Ethics and Identity among International Development Practitioners

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People generally work in the fuzzy areas in which values fostered by different entities do not always match, which sometimes cause dilemmas and create alternative values. This study examines professional ethics and identity at work, by specifically exploring the experiences of Japanese international development practitioners who work in such a grey area. These practitioners work in projects that theoretically aim to support the development of less-developed countries, while on a practical level they must also serve the Japanese side. The individual ethics, which are developed when challenged by alternative ethics from the outside world, are deeply embedded in their professional identities. By Looking at the ways in which their work ethics are fostered and related to their professional identities, the study reveals that each professional fosters his/her own ethical identity. This study expands our understanding of the formation and emergence of professional identity.

Keywords: ethics, identity at work, international development practitioners, professional

INTRODUCTION

People generally work in the fuzzy areas in which values fostered by different entities do not always match, which sometimes cause dilemmas and create alternative values. Support for individual and organisational values might consequently come from formal and informal ethics, such as codes of ethics, rules, ideologies, and cultures. Ethics is "about relationships and social organization" and is closely connected with identity (Gluesing 2017, 83-84). The international development practitioners work in such complex, grey areas that in order to implement development projects and programs which support people and societies, they commonly face daunting challenges. These challenges come while working in diverse socio-cultural circumstances that require collaboration with a variety of stakeholders, including governments, governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, local communities, and others in their home countries, whose missions, values, and capacities can vary substantially.

This pilot study examines some of the experiences and perspectives of Japanese international development practitioners. It looks at their career trajectories and attempts to trace the ways in which their work ethics are fostered and are related to their professional identities. Working in many countries, these practitioners form and re-form their identities as development professionals to effectively implement projects and programs by maintaining a balance between themselves and a set of diverse stakeholders who typically have different missions, values, and capacities and work under different ethics. This paper provides background related to ethics and identity at work, drawing on the existing literature. It describes the nature and role of Japanese development practitioners and the formal ethics under which they work. Following a discussion of the methodology of the study, the career paths of two development practitioners

are introduced, focusing on the ways in which these practitioners have negotiated with different ethics and shifted their identities according to the circumstances they faced. Finally, summarizing the overall discussion, the paper concludes by identifying its limitations as well as its contributions and pointing out issues for further study.

IDENTITY AT WORK AND ETHICS

Identity at work has been the subject of study by scholars for many years. For instance, with a focus on transnational knowledge workers with diverse backgrounds, Colic-Peisker (2010, 483) interviewed them in Australia and Indonesia, and found that they are neither bound by the traditions and communities into which they were born, nor are they attached to a specific nation or locality. She notes that a "professional career is a fixed, conventional reference, firmly embedded in and conforming to the mainstream late-capitalist knowledge economy" and that the workers' profession was "the main anchor of their identity-belonging" (Colic-Peisker 2010, 483).

Ishikawa studies work identity among Japanese employees. Using existing statistical data sources, he finds that Japanese work identity has been changing from the traditional stereotype of employees strongly committed to their companies. He argues that the work identity of Japanese employees is influenced by a variety of factors, such as company size, employment type, and education, and that it has become increasingly "multi-faceted" (Ishikawa 2007, 334).

These studies suggest that identity at work is fixed, at least within a certain group; for instance, cosmopolitans (Colic-Peisker 2010) and those categorized by such characteristics as size, type, and education (Ishikawa 2007). On the other hand, some studies on identity at work highlight the flexibility of identity. Adams and Crafford's (2012, 1) qualitative research examines employees who work for a global manufacturing company and identifies nine strategies of "identity work," that is, the process of "negotiating and regulating identity." They find that employees strategically shift their identities according to "personal philosophies" (e.g. work and personal ethics), "relationships" (e.g. work and family relationships), "career management" (e.g. education, mobility), and "negotiating balance" (e.g. work-life balance).

One's ethics are closely related to identity at work which Adams and Crafford (2012) also identify as "identity work". Some scholars study the relationship between ethics and identity at work. For instance, in the *Ethics in the Anthropology of Business: Explorations in Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*, editors Malefyt and Morais (2017) present the ethical dilemmas of business anthropologists and others working as applied anthropologists. These anthropologists commonly work in in-between codes of ethics (e.g. the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association) and everyday practice in both academic and non-academic settings. Their identity as applied anthropologists is challenged and negotiated in their everyday work. In such a process, the concept of "doing some good" rather than "do not harm" tends to be adopted in the struggle between apparently universal codes of ethics and actual practice (Malefyt and Morais 2017). The "doing some good" precept appears to function as a practical ethic and contributes to the formation of identity among business anthropologists and other applied anthropologists.

