Organizational Membership Negotiated, Denied, and Gained: Breaking the Rice

Paper Ceiling in Japan

Adam Komisarof

Word count: 6536 words

The email had come a few days before: "Can you meet me on Thursday at lunchtime?"

While I found Dean Tomita amicable, being summoned to his office—with advance

notice, no less—made me nervous. I opened his door with trepidation, trying futilely

to recall any reason, negative or positive, why I could have been called here.   But once

inside, with his usual warm candor, the dean invited me to sit down and began to

explain.   He used words like *shikkoubu* and *kyoumu fukushunin*—Japanese which I did

not know but dutifully wrote down.   I would soon learn that they meant, respectively,

"Dean's Committee," which he was asking me to join, and "associate director of

academic affairs," which was to be my new title.

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Both scholarly (Dale, 1986; McVeigh, 2004; Partridge, 1987) and popular literature

(Kerr, 2001; Murtagh, 2005) have made assertions that Japanese people do not accept

"foreigners" in their society. Kopp (1994) described a "Rice Paper Ceiling,"—a barrier akin to a glass ceiling—which limits socio-professional acceptance of foreign workers in Japanese work organizations and upward mobility. I have lived in Japan since 1990 (with the exception of 7 years during this period in the US or the UK), but my experience working here has been far more nuanced, thus defying this monolithic notion of exclusion. The period which perhaps most saliently elicited the complexities of being a white, American male in Japanese society was when I broke the Rice Paper Ceiling and was appointed my department's associate director of academic and student affairs from April, 2010, to March, 2012. In this capacity, I served on the Dean's Committee, a select group of five faculty members who supported the dean in the formulation and implementation of all decisions related to running the department.

In this chapter, I detail relationships and interactions with other Dean's Committee members, giving them order conceptually with a framework for characterizing subjective perceptions of acculturation dynamics and outcomes in work organizations, which I developed as an outgrowth of my research about acculturation between Americans in Japan and their Japanese coworkers (Komisarof, 2011). Moreover, I show how my adherence to a critical set of Japanese social norms, as well as three

general principles for achieving core membership status in Japanese collectives (Komisarof, 2011, 2012; Lois, 1999), enabled me to gain deeper group acceptance.   In drawing on my previous research and showing how I have used it to frame my collegial interactions in the Dean's Committee, I hope to demonstrate the reflexive relationship between work, life, and scholarship.

My journey: Pivotal experiences and insights in developing my acculturation framework

The acculturation profile framework and concepts related to group-joining processes introduced in this chapter are the culmination of twenty-five years of experience since first coming to Japan—a journey in which my personal life, work relationships, and research have developed synergistically—each continuously informing, challenging, and stimulating development in the others.   I originally arrived in Japan in 1990 as a fresh college graduate to teach English in a Japanese high school.   As a member of the Japanese government's Japan Exchange & Teaching (JET) Program, my official title was "assistant language teacher" (ALT).   Having majored in education at Brown University, I aspired to be an English teacher—one with the full responsibility to plan and execute my lessons, support students' extra-curricular activities, and administrate as

would any faculty member.   I quickly learned, though, that I was seen by my Japanese

colleagues as only what my title implied—an *assistant* who was expected to prepare and

teach my lessons in tandem with Japanese English teachers; to my chagrin, I could not

supervise extra-curricular clubs, nor was I included in faculty committee meetings or

other administrative projects.

During my two years on the JET Program, I forged a deep bond with Japan and grew

tremendously as an educator—especially since I eventually gained my colleagues' trust

to plan and teach our lessons more or less independently.   My main point of contention,

however, was that I did not feel accepted as a core faculty member; rather, I felt treated

predominantly like a guest from abroad—honored, but in the end, an outsider.   After I

returned to the U.S. in 1992, I fortuitously met Karen Hill Anton, a journalist and writer

on her book tour.   A resident of Japan for decades, she told the audience, "To be a

member in Japan, you've got to act like one."   But how, I wondered, do Japanese

become accepted as members of society, and more specifically, socio-professionally

accepted as members in their workplaces?   This question drove my master's degree

research, and in Komisarof (2001), I examined how membership in Japanese work

collectives, particularly among secondary school teachers, is conceived, gained, and

maintained, and how such social constructions and norms were perceived by American ALTs as they negotiated their own socio-professional acceptance in Japanese secondary school faculties.

