

# Intercultural competence for non-Japanese language teachers in Japan: A case study approach.

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## Abstract

This paper is structured into three primary sections. The first, which comprises a case study of one specific school, is by far the longest. The second section consists of a discussion of selected theories of intercultural competence. The third of these three sections is the one in which a direct effort is made to bridge the theory of the second section to the practice that was examined in the case study. Two points about the content of these last two sections need to be articulated from the outset: Firstly, the word "other" will be used in the same sense that Edward Said uses it in *Orientalism* (Said, 1978). Secondly, the terms "cross-cultural effectiveness" and "intercultural competence" will be used synonymously.

Since the educational practice being studied in this paper is specific to one particular school, the question of generalizability is a pertinent one. Is it possible to generalize the data informally collected at one private language school to Japanese language education as a whole? While it is most certainly not scientifically, or quantitatively, possible to do so, Japan is widely considered to be a relatively homogenous society (Fanjoy, 1999). Given this cultural homogeneity, an attempt will be made to reveal how the culturally-ordained mindset of Japanese employees in the case study school is at least partially reflective of, and in keeping with, that of other Japanese educators. From this researcher's perspective, however, making generalizations based on a single case study is a purely speculative endeavor, one which cannot be considered as authenticated in the field.

## A Case Study of One Private Japanese School: Eiken Ueda English School

The ensuing discussion will endeavour to present a general overview of, and introduction to, the intercultural friction which has troubled one private cram school in Japan: Nantoka *juku* (this is a fictitious name). After this, and starting on the top of page five, Nantoka *juku* will be analyzed through each of the four frames outlined in L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal's *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, And Leadership* (1997). These four frames will be discussed in the same order that they are presented in this volume: the structural; the human resource; the political; and the symbolic. In the process, it will be revealed how there are some frames that are more applicable to this case study than others. Given the various personalities and specific variables at Nantoka, it will be seen how the human resource frame, as well as the symbolic one, offer a greater range of realistic, viable options for improvement than either the structural or political frames. Lastly, this paper will uncover the fact that the lines separating one frame from another cannot always be clearly delineated, given that there is a certain amount of overlap amongst these frames.

Nantoka is a small, privately-owned *juku*, or after-hours cram school. Its primary, intermediate, and secondary age students come to Nantoka directly after the regular school day ends, just as the adult workers come after their "nine to five" has finished. The one exception to this are the three or four classes of adult females who study during the day. Although Nantoka has two satellite classrooms in neighboring suburbs, it has only nine full-time employees. During the New Year's and summer holidays, this number is increased by

five part-time teachers, typically university students who are brought in to accommodate the dramatically increased holiday enrollment. These increased numbers are a result of the lucrative, short-term, intensive holiday "crash courses" that Nantoka offers.

Nantoka *juku* is located in Ueda city, which is an industrial community of about 150, 000 people. Situated in Nagano prefecture, it is not the only English language *juku* in town. Although it was the first, it is not the largest. Specifically, the Nantoka hierarchy, a rigidly vertical one, is headed by *shachou*, which translates roughly as "honorable, esteemed owner." Second from the top comes Osamu, the Principal of Nantoka. Osamu is *shachou's* only formal advisor, and collaborator, in the decision-making process. After *shachou* and Osamu come the three foreign conversation instructors, followed by the three Japanese teachers. At the bottom of the Nantoka hierarchy comes the secretary, almost always a young, attractive female.

The most divisive issue at Nantoka has been, and continues to be, the friction between the three foreign teachers and the three longer-serving, more experienced Japanese ones. As a gross oversimplification, it could be argued that the three non-Japanese teachers are perceived as over-paid, imported, prize show dogs, who are remunerated higher than the local staff, not for reasons of training, skills, or merit, but purely for reasons of nationality. That is to say, the three foreign staff members normally are only at Nantoka for twelve months, and they normally do not have any formal teaching credentials, other than the *de rigueur* undergraduate degree. The Japanese educators, in contrast, are fully qualified, and have all had at least a few years of experience teaching at Nantoka, and more significantly, belong to a culture that has, until very recently, placed the utmost value on corporate loyalty. To paraphrase, the Japanese staff are with Nantoka for "the long haul," unlike the steady stream of transitory foreign instructors who almost exclusively sign twelve month contracts.

Why are the three non-Japanese instructors, who only teach conversation, as opposed to the more rigorous academic pedagogy of the Japanese staff, paid more? The reasons here centre upon the fact that, in a remote, rural community, the Caucasian foreigners might well be thought of as fascinating members of a (Western) culture that Japanese people are generally curious about. To a certain extent, then, the foreign teachers are metaphorical magnets, attracting both young and old students to the *juku*. They are the ones, for instance, whose faces are splattered across the promotional material- even though they usually lack formal teaching qualifications!

Now, the Japanese educator who is in charge of orienting, and informally acculturating the three foreigners, is Atsuko-sensei. Atsuko has a degree from a midwestern American university, thereby speaking the most fluent English, and being perceived by *shachou* and Osamu as being the in-house expert on foreign culture. This is in fact accurate, although Atsuko's knowledge of Western culture derives mainly from her four years in the United States. It is worth commenting upon Atsuko's gender, as this has a bearing upon the cross-cultural friction at Nantoka. Not only is Atsuko the only female educator at Nantoka, but she is the only Japanese staff member who has lived abroad, and, again, is the only Japanese person at Nantoka who is functionally bilingual. Given this, she justifiably feels that she is being discriminated against, since a Japanese male is the informal head teacher, not her. As a result of her having the best English proficiency, she feels that she should have more authority and responsibility than she does. Yet, this opinion of hers is never articulated to either *shachou* or Osamu, due to the sort of "sweep it under the carpet" corporate culture at Nantoka.

In a nutshell, the culture at Nantoka dictates that a stiff upper lip and stoic facade be maintained, and that differences of opinion, even conflicts, are actively discouraged. To what

extent this corporate culture is unique to Nantoka is difficult to gauge, since attaining consensus is normally an important component of Japanese interpersonal relations. This failure to address the issue of conflict, however, means that Nantoka 's Japanese staff are tacitly resentful of the three foreign staff members, who are sometimes perceived as being out of line for verbalizing their opposition to certain issues.

