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I had the very interesting and enlightening experience of being able to spend a few years - actually almost 7 years in Japan where I taught conversation English to businessmen, government officials, college students, and other adults. Japan is a fascinating country with many spots of beauty, a rich history, a tradition of excellence in the arts - and populated by a people who have chosen to organize their lives and work in ways that are at times quite different from the ways we have organized ours. It is this last element - the people of Japan and their methods of interaction - that became the focus of my interest. Once I was able to get past being awe struck by the temples and gardens, admiring Mt. Fuji, discovering new ways of serving food, watching kimono-clad young ladies float by, trying to find my way about on the subway and train systems, and after having mastered the language to a degree sufficient to allow me to eavesdrop on conversations going on around me that were not structured for the foreign ear. This interest in the way people interact is only natural to communications specialists.

Since my return from Japan, I have followed with great interest the growing body of writings on Japan, most specifically the writings on the reasons for her tremendous economic success. I would like to review two of these, adding my own observations with special emphasis on those areas where listening seems to play an important role.

Before we launch into topic at hand, I felt we needed a platform from which to stand while talking about aspects of communication which are often inter-related to the culture. Admittedly, it is not easy to gain an overview of a culture in a few minutes or indeed in the whole time period allotted to this program, but in a 'better than nothing' attempt, I would like to put up on the overhead projector a graphic comparison of our two cultures. This graph is built on a system for comparing cultures devised by two anthropologists named Kluckhohn with their associate Strodtbeck. Using both analytical and philosophical methods, these anthropologists came up with 5 questions whose answers seem to characterize a culture in a general sense. These 5 questions are:

1. What is the character of innate human nature? That is, how does this culture view human nature: as basically evil, a mixture of good and evil, or basically good - and is this nature viewed as changeable or unchangeable.
2. What is the relation of Man to Nature? Does this culture view Nature as overwhelming human beings, existing in harmony with human beings or do humans dominate Nature?

3. What is the temporal focus of human life? This question deals with the sense of time of a culture. Is the culture basically oriented toward the past, living for the present, or looking toward the future?
4. What is the mode of human activity? The question here is whether the culture in question stresses action, self-development or puts the stress on who you are.
5. What is the mode of human relationships? Does this culture stress individualism? Is it group-oriented? Is it authoritarian?

A grid of these behaviors would show us Americans pretty much falling down the right-hand side of the chart (see attached chart). We are people who generally believe that people are good though this quality is changeable. We view man as the master of Nature. We are future-oriented, action-oriented and stress individualism. Traditional cultures such those of the Arabs tend to fall down the left-hand side of the chart.

If we now take a look at Japan, we find that on human nature, the Japanese tend to view human nature as a mixture of good and evil and that this is a quality that is unchangeable. Man is viewed as living in harmony with nature. When it comes to their sense of time, we get some interesting and 'contradictory' results. The Japanese seem to be both past and future oriented. In the matter of mode of human activity, the stress in Japan is on both being and doing, and in social relationships, we might characterize the Japanese as being both authoritarian and group-oriented. All in all, the Japanese have developed a highly complex

It should be obvious of these charts that the Japanese are not afflicted with the 'either-or' orientation that many of us talk about in our listening classes. The 'either-or' orientation is the result of the influence of Aristolian principle of mutual exclusivity, which influences our thoughts, actions and emotions everyday of our lives. We like to put everything in its little 'pigeon hole.'

Now we turn to some of the recent writings on Japan's economic success. Of that success, I am sure I need not elaborate. From the devastation of World War II, there has arisen an industrial power which now challenges some of our leading industries. All of this has happen in a country which would not need to hide in shame if it were one of the poorest nations on earth. It lacks in natural resources of almost every type, important 100% of its oil and all other raw materials. Densely populated, it stuffs over 100 million souls into land space about the size of California and most of that mountainous and non-arable.

The first writings on Japan's economic miracle usually attributed it to such things as cheap wages but in the last few years, there has been a growing awareness that it is not wages or more modern factories that have made the difference. It is management in which the Japanese have the edge.

