

JETs and the Struggle for a Smoke-free Work Environment

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► Key Words

JET Program(me);
institutional change;
cross-cultural conflict

▼ ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how, in the early 1990s, participants of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program(me) attempted to institute smoke-free faculty rooms at their schools. As primary sources, the author examines written contributions to *AJET Magazine*, between 1990 and 1991. The texts are: one committee announcement; two descriptions of campaigns; a negative reaction to one campaign; and an editorial. The analytical lens will be Kennedy's (1988) "Rainbow/Onion Model" of change in education environments.

1. Introduction

This section will present an overview of the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program(me) and tobacco usage in Japan circa 1990.

1. The Jet Program(me)

The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program(me) is arguably Japan's greatest international exchange initiative since the Meiji Era. The Japanese government established the program in 1987, and 848 young college graduates from four countries were brought to teach language in junior and senior high schools, and to work in government offices involved in

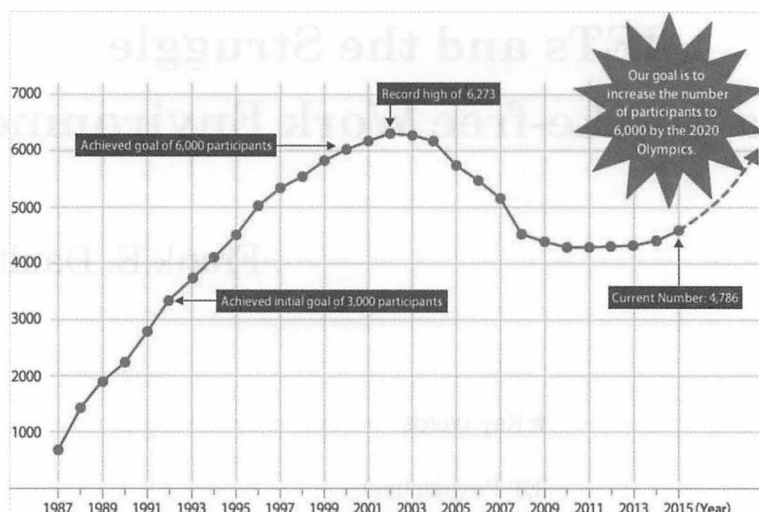


Image 1. Number of JET Program(me) Participants over Time
(<http://jetprogramme.org/en/history/>)

“internationalization” (*kokusaika*). As of 2015, there were 4,786 participants from 43 countries.

The Council of Local Authorities for International Relations (CLAIR) administers the JET Program(me) with the Ministries of: Internal Affairs and Communications; Foreign Affairs; and Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)—along with various local government organizations. CLAIR arranges the arrival of program participant (JETs) and orientation seminars, as well as counseling and distribution of a variety of resources and information.

The *JETs*—consisting of Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) and Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs)—are directed to “promote internationalization at the local level” (in addition to language instruction), and they encounter a myriad of obstacles. As orientation materials acknowledge, work “involves interacting in a bureaucratic environment that might strike Westerners as inflexible and quite rigid” (CLAIR).

Circa 1990, a typical complaint of JETs was, upon arrival at their host institutions, finding themselves in smoke-filled faculty rooms (*shokuin shitsu*), education offices (*kyoiku jimusho*), and so on. Ninety-four percent of JETs did not smoke in the early 1990s (source: CLAIR) and thus confronted a problem that most were culturally unprepared for.

2. Smoking and Japan in the Early ‘90s

Awareness of the dangers of smoking has been low in Asia, and Japan is no exception. As late as 2003, cigarette packages in Japan carried the ambivalent warning to not: “... smoke too much.” The mass media largely ignores the issue and anti-smoking programming has been canceled to not offend advertisers. The dangers of passive smoking are similarly