It should be observed, however, that the foreign instructors soon learn to "fall into line," and keep their concerns to themselves, since little is accomplished by publicly voicing discontent. It is usually discovered that the more effective means to have one's issues dealt with is to speak with Osamu in private. One possibility for this is that Osamu and *shachou* do not want to be seen at the weekly meetings as always giving in to the foreigners' demands; although in such a small company it is difficult to keep such "back room arrangements" truly covert.

However, it would be inaccurate to conclude that Nantoka is a repressed pot of seething cross-cultural friction waiting to boil over! This is partially because of the weekly staff language exchange: once a week, Japanese and foreign staff members are paired off, so that they can instruct each other in their mother tongues for a period of sixty minutes. Consequently, most foreign teachers get to be very friendly with the Japanese staff member they share languages with. On top of this, and perhaps more importantly, the relationship that the foreigners have with their Japanese students, generally-speaking, more than compensates for any potential "bad blood" with the more permanent Nantoka staff. The Japanese students are often extremely warm, friendly, caring, and even generous toward their English conversation teachers, with many of whom lasting friendships are forged. A non-Japanese instructor at Nantoka might frequently receive gifts, or meal invites, from her/his adult students- thus potentially causing more friction with the more permanent staff. In contrast, though, the very close, quasi-Utopian relationships that Nantoka 's foreign teachers have with their classes often dictates that they have a deep fondness for the people of Japan, even though their working *milieu* might be an exception.

The final two points that warrant inclusion here relate to company cars, and working hours. The second major source of intercultural friction, after salary, concerns working hours. Put simply, the three native English speaking employees are allowed to start work daily at twelve-thirty p.m., while the Japanese staff must be at work by noon. On top of this, the former are allowed to leave the premises for one hour during lunch, whereas the Japanese employees are encouraged to remain on site. The verb "encouraged" here is tantamount to a rule. This lunch time staff discrepancy is grounded in *shachou's* belief that if any potential customers were to walk in during lunch hour, it is better that they be greeted by someone from their own culture, someone who can sell them on the array of benefits to studying English- in their own dialect.

The third, and final, direct source of intercultural friction has to do with the two company cars. The foreign instructors are the only ones who teach in the two satellite classrooms, as well as in the boardrooms and education centers of Nantoka 's corporate clients. Therefore, the foreign employees share the two automobiles amongst the three of them. Hence, not only do the foreign instructors get to go off-site for lunch, but they also have the privilege of teaching in different settings. In draconian contrast, and with one exception, the Japanese teaching staff must remain at Nantoka from noon until nine p.m. No surprise, then, that there could be intercultural friction! What is in some ways more surprising is that there is not more active resistance to this unequal *status quo*! As will be seen below, the reasons for this are also cultural.

Why would *shachou* and Osamu administer the school in a way that is so heavily biased in favor of the foreign employees? In one word, the answer is competition. The other English *juku*'s in Ueda-shi, many of which are strictly conversational and do not have a Japanese teaching staff, all provide the same, or greater, salary as Nantoka, and they also offer company cars. As for working hours, the other English *juku* in town only oblige their conversation teachers to show up thirty minutes prior to each class, as opposed to enforcing the twelve-thirty to nine p.m. working day, the way Nantoka does.

### **The Four Frames of L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal's *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, And Leadership***

#### ***The Structural Frame***

The twin cornerstones of the structural frame are differentiation and integration. Nantoka has quite a lot of the former, but probably not enough of the latter. Given Japan's Confucian respect for, and obedience to, authority- as well as its often formalized working *milieu*- a vertical coordination approach is often more culturally appropriate than a lateral one, although not always. Although there are numerous exceptions, matrixes, task forces, and dissent-rife meetings do not usually carry as much weight as the more traditional, time-honored system of authority, rules, and policies.

Although there is no serious ambiguity (ie. goals, roles, and responsibilities are very clearly defined), the chief problem at Nantoka is that there is no built-in process for dissent. That is, *shachou* and Osamu's edicts and rules must be obediently carried out, otherwise one might be perceived as being insubordinate. Is it therefore possible to push for a structural device to resolve such issues of dissent? Perhaps if Nantoka had more than nine full-time staff, but it being so small, one is hard-pressed to imagine how *shachou* would permit more collaborative decision-making. As a result of the top-down, "machine bureaucracy" type organizational structure (even though a nine person firm is by no means a bureaucracy!), the Japanese educators feel their concerns and needs are not being met (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Thus, the institutional structure is actually part of the problem.

What options does the structural frame provide for? Well, one option could be responsibility charting, which involves bringing people together to define tasks and responsibilities (Bolman & Deal, 1997). It would appear, however, that everyone at Nantoka not only knows their own responsibilities clearly, but also everyone else's. Indeed, this is a major part of the problem: the knowledge that responsibilities are not evenly divided. What about the option of a complete overhaul of the organizational structure? This is certainly a feasible, viable option, and could help make the teaching portfolios more equitable. In fact, the only problem here revolves around making the two executive decision makers realize that this would be in Nantoka 's own interest. This, however, might not happen too soon, given that the three Japanese teachers, the ones who bear the brunt of the current structural inequities, are also near the bottom of the Nantoka totem pole. In other words, these three can voice support for a complete reworking of the organizational structure, but they lack both the necessary authority and political power. Of course, this will be examined after the human resource frame, in the political frame.

If these three Japanese educators, who have the most to gain from a reworked structure, were somehow able to do enough alliance building to persuade *shachou* and Osamu to consider a structural change, it could be decided to strike a task force (Bolman & Deal, 1997). One form that this alliance building could take would be to involve their adult learners (ie. adult classes could sign a petition demanding a more equal working environment);

although this might constitute a transgression of Japan's social norms. While a task force might seem ludicrous, or even comic, for such a tiny firm, it could be comprised of one foreign employee, one Japanese teacher, and either *shachou* or Osamu. This task force would thereby consist of one third of all Nantoka employees! It is worth mentioning here that Bolman and Deal do not spend much time on cultural sensitivity, or cross-cultural effectiveness. These, however, will be discussed below, following this case study. Of course, one would not normally expect a nine person firm in a predominantly rural prefecture to have the patriarchal owner agree to strike a task force! While such a task force could, and does, occur in Tokyo-based transnational corporations, Nantoka *juku* is a different firm entirely.

