Surfacing important but invisible issues in American companies in Japan

Process-oriented Dialogue around Cultural Conflicts

Patricia Robinson

Abstract: This paper explores cross-cultural conflict between Americans and Japanese working together in Japan. Drawing on participant observation, this study develops and pilot tests an application for facilitating group dialogue around organizational conflict, based on Arnold Mindell's Process Work model of group facilitation. The model proposes several major concepts: (1) rank awareness and how people in authority use their authority; (2) roles and polarities, including primary and secondary identities; and (3) how the marginalization of views can spawn conflict. The application of this model to several conflicts between Americans and Japanese suggest three sources of conflict that often stem from unvoiced cultural assumptions. First, the case findings here suggest that the freedom to speak up is often taken for granted by Americans, but not by Japanese. Second, Japanese are more aware and constrained by social norms than are Americans. Third, Americans in positions of authority in this case are relatively unaware of how the way they use their authority impacts the Japanese around them.

Keywords: Group Facilitation · Organizational Change · Power · Japan · Conflict

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Dr. P. Robinson, Ph.D. (✉)
Hitotsubashi University, Graduate School of International Corporate Strategy,
National Center of Sciences #712, 2-1-2 Hitotsubashi,
Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 101-8439, Japan
e-mail: probinson@ics.hit-u.ac.jp

As more and more organizations internationalize, the aspect of organizational research that demands ever greater attention is human interaction. Here, human interaction is embedded in a web of multi-cultural contexts that often lack shared basic assumptions or a shared language to deal with them. When managers are unaware of unspoken or submerged differences across cultural contexts, important conversations can be derailed without anyone even understanding what went wrong. Yet, researchers in the area of conflict resolution have largely focused only on issues-based resolution, leaving these often unspoken cultural issues unresolved. To address this critical area of organizational life in multinational organizations, this paper proposes and pilot tests a new application of collective dialogue facilitation to address conflict around invisible but important issues such as hidden cultural differences.

Cultural differences present a major challenge to organizations operating in multiple countries, where “cultural differences” refer to both differences in national culture (Birkinshaw et al. 2000; Hofstede 1990; Barkema et al. 1996; Park and Ungson 1997) and organizational culture (Cartwright and Cooper 1996; Hambrick et al. 2001; Pothukuchi et al. 2002; Weber et al. 1996). To effectively operate abroad, multinational firms must facilitate effective and constructive dialogue across both national and organizational cultures, for example, between representatives of the headquarters in one country and local employees from the subsidiary in another country (Adler 2008; Prahalad and Doz 1999; Birkinshaw et al. 2000). Particularly challenging is the issue of collective dialogue around difficult issues and unvoiced but conflicting national cultural assumptions that face multinational firms (Birkinshaw et al. 2000; Larsson and Lubatkin 2001; Sirmon and Lane 2004). This is especially true of firms in disparate national cultures, such as Japan and the United States (Ohbuchi and Takahashi 2006; Tannen and Yamada 2002; Gelfand et al. 2001; Mezias 2002).

Because cultural interactions are inherently complex and ongoing (Robson et al. 2008), dialogue is best approached as a process rather than as a set of results. Although there is a large literature on issue-based conflict resolution (e.g. Fisher et al. 1991; Raiffa 1985; Bazerman 1994), it has not adequately addressed the nuanced aspects of culture that are often submerged but disturbing, and difficult to identify or concretize. These culturally based conflicts often involve many voices and issues that are ongoing, relational, or implicit in nature.

In order to diagnose and explore invisible aspects of culture, this study applies a process-oriented model of facilitating group dialogue in an original way. While this facilitation model has been examined in other contexts (e.g. Mindell 2002), the original contribution here is to apply it to a cross-cultural organizational context, specifically facilitating groups in American operations in Japan. To develop this particular application for facilitating cross-cultural conflicts, this study relies on participant observation data from Americans and Japanese working together. This fieldwork is relevant to developing a cross-cultural application of the model because cultural differences between Americans and Japanese often stand out in terms of their approaches to conflict (e.g. Gelfand et al. 2001; Ohbuchi and Takahashi 2006; Tannen and Yamada 2002; Adachi 1984; Inoue 1994). Thus, collective dialogue among Japanese and Americans on divisive issues serves as an ideal context for examining very different cultures. As mergers and acquisitions between Japanese and American firms continue to increase (Jackson and Miyajima 2007), conflicts

between American and Japanese approaches to managing operations and making decisions are rising to the surface, and solving them effectively is becoming increasingly important.

1 Theoretical framework

To develop and pilot test an application of Arnold Mindell's Process Work model to facilitate solutions to cross-cultural conflict, this section will first discuss the role of culture in influencing managers of various nationalities and their approaches to conflict (e.g. Ohbuchi and Takahashi 2006; Gelfand et al. 2001; Adachi 1984; Inoue 1994), and will then provide a brief overview of the literature which examines issue-based conflict resolution in cross-cultural contexts. The paper will then focus on Process Work. Process Work (Mindell 1995, 2000, 2002) is an inter-disciplinary approach to group conflict that rests on a simple yet complex tenet: that conflict, once followed and unfolded, offers new insights and fresh perspectives for addressing an organization's problems. This paper will explore the application of several major concepts in Process Work to facilitating dialogue around cross-cultural organizational conflict: (1) all parties as having valuable information to contribute; (2) rank awareness; (3) roles and polarities, including primary and secondary identities; (4) disturbers and disturbances; and (5) boundary defining points and moments of intensity.

1.1 Culture's role in shaping Japanese and Western approaches to conflict

Schein (1999, p. 20) defines culture as those "jointly learned values, beliefs, and assumptions that become shared and take for granted." In emphasizing the shared aspects and their taken-for-granted nature, Schein's definition captures two aspects key to both national culture as well as to organizational culture. The "taken-for-granted" aspect of culture presents the greatest challenge to conflict resolution.

Culture has been shown to affect perception and judgment in conflict and negotiation. Gelfand et al. (2001) found that Americans perceive conflicts to be more about winning and violations to individuals' rights, whereas Japanese perceive the same conflicts to be about compromise and violations to duties. Negotiators in the U.S. are particularly susceptible to competitive judgment biases, such as zero sum biases (Gelfand and Christakopoulou 1999). Negotiators' judgments in Japan are more affected by concerns around relationships. For example, Japanese base fairness assessments on obligations to others, whereas Americans base their fairness assessment on their alternative economic options (Buchan et al. 2004).

Culture also affects persuasive approaches to dispute. Emotional appeals are hypothesized to be more common in collectivistic cultures such as Japan, whereas rational appeals are more common in individualistic cultures such as the U.S. Inoue (1994, p. 7) notes, "A review of literature on rhetorical traditions in the West and in Japan will find that Japanese society lacks a tradition of training in logical argumentation comparable to Western societies probably because Japanese society did not need logical (at least in the Western sense) argumentation in disputes as much as its Western counterparts."