Exploring work experiences among "interculturalists" (e.g. consultants, trainers, and coaches whose profession is to deal with cultural differences), Romani and Szkudlarek's study describes the non-linear process of forming an ethical identity for interculturalists as a professional group. These interculturalists feel a responsibility not only towards their client (e.g. the organisation), but also towards the content and performance that they provide, their businesses, and the trainee—in other words "society or humanity at large" (Romani and Szkudlarek 2014, 183). The process of their negotiation with these responsibilities relates to the construction of their professional identity.

Kornberger and Brown (2007) examine a large national institution that facilitates a knowledge exchange network among stakeholders (e.g. industry, government, educational institutions). Analysing the process of organisational transformation from a non-profitable to a commercial benefits-seeking organisation, they find that the ethics embedded in the institution become "a discursive resource" that is used for the construction of individual and collective identities among its members through negotiating

and reflecting their ongoing narratives. In a similar vein, Caron and Giauque (2006) state that "external controls" such as codes of ethics and rules of conduct, and new work values such as service quality influence the behaviour of civil servants both individually and collectively in Canada and Switzerland, where public management reforms were implemented.

As the above studies suggest, individual identities at work are formed by outside influences, including policies, codes of ethics, regulations, and relationships, and shift as a result of conscious and unconscious negotiation with the work settings and circumstance in which individuals live.

JAPANESE DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONERS AND THEIR FORMAL ETHICS

Those who work in the development arena are very diverse in their specialised fields and status. According to the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), 34,932 individuals and 1,678 organisations have registered for Partner, a platform linking those seeking jobs in international development to those searching for workers across national boundaries (JICA n.d.). Professional development practitioners typically belong to various organisations including private companies, development consulting firms, general and public incorporated associations/foundations, international organisations, governments, NPOs/NGOs, schools/incorporated schools, and others. This also includes freelancers and self-employed ones. Practitioners work at various levels, from the policy level to the community participation level, in a variety of development areas, including poverty reduction, gender equality, agriculture, education, health, energy, environment, governance, and peace-building, among other areas. Some acquire work experiences as volunteers, especially at the very beginning of their career trajectories.

In Japan, international development is under the Development Cooperation Charter[1]. Its three basic principles are: 1) "contributing to peace and prosperity through cooperation for non-military purposes," 2) "promoting human security," and 3) "cooperation aimed at self-reliant development through assistance for self-help efforts as well as dialogue and collaboration based on Japan's experience and expertise" (MOFA 2015, 4-5). Since its introduction in 1992 (revised in 2015), the Development Cooperation Charter has been the foundation of Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) policy, which includes the Country Assistance Policy, Sectoral Development Policy, and Priority Policy for Development Cooperation. Under these policies, development activities are planned and implemented, and individuals and organisations who work in the international development arena are expected to follow the established policies. For instance, JICA, which administers Japan's ODA and is one of the largest bilateral aid agencies in the world (JICA 2018), makes its medium term and annual plans for its activities under the charter and these policies. Other development-related originations do so as well.

The charter and its constituent policies work as ethical instructions for organisations in charge of international development and for individual practitioners. In addition, these organisations and individuals are obliged to benefit, or at least not harm, Japan's tax-payers, who support the various international development activities. Individual practitioners are also expected to follow the codes of ethics, regulations, and rules of the organisations to which they belong as employees or for which they work as contractors.

Moreover, Japanese development practitioners and organisations must conform to international initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by the members of the UN. Recognising that we live in a globalising world, such initiatives help the people in UN member countries and areas to tackle various development issues. For the purpose of solving or mitigating increasingly complex issues, the current trend of international development promotes multi-stakeholder collaboration by forming partnerships with various entities that function under different national and organisational policies and social, economic, and cultural circumstances.

Taken together, the implication is that the formal ethics of international practitioners are derived from the donor source. However, development practitioners simultaneously must be concerned with the beneficiaries of their development support and understand the issues and circumstances that they face. Each beneficiary-generally a less developed country or area-has its own national and regional policies derived from their needs and brought about by their specific social, economic, and cultural circumstances.

Thus, Japanese development practitioners need to respect multiple formal ethical standards. Such ethics govern their way of thinking and behaviour, which consequently fosters their professional identity. Using a case study approach, this study considers how individual development practitioners construct and maintain their professional identity, balancing multiple influences and interests.