While the structural frame contains the ability to eliminate the friction between the foreign and Japanese teachers through a more equal rendering of the privileges and workload, it is doubtful that this would occur. Especially when one considers that this would more than likely have no positive impact on the firm's clientele. That is, restructuring Nantoka so as to reduce or eliminate this intercultural friction probably would have little impact on the bottom line. This bottom line consists of the monthly tuition fees that students pay to Nantoka. Arguably, these are *shachou's* number one priority, given that Nantoka's Japanese educators, who are not unionized, can be replaced without great difficulty.

Finally, on page 40 of their publication, Bolman and Deal outline the six premises of this first frame (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Without reiterating these here, the one premise that has the most relevance to Nantoka *juku* is number two, which states that organizations function best when rationality is the *modus operandi*. Accordingly, it could be argued that Nantoka is not currently maximizing its potential, since it is not wholly rational to give most of the perks to one group of employees at the expense of another. While *shachou* could defend his decisions with the alibi that he had to give these perks to the foreign instructors, otherwise they would not be attracted to Nantoka, one cannot help but wonder how he could discount the effects that this would have on the three Japanese educators. After all, it would not have been too much of a burden to allow them to come in at twelve-thirty, or to go out for lunch once in a while. However, the idea of a more equitable salary is a challenging one. One option here could be to permit the three Japanese educators to teach private lessons in their free time, something that the three foreigners are prohibited from in their contract.

### ***The Human Resource Frame***

The second frame Bolman and Deal discuss is the human resource frame. This frame endeavors to meet and placate the needs of staff. In 1954, Abraham Maslow published his highly influential hierarchy of needs (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Maslow's hierarchy has five levels, the lowermost of which consists of physiological needs, such as oxygen, water, food, and physical health. The next level is safety, while the third level is belongingness and love. The two highest levels are esteem, followed by self-actualization (Bolman & Deal, 1997). With respect to Nantoka, it is ironic, even paradoxical, that both the three foreigners and their three Japanese colleagues are stuck at level three of Maslow's hierarchy, belongingness and love. The foreigners do not truly feel that they belong to the Nantoka team, since they are just the latest imports in a steady stream of foreign instructors. In contrast, the three Japanese educators do not feel much love from *shachou*, who is in one sense awarding them second class treatment. It is also possible that they do not feel much love toward the three foreigners, who are perceived to be monopolizing all the perks. In terms of the needs of *shachou* and Osamu, while their individual needs are being met- after all, they call the shots- they may not be too enthused about the cross-cultural friction that is damaging their school.

In terms of interpersonal relationships, arguably the nucleus of this frame, there is little doubt that this organizational issue is an interpersonal one. The following is a workplace equity quotation from chapter seven, "Improving Human Resource Management," of Bolman and Deal:

"<New United Motors Manufacturing, Inc.>'s success was built on a comprehensive human resource philosophy. There was symbolic egalitarianism: workers and executives wore the same uniforms, parked in the same lots, and ate in the same cafeteria. Grouped in small, self-managing teams, employees participated in designing their own jobs, and rotated through different jobs. NUMMI's motto was "There are no managers, no supervisors, only team members." (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 135)

This is a far cry from the reality at Nantoka *juku*, where there most definitely are supervisors, and where decision-making is centralized in the top two people. As seen already, not only is there minimal symbolic egalitarianism, but there is also little actual egalitarianism! In fact, the mindset of *shachou* and Osamu is very much along the lines of blaming others for any mistakes, and trying to improve their performance. This has often resulted in them getting defensive, which likely proves to *shachou* that he was correct all along! What he could perhaps do instead is to question his assumptions, and think "outside the box."

As with NUMMI, successful organizations start with a human resource philosophy, something Nantoka should undertake post haste. *Shachou* and Osamu might have an HR philosophy verbally shared between them, but there should be a written one for the benefit of all employees. Now, the issue at Nantoka which is more pressing than either investing in people, or job enrichment, is empowerment. With the exception of *shachou* and Osamu, the Nantoka employees feel powerless to improve the unbalanced *status quo*. Note that even though the native English instructors do not want to lose any of their own benefits, if they could be induced to assist their three colleagues, they would gain an increased sense of belonging and love. In this way, all six teaching staff members would be able to move up to level four of Maslow's hierarchy.

Is there something that Nantoka could do to increase employee participation? Could it get them to own more of this cross-cultural problem? If the case of NUMMI is any sort of an example, the decision-making process needs to be decentralized. All six teachers, excluding Principal Osamu and the courses he teaches, would feel a lot more empowered if there was a more consultative, "grassroots" process. As it stands now, the weekly staff meetings are supposed to do just this, except that *shachou* and Osamu normally do what they had originally intended, regardless of what was expressed at the Monday staff meeting. To this writer's mind, then, if the option of empowerment is not a realistically viable one, given the owner's authoritarian proclivities, then he and the Principal should unilaterally do something to help eradicate this staff-dividing problem. Moreover, if *shachou* is concerned about the bottom line, it was seen at the end of the structural frame how there are alternatives to simply boosting salaries. A human resource option here might take the form of increasing the popular staff language exchanges to two hours per week, from the current sixty minutes per week. More employee solidarity building options will be examined in the discussion of the symbolic frame.

Lastly, while it would be inspirational to try out small, self-managing teams, or even TQM (Total Quality Management), the small staff size at Nantoka, not to mention the owner's conservatism, mitigate against this (Bolman & Deal, 1997). However, there are three

other realistic options in this frame that have the potential to do very well at Nantoka. These human resource options consist of in-service training on effective communication techniques (ie. do not simply sweep grievances under the proverbial carpet!); and secondly, a workshop or series of workshops on conflict management. Of course, this latter option requires constant role modeling! The third "highly do-able" possibility here consists of similar in-service training on cross-cultural effectiveness. This third possibility could lead to the publication of a cross-cultural awareness manual that could be required reading for all new employees! This idea will be developed in more detail below.