Moreover, culture affects roles and information sharing. Roles in negotiation are more important for negotiation outcomes in hierarchical cultures such as Japan than they are in

egalitarian cultures (Kamins et al. 1998; Cai et al. 2000). Individualists such as Americans prefer to resolve conflicts using their own expertise and training (Smith et al. 1998), and tend to focus on integrating interests (Tinsley 1998, 2001). In terms of information sharing, U.S. negotiators are more likely to share information directly and to achieve high joint gains through this strategy, whereas Japanese are more likely to share information indirectly through their patterns of offers and to achieve high joint gains through this strategy (Adair et al. 2001).

An outside observer of Japanese organizational life might say that conflict tends to go underground in Japan. Collectivists such as the Japanese tend to prefer styles of avoidance and withdrawal (Holt and DeVore 2005; Ohbuchi et al. 1999). It may be that collectivists are aiming to conserve losses (Morris et al. 1998), or perceive themselves as interdependent with those with whom they are in conflict (Oetzel et al. 2001). Or, it might be that collectivists expect that avoidance leads to better outcomes (Friedman et al. 2006), or that avoidance in collectivist contexts may reflect a concern for others rather than a lack of concern for others (Gabrielidis et al. 1997).

Finally, in groups, if someone with rank in the group due to position or age speaks up, it is often easiest for other Japanese to follow (Oda 2010). If one does not have rank in a group, it is less likely for them to speak up. This presents a challenge for resolving complex or contentious issues, as large multi-stakeholder dialogue and large group conflict or arguments in corporate settings are relatively unheard of in Japan (Oda 2010).

1.2 Issue-based conflict resolution in cross-cultural contexts

Negotiation strategies (Fisher et al. 1991; Raiffa 1985; Bazerman 1994) traditionally focus on issues in order to analyze conflicts and prescribe strategies and resolutions. Although individuals' interests are important sources of human decisions and motivations (Fisher et al. 1991), a deeper level of conflict may involve cultural differences, values, and feelings that underlie what individuals present as facts. While various authors advocate making cultural norms and emotions explicit and acknowledging them as legitimate, this may not be possible for participants to do by themselves when tacit or taken-for-granted cultural issues are at play. Individuals may use facts or issues to logically rationalize underlying feelings or cultural values, and thus facts may be vehicles to express conflicting emotions. Strategies based on issues thus might not address these hidden feelings and values.

As Wanis-St. John (2002) points out, these classics prescribe strategies that might work for people who find it relatively easy to identify creative solutions to shared problems without resorting to a higher authority or to rigid rules. When organizational conflicts involve taken-for-granted or tacit cultural values, however, it may be difficult for all parties involved to articulate their cultural differences or the views of other parties. The real conflict again may not be about the issues, but about how the issues are broached, shared, or negotiated. In these cases, identifying options for mutual gain, rather than directly addressing cultural issues or the deeper emotions behind the issues, can provide only temporary solutions.

The ideal model would surface contentious cultural issues, while not violating any strongly held cultural norms in the process. For the Japanese, such a model would allow people to both voice their opinions and allow the option to save face by dissociating

themselves later if necessary. In this way, important issues get out on the table, without anyone's reputation being sacrificed in the process.

1.3 Process work: a way to work with organizational conflicts in a cross-cultural context

Process Work is an inter-disciplinary approach to addressing conflict, developed by Mindell (1995, 2000, 2002), that rests on the premise that within the problem itself, once unfolded and developed, lies deep meaning and a path forward. This process requires individuals to follow the course of their experience with awareness and openness and unfold this experience in a way that does not marginalize it.

The key theoretical tenets underpinning the Process Work model of conflict facilitation include: (1) all parties as having valuable information, (2) rank awareness, (3) roles and polarities, (4) disturbances as keys to core conflict issues, and (5) moments of intensity and boundary defining points as growing points for group coherence. The idea of all parties as having valuable information serves as a basic assumption underlying the model and will be discussed separately before explaining the Process Work Model. Disturbances, moments of intensity, and boundary defining points represent growing points for the group and will be explained later within the context of the model.

1.3.1 All parties as having valuable information

This model of group facilitation sees every voice, position, and role as having information necessary to the understanding the system as a whole. Accordingly, growth and creativity often arise from the margins of the group as marginalized views are voiced and made aware to the system. As such, although marginalized voices can sometimes be disturbing, they are also useful. Mindell (1995, p. 21) points out that this ability to value all voices:

is a function of the distribution of balance of power. The power is not something which can be balanced with rules.[This deeper valuing of all voices] requires awareness. Without awareness of hidden signals, no one notices how many individuals and subgroups are disenfranchised. Laws are meant to protect the rights of individuals and groups, but they are almost useless for dealing with the subtle forms of prejudice that appear in the way powerful people oppress others.

Valuing the information in all voices requires dialogue and interaction to ensure that views on all sides are well represented. Conflict, difficulties, and disturbances bring often bring invisible voices to the surface. As such, they offer opportunities for transformation, community development, creativity, and growth. Although consensus might be attractive, consensus does not mean that the parties agree to the issue or resolution, but rather that they all consent to follow a certain path for the moment, acknowledging that there are differences along this path or even that other paths would be preferable to some people.

A challenge to consensus occurs at times when it might be difficult for members of a group to express a particular role, for example, if the role is unacceptable to the more mainstream part of the group and therefore repressed. Such a role may also have trouble emerging, because those members who are experiencing this role have been previously taken advantage of in some way and are unable to express their positions. This unexpressed

role then becomes submerged. At these moments, group members will likely feel tension and have difficulty giving this role a voice and expression. Taking time to find these submerged conflicts in the group and to address them often prevents deeper resentment and further conflict.

For the valuing of all voices to be effective, it is important to recognize when a group is repressing a role that is disturbing to the group identity. When communities abandon difficult issues, they choose unconscious methods of bypassing difficult points surrounding these issues, and miss out on essential aspects of the group and its development. These issues often recycle, creating background tension and conflict in the group.

Below the level of informational data, all parties also have valuable emotional contributions that can deepen the members' understanding of the human aspects of the system. It is not enough to see people in terms of their social roles. The essence of a conflict often lies in the deeper streams of emotions that move people to act. Thus, it is necessary to find a deeper understanding for both sides in a conflict. This deeper understanding can help generate a shared vision that more fully encompasses all parts in the whole system.

1.3.2 Rank awareness

Mindell (1995, p. 60) points out that rank is a central "factor in conflicts in many cultures." Rank is the sum of a person's privileges, which can be based on gender, socioeconomic status, culture, nationality or ethnicity, religion, education level, positional status in the organization, age, skin color, and confidence, or any number of parameters determined by the group norms. Mindell (1995, p. 28) notes, "Issues that arise in the multicultural setting are connected with rank. Often, we do not notice our privileges, it is only when we lack a privilege or someone else misuses their privilege that we notice it." As Mindell notes,

You can't get rid of rank . . . You can consciously use your rank to benefit others, or you can mindlessly confuse and abuse those around you by considering them beneath you. Unconscious use of rank shows in a tendency to marginalize the problems of others (1995, p. 64).