One of the most recent studies comparing American and Japanese companies is called 'Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet The Japanese Challenge' by Dr. William Ouchi of the Graduate School of Management at the University of California. Dr. Ouchi took two companies, Matsushita Electric in Japan and ITT under C.E.O. Geneen on the American side, and compared them. He does not consider these two companies to be 'typical' of the firms of their countries, but actually 'stereotypical'. Using these two companies, he came up with a list of differences between Japanese and American organizations:

1. lifetime employment vs. short term employment
2. slow evaluation and promotion vs. rapid evaluation and promotion
3. non-specialized career paths vs. specialized career paths
4. implicit control mechanism vs. explicit control mechanisms
5. collective responsibility vs. individual responsibility
6. wholistic concern for their employees vs. segmented concern

The Japanese traits are listed on the right; the American ones are on the left. After making this list, Dr. Ouchi recognized that there were a number of American firms that had the same traits as the Japanese firms. Thus his label of Z organization to represent a certain type of company which cuts across national boundaries. IBM, Texas Instruments, Hewlett-Packard, and a few other American companies are examples of Z type organizations. Ouchi recognized that at the very core of the Z type organization is good interpersonal communication.

A another new book called 'The Art of Japanese Management' by Richard Tanner Pascale and Anthony Athos attempts to get at the root of Japanese capabilities in handling people. As these authors state, 'It is comparatively easy to make the assertions that the Japanese do a better job in developing human resources and that they are comparatively more skilled in a variety of respects having to do with managing people. The difficulty is that these statements don't really help us know what to do differently; they don't tell us what is at the root of these Japanese capabilities.'

Pascale and Athos believe that the essence of Japanese success in the area of human resource utilization is rooted in two assumptions that are rather fundamental to life. The first assumption is that the Japanese acceptance of ambiguity, uncertainty, and imperfection as a given in organizational life. It follows then that their staffing policies and skills in dealing with people in groups and with one another are different than ours. The second assumption is that of interdependence. On this assumption, they are prepared to make ar greater investments in people and in the skills necessary to be effective with others.

The first assumption, that ambiguity, uncertainty, and imperfection are a natural part of organizational life, goes very counter to the grain of the decisive, action-oriented American manager's thinking. In the American businessman's view, though this conditions might occur, they are to be reduced as much as possible by large doses of rationality, specificity, decisiveness and demand for desired outcomes. In many cases, these responses are appropriate, of course. But sometimes it is better to be indefinite and vague. There are several circumstances where these might be the more effective approach.

One such circumstance is where the course of action one should follow is not yet clear. Temporizing, leaving things in a bit of a middle for a while can give enough time to sort out what path should be taken. Pascale and Athos cite an incident at a certain airline company. The cabin cleaners came to a supervisor with the complaint that the job foreman was being unfair in job assignments. They claimed that the Black cleaners were being assigned the dirtiest, most unpleasant jobs more often than was fair. The supervisor, in his own words, 'juggled' the problem. He told the cleaners, he would hear them out, and in return they must respect his obligation to listen to all other parties to the dispute. In this particular case, the supervisor found that the problem could be handled on a local level without the need for issuing a company- or division-wide guidelines.

Other circumstances in which it can be helpful to be somewhat vague in specifying the connection of one person to another, facts to conclusions, or cause to effect. An expression of some degree of tentativeness in the relationships of these elements can allow one flexibility, and keeps the door open to new ideas. Teachers of listening in this country very often include in their courses some study time examining the nature of inferences, urging students not to treat inferences as if they were facts. The Japanese notion of the uses of vagueness seems to be in this mode.

Communication is also an area where a touch of vagueness can come in handy from time to time. This is particularly true if you are using the consensus-decision making method. Rather than forcing the issue by asserting rank and authority, by temporizing for a time, the decision is left to move along the learning curve of all the participating managers until they can come to accept the ultimate outcome. This collective responsibility for decision-making takes a great deal of time and reaches further down in the company hierarchy than is common in American firms. Each participant in the process must be able to say, 'I believe that you understand my point of view and I believe that I understand your point of view.' Having explored and understood each person's input and feelings, each person is then able to say, 'I will support this decision, whether I prefer it or not, because it was arrived at in an open and fair manner.'

The slowness of this method can drive American managers to distraction. Pascale and Athos speculate that the Eastern philosophy of Zen helps Asians deal with the long 'dead' time before a decision is reached. Zen teaches that space and time are not empty but 'full of nothing'. The area between events and objects can be as important as the objects and events themselves. In fact, the period of nothingness can be the most instructional because it permits us to gain greater insight into what is truly there. It is time to reflect and see the full possibilities without being blinded by our own egos. This assumes, of course, that we are being truly open-minded about the possibilities and have not wed ourselves to some particular outcome.

Communication in Japanese managerial circles isn't always indirect. Most of the time it is straight and to the point and 'very American'. But, in the case of a controller, for example, alerting a division manager to a problem, the controller may find it more expedient to their on-going relationship to carefully choose his words, constructing a balance between opaque and clear. One finds often in Japanese conversations that matters tend to 'go in circles', moving from clarity to indirection depending on the listener's ability to handle the topic.