METHODOLOGY

As Besse-Biber (2017, 226, italicisation as shown in the original) explains that the case study approach seeks "to gain a more *complex and richer understanding* of the data through intense, in-depth exploration of a process"; its diverse unit of analysis ranges from an individual or a group to an entire country or a specific social policy (Hesse-Biber 2017, 222). Since this study seeks to examine the relationship between ethics and work identity through an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of development practitioners, the case study approach appears most appropriate and useful.

The data for the study are based on qualitative research conducted from 2016 to 2018 in which face-to-face, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who were purposively selected on the basis of their rich work experiences as development practitioners in various countries. The respondents were recruited through the network of the author, who has worked and conducted research in the international development arena. The interviews took place in locations convenient to the respondents in their assigned countries and/or in Japan. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents and were transcribed and analysed together with findings from the existing literature.

MULTIPLE ASSIGNMENTS, LOCATIONS, AND IDENTITIES

The respondents had acquired a variety of experiences through their assigned projects and programs in developing countries. Their job status changed often during the course of their career trajectories. Through their accumulation of first-hand experiences in implementing development projects and programs, they fostered their own ethics in order to work in the international development world.

This section focuses on two such Japanese practitioners. Both have nearly thirty years of experience in international development. Their experiences help us to understand the process by which they formed their identities. Both began their careers as volunteers in Africa and developed their own professional work ethics.

Mr. A, in his long career as a development practitioner, has worked closely with various local people and communities in his assigned projects, exercising his preferred work style in African and Asian countries. At the beginning of the 1990s, when he was in the earliest stages of his career, he twice served as a volunteer, working as a teacher at a technical high school in a West African country and helping in the development of local communities in a Southeast Asian country. He learned the local languages and lived and worked shoulder-to-shoulder with the people and their communities. These experiences brought him knowledge of the general socio-economic circumstances of the communities and the ways in which people worked, lived, and thought, all of which were different from what he had seen in Japan. Despite the harsh environments of the areas to which he was assigned, he happily related that he truly enjoyed his work. Consequently, he decided to pursue his career in the international development world. Mr. A eventually became a freelance development practitioner and worked mainly in the area of community development.

Mr. A had participated in a wide range of development projects in different capacities and with a different status, including as a senior volunteer, a project formulation advisor, and an expert. The projects that he led have been mainly planned and supported by JICA. He has worked with various stakeholders-central and local governments, international and bilateral donors, private companies, NGOs, and community members in the recipient countries, as well as Japanese embassies, private companies, NGOs, and JICA on the Japanese side. He implemented his projects by coordinating the efforts and interests of the various stakeholders, carefully observing the relevant social structures and power relations that had been nurtured within the local societies.

At the time of the interview, Mr. A was supporting the development of local communities in a Central Asian country through relevant business activities. Development based on a business approach has been popular since the mid-2000s with the call for collaboration between the public and private sectors. The introduction of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and SDGs among others has contributed significantly to the trend. However, Mr. A had been aware of the importance of income growth in communities even earlier, when Japan was still emphasising the role of the public sector in development. His project fit not only to the current development trend, but also allowed him to apply his accumulated knowledge and his understanding of local needs acquired throughout his development career.

Mr. B began his career in development as a volunteer at approximately the same time as Mr. A, working as an art teacher at a collage in south-central Africa. Following his volunteer service, Mr. B joined a public incorporated association whose business was related to international development. At this point, his back-and-forth work life between Japan and various developing countries began. He has since worked to manage volunteers in an eastern African county, and then shifted to Southeast Asia, with the exception of one project in central Africa. He became a project formulation advisor and later an expert, participating in various projects supported by JICA.

However, Mr. B's career has been primarily concerned with the enhancement of mutual support relationships among less-developed countries. He has worked in this particular area and similar areas in three countries. Through his career as a development practitioner, Mr. B has been obliged to work with multiple countries and related stakeholders in cooperative projects to promote mutual support relationships among less-developed countries and to address cross-border issues. Japan's assistance in fostering such mutual support relationships among the various concerned parties-generally the recipient countries-has been promoted by the Development Cooperation Charter since its 2003 revision. The stakeholders with whom Mr. B has worked have been mainly at the government level, such as ministries and governmental organisations, and international donors, rather than at the grassroots level where Mr. A has worked. In a majority of the projects, Mr. B has acted as a mediator by promoting dialogue among diverse stakeholders in support of their collaboration.

DISCUSSION: NEGOTIATING WITH ETHICS AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES

The cases of the above two individuals present similarities and differences in the career trajectories that have led them to form their identities as professional development practitioners. The words of Colic-Peisker seem quite apt: "For knowledge workers, professional identity-belonging and career-building may serve as substitutes for sedentarist fixities and sources of identity, anchoring and continuity," which are not bounded by a specific nation or locality (Colic-Peisker 2010, 483). My respondents certainly have fostered such "professional identity-belonging and career-building," which anchor and sustain their careers as development practitioners. However, their professional identities are unable to fully escape their nationality and national ethics in implementing projects supported by the Japanese side.