I concluded that American ALTs' perceptions of their degree of belonging were formed at least in part by the extent of their adaptation to the social processes by which people in Japan commonly become core members in work organizations—processes which were usually quite different from those that my subjects had been conditioned to expect in America. In other words, Americans who felt accepted by their colleagues tended to adapt to pivotal norms for joining Japanese collectives (such as working long hours and showing proper deference to senior members), while those who felt unaccepted did not fulfill these key behavioral expectations. Based on these findings, my concluding advice was that Americans (and other non-Japanese ALTs) who wanted to feel deeper belonging in their faculties should try following the social norms through which Japanese teachers themselves gain and maintain such acceptance. This research also gave me insight into my own struggles during the JET Program, so when I returned to Japan in 1998, I was determined from then on to use my newfound understanding of membership in Japanese work groups to improve my own acceptance among my

Japanese colleagues.

The next pivotal development in my personal, professional, and research journey was my discovery of John Berry's framework of acculturation strategies (Berry, 2003, 2013) and Bourhis et al.'s Interactive Acculturation Model (Bourhis & Dayan, 2004; Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997). Here, I gained conceptual schemes for understanding a variety of expectations that non-native people have for acceptance by their host culture members during the acculturation process, the different degrees of receptivity towards non-natives that host societies may demonstrate, and how the compatibility of such acculturation attitudes and their related behaviors can contribute to positive or negative intercultural relations (Komisarof, 2004, 2006, 2009).

While I find Berry's and Bourhis' work informative and even inspirational, from my own research and lived experience, I have grown convinced that certain acculturation dynamics and outcomes in Japan can be more clearly articulated with a different acculturation framework—thus leading me to develop an alternative (Komisarof, 2011). The resulting framework helps to illuminate how acculturators' constructions of national cultural group boundaries and their subjective sense of organizational membership in

the workplace affect the quality of their intercultural relationships and their sense of

empowerment to actualize their professional expertise within their work organizations.

A new acculturation framework for intercultural dynamics in Japan

My framework (depicted in Figure 1) addresses two key acculturation issues: 1. "When

interacting with cultural outgroup coworkers, does the subject perceive these coworkers

categorizing him as culturally *similar* to or *different* from themselves?" and 2. "Does the

individual perceive herself[1] as a core member of her work organization when

interacting with her cultural outgroup coworkers?"   In other words, the first dimension

examines the construction of national cultural group boundaries, while the second

dimension treats the negotiation of organizational membership status.   Considering

these issues simultaneously results in four acculturation profiles, each of which

embodies different clusters of acculturation dynamics, strategies, and outcomes.   The

response to each question is plotted on a continuum, rather than as a categorical yes/no

duality, and done so according to the subject's perceptions, as they form her

psychological "reality" and the basis of future behaviors towards cultural outgroup

coworkers.

<FIGURE 1 HERE>

The response to the question on the vertical axis does not focus on citizenship; rather, the key point is whether the acculturator feels viewed by his cultural outgroup as someone who is similar enough to be—or could potentially become—an accepted member of their national cultural group. A person responding "yes" feels that he is seen as similar enough by the outgroup to join their cultural and linguistic community. He might be admitted by his outgroup because of his extraordinary cultural competence—that is, cognitive and behavioral adaptation to the local culture and mastery of its language (for a discussion of intercultural and cultural competence, see Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Alternatively, he may possesses *functional* competence in his outgroup's culture and language, and as a result, he can usually enact appropriate behavioral norms, perform social roles, and smoothly achieve his communicative and relational objectives in daily interactions with members of the cultural outgroup. Even if such native-like or functional competence has not yet been attained, the acculturator may still feel that he is considered by his outgroup similar enough to be *potentially* accepted as a member of their community. Thus, whatever the actual cultural and linguistic competence of the acculturator, membership in the outgroup is perceived as attainable and their group boundaries permeable. At the "no" end of this continuum,

