

Culture and Conflict in Academic Organizations: A Comparative Field Analysis of Two Disputes in Japan

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Every organization is a society in microcosm. The common supposition is that the Japanese organization reflects a society that values its special qualities of homogeneity and harmony. Yet a closer examination of a fast-changing Japan reveals the myth of a society that was never neither truly homogenous nor simply harmonious; likewise Japanese organizations, which may contain an interaction of people from different kinds of organizational cultures. Few interactions of this nature are devoid of conflict, which can be said to be a creative force, or a site for struggle. Using images of organizations as political systems, the writers decided to collaborate in an examination of a recurring type of organizational conflict in the Japanese academic community, specifically a case study of two different organizations in Japan. We will suggest contributory factors to such conflicts, which can erupt especially at a time when institutions of learning are beset by existential crisis: the economic pressures of a shrinking student population, resulting in endless injunctions to reform. Finally we will introduce ways of examining the cultural aspects of these dysfunctional and damaging conflicts and discuss possible routes to negotiation to bring about constructive social transformation in the future.

Societies are made up of various organizations. Like societies, organizations have their own idiosyncratic cultural behaviors along with various conflicts. Morgan (1997) asserts, "Organizations are mini-societies that have their own distinctive patterns of culture and subculture" (p. 129). Thus, while organizations may have some features in common, they have some particular characteristics that make their own corporate culture unique. However, culture is not a fixed entity in organizations, rather "it is an active, living phenomenon through which people jointly create and recreate the worlds in which they live" (Morgan, 1997, p. 141). Within these worlds, it is inevitable that conflicts occur. As Ting-Toomey (1999) asserts, "Conflict is a well-nigh inevitable part of any relationship" (p. 195), where conflict is defined as a disagreement between people with different cultures, who are interacting and experiencing emotional frustration when perceiving such things as incompatibility of values, beliefs, goals, needs, or scarce resources (Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

This paper investigates organizational cultures and conflicts in two Japanese organizations—hereafter referred to as Organization A and Organization B—composed of Japanese and non-Japanese workers. It is employees' interests, or predispositions that include goals, values (including cultural values and beliefs), desires, expectations, and other

orientations, which lead a person to act one way rather than another way, and in the cases analyzed, led employees into a conflict situation with the organizations employing them. If, as Morgan (1997) asserts, organizational-related interests include organizational task interests, career interests, and personal interests, then it can be assumed that the defense of these interests may be a source of organizational politics. Such organizational politics are important considerations when analyzing the role of organizational culture in contemporary society. As Morgan states, "Important dimensions of modern culture are rooted in the structure of industrial society, the organization of which is itself a culture phenomenon" (p. 122). This is acutely evident in the case of Japan, a society that remained essentially feudal in its social and political structure until relatively recently, when it propelled itself into modernity with late Tokugawa and Meiji-era industrialization and post-World War II rapid economic recovery (Gordon, 2003). For this reason, Morgan's images of organizations as *political systems* and as *instruments of domination* were selected to examine the conflicts in Organizations A and B, who are in the education "business." Each of the images frames the interaction of organization members in relation to power, influence, and conflict. Looking at organizations as political structures, Morgan observes that "Organizational politics arise when people think differently and act differently. This diversity creates a tension that must be resolved through political means" (p. 160). One's interests or predispositions, which include goals, values, desires, expectations, and other orientations, lead a person to act one way rather than another. He describes organizationally-related interests as being primarily oriented towards organizational *task interests*, *career interests*, and *personal interests*. It is the defense of these interests that cause people to engage in organizational politics. Meanwhile, Morgan's "Instruments of Domination" metaphor views organizations "as a mode of domination that advances certain interests at the expense of others" (p. 340). Morgan describes how the division of employees into certain classes encourages imposition of one class upon another. He gives the example of class distinctions between owners, managers, and workers.

Armed with that insight, the search for organizational conflict resolution can begin, as Morgan (1997) reminds us: "The domination metaphor encourages us to recognize and deal with perceived and actual exploitation in the workplace rather than dismiss it as a 'radical' distortion of the way things are" (p. 342). In this way, the traditionally-supposed benign paternalism of Japanese management styles may be set aside as a "powerful rhetorical façade" (Raz, 2006, p. 25) that obscures a rationalized design.

