

Organizational Culture and Change: Action Plan for Foreign Faculty Integration

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Abstract

This paper investigates theories on how to adopt inclusive leadership practices in a strictly hierarchical academic organization. In 2013, the education ministry in Japan announced their English language reform plan to internationalize universities. The new reforms have brought a number of structural and curricular changes for university English education (Egitim, 2022). One of the changes was that all English classes would have to be taught in English. As a result, many universities adopted to the new reforms. In an effort to promote globalization, universities expanded their foreign faculty members. However, due to the strict hierarchical structure, decisions were made by a single authority at the top and communicated down through the hierarchy. Thus, everyone is expected to conform to the demands of the top management without questioning. This study attempted to propose a three-step action plan to help overcome the integration issues of foreign faculty members. The previous literature indicates that a new organizational culture needs to be in place for the successful execution of large-scale changes (Burke, 2018; Jaaskelainen & Uusi-Rauva, 2010; Kotter & Cohen, 2002). Some studies also suggested that positive worker attitude is the most essential factor to enhance performance and productivity among workers (Burke, 2018, p.34). However, collaborative engagement of all workers is needed to allow everyone to embrace the intended objective and vision. Once all employees are given enough autonomy, they can take ownership of their roles. The shared leadership model allows all faculty members enough autonomy to take leadership in their area of expertise. Each member is regarded as the leader in that particular role.

Challenges Involved in the Change Effort

Many Japanese companies have a strict hierarchical structure where all decisions are made at the top and communicated down to subordinate units (Egitim, 2021b). Hofstede's (2001) power distance scale ranks Japan among the most hierarchical societies in the world. The power distance dimension suggests that individuals could have different talents and expertise in a society. Therefore, they are not considered equal and the less powerful must accept that power is distributed unequally. The Japanese are generally aware of their hierarchical position in any setting and act accordingly.

The authoritative leadership model may not be suitable for people from less hierarchical cultures (Egitim, 2022). Since people from Western societies prefer to voice their opinions and concerns directly in any social setting, they may have difficulty accepting passive roles in highly conservative Japanese organizations. This is essentially the challenge facing the foreign faculty members. While, tenured faculty members are well aware of their own hierarchical position and act accordingly, foreign faculty members often struggle to understand their roles and therefore, they can't help but question the system in place.

Due to the changing global socio-economic factors, organizations in Japan will have to manage increasingly diverse workforces (Bebenroth & Kanai, 2011; Egitim, 2021). Burke (2018) suggests that changing an organization's deep-rooted culture involves reevaluating cultural beliefs, values and basic underlying assumptions that are not visible from outside. In other words, the leaders of the organization, which in this case Japanese faculty members, need to reflect on their own actions and behaviors based on deep-rooted beliefs and values. This is the first step to develop a mutual understanding of the issues facing the organization (Egitim, 2021).

Having said that it would be useful to also understand how the existing issues may be viewed through the lenses of the tenured faculty. Currently, the higher education sector operates in an increasingly complex global environment with constant pressure and demand for global competitiveness and excellence. As a result, higher education institutions are required to operate similar to profit-seeking organizations (Egitim, 2021, p. 12). All higher education institutions have a certain level of dependency on the government. They may sometimes have a complex and uneasy relationship with the government. In Japan, some universities are funded by the government.

Nonetheless, they are also required to assume the role of critique and commentary against the government (James et al., 2015).

Having to walk on a double-edged sword places considerable pressure on institutions as well as their academic personnel. Tenured academic personnel are expected to professionalize their role. Other than, teaching, research and civic engagement, they are also expected to be involved in management to successfully lead others operating under them. These academics are under tremendous pressure of fulfilling such pluralist leadership roles (Egitim, 2021). Since the academic institutions are based on hierarchy, department heads are expected to report to the executive board of the university.

Needless to say, those in the management roles face a daunting task of meeting all the listed requirements (Youngs, 2017). Thus, it may be necessary to reevaluate our understanding of leadership in academic institutions. There may be a need to develop a new leadership approach that could potentially ease tenured personnel's burden while embracing employees and encouraging them to participate and partner with each other to achieve collaboration (Egitim, 2021; Youngs, 2017). Bryman (2009) emphasizes a need to "create an environment or context for academics to fulfill their potential and interest in their work" (p. 66). This can be achieved with a new leadership model based on respect for existing values, supporting one another and promoting the interests of subordinates while encouraging autonomy within the organization (cited in Jones & Harvey, 2017).

However, adopting a process approach as such requires a significant paradigm change that acknowledges shared responsibilities in leadership work (Egitim, 2021). Randall (2012, p. 4) claims such paradigm change can only take place if all faculty is committed to participate and in some cases, actually lead the change initiative. Burke (2018) also noted, the change process would involve revisiting cultural beliefs, values and basic underlying assumptions that are not visible from outside. In other words, the leaders of the organization are required to reflect upon their own actions and behaviors influenced by deep-rooted beliefs and values (Egitim, 2021). Such deep reflection could help them develop a genuine understanding of the issues facing the department.

As researchers we must research self in relation to others to gain a thorough understanding of our own perception and biases as well as others' around us. This self-reflection process would allow viewing issues through others' perspectives and gain a better understanding of them. In order

to achieve that, one needs to see the world through the lenses of others (Egitim, 2021). Reflective practice can raise their awareness of the challenges facing their followers. That can help them create an autonomous working environment where everyone first understands one another and allows each other enough room to take ownership for their respective roles (Egitim, 2017).