those with foreign backgrounds tend not to be admitted as group members—i.e.,

participation in the outgroup's cultural and linguistic community is rejected, as one is

seen as too "different" to belong—for instance, because of widespread notions that

non-natives cannot understand the culture or learn the language.

Specifically, do Americans perceive that they are accepted by Japanese as reliable group

members in contexts requiring Japanese linguistic skills and the capacity to behave in

social roles demanding Japanese cultural competence?   On the "yes" end of the

continuum, in Komisarof (2011), Americans in corporations served Japanese customers

directly, participated in meetings with coworkers, and joined project teams—all contexts

in which they were trusted to perform as any Japanese worker.   In other words, they

engaged in joint activities, rituals, and membership-confirming tasks in a way closely

aligned with practices, norms, and values commonly found in—and identified by the

subject with—Japanese culture as it is enacted in the workplace.   Subjects answering

"no" generally felt excluded from such opportunities due to their colleagues'

unwillingness to include them—sometimes exacerbated by their own lack of Japanese

linguistic and cultural competence.

In assessing where a person's acculturation fits on the horizontal axis in Figure 1, it is of primary interest whether the subject perceives herself as a core *organizational* member—one who, for example, is privy to insider knowledge, exerts influence in decision-making, has leadership opportunities, is sought out for involvement in collaborative projects, and is given an active role in the everyday operations of the organization. Engagement in the aforementioned work-related activities might be done according to the outgroup's cultural norms and language, but it also might not—for example, an American in Japan could join these activities in English and do so according to American cultural norms, so long as the subject feels like an accepted member of the organization through such participation.

By juxtaposing the two dimensions in the framework, four basic acculturation profiles were generated (as depicted in Figure 1): *Marginalized Outsider, Alien*, *Assimilated Member*, and *Integrated Member*. *Marginalized Outsiders* perceive that they are not accepted as core organizational members by their cultural outgroup coworkers and believe that their coworkers assume that the Marginalized Outsider is similar enough to adhere to the outgroup's cultural practices and to function in their language. *Aliens* feel unaccepted as core organizational members while treated as fundamentally different

by cultural outgroup coworkers. *Assimilated Members* see themselves as core organizational members and treated as if they are culturally similar to the outgroup. *Integrated Members* perceive that they are viewed by ethnocultural outgroup coworkers as culturally different but accepted in their organizations.

Applying the framework to my work on the Dean's Committee

From now, I will utilize this framework to illustrate how my quality of intercultural relationships, sense of organizational belonging, and work outcomes, within varied situational and relational contexts, reflected *each* of the model's acculturative profiles during my time on the Dean's Committee. In other words, my perceptions, or how I framed my experiences in intercultural communication with fellow Dean's Committee members, were highly contextualized, as they varied depending upon my communicative partner and other situational elements which I will describe below. In this chapter, I operationalize organizational belonging not as my sense of belonging as a member of my university, but rather my degree of perceived socio-professional acceptance on the Dean's Committee. From here, I will detail the communication dynamics and acculturation outcomes characteristic of each profile, illustrating them with examples from my experiences on the Dean's Committee—a group comprised of

six individuals (represented by fictitious names except mine) and organized

hierarchically in Figure 2.

