedom through theory and discourse (Nomura, 2017). Therefore, facts and values are not clearly separated, and they are connected depending on contexts (Nomura, 2017). An interpretivist approach allows researchers to utilise a respondent's spoken stories and the social context around the individual respondent. In this research, respondents share in English or Japanese in interviews with the researcher their spoken life stories related to their learning along with their perception of the cultural influence of Japan on social contexts. An interpretivist approach enables the researcher and the respondent to share a Japanese cultural context along with the respondent's experiences and value by verbally answering research questions.

Taking an interpretativist approach, the researcher should pay careful attention to the inter-influence between the researcher and the respondent in the same social world as well as the researcher's subjectivity and should describe them both (Bryman, 2008; Braun and Clarke, 2013). Words and contexts are key to

interpreting respondents' experiences and social realities for saturation of understanding, extraction of themes, and development of theories (Bryman, 2008).

In sum, the social-philosophical stances of constructivism and interpretivism were selected for this research to explore the meanings of the social realities to which participants belong. It defines the application of the qualitative research methodology used in this research.

Linked logically to ontological and epistemological standpoints, research methodology seeks to answer the question of 'how can we go about acquiring that knowledge?' (Grix, 2002: 180). The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is indecisive and ambiguous (Bryman, 2008). The methodology is quite intimately connected to how 'the logic, potentialities and limitations of research methods' (Grix, 2002: 179) exist. Research methods are also closely connected to the aim of the research as well as the research questions (Grix, 2002).

> 'All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied.' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 31)

A qualitative methodology was selected for this research because of the chosen philosophical standpoints - constructivism and interpretivism - to answer the research questions (Bryman, 2008; Grix, 2002). Reasons for this justification are as follows.

The research interest of this study is to explore what individual and external factors affect the learning dispositions of Japanese managers. A qualitative methodological approach is more appropriate to grasp a better understanding of respondents' experiences through their words rather than deductively testing the hypothesis

with numeric instruments using a quantitative approach (Grix, 2002; Nomura, 2017). The semi-structured interview method can allow the researcher to access the interviewee's interests and viewpoints, as well as insight and flexibility in conversations to generate primary data. It also utilises a biographical structure that explains a participant's information related to learning experiences using the respondent's own words to enhance the primary data for the limited numbers of the sample.

In addition, it examines and answers the secondary research question of to what degree Western theories can be applied to Japanese managers' learning. The use of qualitative methodology can help to better understand social realities and individual beliefs, behaviours, and practices in a Japanese setting, as well as their connection to Western learning theories.

This research seeks to apply an empirical orientation by looking at individual managers' behaviours and attitudes toward learning, then investigating the phenomenon through the experiences of individual perceptions. Criticisms of qualitative research note that it is, too subjective, difficult to replicate, has problems of generalisation and lacks transparency compared to the quantitative approach (Bryman, 2008). At the same time, the quantitative approach receives critiques such as 'qualitative researchers fail to distinguish people and social institutions from the world of nature' (Bryman, 2008: 159). It also argues that the quantitative approach is an artificial measurement process distinct from precision and accuracy, and there is less attention paid to the distinction between the research world and a human's life (Bryman, 2008). Looking at this research objective and the corresponding research questions, the priority of the research is to focus on grasping individual social realities and complexities. The selection of a qualitative approach is more appropriate for this research than a quantitative approach that focuses on numeric testing of hypotheses.

3.2 Framework of Research Design and Research Methods

This part explains the selected research design; that is, the procedures and processes used to gather and analyse data, along with methodological justifications. Reliability, replication, and validity are largely pertinent to the quantitative research approach and are the criteria used to evaluate the quality of social research (Bryman, 2008). Alternatively, trustworthiness criteria, such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, are required to assess the quality of qualitative research: (Bryman, 2008). Considerations of and efforts to minimise the impact of potential problems are explained.

First, the research questions are set as 'what and how' questions, and requires the illustration, as well as interpretation of context by description to uncover the complexities due to its nature; that is, in the form of stories. A selected qualitative research approach permits researchers to interpret thoughts, feelings, awareness and perceptions. The learning experiences, learning dispositions, and influential contexts for managers needs to be illuminated fully to explore individual social realities. Social research methods offer a variety of research designs, such as experimental, cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study and comparative design (Bryman, 2008; Nomura, 2017). This thesis research design is not an application of one single design. The samples selected were those who work or worked in multinational corporations (MNCs) in Tokyo, Japan. A range of different categories including Japanese multinational corporations (J-MNCs) and non-Japanese MultiNational Corporations (non-J-MNCs), Japanese and non-Japanese managers, and male and female managers were selected to obtain data showing social realities for managers' learning in a Japanese setting. The reasons for selecting the above categories are explained in the next part. The above design helped to answer the research questions in consideration of the optimal design, as well as resource limitations. In keeping with an intepretivist approach to this research, a selection of multiple unique types of samples was conducted (J-MNCs and non-J-MNCs). Samples were not extremely typical samples, but unique samples interested in learning through life in Japan (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). A long time was

spent analysing the interview data to illustrate their characteristics and define their meaning, utilising a theoretical filter. This research selected a group of MNCs in Tokyo, Japan to gain in-depth information to know the social realities and contexts around managers in Japan using the interpretivist approach. This research does not seek generalisation by the positivist approach, but rather an in-depth exploration of involving interviewing multiple samples related to the research questions.

As a choice of research method linked to the selected qualitative methodology and design, a semi-structured interview method was applied to this research together with the supplemental use of a self-completion questionnaire with open-ended questions. This method is a procedure for collecting data that needs to be precise to answer the research questions and is logically linked to the selected methodology (Bryman, 2008: Grix, 2002). Supplemental use of a self-completion questionnaire with open-ended questions with a semi-structured interview can help reliability, which is one of the disadvantages of the qualitative interview. There are several qualitative research methods such as ethnography, participant observation, structured interview, unstructured interview and focus group (Bryman, 2008). Detailed reasons for why a semi-structured interview method with a self-completion questionnaire was selected, are as follows.

This thesis focuses on exploring the multiple social realities of respondents' perspectives in a Japanese setting to answer the research questions. A semi-structured interview method gives more flexibility to explore in-depth meanings than a structured interview method (Bryman, 2008). A semi-structured interview method is also more effective for comparing multiple cases based on some set questions in advance than the unstructured interview method (Nomura, 2017). The focus group method has merit for producing group dynamics results through interaction and discussion in the group (Nomura, 2017); however, learning behaviours and attitudes in Japan as the research theme is not recognised by respondents and the estimated dynamics in a focus group are limited. The participant observation method has advantages such as 'seeing through others'

eyes' (Bryman, 2008:465) their social realities, higher sensitivity to the interview context, and hidden thoughts (Bryman, 2008). Other methodological weaknesses of participant observation are also present, such as reactive effects, a longer period of research and higher budget burden (Bryman, 2008). The limited resources for this thesis research are another consideration for the selection of the research method. Ethnography gives the flexibility to know social realities in a longitudinal perspective but requires a much longer period of research and a higher budget burden (Nomura, 2017). An experimental survey method is also available for qualitative research, but is not the typical form of qualitative strategy, and this research does not focus on numerical testing (Bryman, 2008).

As such, a supplemental self-completion questionnaire method, along with a semi-structured interview, was selected to fulfil the research objective. Prior writing to answer an adult learning questionnaire helps to mitigate the weakness of qualitative research methodology concerning credibility, and also to remind the respondent of the research question and their past experiences before the interview.

A biographical questioning method was also applied in the interview. Biographical memory is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2008) as follows:

> 'A social process of looking back as we find ourselves remembering our lives in terms of our experiences with others. Sociological intro-section (C. Ellis) is a method for reconstructing biographical memory' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: 644).

The supplemental methodological approach using a biographical structure assisted in the data collection and analysis process to coherently draw out a respondent's

experiences and thoughts (Mason, 2002; Bryman, 2008; Lynch, 2008; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a).

Purposive sampling of 15 Japanese managers and five non-Japanese managers was used to obtain the respondent's insight and experiences on learning. The required logic of qualitative sampling is to seek 'depth, nuance and complexity and understand how these work' (Mason, 2002: 121). Snowball sampling is prepared as a backup method when the participant does not agree to fully participate and withdraw from the interview process. The qualitative sample size is defined by the adequate number that enables access to enough information to answer the research questions, which is usually a relatively small number (Mason, 2002). Judging by statistical criteria for generalisation to the broader population does not fit into the qualitative research method, which is also not the purpose of this research. Applied research design with a form of a case and comparative study to gain enough depth in social realities helped the research direction to reach 20 samples.   Other doctorate theses which have relatively similar research purposes, designs, strategies, and methods were referred, along with the consultation of a thesis supervisor, leading to the selection of 20 as the sample number.

3.3 Sampling Strategy, Background and Respondents, and Accessibility

Bryman points out that 'most sampling in qualitative research entails purposive sampling of some kind' (Bryman, 2008: 414). Purposive sampling was applied to this research to allow to sample cases in a strategic way and provide relevance between samples and research questions with certain research goals in mind (Bryman, 2008). The objective of this thesis research is to examine an individual respondent's learning dispositions along with the respondent's interrelationship with external factors from social contexts. Therefore, this research does not seek to be generalised to the entire Japanese working population.

After receiving the ethical approval granted by the University of Leicester Ethics Sub-Committee for Media and Communication and School of Management on 23 December 2015, the search to access candidate respondents was begun. Working networks and informal networks were utilised to select people who worked in pharmaceutical MNCs and service-provider sector MNCs who were also appropriate for my research questions. Possible candidates were approached in person and asked if they would be interested in participating in the research. Only one person declined to participate in the research with the reason that she is not ready to speak about her experiences and thoughts on learning. Fortunately, participation agreements could be obtained from 20 respondent candidates before using snowball sampling as a backup sampling strategy. The final sample number was planned to be decided upon flexibly during the research process (Guest et al. 2006). Data were obtained through interviews and written answers to the Learning History Questionnaire from January to June 2016.

The Sample: Background and Respondents

This research is based on a sample of 20 managers in MNCs in the pharmaceutical and service provider sector in Japan. The pharmaceutical industry was selected primarily because the author has have worked in the industry for more than 20 years and has enough knowledge and experience to easily understand its social contexts. The pharmaceutical industry is also required to continually develop more innovative products and focus on higher organisational learning both internally and externally (Lam, 2003; Poirier, 2015). The service-provider sector MNCs were selected because services are located at the centre hub position of economic activity, and this industry focuses on knowledge as one of the key resources and core competencies (Kandampully, 2002). The two industry sectors complement each other as follows.

The pharmaceutical industry sector and service provider sector have a different business timeline and implementation cycle. Product development in the pharmaceutical industry sector can take more than ten years, and strong regulatory'

influences take additional time (Paul et al. 2010; Kaitin, 2010). Alternatively, the service provider sector, including consulting firms, hotels, information communication technologies (ICTs), educational institutions, entertainment and advertising companies, is generally in a more fast-paced environment with customers coming and going daily (Hipp and Grupp, 2005). A doubly-facet research setting examining different industry sectors provides a depth to the research result. External validity (transferability and generalisability) is one of the issues suggested for the qualitative research approach (Bryman, 2008). An interpretivist approach using multiple samples does not seek the kind of statistical generalisation often used by a natural scientific approach. An interpretivist approach tries to implement logical inference that explains fundamental connections in a theoretical process used in place of multiple relevant groups of samples (Nomura, 2017).

Respondents from MNCs have had opportunities to work with colleagues from other countries. In particular, managers working in non-Japanese MNCs receive influence from overseas headquarters in their daily work (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). The literature shows that organisational learning is active in MNCs (Gupta and Govindarajan, 2000). Managers in MNCs in Japan are, therefore, a relatively unique group because of their learning opportunities. Furthermore, non-Japanese managers who work or have worked in MNCs in Japan were added to the sample to offer a non-Japanese perspective or insight into the Japanese context through their working and living experiences in Japan. (Tayler and Napier, 1996). As Bryman (2008) suggests, samples need to be selected as to be appropriate to the research questions. The managers working in MNCs were selected to be part of the sample because of their diverse work and life experiences.

The respondents who agreed to participate in the research were selected because of their interest in learning and because of their working experience in MNCs in Japan (Appendix A). Twenty managers participated: 15- Japanese and five non-Japanese, all who work or have worked in Japan. Participants were selected by purposive sampling. Each had a title of manager, director or similar level of

authority in the organisation. They were selected because they probably have a higher interest and demand for learning at work than lower level workers (Mintzberg, 1973). The age of the participants ranged from the mid-30s to early-50s. The distribution of industry sectors is shown in Table 3.1.

Type of MNCs	Japanese	Non-Japanese
Pharma-MNCs	5	2
Service Provider Sector - MNCs	10	3

Table 3.1 Distribution of Industry Sectors

To minimise ethical risk and possible bias, interviewees from the organisation in which the author works were not included, even though the literature suggests being an insider researcher has advantages (and disadvantages) (Unluer, 2012). I tried to include a similar number of male and female managers to illustrate the experiences and thoughts about learning in life in both genders, especially since stagnating gender equality has been one of the main social issues in Japan (Shiota, 2011). Eleven female respondents including 2non-Japanese females and 9 male respondents including three non-Japanese males agreed to participate.

Accessibility

The respondents were invited to participate in the research after a detailed explanation of this study was given, as described later in the 'ethical considerations' part of this section. A list of substitute participants was prepared in case any of the primary candidates did not participate in the study.   All the potential candidates except for one manager accepted invitations to participate in the research. Therefore, snowball sampling was not needed as a backup. Interviews of the 20 managers were completed after prior submission of a Learning History Questionnaire.

3.4 Data Collection and Instruments

Data was gathered from semi-structured interviews lasting from about 50 to 120 minutes. In many cases, interviews exceeded the scheduled time by more than 60 minutes. Information was also obtained from a Learning History Questionnaire that each respondent was requested to write up as part of their biography before the interview. The Learning History Questionnaire helped participants to remember concisely and think about their past learning episodes or events in advance. How the Learning History Questionnaire was designed and developed is explained later in this section.

Fifteen interviews were conducted in a face-to-face setting as that is methodologically preferable to ensure a suitable venue for a sensitive activity (Sturges and Hanrahan, 2004). Each interview was held in a meeting room in the author's or the respondent's office, in a room in the author's or the respondent's house, or a quiet cafeteria in consideration of spatial relationships and positionality with respondents (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Other settings were selected based on necessity or based on the respondent's preference, because of tight schedules or living overseas: FaceTime (video conversation) was used for two interviews, and Skype (voice conversation) was used for three interviews.

Progress in current information communications technologies provides various options for Internet-based methods of interviewing, such as Skype and FaceTime, and opens up new opportunities to affordably contact participants worldwide in a less time-consuming way (Lo Iacomo et al. 2016). Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technologies are free of charge and researchers, and respondents do not need to pay attention to the communication cost across countries. At the same time, an Internet-based qualitative interview method has limitations, as well as opportunities (Lo Iacomo et al. 2016). The potential limitations of interviews by Skype (voice) are rapport building, reading nonverbal cues, verifying identity, a lack of an interview environment, and the possibility of video recording without

permission (Lo Iacomo et al. 2016). To minimise limitations and to develop the same level of rapport found in face-to-face interviews, the three Skype respondents were contacted by email to explain the research objectives and the interview contents. Questions and answers were also exchanged by email before the Skype interview. During the interview, careful attention was paid to the interviewee's choice of words and tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language could not be seen. Each respondent's identity was confirmed at the beginning of the interview by talking about mutually known topics, while explaining that the interview would not be videotaped. For the two FaceTime (video) interviewees who lived overseas in countries with different time zones, the limitations of VoIP procedures were attempted to be minimized by sending an email explanation of the interview, listening and observing carefully when on screen, and selecting a time that was comfortable for the respondents.

An initial invitation email was first sent to each candidate, then a reply from all candidates was received, except for one candidate. Another candidate was selected from the pooled candidates, then was sent an initial invitation email, followed by which the invitation was accepted. After setting the interview date, time, and place, a Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research (Appendix B), and a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C) was sent to the respondents. The Participant Information Sheet described the research objective, the reason for selecting the candidate, the time necessary for participating in the research, and related ethical considerations for the respondents. After each respondent agreed by email to the contents of these two documents, a Consent Form for Interviews (Appendix D) and a Learning History Questionnaire (Appendix E) was sent to each respondent. Interview dates, times, and places were scheduled, and the interview method was completed. During the interview, Interview Topic Guide Questions (Appendix F) a list of questions and specific topics to be discussed in the interview were utilised for a smooth and effective interview and to promote conversation using open-ended questions (Bryman, 2008, Turner, III, 2010). The Learning History Questionnaire (Appendix E) answered by each respondent was sent by email before the interview. This helped to achieve an in-depth understanding of

the respondent's thoughts and experiences, as well as smoothing the flow of the interview as coming from a self-completion questionnaire approach (Bryman 2008, Nomura, 2017).

Careful attention was also paid to researcher bias (Chenail, 2011), as the author had a strong affinity for the participants as one of the Japanese managers interested in learning in life. Chenail (2011) points out that the advantages of having a pilot study are that the researcher can have an opportunity to conduct a feasibility study and have an advance warning of limitations. The first two interviews were conducted as a pilot study to sharpen the interview process. Active listening, along with offering occasional sample examples for each question, proved to be helpful in obtaining more detailed answers. One respondent in the pilot study suggested that the addition of a Japanese translation to the English only version, as it was presented originally. The learning history Questionnaire was helpful for the Japanese respondents who wanted to answer the questions in Japanese and needed to answer them before the interview. The material was translated into Japanese and added it to the Learning History Questionnaire. Once the respondents understood the questions well, they started to talk about their thoughts and experiences in a natural way. Languages differences were recognised as a potential limitation of this interview, and so the above process was added. The research methodology literature claims that pilot testing needs to be implemented in outside of the sample in the full study (Bryman, 2008; Turner III, 2010). In the pilot testing of this research, other fundamental problems or adjustments for the interview structures and contents were not found in the two pilot semi-structured interviews, and the answered Learning History Questionnaires. This research also does not use a quantitative research sampling such as a probability sampling, that concerns the representativeness of the entire sample. Therefore, I decided to include two pilot samples for the entire sample.

With the respondents' agreement, all interviews were audio-recorded then transcribed. This method allowed for concentration on the interview and

observation of the respondents without the distraction of detailed note-taking (Bryman, 2008).

Part of this research was to seek to grasp detailed and rich descriptions of individual contexts on learning behaviour. Learning includes comprehensive broad features such as formal learning obtained in a structured environment and informal learning that is acquired casually or through experience (Park and Choi, 2016). Furthermore, learners sometimes do not recognise the difference between formal and informal learning and misunderstand that learning and training though different are of equal value (Park and Choi, 2016). The Interview Topic Guide Questions (Appendix F) was utilised in order to obtain detailed clarification of what learning means for each respondent (Bryman 2008; Turner III, 2010). The biographical information of participants was used as a supplemental information instrument to the respondent's life history using open-ended questions to draw out details. The Learning History Questionnaire, filled out by each respondent, illustrated their most significant training, learning experiences and details of their adult life based on their life story. The six focused areas in the interview were: family background, educational background, employment history, current job, aspirations for the future, and anything distinct about working and learning in a Japanese context. During the interview, Lynch's 'Orders of worth' (Lynch, 2008: 679) was referenced to ask the respondent questions that may influence decisions and actions from the six specific orders: domestic (i.e., family), civic (i.e., public benefit), inspired (i.e., personal growth), market (i.e., material wealth), industry (i.e., productivity) and opinion (i.e., recognition) (Lynch, 2008; Boltanski and Thevenot, 1991). This supplemented any weakness that may have come from the interviewer's subjectivity and enhanced external validity by sharpening answers to questions. Being reflexive is another method for performing qualitative research in a better way (Braun and Clark, 2013) and the written tools of the interview guide questions and the Learning History Questionnaire helped achieve this. Furthermore, Lynch's order provided supplemental evidence to the biographical structure of this research. A Learning History Questionnaire in the respondent's adult life helped the aspect of the study

that reflecting the managers' learning experiences of learning throughout their working life over a series of time.

Literature such as Pillemer and White (1989) point out the difficulty of recalling past events, especially from childhood. The interviewees' stories were reviewed, and the coherence of their information in their story during the interview was checked. Coffield suggests that motivation is 'a complex social construction…. best examined at the intersections between history, geography and biography' (Coffield, 2000: 9-10). Additionally, the adult learning research in Wales and Rees, Fevre, Furlong, and Gorard (1997a and 1997b) pointed out the importance of individual biographies and learning histories to understand adult learning participation.

To increase transparency, minimise issues of reliability and credibility, and gain as much trustworthiness of procedures as possible, this research tried to conduct an accurate transcription of the utilised interview dialogue, along with a systematic codified method of analysis. Translation of the transcription from Japanese to English was conducted for ten interviews when the interview took place in Japanese at the respondent's request. Back translation from translated English to Japanese, and examination of coherency, was conducted. Detailed processes are described in the next part.

Learning History Questionnaire (Appendix E)

In qualitative interviews, researchers sometimes face mistakes respondent's make in recalling their memories, and a combination of another method with the interview is recommended for increasing credibility (Burnham et al. 2008; Nomura, 2017). To encourage interviewees to remember and think about their adult learning experience before the interview, they were asked to fill out a form. This questionnaire form asked respondents to think about and then describe the most significant training, development, and learning events in their adult life. The

questionnaire asked respondents to expand on why they chose those events, who influenced their choices, and their reactions to their choices. Respondents were also asked to provide one specific learning example (any case of best, better, good, worse, or worst). The respondents were also asked whether they had a mentor or not, as well as about their views on learning. This process clarified each respondent's learning history and also helped to grasp the interviewee's disposition to learning (Hodkinson et al., 2004).

Using a Learning History Questionnaire helped reduce the bias and possible difficulty to recall important events in the respondent's memory of learning experience, which often occurs when relaying information both verbally and in writing (Pillemer and White, 1989; Nomura, 2017). A clearer description of writing can help respondents to remember their experience more accurately (Nomura, 2017). Based on the suggestion from the first pilot testing in two respondents, an English translation of the contents was developed and added to the form. The respondents chose to answer in either English or Japanese based on their preferences.

There is a possibility of unintentional bias when stories are told verbally because memory can be faulty (Burnham et al. 2008; Nomura, 2017). The interviewer can also unintentionally introduce bias because their subjectivity is different from that of the respondents, as specifically the researcher's subjectivity (Ratner, 2002; Braun and Clark, 2013). A Learning History Questionnaire assists qualitative data analysis 'literally, interpretively or reflectively' (Mason, 2002: 148). The Learning History Questionnaire used for the study helped accomplished this aim.