In fact, the Japanese identity of the two practitioners strongly relates to their professional identity-belonging. The two were quite critical of the Japanese way of conducting development projects. For instance, Mr. A observed that part of the Japanese system of managing projects hardly worked in practice in his currently assigned country, where the people live under a different social structure, system and values and do not understand nor need to follow the Japanese system. Although he had attempted to persuade them to the Japanese side, he failed to reach an agreement. As Japanese, he understood the Japanese way; and as a contractor with the Japanese side, he also understood the obligation to follow it. However, to deal with the dilemma caused by the gap between the Japanese system, which supported the creation and implementation of the project, and the reality of the communities for whom he worked, what he was doing was, in fact, to make a minimum effort (in terms of time that he spend) to meet the requirements imposed by the Japanese side. He was apparently conforming to the Japanese side, while also trying to find common ground. The imposition of the Japanese (or, in a sense, international) system, which was overly ambitious relative to local conditions, he observed, might risk damaging, or at least

delaying, the "self-help efforts" of the recipient society, which are highlighted in one of the principles of the Development Cooperation Charter. Drawing a clear line and differentiating between him and the Japanese side made it possible to manage his project smoothly and undoubtedly contributed to the construction of his identity as a professional development practitioner.

Similarly, Mr. B dealt with his Japanese identity, which existed in his "professional identity-belonging and career-building." He purposely tried not to cross the defined border between himself and his assigned recipient countries. According to his account, if he had been a volunteer, to cross such a border would not have been an issue; however, as a professional development practitioner, he understood that he should not do so. As he had, until recently, been employed by an incorporated association, unlike Mr. A, Mr. B worked in Japan from time to time in between his assignments outside the country. He utilised these periods as an opportunity to regain his Japanese essence. He seemingly believed that to get too close to a recipient country would render him blind and deprive him to view his assigned projects and local situations objectively. On the other hand, Mr. B also mentioned that it was necessary not to bring discussions of Japan's national interests into the projects, as this might interfere with the creation of an innovative approach or have a negative effect on (or reduce the motivation of) the self-help efforts of the recipient countries. He was concerned with finding a better way to develop the capacity of his assigned countries, but simultaneously understood the importance of the values of the Japan side, which planned and supported the projects with money provided by Japan's tax payers. In contrast to Mr. A, for Mr. B, as a Japanese professional practitioner, both the Development Cooperation Charter and international initiatives represented formal ethics and served as useful references in the implementation of projects, that aim to foster mutual support relationships among less-developed countries: the former stresses the importance of enhancing such mutual relationships among the less-developed countries and the utilisation of "Japan's experience and expertise" (MOFA 2015, 4); the latter, which would include SDGs, promote partnerships among all entities, from the public sector to the private sector, in both the developed and developing countries for the realisation of a sustainable society.

Romani and Szkudlarek (2014, 189) describe "an ethical identity construction process that seems to need to define an 'other' to define oneself," observing interculturalist conversations focused on such matters as who they are and who they are not. The clear boundary that the two practitioners draw between themselves and the Japanese side and between themselves and the non-Japanese side reveals their "ethical identity construction process." Both have a strong consciousness of being Japanese, which is their strength as well as base, in working as development practitioners managing Japan's development projects. At the same time, they understand that their local stakeholders, including central and local governments, consultants, NGOs, and community members, work under different values and ethics fostered in their own socio-cultural circumstances. These stakeholders have their own missions and capacities. For instance, while both the Japanese side and the recipient countries may agree on and support project plans at the macro level but at the micro level, the way of managing projects within a certain timeframe may not work well in practical. It may lead to a failure in meeting the expectations of the Japanese side due to such factors like changes in social circumstances during the implementation of the projects or the capacity limitation of the local communities. In such a case, the two practitioners often tried to mediate the concerns and differences of the stakeholders and facilitate direct and indirect dialogue.