<FIGURE 2 HERE>

Profile one: Marginalized Outsiders

While a *Marginalized Outsider* perceives that her coworkers assume that she is similar

enough to them to adhere to their cultural practices and to function in their language,

she does not feel like an accepted core member of her work organization.   As the name

suggests, this is a marginal position—one is relegated to the group's fringes, yet

expected to follow many of their national culture's norms.   Marginalized Outsiders

often think that they are the target of negative social sanctions as their colleagues blame

them for failing to assimilate to their cultural norms.

I sometimes experienced these communication dynamics and acculturation outcomes on

the Dean's Committee—most memorably when Professor Suzuki, my immediate

superior, accosted me one day during a group lunch.   When I had first agreed to join

the Dean's Committee, I did so with the condition that I could complete my term in two

years because I was scheduled then for a sabbatical at the University of Oxford.

Though Dean Tomita initially agreed, it was not uncommon for Japanese professors to be asked to extend their terms of duty on the Dean's Committee and postpone or even give up their sabbaticals entirely. So when Professor Suzuki—in the middle of an unrelated conversation—suddenly proclaimed that I might be asked to serve a third year on the Dean's Committee, I quickly said that I could not, as I might lose my seat at Oxford if I postponed going. To this, Professor Kanda, overhearing us, derisively replied, "If you refuse, you might lose your seat at *this* university."

I clearly had no sympathizers. My colleagues had the same expectation for me as other Japanese: I should not refuse such an assignment from my superiors; if I did, I was recalcitrant and fit to be ostracized. In the end, the dean never asked me to extend for a third year, so I was not forced to choose between my sabbatical and my reputation, but this memory as a Marginalized Outsider remains.

Profile two: Aliens

An *Alien* feels like an outsider on two levels—unaccepted in the organization and treated as fundamentally different by cultural outgroup coworkers. In my research (Komisarof, 2011), I identified a subtype of Aliens, American Rank & File Workers

("R&F"), who struggled to be accepted by their Japanese coworkers and often felt

treated as foreign guests rather than as full organizational members. R&F thought that

most Japanese coworkers assumed that they could not understand Japanese culture, the

language, or competently practice Japanese business norms. R&F could not fully

utilize their professional skills, either: they lacked decision-making power, leadership

opportunities, and the Rice-Paper Ceiling hindered them from advancing beyond

rank-and-file positions or lower-level management.

R&F often attributed Japanese people's behavior to the influences of *Nihonjinron*—an

ideology or world view in which Japanese culture and identity are conceived as

homogenous, yet with a set of "unique" qualities that separate Japanese from other

national and ethnic groups (Befu, 2001). *Nihonjinron* engenders an exclusive national

identity, as non-Japanese, particularly Americans and other Westerners, are presumed

unable to become fluent or literate in the Japanese language, practice a mainstream

Japanese lifestyle, or to become culturally Japanese and take on a Japanese identity

(McVeigh, 2004; Sakata, 2009).

I felt like an Alien at a Dean's Committee meeting about proposed changes to our

department.   One new feature of the curriculum would be that each faculty member would teach a senior seminar in business or economics.   Suddenly, Professor Suzuki asked (referring to one of the foreign English teachers who had a PhD in history), "Do you *really* think we should give senior seminars to foreigners who teach *history*?" Clearly, his rhetorical question implied that this historian had no place overseeing students majoring in business or economics.

Since I wasn't sure if he was objecting to senior seminars going to foreigners in general, all teachers with specialties other than business or economics, or just this one person, I explained that the other two foreign members of our department (one of whom was me) had business expertise—one had earned an MBA, and I regularly worked as a corporate trainer and consultant in intercultural communication.   To that, Professor Mizuno, the coordinator of academic affairs, retorted, "Can you advise people about mergers and acquisitions (M&A)?"   I replied, if it involved how to integrate disparate yet merging organizational cultures, then yes.   Moreover, I added, not all of our Japanese teachers could advise about M&A.   Professor Mizuno insisted that in fact, they *could*.   I was certain he was mistaken, as our faculty included experts in marketing and corporate social responsibility—specialties that were no more closely related than mine to M&A.