3.5 Data Analysis Method

In-depth, semi-structured interviews focusing on learning experiences in a biographical structure were conducted along with a Learning History

Questionnaire. 20 interviews, each lasting between 50 and 120 minutes, were implemented. The transcript of each respondent was between four to 11 pages for the transcript of 10 English interviews and 10 to25 pages for the transcript of 10 Japanese interviews with English translation. Finally, 20 participants agreed to the interview from the pooled candidates. An interview was conducted in either English or Japanese based on the respondent's preference. Eight Japanese and two non-Japanese respondents chose to speak in Japanese, and seven Japanese and three non-Japanese respondents chose to speak in English.

The validity of the translation from Japanese to English in the interviews conducted and in the Learning History Questionnaire is critical to ensure the accuracy of the translation. Brislin (1970) offers four translation techniques that help retain the equivalence of meaning between the original and the translated material: the back-translation method; the bilingual technique; the committee approach; and the pretest procedure. Back translation as also suggested by Nes, Abma, Johnsson, and Deeg (2010) and was implemented in this research, wherein the English translation was translated back into Japanese to help guarantee accuracy. Ten Japanese interview transcripts and six Japanese answers to the Learning History Questionnaire were translated into English. Then the English were back-translated into Japanese as referenced in the literature (Cha, et al. 2007; Chen and Boore, 2009; Douglas and Craig, 2007). The original Japanese transcription, the English translation transcript, and the back-translated Japanese transcript were compared and examined iteratively. Then the English transcript was adjusted as necessary. A bilingual translator was not used for this process due to limited resources. Back translation using a bilingual translator has been used to examine the correctness of translated contents and to find inaccuracies, but it also has several limitations (Brislin, 1970). There may be a different use of language between the bilingual translator and the respondent (Brislin, 1970). A committee approach, another translation technique, was not used in this research because a group of bilingual experts would need to be formed, which was a critical resource limitation. There is no perfect and gold standard method of translation because there are differences in research questions and the research

circumstance (Cha et al. 2007). To minimise limitations caused by not using another translator, each respondent was contacted by email when what the respondent meant in the interview needed to be clarified during the translation process. A network of English native academic scholars and friends was also utilised for suggestions when words and contexts that produced the problem of conceptual equivalence were encountered. Grammarly, an Internet-based grammar checker, was used to check the grammar of the translated transcripts to improve their language, taking into consideration the limitations that Grammarly is a machine-based translation tool, and that the author's own translation decision in each case was the most critical (Sharif and Rabbani, 2016).

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gained from the interview and the Learning History Questionnaire. Thematic analysis is usually used for qualitative data analysis to search for themes, interpret context, abstract key features, and explain causal links in interviews (Boyatzis, 1998; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002, Bryman, 2008). The grounded theory approach is also widely used in the qualitative data analysis framework to generate a theory from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The grounded theory approach was not selected for this research data analysis because the research objective is to search for themes derived from data and to explore the connectivity among them to answer the research questions. Therefore, thematic analysis is more suitable and feasible for this research objective than the application of the grounded theory approach. The grounded theory approach also has the practical difficulty of consuming too much time for the analysis (Bryman, 2008).

Advantages and disadvantages of using electronic data analysis software such as NVivo of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) for the qualitative data analysis are also addressed (Davis and Mayer, 2009; Bryman, 2008). Advantages of using CAQDAS are its simple coding ability, the ability to categorise data into emergent themes, and a utility of linking memos to text (Davis

and Meyer, 2009). Suggested disadvantages are the lack of flexibility, the potential for an electrical malfunction, and the possibility of being time-consuming for novice researchers (Davis and Meyer, 2009; Bryman 2008). Based on the above advantages and disadvantages, the data analysis was handled manually, as both a time-saving measure, as well as because the sample size was relatively manageable. There was a certain familiarity with the data, based on continuously reading the transcripts and the Learning History Questionnaires during the transcribing processes.

3.6 Data Analysis Process

Qualitative data from interviews typically form 'a large corpus of unstructured textual material' (Bryman, 2008: 538) and each researcher needs to select an appropriate analytical method to provide a bridging role from a vast amount of data to a manageable body for analysis. Thematic analysis is widely known as one of the most common approaches (Boyatzis, 1998).

Boyatzis (1998) states:

> 'Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an explicit "code". This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are casually related; or something in between these two forms' (Boyatzis, 1998:vi-vii).

For this research, thematic analysis was selected for three reasons. First, this method seemed to be best because of its ability to 'perceive a pattern, or theme, in seemingly random information' (Boyatzis, 1998: 3). Data from the samples have rich text from the interviews and the Learning History Questionnaire, so the thematic analysis is suitable for this research data analysis. Second, thematic analysis has a consistent and coherent process that is relatively well used by qualitative study researchers to identify, analyse and report themes and patterns

derived from the data and literature (Holloway and Todres, 2003, Bryman, 2008). Third, it offers an appropriate level of flexibility for the interpretation of data, which is suitable for this thesis's research questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Bryman, 2008).

Initial phase

The audio-recording of each interview was listened to twice, with notes taken simultaneously for general reference. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim into English or Japanese based on the language of each interview. The ten interviews in Japanese were then translated verbatim into English. The translated transcript from Japanese into English was then translated back from English into Japanese to confirm the coherency and to avoid mistranslation of the content. Back translation is recognised as a highly recommended technique though there is no single standard method to ensure the validity of translation (Brislin, 1970; Cha et al. 2007; Chen and Boore, 2009; Douglas and Craig, 2007). Maneesriwongul and Dixon (2004) suggest that 'back-translation is the most highly recommended technique for translation in cross-cultural research' (Maneesriwongul and Dixon, 2004:184). The advantages and limitations of the back translation method, explained in the previous part (3.5 Data Analysis Method), led to a selection of supplemental procedures. They are: with the back translation method such e-mail based confirmation to the respondent, the network of English native academic scholars and friends who offered suggestions when words and contexts that produced the problem of conceptual equivalence were encountered; and the utilisation of Grammarly, the Internet-based grammar checker.

The process of transcribing the interviews assisted the description of the circumstances of each interview, as well as noting the tone of voice and the pauses between the words of the respondent. This helped achieve a better understanding of the interview contents. The 20 interviews were compared to each other to understand better the social context, which is the subject of this thesis.

Throughout the analysis process, careful attention was paid when translating words from Japanese into English. At the same time, a certain degree of caution as necessary when interpreting the meanings behind words both in Japanese as well as in English. The respondents answering in English had the potential to incorrectly conveying their thoughts in English as English is not their native language. As such, a follow up with each respondent by email, FaceTime or Skype was conducted if there was uncertainty that a respondent had properly understood a question. This was done when a particular response during the coding of the material was not easily understood. The transcript was then modified as necessary. The original Japanese transcripts were used for the coding and analysis process together with the English transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information from the respondents. As explained previously (3.5 Data Analysis Method), six Japanese answers to the Learning History Questionnaire were translated into English and back-translated from English into Japanese to examine the translation's coherency and consistency.

To grasp each respondent's life story related to learning, an approximately 400-word summary in English of each life story was created, related to their learning experiences and thoughts. This process helped to easily understand the 20 learning experiences and life stories, to focus on the mutually common type of learning characteristics, and to adequately complete coding process. A one-page graphical chart to show each manager's life history related to learning experiences was also developed (Appendix G: Manager's learning experiences and life histories). The 20 managers' learning experiences and lives are illustrated chronologically in a graph showing selected typologies (i.e., school days before working, working life, studied or lived abroad or in an English speaking environment, worked or lived abroad). Using Appendix G, the interrelationship between each respondent's learning disposition and the social contexts were examined, which assisted with the analysis process. Each respondent confirmed the contents of Appendix G to validate each life story before it was graphed.

Six answers were taken from the Learning History Questionnaire for each respondent and placed into one Excel sheet. This Excel sheet was used along with other Excel sheets and content from the transcription pages to obtain key codes and themes about the answers to the research questions. Each respondent's experience of learning from the questionnaire was used for the entire data analysis process and the interpretation of the findings which helped to bring a depth to understanding to each respondent's learning disposition and the influence from their social environment.

Coding and thematic analysis phase

The focus throughout the coding phase was on, answering the research questions, paying attention to frequently used words, and creating meaningful codes and themes to answer the research questions. Careful attention was paid to avoid researcher bias and all English which was non-native or translated y a non-native from Japanese was carefully examined and cross-referenced for accuracy. Pre-coding, in which researchers prepare codes before reading transcripts, and post-coding, where researchers develop appropriate codes after reading transcripts for qualitative data coding, are suggested for social research (Nomura, 2017). The mixed coding method of pre-coding and post-coding are usually used, but putting more focus on post-coding is recommended for the intepretivist approach (Nomura, 2017). The interpretivist approach focuses on social meanings derived from social contents and subjects from the interviews (Bryman, 2008). Post-coding was applied for the data analysis because the theoretical approach in this research is based on an intepretativist perspective. Using 'Post-it' papers to pick up possible key codes from the transcription, initial codes were derived as common phrases and statements about a manager's learning disposition and influential environmental and social factors. The function of searching for words in Microsoft Word 2010 in each transcript was also helpful to seek candidate codes. The technique utilising the framework approach with 'a matrix-based method for ordering and synthesising data' (Ritchie et al. 2003: 219) using Microsoft Excel was applied. Derived codes on 'Post-it' papers were input into separate columns for

each respondent in an Excel sheet to be used as a supportive reference (Bryman, 2008). This helped to see what the data is saying, how the codes are derived and supported by the data, and how themes are structured, all which helped to form the findings.

From the initial preparation process of Appendix G (Manager's learning experiences and life histories), two dimensions for the analysis were selected for the analysis of 'School Days' and 'Working Life' as respondents' comments could be coherently classified by these two dimensions.

Thematic data were derived after continuing several coding processes based on the theoretical dimensions of the perspectives of individual learning disposition and biography, along with influential social factors and the social interplay between them. A basic paradigm of a theoretical framework was also developed. The identified themes and a basic theoretical framework helped to select relevant specific quotations to support each key theme from the data derived from the interviews and the Learning History Questionnaire.   The initial idea for the framework of the interrelationship between an individual learning disposition and social contexts was developed. This was then utilised for further analysis and for writing the findings and conclusions.

Unpacking, reconstructing, and writing

Development of sufficient social scientific knowledge for this research was obtained through the coding process, data analysis, a developed theoretical framework and the process of interpreting data. A series of processes for credible and generalisable interpretation of data was conducted (Boyatzis, 1998) Continuous unpacking and reconstructing processes of interpreting the data were conducted to identify and shape the theme development (Boyatzis, 1998).   The analysis process was also assisted by searching for additional related literature and consulting relevant

information such as recent policies by the Japanese government related to educational systems, the workplace, and learning in life.

To develop and write the findings and discussions, continuous reflections on the data and derived themes along with clarification and understanding of themes and the relationship between those themes was conducted. Developing a relevant model of the influences on learning in a Japanese setting for the future was also implemented.

Based on the theoretical perspective on learning by Hodkinson et al. (2004), Lynch (2008), Illeris (2004), Jorgensen and Warring (2001) and Billett (2014), a continuous shaping process of the theoretical framework was continued. This process and framework are discussed in sections of 4) Presentation of the Findings; 5) Analysis and Discussion; and 6) Conclusions. To avoid the excess description of aspects in derived themes, the academic supervisor was asked to review the framework, and she checked the representation.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Borders between ethical and unethical research practices are uncertain; therefore, researchers should revisit the above principles throughout the implementation of the research (Webb and Webb, 1932). This suggestion was held in mind throughout the research.

Ethical issues in social research appear at every stage throughout, and researchers cannot ignore them as they critically affect the integrity, credibility, and legality of the research (Bryman, 2008). The British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Social Research Association (SRA) regularise codes of ethics (Bryman, 2008). The guidelines to sociological research based on the definitions of social research ethics

by the Japan Sociological Society (2006) also outline similar principles and contents. Diener and Crandall (1978) summarised four main ethical principles: 'whether there is *harm to the participant*, whether there is a *lack of informed consent*, whether there is an *invasion of privacy*, and whether *deception is involved*' (Bryman, 2008: 118).

This research examines what individual and external factors affect the learning dispositions of Japanese managers using in-depth semi-structured interviews, individual biographies and a Learning History Questionnaire. This study illustrates participants' commitment to, opinions about, and information related to their employers. Each respondent's personal learning history, which includes sensitive backgrounds and thoughts in contexts, and the relationship between researcher and participants, are also considered comprehensively and systematically (Bryman, 2008). Informed consent, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity to ensure privacy, paying attention to the power relationship during the research, careful understanding and treatment of participants' sensitivity, and recognition of the researcher's responsibilities are essential to conduct before starting the interview (Bryman, 2008: Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

The informed consent of participants is the essential principle in social research and researchers should ensure participants' understanding and agreement to the research as well as the understanding that researchers cannot force the respondents to participate (Peel, 2004; Bryman, 2008). The best efforts possible were made to provide the necessary information about this study to the participants, explaining the research purpose and all the processes involved in the research, including those that did not engage the participants directly. How information related to the participants would be stored, as well as how interview data and adult learning history data were analysed, interpreted, used, and reported were also explained. Researchers need to ensure that participants understand that they can withdraw from the research at any times for any or no reason (Peel, 2004). Withdrawals do not negatively impact on the research, and researchers should also accept withdrawal (Peel, 2004). Appendix B (Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research), Appendix C (Participant Information Sheet), and Appendix D

(Consent Form for Interviews) were created and used to address the above anticipated ethical issues.

Ensuring the privacy and protection of the participants is a significant ethical consideration. Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity are the primary responsibility of researchers. In this research, each participant's name was changed to maintain anonymity. Detailed information identifying an individual was changed to ensure anonymity as well as to promote the quality of the research (Wiles et al. 2008). After transcribing all the interview data from the audio recording, the recorded interview data and written Learning History Questionnaire were stored in a locked room. The only hard copy was secured primarily for possible future reference or if it was necessary to send to a participant for clarification. Data security software was maintained to minimise the risk of hackers breaking into an e-mail or the computer's contents.

Power relationships inherently exist in qualitative research (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2009). Additionally, power relationships that exist between employers and employees in organisations may cause fear. This fear may result in a hesitancy to provide real opinions and information. When gathering the data for this research, the author was working in the Tokyo headquarters of a Japanese pharmaceutical MNC, and some of the employees of that MNC were possible candidates for this research. To mitigate the situation, respondents who worked in the same organisation were not included. To answer the questions of 'whose interests will be served by this research?' as Alderson (1999: 65-66) suggested, seeking a better way to communicate fostering lifelong learning between employee and employer was focused on, as the prime objective of the research is to seek better communication for future growth in the workplace. In particular, striving to resolve unexpected mistakes about social variables due to English being a second language was important to make sure communications were received as best as possible. The English used in the research plan was polished as much as possible by talking to native speakers and implementing those changes throughout the research, asking for help from native English speakers to check the research. At the same time, the development of a research strategy and protocol including the above concerns was

essential. To respect the participants and the quality of this research, no discriminatory practices or language were used at any time (Resnik, 2015; European Sociological Association, 2018).

In reality, recognising the importance of sharing respondents' sensitive information through the interview and adult learning histories means occasionally acknowledging drawbacks, such as distrust and desperation to the employer and past unfortunate experiences. Participants may not necessarily want to disclose their external activities related to learning (Bryman, 2008). As such, an extensive effort was made to reassure the interviewee and the research itself. Discussions were shared carefully utilising a research protocol, which minimised participants' concern, and provided security to maintain their secrecy.

There is also a concern that the author, as an 'insider' researcher, has an in-depth knowledge of the research setting in pharmaceutical MNCs, which Zinn pointed to as a potential problem (Zinn, 1979). The candidates did not share a training plan, their appraisal or other human resource development and management with the researcher; therefore, a position independent from participants was achieved without any complication. Evidence from the research and previously acquired knowledge and experiences need to be balanced to be an independent observer. Furthermore, attention needs to be paid to the difference between Western culture and Japanese culture in the qualitative research conduction. This research strategy and design are planned in English, but the interview and learning history was investigated in either Japanese or English to acquire accurate context and information. Using familiar ways of asking questions gently and politely, without being too direct, in consideration of Japanese people's shyness and politeness, was also necessary.

Another limitation is associated with the potential for subjective interpretations of the interview results, though every effort was made to mitigate this (Graneheim and Lundman, 2004). At the same time, the limitation of translating Japanese narrative data into English was expected and did indeed occur. The translation and the interpretation of interview contents were prepared with as much coherence

possible, with a back translation carefully conducted to validate the quality of data and avoid researcher's misunderstanding, as explained in the previous section.

A research strategy and protocol including ethical matters mentioned above was developed before approaching participants to make all essential items known. It was utilised to explain the whole picture of the research to participants (Bryman, 2008). The ethics approval was submitted to the University of Leicester's Ethics Approval Process, and approval was received on December 23, 2015. After getting the approval letter from the University, the designed detailed processes were finalised.

Throughout the research process, careful attention was paid to any emerging ethical issues, and best efforts were made to solve them. As Bryman (2008) said, maintaining flexibility in a qualitative research protocol is critically necessary, and two pilot studies were conducted before starting the entire interview process. Flexibility, in terms of asking questions according to the respondents' reactions and listening to them talk carefully, was taken into consideration based on the reflection from pilot studies for better research.

Researchers' reflexivity in ethics in practice is essential for the implications in the social world, and was acknowledged throughout the research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). McGraw et al. mentioned reflexivity as follows:

> 'Reflexivity is a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge' (McGraw et al. 2000:68).

The suggestions by the ethical committee in University of Leicester Ethics Sub-committee that approved this thesis research in December 2015 were reviewed, along with a reflection on these recommendations as they pertain to the research implementation and writing process.

4. Presentation of the Findings

This section explains the presentation of the findings and main themes for the thematic analysis derived from the data gathered in the semi-structured qualitative interview and the learning history questionnaire of 20 managers. It focuses on emerging main themes and their relevance to the theoretical concepts identified at the end of the literature review such as individual learning dispositions, learning through practice, social context, social interactivity, and communities of practice. It also considers unanticipated findings that were identified through the data analysis process. The objective of this thesis research is to explore Japanese managers' learning dispositions and the interrelationship with social contexts in Japan. It also examines how Western theories of learning are relevant for application to a Japanese setting.

The derived key themes have three dimensions. The first is a time dimension. Three time aspects of schools days, working life, and life after retirement (for the future) are derived from the data as key pillars to support data for the interpretation. Second are key analytical themes to influence managers' learning. The derived key themes are: personal interactions, exposure to overseas culture, active learning by female managers, and career choices. Lastly, each time dimension has an influential dimension to managers' learning. The first part has key themes in school days along with active learning: *proactivity and independence, interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective and knowledge of diverse career choices.* The second part has key themes in working life with continuous reflections: *self-growth, recognition in the workplace, diverse workplace and higher labour mobility.* The last part has key themes in life after retirement: *continuous learning and contributions to society.*

Key Demographics of Respondents is represented in Table 4.1.

Item	Attribute	No. of Japanese managers	No. of Non-Japanese managers
Gender	Female	9	2
	Male	6	3
Type of MNC*	Japanese-MNC*	7	3
	Non-Japanese-MNC*	8	2
Age	50s	2	1
	40s	10	4
	30s	3	0
Exposure to overseas culture	Lived abroad in childhood	2	0
	Studied or short-stay abroad	6	4
	Worked, lived or studied abroad	7	5

Table 4.1 Key Demographics of Respondents

*MNCs: Multi-National Corporations

Examining the respondents' life histories and major social contexts together enhances a better understanding of the sample group's characteristics, as well as the typology of the group (Bryman, 2008). The 20 respondents included five non-Japanese people who work or have worked in Japanese or non-Japanese multinational corporations (MNCs), including an educational institution located in Japan. They all have had more opportunities to interact with overseas colleagues through their work a person who works in a local Japan-focused company does.

Appendix A (Respondent Background) shows the further key backgrounds of each respondent.

Appendix G summarises each manager's learning experience and life history from birth to the year 2015 as this helps to grasp the key social contexts and influences on each respondent for the analysis, as well as in-depth understanding of the potential typology of learning. Interviews were conducted in 2016 and examined over two periods: 1) school days and 2) working life. All participants were born between 1964 and 1981, a time when Japan was experiencing ever-increasing economic growth until the asset price bubble burst in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Shiratsuka, 2003). The Japanese economy, demographic situation, business model, and family structure began to change at this time (Yu, 2010). A majority of participants experienced this drastic change caused by this Japanese financial crisis of the late 1980s to early 1990s, and the subsequent economic stagnation. Therefore, the working and learning environment they were promised and expected declined, and employees often needed to create opportunities for learning on their own (Randstad Monitor, 2017).

Another economically stagnated condition was created when the global financial crisis of 2008 to 2009 occurred. The Japanese economy is still today struggling to firmly recover (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2017a, 2018). In addition, Japan has been experiencing a growing elderly population along with a declining birth rate (Cabinet Office, Government of Japan, 2018). Social, environmental changes are also significant because of the evolution of information technology (Sey and Fellows, 2009). These economic and environmental changes in and around Japanese society have influenced Japanese education and employment conditions. The majority of the interviewed Japanese managers were in school before the 1980s bubble burst in an ever-increasing economy, then started their working life during a chaotic economic period as well as an accelerating global business environment.

Examining the life history and learning experiences of the five non-Japanese managers provides a diverse angle to review the findings from the analysis of the Japanese managers. Their learning life may be significantly different, but it is influenced by Japanese ways. It also provided critical implications of the Japanese context that managers did not mention in the interview and were very possibly tacit information for Japanese managers (Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). It added a non-Japanese perspective to the analysis of the answers to the research questions. This clarification of the research questions along with the interviews themselves helps strengthen the analysis of the findings.

The presentation of findings consists of six parts. The first part, 4.1 Early Learning and Importance of Active Learning, focuses on awareness of experiences influencing dispositions on learning in the School Days period after birth. It explores how the respondents remember events and experiences related to their disposition of learning. It also examines influencing factors such as personal interactions, exposure to overseas culture, and the current Japanese educational systems. The potential interrelationship among all the factors is examined. The second part, 4.2 Learning Through Working Life and Social Interplay, examines how evolving individual dispositions of learning responded to the organisational and Japanese environmental factors. It focuses on key themes, such as the career choice to work in MNCs, exposure to overseas culture in adult life, significant learning events and experiences in adult life, attachment to learning in companies in Japan, and active learning by female managers in Japan. The first and second parts focus on 15 Japanese managers' interviews and the learning history questionnaires. The third part, 4.3 Non-Japanese Managers: Perception of Japanese Ways, examines the challenges and opportunities of five non- Japanese managers in a Japanese setting and discusses how they incorporated their experiences into their learning and career development. The fourth part, 4.4 Future Aspirations: Continuous Learning in Life explains their careers and lives, as well as interest in learning for both Japanese and non-Japanese managers. The next part, 4.5 Discussion and Unanticipated Findings discuss the relevance of the main themes to the concepts identified at the end of the literature review as well as the unexpected findings that

were identified through the data analysis process. Finally, 4.6 Conclusions summarises the presentation of the findings.