In order to better understand the types of conflicts and how conflicts are managed in Japanese academic organizations that employ a diverse population, the following research questions were pursued: If organizations are also political systems, what types of conflict exist in the Japanese academic community, and what are some contributing factors, and how might they manifest themselves in such a conflict situation? Furthermore, what are some of the possible ways that such a conflict can be successfully managed?

As a result of analyzing these two organizational conflicts, various insights were gained. Drawing largely on the research of Morgan (1997), these studies showed that the two conflicts resulted from differences in organizational-related interests, the fact that the institutions were inherently organizations of dominance, and lacking in effective communication. In addition, research into these conflicts resulted in three recommendations:

(a) to help improve communication by holding meetings between employees at all levels, (b) to standardize labor conditions, and (c) to implement professional development programs.

Overview: Ethical Stance

At least one of the researchers was a *covert participant-observer* in the case of data collection on the events occurring at Organizations A and B.

There is a body of literature on the strategic necessity of covert participation in particular cases. According to Goode (1996), the rationale for this approach to data collection is that researchers “recognize that people hide crucial information from outsiders—or distort it even when they do reveal it” (p. 13). Thus it is necessary to “dig behind people’s superficial self-presentations and discover the truth about their attitudes and behavior” (Adler, Adler, & Rochford, 1987, as cited in Goode, 1996, p. 13). The researchers agree with Goode and Douglas’ (1976, as cited in Goode, 1996) proposition that in conflict methodology, covert research practices are necessary when other strategies are “impotent to counteract the inevitable problems of facades, evasions, and lies.” Moreover, in a normal research setting, it would be extremely difficult for the researcher who “wishes to be covert not to act as a participant” (Bailey, 1994, p. 247). How else can the presence of the researcher be explained?

Regarding the need for *participant* observation in this particular study, the researchers’ stance emanates from the belief that social research can and ought to be *engaged*. Adapting from Benatar (2002), we believe that our ethical obligation to discuss problems of significant magnitude that “extends beyond the interpersonal level” and must be pursued actively. From an engaged research’s transformative perspective:

Exposing unjust or unethical exploitative, oppressive or illegal practices discovered during research is both legitimate and justifiable. To paraphrase Marx (1867, 1976), critical social researchers subscribe to the view that it is not enough to merely observe the world we live in, merely to understand it; the point is to change it. (Ferdinand, Pearson, Rowe, & Worthington, 2007, p. 532)

A further local issue encountered was the persistent subscription to the fact/value dogma divide (Howe, 2003), that is, a dualistic orientation towards the “‘descriptive’ (scientific-methodological)” stance that “divides questions concerning the morals and politics of social scientific studies from questions concerning their scientific merits, and pursues them relatively independently” and considers that “not keeping these domains separated is often considered the mark of biased social research or of political advocacy” (Howe, 2003, p.113). It was clear on analyzing the reactions to the research that the commentators themselves had not reflected on their own subjectivities, emanating from their positions of privilege and bias, including their own predilections for their positivist approach, despite the fact that “knowing anything for certain, that is, absolutely or positively, is impossible” (Guba, 1990, p.140). That is to say, once upon a time, in normative ethical research the researcher’s stance was ideally expected to be objective, disengaged, and value-free, but nowadays, adapting (Ferdinand et

al., 2007), we are able to perceive that this, too, is a construct like any other. No one is value-free and those engaged in social and ethnographic research always:

. . . enter . . . with particular research questions in mind. However broad their questions are, and however objective they may claim to be or seek to remain throughout the research, the kinds of stories they tell are always determined on the one hand by the kinds of theoretical and conceptual questions that inform research, and on the other by the individual social, political, moral, and ethical concerns and views researchers may have about the research they do and things they uncover. (Ferdinand et al., 2007, p. 532)

In other words, both the researcher's and the readers' subjectivities and multiple identities, must be acknowledged as areas for potential conscious and/or unconscious bias (*epoche*), while at the same time also acknowledging that it is impossible for anyone—even grounded theory practitioners—not to approach a research project fairly loaded:

We are never just researchers; we are both researchers and, at the same time, civically and politically formed individuals. We have, in other words, our own personal moral views and values that determine how we believe we should act in any given situations and circumstances based on our own understandings of what we believe is morally right and wrong. (Ferdinand et al., 2007, p. 532)

Furthermore, Ferdinand et al. (2007, p. 532) argue that it is neither “possible nor desirable” for the researcher in all cases to “remain passive and objective,” particularly (in our case) when researching social issues and conflict issues, which may include acts and attitudes of resistance where abuses of rights or human dignity are concerned. What is crucial is the ability to set ourselves aside sufficiently to hear and observe others. Within the role of participant observers, we did our best to meet this considerable challenge.