### *The Political Frame*

Through the lens of the political frame, what is transpiring at Nantoka is a conflict over preferential treatment. One cultural group has been allotted more status than the other, and thus more power. Traditionally, it may have been easier to replace Japanese educators in the snow fields of Nagano than native English speakers! Further, the owner and the Principal of Nantoka both realize that the Japanese group will most likely refrain from engaging in active political resistance, since the Confucian norm dictates that the nail which stands up gets hammered down. Although there will likely not be much active resistance, there is surely resentment toward the "preferred" group, and this has tended to be swept under Nantoka's carpet. Of course, this reluctance, or unwillingness, to confront interpersonal problems is by no means a permanent solution, and short of replacing the three resentful employees, which in itself offers no guarantee that this issue will not "pop up" again in future, a more equitable, or compensatory, arrangement needs to be negotiated. The argument that the Japanese educators should be thankful to the foreigners for keeping enrollment numbers high (ie. "You owe your job to the high numbers that the foreigners bring in!") is nothing but a myopic solution, since it represents a kind of indirect threat. Instead of trying to rectify the unbalanced *status quo*, this argument tries to justify it. Clearly, intimidation and fear rarely bring about constructive, long-term change.

On the other hand, the two member Nantoka executive is cognizant of the fact that reducing the privileges that the foreign instructors currently enjoy is not pragmatic, either. To varying degrees, foreigners at Nantoka have been perceived as having questionable loyalty, or even to be quite mercenary. This perception has been supported in the past when unhappy foreign instructors suddenly quit, leaving *shachou* and Osamu scrambling to find a replacement in Tokyo, Osaka, or Kobe, if they were lucky. If they were not so lucky, the replacement would be found overseas, thus taking a lot more time. Japanese students typically bond with their *sensei*, so to have a new one suddenly parachute in at the eleventh hour invariably results in several students dropping out at the worst, and learners not being terribly content at best. Note that in the Japanese public school system supply teachers, and occasional teaching staff, do not exist. In Japan, then, having a few unhappy staff members is one thing, but having unhappy customers is literally anathema. In the world of private Japanese cram schools, "the customer is god" is considerably more than a weather-beaten, hackneyed *cliche*.

Given all this, reducing the benefits that the foreign employees currently enjoy is probably not an appealing prospect for *shachou* or Osamu. A *laissez-faire* approach would be far better, given that the three disgruntled Japanese employees will not likely be willing to put their jobs on the line. In other words, they will be wary of being disloyal to their social superior. In the unlikely event such discretion is thrown to the wind, they can most likely be severely reprimanded without too much difficulty. For these three Japanese teachers belong to the national group mentality, and can thus be comprehended, in contrast to the frequently

unpredictable, self-serving foreigners. The need for heightened cultural sensitivity in both groups is apparent here.

If this sounds suspiciously like the human resource frame, that is because it is. The four frames cannot be viewed as being wholly separate from each other. Indeed, there is quite a bit of overlap between them. Returning, however, to the unpredictable nature of the foreign instructors' thought processes, it is clear that cross-cultural effectiveness training, and/or a manual, is needed at Nantoka. Traditionally, Atsuko has been in charge of setting out "the do's and don'ts" of Japanese culture to the in-coming foreign instructors, but the time is nigh for a more in-depth, formal cultural orientation. Especially when one considers that Atsuko herself is a key member of the group that feels it has received unjust treatment from the powers that be.

The final point that should be made here concerns the power balance between the three Japanese teaching employees. It will be recalled that one male Japanese teacher is acknowledged as the informal head teacher, and he is Osamu's "right hand man." Given that this person has more informal power than his two Japanese teaching colleagues, one imagines that he would be far more hesitant to engage in active resistance than these two colleagues. A more cynical view, a critical theory view, is that *shachou* and Osamu have utilized a classic divide and rule strategy.

Bolman and Deal have written that the basic elements of the political frame include enduring differences, scarce resources, conflict, and power (Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. 367). In the case of Nantoka *juku*, the enduring differences were in some ways more blatant than most, given the ethno-cultural differences between foreigners and Japanese. In terms of scarce resources, as a small, privately-owned school, the bottom line is never far from the owner's mind! As has been seen, the conflict appears to be along racial lines, although the inequality that is at the heart of this conflict is actually a structural one. That is, the structure at Nantoka has given more perks to the three foreign employees, without compensating the three least senior Japanese educators. As for power, it is far too centralized at Nantoka, although in such a small business, the argument of "all chiefs and no Indians" could be made. Either way, there is little doubt that *shachou* and Osamu could have done more to accommodate the needs of the three Japanese teachers. This relates to the two faces of power that Bolman and Deal discuss: it can be used for nefarious means, or it can be used constructively to get things accomplished (Bolman & Deal, 1997, p. 368). In the case of Nantoka, there has not been enough of the latter.

One way to help realize this constructive kind of power is to begin by creating an agenda. An agenda can help bring about a new reality in which more is done to accommodate the needs of the Japanese educators (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Carl Rogers has written about how helpers need "to prize" their clients, and at Nantoka more needs to be done to prize these unhappy long-term employees. Although it is unlikely to be used at Nantoka, an agenda could help chart the course toward such a laudable, morale-improving goal.

Not only could an agenda be used by *shachou* and Osamu, but one could also be used by the three less-than-satisfied Japanese educators. Mr. A, Ms. B, and Mr. C could produce an agenda to help them chart the course toward their goals. Realistically, there is more of a chance of this occurring than what was hypothetically described in the previous paragraph! So, after these three have finished their agenda, they would need to devise a strategy for getting *shachou* and Osamu "on side." A key part of this strategy might involve networking, or having good relationships with people who can help. As part of this networking process, these three employees would soon discover who is an ally, who is an opponent, and who is a fence-sitter. The ultimate aim in networking is to create a like-minded coalition, one that can



negotiate with those who hold executive power (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Using the information gleaned from networking, it could be possible to produce a political map of Nantoka, with those who have high power (ie. *shachou* and Osamu) at the top of the page, and those with low power at the bottom of the page. However, with only seven teaching staff including Osamu, there is probably not much use for a political map at Nantoka. Such a map is ideally suited for a larger company.