4. 1. Early Learning and the Importance of Active Learning

The 15 Japanese respondents were in their mid-30s to early 50s at the time of the interviews. All were born in Japan but grew up in different prefectures. The educational background of the respondents was from both public and private schools as well as a US high school. Table 1 shows the key demographics of the respondents. Five spent their school life before university in public schools (Sara, Shin, Satoko, Keiko, and Megumi), and nine went to prestigious private schools that were combined middle and high schools (Hideo, Ichiro, Nana, Mihoko, Chika, and Junko). Ken and Taka went to a public elementary and middle school then went on to a private high school. Shoko spent her high school days in the US.

In Japan, mobility within the company is historically the norm and often disruptive to the family (Sugimoto, 2014). Movement happens within the company both inside and outside of Japan (Sugimoto, 2014). There is also an order called '*Tanshin Funin*' where a husband is required to live separately from his family (Bassani, 2007, Yu, 2010). Three managers mentioned that when they were children, they struggled to adapt to new environments during these moves. They said that they needed to adapt themselves very quickly to the new environment and were often met with uncomfortable experiences related to the intolerance of classmates to transferred students. They stated that this is one of Japan's of societal characteristics (Shoko, Satoko and Shin). These experiences changed managers' learning attitudes positively and negatively. Shoko and Satoko received positive experiences, but Shin tried to hide his ability and came to dislike learning.

> *'When I returned to Japan, I hide my English ability as much as possible, as there was a discrimination attitude from friends too' (Shin, male, Japanese).*

Two male respondents lived for several years in Western countries with their families because of their father's job relocation (Taka and Shin). Six respondents lived for shorter periods (some weeks or months) or longer periods (some years) in Western countries (Shoko, Keiko, Junko, and Megumi for high school, university or college, and Megumi, Chika, and Osamu for short-term study). Seven respondents worked, lived, or studied abroad in their working life (Sara, Shin, Hideo, Mihoko, Ichiro, Chika, and Taka).

4. 1. 1 Learning Dispositions and Attitudes

During interviews, the respondents did their best to accurately remember past moments. The learning history questionnaire that each was required to answer before the interview helped respondents to focus on their perceptions and reflections on their past learning experiences as sometimes recalling past events especially childhood, can be difficult (Pillemer and White, 1989). They acknowledged that often their learning behaviours and situations were influenced by people who interacted with them closely.

Three respondents mentioned that the interview increased their awareness of previously unrealised dispositions, such as a love of learning, and of personal experiences such as having a lot of teachers within a family. They were not aware of the tendencies, preferences, actions, events, and settings related to their learning. This shows two implications: unstable recall ability and a positive attitude for discovering new insights related to their learning.

> *'In this interview, I first realised I had a lot of teachers in my family when I grew up' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).*

> *'This is my first time to think about my educational history and fun learning experience, and I found I love education and learning in my life' (Sara, female, Japanese).*

> *'Throughout this interview, I found I tend to be influenced by people around me, such as my family members' (Megumi, female, Japanese).*

Managers talked about the characteristics related to their dispositions to learn in different ways. Intense curiosity, loving to learn and finding out something interesting were provided by Sara, Keiko, Junko, and Ichiro.

> *'I like a spontaneous perspective for learning, just try it! Nobody can kill you. I cannot stop studying. Once I get interested in something, I never stop' (Junko, female, Japanese).*

> *'If I can see one word to express my motivation for learning, it is curiosity' (Keiko, female, Japanese).*

> *'Curiosity is a good trigger to learn for me' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).*

> *'I am just curious always. That's it. Very curious and I love to learn something that I do not know. I would like to learn various thoughts and minds and values across borders' (Sara, female, Japanese).*

By contrast, Chika and Nana explained that from their childhood, their attitude to learning has been reactive, not proactive. They also stated that they were accustomed to following instructions and only having access to lectures, not interactive discussions, in school. Furthermore, they realised that having been promoted in J-MNCs, active learning is necessary, even though they were not familiar with it during school, probably due to the older school educational system (MEXT, 2017a, 2017b). MEXT's new guidelines are now trying to improve the Japanese school curriculum and teaching methods to be more interactive (MEXT, 2017a, 2017b). Chika and Nana's comments suggest their learning dispositions were influenced by the conventional educational methods in Japanese society. Any proactivity on their parts was not seen and they believe this to be based on their work experiences.

'I did not feel any uncomfortable feeling to the Japanese school system, and education system, as well as a school uniform. We can feel a unity with wearing the same uniform' (Nana, female, Japanese)

Three respondents expressed their learning attitude as more intuitive-based, with a tendency to follow a natural flow or instinct. They listen to their instincts about learning, instead of strategically planning. They are, however, trying to be *proactive* in learning, as well as being flexible.

'Normally I do not have a plan in details in advance about my learning and spontaneously do things like "Ok, let's do it' if it is feasible and interesting' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).

'My style is intuition based then later the rational comes. I tended to be more imaginary rather than making logic' (Taka, male, Japanese).

"Throughout this interview, I found I am not moving forward strategically in advance about learning, though I look like so. I have a rough direction but I drive when I have a significant encounter with a person, or I feel I need to change. I focus on the natural flow and listen to inner instincts' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

Ken called himself an 'opportunist for learning.' He says he loves to use 'Yorimichi' in his life. Yorimichi is the Japanese word for 'detour' in English. He applies the same strategy to learning and considers himself a flexible learner.

'I am an opportunist for learning. I like to detour, and like to stop by somewhere on the way home, "Yorimichi" in Japanese. It is the same in my learning experience. I do not like to make a strategy, going forward in the fastest way. I love to move differently based on my curiosity' (Ken, male, Japanese).

Satoko, Mihoko, and Shin are working in non-J-MNCs and revealed their anxiousness because of the awareness that ongoing learning is often required for better job security.

Non-J-MNCs are generally considered to have lower employment security compared to J-MNCs (Ono, 2007). This vague anxiousness of managers in non-J MNCs may drive them toward more proactive learning to help improve their job security.

> *'I always feel that I do need to learn further for expanding my capability as the business professional to work as a partner in the company. Otherwise, senior level clients like board members do not hear my suggestion and ignore me' (Satoko, female, Japanese).*

> *'I do not have enough confidence in everything, so my starting point for learning is to get proof of confidence by learning. I think my appetite for learning may help me when I do not have confidence at work. Throughout this interview, I found I am proactively going to learn. I found my tendency taking this opportunity' (Mihoko, female, Japanese).*

> *'I feel I am not fully confident, though I have many experiences in tough negotiations and I can find a place for a compromised point each other. More structured learning can provide a more solid backbone, and solid methods can be transferred to me. Every day is a learning opportunity. Formal learning to get a certificate is related to our confidence' (Shin, male, Japanese).*

In the interview, each manager explored and *reflected* on their dispositions and attitudes about learning individually by answering questions about their life stories. Curiosity, flexibility, tendency to follow a natural flow, a reactive rather than proactive attitude that was previously nurtured in the Japanese educational system and is now being required to change, and approaches for gaining the confidence to survive in non-J-MNCs were illustrated. The methodology of exploring each manager's life history using biography helped to draw each respondent's learning

disposition (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008). Interactions and influences between dispositions and the impact of the Japanese educational system, and requirements in the workplace in J-MNCS, as well as in non-J-MNCs, were also observed.

4.1.2 Personal Interactions

Respondents discussed their memories of the influential people in their life. They are family members, school teachers, university professors, and friends from childhood through university. Appendix H summarises the influencing personal interactions of learning for each respondent in their school days and working life.

The Japanese respondents explained how they received influence on their learning, from family members (such as parents, sisters, brothers, grandmothers, grandfathers, and uncles), primarily by example, intentionally or unintentionally, when they were young. In addition to being influential family members, some family members were also teachers and entrepreneurs, thereby also providing social influences. Influential mothers who were stay-at-home mothers but with a strong will to work as well as those mothers who worked along with raising their children influenced the disposition of the respondents (Appendix H). This type of influence on disposition is notable because historically, Japanese society and the Japanese workplace has been intolerant of working mothers (Shiota, 2011).

They also explained how they were given experiential opportunities to learn, such as going overseas, whether by other relatives or high school and university lecturers, which motivated them to learn and be enthusiastic about learning from a young age. This enthusiasm appeared during the interview when respondents eagerly volunteered detailed and lengthy information.

'I received a great influence from my grandfather, who was the founder of his venture business in material electronics when I was young. That may be a part of my gene to be interested in learning and new things' (Hideo, male, Japanese).

'I found that my parents love to learn a foreign language and foreign history, and they influenced me to learn diverse world outside of Japan' (Ken, male, Japanese).

'My parents read a lot of books. I loved to read books and never went to the prep school during my school days although other friends went to it. I learned a lot through reading' (Shin, male, Japanese).

Two respondents experienced developing a strong impetus to learn by observing the struggle family members faced in life's social situations.

'Both of my parents worked for their own business and were busy as entrepreneurs, and they were very tough business thinking person. They did not give any educational advice to me, but they always asked me 'why' questions, and I needed to explain it to them. It was nice critical thinking training for me much more than I thought. Doing myself, being myself, not like others, that is my tips from parents' (Keiko, female, Japanese).

'I received strong influence from my uncle as he was a kind of father figure as my father was very busy on business. My uncle always took care of me in school, and he was such a kind and calm person, though sometimes he suffered in society because of his honesty and kindness. I thought about how this kind of nice person could survive in society, and the current society is not right. Then this brought me strong motivation to change society through Base of Pyramid (BoP) type business together NGO to contribute to support people' (Osamu, male, Japanese).

Respondents spoke of parents and grandparents who after surviving hard times during a difficult period in Japan's history, strongly advised that they should learn and do their best (Sara and Junko). Junko also explained that she learned from her mother how talent and education are much more precious than money based on her mother's difficult experiences during World War ll.

> *'My father influenced me that he had a hard time to make money then he recommended me to get any certificate when I chose my career direction. He advised how to survive in the man-dominated Japanese society' (Sara, female, Japanese).*

> *'My grandfather came to Tokyo alone, worked, and learned architecture as an apprentice in the University, as he was poor. He taught himself how to design, then bought a small garage and started his own business creating gasoline meters and tanks and hit a big success in this business. He is nearly 80 and still loves to read and learn about something' (Junko, female, Japanese).*

> *'I love my mother's word that talent cannot be lost, although money can be lost which she learned, through her hard experience in World War II' (Junko, female, Japanese).*

In schools, teachers and university professors played an important role in influencing the learning attitudes of respondents, opening their eyes to a broader world. They asked probing questions that promoted deep thinking about their dispositions.

> *'My university professor influenced me a lot and always reminded me to learn English to know the world and its importance. He reminded us that you should learn English, then your life will become richer and wider. As my family was domestic focused and I have not visited foreign countries, thanks to his advice and reminder, I came to have an interest in foreign countries' (Ken, male, Japanese).*

'My university professor in my PhD said to me to be proactive, proactive and proactive through the entire doctorate course always. He said 'Think yourself and do yourself'. He said that 'Life and research are in limited time and let's focus on your strong part, not supplementing weak point, not seeking the spot that is a space to research, but rather do your favourite subject. He also said 'Why do you mention other people's awareness, not your awareness?' Research is a very tough and unrewarded job, so you should reward yourself. Otherwise, you cannot reward others'. His suggestion hit my heart, and I could focus on my instinct. I have not heard such advice before starting PhD and knowing this professor, and I was accustomed to being reactive in the classroom' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

Analysis of the data shows that early personal interactions turned out to be a strong influence on each respondent's learning attitudes, shown in Appendix H. The analysis also shows that respondents were impacted by personal interaction mainly in a Japanese social context, including the educational system, history, social changes, and opportunities to know overseas cultures. A '*proactive attitude to learning*' is one of the key themes to promote learning during the school days period.

4.1.3 Exposure to Overseas Culture

As Appendix G exhibits graphically how two respondents experienced life in the US and Canada when they were young because of their fathers' jobs (Shin and Taka). One respondent chose to study in a US high school as well as a Japanese subsidiary of a US university where only English was spoken in classes (Shoko). Two respondents decided to study abroad, one to study in a US college and the other to get a bachelor's and a masters from a UK University (Keiko and Junko). Three respondents also had an opportunity to study and stay for weeks or months in the US, Germany, or France (Chika, Osamu, and Megumi). These experiences were mainly between 1970 and 2000, when exposure to overseas culture in Japan was relatively infrequent. Even in 2017, the official statistics of the number of registered

aliens in Japan was still less than 2 %, in comparison to the average in OECD in 2014, 8% (Ministry of Justice, 2017; OECD, 2014), as Figure 1.4 shows. Therefore, it would be understandable that these managers did not see foreign people near them on a daily basis, as well as how strong the cultural influence was when they were in each country. Some of them mentioned it was a fun and surprising experience. Shin said it was tough to get accustomed to the different culture, customs and friends; he suffered from the discrepancy between his English ability and other students'. Taka mentioned that his experience was helpful for improving his English capacity and did not express that he had difficulty in his life in Canada.

> *'My father had an opportunity to work in the US, and we all went together as a family. For Japanese Asian young guy, it was a very tough time to survive there with American children in public school in Queens, in the US. When I returned to Japan, I hide my English ability as much as possible, as there was a discrimination attitude from friends too' (Shin, male, Japanese).*

> *'I spent one year in Calgary at five years old for a year due to my father's work as he was a scientist working at Calgary University in a postdoctoral position. My experience staying in Calgary did help for my better pronunciation and understanding in English' (Taka, male, Japanese).*

In contrast to the above two cases, three women chose to study abroad when they were in middle or high school because of their curiosity. Their parents disagreed with their interest, autonomy, and *proactive attitude* towards their lives. Shoko sought a new way to live life after a bitter experience failing the competitive Japanese educational system exam, coming to different approach by studying in a US high school.

> *'I failed to pass the exam to enter the private middle school and felt I would like to do something more than taking an exam to the university from my experience to prep school in late elementary school period. Then I searched myself how to go on an overseas study program and went to the US from summer of age sixteen then extended my stay in high school. Of course, parents disagreed with my proposal, but the first mother agreed, then finally*

mother helped to persuade father, then he agreed with great reluctance. It was a very nice Christian school with a solid curriculum and safe' (Shoko, female, Japanese).

An influence on Keiko's activity and interest was the US movie, *Star Wars*, which she was when she was a middle school student. American films and culture were becoming more popular in Japan during that period, and she was very much influenced by it, as it changed her direction towards the US for her learning because of her curiosity.

'I decided by myself at year eleven to go to the US as I was exposed myself to US community through movies, STAR WARS! It hugely influenced me; I was shocked to realise it is only English, somewhere outside of Japan. So, I was motivated to studying English weekly, and everything started from that moment. I tried to follow my inner feeling and be honest with myself, and I decided my direction by myself' (Keiko, female, Japanese).

Similarly, Junko disliked the Japanese school system and felt she wanted something different. She has a highly spontaneous attitude to her learning, but her questioning to teachers was not welcomed in the classroom. As such, she sought another way to learn, then deciding to study *interactively* in the UK for the university, then extended her study into graduate school.

'I did not like schools I went to, and the whole studying system because schools in Japan request us to focus on memorising everything in our learning. They did not encourage thinking, saying or telling our opinions. They did not like it. I often made a comment and teachers hated me. Such a cheeky little girl was not welcomed, maybe. Also, it depends on the person, but normally in Japan, once you get to university, you do not study. However, I wanted to study and improve myself, as I did not like myself. I wanted to change myself, and I thought it was an opportunity. In the university in the UK, it was not only memorising, what and why Michelangelo created this

sculpture, and his teacher depressed, etc…. I felt free when I started to study in master degree in the UK though I could not feel in Japan. I could speak my own words' (Junko, female, Japanese).

Even with a short term stay, managers learned and became more confident than they were before. They had the independence to do a thing for themselves during the short stay, even if they could hardly speak English at all (Chika). Through these experiences abroad, they learned how human and environment are harmonised in the country (Osamu) and could unexpectedly find people who like and speak Japanese (Megumi). These were rare opportunities at that period of the Japanese social condition, but very inspirational experiences.

'We could have a great experience to find a chance to visit students' house who like Japanese in Singapore. We developed this plan by ourselves by asking the lecturer at the university. We were highly welcomed in Singapore! We could experience to meet new friends and enjoy the mutual exchange of our culture' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

In sum, significant opportunities to live, study and learn in foreign countries and exposure to overseas culture, came from respondents' fathers' workplace transfers from Japanese companies' globalised business expansion, and respondents' behaviours inspired by the environment. Social contexts, such as the Japanese educational system and its rigorousness as a teacher of negative example, and dissemination of US culture to Japanese society influenced the respondents. These factors played roles in providing options to expand Japanese managers' thoughts and capabilities, as well as helping to unpack their hesitation towards experiencing unknown overseas cultures, things, and people.

4.1.4 The Current Japanese Educational Systems

Four respondents concretely expressed how they enjoyed and welcomed the transformation from one-way didactic learning style to a two-way *interactive learning style* in Western countries based on their experiences staying, living, learning, and working there (Taka, Junko, Ichiro, Shoko, Chika and Shin). As introduced in the previous part, Junko argued she hated the Japanese learning method focusing on memorisation, and her way of asking questions and interacting with teachers was not welcomed in the classroom. Furthermore, she felt that teachers and classmates consciously and unconsciously classified students into 'good students' who listen to the teachers' lecture, and 'lousy students' who ask questions and try to debate with teachers. It was one of the reasons why she decided to study at a foreign university. Taka and Keiko also expressed similar opinions about feeling uncomfortable in the Japanese classroom, but had a wonderful sense of fun with *interactivity and dialogue* in the US college.

> *'We learn in a given structure and answer in Japan: fewer spaces to be sceptical, rational, logical.. and learning stuff contents have a discrepancy of the order and gap between what we are learning and could be applying, knowledge vs application. We learn difficult stuff about math, but we never talk about how to apply in the practice area. The way to incentivise people is quite missing' (Taka, male, Japanese).*

> *'I learned interactivity in learning place in the US college, and surprisingly it was fun' (Keiko, female, Japanese).*

In contrast, Nana, Mihoko, and Chika said that they were not uncomfortable with Japanese didactic learning in school as they could follow the teacher's directions easily. Nana noted that she is not familiar with an informal learning style, which means to her creating ideas *interactively* in parallel, and likes structured learning in a formal form; she is now, however, required to learn informally in her higher position in the company. Mihoko said she loved school and listening to the teacher's lectures, and believed the teacher was 100% correct. Now, she is enjoying

interactive and dialogical communication in her organisation, so she feels that she could adapt to changes in the workplace. She was influenced by the necessity of work and by her mentors. Chika argued that logical thinking and the ability to logically explain ideas in both Japanese and English should be entirely in parallel. This does not happen so much by pushing and loudly negotiating, but by careful listening and collaborative attitudes. She says Japanese education is nurturing this ability in Japanese. A focus on English skills would reinforce this general strength of the Japanese system much more, while helping Japanese global business practices. Hideo mentioned the current popularity of the Japanese learning system of KUMON in the US for children to accumulate essential learning skills. Furthermore, the 'Singapore math' curriculum, a similar mathematics education method, was introduced in the in New York state education system showing that Japanese and similar Asian educational approaches have been well accepted in the US.

Hideo also pointed out that *learning with an objective*, why we learn, and how we can utilise it in the future, would be much more critical for making the Japanese education system better. He asked if a person who continuously did KUMON or Singapore math could be a math genius. Since not all people are genius, he points out that more flexibility and questioning of 'what' and 'why' to students are essential to implement in the Japanese education system.

Hofstede's study (1991, 2001) identified the features of Japanese culture. They are: a tendency towards high levels of uncertainty avoidance, low individualism, and high long-term orientations. Other modern studies also identified other elements, such as self-criticism, and modesty, portraying a people who are never proud of themselves, stoical, never satisfied, and eager to self-improve (Takata, 2003; Leuyers and Sonoda, 1999). Furthermore, philosophical differences between Eastern and Western cultures were discussed by Tweed and Lehman (2002) in a distinction between a Confucian approach as a reactive learning attitude in Japan and some Eastern countries, and Socratic approaches as active learning attitudes in

Western countries, and even in some Asian countries. (Ryan et al. 2013). The literature mentions how the Socratic method frequently challenges others' beliefs referring to Socrates' tendency to question his students in ancient philosophy (Tweed and Lehman, 2002). The Japanese education system has traditionally been focused on how to efficiently reach a determined goal, instead of seeking innovative ways of exploring directions and answers, which was not visible in the ever-increasing factory model the educational system until the 1980s. Since then, the didactic method has been more accepted (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b; Kimura and Tatsuno 2017). In the samples, a majority of respondents showed their comfort with the Socratic learning approach, believing it to have merit, although they experienced difficulty when they first encountered it. At the same time, some respondents are still comfortable with and accustomed to the didactic learning approach, and there was one respondent who realised the importance of the Socratic method according to their increased level of management.

Furthermore, Hideo and Megumi pointed out that a *proactive and independent learning attitude* and *learning with an objective,* based on their strict PhD studies and work in business development in a competitive US environment, were important. They also emphasised the importance of teaching the *knowledge of diverse career choices* for Japanese students, showing more examples than traditional single career choices. Hideo discussed, for example, that students who like science are advised to become scientists, but other career choices, like becoming an entrepreneur to create a business around scientific invention, would not be informed in general. *Knowledge of diverse career choices* can be suggested during the school period and has capabilities in enhancing students' learning and motivation.

> *'My friend who grew up in the USA says the Japanese education system is*
> *perishing and losing its independence. For my case, my professor said to me*
> *to be proactive, proactive, and proactive in the doctorate course always. .....I*
> *feel the same problem in Japanese university entering exam system when I*

teach, and there is still the same problem in my university now. I think I could study much harder if there were an opportunity to be considered by students that each life has a diverse choice. For example, liberal arts would, need a scientific perspective, and to introduce concrete examples. I was simply asked continuously by my professor, what is good and interesting for me, with no respect for my thinking process and needed to make my argument with my best efforts……. It was my significant decision to change my character as a learning experience. Furthermore, in Japan, students are required to get a high score in all subjects comprehensively, and teachers do not encourage strengths naturally. Though we are encouraged to be in the same line, we are also told that you should decide and think in university. This thought can be embedded in the earlier period in education, and it would be effective to accommodate interactive learning more obviously in Japan' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

'I think meaning and effect of learning depends on the degree of clarity on the reason why we learn. For example, if we think to start a business in Japan, learning in Japanese is the best, and we cannot utilise the business mind and method effective in Silicon Valley, right? Also, I think I wish if I could learn more diverse choices of career development, especially how to develop business even for researchers as I need to put into practical use now. If I could learn this before entering the university, I could consider more variety of choices, not just select researcher as I like science, but also a businessperson who loves science can learn business in Silicon Valley together with learning science, and so on. That choice is popular in the US' (Hideo, male, Japanese).