Related to the issue of *epoche*, the researchers wished to explore the East-West dichotomy that regards Western systems of thought as hegemonic, in comparison with a more authentic Eastern alternative (Hendry & Wong, 2006). Did we accept *uncritically* as a Western conceptualization of hierarchy in which human relations are defined primarily in terms of power and dominance? How did this chime with the assumption of Asian societies that hierarchies are (ideally) nurturing? Was this, in fact, the case for these participants? Clearly analysis of events indicated that the hierarchy had no intention to nurture them, since from the outside, the relationship was clearly marked as limited by time (a non-negotiable contract) and absence of professional development. What also was apparent in the findings was that the notion of a nurturing hierarchy was archaic in a globalized, fully-industrialized country, which had reinvented its traditions to communicate Fordism (and post-Fordism) to its workers (Kinzle, 1991). Furthermore, by definition, inequality is inherent in hierarchies (just as organizational equality is historically problematic) and in an era of human rights constructs, may lead to forms of conflict (such as organizational conflict), especially when humiliation is persistent and contemporary cultural issues are thrown into the mix. Theorizing

the research of Evelin Lindner, founder of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Network, “*Dynamics of humiliation* [italics added] profoundly change in their nature within the larger historical transition from a world steeped in Honor codes of *unequal human worthiness* [italics added] to a world of Human Rights ideals of equal dignity” (Lindner, 2004, p. 4).

Method

The researchers kept comprehensive field journals that recorded our observations and collected an extensive body of documentation from stakeholders in the disputes described below, in the form of emails, correspondence between management and participants, union and participants, and among participants; minutes of union meetings and management-union negotiations, photographs, videos and other documents. For reasons of sensitivity and protection of participants’ confidential data, we do not append these; the primary injunction for us the researchers to “do no harm” constituted our guideline at all times. It is also obvious that covert participants cannot ask for consent to publish data in such cases.

Examination of a Conflict: Organization A

Organization A is a semi-government, non-profit Japanese organization in Japan, which provides training to Japanese local government employees on how to deal with foreigners and conduct international relationships. The two parties in conflict can be separated generally into a Japanese group and an almost entirely non-Japanese group of language instructors. The Japanese group in this case consisted mainly of Japanese men in their late 40s to mid 50s in age who had previously held posts in the Ministry of Home Affairs in the Japanese national bureaucracy. They had been transferred to management posts in the training institute. The language instructors consisted mainly of men (50%) and women (50%) from English-speaking countries (the U.S., the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand) who were mostly in their late 20s to mid 30s and who were teachers of English as a foreign language.

Looking at the Organization A group through the Morgan metaphor of *organizations as political systems*, one can see diverse competing stakeholders. Members of management had *task interests* that included such things as increasing the number of public employees who came to the institution for training and overseeing the work of employees. Some of their *career interests* generally included looking for lucrative positions in other government-related organizations or as consultants. Often, personally, management members were living by themselves in apartments far from family and had fairly conservative attitudes, not wishing to have any problems during their two- or three-year terms at the institution. They also tried to arrange time to go to see their families whenever possible.

The language instructors also had diverse interests. In the area of *task interests*, most saw their task as educators. Most had aspirations of contributing to the field of English teaching, and some had ambitions to move to positions of authority in the organization. Personally, many of the instructors saw a need for protecting their privacy while valuing creativity, autonomy, and democratic ideas. However, they lived in company-owned housing and thus

were required to live in the same apartment buildings and ride the same trains with other employees of Organization A, including members of the Japanese management group.

The political implications became evident on at least three major occasions. One of these was an occasion in which the Japanese management group decided to hire an outside consultant from Britain to evaluate the language training program at Organization A. This clashed with the values of democracy and lack of control over decision-making that most of the language instructors already felt. They expressed the opinion that they should have been asked for their input on matters that concerned them most, namely the condition of the language training program.

The second major political event occurred when language instructors asked a new departmental director to give them a direct channel of communication without having to go through middlemen and supervisors, of whom they had become distrustful. The Japanese manager replied that it was not possible, and as a result, a group of instructors declared a union branch.