In addition to many positional or socioeconomic forms of rank, personal empowerment or "personal power" is the feeling of power people earn through their behavior, rather than through their position. Personal power may arise from having survived terrible traumas (war, near death, etc.) and realizing that as survivors, they are bigger than those traumas. Even when individuals lose their positional power, they cannot be separated from their personal power; they lose the feeling of personal power only through their behavior. The feeling of personal power is reflected in such personal qualities as an ability to overcome challenges or adversity, a developed sense of self, and how well someone maintains that sense of self in trying times. This sense of personal power can be enhanced through feeling appreciated and secure in relationships, from feeling centered/balanced, or through a sense of spirituality that enables individuals to perceive themselves as part of something greater than their individual selves.

1.3.3 Roles

Roles are states of being, that can be represented by identities (lawyer, client, American, Japanese, etc.), relative positions in a system (boss/employee, teacher/student, mother/child, etc.), qualities (competence, mistake making, politeness, power, fear, etc.), or opinions (we should do x, we should not do y, etc.) Having group members step into roles provides a non-committal way of exploring a position, quality or opinion that enables the role-taker to voice and imagine various points of view and opinions. Roles can be powerful forces that draw people into them. As such, roles are bigger than the individuals who step into them. However, a person is also bigger than the role. People contain multiple roles inside them. Thus individuals can explore multiple roles and various sides of a conflict. To clearly delineate particular roles, it is useful to assign a specific location in the room to each role.

Key to taking the conflict to deeper underlying feelings and sources of dissention, as well as to creating meaning, it is critical for the role to eventually become real and express the true feelings of group members beyond role-playing. Here, it is important for the facilitator to allow the roles to interact and to watch for a shift from role-playing to the expression of real feelings whenever possible. The facilitator should aim to develop the roles toward approximating the reality of the group's situation. Then, if one person shares something deeply personal, the facilitator can facilitate the deepening of the process by noting that someone deepened the process by sharing something personal and inviting others to share personally as well to further this deepening. If the other side shares from the more superficial level of a role, it is useful for the facilitator to encourage the other side to share more personally toward deepening the interaction. Where one role is present in a group, often there is a polar opposite role also present or submerged, which brings us to the topic of primary and secondary identities. It is the interaction of these identities that brings great awareness to each of them and to the system as a whole.

1.3.4 Polarities: primary and secondary identities

Mindell (2000) defines the group's primary identity as that which is most known or normal for the group. The secondary identity is that which is less known, unfamiliar, mysterious, attractive, or repulsive. Often the "primary" identity is reflected in a "mainstream" voice in a group, while the "secondary" identity is reflected in the group's marginalized voice. Both within the individual person, and within the group as a whole, primary and secondary identities are often polarized. In contrast to the main stream views which are often highly visible, the marginalized roles are often behaviors we cannot voice, because they are not seen as "acceptable" or "rational" by the organization, or they are outside of what it considers "reality" Schupbach (2009, p. 10).

To illustrate primary and secondary identities in terms of a group structure, Stephen Schuitevoerder (2009) gives the example of a high tech company, where a primary or mainstream identity may be represented by "Competence and Expertise" (see Fig. 1). A more secondary or marginalized identity might be that of "The Learner who Makes Mistakes." The mainstream "Competent Expert" identity might not even know that it is marginalizing the "Mistake Maker" identity. One reason for this lack of awareness is that even though this marginalized secondary "Mistake Maker" identity might be present and

Fig. 1: A Typical Organizational System: The example of a high tech company

even central, it also may be invisible to the system. The marginalized “Learner who Makes Mistakes” identity will only become visible when the person can no longer tolerate the status quo—this is the process wanting to happen, and it is often the source of conflict in groups. When the secondary identity surfaces, it often disturbs the system by causing trouble and conflict.

By hypothesizing the primary process of a group, the facilitator can often anticipate that the secondary process will be its polar opposite. Work on a polarization therefore brings the “mainstream” voice into contact with the “marginalized” voice, thus moving toward achieving a state where all voices can be heard (Goodbread 1997, p. 73). The key to Process Work is to flow back and forth between the known and unknown, the main stream and the margins, moving toward integrating them into wholeness. The goal is to achieve a wholeness and unity that incorporates all aspects of the individual members and all voices in the group.

1.3.5 Disturbers and disturbances

The concept of disturbers is pivotal to understanding the surfacing of important but invisible dynamics, such as cultural differences. As discussed above, often in a group, certain people, attitudes, or ways of thinking are more mainstream, and others are marginalized, often representing polar opposite views. Frequently one of these sides is more evident and the other is often more hidden. Or, alternatively, both sides of a conflict are evident and a third side (often the rules, a critic, the voice of authority, etc.) is not directly present, but is referred to by the other two roles. The more disavowed role or position is often an attitude that is talked about or hinted at in the group but that has difficulty in being directly represented. For instance, some members of an organization might use the word “we” when referring to something that they identify with, but the words ‘the organization’ when referring to something they feel is not in their control Schupbach (2009, p. 8).

Even though this role is invisible, it still exists. It may not be explicit, but everyone feels its presence and suffers from it. It often can be detected in unintended communication, especially through nonverbal behavior that is not consistent the content of what is being said. If not welcomed, it can become disruptive. Terrorism is an extreme example of this disturber role not being heard or taken seriously. However, if heard, it often loses its ability to disturb or disrupt the group. Because of its marginalization, members of the group often

Fig. 2: Disturbers in the group of insiders and outsiders

do not want to play the role of the disturber. So it falls to the facilitator to take this position and bring this hidden viewpoint out into the open and explore it. In addition to articulating unvoiced views, the taking on of marginalized roles provides a way to answer the questions, “Who is not here?” “What views are not being represented?” and “What criticisms may be useful?” Schupbach (2009, p. 10).

To illustrate the roles in a group, particularly marginalized roles and how they might lead to conflict, let us take the example of a group in which the role of a mainstream identity may be represented by “Insiders” (see Fig. 2). The polar opposite role is a more marginalized identity might be that of “Outsiders: New Participants who are new to group and who know nobody in the community.” The mainstream “Insider” role might not even know that it is marginalizing the “Outsider” identity. Although this marginalized “Outsider” identity is present and often central, it may be invisible to the rest of the system and becomes visible only when it can no longer tolerate the status quo. When it surfaces, it often disturbs the system by instigating trouble and conflict. Identifying these disturbers enables the group to interact with them. Frequently, the disturbance and related conflicts occur in response to how the mainstream identity has used its power to oppress the marginalized identity.

Being the disturber to a mainstream convention, norm, or opinion requires courage, conviction of purpose and commitment to one’s ideas in a challenging environment, because the mainstream voice often does not support its expression. It is therefore useful for the facilitator to consciously look for the disturber in the group that is not welcome or visible and to support this role’s emergence. Even with support, however, it can be difficult to express these roles. When people have been reprimanded for expressing their views, they often find it difficult to express these views again. At times, there is a real danger in expressing one’s truth. At other times, it may be the voice of a parent or teacher that one has internalized that keeps one from speaking up.