When we look at the Japanese educational system and the history of its evolution, it has been revised almost every ten years based on societal needs and visions for society's future (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). These changes, however, have been based on a 'one-size-fits-all' type strategy that attempts to make activities and methods for increasing the average educational uniform throughout the country,

from a period of supporting industrialisation to the end of rapid economic growth, and now into and globalised economy (Kawachi, 2008: Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017). In 2017 MEXT published the new guidelines for education focusing on diversity in society from globalisation and a rapid information technology revolution looking into the future to 2030 further unpredictable period, with children's' futures depending on a more open educational process (MEXT, 2017a). Points to be changed are *'active learning'* over one's lifetime, supported by *independence and dialogue*, *with purpose and meaning of learning,* together with the earlier introduction of English education in elementary school.

Based on the survey results by MEXT (2014), the *'active learning'* approach is now becoming more common in Japanese compulsory education, with the survey result showing that more than 50% have already seen it started in practice. As such, there is a general expectation that further methods and training to meet the growing needs in Japanese educational setting will be improved in the next generation.

According to the above points expressed by the respondents, fifteen Japanese managers' learning experience, their acceptance of their learning environment in their school days, and the implications of such, were illustrated by the interview process and their biography. Their learning attitudes were profoundly influenced by social contexts around them such as personal interactions, the Japanese educational system, and overseas cultures. Even in Japan, which is recognised as a mono-cultural country (Wilson, 2001) with much fewer non- Japanese residents compared to other OECD countries, managers could grow through their experiences and specific environments such as in English speaking circumstances or learning in a country overseas.

Based on managers' voices, *reflections,* and their analysis, as well as on the evolution of the current Japanese educational policy, *proactivity and independence*, *interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective*, and *knowledge of diverse career choices* were vital elements influencing their dispositions to learning, as well as to strengthen the current environment of learning during school days.

4. 2. Learning Through Working Life and Social Interplay

Shin started to talk about his interest in going to graduate school to get an MBA after working at the end of the interview. He talked about how much he learned through his working practice, but expressed a strong desire to continue learning formally. Through this, the researcher could see actual progress of lifelong learning in Japanese male managers.

> *'I should tell you the truth, actually I read a Nikkei newspaper article about one of reporter around fifty years old decided to go to the night school to get MBA, and he said we need to do something at age fifty. I was very impressed with that article, five years old with MBA…. It is not bad. I decided to challenge, two weeks ago, I took an exam in university night course close to my office, will see the result…'(Shin, male, Japanese).*

Appendix G introduces managers' learning experiences and life histories, as well as how managers are trying to obtain learning opportunities, and influences from learning opportunities of which they were unaware after starting their working life. Appendix I further explains the details of the selected most significant learning events or experiences, such as training, development, and formal and informal learning events managers have experienced in their adult life. The Nikkei News Paper (2017) introduced the results of an investigation by Pricewaterhouse Coopers of around six thousands working male and female employees in Japan. The result shows that 71% of respondents think individual workers should be responsible for their skill improvement. Awareness to self-learning in life is firmly increasing even in the situation of less labour mobility in Japan, supported by a lifetime employment system different that most other countries. For the research results, individual *proactive* learning to get a higher degree like an MBA, PhD, CPA, as well as from seminars, were selected based on each manager's will and sense of importance concerning their proactivity. Furthermore, their will and mindset were fostered by social influences, including their risk awareness to career development

and job security in current Japanese economic conditions, MNCs' organisational culture to encourage learning, and influences to learn from peers or friends in their close community. At the same time, company sponsored learning opportunities including English language study overseas, and global team training, were influential.

4.2.1 Career Choices by Working MNCs

General thoughts about labour mobility in Japan are that it is really low and Japanese workers tend to stay in the same company for their working life. Updated statistical data on the job turnover rate in Japan from 2017 was at 4.8 % (male 4.0%, female 5.7%) and this trend had remained mostly level for five years (Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 2017). International comparisons of the length of service of employees (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training, 2016) shows that the length of service for Japanese employees is significantly longer than in other countries.

In the sample, ten managers experienced changing their job and company once or more in their working life (Shoko, Sara, Satoko, Mihoko, Keiko, Ichiro, Taka, Junko, Osamu and Megumi). Six managers experienced changing companies more than three times, and achieved a promotion, got their desired position, or reformed their career path based on the interview discussion. Another five managers also experienced reforming their career direction, developing their expertise in the same company by firmly focusing their *self-growth* (Shin, Hideo, Nana, Chika and Ken).

Shoko and Sara talked about their thoughts about changing career or companies strategically nurturing their interest and instinct.

'I am trying to keep my interest in marketing job during working as an executive assistant. I consulted this hope to my boss and kept network inside and outside together with doing self-studying. Finally, I could get the desired position now after some company change' (Shoko, female, Japanese)

'My previous work was challenging to continue to work for a long time. As my female bosses worked hard to keep their position, and I felt it is not my place. I wanted to try to find something different for me. My goal is self-employment as an accounting professional and to be a consultant or management advisor. Another goal was to become the controller of the company. I tried to search my thoughts always' (Sara, female, Japanese)

Ichiro mentioned his long process of moving from a J-MNC to a non-J-MNC objectively taking care of his desire and learning in a sizeable J-MNC company after receiving his MBA as a form of self-learning.

'Curiosity is a good trigger to learn for me. Only one exception was I spent much time almost for two years to consider the opportunity to move to the current company. I expected that the company would cease our business in India due to the company transaction and my workload was gradually going to small. I tried to change it but was not successful… I wanted to work for hands-on experience and responsibility for business development or country manager. Then I got the opportunity in a small company, and I am busy but comfortable now' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).

Eight respondents were working in a J-MNC now two of them are changing their career path, away from the company and towards more education path. Megumi and Osamu are the two youngest respondents in this research, and both of them achieved career changes from business to educational service in the university. Osamu had strong hope and his own strategy to teach, recognising that a person who experienced business in the real world should teach, and that path would be necessary for him to bridge the ap between academia and industry. He strategically

searched available pathways, then accumulated his learning in real business, such as BoP business consulting and active collaboration with the government and industries in his consulting company. Later he received a PhD together while working and temporarily teaching in two universities, thus achieving his desire to change his career to academia entirely. In Japan, labour mobility between industry, government and academia is still low, and Tokuraro's case is essential for understanding how to bridge these critical actors in Japanese society. He is trying to grasp changes in social conditions and their influences, while continuously thinking about his next learning opportunities.

On the other hand, Megumi did not have a strong hope to teach in a university setting at the beginning of her working career. She started to work in the company after graduating from university. She did not have the objective to learn in the university, but she found her interest and aim in a master's degree and started to become a lecturer in the school with the support by her supervisor. One of the reasons she began to be interested in teaching was the influence of the Japanese economic condition following the global financial crisis in 2007-2008, which was during her study period. The job market for graduates was increasingly shrinking, and getting her job was tough. She struggled to get a PhD while working as a temporary lecturer, then finally achieved her desire to teach in the university as an official faculty member. She is trying to grow more with broader learning continuously. These two respondents stated their further learning plans.

> *'There are many things to do much as improvement of my English, stable approval of my academic papers, getting governmental grants for research, etc. I also would like to challenge activities to increase my influence on society. Hopes to learn how to sharpen my representing power again'*
> *(Osamu, male, Japanese)*

> *'I would like to change the venue as I can be influenced by many people. I need to expand my research results and go outside for co-research opportunity or fieldwork. I am very interested in overseas and would like to visit the USA or the UK if possible including sabbatical chance. Motivation is*

different as in Japan situation it is the same if we do our best or not, but Western countries may provide a system to make us worthwhile with our best effort through it would be a tough environment' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

In the results of this research, it is significant that majority of respondents experienced changes in their work organisation, utilising their learning experiences and influences from their social environment, and achieved improvements in their career in the Japanese work setting. *The higher labour mobility* may be one of the key elements for active learning in organisations and society.

The Japanese company promotion system, particularly in a large company, is still linked to a number of years working for the company as well as age, in the lifetime employment system (Sugimoto, 2014). Efforts to obtain new skills by receiving higher qualifications, such as an MBA or PhD degree, or a certified accountant and tax accountant status would not directly help promotion and pay increase. Therefore, managers' motivation to gain further skills using their own time and money was generally low. In the results of this research, however, the researcher observed that managers working in MNCs, who have an awareness of their self-growth, meet social changes and proactively take actions to grasp various career options in and outside of the company and overseas. They could link their career plan to societal changes in an individual way.

Female managers (Shoko, Sara, Satoko, Nana, and Mihoko) mentioned that learning is essential to survive in the changing, competitive and *higher labour mobility*-based workplace. They need to be *proactive* to learn in more senior positions to work with higher-level clients to meet their needs. They also pointed out that learning is very important to survive in the male-dominated, conservative Japanese working environment. It shows that female managers receive influence from Japanese

societal customs and culture, which thus enhances their approaches and attitudes towards learning.

Even for male managers, Ichiro, for example, says that learning is necessary to survive in order to catch up with social changes, and that it is indeed fun.   Shin also mentioned that changes happen every industry and surviving in that environment getting more difficult.

> *'I think any new information, technical knowledge or ways of work, regardless of art or science, will become obsolete (outdated) within five years. I need to continue learning as far as I would like to survive. Learning is fun, and also it makes my eyes open by showing new ideas' (Ichiro, male, Japanese)*

Junko mentioned the crucial learning she received from her boss in the workplace, which became her basis for working. Managers working in MNCs have opportunities and challenges that are often seen through the lens of global business implementation, and they are quite proactive to seek opportunities.

> *'I learned from my boss that every business is a hospitality business, focusing on customers anytime and anywhere. That is true' (Junko)*

Work identity is a crucial component in Illeris's model for learning in working life (2004) to structure a holistic model for learning in working life. Illeris (2004) developed a comprehensive model for learning in working life based on the original model by Jorgensen and Warring (2001). He explains the key features of the distinction between social and individual levels of learning, and interactions among them through working practice. The respondents' work identities have been developed through their working practices in J-MNCs and non-J-MNCs, with exposure to overseas cultures within a Japanese societal environment. Managers'

awareness of conscious and unconscious *self-growth* would be produced in work identity with working practice in a chaotic situation.

Although cooperation between industry, government, and academia has not proactively conducted in Japan, two managers in the research samples are progressing their career from industry to academia through their experiences in the industry, supported by their efforts for *self-growth*.

4.2.2 Exposure to Overseas Culture in Adult Life

Appendix B shows that six respondents (Sara in the US, Shin in Germany, Hideo in the US, Ichiro in India, Chika in the US, and Taka in Belgium) had a chance to work, live, and/ or study in an overseas country. They explained how they had an exciting but tough time there, with excellent learning opportunities to grow. Cultural diversity and different roles in bridging the headquarters with the overseas office were presented as a new agenda to tackle, which was sometimes harder than previous tasks in Japan. They conveyed an honour and appreciation to be selected as an expatriate to foreign countries, which also proactively supported their motivation to work in a foreign country, as well as the opportunity for new experiences and learning.

> *'It was a miracle for me to visit and work in the US. I wanted to live in the US anyway, and my CEO remembered my desire and just three years after I joined the company, he sent me to NY. Some years later in 2008, Lehman shock occurred, and I decided to be back to Japan' (Sara, female, Japanese).*

> *'I went to Germany with family for two years as product marketing manager covering Finland and central Asia. Working condition was very efficient, and we needed to take holidays, summer vacation for 3-4 weeks. It was immediate notice' (Shin, male, Japanese).*

> *'It was a dreamy period in the US for two years... I focus on networking to industrialise idea to actual business together with researching. It was a*

worldwide top intellectual brain's group venue, and I learned how it is critical to be there in person' (Hideo, male, Japanese).

'I worked in India office for five years, with 50% in Japan and 50% in India style to bridge the corporate in Japan and business in India. This was my first experience to work with foreign peoples in the foreign office. 95% was Indian and very few colleagues with other nationality worked there. Every day was learning opportunity and had a problem' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).

'I have a strong loyalty and appreciation to my company to send me to the US, and I have not thought to change the company and wanted to stay here for a long time. It was a busy but amazing experience to work with foreign colleagues, bridge Japan and US workplace and different philosophy and culture' (Chika, female, Japanese).

'I am working with potential partners and clients, prepare documents, understand the scheme... many things to do as I am only one person in Europe now, but very exciting. I need to think by myself, and I do not have anyone who is familiar with setting European business in my company. Bridging here and Japan would be another role' (Taka, male, Japanese).

An international assignment is an opportunity to internationalise a company through a learning process and *proactive* learning (Wong, 2001; Yamazaki and Kayes, 2007). The above respondents therefore proactively addressed their assignment and achieved satisfaction and growth through their *proactive* learning through cross-cultural diversity in the host country. At the same time, they absorbed the overseas culture, customs, and business practices, with influences from communications with people in that country taking great efforts to transform challenges into chances.

Seven respondents experienced studies in master's degrees as formal learning in English speaking and studying environment. Three were learning by distance for MBAs in UK universities (Shoko, Keiko, and Hideo), one by distance learning for an

MBA in a US university (Sara), and one for an MBA in an English speaking environment in Japan (Ichiro). On had six months in France as part of a short MBA exchange program (Megumi), another had short-term research experience in the US (Taka), another went for master's degree program in a UK university, and one had two short language training stints in the UK (Ken). Respondents who studied for an MBA achieved their degrees after a tough period of balancing work, study, and life balance, as well as time management. They are very proud of their efforts, achievements, and learning accomplishments themselves, with high appreciation for their family and their boss in the workplace. Hideo, Shoko, and Keiko completed an MBA by distance learning in a UK university based on needs in their career plans; they enjoyed studying and the available systems there. Management skills would be useful for their current job position.

> *'I started to think to try MBA as I experienced that my learning by reading books and internet marketing does not appeal to my clients and colleagues. I needed to have something like a formal certificate, and it would be great if it is certified by Western University. So, I decided to start an MBA course at a UK university as an accredited course by distance learning with working as it was a reasonable tuition fee, excellent, and flexible system, at the beginning of the '40s. I learned a lot about subjects of course, but also important to developing my learning with securing my learning time. Marketing knowledge, as well as management perspective, are all useful for my next career; especially I am in a management position in a small company. I appreciate the support of everyone!' (Shoko, female, Japanese)*

> *'As I was busy and I needed five years to complete it, and it was tough work across US and Japan. This experience to study MBA in UK university by distance learning was beneficial for my current job as a management position, and I can sort out all knowledge in my brain. Moreover, this is very helpful when I have cooperative work with overseas clients and colleagues as almost all people have PhD and MBA, though MBA is not very helpful in Japan' (Hideo, male, Japanese).*

> *'I needed to be more professional in business, so I started to think what I need to do until 40 years old. Marketing work would not be my choice and started to see the opportunity to get an MBA to reinforce my ability as some managers got a higher position or opportunity with an MBA degree. I was interested in an MBA in the international world with different dimension from domestic, so I chose a UK university MBA course by distance learning. Japanese graduate schools had the MBA school division but did not have an accredited certificate at that time. Moreover, this course was reasonable cost and good quality, and flexible system, why not choose this?' (Keiko, female, Japanese)*

Sara also utilised her MBA degree for her next career, and Ichiro enjoyed his studying in Tokyo with an atmosphere that enabled studying and speaking English with native faculty.

> *'My friend visited NY to see me when I worked there, and she realised my desire to go to MBA and introduced one distance learning MBA course to me that was first internet-based interactive measures in the US. So I could start it together with working for one and half year. Especially time management was mutual difficulty among all students. English was also my big hurdle, never-ending… Continuous learning and self-brushing up are fun. This MBA study helped my next career in creating private equity fund by myself and other work' (Sara, female, Japanese)*

> *'In the choice of MBA course, my wife influenced a lot of my choice to learn in English even in Japan, and that was correct suggestion though it was harder for me. The classroom was a kind of chaos but very interesting and fun with different nationality's students and talented faculty who are 40% non-Japanese. I loved learning in this course with much cost-effective in national university and qualified contents' (Ichiro, male, Japanese).*

The start of MEXT's actions to encourage adult workers' re-learning, including higher educational reorganisation as a public policy, began in the late 1990s. In consideration of the future ageing of the society, with fewer children, working skill issues, information technology development, the long hours working model in Japan, and work efficiency, an expansion of learning opportunities that enable all adults to learn continuously in a challenging society were developed (MEXT, 2014). New opportunities for distance learning in foreign universities and Japanese universities started during this period, and respondents utilised this without quitting their jobs or their MBA programmes. The opportunities and challenges of online education by distance learning, such as how to secure interactivity, certifications, and confirmation of students' progress have been discussed (Moore and Kearsley, 2012). This method is becoming more popular for Japanese managers' learning as one of the qualified means of obtaining higher education, in consideration of their work, learning, and life balance. Rapid progress in information communication technology (ICT) would make distance learning education much easier than before to provide many options for communications among students, faculty, and peers

Ken received opportunities from his company to study English and economics for a short term in the UK, then finally got the chance to explore a master's degree in the UK. He talked about how hard and exciting his experiences tackling the course of study were, and how he learned from world-class faculty and a diverse place of learning.

> 'I got a chance from the company to study in the UK for two years and got the master of science in global market economics. I enjoyed it and always struggled to complete the course… I had a nightmare sometimes and could not sleep well. However, great opportunities and experiences in many aspects. I had a chance to learn from one of a great Professor who got the Nobel Award and specialist of unemployment. It was a very diverse place and different type of diversity from the US. This experience helps my current

> *work as program director in management school very much, and I appreciate my company's support' (Ken, male, Japanese).*

Taka got an opportunity to work in a US laboratory as a researcher for some months, and working in a collaborative lab, which was fascinating for him. He was able to publish one article while having a mind-opening research discussion.

As her first overseas experience, Megumi stayed in France for six months to participate in the MBA school exchange program when she was in a master's degree course.

> *'it was my first overseas living and learning experience in a certain period, so it was fascinating and interesting for me. Students came from various countries, and I could experience many cultures and enjoy communication fully as I was a bit older than other students without being nervous, and had a margin of my mind. Japanese is called as no-argument people I could express my good point to be flexible, can adjust discussion as western and Indian students talked too much and argued too much, and had difficulty in forming group's opinion. So, I found I can be confident in me and do my way'*
> *(Megumi, female, Japanese)*

One female manager also talked about her domestic experience, saying that she felt a big jump in her learning when she moved to Kochi prefecture to Tokyo. There, she could be responsible for her dream job of promoting corporate responsibility, focusing on society and patients as the eventual result of her proposals for a popular training program. There, her role could be much more significant and closer to her dream (Nana). Therefore, though still in the small island nation of Japan, the relatively minimal geographic difference still may reflect on a manager's learning behaviour and dispositions.

Opportunities in English speaking environments are related to increasing opportunities in MNCs in the globalised business field, and working opportunities with employees and clients in the world. Respondents captured them, considered options, chose one, then achieved them effectively with their learning, adding to the *diverse workplace* in a Japanese setting. Social contexts around respondents influenced their approaches and attitudes to learning: the progress of ICT, the change in educational policies, and institutional support for learning opportunities.

4. 2. 3 Significant Learning Events and Experiences in Adult Life

Respondents provided their thoughts about their learning and learning experiences on a one-page 'learning history questionnaire,' based on their memories and reflections, before the interview. First, the questionnaire asked them to 'provide a very short overview of the most significant training, development and learning events' they had experienced in their adult life. It then requested more details of these events. Next, the respondents were asked to select one event and explain their reasons for selecting and participating in it. Last, the respondents were asked to describe their thoughts on their views of learning. The goal of the questionnaire was to get respondents to remember their memories of their learning experiences in a progressively narrowing process.

Appendix I summarises the significant learning events and experiences in each respondent's adult life. All of the choices are listed, but not all are described in detail, and the choices are varied. Selected company-sponsored opportunities include: global training (Shin and Mihoko), volunteering activity (Keiko), training for female managers (Chika), and continuous mentoring (Satoko). Selected external opportunities include: a seminar to discuss global social agendas (Osamu and Junko), and PhD study experience (Taka). Managers' dispositions to learn are

related to the respondents' discussion, even though they may have had difficulty recalling past events.

Appendix H also explains that respondents received influences from their business mentors, friends, colleagues, and university professors when they were learning during higher education. In the period of their working life, managers were influenced by other factors and those influences transformed their learning attitudes and approaches. Shin and Mihoko had foreign mentors who were their previous bosses, and they talked about how they could grow with their advice, could learn from them, and how that relationship and transformed approach generated their next learning opportunities.

> *'When I became sales group manager as a big promotion at the beginning of '30s, he said "Shin, congratulations!" and I asked him who is my group members. Then he said that "Shin, didn't you learn? Hiring or firing is up to you". Then I started to make job descriptions with HR and recruited internally and externally. I did not know how to make a business plan and management, and he led me to autonomy. He was a one of the key person for me to take an opportunity to participate in the company-wide learning university training' (Shin, male, Japanese).*

> *'She was a first person to start to increase the presence or public affairs (PR) work strategically in our company. I thought the same thing but could not in Japan subsidiary. She asked me why you are not willing to make PR like the one independent division, then I was asked if "yes or no?". Then I answered "Yes!" as I had the same thought as her idea. She always learned a lot by herself, such as speaking ability in English, technical knowledge and so on, and how to talk logically. She gave me an opportunity to participate in the global training held in Switzerland. I always appreciate her leadership and mentoring. I started to take English face to face lessons when I started to work with her. I was inspired by her and could change my approach to learning' (Mihoko, female, Japanese)*

Shin, Mihoko and Hideo expressed their feelings of honour at being selected as attendants for global training with managers and senior executives from other countries to discuss how to solve issues around the company together. Shin has worked non-J-MNC continuously, even though a tough period with many lay-offs, and survived without changing the company he worked for. Managers working in J-MNCs also received *recognition to their achievements in the workplace,* as well as opportunities to work abroad and training opportunities. Thus, *recognition in the workplace* would be significantly influenced by managers' expanding learning disposition and activities.

Keiko's volunteering activity provided by her company helped her move her career from marketing to social responsibility work in the same company, and Satoko utilises continuous mentoring support from her previous boss for her daily work when she encounters difficulties and obstacles. Chika unexpectedly enjoyed participating in the female managers' training sessions offered by the company, as it was an excellent opportunity to reconsider her future career plan together with how to act and perform well in management level work. She did not want to participate in this training at first, as she questioned why it was only for female managers, but eventually, this became her way of learning. She said 'Nothing is wasteful for our lives.'

Osamu and Junko chose the same external learning opportunity, thinking about a global social agenda, and it helped expand their external network and their perspective beyond their work. Both of them say it was a meaningful learning opportunity.

