

IBMI Japan: UMUC Embraces the Japanese Juggernaut in the Roaring Eighties

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I had been at Georgetown Law Center for five years and thought a change of pace from the rigorous and demanding research schedule would be rejuvenating. Thus, I arranged for a leave of absence and committed to spending a year with UMUC in Asia.

Others have addressed the many facets of teaching on the circuit quite well. My experience for the first few years was eye-opening and full of daily adventures that most reading this piece will have shared. I had spent a year in the European Division in 1974-75, so had some idea of what to expect. However, the cultural aspects of East Asia, and especially the barrier of completely unfamiliar languages rendered the Asian experience a significantly greater challenge.

After a few years on the circuit, my wife and I settled in at Yokota Air Base, where she became an academic advisor, and I, a term-appointed indentured servant, I mean faculty.

We had settled into a Japanese neighborhood as the only foreigner (Gaijin) within sight. Our neighbors were curious as to what their newest neighbors were up to, and what strange customs and behavior they would display. We did not disappoint.

Our family included had two dogs and a cat. One dog was a black, woolly 100 lb. beast which usually meant that on neighborhood walks, people meandered over to the other side of the street. His name was Group Captain Lionel Mandrake, named after the character of the same name played by Peter Sellers in Dr. Strangelove.

Worst of all, gasp, the animals lived inside. Dirty dog paws on a tatami mat? Gasp again and repeat as needed until the implausibility of it all completely registered.

Soon the curiosity got the best of a few of the neighbors. We were presented with gifts from a delegation of women. Later, perhaps unrelated, they asked if I would have the time to offer an English language class to them once a week. I did, and they seemed to enjoy it immensely. And as the saying goes in Japan, you take English classes not to be good at the language, but to engage in the socially appropriate thing of simply taking a class. My wife taught evening classes in Tachikawa and said, while she offered the same beginner course year after year, she had many of the same students, who faithfully took the same introductory class over and over again. They seemed to delight in the familiarity of the circumstances and saw nothing unusual about just being there.

But my life, and for that matter, the posture of UMUC, was about to change in a significant way. One afternoon while I was in the Maryland office at Yokota trying to wrangle a few sheets of typing paper or maybe a photocopy or two, a staff member in the office piped up, with a hand over the mouthpiece of a telephone, and asked, “Does anyone here know anything about case studies?” Odd.

“Who wants to know?” I asked.

“I don’t know, came the reply. “Some guy who asking if we have anyone who knows about case studies.”

Curious, I took the call. It turned out the person was an administrator at Sophia University in Tokyo. He was putting together a training program for Japanese business managers for the world’s largest advertising company, Dentsu, Inc. I listened to what he had to say and agreed to meet him in Tokyo to discuss. I was curious about Sophia University and thought, if nothing else, I would have established a contact there.

The meeting was productive. He liked what I had to say and asked for a proposal. In a week or so, I duly complied with an outline of a one-week course in International Management. He accepted it and about two months later I found myself in Kamakura, Japan at the Dentsu Training Center, located in a traditional Japanese setting. We had about 25 managers from Dentsu offices throughout Japan mostly as the “section level” (Kacho) or below. The program was arduous, as we arose at 6:30-7:00, ate breakfast together, then began at 8:00 am. We continued until 5:00 or 6:00 pm, had dinner then resumed evening sessions from 7:00-10:00 pm.



Workshop at Dentsu Training Center in Kamakura

It was at that point, I was to learn, that the program truly began. From 10:00 pm until, well, the last person standing, we sat around and drank, and drank and drank. The conversations were engaging, animated, and by the third night, quite boisterous. In the safe environs of the lounge, lubricated by copious quantities of beer, sake, and whiskey, we tackled topics not likely to be embraced in a more formal class session.

The Dentsu program became a regular event, scheduled two, and sometimes three times each year. Soon the people from Sophia faded away, leaving me with the responsibility to design, develop, and teach programs for Dentsu. Over time, other major Japanese companies got wind of the Dentsu program and began to invite me to talk with training managers and departments involved in international business. I was teaching on a term-appointed basis with the Asian Division, so had little difficulty in scheduling around my classes. But over time, it became clear that the opportunity I was seeing unfold went far beyond a few training sessions here and there.