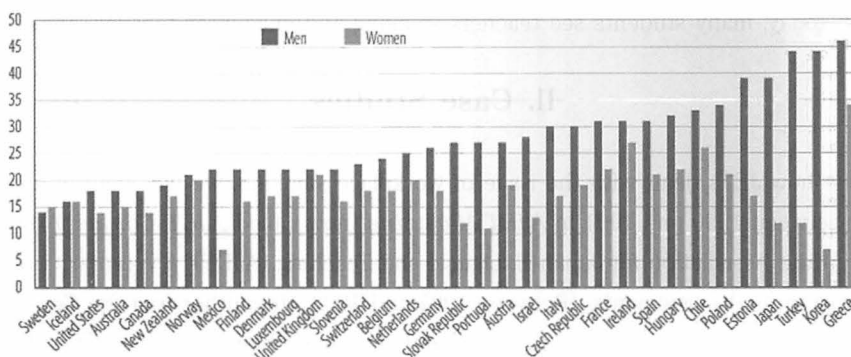


Image 2. Men/Women Smokers Country Comparison
(Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. OECD Health Data 2011)

unacknowledged.

The male smoking rate in the 1990s was over 70% and that of females was relatively low but climbing. Even in 2011, Japan ranked as one of the most “smoker-friendly” countries in the developed world.

Osaki, Ohida & Minowa (2000) found that in Mie Prefecture, 88% of male teachers smoked at school, mainly in the shared faculty room but sometimes even in classrooms.

The central government has addressed the issue, arguably to preempt more substantial change. The Health Promotion Law passed in 2002, to take effect by May of 2003, simply required people in charge of areas such as schools, gymnasiums, hospitals and restaurants to “make efforts” to prevent passive smoking in those places and immediate environs. School compliance has been relatively good; a MEXT survey reported in 2012 found that of 49,892 schools, nearly 98% had some passive smoke prevention policy. Of those, around four fifths had completely banned smoking on all school property. However, as much as one fifth of schools still allowed smoking to some degree: around 11% allowing smoking outside; another four percent having designated smoking areas inside. Remarkably, some two percent of schools had no policy whatsoever, as seen in Image 3.

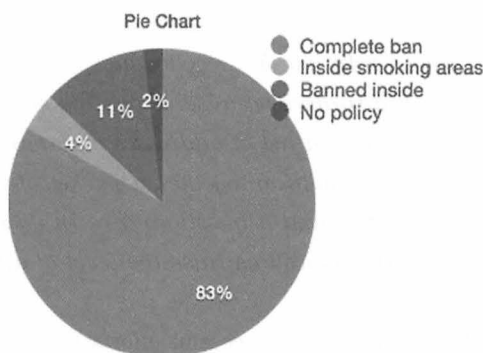


Image 3. Passive Smoking and School Prevention Guideline Compliance (MEXT)

Thus even today, many students see teachers smoking and encounter tobacco smoke.

II. Case Studies

To examine how JETs dealt with the issue of workplace smoking, we will analyze articles that appeared between 1990 and 1991 in *AJET Magazine* (now called *AJET Connect*) the national magazine of the Association for Japan Exchange and Teaching (AJET), a voluntary organization of JET Program(me) participants. (Between 1991 and 1992, the author was the Content Editor of *AJET Magazine*.) The excerpts that appear below have been condensed to their salient points.

The topic first appeared in *AJET Magazine* in a CIR's announcement of a newly formed committee on workplace smoking, an issue that had gained attention at a recent CIR conference.

1. "May 31st is International No-Smoking Day" (Sara Shepherd Hanke, CIR Nagano)

First of all, thank you to everyone who has sent information, articles, addresses, and words of support since this committee was formed at the CIR Mid-Year Conference, February 15th, 1990. It has come to light that working in smoke-filled offices is a widespread problem that affects many JET Program(me) participants as well as many of our Japanese colleagues. The purpose of this committee is to investigate this problem and find workable solutions for all involved.

There is much information available on the effects of passive smoking, health-related issues, creating non-smoking areas, and the economics and politics involved in the tobacco industry. The first step is to educate yourself on this issue. You will be much less likely to silently endure a smoke-filled office if you know exactly the effects it is having on your emotional and physical wellbeing. The next step is communication and educating those around you. It is a difficult subject to discuss simply because there are so many smokers in Japan and little support for nonsmokers. However, awareness of the situation is the key to finding a solution. Your colleagues may be unaware that you are in pain or experiencing health disorders because of passive smoking.