In order to not repeat the abuse or misuse of power, it is important to create an environment where the oppressed voice can be heard and cared for. The need for caring extends further, however, to include everyone in the group. Thus the disturber needs to be self aware. Often those issues we are upset about in others are also part of who *we* are as people. As such, the disturber needs also to be aware of their own desire for revenge and their own marginalized voices within. To create a condition where people are able to participate freely is challenging but deeply enriching. When all roles in the field are valued

and expressed, there is greater freedom for everyone to express themselves and contribute to the group.

1.3.6 Moments of high intensity

Moments of high intensity arise in instances of “attack and defense, fight and flight, ecstasy, apathy or depression” (Mindell 1995, p. 42). As the issue becomes heated, the group might experience very intense moments. It is important to stay with these moments, although the tendency will be to shy away from them and focus on less-heated topics. Moments of high intensity tend to escalate later if they are not focused on when they first emerge. Such moments are an invitation to explore issues more deeply, and they often bring out disavowed feelings and thoughts, which bring further understanding and enrichment to the group. These moments can be difficult, however, and may bring out new, less comfortable and more challenging aspects. These moments often indicate that the group is on the verge of new expressions and development.

1.3.7 Boundary defining points

Boundary defining points mark the boundaries of the group’s awareness and define the organization in terms of known and unknown, primary and secondary, comfortable and uncomfortable, etc. Boundary defining points occur when an individual or group faces or represses the very thing that he, she, or it is trying to learn (Mindell 1995, p. 41). In a group, Schupbach (2009, p. 8) explains the boundary defining point as

the point at which a group is challenged by its development to identify itself with an idea or experience that is new for them Because[this] is the focal point that carries the greatest potential for change is closest to the self-organizing stream of the organization, it is perceived as an area in which things are getting out of control.

Although occasionally frightening or distasteful, it is useful for groups to work through these defining points and transcend them. If the group avoids them, then it is likely to lose its energy and might continue to avoid addressing the issue at hand. The facilitator’s role is to recognize a boundary defining point and encourage the group to stay with it and unfold it further. While striving to remain aware of all parts of the group, it is important to honor all the roles and individuals, recognizing that all are needed for the whole to be expressed. In this way, collective learning takes place through the meta-view of examining the group’s assumptions, because, as Schupbach (2009, p. 11) notes, “The process of gaining self-awareness about one’s own nature cannot easily happen on a rational and linear level only, as it is precisely that level that often contains the belief systems that marginalize the very issues that a group needs to wake up to.”

2 Research methods

2.1 Participant observation

The purpose of this study is to explore and apply the Process Model to address unspoken cultural issues in an organization. Because cultural interactions are inherently complex, cross-cultural conflicts need to be studied in a way that encompasses this complexity. Further, culturally based conflicts often involve many ongoing, relational, or implicit voices and issues. As such, applying and developing theory in this area require a method that also addresses the inter-relatedness of the interactions involved. In addition, data collection needs to capture unvoiced cultural differences that are difficult to identify or delicate in nature. Finally, to understand the nature of the conflict, it is useful to examine it in the larger context of cultural influences. Participant observation encompasses the complexity and inter-relatedness of interactions involved in group process work and captures unvoiced cultural differences that are difficult to identify.

As Spradley (1980, p. 54) notes, “the participant observer comes to the situations with two purposes: (1) Engage in activities appropriate to the situation and (2) Observe the people, activities and (other) aspects of the situation.” I presented myself as a participant who then became an observer. Participant observation lends itself to observing complex processes, such as group facilitation.

Participant observation offers an avenue for rich detail and observation of both verbal and non-verbal communication, context, and the group’s emotional atmosphere. While data from such a small sample are usually not generalizable to the larger population, participant observation offers rich insights that can be used to develop theory when phenomena are understood in detail.

2.2 Description of participants

Participant observation took place over the course of five three-day collective dialogue sessions in Tokyo with a group of 15 managers and HR staff (including trainers), and an academic involved in training employees in western firms in Japan. These included: 7 North American women, 1 North American man, and 5 Japanese women, and 2 Japanese men, in addition to a western male facilitator. The participants worked for or with an American company in Japan. Although they did not precisely represent the composition of the organization which had many more Japanese than Americans in its Japanese operations, every participant saw the issue of unvoiced issues as central to many of the conflicts present in Japanese firms and in foreign-affiliated firms in Japan. The dialogue sessions took place in English, because all the Japanese spoke English, but not all the Americans spoke Japanese. The issue of language contributed to not all issues being voiced, particularly by the Japanese, and thus served as an extreme test case of the model’s ability to allow the Japanese to voice issues.

2.3 Data-coding and post-group process debriefing interviews

Interviews were analyzed using data reduction, display, conclusion drawing, and verification (Miles and Huberman 1994). During the data reduction phase, the interviews were simplified into categories corresponding to the phases of the model: sorting, selecting an issue, roles in discussing the issue, boundary defining points, and moments of intensity. During the data display phase, the information was organized into patterns. These regularities and patterns were used to articulate meaning. To further test the accuracy of the analysis and credibility of the interpretation, this paper was shared with the facilitator and participants to confirm quotes and summaries of quotes.

2.4 Emic and etic issues of cross-cultural models

Transporting models across cultures raises emic and etic issues. Emic and etic are terms used by anthropologists and by others in the social and behavioral sciences to refer to viewpoints. An emic model has culturally specific meaning (Goodenough 1970). An etic model is interested in explaining human behavior in a culturally neutral way or at least in terms that can be applied to other cultures (Harris 1976). Although the stages that negotiators may go through in addressing disputes may be etic, there is cultural variation in the types of strategies used across different stages (Adair and Brett 2005). However, little research has been done on how to uncover and diagnose the invisible cultural issues that often underlie conflict.

One emic-etic issue associated with models for addressing Japanese-American conflicts is where to start: in the United States or in Japan, or somewhere else. Although the Process Work model was initially created in the United States, it is actively evolving in Japan and appears to tap into certain aspects central to human behavior across cultures. For example, just as in the U.S. and Europe, a number of Japanese have regarded the model as a means for making their voices heard, and interviews indicated that the Japanese participants felt that it was one of the most effective means they had experienced in raising issues among Japanese as well as among westerners. The final test lies in the question, "How do these methods work with the Japanese, particularly as they were designed by westerners originally to facilitate groups of westerners?" Prior to this, intercultural facilitation had not yet been widely studied in Japan, perhaps in part because Japanese interactions with non-Japanese in organizational settings have been prevalent in only the last several decades.

3 Data analysis and interpretation

Drawing on participant observation and post-facilitation interviews, this section explores the application of the Process Work model to the facilitation of a Japanese-American group. In particular, these data focus on implementing the Process Group model in terms of participants' experiences and observations.