For Japan, the 1980s were the golden years. With breathtaking speed, they became the manufacturing center of the world for high-quality vehicles, consumer electronics, and product innovation. Real estate values went through the roof. At the peak in the mid to late Eighties, one square meter of land in the Ginza area was valued at over \$1 million. The whole country seemed to be on fire with growth, expansion, and an insatiable desire to “internationalize.”

A proposal: UMUC Japan

I spoke with Asian Division Director Julian Jones and his spouse, Pat Wallace, about the opportunities and wondered aloud if UMUC would be interested in taking the plunge and expanding its international operations beyond its Department of Defense contracts. I believe at some point Joe Arden joined the discussion, as well.

Over time we agreed that it would be worth bringing Ben Massey, President of UMUC, into the picture. After a few informal discussions, I submitted a proposal for the creation of a UMUC International Business and Management Institute, which would be based in Tokyo. Julian was especially supportive of this effort because he was already thinking the military contracts might fade leaving UMUC with an experienced overseas faculty and staff. He often spoke of non-military international programs. IBMI would be the first.

At some point, Ben agreed and we set up our first office in a building directly across from Yasukuni Shrine—yes, that Yasukuni Shrine, which was the subject of ongoing controversy as the remains of people who were convicted of war crimes during World War II were interred there. It was a favorite hangout for loud, ultra-rightist groups to park their sound trucks, blasting non-stop commentary on the glories of the Japanese Empire, foreign contamination, and other popular themes that far-right organizations throughout the world cling to with nationalistic fervor. Sometimes, as I

crossed the street in front of the trucks, drivers would rev their engines and glare at me with an expression that did not exude warmth or brotherly love. I would usually ignore them but occasionally smiled, or flashed a peace sign, which would result in engines revving to an even higher RPM. I never felt in danger or intimidated. It was just that the trucks were so damn noisy and operated virtually non-stop within the legal limits of broadcasting hours. I wondered why they just couldn't give it a rest.

Two years later we moved our office to the Koito Building in Shinjuku, which was in every respect a better location for IBMI. I did not miss the sound trucks or the strutting of para-military types around the Shrine. Frankly, they looked like characters out of a Grade B World War II movie which lent, oddly enough, something of a comical air to the scene. Here, amongst peaceful work-a-day Japan you had, in full costume, a bunch of Japanese men noisily parading around on foot, then back into the trucks, then repeat the cycle. Where was Baron Sacha Cohen when we needed him?

An added plus to the new location was that the 10-story building had an unusual architectural feature: a large green pipe in the front of the building, running from the top to bottom in the middle of the façade. Why was that an advantage? Because in Japan, addresses mean very little. Landmarks are critical for providing directions or instructions to guests or taxi drivers. Thus, when I provided the address to a cab driver, I would get a quizzical look until I mentioned the office was next to a particular insurance building and had a large green pipe in the front. Mission accomplished.

As we began to expand operations, we had among Japan's leading corporations, including Dentsu, Sony, Matsushita Electric (Panasonic), Toyota, Nissan, Mitsubishi Trading Company, Itochu Trading Company, NEC, Nippon Steel, Nippon Express, Fujitsu, and Toshiba, as our larger clients. The Department of Defense also had us offer programs on US bases in mainland Japan, Okinawa, the Philippines, and very occasionally, in Korea, to help develop more effective relations between local employees and US military and civilian managers.

The Japanese companies were going full-throttle on the international scene. They had a huge appetite for not only training Japanese managers in best management and business development practices but also to help local staff the world over to work effectively with Japanese managers.

The training programs took place on every continent except Antarctica, with the Japanese desire for training growing in proportion with their expanding presence worldwide. The trading companies were ever-present, often with operations in 100-150 countries. It was through their worldwide network of transportation and distribution that Japanese manufacturers reached, and often saturated, virtually every market on earth.

IBMI became a harbinger and in some ways a model, for future UMUC non-military adventures. Most importantly, it changed the perspective of what UMUC overseas programs could be. No longer bound by Department of Defense contracts, UMUC set its sights on a more comprehensive international presence and soon launched programs in Malaysia, Korea, Russia, in the Siberian cities of Irkutsk and Vladivostok, and the former US Army base at Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany.