In light of this, we are compiling a list of addresses or organizations where you can write for information ... I am, also, putting together a packet of information that can be copied and sent out upon request ... and a questionnaire in Japanese and English that can be used to start up a program, as well as raise the level of awareness, in your office.

Next is the first of two ALTs' accounts of successful efforts to have smoking banned in the faculty room, a single room shared by all teachers and frequented by students. The first,

rather detailed account appeared in the same issue of *AJET Magazine* as the above CIR's contribution.

2. "Campaign for a Smoke-Free Teachers' Room" (Carolyn Adams, ALT Miyagi)

By 11 o'clock every morning the teachers' room at my school was a gas chamber. Only 25% of the teachers actually smoked but the room was poorly ventilated and the smoke hung in the air forever ... Sometime during February, when the pollution was at its worst, I decided to act.

Lasting change is rarely accomplished in the absence of general consensus. My wish for a smoke-free workplace was also tempered by the fact that I like the people I work with and was loath to alienate them over the issue unnecessarily. To my delight, I have discovered that if the matter is approached rationally, politely and coherently, it is possible to deal with the issue without losing the respect and friendship of your colleagues.

Ground Work and Propaganda: *I began by setting the scene. I started discussing smoking with all and sundry. I made my personal distastes for breathing cigarette smoke known. It became a standing joke at enkais (office parties) that my end of the table was the "no-smoking" end. I admit that I started to hassle my friends among the smoking staff to cut back or quit smoking altogether ...*

I started to get very positive feedback from the non-smoking teachers. Many of them felt quite strongly about the issue but did not feel that they were in a position to do anything about it. Even some of the smokers made encouraging comments.

Information and Politics: *Next I asked the Health and Environment Section of the prefectural government to send me pamphlets on smoking and health. They were very obliging and sent me about 20 copies of two different pamphlets that I copied and put on everyone's desks — smokers and nonsmokers.*

I counted heads to see exactly how many teachers smoked. I rang around my friends at other schools in the prefecture and found out which schools already had non-smoking staffrooms.

Finally I approached some of the more influential teachers (e.g., the department heads, grade leaders and anyone who had been at the school for more than 10 years), and asked them whether they would support a move to make the staffroom non-smoking. I chose the people I approached very carefully. They were all people with whom I was on good terms and from whom I'd had some positive feedback about the smoking issue. Only one of them was a smoker, but I was doubly grateful for his support.

If you can get your principal or vice principal on your side, this would be very useful. Unfortunately, in my own case they did not want to lend their overt support to

the movement. In some ways this is a highly political issue because many of the hard-core smokers are the older and more influential teachers and nobody likes to rub them the wrong way.

Petitions and Peer Pressure: *I drafted a letter to the staff, in Japanese, detailing the problems smoking was causing, the percentage of teachers who smoked, methods used in Australia to overcome the problems, and naming other schools in the prefecture that had smoke-free staffrooms. I asked for their support in creating a smoke-free work environment and I suggested that smoking be confined to the (AV) room next to the staffroom.*

Then I asked the influential teachers I had already sounded out to sign the petition. They all did and I'm certain that these signatures were a critical factor in encouraging other teachers to add their names. I circulated the petition the day after I distributed the smoking pamphlets while the issue was still fresh in everyone's mind.

I lost track of the clipboard with the petition for about three days. I feared sabotage or at the very least that it would sit on (the vice principal's) desk for a fortnight until everyone forgot about it. I made a few covert night raids on certain suspect desks but it was all unnecessary. It arrived back on my desk one afternoon signed by over three quarters of the teachers. Admittedly three of the smokers had signed in one space — they said they couldn't offer wholehearted support but they were prepared to sign as one vote ...