Table 1: Types of rank in this group of Japanese and Westerners

Types of Rank in this Group
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organizational Position—CEO is best, followed by Vice President, HR director, etc.• Language Ability—native speaker of English seemed to have the most rank, followed by bilingual Japanese, followed by Japanese only• Corporate Affiliation & Work Experience—prestige of company, length of experience and knowledge, etc. working for a big, famous company seemed to have the most rank• Nationality or Race—western seems to have more rank in this group• Gender—male is better• Age—senior is better• Economic status—where they live in Tokyo• Education Level• Social Rank—i.e. how far back Japanese can trace their family history in Japan, who they know, and with whom they are affiliated• Psychological Well-being—how well they know themselves• Survivor Rank—surviving Discrimination, Oppression, War, Illness, etc.• Spiritual power—feeling part of something larger than oneself

3.1 Rank: facilitator and group member rank

In this group process, participants worked for or with American operations in Japan, and the process took place in English, and thus language ability was a major form of rank. Privilege and rank also manifested in age, occupation, and in the case of this group, the length of time foreigners had spent in Japan and whether Japanese were born in or outside of Japan. Also, group members placed a strong emphasis on each individual’s position within the organization. At the same time, however, group members felt that people could earn power through their behavior, and not just their position. Drawing on Mindell’s (1995) examples of various ranks, the following types of rank applied to this group (see Table 1).

3.2 Essence of conflict

Table 2 provides an excerpt from a facilitated dialogue that characterizes some of the feeling underlying the difficulties in relationships between Japanese and Americans. This section explore the meaning of this excerpt in the context of the Process Work model in the following section and how the dialogue was facilitated to arrive at such a deep exchange.

3.3 Mainstream and marginalized roles: hypothesizing the primary and secondary structure of the group process

Most participants in the group process were Japanese and this process took place in Japan; therefore, one hypothesis was that the primary identity was Japanese, and Japanese were insiders. At the same time, however, because the processes took place in the context of American operations in Japan, an alternative hypothesis was that the primary process was American. Furthermore, from the larger perspective of the world stage, since the language was English, perhaps the native English speakers who were largely North Americans were

Table 2: Dialogue excerpt from Japanese vs. Westerner conflict

Japanese participant #1 to western participant #1: “Foreigners in Japan don’t have to follow the rules of social interaction, but Japanese do. We have social etiquette and customs such as funerals that you don’t know or have to follow.”

Western participant #1: “Yes, it is true. I don’t know the rituals and rules, so I don’t feel bound by them. Japanese just let me get away with breaking lots of social rules. You made me irresponsible. In part, you never tell me when I make a mistake. You don’t help me out. You just judge me inside your heart. Maybe you believe foreigners can’t learn Japanese customs or ways of thinking.”

Japanese participant #1: “We don’t tell you when you make mistakes because our learning style is different. We learn by experiencing, not by having everything explained to us rationally. For example in calligraphy, we are expected to observe and copy, there is no explanation of why.”

Japanese participant #2: “And you want us to change. We need our identity. We have to exclude foreigners to get unity. Being open to non-Japanese is denying something for ourselves. You foreigners threaten our identity. We feel invaded.”

Western participant #1: “Why don’t you speak up and say “NO” when your space is invaded, the way we do?”

Western participant #2: “Why don’t you speak up and share your reality more assertively? We think we are right, so we just go ahead without asking, until someone speaks up and says “No”. We expect you to speak up and say something if you have a problem. That openness creates closeness between people.”

Japanese participant #2: “I need some distance. This is my way of saying “no” to western customs to keep my culture. We were doing fine without any influences from the outside world. Throughout history, Japan had evolved an eco-system of harmony serving society. Yes, we had to follow certain rules to achieve harmony. Yes, there were many rules to follow, but we felt “wa” (harmony). It was a great masterpiece of culture with no single artist. It is hard for Japanese and western values to co-exist. And you just run over us with your western values.”

Western participant #1: “Perhaps, westerners don’t take it personally when they run over each other. We don’t mean it personally to you either.”

Japanese participant #2: “You need to go more slowly, and with more sensitivity.”

Western participant #2 (reflecting, after the process concluded): This conversation was a revelation to me as a westerner, because no one ever explained this perspective to me, even though now it seems obvious. I realized that my ideas for change may not work or fit in, in Japan. As more and more western firms enter the Japanese market, perhaps this is the type of conversation that Japanese and westerners need to explore together.

Later:

Japanese male: When I am in the U.S., I feel respected as an individual, and I can speak up. But when I return to Japan, I feel some invisible pressure to conform and be part of the group. This group pressure makes me keep my own opinions back (suppress them).

the mainstream primary identity, and Japanese were the secondary identity of the group. When the group process started to focus on the dialogue laid out above, the structure of the group process did evolve around Insider/Outsider Issues.

Fig. 3: Hypothesizing the primary and secondary structure of the group process

A second group structure that was hypothesized was: “Our Identity as part of a group” vs. “Our Identity as Individuals.” In terms of behavior, this appeared in the group as “Be Polite and Stay Quiet” vs. “Having the Strength to Stand up and Say No.” Here, the identity process of the Japanese participants appeared to have been polite and stay quiet, and standing up and saying no was less known identity until it was brought out into the open by North Americans in the group. Conversely, the primary identity of the North American participants was to speak out, and a secondary disavowed identity was being quiet and value the harmony of the group (see Fig. 3).

3.4 Insider and outsider roles in the Japanese-American group

“Insiders” and “Outsiders” represented key roles in this ongoing conflict. At the outset of these collective dialogues however, the “Outsider” role was invisible. An important role played by the facilitator was to evoke the group’s awareness of this Outsider role and of other invisible positions or marginalized roles. In the beginning, the facilitator brought out the marginalized voices by noticing that some people spoke up with ease, without naming specific individuals. The facilitator then noted that some people had not spoken at all during the first session. He called on them specifically one by one, and asked their opinions. This succeeded in bringing out a more diverse range of views and issues, some of which had previously been invisible.

Previous to the dialogues, a Japanese participant had felt it was very difficult to participate in department meetings and to be heard with English as the language of discussion, because their own English was very limited, and that they felt like an Outsider. At this point, another participant, seeing the speaker’s facial expression, spoke up and expressed the view that the westerners often dominated the group’s discussion (in the office and in the session), and that the westerners were like Insiders. In a revealing comment, someone noted that the reason that people often speak for others is that their silence manifests the speaker’s own vulnerability. Marginalized roles here frequently embodied a deep feeling in the background felt not only by the participant speaking from the marginalized role, but also by other quieter members of the group, who may also feel marginalized. Here, one

Fig. 4: Roles and positions in this process

older Japanese participant with positional rank stepped in as facilitator at various points in the process to identify the marginalized roles of authority in the background, rules, and military invasion (see Fig. 4).

Setting up these roles for participants to step into offered an opportunity for people to share their views under the guise of playing a role. Because the roles did not necessarily represent the views of the people playing them, participants could explore various sides of an issue, as “roles” could be created to represent any number of positions, points of view, or behaviors. Although roles often started as stylized play-acting, they were most valuable in this group process when they triggered real feelings in the group, thus highlighting conflicts among group members. Roles often fell into mainstream views and marginalized views, such as “Insider/Outsider,” “Polite/Able to Speak Up,” “Having Positional Rank/Lacking Positional Rank in the Organization,” and “Proficient English Speaker/ Not Yet Proficient English Speaker.” The facilitator would notice when one role was strongly represented but its polar opposite was not. To let the participants explore the experience, the facilitator tried to demonstrate the unvoiced role and get others to step into it by asking the group, “Can anyone help me?” He would then try to get out of that role himself as quickly as possible in order to return to facilitating the group.