Other Japanese faculty members had no business expertise at all—scholars in political science and geography who taught liberal arts courses unrelated to business or economics—yet their qualifications were not being questioned by Professors Suzuki or Mizuno.   As this conversation focused on nationality instead of the more relevant issue of business expertise, I felt keenly that we non-Japanese were being excluded and our professional qualifications disparaged—i.e., we were allowed to teach our native language, English, but no matter what our background, we were not trusted to instruct courses in the core academic knowledge imparted in our department.

Yet Aliens are not always so obviously or egregiously excluded.   In Komisarof (2011), Aliens frequently felt treated as guests in their work organizations in a benevolent, but ultimately ostracizing manner.   I had many such interactions with Professor Kanda, the coordinator of student affairs.   I recounted in my journal the time when the Dean's Committee oversaw the National Center Test for University Admissions ("*Senta Shiken*"), which is a grueling two-day set of college admission exams for high school students:

> Professor Kanda often treats me as a guest—not a regular member of the Dean's Committee.   He is quick to say—as if he were doing me a favor—that

I do not need to attend certain events—like when he told me I could go to my office during the time that the whole Dean's Committee was supposed to stay in Test Center Headquarters. I politely declined—electing to remain with everyone instead. This "kindness" makes me feel like an outsider because I am its *only* recipient. He obviously has no pernicious intention to exclude me, though exclusion would be the result if I were to accept this special treatment. I doubt it would endear me to my comrades if they were toiling for hours in the Test Center Headquarters while I was in my office relaxing or doing my own private work.

Why did Professor Kanda offer to exempt me from this duty? Most likely, he assumed that I could not really be of help—as I would not understand the complexities of overseeing the tests—so there was no need for me to be there. Actually, I had proctored these exams six times before and was quite familiar with how they were run, but Professor Kanda never bothered to ask me about whether I had such experience. Facing assumptions that I could not, as a foreigner, be of help and fulfill the same role as others on the Dean's Committee, I felt like an Alien.

Profile three: Assimilated Members

In Komisarof (2011), American *Assimilated Members* were usually one of the few non-Japanese in their companies, but they constructively utilized the tension of being a cultural minority—i.e., of not always understanding their environment—as motivation to learn Japanese, as well as the values, common conceptual schema, and skills to enact key Japanese workplace norms. Both these Americans and their Japanese coworkers shared preferences that the Americans assimilate to what they described as Japanese business culture, and since these Americans made the effort to do so, they were accepted as functioning members of the Japanese linguistic and cultural community in their offices. American Assimilated Members also perceived themselves as core organizational members. Their Japanese colleagues encouraged participation in a variety of work-related activities and tasks, and these Americans had influence in group decision-making processes, ample leadership opportunities, and fair chances at promotions, which left them feeling fulfilled and effective.

My time on the Dean's Committee coincided with my 14th and 15th years in Japan; before then, I had taught a lecture course for many years in intercultural communication in Japanese and used Japanese written sources in my research, so my speaking

proficiency and literacy were sufficient for me to work more or less entirely in Japanese.

As a matter of personal pride, and to demonstrate that a foreigner could do so, I

preferred to follow mainstream Japanese workplace norms and wanted to contribute as

much as my Japanese colleagues on the Dean's Committee.   Dean Tomita understood

and encouraged my approach, so he delegated to me many duties identical to those of

the Japanese members.   For example, I coordinated a 3-day intensive course entitled

"Introduction to Social Scientific Analysis" involving all of the department's faculty

members and first-year students.   I also acted as a university representative at "Open

Campus" events—giving PR and recruitment presentations in Japanese about our

department to prospective students and their parents.

In some of these tasks, my goal was to perform at the level of my Japanese colleagues

(for instance, when organizing the logistics of the intensive 3-day course), but in other

cases, my Japanese cultural and linguistic competencies, along with my foreign

appearance, empowered me to offer something that my Japanese colleagues could not.