Taka experienced higher motivation to accumulate his business work experience, in addition to researcher' experience, when he was rejected by interviewers when he tried to change his field to business and applied to some companies after getting a PhD. His resume was not accepted to be a business manager, so his learning motivation was stimulated, learning him to then finally get the job position in the business field that he desired. He said he learned a lot from this experience as 'very

nice learning for me'. 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) is the social framework for a community who share interests, issues, and enthusiasm about specific themes, and enhance knowledge and skills through continuous interrelationships among one another (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This seminar is an example of a CoP. It was situated with around 70 motivated middle-aged and older adults who were interested in globalised society who gathered every month to discuss the topic, focusing on the global agenda, once a month for all of 2010. Together with the whole discussion, participants developed each participant's projects for practical implementation and aided in knowledge development to share them. Each of them is a professional in a particular field, and they have been continuously gathering and influencing each other since 2010. This kind of dynamic is a very important learning place and opportunity. MBA study by distance learning is also an example of a CoP, as interaction with international students and faculty around the mutual interests and goals of the master of business administration utilisingInformation Communications Technology (ICT) to connect, even though they are physically separated in different countries. Hideo's example of participating in the Berkley Innovation Forum in the USA is another 'Community of Practice' which joins the community of innovation gurus' together to influence each other. Company training is yet another 'CoP', as it involves the company community. Continuous mentoring with a former boss can be seen as a CoP in an informal format. Therefore, the researcher recognised that all respondents participated and utilised the opportunity of CoPs in some way, whether formal or informal, in Japan or across countries.

Although respondents did not necessarily recognise it themselves, the majority of them were participating in CoP-based events, where learning opportunities were based on the intersection of their work identity (disposition of working) and work practice (active learning) as illustrated in Fig. 2.4 (the holistic model of learning in working life by Illeris, 2004). Illeris pointed out that this overlapping place is where 'the most important factors in connection with learning in working life take place' (Illeris, 2004:439). Therefore, the various CoPs in which the respondents participated link the theoretical implication of Illeris's holistic model of learning in

working life and a Japanese manager's approach to active learning. Illeris described the importance of the overlapped area between work identity and work practice as follows:

> 'Identity is always both an individual, biographical identity: an experience of a coherent individuality and a coherent life course, and at the same time a social, societal identity: an experience of a certain position in the social community' (Illeris, 2004:436).

4.2.4 Attachment to Learning in Companies in Japan

All the Japanese managers interviewed pointed out that *proactive* learning and ability to learn on one's own is necessary to survive in the current global, competitive, and changing workplace, especially in a Japanese context. Their comments do not align with Japan's slow pace of national consensus on the implementation of lifelong learning policies and practices, as pointed out by UNESCO's Faure report (1972) and Ogden (2010). Japanese workers are becoming increasingly responsible for directing their learning and development as suggested by the literature review and conceptual framework sections in this thesis. Because Japan generally has a lifetime employment system, Japanese organisations appear to provide plenty of company training, but this type of 'one-size-fits-all' training does not focus on the capabilities and needs of individuals.

Japanese people are portrayed as not only self-critical but also modest, never proud of themselves, stoic, never satisfied with themselves and eager to self-improve (Takata, 2003; Leuyers and Sonoda, 1999). They often have tacit knowledge obtained through collective engagement and solidarity (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The following respondent's comments illustrate their thoughts about Japanese organisational characteristics and how those characteristics relate to attitudes and approaches to learning. The comments also suggest possible modifications to these organisational characteristics.

> 'I feel my colleagues in the company (non-J MNC) do not have enough will to learn, and most of all are male. I think they seem to have self-confidence. For example, Japanese participants in the global conferences seem they are Ok without learning before and during the conference. They might feel the method that they have done is correct, and if their method does not work in the market and produce further profit, nobody can improve it because they are correct. Then they are quitting the job. They seem to dislike changes because they cannot survive in the company without learning as change is occurring in the company every day' (Mihoko, female, Japanese).

> 'Japanese culture is more monoculture, centralised, and still domestic though our company's culture is changing by new top management. Major language is still only Japanese and technology is not connected to a global standard. Japan will have difficult times if we cannot change it. We need to compromise the method from Japanese standards to global standards to avoid the Galapagos type systems escaping from past success models. I think the Japanese company's speed for business is still slow for the firm success' (Keiko, female, Japanese)

> 'I think it is important to have mutual trust and respect for others as equals, accepting people regardless differences on experiences. Speaking up is also key to communicate solidly' (Chika, female, Japanese).

> 'We tend to do too much emphasising or harmonising, and interdependent each other… In a business context, it does not add any value to the team rather insisting opinion. It is a regrettable fact we need to change the view of respecting people as Japanese' (Taka, male, Japanese)

> "Japanese culture of learning is very conservative, one-way direction, and low speed and inflexible, therefore I chose my education overseas and non-Japanese MNC as my working place" (Junko, female, Japanese)

The above-mentioned Japanese managers pointed out some specific criticisms of Japanese society and its workplace. These included a lack of proactive learning attitudes, a mono-cultural environment, inflexibility, a school-type one-way teaching method, a process-driven systematic work style with too many details, slower decision-making, bottom-up style management, and slow progress in utilising Information Communications Technology (ICT).

Sugimoto (2014) wrote that 'Japan is often described as an internally homogeneous island nation' (Sugimoto, 2014: 6). Government policy contributed to this isolated status by creating a steadily centralised state, and linguistic unification that was a step forward in shaping the national identity (Rarick, 1994; Tweed and Lehman, 2002).

Ken, a respondent who operates a Japanese business school in English for Japanese senior executives, noticed that the Japanese participants have difficulty participating in two-way interactions.

> '*It is tough for Japanese executives to do case method, debating, discussing with each other in English. They ask questions, questions, and questions. This is one of Japanese context, and we are so much accustomed to a one-way lecture. Many Japanese executives feel case method like very uncomfortable for the first week, but after that, they can do more. Japanese executives tend to know Professor's answer. However, this is not management. Moreover, there is no single right answer. This is also related to Japanese organisational context' (Ken, male, Japanese)*

Historically, two-way interactive learning has not been disseminated in Japan. Yamazaki's cross-cultural learning theory also proposes that the 'the *Confucian* ethics that creates a moral discipline in Hofstede's cultural dimension also plays an

important role in learning styles among Asian countries' (Yamazaki and Kayes, 2010: 2274). Nakata further explains that 'East Asian learners, whom educational contexts are to a greater or lesser extent influenced by *Confucius*, are generally obedient, passive, and teacher-dependent' (Nakata, 2011: 902) based on a substantial amount of evidence on learner autonomy in East Asia. Tran (2013) explains that *Confucian* learning styles produce students with a passive view and attitude towards asking questions in the classroom and instead focus on memorising knowledge provided by teachers (Tran, 2013:60). The Socratic method is accepted as a form of a cooperative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presumptions. Thus, based on this research result, many respondents highlighted how the Japanese learning approach in education and workplace learning is based on one-way didactics with less questioning and interactivity, which is aligned with Nakata's perspective (Nakata, 2011). Findings in 4.1, 'Early Learning and Importance of Active learning,' also suggest that more interactive and dialogue based learning would support students' learning for within the 'active learning' strategy presented by Japanese governmental-led educational curriculum guidelines. Key themes to support the new reform strategy are: 'interdependence,' 'collaboration,', and 'creativity' (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b).   The Japanese government is also promoting policy implementation related to 'recurrent education to adult learners,' reforming the current higher education system for adult learners (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). In addition to this, Yoshida (1997) points out that the Japanese management system traditionally placed importance on interdependence, mutual trust, and central relationships.

The research results show that interviewees tried to learn from typical Japanese environments. After some reflection, they thought about possible solutions to transforming themselves as well as the organisational learning attitudes and behaviours in the workplace.

> *'The way of learning in Japan is teaching given structure; there is no space to be sceptical, thinking of logical rationale and discussion something. We*

need to think about the answer by ourselves, not asking. Another point is that our learning contents have a discrepancy between the order and the gap between what we are learning and what we could be applying. The knowledge v.s. The application is one example. We learn difficult stuff, but we never talk about how to apply in the practical area. It would be more interesting' (Taka, male Japanese)

'Japanese context in learning-memorising style is not comfortable for me. The more interactive and creative way would be fun and useful' (Sara, female, Japanese)

'There was a few discussion training in English in my company, but I feel I am not good at it. More logical thinking and ability to explain in Japanese and English both are important. Also, communication ability is important as it can create solutions, even though English is not very fluent' (Keiko, female, Japanese).

Other respondents did give credit when companies offered training.

Ken says that he appreciated his company's support of learning and his need for learning as a consultant.

'Thanks to the company policy to encourage self-learning as a consultant, I became comfortable to learn by myself. The consultant should learn their client's business field in a short period, sometimes within a week as we need to provide advanced and appropriate advice to them. So self-learning by books is the best way in consideration of time limitation' (Ken, male, Japanese).

Also, Ken points out how the role-oriented culture in Japan is one of Japan's organisational strengths.

"Learning is available everywhere. Western companies focus on professionality, but Japanese employee has different kinds of jobs in a single

company and share knowledge and support each other. Task-oriented culture in Western and role-oriented culture in Japan. In the mid/long-term perspective, role-oriented culture provides organisational strengths as a shared accumulated value in the organisation. We can say Japanese way make each dot to a line, then face. I think detours in the Japanese company have meanings and strength' (Ken, male, Japanese)

Japanese society, as well as business and educational organisations, are being forced to transform to meet Japan's social changes. Conflict cannot be avoided when workers do not modify their behaviours from their conventional thinking. Interviews from the respondents offer possible solutions to help address the conflict based on their reflections. Previously embedded social rules of business conduct in Japanese organisations, along with un-consciously identified tacit knowledge (Nonaka, 1991: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), were drawn out in this section. This embedded and tacit understanding continues to influence Japanese managers. Quotes from the respondents show their reflections on the historical significance and influence of these tacit expectations.

4.2.5 Active Learning by Female Managers in Japan

There were 11 female managers in the research sample, nine Japanese and two non-Japanese. Questions related to gender equality were not directly asked during the interviews because it might be a sensitive issue. Even still, some female managers revealed living through tough and discriminatory experiences and offered thoughts on how to survive similar situations. Other managers did not directly mention difficult experiences, but instead, talked about behaving *proactively* to explore and to create learning environments to improve their situations focusing their *self-growth*. This unasked for information about the environment of female managers turned out to be an unexpected key component to answering some of the questions about the social aspects of a manager's learning in Japan. All six male managers were married, and seven of the nine female managers were single when the

interview was conducted. The single female managers stated specifically that they focused on their career development and actively sought out continuous education.

After the beginning of the Meiji Restoration in 1868, Japan created a new working model to catch up to Western countries. After World War II, Japan sought an even more efficient working model. None of these changes, however, improved a female manager's working environment in Japan (Shiota, 2011: Sugimoto, 2014). The Act on Securing, Etc. of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Men and Women Employment was executed in Japan in 1986. Still, fundamental improvements, such as a punitive clause for when a company does not follow the law were not included. The Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society was enforced in 1999, but with are many issues yet to be addressed (Shiota, 2011). Governmental policies are also weak on supporting gender equity because the tax system offers rewards for being a full-time housewife. In the sample, the female managers in their forties who structured their business careers in Japanese organisation have had a proactive attitude to learning.

In the research results, female managers were found to have had fewer opportunities and tended to be more discriminated against than male managers, especially in the Japanese workplace. This tendency could be seen in both Japanese and non-Japanese female managers. Japanese female managers generally felt that the Japanese workplace and hierarchy, as well as society, did not welcome a female manager's assertiveness. Non-Japanese female managers felt the same way, but noted that they did not feel that way when they lived or worked in their home countries (Margaret and Li).

Three female Japanese managers said:

> *'My father recommended me to get any certificate based on their learning in the university to survive in men-dominated Japanese society' (Sara, female, Japanese).*

'I encounter many moments that I feel female discrimination in the workplace even now. Primarily I have opportunities to work with salespeople, so almost all the time I feel so. I was treated with what she can do for marketing when I moved to the marketing department in previous food non-J-MNC. I think they are hopeless and I should show what I can do for them and did it, then they were changing their attitudes once they realised I could do it. It took for two or three months. However, this is the only way that I could do. Also, I encounter a similar situation when I meet external client and the first time I visit them; they normally express their impression which she is. Again, I provided effective information or concrete proposal for three to six months; then they understand what I can do for them. Particularly the retail industry has a visible or invisible intense female discrimination. I needed to develop a human relationship to overcome the situation based on my learning. This Japanese traditional business custom and quality does not change so quickly. So, I need to motivate myself through my learning. Otherwise, I cannot survive here, as I fall into the pits of hell....'
(Shoko, female, Japanese).

"I fully understood how hard to survive in Japanese trading company as a female worker without specific skills. Then I quitted it then went to the school of Certified Public Accountant (CPA), studied it hard then received the certificate, then joined the current multinational audit company. If I were back to university period, I could select to enter the manufacturing related company that can allow female managers to work well, not a trading company that is still a male-dominated organisation. My mother recommended me to become a pharmacist with a national certificate as it is desirable to continue working as a woman in Japan. This meant how female managers felt working environment in Japan for women was hard and discriminatory' (Satoko, female, Japanese).

These types of comments were not only from Japanese female managers but also from non-Japanese female managers. Margaret said:

"My father always told me that I should never depend on someone's salary (e.g., their husband). So, it was always good if I earn my salary, that learning is nothing people can take away that is always my, let's say, profit. It was not common during that period' (Margaret, female, non-Japanese).

Satoko and Junko commented that they learned that learning and challenges are essential for women during tough periods of life and were also told that chance and talent are important for women in business and life.

'I learned from my mentor that if you receive chances, just get it! Moreover, up escalator should be taken' (Satoko, female, Japanese).

'Talent cannot be lost, although money can be lost, by my mother after her experience in World War II' (Junko, female, Japanese)

Japanese social acceptance can be hard to come by when the conservative cultural environment is challenged as Megumi explains:

'When I quit a job in my 20's and joined the graduate school, many friends and colleagues said why you are doing it now as a woman, and it is enough for women to study in the university. Other female friends who went overseas universities to study further had the same experience. I think women would like to learn so much and we can connect each other in various stages more. I was told that 'do you want to reset the life or sacrifice your life?'. I was so sorry to hear that as I was not understood why I wanted to learn continuously. I think that Japanese culture should be more proactive for learning. The message that we can learn at any age is vital' (Megumi, female, Japanese).

The struggle of female managers in Japan may be related to Japan's ranking as country 114 out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report (GGGR) issued by the World Economic Forum (Abe, 2017).

'Japan (114) sees reversals of progress on the Political Empowerment subindex counter-balance notable progress on the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index. This is due, in part, to increases in gender parity for wage equality for similar work, women's estimated earned income and the country's share of female legislators, senior officials and managers as well as professional and technical workers. Japan has also experienced a multi-year trend towards near-parity in enrollment in tertiary education, which would result in the country fully closing its Educational Attainment gender gap for the first time. It has also fully closed its Health and Survival gender gap for the first time since 2011' (World Economic Forum, 2017: 17).

Lam (2002) also pointed out that the traditional Japanese employment situation is as follows;

'It is often argued that the vitality of the Japanese employment system is sustained by personnel management rules and practices which make a clear distinction between the 'core" and the 'non-core' employees. The former, predominantly male, enjoy the privileges of long-term employment, wage increases and promotion based on age and length of serve (*nenko*), and internal career progression through job rotation and in-company training; whereas the latter group is excluded. Women workers constitute a high proportion of the latter category of employees' (Lam, 2002: 3).

Keiko and Shoko said that their parents were concerned about sending them, especially as girls, overseas to study after middle and high school; however, they were finally able to convince their parents to allow them to live abroad.

There were no similar comments about gender discrimination from male managers.

Looking at the latest data from global gender equity indicators such as HDI (Human Development Index), GDI (Gender Development Index), GII (Gender Inequality Index), and GGI (Gender Gap Index), Japan has been, and is still now, apparently behind other developed countries. Recently, however, the Japanese government put forth aggressive numerical targets and updated figures of the 4th basic plan for gender equity in May 2016 (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2016). As Lam pointed out (Lam, 2002), historically and in the modern period, Japanese society and the workplace has been male-dominated, giving leadership to males, and only a limited number of female senior positioned leaders could receive opportunities and survive in the workplace. This was particularly true after World War II, although it has not been changed until now. It is improving based on public monitoring by the international institutions who focus on the improvement of gender discrimination, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Labor Organisation (ILO) and UNESCO. The first step of remarkable progress in the official announcement for the advancement of equal employment opportunities was 'the new provisional Japan's plan for dynamic engagement of all citizens' (Abe, 2017) led by Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe. The Basic Act for Gender-Equal Society by the Japanese government in 1996 as a working style focusing on work-life-balance and transformation of the working method for male workers, could not have been promoted and accepted during the period of high economic growth in Japan in the 1990s. The implementation of the law has been rapidly progressing after Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's second term, beginning in 2012, as he is trying to make dramatic changes for the empowerment of women and to make work-style reform happen for regular and non-regular female and male workers along with some positive actions for female workers. As a majority of respondents had spent their early working life before the recent movement on working style reform, understanding that female respondents did not feel a direct impact and influence from the series of governmental actions on their work and learning behaviours and attitudes would be reasonable. This was the period for female respondents to be able to absorb environmental impacts more than in their later working period. The

influence and impact of the current movement can still, however, encourage and support their activities.

The researcher recognised that respondents tried to *seek their career opportunities proactively* and learn necessary skills and concepts to survive to focus their *self-growth* in the workplace and gaining skills and knowledge in the Japanese workplace using organisational and cultural contexts. They received *recognition in the workplace* as their motivation to work and pursue further learning. They are trying to participate in the opportunities that communities of practice (CoPs) offer proactively, though they did not necessarily recognise they were CoPs. Their *continuous reflections* on attitudes and approaches to learning and self-development in life are significant. The above implication from this gender point of view supports the insight that female managers' learning dispositions are influenced by the above social contexts, as well as by their activities and experiences. These would be interlocked mutually throughout the working life stage, and reflect the Japan-specific working environments and customs attributing to female managers' behaviours and attitudes to learning. *The diverse workplace* would be desired in Japan.

4.3. Non-Japanese Managers: Perception of Japanese ways

Japan continues to have relatively low levels of foreign residents (less than 2% in 2016, compared to a more than 8% average in OECD in 2014). Relative to other countries, Japan has few foreign residents and workers. Attracting foreign workers, however, has been identified as a critical factor for Japan's continuous economic growth, especially considering its ongoing ageing and low birth rate societal progression (Sonoda, 2017).

Five respondents including two female managers came to work in Japan as Appendix G shows. Two Chinese managers first began to study the Japanese

language, then studied in a Japanese university, then started to work in a J-MNC continuously (Gary and Li). Two managers began to work in the Japanese subsidiary of a J-MNC and a non-J-MNC respectively then worked in Japan for two years as an international assignee (Margaret and Victor). Tony first came to Japan to join the international exchange program supported by the international governmental collaboration network, then started to work in a J-MNC, after which he moved to another J-MNC, and is now working there together with operating his own business. Li, Gary, and Tony have lived and worked in Japan for more than 20 years. Margaret and Victor went back to their home countries after the expiration of their assignments, but they say their life in Japan was fascinating and happy.

Audrey and Tony had Japanese cultural influence since they were children. Tony learned *karate* (a martial art developed in Japan) when he was young and was familiar with Japanese culture. Audrey said:

> *'Japanese animation and idles such as "Shonentai (Japanese boys idol group)" were very popular in China and girls collected their photo cards. My father worked in a Japanese trading company, and I received his influence. I visited him in Japan, felt Japan is a good place and food is great. Japanese animations such as "Doraemon", "Hananoko Run Run", "Akko-chan" were also fun for me. I was very familiar with them in Chinese and influenced a lot. I learned Japanese in China first, and naturally, I became to think about studying in a Japanese university' (Audrey, female, non-Japanese).*

Audrey and Gary enjoyed learning in the Japanese style, and the researcher did not hear any uncomfortable feeling or experiences with the usual didactic form of learning in Japan.

> *'I was treated very nicely in Yamagata prefecture that is one of the rural areas, and I have very nice memories only. The learning method is fine with me' (Gary, male, non-Japanese).*

'I had an outstanding university teacher in Japan in my seminar and friends. Very interesting and had many opportunities and lots of discussions and training camps. I could hear many pieces of advice from peers who already worked in Japanese companies, and I thought it was great to choose this university and this strong network' (Audrey, female, non-Japanese).

In the workplace environment, they mentioned some uniquely Japanese cultural characteristics, such as hierarchical communications and process-driven and slow decision making organisational systems.

'In Japanese workplace, subordinates do not challenge their boss and are reluctant to show their own strengths that are superior to their boss. In China, this is very usual to challenge each other. I felt uneasy' (Audrey, female, non-Japanese)

'Japanese is a process driven-systematic. Long-term time frame but the decision-making process is too long but once decided, it goes well but takes a long time. Very structured. People do not want to make a mistake' (Gary, male, non-Japanese)

Tony talked about his strong passion for learning.

'I am born learning and love to learn always. I think myself is a life-long learner. I got three master's degrees from UK and Canadian universities by distance learning together with working. My mother was a professional teacher, so she influenced me as I love learning and teaching both. My history teacher in high school was also the best teacher for me, and he has a distinct approach as a storyteller' (Tony, male, non-Japanese).

Tony is a professional lecturer in cross-cultural training and realised how learning is essential and crucial to workplace learning. He mentioned that *'kenshu'* in Japanese is used for the translation of *'Training,'* but that it is not quite the same. He suggested that '*kenshu*' is one of the educational approaches that sounds 'mandated and boring' and 'training,' can have a clear objective and encourage active attitudes. These two words of *'kenshu'* and '*training*' should be used appropriately based on the purpose of learning opportunities sought. This is also related to the current movement to explore active learning though Japanese educational reform (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b), and even for workplace learning. A fine-tuned curriculum, focusing *on learning with an objective* and *active attitude* for learning is desired.

Margaret learned from her father that she should never depend on someone's salary (e.g. a husband's) and it helped her to grow. Her father learned in night school together while working during the daytime with great enthusiasm and effort. Her learning attitude is also always *proactive,* focusing on her *self-growth*. She learned from others in a positive way, even it that feedback was sometimes hard to hear, and it has helped her work as a head of global communications.

> *'Learning is nothing people can take away that's always my, let's say, profit. Trust with people would be an important key to learning. I participate very impressive learning opportunity in a group seminar which was a mixed group from different companies when I worked as a sales rep. The feedback I got was along the line that I am selfish and want to stand in the middle (always know everything better, and that might be because of my PhD). So, the learning was to listen more to people, to understand their sensitivity and their history. Show respect to others is very important for my success. This is a great base of my current work' (Margaret, female, non-Japanese)*

She also pointed out her impression of the Japanese contexts and its weakness as follows:

> *'First of all, it was difficult to work with Japanese as they do not have many experiences to cope with different cultural background people. Because Japanese celebrates their historical cultures, I think sometimes it is difficult to learn and live in Japan. I was surprised many times that people did not try to learn from me. Japanese people tend to be too much humble. Leaders never encouraged employees to learn from foreigners. Senior leadership also did not do it. Mono-cultural and old and less diversity is Japanese context' (Margaret, female, non-Japanese)*

Victor came to Japan after several changes in companies he worked for, and he enjoyed his international assignee period working in Japan for two years.