3.5 Role interaction and deepening in the Japanese-American group process

During debriefing, participants noted that after articulating various views on an issue in the form of roles, it was important to allow the roles to interact, or the conflict would continue to recycle and thus remain unresolved. In the instance illustrated in Fig. 4, one member shared that she did not feel safe to speak freely in the group. The facilitator responded by asking her to say more about her fear of personal attacks in the group. He then created

two roles for members of the group to play: the role of “Being attacked,” and its logical counterpart/polar opposite, the role of “The Attacker.” He had everyone start by acting these roles in the abstract, with the goal of bringing real experiences and feelings to the surface. A turning point came when one group member spoke up and said they did not see the point of having people play out abstract positions. This comment, when drawn out and elaborated on, drew the group into a discussion of the real feelings felt in the group, as opposed to merely their abstract or potential feelings.

When one person first came out with a personal disclosure, someone else went back to the level of playacting a role, which prevented the interaction from going to a deeper level of personal interaction and disclosure. In the debriefing, it came out that the person felt uncomfortable exposing their vulnerability and went back into the safer/more superficial guise of the role. Yet, when personal disclosure was not met with at the same level of personal or emotion disclosure, the one who exposed their feelings ended up feeling very vulnerable. To avoid this, the facilitator commented, “I’m noticing we had a very personal sharing and now we are going back into roles. I am wondering if there is a voice that could talk about being alone and speak to the group from personal experience.” At this point people began to speak very deeply about their feelings of vulnerability. From there, the process went into a very deep exchange of feelings, and the polarity of attacked and attacker found a common ground in the fear of vulnerability that lay beneath both feelings. While the facilitator could not force individuals to share personal insights, it helped bring about personal sharing to name what was going on in the group process. This experience demonstrated that group leaders and facilitators have the power to bring a group together or divide the group and marginalize important issues central to the conflict.

3.6 Disturbers in the group process

Prior to the conversation excerpted above (Table 2), the facilitator picked up that there was an “Invader.” One participant did not feel safe to express a lot because of the dynamic of the group, and because there had been issues and conflicts, and she was afraid of being attacked, so she was feeling protective of herself. However, even when participants did not talk about an issue, it did not go away—instead it became submerged. To surface these submerged voices, in the process above, the facilitator elicited unvoiced issues by noting that he felt something in the air. This encouraged another Japanese to step into the role of the “Invaded Japanese” who felt occupied by the west, which helped flesh out the role and give voice to unspoken feelings. In articulating the unspoken views of the “Invaded Japanese,” and stepping in the role initially, the role filled out and provided a vehicle for others to express their feelings.

Here again, the facilitator tried to elicit unvoiced views by naming them. He then tried to set up roles as a vehicle for people to step into a safe and defined position, with the opportunity to take the role deeper into expressing their feelings. Allowing different sides of an issue to interact through roles provided a practical tool for bringing about paradigmatic shifts. One critical facilitation skill in eliciting unvoiced views is listening deeply. Often the quiet participants would say something vague and not completely clear or fleshed out—however, this experienced facilitator saw this as an invitation, and probed further to flesh it out.

Right before the Japanese participant in the excerpt above (Table 2) finally said, “For-eigners in Japan don’t have to follow the rules of social interaction, but Japanese do. We have social etiquette and customs such as funerals that you don’t know or have to follow,” the westerners had become increasingly direct in their questions as to why Japanese did not directly tell them when they were being rude. As the westerners became more and more direct in asking why Japanese did not directly tell them when they were being rude, the Japanese in the group became quieter and quieter, indicating that this directness by the westerners might be disturbing to them (an ironic example in the moment of western rudeness). Other signals that suggested this might be a disturbance included double signals—where someone’s body language is not congruent with their words or tone of voice or message, such as speaking calmly while tapping one’s fingers. One Japanese participant finally stepped into the role of the “Disturber” by responding to the westerners in the same direct manner in which they had questioned him.

Usually when there is a disturber/disturbance, it shows up in the field as different things for different people. Illustrating how the indirectness of the Japanese disturbed one westerner, at another point in the process, one western participant did not feel safe to express a lot because her desire to resolve issues openly created problems with the Japanese around her. Because she was so direct, people often avoided her or had their feelings hurt. Subsequently, she felt that because of unresolved issues in the past, she was afraid of being attacked, so she was really protective. What happened afterward was also described as extremely powerful by participants in the debriefing. For a moment, she took on the role of the “Indirect One” and came to see a more gentle way of approaching conflicting views with the Japanese around her.

3.7 Moments of intensity in the group process

These group processes were characterized by several intense moments and represented an “attack and defense, fight and flight, ecstasy apathy or depression” (Mindell 1995, p. 42). In the Japanese-American group facilitation, moments of intensity (known in Process Work as hotspots) were identified alternatively by lots of laughter or increased numbers of accusations or general discomfort.

At one point, a westerner directly confronted a Japanese, and there was nervous laughter on the part of some and intense silence on the part of others, indicating discomfort at the level of open conflict. When the facilitator asked the group if people felt safe, Person A (a North American) started by saying, “I feel safe.” However, Person B, also from North America, expressed the opposite polarity, “I feel fear.” Saying this out loud allowed for a Japanese to speak up and say, “I feel uncomfortable because I don’t speak English well and I cannot defend myself.” Person A, a North American with long-time residence in Japan, noted that she felt that the westerners were marginalizing the Japanese in the group. Exploring this moment of intensity by asking about the laughter allowed a critical, underlying issue to come to the surface that would not have come up had the collective dialogue focused solely on resolving issues.

3.8 Defining points in the group process

Boundary defining points, as set out earlier, occur when an individual or group faces or represses the thing that it is trying to learn (referred to as Edges in Process Work, Mindell 1995, p. 41). These boundary defining points provide a path into seeing a broader range of perspectives and are evident when someone feels it is risky to speak up and express a marginalized voice. Barriers to facing these boundary defining points can arise from feeling fear, conflict, lack of awareness, or a lack of acceptance, or even feeling an obligation to the current status quo.

In the Japanese-American group, boundary defining points or growth points were identified by an atmosphere change in the group. For example, one person hesitated before speaking up to defend herself, giggling in an embarrassed way, as if she was afraid to step in and stand up for herself. It was as if politeness kept her from speaking her honest feelings, in fear that they might not be socially appropriate or might hurt someone else. The facilitator responded by asking, "Is it OK to ask you to say more?" She then spoke up that she felt power in a leader automatically marginalizes others, and in so doing, also marginalizes the leader who then feels lonely. This opened up the discussion for other members of the group to explore their views on the issue.