For example, at Open Campus events, my Caucasian face speaking Japanese pleasantly

surprised my audience.   This made my presentations more memorable and

differentiated my university from others, which was important, as prospective students

often attend Open Campus events at multiple universities.   I also gave our department a "global" face—literally and figuratively—which was great for PR.   Professor Suzuki—from whom praise was rarely gratuitous—said as much when he congratulated me after compiling the audience survey results from my first Open Campus presentation. Afterwards, I was asked to repeat these speeches many times; presumably, they enabled us to recruit more students—a "win-win" situation in which both the department and I benefitted—all because my colleagues entrusted me with the same work as Japanese Dean's Committee members.

Profile four: Integrated Members

Integrated Members perceive that although they are treated by ethnocultural outgroup coworkers as culturally different, they feel accepted as fellow organizational members. In Komisarof (2011), American Integrated Members reported a match between their own integration acculturation strategies and those of their Japanese colleagues—i.e., both sides appeared comfortable with Americans behaving and being identified as culturally different from Japanese.   Namely, Americans welcomed socio-professional involvement with Japanese people but usually communicated in English and interacted according to norms which they predominantly associated with American culture—an

approach which their Japanese colleagues largely supported. These Americans also perceived themselves as accepted organizational members, as Japanese colleagues encouraged their participation in group decision-making, project teams, and other communal work activities. Integrated Members differed from Assimilated Members in that they were not expected to function within contexts requiring Japanese linguistic or cultural competence; consequently, their roles and duties were not usually the same as Japanese, but they substantially contributed to their organizations all the same.

I felt like an Integrated Member when liaising between the Dean's Committee and several administrative bodies comprised of foreign faculty who did not speak Japanese—for example, committees concerned with the department's various English programs. It was my job alone to explain Dean's Committee proposals to these groups, receive feedback, and report back to the Dean's Committee on these exchanges. As the Dean's Committee was designing a new English immersion program and proposing broad changes in the general English curriculum, my duties were time consuming. But I felt uniquely able to contribute here because of my research and experiential background in English education as well as my bilingual skills. As a result, I could tap my skill set, which had some relation to my cultural background, and make

personally-satisfying, unique contributions which were also valued by the Dean's

Committee—all signs of Integrated Membership.

Dynamic movement between the profiles

My perceptive mode could shift between profiles depending upon prominent features of

the situation, including my perceptions of my communicative partner's intentions and

actions towards me.   For example, after one Open Campus event, I felt like an

Assimilated Member when I was entrusted by Professor Ando (the associate coordinator

of student affairs) with confidential attendee survey results to bring to the next Dean's

Committee meeting.   However, the next morning, Professor Kanda, his superior,

suddenly appeared at my door, looking harried, and asked me to give *him* the documents.

He did not offer an explanation as to why, though his impeccably measured tone was as

polite and benevolent as ever.   Suddenly, I felt like an Alien—convinced that Professor

Kanda did not trust me to deliver the documents safely.   I saw myself as a foreign

guest, limited in how much I was "allowed" to contribute and kept at arms-length from

membership-confirming tasks like these.

My entrée into a specific profile was not only reactive.   My sense of agency was also

important—specifically, my choice to try to fulfill personally-compelling needs and/or goals which aligned with a particular profile. For example, primary motivators of my behavior on the Dean's Committee included wanting positive recognition from my colleagues, proving my own competence, or showing that foreigners could also do the specific work at hand. To fulfill such needs, either I challenged myself to participate in work which everyone else was doing (thus viewing myself and expecting to be treated as an Assimilated Member) or assumed duties that I, as a non-Japanese, was uniquely qualified to perform (thus seeing myself and expecting treatment as an Integrated Member).