Cultural Diversification at the Management Level and Establishing a Bottom-up Channel

Cross-cultural adaptability is necessary if we are to understand, value and mobilize complex cultural workforces. Consistent with this assumption, Syed and Ezbilgin (2010) also argue that compatibility of the organizational culture with growing diversity is essential for long-term success. However, in order to establish that, leaders need to relinquish control to allow collaboration with others working under them (Egitim, 2020; Egitim, 2021b; Kramer & Crespy, 2011).

Creating a climate for collaboration involves minimizing power differences between different hierarchical levels. This is especially an important step to promote the necessary cultural diversification at the top management. A study performed by Nielsen and Nielsen (2013) suggests that creating diversity at the top management may help with the successful integration of a culturally diverse workforce. In fact, the researchers also concluded that culturally diverse top management team may lead organizations to superior performance (Nielsen & Nielsen, 2013).

Some studies suggested that colleagues with dissimilar backgrounds complement each other better such as co-teaching model presented in the Japanese context (Egitim & Garcia, 2021). Therefore, creativity, innovation, and performance are likely to be higher in teams with such diversity (Drescher & Garbers, 2016). However, people from different cultural and educational backgrounds presumably have different ways of perceiving the external environment. Thus, it is possible that each member is likely to make different contributions to the team.

One way to achieve effective cultural diversification is to integrate full-time foreign faculty members into committees. The main benefit of involving foreign faculty members in the committee is that it may help to create a bottom-up communication flow. Since full-time foreign faculty members will be involved in decision-making, the part-time faculty can directly communicate with the full-time foreign faculty to convey their desires and concerns to the top management.

A study performed by Jaaskelainen and Uusi-Rauva (2010) concluded that the bottom-up approach improved efficiency and productivity compared to a conventional one in public organizations in Finland. The next step would involve establishing a sound dialog within the culturally diverse committee members, “release agency from structure and from pure individual motive” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998).

According to Kramer and Crespy (2011), collaborative communication was essential to establish effective collaborative teamwork between members in a major theater. Such collaborative communication starts by getting involved in daily discussions on topics such as “religious practices, political views, college course work, summer jobs, careers, and family situations with other members”. This process was helpful to build relationships. As a result, people on the lower end of the hierarchy could feel at ease approaching top management.

Allowing such interactions would not only help to ease the foreign faculty members’ adaptation process but also create opportunities for them to share their views directly with committee members in social settings. Many Japanese companies hold a number of welcome parties and social events to help ease the adaptation of new staff members. As I emphasized earlier, academic institutions need to act like corporations in some ways. Their personnel are expected to develop a strong business sense so that they can overcome the problems and challenges posed by the constantly changing external environment (James et al., 2015). Thus, it would be beneficial for academic institutions to gain insight into how culturally diverse international companies in Japan help their new staff members integrate into a working environment with different dynamics than they are accustomed to.

Nurturing Shared and Inclusive Leadership in Organizations

According to a study conducted by Hsieh and Liou (2018), shared leadership had a positive impact on public employees’ perception on the organization’s performance and facilitated their acceptance of organizational rules. In addition, it was helpful to reduce conflict, facilitate employee engagement and achieve a shared purpose (Archer & Cameron, 2009 cited in Hsieh & Liou, 2018). The study suggests that public agencies have to work together formally and informally to solve potential problems in multi-organizational network arrangements. This concept can also apply to universities where inter-organizational network is a prevalent system. In addition,

due to rapid globalization, many universities in Japan are in the midst of going through cultural diversification. Thus, conflicts and misunderstandings due to ever diversifying academic environment are inevitable.

According to McGuire (2002), successful organizational structures involve dependence and resource-distribution among the collaborating parties. In other words, active engagement and role sharing is expected from all employees. Putting this concept in practice requires initiative from the top management. we first engage the full-time faculty members in decision-making by allowing them to take leadership roles. Once the full-time foreign faculty members embrace their leadership roles, they can start to engage the part-time foreign faculty in the leadership process as part of the final step.

This process can be initiated by holding regular meetings between the full-time foreign faculty and the part-time foreign faculty members. In meetings, the part-time faculty's inputs will be received to understand their opinions and concerns regarding class management and administrative procedures. The goal is to create social interactions between the full-time foreign faculty and the part-time foreign faculty. While the full-time foreign faculty would have the opportunity to understand how the part-time faculty could contribute to the department better, the part-time faculty would be able to express how they could actively contribute to the organization. Once all parties recognize how they could contribute to the department, the opportunity to engage the part-time faculty in collaborative leadership process will emerge.

Conclusion

The present paper attempted to understand the challenges facing foreign faculty members at Japanese universities. Hierarchical leadership models may not effectively respond to the challenges facing a culturally diverse workforce. Therefore, this study proposed a three-step action plan to adopt collaborative leadership in the organization. The first step involved integrating the full-time foreign faculty into the committee. As a result, a culturally diverse management is formed. Through the relationship building process, the tenured committee would have the opportunity to reflect on the challenges foreign faculty members encountered and gradually realized the benefits of engaging others in leadership roles (Egitim, 2020; Egitim, 2021b).

In addition, the involvement of full-time foreign faculty members in the decision-making process would make it possible to build a bottom-up communication channel which the part-time

faculty can use to directly communicate their desires and concerns to the decision-making body. However, the main objective here is to build collaborative leadership that would allow all faculty members to take leadership in their respective roles.

The final step is to recognize all part-time foreign faculty members as leaders in their own roles. This process involves giving them autonomy and decision making power in their class management. This would show them that their opinion is valued by the organization. Once all members are actively engaged in the collaborative leadership, it will be possible to establish unity based on mutual trust and respect in organizations.

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