Another boundary defining point in the Japanese-American group arose around the issue of language. The facilitator tried to bring the issue to the surface by saying, "Something is sitting here that should be said, but it is hard to say it." A Japanese participant spoke up and said, "I don't communicate well here." Another Japanese participant nodded in support. The facilitator quietly waited for the Japanese to speak, and finally the Japanese man began to talk about how self-conscious he felt speaking in English and how he wished more foreigners spoke Japanese. Here, the facilitator did not intervene, but let the discussion unfold, because the Japanese-Foreigner issue was present in the group, whether the group recognized it or not, and pushed it or not. The facilitator did not push the issue, but instead set the stage for discussing such delicate topics by noting, "We are explorers. Let's explore making mistakes."

It became apparent that if a group member gets to a boundary defining point and does not face and surmount it, the issue will continue to recycle, the participants will get stuck, and the group will lose energy. Facing challenges presented in these boundary defining points results in relief and momentary resolution or equilibrium.

4 Discussion and conclusions

Cultural conflict frequently presents a major barrier to organizational effectiveness in managing multinational firms, particularly from the viewpoint of the marginalized host-country subsidiary. As the collective dialogues studied here illustrate, for American companies in Japan, the American voice is often mainstream and does not always perceive its impact on the Japanese subsidiary's employees. Where there is a power differential, the people most likely to recognize it are those without power, in this case, the Japanese. Further, the Americans prefer directness and are uncomfortable or unable to read indirect hints, while the Japanese are the opposite, setting up another invisible power dynamic. The innovative

contribution of Process Work is to facilitate greater awareness of the problematic effects of mainstream power in the functioning of a multicultural organization.

4.1 Applicability of process work to cultural conflicts in organizations

This paper developed a new application of Process Work to facilitate collective dialogue toward surfacing unspoken cultural issues that often underlie cross-cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. Drawing on Arnold Mindell's work (1995, 2000, 2002), this study explored the premise that the solution to a problem is contained within the disturbance itself. For example, applying this case study to other potential scenarios, if Japanese employees are hesitant to bring issues to their American bosses, perhaps part of the issue lies directly within this lack of communication (or ability to communicate easily), as much as with the problem at issue. While other approaches to conflict focus on issues, this model of group facilitation focuses on the process of interaction and the unspoken, (often cultural or emotional) issues that underlie the heart of many conflicts. Rather than skirting around delicate emotional issues, this facilitation approach provides tools to diagnose and explore them directly, proceeding on the premise that, once followed and unfolded, it is these very difficulties and differences in culture and feeling that offer new insights and fresh perspectives to the group's problems and conflicts. Thus, if one employee complains that another employee is not pulling their load and that that second employee is weak, maybe the first employee envies the luxury of being weak and not having to work as hard. Once explored and developed, the underlying meaning and way forward may be that the one who carries the load for the group needs a vacation as well.

This case study suggests that the Process Work model can contribute to understanding cross-cultural conflicts in organizations in several ways. As a systems approach, this model encompasses context, feelings, and atmosphere as well as issues. Here, the emphasis is on the big picture, rather than simply the issues that contribute to the larger conflict. When looking at systems, often causality is circular rather than linear, and in process work conflicts will cycle and cycle until they are picked up by the participants. In systems, progress is not linear; rather, everything is related and exhibits circular causality. Moreover, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It is difficult to understand each issue, without looking at it in context and understanding the whole.

4.1.1 All parties as having valuable information to contribute

Approaching conflict with the attitude that all parties as have valuable information to contribute paves the way to delve below the social level of interaction to a deeper emotional level, in pursuit of deep sympathy for all parts of the system. The implications of this attitude for cross-cultural groups with unspoken and often conflicting cultural norms are profound and address fundamental issues around group communication and self-governance in multinational organizations. In Process Work terms, often the more popular role in the field dominates other roles and shapes the environment in which the whole group operates. Although this might work well for those who are in the mainstream or majority roles of the field, such as the multinational corporation's headquarters, it marginalizes minority roles in the system, such as those of the subsidiary. Individuals within such a group will

not feel honored and may feel resentful of the decisions made. The less representation the marginalized group has, the more dissatisfied the members will likely feel and the more likely they will be to disrupt the majority group. The majority group will then likely experience the marginalized group as disturbing and create structures to control this group, which will further escalate conflict and polarization. Applying this case to other cases, when Japanese employees do not feel sufficient authority or power to speak up to their American bosses, it is particularly useful for the American executive to bring in a skilled facilitator who can support the Japanese to speak up or speak on their behalf as a way to model voicing their views.

4.1.2 Use of rank in process work

Rank is one reason why cultural issues are not often brought out into the open. Executives and senior managers who have positional rank in the organization, or rank resulting from ethnicity or gender, often do not see that they are using their rank without awareness and oppressing other members of the organization. At the same time, employees at the bottom of the positional ladder often do not feel they have the rank to speak up about feeling repressed, without facing negative repercussions. As Mindell (1995, p. 28) notes, “issues that arise in the multicultural setting are connected with rank. . . . [O]ften, we do not notice our privileges. It is only when we lack a privilege or someone else misuses their privilege that we notice it.” Process Work provides a way to engage in collective dialogue around these delicate issues that lie under the surface of many disputes. Applying this case to other cases in Japan, when Japanese employees do not feel sufficient rank, it is useful for those in positions of authority to recognize this and provide a mechanism for having the voice of those with less rank heard.

4.1.3 Roles, polarity, and flow between roles

When dealing with cultural differences, there is often a polarity between different roles or positions represented in the group. Frequently, one role is visible and the other role is less visible or even invisible. Often the first role is more supported by the group or culture as well as other norms or rules. In contrast, the second role may be marginalized in the group or culture, causing this role to become hidden or invisible. This marginalized role can represent a painful or difficult issue related to conflict in the group, and it is the polar opposite of the group’s mainstream or primary identity. Applying this case to other cases suggests that the unvoiced Japanese view may often be the invisible one.

Allowing participants to explore various roles and positions within oneself and within the group through the use of roles provides a new perspective on the issue at hand. Both individual and group processes can be mapped in terms of primary and secondary processes. In both cases, the demarcation between the primary and secondary is often a boundary defining point, and the seed of the solution often lies in the disturber. And finally, in both cases, picking up accusations and seeing the kernel of truth in the accusation leads to a broader perspective. The practice of taking one’s own side strongly is useful for both individuals and for groups, particularly for Japanese. Through social interaction, individuals can become more aware of themselves, in both individual and group situations.

The sense of flow that arises from exploring various roles and positions within oneself and within the group through the use of roles is also in keeping with the idea of organizations as living systems, where there are no permanent equilibria, but rather ongoing change and evolution. Moreover, this welcoming of all the various roles and positions allows for a more holistic and complex view of the situation, rather than breaking it down into parts which may not equal the sum of the whole. Applying this case to other cases of American firms in Japan, it would be useful for American executives to regularly put themselves in the shoes of their Japanese subordinates, especially with the guidance of a Japanese cultural mentor who can explain the cultural issues at play.