Instructors said that this action was the only way to have some influence on their work life. As Morgan (1997) states, "For many people at the lower levels or marginalized areas of an organization, the only effective way that they can influence their work life is through this [organized or unionized] form of countervailing power" (p. 188). Morgan explains this dynamic as part of a process that occurs when "people begin to identify with the responsibilities and objectives associated with their specific role, work group, department, or project team, in a way that often leads them to value achievement of these responsibilities and objectives over the achievement of wider organizational goals" (p. 169). The lack of an effective channel of communication contributed consequently to escalating the conflict between the polarized parties.

In the third major political event, in the name of restructuring, the Japanese management group made a decision to renew all language instructor contracts only one more time. In the past, there had been no limit on the number of times contracts could be renewed. This led some instructors to avoid association with the union in order to appear compliant, in the hope of saving their jobs. Ultimately, politicking and personal animosities occurred between the Japanese management group and the language instructors, as well as amongst the language instructors themselves. Morgan (1997) describes this pattern of politicking as something that happens quite often:

Organizational structure is frequently used as a political instrument. Plans for organizational differentiation and integration, designs for centralization and decentralization, and the tensions that can arise in matrix organizations often entail hidden agendas related to the power, autonomy, or interdependence of departments and individuals. (p. 176)

Japanese management controlled virtually the entire decision-making process, as well as all information. Often employees at Organization A were only told after the fact what policy or personnel decisions had been made; they were frustrated by lack of access to the decision-making process, which can ensure that those decisions one actually desires are made.

Moreover, controlling knowledge and information is a source of power, and those persons who control them systematically influence the definition and reality of organizational situations (Morgan, 1997). This situation of controlled information can also create patterns of dependency and institutional stasis.

The language instructors tried to use the power of uncertainty, in the way of strikes and the withholding of information about how many instructors were originally expecting to leave, to manipulate the union versus management situation and convince management to offer severance packages and reconsider limited contract terms. However, this did not work, since management saw the language instructors as replaceable with seasonal employees whom they subsequently hired through an employment agency. As Morgan (1997) states:

The degree of power that accrues to people who can tackle both kinds of uncertainty [environmental and operational] depends primarily on two factors: the degree to which their skills are substitutable, and hence the ease with which they can be replaced; and the centrality of their functions to the operations of the organization as a whole. (p. 183)

In the end, all language instructors left Organization A willingly or unwillingly, and most of the Japanese management group members were transferred to various other posts after their stints of service were completed. Thereafter, instructors were supplied through outsourcing. Undoubtedly cultural reasons were partly, but not wholly, to be blamed for the failure of various conflict resolution approaches.

Examination of a Conflict: Organization B

Organization B, a popular and expanding private university organization in Japan, describes itself as an educational trust and included (at that time) four campuses, various attached elementary, junior high and senior high schools.

The complex web of disputants in Organization B indicates that this was a multiparty conflict; but the fellow disputants did not necessarily express solidarity, reflecting the discrete subcultures to which they owed allegiance. Before describing in more detail the particular conflict which is our focus, we shall briefly outline some of the parties to the conflict. They included the board of the educational trust; B's own in-house union affiliated with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). Members of the in-house union (mostly male Japanese) include both tenured faculty and administrators holding permanent positions. In 2005, these members staged a 10-minute strike and a lunchtime rally on campus over bonus cuts.

The third party was a group of mostly non-Japanese foreign language lecturers employed on non-renewable, term-limited contracts at the Western Japan campuses, who declared in May, 2003, their own branch of the General Union (GU), "a legally registered Japanese labor union open to all nationalities from all walks of life" (*The General Union*, 2006). The key issue of non-renewable contracts formed the backbone of a dispute which is ongoing to this day.

The language lecturers, aged 30s-50s, originating from Europe, the Americas, and Australasia, spoke Japanese with varying degrees of fluency (from fair to native-like). Some were dependent on Organization B for visa sponsorship. Most were based long-term in Japan and many had Japanese families. All possessed master's level degrees; some possessed PhDs or were studying for PhDs. This third group forms the focus of our analysis.