At the next staff meeting, when everyone was together in the conference room, I presented the result of the petition and proposed that we make the staffroom officially non-smoking. This speech did not go well ... Everyone stared very hard at the desk in front of them except the principal and vice principal who stared at me in a sternly disapproving manner. The day was saved by two of the other teachers whom I had asked to say a few words in support.

Results and Bribery: *It took a while for the non-smoking habit to catch on. People would often light up without thinking or while standing around the heaters in the mistaken belief that this was better than smoking at their desks. I played policeman for a while If I saw someone smoking I would stick a non-smoking sign on their back, their ashtray or their desk. I made these signs myself — the familiar red circles with a red slash across a cigarette in the center of a circle. It wasn't long before they started to yell "ghost busters" when they saw me coming. As a final resort I offered jelly snakes as an alternative to cigarettes.*

As far as I know, it's worked. Nobody smokes in the staffroom now, at least when I'm there ...

In the subsequent month's issue, a second ALT described his own anti-smoking campaign—one with confrontational tactics.

3. “We Now Have a (Separate) Smoking Room!” (A. Rory Embuido, ALT Nagano)

Why must it take a (noisy foreigner) to make change? Because we get listened to and seem to have a better chance at making changes than our Japanese colleagues.

Some teachers have told me they don't have the power to change things. They feel helpless and worry about repercussions that may occur after making complaints. Regarding the smoking situation, you and the teachers you work with many also be in a similar position. If so, I ask you to start talking about this issue ...

When I was asked to stay on another year, I asked for two additions to my contract. One was to have a non-smoking environment to work in.

I have a right not to renew (my one-year contract) just as the town has a right not to renew my contract ... They didn't want a new ALT, but I didn't want to renew under the current conditions and said I wouldn't renew unless my work environment was smoke-free. I was even selfish and went as far as to ask for a room of my own. But, it was the Board of Education that said it wouldn't be fair to the other non-smoking teachers. They were right.

Our job here as JETs is not limited to only teaching students our languages. Forgive me for repeating the 20-letter word INTERNATIONALIZATION ...

Three months and issues following the advent of the smoking topic in *AJET Magazine*, Adams's campaign was criticized by a fellow ALT.

4. “Campaign Methods Questioned” (Tom Baker, ALT Chiba)

Never before have I experienced horror and dismay while reading the AJET Magazine. But that is exactly what happened when I came upon “Campaign for a Smoke-Free Teachers' Room.”

Ms. Adams' desire to breathe clean air while at work is entirely reasonable. The methods by which she achieved that desire, though, strike me as somewhat unprofessional.

Her well-planned campaign began to go down hill. Having lost track of the petition's whereabouts for a few days, Ms. Adams began to expect “sabotage” and rifled through other teachers' belongings in what she called “a few covert night raids on certain suspect desks.” Where I come from, lawsuits have been filed for less.

Later, when the suggestion in her position was adopted, she appointed herself the non-smoking enforcer. Perhaps I'm just an old fogey, but the last time I stuck a sign on someone's back, I was an elementary school student.

Bringing about changes in a foreign country requires tact, diplomacy and patience. Militancy and overzealousness may succeed in the short run, but they are bound to

eventually leave a taste worse than smoke in a lot of peoples' mouths!!

Five months on, the outgoing editor of *AJET Magazine* suggested why Japanese society had not taken clearer steps towards smoking in general.

5. “Office Environment” (Maile Melkonian, Editorial)

Some say (the Japanese government) needs the tobacco tax revenues. Sure enough, if a guy starts smoking two packs a day when he's 20, and doesn't quit 'til he dies at the national average age of 75.5, he will have contributed 915,000 yen in tobacco tax. I used to retort that this argument is a red herring because hospital costs for a lung cancer patient run the government about 1,467,000 yen (per patient).

But I guess proponents of smoking within the government have the last laugh. Retirement to the end of the average lifespan is now about 18 years for men — while women are living 32 years longer than they did in the 1930s. Pensions for the average person then come to about 15,500,000 for men and 24,100,000 for women — much more expensive than hospital treatment for terminal cancer!