4.1.4 Disturbers and disturbances

Submerged factors are often key in the breakdown of group dynamics. Subtle and unexpressed attitudes, assumptions, and disposition may revolve around competition for leadership, hierarchical privileges, race relations, issues between women and men or older and younger people, environmental peace, spiritual issues, or private agendas at odds with the group's stated purpose. In fact, hidden messages can be generated around any kind of diversity (Mindell 1995, p. 20). The case study here suggests that when these issues are not voiced directly or openly in the group, they easily become marginalized. It is important for managers and facilitators to notice this marginalization, particularly when there are subtle or submerged tensions in the group. Indicators that there are important but marginalized issues may occur in side conversations, during breaks, or in other ways outside the main arena of discussion. This makes it important for the manager or facilitator to monitor side conversations and listen to the issues discussed, and then keep those issues at the back of his/her mind. Side conversations often occur because the issue is marginalized or because the group is at the beginning of a disturbance. It is important for the facilitator to bring such side conversations, jokes, or cross-talk out into the open for the group to discuss.

While it is important to recognize the mainstream role in the group and hear that view, the marginalized voice or identity also plays an important role in the system. As shown in this case, the Americans here were often quick to take their own side, but rather than considering other points of view, they expected others to speak up as assertively as they did. Applying this case to other potential cases, it would be useful for those who easily take their own side to consider other possible sides to an issue. Disturbance and conflicts frequently revolve around how the primary/mainstream identity used its power to oppress the secondary/marginalized identity.

The marginalized voice brings wisdom to the system, because it generates understanding about something in the system through its very marginalization. Feeling less rank often brings a new awareness to the meaning of having rank by its very lack of privilege and group membership. Those on the margins are often more aware of an abuse of power than those in the mainstream, because they are more impacted by their lack of power. Hearing why the marginalized group feels disempowered contains the seeds of empowering them and bringing their voice into the mainstream. It is important to hear both the voice of the mainstream and the voice of the marginalized group. The more quickly a facilitator can bring out these disturbers, and appreciate the information they bring, the more quickly he/she can deal with systemic group conflict.

4.1.5 *Boundary defining points*

Boundary defining points mark the boundaries of the group's awareness and define the organization in terms of known and unknown, primary and secondary, comfortable and uncomfortable, etc. In the case study explored here, the boundary defining point was the Americans' lack of awareness of how they invaded the Japanese around them. Boundary defining points occur when an individual or group faces or represses the very thing that he, she, or it is trying to learn (Mindell 1995, p. 41). At first, the Americans in the group avoided identifying as invaders by urging the Japanese to stand up for themselves. Were the group to have avoided this unspoken misunderstanding, the Japanese may have lost motivation. Applying this case study to other potential cases, it may require an astute outsider to point out where awareness is lacking.

4.2 Applications of this facilitation model across cultures to both Japanese and Americans

The Process Work model of group facilitation provides a tool to diagnose and explore cross-cultural conflict, as well as a means to give Japanese and Americans working together equal permission to express opinions and feelings, and explore emotions. The taking on of roles allows participants to dissociate themselves later with an opinion while still providing an opportunity to have the opinion expressed in public, much the way drinking does (e.g. later one can always dissociate oneself from the opinions discussed because they were under the influence of alcohol). In many ways, the particular case studied here serves as an archetype for American firms in Japan, as many U.S. executives complain of Japanese subordinates not speaking up in meetings, and some Japanese (who feel comfortable enough to discuss this issue) feel unseen, misunderstood or invaded by their American bosses.

Process Work's emphasis on flow between positions may feel very natural for participants from high context cultures such as Japan's, where identity changes with the context. This ability to flow from one state to another may also be in keeping with Buddhist sensibilities where the emphasis is on flow. From this perspective, rather than striving for a permanent solution or conclusion as the definition of success, everything is ongoing, nothing is ever ended, dialogue is ongoing and evolutionary, and momentary resolution is just reborn in another form, like a seed becoming a tree, bearing fruit, more seeds and more trees.

Similarly, a systems approach such as this may also be more in line with Japanese thinking than issue-based conflict resolution. Kaiping Peng highlights a difference between Asians and westerners in this regard. In common with many Asians, Japanese "pay attention to a wide range of events, they search for relationships between things; and they think you can't understand the part without understand the whole. Westerners live in a simpler, more deterministic world; they focus on salient objects or people instead of the larger picture, and they think they can control events because they know the rules that govern the behavior of objects" (Nisbett 2003, p. xiii).

The element of this facilitation model that may need the most adaptation to be useful in Japan is the cultivating of atmosphere, mood, or climate in the group by the facilitator. In Japanese, this is often referred to as "Ba," a shared context, experience, ideas and feelings

(Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). The Japanese character for “Ba” is the character for place or moment of sharing. Yet, it also includes time and place of shared context. In this way, it includes the network of relationships involved and how they are engaged in terms of the quality of trust and regard they represent. To effectively adapt this model of group conflict facilitation for use in Japan, it is critical to emphasize the importance of creating safety and an atmosphere in which conflict can be explored, beyond just being able to assess what the current atmosphere is.

4.3 Limitations of the study

Studying complex cultural interactions in rich detail requires using time-intensive methods, such as participant observation, and the findings are not necessarily generalizable to a larger sample. Thus, the collective dialogue sessions studied here merely illustrate this approach and serve as a tool to build new applications for theorizing about cross-cultural group facilitation, but cannot possibly test theory or be generalized to a broader population. Cultures are complex, and a wide range of cultural issues are possible; thus it is difficult to generalize from one cultural conflict to others. So even if a researcher studies many conflicts and collective dialogue sessions, it may be difficult to generalize the findings to other environments. However, even if the findings cannot be readily generalized, cultural conflict is a problem worthy of detailed study, because it is one of the major barriers to organizational effectiveness in multinational corporations.

4.4 Change and innovation through conflict

Change here represents a new awareness, especially the mainstream’s awareness of marginalized voices, and perhaps in the process, awareness of the disavowed parts of the mainstream itself. On an organizational level, increased awareness may result in a greater diversity of views and a potentially broader range of options for the organization. For marginalized individuals, this broader awareness might eventually include their voice. Over the long term, conflict that is attended to generally results in greater openness and closer relationships, even though allowing conflict to come into the open is often very uncomfortable. Depending on the organization’s ability to hold tension and give meaning to the views expressed, the organization may either regress back to being polite when conflict is avoided or not thoroughly processed, or go through conflict to arrive at a deeper appreciation of all the views involved. How to achieve awareness is the final frontier in the study of human interaction.

Process Work offers a useful tool for diagnosing areas where awareness may be lacking and for exploring how that awareness might be developed. It is the awareness of deeper emotions underlying conflict that brings meaning out of the misunderstanding, particularly around unspoken or invisible cultural issues. Process Work helps diagnose invisible issues in cultural conflicts by suggesting that facilitators hypothesize the areas not represented by the mainstream. It then focuses on how to give voice to those issues. Thus, it is the combination of knowing what to look for and how to bring it voice that allows Process Work to diagnose and enhance awareness, and to facilitate dialogue around cross-cultural conflict such as that between Americans and Japanese in Japan.

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