### *The Symbolic Frame*

The fourth and final frame, the symbolic one, comprises communal rituals, events, or myths that symbolically unite and bond an organization together (Bolman & Deal, 1997). One key facet of this frame is values. Although no explicit values were communicated to the foreign instructors upon arrival at Nantoka, there was only an informal orientation, they have been able to ascertain that much value is given to hard-work; to stoicism, and grace under pressure; and to minds that are open enough to accept cultural differences. This last value posits that the foreign employees should be open to experience the full array of Japanese culture during their year at Nantoka. Besides these three values, the fourth and final (unarticulated) Nantoka value, one that supersedes the others, centers upon satisfying one's learners. This paper has already seen how "the customer is a god" in Japan.

Would a return to these core values help solidify, and bond together, Nantoka employees? While there is no doubt that every staff member at Nantoka works hard, although some harder than others, to satisfy the students, not everyone is as stoic as *shachou* and Osamu might like. For, if everyone was, then there would be no friction related to the extra benefits given to the foreign instructors. As for being accepting of cultural differences, the foreigners generally seem less adept than the Japanese. Most of Nantoka's foreigners have had minimal cross-cultural experience, and most have not had a great deal of full-time work experience. Consequently, they typically expect things to be as they were back home, or they are afflicted with ethnocentrism. While the Japanese staff at Nantoka tend to be comparatively refined in their approach to cultural differences, it has been examined how they sometimes have a difficult time understanding foreign cognition!

One Nantoka ritual that works very well is the weekly language exchanges. To reiterate, this could easily be doubled to two hours per week, since it has served to bring both participants together. Another possible platform for ritual exchange could involve the selection of a staff social convener (sadly lacking at present), who once per month would arrange a culinary, athletic, recreational, or artistic group outing. In fact, one wonders why this avenue has not already been explored. Perhaps it has, and *shachou*, ever conscious of the bottom line, did not want to get stung with the bill. If this were the case, these monthly social outings could be on a "Dutch" basis. Since Nantoka has three foreigners on its payroll, they could lobby for a "paid by the individual" system, citing the third company value, the one that advocates acceptance of cultural differences. This would enable *shachou* to save face, if he is in fact worried about money.

While there is no shortage of solidarity-building insider jargon (ie. black line master, TOEFL, OHP, Gestetner, and realia), more could be done to establish some rites of initiation for new employees. Currently, there is a staid welcome dinner for incoming staff, but this has become predictable and lifeless. Something a bit lighter, with an element of humor, would certainly be a morale booster. One possibility here would be establishing a monthly award honouring an outstanding employee. Instead of a traditional trophy or silver cup, this could take the form of a stuffed polar bear, grizzly bear, or koala, which one of the foreign employees could have sent over, since Japanese people are often fascinated with foreign

wildlife. Every Nantoka staff member would be so recognized at least once during the year, each for their own special talent.

There is one final facet of the symbolic frame that is worth shedding some brief light upon. Bolman and Deal discuss the importance of faith to this frame (Bolman & Deal, 1997, ps. 369 & 370). Organizations are described as secular temples that create meaning in people's lives, and help these people know themselves better (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Although Nantoka might seem like one of the last places a person might go to discover spirituality, the fact remains that most, if not all, of its educators applied to work there for reasons that transcend the purely monetary, or material. After all, there is a lot more cash to be had teaching in a big city than in a rural "backwater." Moreover, one does not normally go into the teaching profession to "strike it rich!" From this idyllic perspective, Nantoka truly is a secular temple where its employees are chasing their value-laden dreams of making the world a better place; by positively impacting future generations. However, intercultural friction has separated Nantoka's keepers of the faith, so now the challenge is to find something to pull these two groups of employees together. The final facet of this frame would dictate that Nantoka's "warring factions" need to sit back, contemplate their spiritual values, and realize that they are doing what they nobly do because they want to leave their mark on those who will succeed them.

Bolman and Deal's four frames have helped to uncover a variety of possible solutions to the problem of intercultural friction at Nantoka *juku*. Moreover, the use of these frames has resulted in a clearer comprehension of the problem itself. What started out as a seemingly intractable cross-cultural problem can now be viewed as one that is not devoid of hope. There are options. And, although many of Bolman and Deal's insights seem to be targeted at much larger companies, it was seen how the human resource frame, as well as the symbolic frame, offered the least costly, most feasible options for Nantoka.

With respect to the human resource frame, particularly promising options include employee training in effective communication techniques; in conflict management; both of which, in turn, play important roles in cross-cultural effectiveness. Decentralizing the decision-making process would make employees feel more empowered, so this too would be another human resource option. Except, of course, for the fact that Nantoka's owner will not likely relinquish any of his authority; this option, then, clearly overlaps with the political frame. Thus, it has also been seen how these frames are not completely autonomous from each other. Finally, the most promising options from the symbolic frame were seen to include expansion of the weekly language exchanges; the selection of a staff social convener; and the creation of staff awards. The above options all serve to celebrate both cultures present on the Nantoka staff.

## **Selected Theories of Intercultural Competence**

### ***C.I. Bennett's Five Assumptions of Cross-Cultural Effectiveness***

In *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory And Practice*, C. I. Bennett defines "intercultural competence" as the ability to interpret intentional communications (such as language, signs, and gestures), some unconscious cues (such as body language), and interpersonal customs that are different from those one is normally exposed to (Bennett, 1999, p.286). The two dominant tenets of intercultural competence are empathy and communication. As well, Bennett has observed that intercultural competence includes recognition of the fact that communication between people from different cultures can be hindered by preconceived assumptions, or stereotypes, about the other's culture (Bennett, 1999).

A.J. Kraemer has written that people can become so parochially immersed in their own culture that they simply cannot comprehend a communication based on a different set of norms, and cannot understand why a supposedly self-evident communication from them cannot be understood (Kraemer, 1975). The image that comes to mind here is of an English-speaking tourist in an Asian country raising her/his voice, fully convinced that this will somehow help the person being asked directions understand the English language!