There are certain features of the Japanese language which make this indirection easier, more 'built-in' to the language. There is a verb form, for instance, that indicates a tentative nature of the statement. In English we can get the same effect by using such phrases as 'I believe', 'It appears', 'It seems to me'. More often we end up using declarative statements to express thoughts which are our assumptions or conclusions. As a consequence everything comes out either black or white. The Japanese are not uncomfortable living in this 'gray' areas.

The word for 'no' in Japanese is rarely used. It is not that Japanese agree to whatever is being proposed, but express their opposition in a less blunt manner. You are more likely to hear, 'Well, I really don't think so,' or 'Is that right? Um that presents some problems.' The word, 'yes', is often heard, but does not indicate that a definite stand has been taken but only shows that the person has understood the point and the speaker can continue. The goal is always to avoid setting up the situation so that an adversary relationship will develop. Hence, a soft approach is used. The establishment of goals and plans are couched in language such as 'I wonder if we could..', 'You may be right but..', 'What would you think if we did it this way?'

The Japanese and their language are particularly adept at taking into account the feelings of others. In recent years, our own Human Resource Development programs have emphasized supervisory techniques that have as one aim the encouraging of management personnel to be cognizant of and respond to the feelings of subordinates. The Japanese are past masters of this type of

interaction. The necessity for being so is an overwhelming in a land as densely inhabited as is Japan. No clue is overlooked. A slight hesitation, a twitch of an eyebrow, some intonation change will be picked up and responded to with sensitivity. The language also has a great number of terms to characterize feelings and emotions.

Pascale and Athos' second assumption, if you will remember, is that the Japanese view themselves as being interdependent while Americans like to view themselves as being independent. We make a great deal of the notion of independence, and while not overlooking what we have achieved because of this notion, it also contributes to isolation and unhealthy rivalry in organizations. To the Japanese independence is equated with self-centeredness and disregard for others. The Japanese see themselves as beings moored by many lines that are tied to friends, organizational colleagues, and family.

Pascale and Athos feel that our Western tendency to believe that people should act 'in character' acts as a cultural filter hindering the listening process so necessary in decision making. We, for instance, consider it a sign of maturity to have a well-defined separate sense of self but this sense of separation is often accompanied by a judgmental stance toward what the other is saying. We are constantly torn between loyalty to our own identity and deference to the group. Whether we agree or disagree with the speaker, and the extent to which that affirms or diminishes our sense of self, determines what we will hear and how we will respond to it. Since the Japanese place a higher priority on the group's harmony and progress, they can more easily practice what Pascale and Athos have called 'less-ego' listening. They see themselves as one among others allowing time to seek a unique reality of each situation and to absorb ideas less evaluatively.

The Japanese are extremely sensitive to and concerned about group interactions and relationships and the prime qualification of a leader is his acceptance by the group. Group leaders in the West tend to emphasize the task and often neglect group maintenance activities while in Japan the maintenance of a satisfied work group is an integral part of the role of the leader. They realize that a group can become a troublesome force and put in a great deal more effort in developing and maintaining group functions.

These are only a few of the ways that Japanese interact with each other and when one pulls cultural patterns out of context, it produces a somewhat distorted picture. Certainly we should not avoid taking a look at their management techniques for that reason. We may or may not find anything that we can utilize in this country but most certainly we will be able to see ourselves better in this reflected light.

1. What is the character of innate human nature?

= Human nature Orientation

2. What is the relation of Man to Nature?

= Man-Nature Orientation

3. What is the temporal focus (time sense) of human life?

= Time Orientation

4. What is the mode of human activity

= Activity Orientation

5. What is the mode of human relationships

= Social Orientation

HUMAN NATURE * ➔	BASICALLY EVIL	MIXTURE OF GOOD AND EVIL	BASICALLY GOOD
MAN TO NATURE RELATIONSHIP ➔	MAN SUBJUGATED BY NATURE	MAN IN HARMONY WITH NATURE	MAN THE MASTER OF NATURE
SENSE OF TIME ➔	PAST - ORIENTED	PRESENT- ORIENTED	FUTURE ORIENTED
ACTIVITY ➔	BEING (Stress on who you are)	GROWING (Stress on self- development)	DOING (Stress on action)
SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS ➔	AUTHORITARIAN	GROUP- ORIENTED	INDIVIDUALISTIC

* Basic human nature may be seen not only in terms of good and evil, but also in terms of whether it is believed to be changeable or unchangeable