Designing and operating non-military-related programs was in many ways more complicated than what UMUC offered on DOD installations. While there was a tried-and-true logistical system that connected military installations, and UMUC faculty had the convenience of health care, the commissary and exchange systems, and an ID card that provided access to those services, operating in the local economy meant figuring out not only how to run programs, but how to train and support staff, as well. In my case, the situation was eased by the fact that my wife was an Asian Division employee and therefore had base privileges. Still, I had to apply for a work visa which initially was good for only 6 months. It was a grind and worse by a factor of 10 lining up at your local department of motor vehicles to get a driver's license.

If the Japanese language on the application was not correct, you had to fix it, go back to the end of the line, and start over. The line was long and moved slowly. Your number was called in Japanese. If you didn't respond quickly, you lost your place and had to start over with another number. If your passport expired within a year, you had to get a new passport, then start the process over again. If you didn't have a business address or one that they could understand, you had to find one and get back in line. And so it went.

I eventually learned to make sure I had a good lunch with at least one glass of wine and arm myself with something to read before throwing myself into the maw of the Japanese Office of Customs and Immigration. An unhappier lot I have rarely seen. Sometimes rude, they were mostly placid and expressionless as they pointed out, in Japanese, of course, what I failed to get right on my application. But eventually, in each case I prevailed. Thus, persistence, a good lunch under my belt, and something interesting to read always left me in a frame of mind so that I could stay as long as it took.

I should make clear at this point that I did not know what I was getting into in offering to launch IBMI to the greater glory of UMUC. It was by any measure invigorating, mind-expanding, hard, rewarding, and sometimes, just plain fun. But it was also damn challenging, frustrating, mind-bending, exhausting, and sometimes infuriating. And not infrequently, it seemed, all the foregoing emotions would find an opportunity for expression on the same day. In that respect, teaching for UMUC as a full-time faculty member was good training. I learned to improvise; always to have a Plan B in my back pocket; not to count on, how shall I put this, overwhelming support

for getting basic classroom supplies; and learning how to solve whatever problem I faced as best I could without having to seek help. Also, useful was the culture of UMUC, which was one of innovation and dealing effectively with non-traditional audiences. I should add that it was beneficial that the Internet was not yet a regular means of communication. Even the fax was a relatively new phenomenon, and not always reliable. Let me explain.

Given the reliance on costly international telephone calls and regular mail, I made sure not to suffer from excessive availability, which allowed time to “make decisions on the best information I had,” and not wait for instructions or input from College Park. It permitted an approach of acting first, then asking for forgiveness later rather than to seek permission beforehand. Ben Massey and Vida Bandis no doubt saw right through it. After all, they likely had used the same approach in Heidelberg and Yokota. I knew the things that drove Ben nuts, such as any printed material which bore the UMUC name. And woe be it unto him or her who would dare place the indictable letters “Ph.D.” on a business card. After explaining that in Japan, what you place on your business card was important in that it conveyed to others how you should be addressed and the amount of respect and deference you should be shown, reluctantly, he relented on the name card. I wondered how much capital I expended in that little saga.

Ben was a tireless editor, which often had me wishing that he would tire more easily. So you will understand when I say that it was all for the good that Ben did not see our first major brochure touting the many qualities of IBMI, proudly announcing, in English and Japanese, The University of Merryland. How could that happen? We got the original proof that had Maryland spelled correctly. But the printer thought there must have been a mistake, as in Japanese, Maryland is pronounced, “Mer-ri-ran-do” The Japanese syllabary, Katakana, spells it out phonetically. I kept a few of the brochures and years later, showed one to Ben. We had a good laugh about it.

In any event, I soon learned when to consult and when I could just exercise my judgment. It worked well for my tenure at IBMI. There were, however, a few times when we had, in the words of the prison warden in Cool Hand Luke, “a failure to communicate.”