Now, Bennett has determined that there are five assumptions which relate to cross-cultural effectiveness. These are: 1) that language is the heart of culture and cognition; 2) that intercultural competence is enhanced by development of the ability to recognize cultural influences on their own cognition; 3) that there are modes of human communication which transcend cultural barriers; 4) that there are some facets of the diverse cultures within a larger society that can be identified, defined, and taught; 5) and lastly, that people can achieve a psychological balance between cultural pride and identity on the one hand, and an appreciation for different cultures on the other (Bennett, 1999). Paraphrased, this fifth assumption posits that once people understand how their own language, experience, and cognition relate to their own culture, contrasts can be made with different cultures.

Eventually, such individuals might be able to attain a level of "transpection," which is what R. Hanvey defined as "the capacity to imagine oneself in a role within the context of a foreign culture" (Hanvey, 1975). Nine years after Kraemer coined this term, Gudykunst & Kim (1984) characterized intercultural competence in terms of "the intercultural person." Such persons were ones who had achieved an advanced level in the process of becoming intercultural. They had cognitive, affective, and behavioural characteristics that were open to growth beyond the borders of any one culture (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984).

#### *The Five Characteristics of Intercultural Persons*

Just like Bennett's list of the five assumptions that intercultural competence rests upon, Gudykunst & Kim have produced a list of the five characteristics of intercultural persons. Thus, intercultural persons have: 1) lived through experiences that challenge their own cultural assumptions, a prime example of such an experience would be culture shock, and that give insight into how their world has been formed by their culture; 2) intercultural persons can serve as facilitators for contacts between cultures; 3) they come to terms with the origins of their own ethnocentrism, and achieve an objectivity in viewing other cultures; 4) they develop a "third world," or third party, mentality which allows them to evaluate intercultural encounters more accurately; 5) and finally, they show cultural empathy and can "imaginatively participate in the other's world view" (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). The literature that was reviewed for this synthesis paper appeared to concur that empathy is a crucial component of cross-cultural effectiveness. That is, it is one thing to develop knowledge and awareness of human similarities, yet quite another to develop empathy. Knowledge, while being an important factor, is an insufficient attribute- it does not automatically lead to intercultural competence.

#### *The Culture Assimilator Paradigm*

H. Triandis (1975, 1989) has pioneered a paradigm for cross-cultural training called a culture assimilator. Simply put, Triandis designed this model to increase understanding between people from two different cultures. So, how does it work? Participants are given various culturally-relevant scenarios to read about, and as they work their way through these written passages they learn what aspects of the scenarios need to be attended to, and what details can be ignored. These scenarios, or "episodes," are chosen in such a way that they expose

participants to situations which highlight the salient features of social events (Triandis, 1975, 1989). The intent is for participants to learn to discriminate and recognize the key features of various social situations. The reading passages are chosen to give participants contrasting experiences with situations that differ sharply. The cultural assimilator model emphasizes the distinctive features of interpersonal events, features which make the various situations very different from parallel ones participants have already experienced in their own culture.

In N. Dresser's Multicultural Manners: New Rules Of Etiquette For A Changing Society, a modified culture assimilator model is used as the organizational framework. The book has three sections: 1) common blunders that occur when people from different cultures interact; 2) blunders that occur when they holiday or worship together; and 3) common blunders with multicultural health practices (Dresser, 1996). As with Triandis' paradigm, specific case studies and real-world scenarios with post mortem, written debriefings serve to instruct readers in what needs to be attended to, and what can be ignored. However Dresser, in contrast to Triandis, does not attempt to search out the "cultural principles" shared by the thematically grouped scenarios of her three sections. Dresser, then, has configured this "how to" guide as a thematically organized, prescriptive cross-cultural resource.

As participants receive more training in the various scenarios of the culture assimilator, they generally become increasingly able to glean the common features shared by all the scenarios. Such shared commonalities are what Triandis called cultural principles (Triandis, 1975, 1989). After a participant has proceeded through approximately six scenarios dealing with the same cultural principle, she/he is presented with a summary sheet, a sheet in which the principle is stated as a conclusion (Triandis, 1975, 1989). Thus, if a participant has not "clued in to" the cultural principle by this point, it would simply be given to her/him.

To illustrate this paradigm, Triandis has provided the grossly, perhaps carelessly, overgeneralized example of "black/white subcultural differences" (Triandis, 1975, 1989). The somewhat surprised reader learns that "Black subjects have a tendency to assume that all white persons are prejudiced against blacks" (Triandis, 1975, 1989, ps. 70-71). Triandis goes on to explain how a cultural assimilator model could be utilized to bridge this cultural gap, and to show African Americans that not all Caucasians are racist! Granted that Triandis wrote this before the age of political correctness, but at the dawn of the twenty-first century few would contest that he would do well to replace this questionable example with one that is less of a sweeping generalization. After all, this writer alone has met several persons of African descent who were not convinced that all Caucasians discriminated against them.

### ***E.T. Hall's Low Context and High Context Cultures, As Well As His Recommendations for Intercultural Competence***

In E.T. Hall's article "Unstated Features of the Cultural Context of Learning," not only does the author put forward another paradigm for cross-cultural effectiveness, but he also makes five recommendations for such intercultural competence. However, the first section of this article concerns itself with contrasting low context cultures with high context cultures. Low context cultures are ones in which meaning is assembled from parts, like words which are themselves meaningful (Hall, 1985). Meaning changes with the selection of parts, as well as their arrangement. For example, "The man bit the dog," versus "The dog bit the man" (Hall, 1985, p. 164). Examples of low context cultures include North America and Western Europe.

On the other hand, meaning in high context cultures is not so much assembled by the selection of component parts as it is extracted from the specific environment that surrounds one. High context cultures inhabit a "sea of culture" that is collectively shared (Hall, 1985, p. 164). All or most of the component parts of meaning interrelate to make the environment

meaningful (Hall, 1985). Examples of high context cultures include the Pueblo, many indigenous African cultures, the Russians, and the Japanese.

In their Journal Of Cross-Cultural Psychology article "Silence in Japan and the United States," Hasegawa and Gudykunst have done a commendable job of summarizing E.T. Hall. They write that, according to Hall, low context communication involves making direct and precise statements (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998). In contrast, high context communication involves the use of understatements, indirect statements, and interpreting pauses in conversations (Hasegawa & Gudykunst, 1998). Not surprisingly, low context communication is a feature of individualistic cultures, while high context communication is emphasized in collectivistic societies.