Through their career trajectories, the two practitioners developed the ability to see things from multiple viewpoints, often from those of local stakeholders, including the "ordinary" people in the communities they served. They fostered such flexibility through participating in various projects in a variety of roles, from volunteer to expert. As volunteers, they rarely had a sufficient budget for their activities, which required them to practice diverse innovative ways to complete their tasks and compelled them to interact and collaborate with community members. Such experience resulted in enhancing their understanding of local societies living in markedly different social, economic, and cultural environments from Japan's. As project formulation advisors, they worked in JICA's country offices and often played the role of mediators between the Japanese experts and the offices, between the offices and the headquarters, and between the offices and the local stakeholders. As experts, they frequently met and negotiated with local stakeholders, including the people living in the recipient communities and especially in the case of

Mr. A, acted as mediators between the local stakeholders and their offices/headquarters. From their broad perspectives as mediators, they often shifted their identities from being a member of an office /headquarters and a Japanese expert to being a local stakeholder and a local community member, depending on whom they were talking to and what they were negotiating. In so doing, they were seeking a better way of managing their projects and realising their final goal of benefitting the recipient countries, while carefully enduring no harm in the Japan side. With respect to the diverse ethics of all the stakeholders, which influence their ways of thinking and behaving, the two practitioners nurtured professional ethics that helped them construct and sustain their identities as Japanese development practitioners. Their professional capacities to assume multiple viewpoints, understanding both the values of Japan and the recipient countries and maintaining a proper balance among all stakeholders, has served well Japan's bilateral cooperation in the international development world, where varying interests are intertwined.

It is, however, worth noting that the ethical identities of the two practitioners are seemingly not the same. Mr. A saw things decidedly from the side of the recipient countries and prioritised their needs. In contrast, the priorities of Mr. B appeared to favour the Japanese side, which financially and technically helped to implement the development projects and facilitate the mutually supportive relationships necessary among the less-developed countries being served. Thus, while the "professional identity-belonging" of the two practitioners might serve as "fixities and sources of identity, anchoring and continuity" (Colic-Peisker 2010, 483), it was not collectively internalised as a professional group, but rather was individually determined. Their identities shifted according to the complex interplay between internal (individual) and external (organisation, national) ethics (Kornberger and Brown 2007).

CONCLUSION

This study examined professional ethics and identity at work, specifically exploring the work experiences of Japanese international development practitioners. These practitioners work in projects that theoretically aim to support the development of less-developed countries, while on a practical level they must also serve the Japanese side. The stakeholders in the target countries are diverse entities rather than a monolithic whole. The cases of the two practitioners highlighted in this study reveal the complexity of identity formation, as many scholars have suggested. In their career trajectories, the two practitioners changed, developed and re-developed their status and expertise, and worked under increasingly complex circumstances in which the ethics of individual agency are consistently challenged by alternative ethics from the outside. In their various roles, these practitioners have mediated the interests of various stakeholders and attempted to "do some good," rather than to "do no harm," as required by formal codes of ethics. They have acted according to the situations they have faced, as Briody and Pester's (2017) study of practitioners who participated in research projects in General Motors suggests. In both cases, the individual ethics of the practitioners developed through their work experiences are deeply embedded in their professional identities as development practitioners. Where they work, how they work, with whom they work, and what status and responsibilities they have all presented ethical challenges and contributed to the construction of their professional identities. As can be seen in their development, the process of forming an ethical identity is not linear (Romani and Szkudlarek 2014). Each professional fosters his/her own ethical identity in his/her trajectory.

This pilot study certainly has limitations. The number and diversity of cases are not sufficient for deeper and more extensive analysis. For instance, the cases of the two practitioners suggest that development practitioners tend to see things from the local viewpoint rather than the Japanese viewpoint if they had volunteer experiences at the beginning of their careers. However, not all practitioners start their career trajectories as a volunteer in developing countries. Some work for private companies for years and then restart their careers in the international development arena. Some develop a certain expertise in their early career as development practitioners and then work as experts. More diverse data representing, for instance, both those with and without volunteer experience would allow for a deeper analysis and enhance our understanding of individual ethics and the process of constructing a professional identity. It

would also be important to examine how private life in a developing country, where work and life are typically interconnected to a much greater degree than in the practitioner's home country, may influence one's ethics and professional identity.

Despite the above limitations, I believe that this study expands our understanding of the formation and emergence of professional identity by adding the experiences of international development practitioners to the discussion. "Studies on work identities connect occupational commitment, job involvement and levels of tasks performance (work outcomes) to employees' vocational socialisation and skills development" (Brown, Kirpal, and Rauner 2007, 3). Further studies involving development practitioners and their identities will help to improve the planning and management of future development projects intended for the betterment of our societies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Yukimi Shimoda is an associate professor at Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan. She received a Ph.D. in Anthropology and Sociology from The University of Western Australia. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 16KT0186.

ENDNOTES

1. The Government of Japan revised the former ODA Charter and establishes the Development Cooperation Charter in 2015 (MOFA 2015, 1).

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