> *'Interactivity by teachers, not monologue in the school is important; students can be opening up for questioning. At the same time, respect for teachers is important, without prejudice. I feel a big gap between the Japanese boss and top-down approach. Decision-making time in Japan is longer than in other countries, and it is a problem for success, that is one of the company's objectives. It needs to see reality and how it impacts our business now and the future. Sometimes communication is too late. Japanese colleagues should not be afraid of mistakes, and more open discussion would be helpful for their success' (Victor, male, non-Japanese).*

He also mentioned how much he learned in Japan and encouraged Japanese managers to further their *self-growth*. His experiences in Japan made him reflect on himself and his bias about Japan, helping him to transform his ethnocentric habits (Mezzrow, 2000). He also said he would look for another learning opportunity to participate in an executive program for *his future growth*.

> *'In Japan, human cultural value has an important role and self-respect to community members that very few countries have such national behaviours and habits, is very good in Japan. I learned a lot from Japanese ways such as*

many respect and openness in society. Japanese colleagues should not be afraid of mistakes, and more open discussion would be helpful for them. I look forward to participating in an executive program in the future, and I think continuous learning is important for my career and working life' (Victor, male, non-Japanese).

Five non-Japanese respondents had a firm willingness to participate in learning opportunities for their *self-growth* and *proactively* participated in learning opportunities. They pointed out the strengths of Japanese society and organisations, such as mutual respect, the structural learning method, and warmness to welcome them. They also suggested weaknesses, such as slow decision making, fear of making mistakes, hierarchical working culture*, less interactivity and proactive attitude of learning*, *less learning with an objective*, and *less diversity in the workplace.*

Their awareness of the Japanese context and thought processes could reinforce and align with key themes derived from the Japanese managers' interviews. They hope that the Japanese workplace will come to be *more diverse* while nurturing Japanese strengths.

4.4 Future Aspirations: Continuous Learning in Life

All respondents expressed their future aspirations for their careers and lives, defining a learning plan to help reach those goals. The respondents' aspirations for ten years in the future are diverse and well thought out. A majority of the respondents said that even though their aspirations are still tentative, and they have not yet decided their future, they have career aspirations within the company and possibly elsewhere. Further long-term aspirations included *contributions to society* and *continuous learning*.

The respondents specifically talked about their aspirations. Eight respondents (Shoko, Ken, Shin, Chika, Hideo, Taka, Ichiro, and Mihoko) have higher career aspirations where they could utilise their accumulated knowledge, experiences and networks. They desire to become a general manager of an MNC subsidiary in another country, a senior manager or some similar higher position in their current company or elsewhere. Plans to achieve their goals include participating in senior management training and completing an MBA course. Proof of their positive attitudes is shown by their willingness to use their expenses, to negotiate with the company to reach their goals, and to do the work required to get any necessary certifications. Four respondents (Keiko, Satoko, Nana, and Junko) desired socially meaningful work where they could teach, work in a non-profit-organisation, support artists, or work in a local pharmacy to serve people while also contributing to the community. Some of them are already starting to seek new job opportunities. Sara and Ken hope to study further in their doctorate courses to get a higher qualification for developing their academic careers and bridging academia and industry. Two educational faculty members in the university (Megumi and Osamu) also seek to contribute to further collaboration between academia, industry, and government. Sara has an aspiration to establish her educational institution, and Ken would like to write a book about the macroeconomy for Japanese executives. Non-Japanese managers also expressed their future ambitions and possible approaches to attaining them. Victor wants to impact society through his current job in his home country and also internationally. Tony is a family man who desires a better work-life balance while also obtaining his PhD. Margaret seeks promotions and hopes to be a better leader in her current company. Gary and Audrey each want to find an opportunity to go to the US to work and study.

Managers' firm willingness to learn and their proactive career planning across an entire life span including after retirement, was not anticipated in these findings. This is surprising because in Japan the retirement plan is understood to begin at age 60 with a pension based on the lifetime employment system. This system has been generally maintained and followed while gaining further employment and new skills have not been sought as such. The typical human life now spans 80 to 100

years (Gratton and Scott, 2016), so it makes sense that managers are more aware of their long-term life learning and planning, including the next job. As the findings show, unintentional active participation in opportunities from CoPs is already being done by managers. As such, they can expect to have further *self-growth*, together with creating and participating in further *continuous learning* opportunities after retirement if their dispositions and social context interactions continue. Therefore, the third time dimension of 'Life after Retirement' is influenced by two key themes: *continuous learning* and *contributions to society*.

4.5 Unanticipated findings

Though gender equality was not the primary objective of this thesis research, it can be recognised as one of the possible critical influences in Japanese society as is seen in the findings of this research. This theme was not directly asked about during the interview, but the information was offered freely by the female respondents. This is not an issue only in Japan, but also in other countries. The gender equality issue is very critical especially in Japan, as is shown by the global gender equity indicators (HDI, GDI, GLL and GGI). Japan has been and still is, behind other countries. The Japanese government has expressed its desire to reach challenging numerical targets and updated figures in a recent governmental publication, 'The 4th basic plan for gender equity' in May 2016. Historically, modern Japanese society and the workplace have been male-dominated, giving leadership to males, with a limited number of female senior positioned leaders (Shiota, 2011). Female leaders received limited opportunities and often left the workplace or barely survived in the workplace. In the findings and data of this research, female managers were found to have had fewer opportunities and tended to be more discriminated against than male managers especially in the Japanese workplace. The fact that respondents tried to seek their career opportunities proactively and tried to learn necessary skills and concepts to survive, focusing on their *self-growth* in the workplace and gaining skills and knowledge, can be easily recognised. They tried to participate in the opportunities of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991) even if they did not recognise these opportunities as 'communities of practice'

per se. Their *continuous reflections* on attitudes and approaches to learning and self-development in life were more significant than male managers' efforts in these samples, through continuous learning, seeking and receiving opportunities to learn, changing subjects to learning promptly, and so on.

I also did not anticipate participants' holistic plans to learn through life and their strong willingness to *learn after retirement* beyond their working life. This theme came from questions about future aspirations for their career and life for ten years in the future, and the respondents looked at further *self-growth* by creating and participating in further learning opportunities and work after retirement in an ageing society. These findings reinforce the continuous interaction between their learning dispositions and the social environment around them throughout their life spans.

These findings coincidentally can also be used as a background to explain the recent rapid progress of governmental actions to promote learning in life, the educational system, working style reform, and the progress of recurrent education for adults. When this thesis research was started in 2011, the Japanese government had just declared their awareness of and intention to address these initiatives, but little progress had taken place. Finally, in 2016 the Japanese government launched massive programs after years of examination and discussion.

4.6 Conclusions

The findings from the thematic analysis of the interview data and contents of the learning history questionnaire about significant learning events and experiences in adult life were developed by three time dimensional perspectives to distinguish Japanese learning contexts: early learning in school days, adult working life, and life after retirement. The managers' learning dispositions had multifaceted influence from social interplay in a Japanese economic, cultural, and organisational context,

and mutual social conversation with other countries through their work as managers working in MNCs and life.

Each learning experiences, life history and biography drew out the learning disposition of Japanese respondents working in MNCs with higher interest and demand for learning than lower level workers. Japanese managers' learning dispositions have been influenced by much exposure to overseas culture, personal interactions, Japanese educational systems and learning environmental factors in the workplace and life. These dispositions were variously called the following, depending on the respondent: curiosity, eagerness to learn, proactive attitude, flexibility, and listening to and following their instincts. The methodology derived from Western theories of exploring each manager's life history and biography (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008) helped to label each respondent's learning disposition. Many Japanese managers have tacit and implicit thoughts, opinions, and knowledge, a mannerism that is culturally prevalent in Japanese society (Nonaka, 1991; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The methodology used in this thesis helped to draw out this often unspoken information.

Key dimensions used to analyse the interactions between dispositions and social environments included personal interactions with family members and close others, exposure to overseas culture, the current Japanese educational systems, career choices of working in MNCs, and attachment to learning in companies in Japan. Another key aspect is female managers' active learning, which was used to point out a specific context of Japanese society that has been developed historically and politically. Beginning in 2017, the Abe administration began to push Japanese governmental policies that promote gender equality and female managers' activities, reforms of the work style that demands long hours in organisations, and recurrent education reform in Japan. Non-Japanese respondents offered stories about their experiences in Japan along with their thoughts on their learning. Mentioning both strengths and weaknesses, they offered suggestions that along

with the suggestions of the Japanese respondents could be used to improve culture, organisations, and the educational system in Japan.

The key themes that enhanced Japanese managers' learning through life in the future converge. In school days, active learning, *proactivity and independence, interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective,* and *knowledge of diverse career choices* were derived from the data. The derived themes in school days align with the mission recently published by the Japanese government to promote active learning as a way of enhancing Japanese students' learning quality to meet societal needs (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). In adult working life with continuous reflections, *self-growth, recognition in the workplace, diverse workplace*, and *higher labour mobility* were identified. Significant to enhancing learning are continuous reflections on practices in working life along with observations on Japan's and other countries', societal context by the managers. The same key themes align with the suggested requirements of 'self-directed' adult learning as noted by Knowles & Assocites (1984), and with 'the process of reflecting upon oneself critically and questioning one's assumptions and philosophy as the base of the view of the world' by Mezirow (1977, 1991, and 2000). The third time dimension of Life after Retirement is influenced by two key themes: *continuous learning* and *contributions to society*.

'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) were utilised in some form as a learning opportunity by Japanese managers, often without the managers being aware of it. 'The central overlap between working practice and working identity' (Illeris, 2004: 439) in Illeris's holistic model of learning in working life (Illeris, 2004) is where 'the most important factors in connection with learning in working life take place' (Illeris, 2004: 439). Illeris points out that the central overlap in his above model is the place to develop the practice of the community. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003) also point out that significant individual dispositions and personal relationships are essential in the structure of communities of practice. The utilisation of CoPs by Japanese managers in the sample may suggest the intersection

of the managers' learning dispositions and learning practice in society. Thus, Illeris's model may help to explain the Japanese managers' utilisation of CoPs both practically and theoretically.

Three unanticipated findings are: female managers' struggles, and those struggles' influence on their will to learn; participants' holistic plans to learn through life and their strong will to learn after retirement beyond working life; and the coincidental Japanese governmental policy initiatives after 2016 to reform learning in life, the educational system, the working style of long hours, and improve the progress of recurrent education for adults.

The next section will have a deeper consideration and critical evaluation of the presented findings alongside the issues raised in the literature review.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This section more deeply examines and critically evaluates the findings that answer the following research questions:

- The central research question: What individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?
- The secondary research question: To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning explain the learning behaviours of Japanese managers?

A summary of the main themes, patterns and identified relationships are discussed along with the extent to which they are similar or different from other studies in the field. Most importantly, the meaning of the findings is explained.

5. 1 Overview of the Main Patterns and Relationships in Findings

The findings examined Japanese managers' learning in life from 1964 to 2015 through the theoretical lens of individual learning dispositions, social interplay with Japanese culture, and relevant social and organisational contexts in their lives.

The main patterns are as follows.

The time aspects of school days, working life, and life after retirement (for the future) are key pillars for the systematic interpretation of meanings. There are also analytical key themes that influence managers' individual learning disposition derived from the interviews, such as: personal interactions, exposure to overseas culture, the current Japanese educational systems, attachment to learning in companies in Japan, career choices of working in MNCs, opportunities for communities of practices, and active learning by female managers. Last, influential key themes and patterns to enhance managers' learning through life in the three time aspects were extracted from the findings: *in school days with active learning,*

proactivity and independence, interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective, and *knowledge of diverse career*; in *working life with continuous reflections, self-growth, recognition in the workplace, diverse workplace*, and *higher labour mobility;* are finally, *life after retirement* is influenced by two key themes, *continuous learning* and *contributions to society*.

The relationship among these themes and patterns to enhance Japanese managers' learning through life can be integrated into one model of 'influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future,' referring back to the models of learning in working life developed by Illeris (2004) and Jorgensen and Warring (2001). This is explained in the next section 5.2 Meaning of Findings.

5.2 Meaning of Findings

5.2.1 Discussions

Early learning in school days and learning through working life were analysed and depicted graphically in Appendix G (Managers' Learning Experiences and Life Histories) to show the different learning characteristics and social influences for each period. The findings, derived from the use of Western theories and methodologies that focus on individual learning disposition and biography (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008), contributed towards drawing forth the tacit and embedded thoughts of Japanese managers for identifying learning dispositions as a core and transformative agency (Nonaka, 1991: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). The application of a biographical structure in the analysis along with focusing on the significance of learning dispositions worked well to obtain stories related to learning in life from Japanese managers who are less comfortable with a directly Western questioning style, even those Japanese managers working in MNCs.

The continuous social interplay between the individual learning disposition of the respondents and the influence from Japanese and other relevant contexts produced

multifaceted reflections on learning opportunities and respondents' attitudes and approaches. During school days, the weaknesses of the past and current Japanese educational systems could be derived: minimal interactivity and dialogue, a lack of proactive and independent attitudes towards learning, an unclear learning objective, and the need to have more knowledge about diverse career choices. On the other hand, the strengths of the Japanese education system have led to a rapid improvement of the nationwide standard of student's basic learning capabilities, at least in the short term. OECD (2015) described that 'Japan is among the top PISA 2012 performers in mathematics, science and reading' (OECD, 2015: 4). Even though the strengths are understood by the respondents - especially by the non-Japanese managers - they stated that the improvement of the weaknesses above and an increase in proactive learning is vital for the future of Japanese education. Coincidentally, the Japanese government is going forward with an 'Active Learning' style, which includes dialogical and interactive learning. This teaching method is based on the new educational curriculum reform policy (MEXT, 2017a; 2017b). The thesis findings are consistent with the suggested direction of future education, which will be based on the strategy of the new policy.

In working life, the respondents' attitudes and approaches to learning were interwoven with the complex aspects of their individual learning dispositions and social contexts. Interactions between individual learning dispositions and social contexts often generate awareness of learning opportunities that then result in activities that bring about often unintentional participation in Communities of Practices (CoPs). A more proactive approach to learning is also expected because of the recent rapid progress of implementing social policies such as those related to education systems, gender equality, working style and recurrent education reform to produce learning opportunities and time for *self-growth* (MEXT, 2017a; 2017b; The Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, 2017b).

Agency (manager's learning disposition) and structure (invisible and behind the social phenomenon of learning) and the interrelationship between the two are

critical aspects that have been used to address complex and changing society, as had been found in previous social research of learning through life (Hodkinson et at., 2004; Hodkinson et al., 2008; Billett 2008). The findings of this research elaborated on each entity of agency and structure in the Japanese environment from the perspective of learning and pointed out the continuity in the contextualised interrelationship between individual learning dispositions and social environments. Since structure (social contexts) and agency (manager's learning dispositions) may both include individual factors (personal and self-driven), they are also closely interrelated.

Learning through life is becoming a central part of this process, and the data from this thesis show the influences the key factors have had and may support future learning in Japanese society. The findings elaborated managers' thoughts about *continuous learning after retirement* in an ageing society through their *contributions to society*. The theoretical focus in Illeris's model of learning in working life (2004) is working life; therefore, the findings contribute to adding another time aspect of 'life after retirement' to his original model, as well as adding the influential factors of *continuous learning* and *contributions to society*.

There is also a coincidence between the rapid progress in 2016 of Japanese governmental policy reform in educational systems, gender equality, working style, and recurrent education and this research aim, which was started in 2011; this brings attention to the compulsory governmental pressure for learning in life apart from individual learning autonomy pointed out by Rees et al. (1997a; 1997b).

5.2.2 A model of Influences on learning in Japanese Managers in the Future

The findings suggested that Japanese managers working in MNCs develop their learning dispositions by continuously reflecting on their behaviours, their experiences, their interrelationships with others and their interactions with social environments through their working practice. Billett (2014) seeks evidence of 'learning in the circumstances of practice' (Billett, 2014:674) to support 'a need for

practice settings to be legitimised, understood more fully and on their own terms as environments in which individuals come to participate and learn' (Billett, 2014: 690). The findings assist the needs identified by Billett.

The findings also discussed the past and present status of managers' interactions in society, their interrelationships with key actors, and the implications of using theoretical frameworks based on Western-derived social theories of learning. At the same time, suggestions for enhancing the Japanese managers' learning dispositions through life in the future are derived from the findings. Figure 5.1, 'a Model of Influences on Learning in Japanese Managers in the Future' shows this concept visually and is explained more fully as follows.
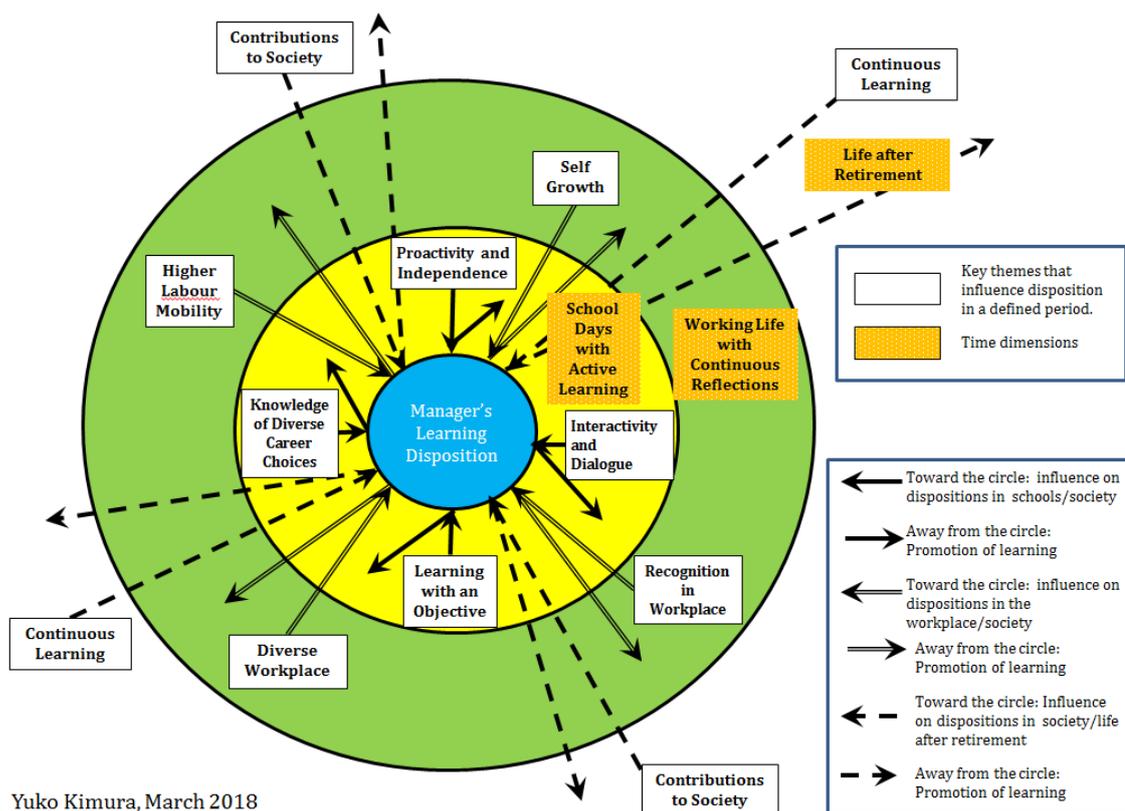
Figure 5.1 A Model of Influences on Learning in Japanese Managers in the Future

The data analysis utilised the time aspect of 'school days with active learning' and 'working life with continuous reflections'. The time aspect of 'Life after Retirement' is also shown in the model because the implications of the managers' aspirations expressed in the interviews suggest their distinct thoughts and plans for long-term learning. In the centre circle is 'manager's learning disposition,' which is usually an individual's unchangeable, but transformative, a character formed by time, influencers, and directions.

The circle just outside of the centre circle shows 'school days with active learning.' In 'school days', four key themes positively influenced and enhanced learning: *proactivity and independence, interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective, and knowledge of diverse career choices.* The circle outside of 'school days' is 'working life with continuous reflections.' In 'working life,' four other key themes influenced and enhanced learning: *self-growth, recognition in the workplace, diverse workplace, and higher labour mobility.* The area outside of the circles represents 'life after retirement' and is influenced by two key themes: *continuous learning and contributions to society.*

The hollow arrows pointing toward the centre circle from 'school days' show influences on a manager's disposition in schools and society. The hollow arrows pointing away from the centre circle through 'school days' show enhanced learning, together with the four key influential themes. The 'working life' circle shows arrows going to and from the 'manager's learning disposition' circle, where the arrows going toward that circle represent the influences of four key themes on disposition, and the arrows going away from the circle represent enhanced learning in working life and society.

The broken arrows going to and from the 'manager's learning disposition' circle from the 'life after retirement' area represent influences of the two key themes,

expected aspirations and learning and the resulting influence on disposition and learning in society.

The process shown in Figure 5.1 was inspired by the holistic model of learning in working life by Illeris (2004) and the model for learning at the workplace developed by Jorgensen and Warring (2001), which Ileris referenced. Illeris expanded previously developed models into the holistic model which have 'a distinction between social influences and individual work identity and work practice' (Illeris, 2004). Like the model by Illeris, Figure 5.1 shows influences for learning in work between a manager's learning disposition and social contexts but examines influences over a lifetime also.

Furthermore, Figure 5.1 shows how social structures (the ten key themes) in Japanese society along with agency (manager's learning disposition in the centre circle) are interrelated and mutually influenced. Figure 5.1 shows how the interrelationships between structure (social patterns and context) and agency (an individual's capacity to act independently) interact with each other to improve a manager's learning in the future. (Arrows from the key ten themes act on the manager's learning disposition: agency.) Figure 5.1 visually shows the interactivity between the time period (school days with active learning, working life with continuous reflections, and life after retirement) and the direction of influence (arrows pointing to and away from Manager's Learning Disposition: agency).

Each of the three areas outside of the centre circle represents a manager's learning in each period (school days, working life, and life after retirement). Themes that could be viewed as potentially positive and would probably reinforce learning were extracted. This relationship is not specifically addressed in Western learning theories, so it was used to build upon the Illeris model (2004), which itself was built upon the Jorgensen and Warring model (2001).

Unexpectedly, 'proactivity and independence' and 'interactivity and dialogue,' two of the key themes in 'school days,' align with the recently published new educational curriculum reform policy by the Japanese government (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). This reform plan has been implemented because rapid changes in knowledge, information, and technology are necessary for students living in a society that is evolving because of ICTs, globalisation, and ageing. Recent significant progress in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology also accelerated the discussion about how knowledge and learning-capacity development are essential to life and society, as well as suggestions for how the current education system and curriculum should evolve (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). Historically, Japanese education tended to focus mainly on studying to pass the university entrance exams with memorised knowledge from the one-way delivery-type educational model. Further transformation of Japanese education, which will become more proactive and focused on learning with an objective of each subject in depth can be expected (MEXT, 2017).

