Diagnostic and Dialogic Organization Development Assumptions: Their Fit with Japanese Culture

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Abstract

This article aims to extend Jaeger's (1986) global perspective to explain why fundamental assumptions of Organization Development (OD) have encountered good fits and/or conflicts in various cultural settings. The article focuses on Japanese culture, where various diagnostic and dialogic practices have been applied without a deep discussion on the match between its cultural beliefs and OD assumptions. On the one hand, my analysis reveals that Japanese people are generally good at staying attuned to the unspoken meanings of others and, thus, have a good potential to understand the importance of a dialogic mindset and respect continuous co-creation of social realities in their organizational life. On the other hand, the diagnostic planning orientation may work well in the Japanese uncertainty-avoiding atmosphere due to its cultural disinclination to speak up to invite disruption for transformational change because of their eagerness to sustain harmony in organizations. Given the Japanese taken-for-granted assumption that "an authority figure decides what is right," it is clear that the dialogic mindset faces the challenge of dealing with the hesitation of Japanese people to speak up for transformational change. Based on Jaeger's (1986) postulation that OD practitioners are encouraged to be sensitive and knowledgeable about the host culture, this article concludes with my paradoxical hypothesis that Japanese people may speak up and become transformational when they feel safe to be generative in a space and/or feel adequately unsafe.