The diversity of strata and ranks in Organization B crucially dictated subcultural allegiances in an array of dialectical contradictions; in-house unionists, in their roles as managers, often found themselves on opposite sides of the negotiating table from GU members. Conditions also naturally descended with rank (salary, research budget, sabbatical privileges, office space). However, as all non-tenured members were located outside the power structure, such as faculty meetings, and discouraged from attending academic conferences, it was virtually impossible for them to progress hierarchically or to influence change, due to lack of channels of communication. This "intellectual closed shop" pattern has been referred to previously in controversial works by Ivan Hall (1998) and Brian McVeigh (2002, 2003).

In addition to Group 3, a further sub-class of largely female non-unionized clerical staff members was also employed on a term-limited contract basis. In fact, 50% of B's employees were on contract, a configuration not dissimilar to other Japanese private universities and businesses, although not many have such complex subdivisions.

As with most Japanese universities, the non-tenured are the first to suffer cutbacks as Japan's prolonged economic recession and declining population impact severely on its institutions of higher learning. In particular, lecturers teaching more vulnerable languages, such as Spanish, Italian, and German face the toughest battle to retain their teaching hours. Consequently, they were among the most solid members of the GU dispute that erupted.

Looking at the politics of Organization B through Morgan's systematic analysis of the "relations between *interests*, *conflict*, and *power*" (Morgan, 1997, p. 160), one can surmise that the university's board and administrators had *task interests* that may have been in conflict with the desired aims/task and interests of an educational institution and its academic faculty, namely, to run the university on a profit basis while at the same time engaging in an acute existential campaign to win a larger market share of Japan's dwindling student population. Triangulating this analysis with activity theory, if the primary object of commodified educational services in Japan is "the production and maintenance of [more] goods and services . . . the expansion of labor-power, or rather labor power *potential*" (Warmington, 2009, p. 6) exists in dialectical tension with the more rarified research-and-learning goals of the ivory tower.

The first chapter of the dispute occurred when Organization B announced the "Constructive Dissolution" of the rank of term-limited senior lecturer in summer 2005. This formed the impetus for GU branch members to exercise their "countervailing power" (Morgan, 1997, p. 188) through leafleting actions, newsletter distributions, and collective bargaining meetings with university administrators—all meeting with a rejection of members' key demands.

This led indirectly to the second event. After the first leafleting, four teachers alleged harassment by administrators, including threats of non-renewal of contracts if they did not

apologise and cease union activities. This formed the backbone of an unsuccessful suit by GU for unfair labor practices at a Prefectural Labor Commission. In addition, GU filed complaints against B's breaches of the Labor Standards law with the Labor Standards Office.

The third major event—a one-day strike by some GU branch members—occurred as a result of the breakdown of collective bargaining talks. By then, a degree of politicking had taken place among members themselves, similar to that described in Morgan's *Images of Organization* (1997); it echoed the politicking in Organization A. "Class distinctions" emerged between the different ranks of union members, with the non-tenured associate professors subsequently withdrawing their participation. In Bourdieuvian parlance, the imposed limits of rank became an organizing principle of the instructors' social world:

Dominated agents, who assess the value of their position and their characteristics by applying a system of schemes of perception and appreciation which is the embodiment of the objective laws whereby their value is objectively constituted, tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them . . . defining themselves as the established order defines them, reproducing in their verdict on themselves the verdict the economy pronounces on them. (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 471)

Subsequently, administration "antistrike notices" were distributed, proclaiming that GU's action had harmed students' education. A campaign to elect a GU executive member as the workers' representative on campus (required by Labor Law in all workplaces) produced a last flicker of resistance in the form of a poster campaign using all the major slogans of the past years: *Workers are not disposable! No to outsourcing of language education! Support Human Recycling at B! No to McEducation! No to McJobs!* (The General Union, 2006).

Other universities took note of B's "troubles," engaging in pre-emptive dispute avoidance. However, GU's central demand for renewable contracts at B remains unmet. In two years, 12 members lost their jobs. Discussions and rumors about outsourcing a good deal of B's language teaching remain management's main sword of Damocles.

Discussion

Returning to Morgan's (1997) metaphor, it can be seen how Organization A was divided into political class systems: those of national government management, local government middle managers, permanent employees, part-time employees, and contracted language instructors. The Japanese national government management group had most of the power and constituted a group of elite members of Japanese society. Middle managers were local public employees who returned to their home offices after two or three years in Organization A. Organization B contained a four-tier class system: administrators, tenured faculty, contract employees (faculty and clerical), and part-time faculty.