The greatest fear among bureaucrats in this country is the dreaded “aging society,” and its concomitant economic threat. And don't overlook the fact that the Japanese tobacco industry was “privatized” only six years ago, and the government still owns almost all of JT's (Japan Tobacco's) stock.

III. Analysis

To analyze the JETs' contributions to *AJET Magazine*—focusing on the crucible of Adams's and Embuido's campaigns—I will adapt Kennedy's “Rainbow/Onion Model.” It describes the different “spheres” of society that impact proposed change in education environments and determine success. As Kennedy (1988) explains:

Any innovation is part of several interacting systems and subsystems, and other areas (that) at first sight appear to have little to do with the innovation itself may have considerable influence on degree of acceptance of the innovation (p.331).

The Rainbow/Onion Model consists of five hierarchical, “higher-level” systems successively influencing those below them. They are: *cultural, political, administrative, educational, and institutional* (Kennedy, 1988 p.332). The cultural sphere is assumed primary, as it will influence both the political and administrative structures and behavior within it. These in turn produce a particular educational system, and so on. Kennedy believes that if those attempting to initiate change ignore these different levels, they are “bound to fail” (p.333).

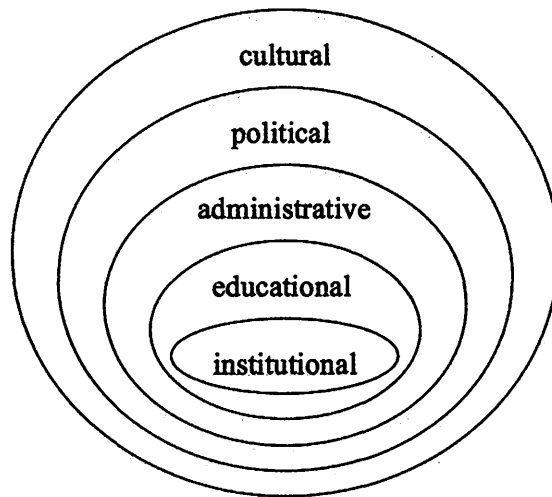


Image 4. Kennedy's Rainbow/Onion Model

Meanwhile, the efforts of foreign innovators should meet Kennedy's (1988) following conditions:

- working with existing cultural systems
- working within existing social and administrative structures
- having a good communication system
- involving all participants in the process to create "ownership"
- appreciating one's own position as an outsider
- gaining the support of the adopters

Additionally, there must be:

- dissatisfaction with the present conditions
- high feasibility, acceptability and relevance with a proposed change

Let us examine the JETs' efforts from the perspective of the five spheres of Kennedy's Onion/Rainbow Model, beginning with the most important.

1. Cultural

While Westerners typically admire "standing up for one's rights," the Japanese stress harmony (*wa*) and bearing difficulty without complaint (*gaman*). The Japanese often feel unable to express discontent or challenge the status quo, as there are repercussions for the individual as well as the group.

Hanke writes, "... There are so many smokers in Japan and little support for nonsmokers,"

but this was not necessarily true. At Adams' school, 75% of teachers had been nonsmokers who had silently endured the smoke that "hung in the air forever." There was, rather, a long traditions of "smokers' rights" in Japan coupled with the change-adverse primacy of group harmony. Despite their dissatisfaction, it may be hard for teachers to challenge the status quo without virtually unanimous support behind them.*

Both Adams and Embuido exploited their position as outsiders to lobby for change. As mentioned by Embuido, Westerners are expected and allowed to be more outspoken (*urusai*) and even selfish (*wagamama*)—although it is nevertheless hoped that they will conform. Furthermore, foreigners do not usually have long-term, Japan-based career considerations. Therein lies the answer to Embuido's question: "Why must it take an *urusai gaijin* (noisy foreigner) to make change?" Whether exploiting one's special status qualifies as Kennedy's (1988) "working with existing cultural systems" and "appreciating one's position as an outsider" remains a moot point.

A final, cultural aspect is that smoking is considered a Western thing, and therefore modern and fashionable. This is despite the relative scarcity of smokers in many Western countries. The presence of young, non-smoking foreigners has probably weakened this stereotype in Japan.