MEXT identifies that 'Active learning,' based on 'Interactive learning with dialogue' and 'independent-minded learning' would be an essential priority. 'Active learning' also includes how to link learning activities and interests to the direction of one's own career development and reflection on one's own behaviours and activities. 'Active learning' would be essential for Japanese students to adapt to a globalised society, and also useful in adult life, based on the national slogan for the education of 'Zest of Life' (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017: MEXT, 2017a and 2017b).

MEXT and the Japanese government think that now is the time to make this change happen based on the open collaboration between schools and society. The Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, expresses his action plan for promoting adult learning as follows:

> 'We will promote "recurrent education (continuing education)" enabling people to continue to learn, whatever their age. We will advance reform of universities and other higher education institutions, in order to meet the demand for practical education, such as addressing the diverse needs of

working professionals and providing the education required as IT personnel. Though these measures, I intend to implement bold policies that amount to two trillion yen' (The Prime Minister of Japan and His cabinet, September 25th, 2017b).

The thesis findings support the reformed strategic direction of Japanese educational policy reform as well as the rapid progress of promoting adult learning. The influences as suggested in Figure 5.1, 'a model of influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future,' may assist the Japanese government's effort using social-scientific point of view based on the empirical experiences from these findings.

The future for education in Japan is looking brighter. In March 2017, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published new curriculum guidelines defining the basic standards for education in kindergarten, elementary, middle, and high schools. This guideline, the 'Zest for Life' initiative (Kimura and Tatsuno, 2017), is to be used to influence Japanese society through 2030 and will be applied to the educational curriculums starting in 2020 (MEXT, 2017a). The findings in this thesis can provide a reference to pave that way.

5.3 How Findings Relate with Other Studies in this field

One of the less examined key theoretical pillars of this research is the focus on the significance of individual learning dispositions and biography argued by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004a). The findings reveal the critical role of individual learning dispositions as an essential base for learning, with the continuous process of interactivity of personal interactions, exposure to overseas culture, introduction to career choices in schools, and workplace and social community analysed in each biography. The findings show the significant influence of the Japanese educational system, a company's attachment to learning, opportunities for communities of

practice and female managers' struggles, all of which were tacit characteristics hidden in Japanese society. Paying attention to potentially tacit knowledge was pointed out by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995). The findings also drew out the usefulness of social research with a focus on significant learning dispositions and biography (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a; Lynch, 2008) in a Japanese environment. A particular item that was not identified by previous research is the continuity of social and cultural circumstances that influenced managers' learning dispositions across their lives in a Japanese setting.

The use of Illeris's theoretical model (2004) of a holistic model of learning in working life assisted in drawing out key themes and patterns, as well as in identifying their relationships, in a Japanese setting. Illeris's theoretical work especially drove the development of the model of 'influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future,' explained in section 5.2 Meaning of findings. Time dimensions in this research's model are school days with active learning, working life with continuous reflections, and life after retirement in Japan, going beyond Illeris's time dimension of working life (2004). Furthermore, the findings pointed out that examples of communities of practices (CoPs) in the results indicate the potential of the use of the theory of communities of practice in conjunction with the Illeris's (2004) model of learning in working life.

Also, the findings provided critical examinations on rapidly changing Japanese social contexts and challenges and their influence on managers' learning and characteristics in a variety of working environments. These findings were not drawn out in the previous qualitative research about Japanese nursing and IT managers done by Matsuo et al. (2008).

Results show that Western-derived social theories of workplace learning and learning in life are becoming more applicable as the tacit style of gaining knowledge

in Japan is becoming more Westernised according to the emerging needs for learning in a globalised business world and an ageing society.

6. Conclusions

This conclusion section has three roles. The first role is to provide a summary of the findings, explaining how they have contributed to answering the research questions. The second role is to consider the implications of the findings for potential theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. The third role is to review the limitations of this research and to suggest implications for future research.

6.1 Summary of Findings

Early learning in school data and working life data were analysed and depicted graphically in Appendix G (Managers' Learning Experiences and Life Histories) to show the different learning characteristics and social influences in the lives of the managers. The data supported Western theories and methodologies focusing on individual learning dispositions and biographies (Hodkinson et al., 2004: Lynch, 2008), which worked well to draw forth the tacit and embedded thoughts of Japanese managers (Nonaka, 1991: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995). Analysis by biographical structure, along with focusing on the significance of learning dispositions, worked well to obtain stories related to learning in life from Japanese managers, even those Japanese managers working in MNCs, who are less comfortable with a direct, Western-style questioning format.

The continuous social interplay between the learning dispositions of the respondents and influences from Japanese and other countries' contexts produces multifaceted reflections on learning opportunities, as well as respondents' attitudes and approaches. The characteristics of the current Japanese educational systems (minimal *interactivity and dialogue*, a lack of *proactive and independent attitude to learning*, an *unclear objective to learn,* and the need to have more knowledge about *diverse career choices*) are derived from the 'school days' period. On the other hand, the strengths of Japanese education systems have led to a rapid improvement of the nationwide standard of students' basic learning capabilities in the short term. The

thesis results are consistent with the suggested direction for the future education, which will be based on the strategy of the new policy to transform the education curriculum towards more 'active learning' via the new educational curriculum policy (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b).

In working life, the respondents' learning dispositions (agency) were interwoven with the complex aspects of social contexts (structure). Relationships between learning dispositions and social contexts are interrelated and inseparable. They often generate awareness of learning opportunities, which then result in activities that bring about the often unintentional participation in Communities of Practices (CoPs), as Lave and Wenger (1991) described CoPs. A more proactive approach to learning that is led by female managers in this research is expected because of the recent, rapid progress of reforming social policies, such as those related to gender equality, efficient working style, and recurrent education for Japanese individuals.

Based on the key aspects, themes, and patterns in the findings, as well as the Illeris's model (2004), 'a model of influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future' was developed. This model has the potential for practical use for policy development in Japan. Suggested themes are aligned with the Japanese government's new educational vision.

6.2 How the Findings Contributed to Answering the Research Questions

The primary research question of 'What individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?' is continuously explored and probed in this thesis. The secondary research question of 'To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning (e.g. Illeris, 2004: Hodkinson et al., 2004; Hodkinson et al,. 2008) explain the learning behaviour of Japanese managers?' is also examined.

- **What individual and external factors affect learning dispositions of Japanese managers at the individual level?**

Significant individual and external influencing key themes to managers' learning dispositions extracted from the analysis include personal interactions with family members and others, exposure to overseas culture, the current Japanese educational systems, career choices of working in MNCs, and attachment to learning within companies in Japan. The research results show that, in a Japanese setting, the learning disposition (agency) of managers working in MNCs is in the continuous process of interactivity with key individual and external factors (structure) in each time aspect of: 'school days,' and 'working life,' and 'life after retirement,' as shown in the Figure 5.1. The findings reveal the critical role of individual learning dispositions as an essential basis for managers' learning, which progresses due to the continuous process of interactivity with social factors in a Japanese manager's life. Key themes on the interrelationship between manager's learning dispositions, individual factors and external factors that are interrelated and inseparable may enhance attitudes and approaches to learning in Japan now and in the future.

The focus on managers' learning dispositions and their biographies related to their learning in their life history (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008) helped the process of drawing out the details and dynamics of managers' activities and thoughts in society. Japanese managers' dispositions towards learning are interactively influenced during the periods of 'school days' and 'working life'. Personal interactions with family members and others, exposure to overseas culture, the current Japanese educational systems, career choices by working in MNCs, and attachment to learning in companies in Japan are extracted as significant influencing factors from the analysis. These analytical key themes influenced a manager's learning disposition continuously in and beyond the workplace, and cause managers to have continuous reflections on their behaviours and observations in the social context. Female managers' active learning was another variable shared by Japanese and non-Japanese respondents. Changes in policies and awareness of gender equality in society may encourage female, along with the male managers to cultivate active learning attitudes. Participation in opportunities

for 'Communities of Practice' (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) is derived as one of the unexpected factors to show managers' attitudes towards learning.

Before discussing managers' learning in the future, Japan's society as it exists now needs to be considered. Japan is facing a 'super-ageing society' (Muramatsu and Akiyama, 2011: 425) with a life expectancy of at least 80 years. The question then becomes, 'How can life be made more meaningful?' Progress in society, such as globalisation, technological innovations, and changing work styles, also offer options beyond the standard formal education framework. Analysis of the data recommends that Japanese managers and companies should expand their learning capabilities to meet the changing requirements for success (MEXT, 2017a and 2017b). From the thesis findings, managers' aspirations for the show their proactive thoughts and action plans for continuous life learning, sometimes including after retirement. The Abe administration in Japan began to actively promote learning throughout life in 2017. New policies include promoting gender equality and reforming the current working style to a more efficient one (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2017: The Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, 2017a). This strategic direction aligns with critical themes derived from the thesis findings. Figure 5.1, 'a model of influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future' visually displays the potential and predictable status of Japanese managers' learning dispositions and social interplay in life. Figure 5.1 is inspired by the models of learning in working life developed by Illeris (2004) and Jorgensen and Warring (2001).

Ten key themes for enhancing managers' learning in the future, especially in their school days with active learning, are *proactivity and independence, interactivity and dialogue, learning with an objective,* and *knowledge of diverse career choices*. Key themes in adult life with continuous reflections are *self-growth, recognition in the workplace, diverse workplace*, and *higher labour mobility.* Key themes in life after retirement are *continuous learning* and *contributions to society.*

The above ten key themes may enhance managers' learning dispositions looking to

the future of Japanese society, based on the analysis of thesis data. In the near future, there is expected to be a higher number of non-Japanese workers in Japan (The Japan Times, 2017). Thesis data show that interactions with non-Japanese managers would be an additional influential factor to shape and enhance Japanese managers' learning attitudes and approaches. Today, Japanese companies still generally have lifetime employment systems that expect long working hours (Kato, 2001). Changing this established pattern will encourage Japanese companies and workers to become autonomous and proactive about learning opportunities. The same key themes also align with the suggested requirements of 'self-directed' adult learning, as noted by Knowles & Associates (1984), as well as with 'the process of reflecting upon oneself critically and questioning one's assumptions and philosophy as the base of the view of the world' that was explained by Mezirow (1977, 1991, and 2000).

- **To what extent can predominantly Western theories of learning explain the learning behaviours of Japanese managers?**

The research results show that Western-derived social theories of workplace learning and learning in life are becoming more applicable as the tacit style of gaining knowledge and information in Japan is becoming more Westernised. Typically, Japanese knowledge and information, especially in the workplace, is implicit, unspoken, and generally embedded in awareness and actions (Nonaka, 1991 and Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

The theoretical focus on the significance of the individual learning disposition and biography suggested by Hodkinson et al. (2004) and Lynch (2008) is also valid for making hidden features and information apparent in Japanese managers. The Illeris (2004) holistic model of learning in working life assisted in the analysis phase of the research by examining the social context around Japanese managers and society. The Illeris model also helped to develop Figure 5.1 from the perspective of working life, and was then expanded to include the concept of school days and life after retirement. Examples of the findings of Communities of Practice (CoPs) (Lave and Wenger, 1991) indicate the potential to theoretically combine CoPs with a holistic

model of learning in working life. Practices of learning, as significant learning events or experiences, derived by analysing the data, are similar to the overlap seen in Illeris, where work identity overlaps with work practice to create 'the practice of the community' (Illeris, 2004: 439). That relationship between individual learning disposition (agency) and social context (structure) is interrelated and inseparable.

The findings provided critical examinations on rapidly changing Japanese social contexts and challenges and their influence on managers' learning and characteristics in a variety of working environments that were not drawn out in previous research (Matsuo et al., 2008; Matsuo, 2012).

Also, there is little existing empirical evidence of the relevance of 'Learning in the circumstances of practice' (Billett, 2014: 674) in Japan. The thesis also results in highlight the need, pointed out by Billett, 'for practice settings to be legitimised, understood more fully and on their own terms as environments in which individuals come to participate and learn' (Billett, 2014: 690).

6.3 Contributions to Existing Knowledge and Theoretical Implications

This thesis research provides contributions to knowledge in social theories of learning in life. This study examines Japanese managers' workplace learning and learning in life, focusing on the influence of learning dispositions that are interacted on by social contexts.

This promotes further understanding of the importance of an individual learning disposition and biography, as promoted by Hodkinson, through the development of a model of influences on Japanese managers' learning in the future. For example, the findings support the importance of individual learning dispositions, as well as the holistic influences of social contexts in a manager's life. Professor Illeris was contacted directly during this research, and he is interested in this adaptation of his holistic model of learning in working life. He said his theories have been met with a lot of interest and practical application in other East Asian countries, such as China, Taiwan and Korea, but interest from Japan is still modest. This means that these

thesis results support the less examined theoretical framework developed by Illeris in Japan. This model has important theoretical implications for attempts to promote learning within the ongoing educational policy improvements in Japan.

This study is also timely because it has the potential to explain issues such as ageing, low birth rate, and under-utilisation of technology in Japan. Academically, social studies focusing on workplace learning and learning in life are rarely conducted at the individual level. This thesis aims to have an important role in bridging the theoretical perspective (i.e., applying Western-derived theories of learning in Japan), the empirical perspective (i.e., learning in a Japanese setting) and the practical perspective (i.e., promoting related government policies and encouraging managers' active learning).

Previous findings on learning in the workplace focused on a learner's individual disposition and life history by a biography (Hodkinson et al., 2004; Lynch, 2008), which is also supported by the analysis of the data in this thesis and is applicable to a Japanese setting. The methodology, focusing on the significance of learning dispositions using an individual biographical structure, is an effective procedure to probe for and draw out generally unspoken tacit knowledge and information often hidden within Japanese managers (Nonaka, 1991: Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), thereby making the knowledge and information more apparent and easier to identify for analysis. Hodkinson et al. (2008) argued that learning comes from a more holistic view rather than a dualistic view, as either individual or social. Similarly, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) also point out the close view that the Japanese management model of SEKI (Socialisation-Externalisation-Combination- and internalisation), which does not separate knowledge creation from people beyond rational dualism, such as body and mind, and rationale and emotion.

After analysis, the findings may add possible value to the literature by offering an additional expansion to previously existing models (Ileris, 2004: Jorgensen and Warring, 2001). Figure 5.1, 'a model of influences on learning in Japanese managers in the future,' was developed in consideration of empirical results and theoretical

implications to expand the time frame used in the previous models.

The piece added to the Illeris model focuses on the time aspects (school days, working life, and life after retirement), and not only the working life, as Illeris did. Illeris says that 'one should not read more into the model than that it was intended and drawn up as an auxiliary tool. It can be used to support one's perception in the context of planning, implementing and evaluating learning processes, undertakings and measures in working life, precisely to the extent that one thinks it can be of help in the specific case' (Illeris, 2004: 441). Therefore, perhaps the development of Figure 5.1 will encourage researchers to reflect on existing models and modify them to better represent their research plan and findings as necessary.

Another theoretical implication of the findings are examples of CoPs in this thesis. The Illeris model (Figure 2.1) shows a circular area where working identity overlaps with working practice to create 'the practice of the community' (Illeris, 2004:439). Figure 5.1 does not show it graphically, but CoPs are scattered within the managers' working life through the continuous interaction between learning disposition and social context. The findings in this thesis show the creation of learning working life and therefore theoretically support combining the CoPs from the Illeris model and the social theory of 'communities of practice' from Lave and Wenger (1991), especially since combining these theories in the workplace can potentially be strengthened.

Furthermore, the results of this research show the theoretical implications of continuous, interactive processes of individual disposition with social influence throughout a learner's life and workplace based on empirical and practical real-world samples. This result could potentially be an entrance for readers to more openly explore the complex socio-cultural theories on learning, as the social theoretical approach is becoming more specialised and subdivisional in context (Sasaki, 2003). This would help further theoretical expansion in this research field of learning in life.

6. 4 Empirical and Practical Contributions and Implications

Empirically, this thesis indicates the potential for the use of the theory of Communities of Practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), in conjunction with the Illeris model of learning in working life, using examples of communities of practice in the results. Furthermore, this is the empirical exploration of the issues above within a Japanese environment, which has been relatively underexplored. In this model, key themes are related to both structure (individual and external factors in society), and agency (individual managers' learning dispositions) and they are very closely interrelated and not to be separated. The empirical implications from the findings provide depth to the structure and agency debate in learning in life in a Japanese setting.

Researchers of learning in the workplace often face the same feeling as Hodkinson (below) (Hodkinson et al., 2004) and empirical data from the workplace are often not apparent or easily obtained. The research results in this thesis provide evidence of 'learning in the circumstances of practice' (Billett, 2014:674), focusing on the individual's disposition to learning and Japanese social structures.

> 'It is important to understand workplaces as organisations where learning is not the primary activity. Consequently, the learning needs of individuals are rarely a high priority for any of the participants' (Hodkinson et al., 2004:6)

In the literature review process, there remains the fact that there is a less researched domain of qualitative research focusing on managers' learning dispositions and interactions with social and organisational contexts in a Japanese setting. Purposive sampling of managers who work or have worked in Japan and a semi-structured interview with a learning history questionnaire were applied to this research. The obtained data represents a solid foundation for examining Japanese and non-Japanese managers' thoughts and experiences based on these learning theories. This thesis provides an examined form of these theories, offering an empirical understanding of Japanese managers' attitudes, positiveness, and struggles, along with progressing governmental policies. Knowledge obtained from this research

contributes to providing another diverse dimension for empirical application. The research results for managers working in MNCs empirically suggests that the continuous progress of governmental policies related to learning in life for a long period directed Japanese managers' awareness to work, their working style, and higher levels of confidence towards learning. This relates to the discussion of how policies can adapt to and with workers while bearing in mind the autonomy of workers for learning in life (Rees et al. 1997a; 1997b).

This thesis also empirically contributes to filling the gap between social research and theories about learning at work, established mainly by anthropologists and social psychologists (Lave and Wenger, 1991: Hodkinson et al., 2004), focusing research on the significance of individual workers' learning dispositions.

The suggested implication of Dewey's approach (1916, 1938) to adult learning would be that all learning is generated from direct experiences and learning is a lifelong process. The research findings in this thesis empirically support Dewey's original theoretical thought by showing the combined learning practice and experience of working managers in MNCs from 1984-2015 in Japan.

The unexpected findings of female managers' active learning in Japan also contributes to research on Japanese managers' gender equality by providing empirical qualitative data, and also by encouraging further progress of gender equality in Japanese society.

These results can also empirically highlight what managers working in MNCs in Japan go through, together with illustrating ongoing government efforts to reform policies for Japan's educational systems, gender equality, recurrent education, and promotion of efficient working styles. There is further applicability from the findings for further learning in life in practice in Japanese society. The key themes of active learning, interactivity and dialogue, and independence in school days are derived from the data of this thesis; these themes align with the ongoing governmental policy direction of educational curriculum reform. The key themes of a diverse workplace, *self-growth*, *recognition in the workplace*, and *higher labour*

mobility also align with the government's clear direction to enhance recurrent education for adults.

This research offers a number of important practical implications: how policies work with workers while bearing in mind the autonomy of workers for learning in life; and the practical importance of 'proactivity in learning,' 'learning with an objective,' 'autonomy of learning,' and 'diversity and higher labour mobility' in the Japanese education system and workplace. During the current period of many social changes in Japan, this study provides information about learning in life for Japanese managers and society in general, with the potential for significant contributions in practice. This thesis also has the potential to contribute practically to the future direction of educational and working style transformation as it is related to policy development in the Japanese government.

6.5 Limitation of This Research and Suggestions for Future Research

An applied qualitative research approach using a semi-structured interview and the contents of a learning history questionnaire provided data for developing the findings. There are several limitations of this research, as well as in the methodology applied to the research. Probably the most noticeable limitation is the small sample size. A sample of more than 20 would be beneficial to improve the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, a sample of non-managers (younger or non-titled workers) in MNCs, who are missing from the current data, would bring a depth to the knowledge of learning in life. They are key players who support and lead activities that are helping to shape a flatter organisational structure in Japan. Adding non-managers would give a broader scope to future research. Further research could also target contractors, temporary staff, and self-employed workers. Sampling these workers would produce findings with a different focus on working requirements, styles, and timeframes, since they are different from managers in MNCs.

The questionnaire asked for information that required the recall of specific events.

The nature of such questions introduced memory bias as another limitation. A quantitative survey method using a larger sample of respondents and a more detailed questionnaire would be helpful to inform a larger picture, from a positivist viewpoint.

Japanese managers who work in non-MNCs but that focus only on the Japanese market also have a need for workplace learning. Inbound customers into Japan are increasing, and the need to communicate in English is becoming more critical, even in rural areas of Japan. Including respondents who work in other Asian countries, such as China, Korea and Taiwan, and who have close cultural backgrounds with each other would help to provide further empirical contributions to this research field.

This thesis focused on managers who work in MNCs and who are relatively proactive in learning due to their working environments and dispositions. In future research, holistic examination of a combined perspective from managers who are less proactive, along with those who are proactive will provide a more balanced picture of workplace learning in Japan.

More focused research on female managers would also be meaningful, as even more progress on gender equality in Japan, based on current governmental actions, is expected in the future. Another qualitative research methodological approach could be made by a focus group; wherein Japanese respondents would be encouraged to speak up and share information more freely.

Future research could include a comparison of male and female manager's behaviours to encourage learning within their team or organisation by promoting the value of learning perspectives (Return On Expectation: Anderson, 2008) with more communication. Generally, organisational learning is one of the hardest items for which to measure value (Anderson, 2008). Most top managers realise the importance of learning, but they do not try to disseminate learning in their organisations. Female managers may very well lead learning in a different way than male managers.

Professor Makoto Matsuo (Hokkaido University in Japan) who researches experiential learning and team learning says that this research is a very interesting theme, and also that there is little research focusing on Japanese managers using a qualitative research approach. Professor Katsumi Akao (Kansei University in Japan), who researches lifelong learning theories, also says that in addition to being interesting, this thesis research is very meaningful to illuminate ways of researching managers' lifelong learning in social contexts. Professor Matsuo and Professor Akao plan to read this thesis when it is approved, and I hope to conduct collaborative research that further examines Japanese managers' learning with them in the future.

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Appendix A: Respondent Background

*Non-Japanese managers were born in their home country.