In terms of instruments of domination, in Organization A and Organization B, permanent employees were predominantly male, while part-time employees were female and could be let go at any time, like the mostly non-Japanese language instructors. This created a system for potential arbitrary dismissal of employees with few consequences. Part-timers and non-

Japanese instructors who have lived in Japan for a few years know that stable employment is usually not available to most marginalized groups (i.e., women, non-Japanese, ethnic minorities, the physically challenged). All are frequently subject to a form of economic patriarchy deeply resistant to change, as recession hit, employers' institutionalize their structural preferences for irregular, dispatched, and part-time workers.

Morgan (1997) uses an example from Arthur Miller's play, *Death of a Salesman*, to demonstrate how many organizations use employees as disposable resources. Morgan states that, "In the world today, individuals and even whole communities find themselves being thrown away like empty orange peels when the organizations they serve have no further use for them" (p. 308). This sums up exactly the feelings that most contract employees working in Organization A and Organization B held, on being informed that their contracts would be renewed only one more time, meaning that they would have virtually no chance to advance to higher-level positions. As a result, union members in both organizations asked their representative to negotiate the contract matter with the Japanese administrators, since not only did they face having to find a new job and/or new visa sponsor, but also in the case of Organization A, new housing, since Organization A was the provider of company housing.

Administrators' decisions in Organization A and Organization B concerning channels of communication and organizational structure completely marginalized most of the language instructors. Long before union branches were established, working conditions and job roles between language instructors and other classes of employees at Organization A and Organization B were so different that a sort of "language instructors versus predominately Japanese employees" mentality prevailed inside the organizations. Morgan (1997) contends that this often happens in organizations, stating that "many organizations become radicalized in ways that stress 'them and us' attitudes" (p. 341). These *them and us* attitudes at Organization A and Organization B became more complex as the *them* became more diverse. The *them* groups became not only administrators, but also non-union instructors and Japanese permanent and part-time employees. These largely intracultural conflicts came to be perceived by the non-Japanese instructors as purely intercultural in part due to difficulties in distinguishing that "a nation is not an organization, and the two types of 'culture' are of a different nature" (Hofstede, 1991, p. 181).

The researchers acknowledge that there are many lenses through which to view these unsuccessful organizational conflicts. For example, looking at them through the perspectives of activity systems, "sites in which . . . social energy is permanently being transformed" (Warmington, 2009, p. 9), the build-up of [intracultural] stresses and strains within the system has the potential for positive or negative outcomes. Engeström (2001) for example, sees this "idea of internal contradictions as the driving force of change and development in activity systems" (Engeström, as cited in Warmington, 2009, p. 4). When "the contradictions of an activity system are aggravated some individual participants begin to question and to deviate from its established norms. In some cases, this escalates into collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort" (Warmington, 2009, p. 7). In the case of the disputes described, the problem was ambiguity towards collaboration/collective change effort, for example, through collective bargaining. The escalation that did take place was not constructive. Meanwhile failure to collaborate in redesign meant that no transformation took

place, only a lose-lose stalemate, for “an expansive transformation is [only] accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode of the activity” (Warmington, 2009, p. 7).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Looking at these organizational conflicts, it is plain to see that the parties involved lacked communication, attempted to control information vital to the other group, and used the organizations as instruments of domination. More employee development and study programs could have been implemented to make managers and lower-level employees aware of the diverse values, beliefs, and communication styles present in the organization. As it happened, each class of employees had its own agenda, which was pursued at the expense of the well-being of the organization as a whole. Much time and energy was spent in speculation about what the goals of the other groups of employees were. As a result, the organization was split into factions with each group moving farther away from the others.