Simplified, Hall's building block approach to meaning-making allows for meaning to be faithfully translated from low context to high context cultures, and vice versa. This paradigm, then, acts as a bridge spanning the chasm separating the construction of meaning in low context and high context cultures. Now, it has been seen above how the number five appears to be a special one for intercultural communication theorists, and Hall is no exception. Thus, he lists five "important microcultural topics," or influences, that impact upon his building block model: 1) rhythm patterns ranging from those at the kinesic (body movement) level in the classroom to work and activity patterns for the day, month, and year; 2) differences in listening behaviour which signal attention and deference; 3) group pressures that result in reluctance on the part of the individual to exceed the performance level of the entire group- this is especially true in Japan; 4) differences in accepted voice level and kinesics on the part of educators; 5) and finally, awareness of unconscious racism and ethnocentric bias (Hall, 1985).

Hall also posits five recommendations for effective cross-cultural pedagogy. The first of these relates to the commonalities shared by all human cultures: the term that he uses for such commonalities is "interfaces" (Hall, 1985). Next, he recommends that indigenous education systems be encouraged and increased, and that these build on past successes. As well, Hall makes the controversial recommendation that outstanding educators be rewarded. The fourth recommendation is that cross-cultural education needs to be highly aware of different learning styles; while the final recommendation advocates a wider recognition of the importance of "the microculture of education" (Hall, 1985, p. 170). In the increasingly cross-cultural world of the twenty-first century, educators everywhere need to understand the differences and similarities amongst the various ethnicities represented in urban classrooms.

While the conclusion that more research into intercultural competence, what Hall terms "cultural interface," is needed is a valid one, certain elements of the article did appear to be dated. Examples of this would include his repeated use of the terms "white" and "Indian"; his assertion on page 171 that foreign journalists in Japan are assisting it by using television and the cinema to spread the use of English; as well as his observation that while it is commonly believed in the West that all children learn the same way, this is not actually the case (Hall, 1985, p. 170). Of course, Howard Gardner's widespread popularity has made all educational stakeholders keenly aware of multiple intelligences and different learning styles.

## **How These Theories of Intercultural Competence Could Inform Practice at Nantoka**

### ***Nantoka Cram School and Bennett's Five Assumptions of Cross-Cultural Effectiveness***

This paper has already recommended the drafting of a cross-cultural awareness manual for Nantoka *juku*. With little doubt, such a manual would have to adhere to C I Bennett's two *sine*

*qua non* facets of intercultural competence: empathy and communication (Bennett, 1999). Specifically, the manual could begin by relating Bennett's five assumptions of intercultural competence to Nantoka. It has been seen how the first of these assumptions posits that language is the heart of culture and thinking (Bennett, 1999). Given that *shachou* and Osamu encourage their foreign staff to acculturate to Japan as soon as possible, this provides theoretical proof for the suggestion of extending the weekly employee language exchange from one hour to two- possibly even more.

Again, the second of Bennett's assumptions stipulates that intercultural competence is enhanced by the development of the ability to perceive the cultural influences on one's own cognition (Bennett, 1999). Accordingly, Nantoka's cross-cultural manual would examine, and discuss, how many western cultures have been informed by a pluralistic Judeo-Christian heritage; whereas Japanese culture has been influenced by a Shinto and Buddhist, homogenous heritage. Specifically, the key tenets of these world religions would be compared and contrasted. Since the cultural influences on a population could easily constitute the subject matter of several monographs, it must be noted that, in addition to religious history, the mass media, the political milieu, the economy, social norms, etiquette, music, drama, poetry, not to mention the visual arts, all influence an individual's cognition. Of course, the social composition of a culture, that is whether it is more individualistic or more collectivist, will also impact upon how its denizens think. It is doubtful that the Nantoka manual would be able to do justice to the full cornucopia of cultural influences, although the ones that are more applicable to a working environment would be examined. Apart from religious history, examples here would include social norms, etiquette and behavior, as well as the social composition of the target cultures.

Bennett's third assumption concerns the modes of human communication that transcend cultural barriers (Bennett, 1999). Although a seemingly inconsequential triviality, Nantoka staff should be encouraged to smile as much as possible! They should also be encouraged to refrain from whispering to each other in front of staff members from the other ethnicity; to be active listeners; to keep their office doors open more often; to speak interculturally in soft, courteous tones; and to engage in inviting, non-threatening, body language when dealing with members of the other culture. Three more esoteric examples of human interaction that are common, for example, to both Canada and Japan include treating colleagues with kindness and respect; placing a high value on personal integrity and honesty; as well as placing a high value on hard work. These last points would definitely be important principles for the cross-cultural manual. And, even though Japan has not had a conspicuous Christian heritage, "doing unto others as one would have them do unto oneself" is a major cornerstone of both cultures.

While some of these suggestions are clearly more practicable than others, they never the less share the quality of being able to transcend cultural barriers. As such, they are all worthwhile entries for the Nantoka cross-cultural manual.

The fourth assumption of intercultural competence concerns defining and learning the elements of a culture that are specific to it (Bennett, 1999). This is exactly what N. Dresser has accomplished in the above-mentioned 1996 publication. Moreover, the above discussion on E. T. Hall revealed how many western democracies are **low context** societies, and Japan a high context one. What features are unique to each? The culturally unique elements of Japan, and to a lesser extent western democracies, have already been covered in the preceding case study, although it is worth revealing that cultural predispositions tend to be generalizations. As such, they are replete with numerous exceptions.

Bennett's fifth and final assumption, the one dictating that once a person understands the influences on their own culture they can better appreciate other cultures, can be readily applied to Nantoka (Bennett, 1999). That is, foreign educators in Japan can remain proud of their ethnicity, and still fully appreciate Japan at the same time. There would most likely be less intercultural friction at the *juku* if the three foreigners were more receptive of Japanese culture. This once again leads into Triandis' culture assimilator paradigm, since these foreigners would do well to search out the cultural principles, what Hall terms interfaces, common to both western democracies and Japan. Not only is there common ground shared between these five assumptions, then, but the link between Bennett, Triandis, and Hall bares witness to some theoretical common ground, as well.