One such instance involved an HQ staff accountant being dispatched to Japan to look at Asian Division operations and, while in there, IBMI. I had only one Japanese staff member at the time. Thus, a separation of functions, e.g., accounts payable and accounts receivable, was not possible. Also, our relationship with the bank was based on local Japanese business practices. Well, the auditor first determined that we were not in compliance, which wasn’t hard to figure out since I had highlighted that to Vida before his arrival. Furthermore, we were violating UMUC policy by the way that our bank account was set up. Third,---oh our sins were manifold--we were not getting

signed contracts for training programs. Everything was based on a verbal agreement, a bow, or a handshake (we were all so damn international, after all). We had working papers that showed the deliverables, dates of training, the fees for service, etc. But they were worksheets, not contracts. I learned that I would have to comply with all of the UMUC policies effective immediately.

Well, the first result of the auditor's "help" was that our Japanese secretary presented her resignation, citing shame that she could not be trusted with the bookkeeping responsibilities. Second, we never had a problem getting paid, and was never "stuffed" in all my years at IBMI. I offered to the auditor that for me to go back to clients and now require them to sign a contract would be more than insulting, it would stop IBMI dead in its tracks. I said that I could not do that, and in any event, I would need our secretary to help explain that, and she would have rather committed seppuku with a dull, rusted knife than to insult the people with whom we had cordial and productive relationships. Third, we were in Japan, not College Park.

We banked as the Japanese banked and were not in a position to have the national banking system bend to our will. Eventually, we worked it out, but not before I was reminded that the auditor, with whom I did not enjoy an especially cordial relationship, was there at the behest of the president and therefore to be accorded appropriate—appropriate something. Respect, deference, I was never quite sure. But we overcame that episode which I think helped UMUC in future international programs. The tried and true expression of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" —or at least as much as you can while understanding that you were still an American institution, clearly pertained in Japan. It was not always an easy equation to balance. I credit Ben and Vida, as well as Julian, Joe, and Paula, with helping to make that possible.

Some of you will recall that as the Japanese pushed the envelope on exports in the 1980s, they were less than enthusiastic about receiving imported goods and services. I remember when setting up our office in Tokyo I had purchased an acoustic coupler (remember the device?) made by Prometheus. Of course, since it was American made it was illegal. The Japanese, through its communications giant, Nippon Telephone and Telegraph, permitted only acoustic couplers made in Japan.

One day, there was a knock on the door and the secretary explained to me that we had technicians there to install a "proper" communication device—an Epson acoustic coupler. They said I must not have understood the government requirement, and they were there to help us "get set up properly." So, as we learned, the saying "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you," appeared to hold in Japan, as well. After a few minutes of chatter, a show of worried expressions, and the appropriate amount of "sucking air,"—always imperative when a weighty or difficult matter was at hand-- I had a new Epson device at about 4 times the cost of my identical Prometheus. They kindly removed the offending device, tested the Epson, and said I should not have

any problems now. Of course, I hadn't had any problems before the exchange but that was immaterial. IBMI was in compliance and the clueless, heedless foreigners had been rescued and made whole once again. They still probably couldn't use chopsticks or possibly eat Japanese food, but that's a story for another time.

It was but one example of an interesting transition time in Japan, where non-tariff barriers drove non-Japanese manufacturers and service providers bonkers. We learned that American beef couldn't be imported because Japanese intestines were different and couldn't easily digest foreign beef. We also learned that Japanese snow was different and that foreign ski equipment just could not cut it and would disappoint Japanese consumers. And of course, most foreign telecommunications devices were not "workable" because Japanese electricity was different, e.g., different impedance. Over time things began to thaw as American, European, and other Asian manufacturers pressured Japan through the World Trade Organization and various bilateral agreements to open Japan's burgeoning consumer market to foreign goods. But it was a long and arduous process. When I read about the issues of non-tariff barriers in China today, it seems, as Yogi Berra put it, like *déjà vu* all over again.