At the time of these conflicts, there were very few meetings held in departments in Organization A. Also there were few meetings that involved both administrators and lower-level employees from all levels in Organization B. There were informal, voluntary organizational functions in both Organization A and Organization B, but many employees did not attend them, as they saw no merit in attending or were not invited at all. This meant that there were very few opportunities for communication between administration and lower-level employees. Members of one department had little knowledge of what members of other departments were doing. In both organizations, there was a sort of tension between the departments and between lower-level employees and administrators. The resulting conflicts involving union branch members and administration in the two organizations openly displayed this problem. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) explain that, “Communication is of course essentially the *exchange of information* [italics added], be it words, ideas, or emotions. Information, in turn, is the *carrier of meaning* [italics added]. Communication is possible only between people who to some extent share a system of meaning” (p. 75). More official meetings within the organization would help to confirm the importance of communication, shared information, and understanding of diversity, including cultural diversity, inside the organization. More effective communication would help all employees recognize different kinds of diversity in the organization, which could possibly lead to more respect of those diversities. As Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner state, “To sum up, both awareness and respect are necessary steps towards developing transcultural competence” (p. 204). We would suggest that *transcultural competence*, in this case, be taken to mean not only ability to function “interculturally” (across the “different cultures” of Japanese and non-Japanese employees in Organization A and Organization B), but also refers to competency in negotiating the diversity of different *subcultures* within these organizations.

Based on interpretations of these two conflicts, the following recommendations could be made: (1) that there be more regular formal meetings that include management and lower-level employees from all departments, (2) that stable employment conditions be standardized, and (3) that professional development programs, including intercultural communication, be

implemented. Yet before any of this can happen, a major adjustment of political will and vision is necessary.

A further recommendation is for employment conditions to be standardized. All employees at both organizations could be given equal status through an intention of *renewability*. In today's Japan, there is little real distinction between what is termed permanent employees and non-permanent employees. When the Japanese economy turned sour, many large Japanese corporations were forced to lay off employees and offer early retirement packages to lifetime employees. Many organizations in both the private and public sector are hiring non-permanent employees, predominantly women and non-Japanese, through employment agencies so that they do not have to bear the expense of insurance and other benefits. They also do not have to deal with the responsibilities of keeping employees on in an economic slump. It is a system that helps to allow permanent employees in the organizations to feel more secure. However, the existence of this supposedly widespread system could be called into question, since, as Sugimoto (1997) contends, less than a quarter of all employees in Japan ever work in large organizations that are able to offer lifetime employment.

It should be noted, however, that the Hijokin Union (the part-time instructors' union) supports the improvement of adjunct instructors' pay and stabilization of conditions, rather than improved contractual conditions for non-permanent employees, seeing this as a more realistic solution to the three tiers of inequality (permanent core, contract, and part-time employees).

Thus it can be seen that although creating ranks and classes has been one of the main ways of avoiding conflict in Japan, reducing the friction of subcultures wherever possible is more likely to ameliorate discontent among employees. While imported political and multicultural equalities might not resound locally, less dominance and fewer differences might also encourage more employees to feel more loyalty towards the organization. In order to resolve conflicts between groups of differing status, there is always a dialectical tension that may not find perfect resolution, but much can be learned from the routes taken towards resolution:

Everyone should have equal rights and opportunities, yet any contest will produce a hierarchy of relative standings In the final analysis culture is the manner in which these dilemmas are reconciled, since every nation seeks a different and winding path to its own ideals of integrity. It is our position that businesses will succeed to the extent that this reconciliation occurs, *so we have everything to learn from discovering how others have traveled to their own position* [italics added]. (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 187)

Above all, an effective solution to the dilemma is to be located in a culturally appropriate process, one which also recognizes that the educational programs of those organizations endeavor to educate their clients (students and trainees) to become more global citizens.

This leads to the last recommendation that professional development programs in intercultural communication and independent third party interventions should be implemented

throughout the relevant levels of an organization when conflicts occur between mainly non-Japanese language instructors and Japanese management. Whether or not the real context is intracultural, in this instance the conflict may at least be partly aggravated by inflexible perceptions and a lack of awareness of others' cultural differences. Approaching the issue synergistically, any management of organizational conflict involves managing *change*, as Adler (1997) observes, "The most fundamental change is one of perspective: senior executives must guide their organizations toward a more inclusive, global world view" (p. 118). A good place to start would be by acknowledging diversity within the workforce.

Without some kind of training program to directly address dysfunctional issues, it would be very difficult for management or employees at an organization to gain this awareness on their own. Both are just surviving within the organization until there are more changes, hopefully for the better. Some cannot see the forest for the trees. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) and Adler (1997) support this point. The former provides an image of how awareness of differences should work, asserting that, "Respect is most effectively developed once we realize that most cultural differences are in ourselves, even if we have not yet recognized them" (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, p. 203). They show how important it is to be aware of our own assumptions so that we may be better able to understand those of others. Without this awareness, there can be no negotiation, no compromise, and no solution to corrosive conflicts.

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