#	Name	Gender (Marital status)	Range of Age	Nationality	Work Background in MNC
1	Shoko	Female (Married)	Early 50s	Japanese (born in Japan)	Manager of marketing in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider –Food/Beverage)
2	Sara	Female (Single)	Early 50s		CFO in venture company now and worked as manager in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider-Finance-Audit)
3	Shin	Male (Married)	Late 40s		Department manager in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider –Engineering)
4	Hideo	Male (Married)	Late 40s		Associate general manager in J-MNC (Pharma)
5	Satoko	Female (Single)	Late 40s		Senior manager in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider -Auditing)
6	Nana	Female (Single)	Late 40s		Manager in J-MNC (Pharma)
7	Mihoko	Female (Married)	Late 40s		Head of communications in Non-J-MNC (Pharma)
8	Keiko	Female (Single)	Late 40s		PR manager in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider -IT)
9	Ichiro	Male (Married)	Mid 40s		Global business development manager in Non-J-MNC (Pharma)
10	Chika	Female (Single)	Mid 40s		Manager in J-MNC (Pharma)
11	Ken	Male (Married)	Mid 40s		Senior researcher in J-MNC (Service Provider -Consulting/Education)
12	Taka	Male (Married)	Early 40s		Managing director in J-MNC/Non-J MNC (Service Provider-Consulting)
13	Junko	Female (Single)	Late 30s		Promotions manager in Non-J-MNC (Service Provider-Hotel Service)
14	Osamu	Male (Married)	Late 30s		Lecturer in J-Service provider (Education in University) and worked as manager in J-MNC (Consulting),
15	Megumi	Female (Single)	Mid 30s		Lecturer in J-Service provider (Education in University) and worked in J-MNC as manager (Advertising Service)
16	Margaret	Female (Married)	Early 50s	German*	Head of global communications in Non-J-MNC (Pharma)
17	Gary	Male (Married)	Late 40s	Chinese*	Manager in J-MNC (Service Provider-MNC-Market Research)
18	Tony	Male (Married)	Late 40s	Canadian*	Senior Consultant in J-MNC (Service Provider-Consulting/Education) and president of own company (Educational service)
19	Audrey	Female (Married)	Early 40s	Chinese*	Manager in J-MNC (Service Provider-food)
20	Victor	Male (Married)	Early 40s	Indian*	Director in Non-J-MNC (Pharma)

Appendix B - Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research

Letter of Invitation to Participate in the Research

Date:
Interviewee Name:
E-mail Address:

Dear   :

My name is Yuko Kimura, and I am doctorate student at the school of management in University of Leicester. I am writing to invite you to participate in my doctorate research, which is focusing on managers' learning attitudes and approaches within the Japanese setting.

Your participation would occupy around 60 minutes of your time in total, and would consist of filling in a short questionnaire concerning your previous learning experiences and current attitudes towards learning, followed by an interview expanding on the same theme. The interview would be conducted in person or via telephone/Skype/Face time at your convenience, and as scheduling and resources allow. Your responses would of course be kept entirely private and confidential, and you would be able to withdraw from the research at any time.

I sincerely hope that you will consider participating in this research project. I will be contacting you via e-mail or telephone in the near future to confirm your interest in being interviewed. Please feel free to contact me as specified below with any question. An information sheet containing further details on the project is attached for your reference.

Sincerely,

Yuko Kimura
Doctorate student in social science
School of Management
University of Leicester

e-mail: yk27@leicester.ac.uk
Mailing address: 5-8-904, Higashigokencho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 162-0813, Japan
Telephone: +81-80-4207-5538

<u>Participant Information Sheet</u>

January 15th, 2016

Yuko Kimura
Doctorate student in Social Science
School of Management
University of Leicester

Doctorate Thesis Research Project:

How do external and internal factors shape the attitudes and approaches to learning adopted by Japanese managers?

Participant Information Sheet

1. What is this study about?
    You are invited to take part in a research study exploring managers' attitudes and approaches to learning in a Japanese setting.

    You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a manager or director level in pharmaceutical or service provider multinational corporations (MNCs) in Japan or who have worked before in Japan. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

    Participation in this research study is voluntary.
    By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:
    ✓   Understand what you have read.
    ✓   Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
    ✓   Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

    You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

2. Who is running the study?
   - Yuko Kimura is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctorate in Social Science in the School of Management at the University of Leicester. This will take place under the supervision of Dr Katharine Venter, lecturer in sociology and supervisor of Ms Kimura's thesis, School of management.

3. What will the study involve for me?
   This focus of this research will be on managers in multinational companies in Japan. This study primarily will explore learners' positions and dispositions and examine how these inform learning behaviour (including learning in higher education, vocational training and learning, skill development, and also informal learning as informal learning is also a major part of lifelong learning). This study will examine the impact of individuals' attitudes towards learning and examine the role played by social background and biography, the social and organisational structure and management of MNCs. The interview will be electronically recorded, and all information will be stored with securing data security. All information collected will be anonymous and personal identifying information removed. Prior to the interview, you will be requested to answer the learning history questionnaire about your past learning history. All information on the learning history questionnaire will be stored securely by data security.

4. How much of my time will the study take?
   The interviewee will be requested to participate in one interview of approximately one hour and to record their experience and thoughts in the learning history questionnaire. The questionnaire will take about 30 minutes to complete, and you will be asked to complete this prior to the interview.

5. Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?
   Being in this study is completely voluntary, and you do not have to take part.

   If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by two weeks after the interview.

   You are free to stop the interview at any time. If you do decide to withdraw, any recordings will be erased (unless you say you are willing for the data to be used) and the information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

6. Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?
   As the researcher, I appreciate that the interview and the learning history questionnaire may include personal or sensitive information regarding your learning activities, motivations and history, and may make reference to past and current employers. The researcher will keep all information securely and your name (and that of any organisations or other people you mention) will not be used to maintain anonymity.

Aside from giving up your time and above factors, we do not expect that there will be any further risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

7. What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?
By providing your consent, you are agreeing to the collection of personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Sheet unless you consent otherwise.

Your information will be stored securely except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be identified in these publications.

8. Can I tell other people about the study?
Please don't talk to other people about the study, because this is an academic doctorate research project for gaining doctorate degree and confidentiality on research should be kept.

9. What if would like further information about the study?
When you have read this information, Yuko Kimura will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any question you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Yuko Kimura.

10. Will I be told the results of the study?
You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one-page summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

11. What if have a complaint or any concerns about the study?
The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Ethical Research Committee of the University of Leicester. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the official ethical guidance of the University of Leicester. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below.
- Telephone: Dr Katharine Venter +44(0)116 252 5956
- Email: k.venter@le.ac.uk

This information sheet is for you to keep

Appendix D – Consent Form for Interviews

CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWS

CONSENT FORM FOR Yuko Kimura's thesis: 'How do external and internal factors shape the attitudes and approaches to learning adopted by Japanese managers?'

Please tick the appropriate boxes	Yes	No
Taking Part		
I have read and understood the participant information sheet dated 15/01/2016.		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include being interviewed, completing a learning history questionnaire, and recorded (audio).		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part.		
Use of the information I provide for this project only		
I understand my personal details such as phone number and address will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand that my words during the interview and in the learning history questionnaire may be quoted in the thesis, publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. However, those words shall not be attributable to me. Nor will my name will be used in any write-up or publications resulting from the projects.		
I would like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study in the form of one-page summary after the study is finished.		
Use of the information I provide beyond this project		
I agree for the data I provide to be stored in a password-protected folder on the researcher's personal computer supported by data security software.		
I understand that other academic researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand that other academic researchers may use my words in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
So we can use the information you provide legally		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials related to this project to Yuko Kimura.		

Name of participant: …………………… Signature: …………….……………………… Date: ………………

Researcher: <u>Yuko Kimura</u>, Signature: …………………………..……….. Date: ………………

Project contact details for further information:
Yuko Kimura, doctorate student in social science, school of management, University of Leicester
e-mail: <u>yk27@leicester.ac.uk</u> , Telephone: +81-80-4207-5538
Mailing address: 5-8-904, Higashigokencho, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo, 162-0813, Japan

Notes: Adapted from UK Data Archive (2011) 'Managing and Sharing Data: Best Practice for Researchers (available at http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/media/2894/managingsharing.pdf).

Appendix E- Learning History Questionnaire

<u>Learning History Questionnaire 今までの学びについての質問表</u>

Participant name: お名前
Date of description:　記入日

1. Could you please provide a very short overview of the most significant training, development and learning events you have experienced in your adult life? These could be formal training events, seminars, workshops, conferences, university courses, or learning less formally from other people in your workplace.
社会人になってから経験された、特に印象的、または重要であった研修、自己開発、学びのイベント等について短い要約を教えていただけますでしょうか。フォーマルな研修、セミナー、ワークショップ、会議や学会、大学等でのコース、または職場におけるインフォーマルな同僚等からの学びなどが含まれると想定しています。

2. Please briefly expand on what you consider to be the most significant of these events. Where and when did it take place?
そうした最も意義深いイベントについてのあなたのお考えをもう少しお聞かせください。どんな場所で、またいつ行われたものでしょうか。

3. Choose one of these events. If it was planned in advance, how did you feel before attending it? Why did you feel this way?
こうしたイベントの中から一つを選択してください。もしそのイベントが事前に計画されていたものであれば、あなたは出席前にはそのイベントについてどのように感じていましたか？またなぜそのように感じていましたか？

4. What caused you to attend/participate in this learning experience? For example, did you decide yourself to volunteer for it, or were you required to do it by your employer?
この学ぶ経験に出席する理由はなんでしょうか。例えば、あなたはこれに参加することを自発的に申し出たのでしょうか、それともあなたの雇用者によって出席するように求められたのでしょうか。

5. Within your organisation, do you have a named mentor or another person who is responsible for your learning?
あなたの組織において、あなたはメンターと呼べる人、またはあなたの学びについて責任をもっている人がいますか？

6. Overall, how would you describe your own view of learning? For example, is it something that you consciously volunteer for or participate in? Is it something that you feel you are too busy for? Do you try to avoid training courses? Do you prefer to learn in less formal ways (e.g. by searching the internet or by talking to other people)? Why do you think you feel this way?
最後に、あなたの学びについてのご自分の考え方を述べていただけますでしょうか。例えば、それは意識して自発的に行うものでしょうか、それともただ出席するものでしょうか。それはあなたにとってただ忙しいと考えさせられるものでしょうか。あなたは研修コースを避ける傾向がありますか？　あなたはよりインフォーマルなやり方での学びを好みますか（例えばインターネットによる探索や他の人との会話によるもの）。なぜそのように感じるのでしょうか？

Appendix F – Interview Topic Guide Questions

Interview/Learning history questionnaire Guide Questions

1. Opening comments: Thanks, explain project and purpose of this interview, recording, anonymity, the right to withdraw from the research at any time and elect not to answer any question if you do not wish to, and confidentiality, and ask questions

2. General biographical and demographic question (background of individual manager)

1) Could we start with our telling me a little bit about yourself, your education background, and your current role?

2) What and how long is your present role (job title, full/part-time, etc.), previous role if you have in the organisation, job history before current organisation?

3) Please let me know your level of education and provide a brief outline of your educational background?

4) Age (if interviewee looks comfortable), experience to study or work in overseas countries,

3. Individual subjectivity/external factors such as family background, employment history, decisions, choices, how they came to be where they are today the points above, what the current job involves, training within that, the learning that take place, motivations and experiences of learning, the employer and organisational context, impact of learning related to learning by biography and adult learning diary

1) What geographical area are you from originally? Do you still live there?

2) If you do not mind my asking, who was the main wage- earner in your home when you were a child? What did they do? Remember that you can withdraw from this research at any time if you want to.

3) What kind of secondary school did you attend? Was it public, private, national, or other forms?

4) Did you enjoy it? What did you particularly like or dislike about it (e.g. preferred subject, forms of pedagogy)?

5) At the age of 16, did you stay on in school, or find a job, or another form?
What promote you to take that decision? (I will try to let interviewee talk about them about 'Was it a planned strategy with a goal in mind? Or just simply 'the next step'?' or any details of their motivational factors)

6) Did anyone advise you, did anyone else influence that decision and what was your family's view? (or help you or put pressure on you in that decision?), or do you feel that it was something you decided completely by yourself? (e.g. family influences, class mentality, gender factors?)

7) Ask about following decisions regarding initial education, career, e.g. did you go on to university, higher degree or other form education?
-Reasons for above decisions: strategies, rationales or just the next thing?

-Processes involved in choosing a course, institution: a cost-benefit analysis?

-Attitudes to formal education: dislike of abstractness

-Inclination towards more vocational options

8) Have you had any experience of training or education in a university? If so any details information?

9) What are your abiding memories of your time in the education system? (e.g. for preferences for in/formal education or other preference criteria)

10) If you had those decisions to make again, would you make any of them differently?

   (e.g. continuity in like/dislike of formal education)

11) Do you feel that your career, in general, has worked in terms of some sort of plan or strategy? (e.g. any signs of strategy, even informal/largely implicit, would you say that you've deliberately used training and education to further your career, what triggers you had (in Japanese generally just next step was common))

12) Now, I'd like to try to get a picture of what your job actually involves, the tasks and activities you undertake in the course of a working day, the tools you use to do your job and so on. What are the things or specific tasks that you do most often in your job, on an everyday basis? (e.g. how did you learn how to do that? Do you remember? Formal training/ or just you picked it up? How? (observation, doing, mentoring), instances of informal training (how, when did they occur? Were they useful?)

13) Have you done much formal OJT since you joined the firm? (if none, why? Have you considered doing any, or been asked to do any? What happened?)

- Break down into specific instances: 'any others', focus on one.

- Take one significant and relevant episode: so what was the reason for you doing that training? How did you come to be involved in that? The motivations and processes (e.g. simple told to do it? Any say in it? Own decision/initiative? If so what prompted the decision to participate? Economic reasons (explicitness/rationality)

- Role of employer: formal appraisal or routine training system?

- Negotiations: interactions between employer and employee: how did you feel when you senior suggested that? What did your senior say when you suggested that?

- The formality and explicitness of the whole thing: systems or ad-hoc-ness?

- So what (if anything) did you hope to get out of it (more skills for self, or able to do the job better)? Do you think you have got that out of it?

14) How did you come to do that particular course (at that particular place)?

- Did you have any say in it at all (simply told to do it?)

- If so, the process: criteria? Formality? Explicit? Market analysis or more informal?

- Proactive in finding course and institution?

- Involvement of other people (e.g. boss, recommendations etc.)

- Before you started the training, how did you feel about doing that course, and doing it at that place? Looking forward to it? Apprehensive? Didn't know what to expect? Indifferent?

15) And how was the course?

- Did you enjoy it AND was it useful?

- How was it delivered? (seminars or work-based); did you find that a good way of doing it?

- Was there anything you particularly liked or disliked about it? Or thought that it could have been done better in a different way?

- Did anyone else from the firm go to the training? What did they think of it? (for stories, collective agreement)

- Has it helped you to do your job better?

- Do you see it as something that will help you develop your own career? Was that what you hoped?

16) (Utilizing individual learning diary) Now, thinking of the other training you've done, are there any that stand out in your mind for any particular reasons?

- Are there any that you've liked or disliked for any particular reason? (reasons: too formal, useless etc.)

- Would you say that the training you told me about just now is fairly representative of most of the training you've done?: Do you usually go about choosing training courses in the same way, like you just described?

17) How much contact do you have with your boss/senior/the superior management?

- All the time? Only at meetings? Occasionally?: how formal would you say is the contact between you? (first name terms? Socialising?), so would you say that relations are pretty relaxed and informal?

- How much input do you feel you have in decision making in the firm?: If so how does this occur? Formally at meetings, or more informally? The frequency, role and importance of meetings

4. Aspirations for the future

1) Now turning to your plans for the future, do you have any idea of what you would like to see yourself doing ten years down the line?

2) Staying with the same company? Same industry different company? Different industry altogether?

3) Why? (why do you want to stay here, go somewhere else, change career?)

4) Do you have any sort of plan about how to reach that goal?(does training come into it at all? How?)

5) What are your overall, general aims for your life over the next ten years or so (possibly including your career, job but not necessarily): How important is your job or your career to achieving these aims? Are other things more important (general importance of the job to them)

5. Anything distinct about working and learning in a Japanese context (Social and organisational context)

1) Organisational Context
-Did you have experiences that your organisational context, culture or other factors influenced your learning attitude or behaviour in the past? And how?

- Are you comfortable in the current or past organisation you worked? If so why? If not, why?

2) Japanese context

- Did you have experiences that Japanese context, culture or other factors influence your learning attitude or behaviour in the past? And how?

- Are you comfortable with working in Japan or Japanese context? If so, why? If not, why?

6. Ending: Anything you would like to add that wasn't covered? Any questions? And thank you!

Appendix G: Managers' Learning Experiences and Life Histories

Legend:
- : School days before working
- : Working life
- : Studied or lived abroad or in English speaking environment
- : Studied abroad or with DL * or English speaking environment with working
- : Worked or lived abroad
- : Studied or work experience in Japan

*SL: The most significant training, development and learning events they have experienced in their adult life

** DL: The distance learning experienced in adult life

Japanese Economic Status / Nationality / Name

Years: 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015

Japanese Economic Status:
- Asset Bubble Burst
- Lost Decade in Japanese Economy
- Global Financial Crisis

Japanese managers:

1. Shoko — UK, US Univ. in Japan, SL*, UK by DL**
2. Sara — US, SL*, US by DL**, Germany
3. Shin — US, SL*
4. Hideo — PhD, US, SL*, US, UK, DL**
5. Satoko — SL*
6. Nana — SL*
7. Mihoko — Switzerland, SL*
8. Keiko — US, SL*, SL*, UK by DL**
9. Ichiro — SL*, India, SL*
10. Chika — US, US, SL*
11. Ken — UK, SL*-UK, UK, France
12. Taka — Canada, PhD, SL*, Belgium
13. Junko — UK, SL*
14. Osamu — Germany, SL*, SL*-PhD
15. Megumi — Singapore, France, SL*

Non-Japanese managers:

16. Margaret — Canada, SL*, I-MNC, J-MNC
17. Gary — Study, SL*, I-MNC
18. Tony — Study, I-MNC, UK by DL**, Canada by DL**, UK by DL**, SL*
19. Audrey — SL* Study, Study, I-MNC
20. Victor — Mid-East, SL*, Mid-East, J-MNC

Appendix H: Personal Interactions of Learning

	Name	School Days	Working Life
1	Shoko	Sister who taught me that English is interesting	Friends and companions to learn with
2	Sara	Parents who owned own business and advised me to get certified as a working woman	Mentors who provide new learning perspective
3	Shin	Parents who loved reading books	Finnish business mentor who gave me opportunities and trusted me
4	Hideo	Grandfathers who were venture business founders, and a university professor who led worldwide level research	Friends and colleagues in US university when I researched there, and business mentor to support my project and issue
5	Satoko	Mother who advised me to get a certificate as a working woman. Elementary school teacher who encouraged my writing skill. Flower arrangement teacher and her sister who encouraged me to do challenging things continuously	Business mentor who gave me opportunities and guidance on how to work well
6	Nana	Parents who worked in their pharmacy and communicated with others well	Business mentor who gave me opportunities and guidance
7	Mihoko	Mother who had high motivation to work, and father who transformed himself to support mother	German business mentor who gave me opportunities and guidance to be a leader, and I learned a lot
8	Keiko	Parents who operated their business and led me to think about the why and then explain it	Colleagues and friends who actively learn
9	Ichiro	Parents (father who travelled around world and mother who was a teacher), sister who loved to study, and teachers and friends in mid and high school	Business mentor who stimulated me to learn something special for the future
10	Chika	Uncle who gave me a chance to visit US summer camp, advised me of importance of English and continuously challenged and encouraged me not be afraid of failure	Friend who is always challenging
11	Ken	Parents who loved learning, foreign language and history, University professor who reminded me you should learn English to make my life richer and wider	University professor in the UK who is world renown
12	Taka	Family members, father who was a scientist, mother who was a teacher, sister who is a teacher, and brother who is a consultant, University friend to have disrupting ideas and discussions	Mentor who taught me about business and how to be a businessman
13	Junko	Grandfather who was an inventor who worked his way through school from apprentice in the university, grandmother who was first Japan Air Line international flight passenger to Paris, mother who wanted to become diplomat, and brothers who are working globally	My boss who gives me opportunities to do new marketing field work
14	Osamu	Father who showed his hardworking attitude, uncle who took care of him and gave an opportunity to think about Base of Pyramid business and female mentors to support me	Female mentors to support me
15	Megumi	Parents, father who was a researcher and mother who was a teacher, university professors who guided me to research and taught me through a difficult PhD journey	University professor mentor for my PhD who led me to think about how I should be as researcher and
16	Margaret	Father who was a chemist who worked full time while getting his degree and taught me I should live on my own	Colleagues
17	Gary	Grandfather and uncles who were distinctive students, uncle who gave an opportunity to come to Japan, friends and teachers in Japanese language school and Japanese university	Colleagues and boss in the company
18	Tony	Mother who was a teacher	Business mentor who trained me
19	Audrey	Parents, father who gave an opportunity to be familiar with Japanese culture, mother who worked hard, University professor and friends who encouraged learning	Business mentor who is my future role model
20	Victor	Parents who are always confident about me and appreciate what I am going to do, my sister, and a University professor	My wife who always supports me to learn, business mentors and colleagues

Appendix I: Significant Learning Events and Experiences in Adult Life

No	Participant	Significant Learning Events and Experiences (paid for by self or by company/university)	Period
1	Shoko	MBA distance learning at a UK university (Self)	2005-2009
2	Sara	Executive MBA course at a university in the US (Self)	1985-1986
3	Shin	Company academy training in Switzerland (Company)	2001
4	Hideo	Innovation Forum on the West Coast, in the US (Self/Company)	2004-2005 (twice a year)
5	Satoko	Official and unofficial mentoring by the previous boss (Self)	More than ten years
6	Nana	Training to set objectives and goals to implement tasks (Company)	2005 (One day)
7	Mihoko	Company training course in Switzerland to improve leadership skills and mindset (Company)	2011 (One week)
8	Keiko	Volunteer program to teach PC skills to domestic violence victims (Company)	2003-2004 (Bi-weekly visit to their home for two years)
9	Ichiro	MBA in international business in Japan (Self)	2005-2007
10	Chika	Female managers management training (Company)	2014 (Eight months)
11	Ken	One-month summer school for economics at a UK university (company): one-month English training (1999 UK), two-year master's program at a UK University (Company), and four-day cross-cultural business training in France (Company)	2001 (One month) 1999 (One month) 2003-2005 (2 years) 2012 (Four days)
12	Taka	PhD course training (Self)	2001-2007
13	Junko	Global Agenda Seminar in Tokyo: a series of academic seminars directed at adults with interests in social business (Self)	2010
14	Osamu	Global Agenda Seminar in Tokyo: a series of academic seminars directed at adults with interests in social business, and a PhD course (Self)	2010 2012-2015
15	Megumi	Faculty Development program provided by the university where Australian lecturers gave new perspectives on research misconduct, sexual harassment, etc. (University)	2015
16	Margaret	Seminar with a mixed group from different companies when I worked as a sale rep (Company)	1993 (One day)
17	Gary	University life in Japan (Self)	1992-1996
18	Tony	Summer Institute for an intercultural communication course (Self)	Summer in 2015
19	Audrey	Japanese language study in a Japanese language school in Japan (Self)	Apr1993-Sep1994
20	Victor	Lateral thinking training (Company)	2010