2. Political

Widespread dissatisfaction with the present situation is necessary but not adequate for change (Kennedy, 1988); there must be political support as well. Yet Article 1 of the Tobacco Business Law, enacted in 1984, has the objective to "ensure the sound development of the tobacco industry in Japan, thereby contributing to fiscal revenue and the sound development of the national economy" (Ito, 2015). One result is the ambivalence of the subsequent Health Promotion Law of 2002.

Melconian's editorial gives provocative clues to why the central government has eschewed anti-smoking policies. The Japanese government indeed receives both tax revenue and profit from the domestic tobacco monopoly. This conflict of interest between public health and government revenue would not go unchallenged in Western democracies. Furthermore, the birth rate, number of taxpayers and smokers are all shrinking. This is attested to by the continuing sales tax increases. From a fiscal perspective, the government has little incentive to encourage nonsmoking and longevity.

* In Japan, the relationship between superior and inferior is one of dependence, described by Doi (1971) as *amae*, the archetypal relationship of child and mother. According to this social model, management should understand employees' needs without their being stated. The employee, whose needs are met, then gives uncomplaining loyalty. In fact, *amae* leads to a passivity of outlook—a reluctance to disrupt the comfortable embrace of society (p.9). To express one's own will over that of the group is seen as selfish and childish. However, management's failing to care for employees' welfare is likewise a violation of this social contract.

Despite the national government's inertia, many local governments—with the notable exception of Tokyo (see Ito, 2015)—have moved to prohibit smoking in public spaces and streets, and the number of restaurants with either segregated smoking areas or smoking bans has increased.

3. Administrative

According to Kennedy (1998), change must be implemented through existing social and administrative structures. There appears to be support for smoke-free faculty rooms from offices such as the Health and Environment Sections of prefectural governments. Yet government efforts seem limited to non-confrontational brochures and posters.

A top-down edict without general consensus is almost unimplementable. However, if the central government were to more consistently push for smoke-free work environments, the non-smoking majority could more actively lend its support. As for Hanke's committee for smoke-free school environments, it never exercised power to lobby the administrative level; it simply disseminated information and advice to JETs.

4. Educational

JETs soon encounter the contradiction between teachers' high status and their inevitable shortcomings. Teachers are addressed as *sensei*, an honorific title shared with doctors, lawyers and other authority figures, which literally means "one who has lived before." Traditionally considered a calling, teaching involves instilling proper conduct. In particular, schools strictly forbid students from smoking. Teachers might even patrol shopping areas after school for violators. However, not only is the rationale of smoking prohibition not made clear, many faculty smoke openly around students. Partly due to such mixed messages, Osaki & Mimowa (1996) found that about a quarter of junior high, third-year boys (15-year-olds) had smoked in the last month, and half had tried smoking.

JETs might assume that a common-sense approach to smoking at school would be warmly embraced. However, as we saw, Adams and Embuido experienced degrees of dismay at the support they received. JETs need to fully appreciate society's schizophrenia regarding things such as education and smoking.

5. Institutional

Adams and Embuido each describe how they implemented a smoke-free faculty room within the existing social and administrative structures of their institution. Two crucial aspects of Japanese secondary schools are the power structure and *nemawashi*.

Decisions in secondary schools are often made at the *middle*; actual power in daily

matters rests largely with senior staff and the vice-principal, as head of teachers. The vice principal's desk is at the front of the faculty room, facing the staff, whose desks are in perpendicular rows. By contrast, the principal is isolated in an office behind the vice principal. The principal tends to be a patriarchal figurehead (with similarities to an emperor) to whom decisions are often presented as a *fait accompli* after achieving general consensus, typically through *nemawashi*.

Nemawashi literally means "taking care of the roots" (Van Wolferen, 1993, p.442)—privately consulting with those who will be affected by a change as one prepares a tree for transplantation. A plan is molded into a form acceptable to everyone, and by the time it reaches public consideration, participants already feel a degree of "ownership" (see Kennedy, 1988); conversely, if *nemawashi* encounters great resistance, a plan may be quietly abandoned.