Similarly, my confidence in my cultural and linguistic competencies was also an important influence on the trajectory of my transitions between profiles. When I had the skills and desire to contribute but felt denied the chance because of my nationality (as when Professor Kanda asked for the confidential surveys), I perceived myself as an Alien, but when I was given the opportunity to contribute and felt confident in my resources to complete the task (as when Professor Ando *entrusted* me with the confidential surveys), I saw myself as an Assimilated Member. When I wanted to use skills related to my cultural and/or linguistic background to further the Dean's

Committee goals and was encouraged to do so, then I felt like an Integrated Member (as

when I acted as a bridge between Japanese and non-Japanese faculty regarding the new

English curriculum). But if I was expected to perform a job for which I felt

underqualified, and to do so with the same competence as Japanese colleagues, then I

perceived myself as a Marginalized Outsider—as when I was first told that I would

coordinate the 3-day intensive course "Introduction to Social Scientific Analysis."

However, once I realized midway through this task that I could handle it, my perceptual

paradigm shifted to that of an Assimilated Member.

My predominant profile

I have argued that my varied experiences on the Dean's Committee fit each

profile—depending upon my sense of agency, relationships with other Dean's

Committee members, and contextual factors such as my skill sets, knowledge related to

the task at hand, and personal needs. However, in hindsight, I mainly preferred

viewing my acculturation process and evaluating its outcomes through the "lens" of an

Assimilated Member, and secondarily as an Integrated Member.   Though I sometimes

experienced unpleasant instances as an Alien or Marginalized Outsider, I believe my

former colleagues would agree that I was accepted as a core member of the group in

light of my contributions over those two years.   What varied primarily was whether I was expected to participate in our daily rituals and enact the same duties in what I perceived as a Japanese way (Assimilated Membership), or whether we negotiated a different means of participation (Integrated Membership).   But usually, I felt like an Assimilated Member, as I believed that the other Dean's Committee members and I shared assumptions that I would contribute as others did while communicating in Japanese and engaging in Japanese cultural practices.   Even when my non-Japanese status became salient, I still felt accepted as a member—someone who was recognized as committed and had substantially contributed to the group realizing its goals.   That is, to me, an indication that the Rice Paper Ceiling had yielded—perhaps not always in the way that I wanted, though, with me feeling like an Assimilated Member.   Rather, the Dean's Committee members and I were able to negotiate a form of belonging that moved primarily between Assimilated and Integrated Membership and empowered us to work together effectively.

Breaking the Rice Paper Ceiling: Reflections and theoretical applications

How was I able to pierce (at least partially) the Rice Paper Ceiling on the Dean's Committee?   Naturally, the tacit approval and support of my coworkers, especially Dean

Tomita, was crucial, for without it, such change would have been impossible.   But I also

helped to catalyze this movement beyond the Rice Paper Ceiling through my own efforts to

achieve a sense of belonging.   Lois' (1999) research helps to understand how and why the

Rice Paper Ceiling broke.   She postulated three criteria for newcomers to gain trust and be

accepted into a group or organization: *consciousness*, *resources*, and *commitment*.

Regarding *consciousness*, prospective members maintain humility and accept a broad range

of tasks assigned to help the group achieve its primary goals.   Mastery of a skill which the

group values—i.e., proper *resources*—is also essential, as is a long-term *commitment* to the

group expressed primarily through sustained participation in its activities.

Instrumental to my acceptance on the Dean's Committee was my effort to prove myself on

these three dimensions and my colleagues' positive acknowledgment thereof.   In terms of

consciousness and *commitment*, I spent many hours engaged in a broad array of group tasks

both on weekdays and weekends.   If offered an exemption (as I was by Professor Kanda

during the National Center Test), I declined, and in time, such offers became infrequent, as

my colleagues realized that I would not take them and that in fact, I could make meaningful

contributions when given the chance.   I also utilized my *skills* to help with the veritable

avalanche of work that screamed for our attention each week—sometimes, skills related to

Japanese linguistic and cultural competencies (which I utilized when serving as the Dean's Committee representative on committees where I was the only foreigner), and others stemming from my expertise in English education (which I used to help create a new English immersion program).   Building credibility and trust—and then continuously feeding them—through these three basic "channels" were important in gaining and maintaining acceptance on the Dean's Committee.