Given that this particular writer has spent a good portion of his life overseas, he is convinced that nothing makes an individual more aware of the forces acting on her/his own culture than being removed from it. Canadians often feel most in tune with the elusive Canadian identity when they are abroad! As a result of this heightened awareness of their own cultural heritages, Bennett's fifth assumption would posit that the foreign staffers at Nantoka are in a prime position to appreciate the host culture. So, why is this not necessarily the case? Perhaps the main reason for this is the unequal treatment meted out to the foreigners, and the resulting "bad blood" between them and their Japanese counterparts. If the Nantoka working environment was more egalitarian, the permanent teachers would feel less animosity towards the foreign instructors, who would then be in a better position to realize this fifth assumption. Sadly, it has been seen how this unbalanced *status quo* will likely not change too soon.

### ***Nantoka Cram School and the Five Characteristics of Intercultural Persons***

Both Nantoka's cross-cultural manual and its intercultural competency workshops would have to include Gudykunst and Kim's (1984) five characteristics of the intercultural person. Especially relevant to Nantoka are their third and fifth characteristics. The third characteristic held that intercultural persons are able to come to terms with their own ethnocentrism, and objectively view other cultures. The three foreign instructors need to be more aware of their own cultural biases, and to not expect everything in Ueda city to be as it was back home. Similarly, the Japanese staff should perhaps try to be more cognizant of the fact that western democracies are often low context societies, and thus their citizens often tend to be unique individuals.

Nantoka staff also stand to benefit from adherence to Gudykunst and Kim's fifth characteristic of intercultural persons. If these private educators can walk the proverbial mile in the other culture's shoes, presumably the intercultural conflict would be decreased. This is because cultural discrimination is usually rooted in some form of ignorance, and walking a mile in the other's shoes clearly makes one more knowledgeable about that other. This fifth characteristic relates to Bennett's assertion that empathy is one of the two crucial traits of intercultural competency. After all, it would be difficult to see through another's eyes without accruing empathy for them.

### ***Nantoka Cram School and the Cross-Cultural Theories of E.T. Hall***

In terms of the five microcultural components of Hall's building block model, which itself facilitates smooth interrelations between low and high context cultures, there are three that are particularly pertinent to Nantoka. The second component of this model advises those who would bridge cultural gaps to be aware of differences in listening behavior, which can signal

attention and deference. Given that westerners can often be more vocal listeners than the Japanese, it is conceivable that *shachou* and Osamu have perceived such "vocality" as a lack of suitable deference. Since the vertical stratification of Japanese society derives from Confucianism, wherein employees always defer to supervisors, it is strongly possible that this "vocality" could exacerbate intercultural friction. For instance, Nantoka's foreigners went so far as to complain directly to Osamu about having to work on Christmas day.

Hall has further observed that individuals in high context societies are generally reluctant to exceed the performance level of the whole group. At Nantoka, none of the disgruntled Japanese staff members dared complain openly for this reason, as well as for fear of being singled out. The final element of the building block model to be discussed here has to do with differences in accepted voice level and body movement. The former has already been remarked upon. Yet again, the theoretical common ground in this field has been highlighted. Now, since westerners generally communicate with more auditory volume and kinetic movement than the Japanese, it is possible that Nantoka's permanent employees perceive this to be somewhat confrontational, or even quasi-antagonistic. It could be argued that even if an individual is aware of certain cultural traits on a conscious level, and accounts for them consciously, there is still the possibility that these may be negatively received on a subconscious level. In this light, the foreigners at Nantoka would do well to moderate their voices and minimize physical gesticulations when conversing with their Japanese colleagues. This needs to be included in the cross-cultural awareness manual, as well as in related training sessions.

#### ***Nantoka Cram School and Theoretical Overlap in the Literature***

Bolman and Deal's fourth frame, the symbolic frame, provided for staff recreational outings, as well as for a "Grizzly Bear" Employee of the Month Award. How do these suggestions for improvement relate to the theories of intercultural competence? Not surprisingly, these symbolic frame proposals can be grounded in more than one of the theories, which again emphasizes the fact that there is a significant amount of theoretical overlap in the literature. Specifically, these proposals would, it is hoped, foster increased communication between the "rival" factions, which relates to the work of Bennett (1999); they would ideally increase awareness of cultural principles, as envisaged by Triandis (1975, 1989); they would ideally lead to cultural interface, as envisaged by Hall (1985); and finally, they would provide opportunities for the two target cultures to participate in the other's worldview, which touches upon the work of Gudykunst and Kim (1984).

#### **Conclusion**

While the above discussion served to highlight the fact that the theories of intercultural competence selected for this paper are not entirely autonomous, and that they do share common ground, it will be the aim of this conclusion to reveal how all of this can, at least on paper, benefit foreign language educators working in Japan.

Bennett has maintained that the two crucial features of intercultural competence are empathy and communication. Few would argue that these qualities, easy to envision but difficult to realize on a continual basis, would also help improve the practice of pedagogy anywhere on the planet!

Hanvey's concept of transpection, not to mention Gudykunst and Kim's concept of the intercultural person, could have a direct, positive impact in many language learning environments. There is, however, also an indirect benefit, in that those professionals who are open to other cultures and to different ways of thinking and doing might well be more



flexible than those who are less open-minded. Such flexibility is a valuable pedagogical commodity, especially given the recent pace of state-sponsored educational change.

In promoting cultural interface, Hall has advocated that cross-cultural educators should focus on that which unites all humans, as opposed to that which is divisive. The implications of this for ex-patriots teaching in Japan are clear. Whether dealing with gifted or challenged special education learners, rich or poor pupils, religious minority or religious majority ones, male or female ones, gay or heterosexual ones, it is vital for such educators to focus upon what brings together a community of learners. In other words, the mindset promoted by intercultural competence logically progresses towards non-cultural fringe benefits, ones that facilitate the creation of an inclusionary learning environment.

Since the Bolman and Deal inspired case study constituted the lion's share of this paper, it is only fitting that its final words be dedicated to reframing. In short, reframing need not be limited to small, private, "after hours" cram schools. Reframing can be, and has already been, used to successfully improve practice in much larger institutions, and organizations. Additionally, Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, And Leadership is replete with numerous examples from both the public and private sectors.

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