Adams began well in "setting the scene" by bringing up the topic of smoking "with all and sundry." However, her communication faltered when she next left anti-smoking information on colleagues' desks before consulting with senior faculty. Later, she approached not only the vice principal but the principal, neither of whom could overtly support a matter for the rank and file to decide. Adam's subsequent petition created an opportunity for nonsmokers to safely express discontent as any backlash would focus on Adams, herself.

Notably, many *smokers* signed her petition as well—albeit in passive-aggressive fashion (i.e., using a single space). Perhaps the awkward situation was felt best defused by superficial support. The smokers could have confidence that nothing would actually change, since, for instance, Adams's presence was temporary. Indeed, it is not enough for people to act differently for a limited time, because such short-term change is a surface phenomenon (Kennedy, 1988, p.329).

Even given dissatisfaction, a proposed change must be feasible, acceptable and relevant. Adams's proposal that smoking move from the faculty room to the adjoining AV room met these conditions. By contrast, Embuido's unprecedented demand for a private room was inappropriate on many levels. Despite having the same ultimate outcome as Adams, Embuido's approach seems more likely to have failed completely and to generate resentment regardless.

Embuido's threats, where a smoke-free work environment became a condition to renew his contract, gave the administration an awkward choice between a difficult ALT and a perhaps un-implementable, top-down edict. Unsolicited attempts at change from inappropriate sources often result in punishment rather than reward (Kennedy, 1988). Furthermore, tightly organized institutions such as Japanese schools do not have a high degree of openness to outside influences, and therefore they are slow to accommodate change. Adams's approach, by contrast, was relatively gradual.

Nevertheless, Baker singles out Adams's tactics as "militancy and overzealousness." He particularly cites how Adams "rifled through other teacher's belongings" and her putting stickers on non-compliant coworkers backs. In fairness, faculty rooms in Japan are antithetical to privacy, with anything atop a desk in clear view. Moreover, Adams's censoring stickers

apparently were an acceptable form of communication as the “laggards” themselves laughed about them. Policing, per se, is defensible because of the Japanese dichotomy between a rule and its observance (i.e., appearance (*tatemae*) versus reality (*honne*)). On balance, there is a perception that only “militant” Japanese use petitions. A simple vote at an official campaign launch (after *nemawashi*) may have been better received.

IV. Conclusion

This study illustrates how JET Program(me) members struggled with a difficult problem compounded by great cultural differences. Despite their occasional lack of cultural savvy, they succeeded in implementing change in a cross-cultural context. Perhaps they were aided by the fresh winds of change—the global anti-smoking trend.

The longevity of the changes achieved by such JETs has become clearer with time. Today the situation is greatly improved, with room for further improvements. By 2004, Osaki et al. (2008) found that cigarette smoking by adolescents had decreased in both sexes and in all school grades. Among the likeliest causes was the advent of smoke-free school policies, whose strongest form should arguably be a national goal as a total ban on smoking can effectively reduce adolescent smoking. Unfortunately, there are no consistent, nationwide regulations in Japan.

The author experienced such inconsistency during his own attempts to institute smoke-free faculty rooms at the three schools he rotated among in the mid '90s. One school adopted a school-wide ban, one assigned smoking to the adjoining AV room (as in Adams's and Embuido's cases), and one did nothing at all. Potentially, the smoke-free policies were only implemented on days the author was present.

The timing of the 2002 Health Promotion Law may correlate with the growth of the JET Program(me), which reached its peak of 6,273 participants that year. From 1987, increasing numbers of non-smoking, non-Japanese ALTS and CIRs were introduced nationwide into the education system. It has been observed that the actual intention of “internationalization” was to apply outside pressure (*gaiatsu*) on local schools to shift language education from test preparation to communication. If so, an unintended byproduct may have been the quicker development of smoke-free faculty rooms. Thus the campaigns of JETs such as Adams and Embuido likely had lasting impact on later anti-smoking policies and their implementation.

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