Following established protocols for gaining group acceptance was also important in breaking the Rice Paper Ceiling.   Regardless of the national culture, every organization has pivotal norms, attitudes, and values, or a normative system which must be understood and participated in if newcomers hope to be considered for core membership (Levine & Moreland, 1991; Lois, 1999), but the protocols for belonging which emerge from such normative systems are numerous, detailed, demanding, and necessitate precise execution in most Japanese workplaces.   In the Dean's Committee, Japanese normative systems dominated, but my previous intercultural research and work experience helped me to identify critical opportunities for gaining group acceptance and adjust my behavior accordingly.

One of the most important values, along with its concomitant norms, in gaining and maintaining acceptance on the Dean's Committee was that of being *"kichinto"*—a concept which connotes orderliness, trustworthiness, reliability, morality, and cleanliness, and is demonstrated, according to Kondo (1990), by being disciplined, loyal, neat, hardworking, responsible, self-motivated, and respectful. Following the "*kichinto* code" (e.g., being punctual for all meetings, responding quickly to email, and thoroughly carrying out any requests from my superiors) demonstrated my dependability, a critical social currency in earning trust, credibility, and acceptance.

My sense of belonging on the Dean's Committee was, I believe, also promulgated by engaging in communication norms which are positively reinforced in many Japanese workplaces, such as those that stress the importance of listening intently and showing empathy towards others' opinions, even when one disagrees (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). Moreover, conflict avoidance and maintaining the face of others are essential to maintaining positive interpersonal relations and smooth group functioning (Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994). My careful adherence to these norms, even when feeling provoked, was, I believe, instrumental in moving beyond the Rice Paper Ceiling on the Dean's Committee.

Concluding advice

This chapter reinforces the importance of learning the local language, communication norms, and also the social processes underlying how group membership is gained and maintained in order to become accepted in faculty groups—especially in "tight" cultures like Japan's with strict expectations for conformity to the local normative system.   I would argue that one type of essential cultural competence in Japan or anywhere else is achieving at least functional competence in enacting the norms instrumental for gaining group acceptance where one works.   By achieving such competence, faculty members can build more positive collegial relations and make more significant professional contributions in group-based work.   Also, to the hosts of academic migrants: to build multicultural teams, it is important that organizational ingroup boundaries be *permeable*, so that acceptance can be achieved based on cultural competence rather than ascribed based on ancestry and/or nationality.   If both transnational faculty members and their host institutions work synergistically towards these goals, then their universities will grow more inclusive of diversity and be better positioned to actualize the benefits of having an international faculty.

Author Profile

Dr. Adam Komisarof is a professor of intercultural communication and acculturation in Reitaku University's Department of Economic Studies and Business Administration. He earned his BA in educational studies from Brown University, MA in intercultural relations from Antioch University, and PhD in public administration from International Christian University (ICU) in Tokyo. During the 2012-13 academic year, Dr. Komisarof served as a senior associate member of St. Antony's College, University of Oxford, and conducted research as a visiting academic at the Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies. Dr. Komisarof's first book, *On the Front Lines of Forging a Global Society: Japanese and American Coworkers in Japan*, earned him Reitaku University's Excellence in Research Award for 2012. His lectures about his second book, *At Home Abroad: The Contemporary Western Experience in Japan*, were sponsored by the University of Oxford's Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies, the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan, and the Harvard University Club of Japan. Dr. Komisarof is a fellow and an executive board member of the International Academy for Intercultural Research. As a bilingual intercultural trainer (Japanese and English), he has performed scores of workshops for large companies and governmental organizations in Japan, the United States, Southeast Asia, and Europe.

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[1] In an effort to achieve gender neutrality, the author alternates between male and female pronouns at various points in this chapter.