Among the most fundamental challenges that we had in setting up IBMI is that there was no precedent for what we were doing in Japan. We were a not-for-profit US educational institution that had set up shop in Tokyo. We hired Tom Blakemore, a well-known American attorney who had established a law practice in Japan soon after World War II. He worked with the Ministries of Education, Foreign Affairs, as well as Labor, to find out how we would be treated or classified by the Japanese government. Finally, after several months of wrangling, it came down to this. "If you (UMUC) don't ask the government (any of the many ministries who had some role or claim in our presence) for permission or a ruling on how you should be classified, they won't say you can't do it. In other words, if you don't ask for permission to operate as a not-for-profit educational institution, they won't deny it. "I suppose you could say it was an early example of don't ask, don't tell. We simply agreed to honor Japanese labor law and to adhere to "the laws of the land." To my knowledge that never changed during the entire tenure of IBMI in Japan. Thus, we never had an officially registered corporate entity, despite operating freely—and legally-- in one of the world's most dynamic economies.

The Training

Most of the early training by IBMI took place at locations throughout Japan, usually at corporate training facilities. The focus was primarily on how Japanese managers could be more effective in working with their American counterparts, and with English as the working language. There were cultural divides aplenty and it was not difficult to isolate potential problem areas and develop approaches to address them, e.g., how to say "no" or "we're not interested" without being insulting. As many people reading this likely know, the Japanese have traditionally avoided directness and instead

of saying “no” would offer something softer such as “it might be difficult.” To American ears, that meant, “difficult maybe, but I know how to overcome objections.”

Then there was the issue of contracts. In the US, a contract is a contract, and once signed is irrevocable unless both parties agree to changes. In Japan, a contract is the starting point. It is an agreement that works only as long as circumstances remain about the same. But if circumstances change, the contract would need to be revisited. I need not offer any more detail on how that could be a showstopper for most Americans.

Even arriving at a contract could be harrowing. Americans generally prefer to work through a contract point by point. Once an issue is agreed upon, it is on to the next one until all are items are resolved. Then you have a contract. The Japanese saw things differently. The contract was not a contract until all points were agreed upon and the fact that I agreed on point #2, means nothing if, say, I make concessions on #5. In that case, #2 is back in play. To say that each side was operating under a different set of assumptions understates the magnitude of the divide. It created significant issues of trust which sometimes could not be overcome.

The misunderstandings also plagued EU nations as well. We ran several programs for a joint EU-MITI (Ministry of International Trade and Industry) consortium in which the differences within the EU group and with their Japanese counterparts, made the training more challenging—but very interesting.



Managers Engaged in a Workshop for the European Union-MITI Consortium

Ultimately “trust” became a centerpiece of our training. The goal was to help the Japanese establish some level of trust with whomever they were doing business with and to agree on what the ground rules were. The feedback we received over time suggested those training sessions helped defuse difficult situations and even better, avoiding misunderstandings by working out “the rules of the game” before getting down to actual negotiations.

Over time, however, the emphasis of some companies began to change. Japanese managers were having difficulty working effectively with local managers throughout the world. Thus, we began a new chapter in IBMI, holding sessions with Japanese managers and their local staff in every region of the world. These programs were a much greater challenge than working only with Japanese managers. There were different constituencies: the Japanese corporation’s head office, usually in Tokyo; the Japanese managers assigned to the overseas office; and the local staff. I spent a good deal of time trying to assess the expectations of each constituency. And in some instances, they were either inconsistent or directly at odds with each other. And while everyone involved seemed to understand this, it was rarely, if ever, addressed during office meetings.



Training Program for Itochu Corporation

Perhaps no issue was more intractable than that of how the Japanese defined and measured loyalty to the company and how they promoted local staff. Loyalty was usually defined by the number of years you spend at the company, and your willingness to work “Japanese hours.” That is, it was common in Japan to remain at work well into the evening, then around 9:00 pm or so, head off to drink with office mates at a local bar. Climbing the ladder of managerial success in Japanese companies virtually mandates playing by those rules. Only then was promotion possible.

The issue for Japanese corporations was, in many cultures, the expectations for a work-life balance were quite different, with fathers, for example, expected to be home for dinner, or to spend weekends with the family, or to take an afternoon off to see a child’s performance or baseball game. Those local expectations flew directly in the face of Japanese expectations, as such absences were unheard of in Japan. So, local employees who adhered to their cultural expectations were invariably defined as not being sufficiently loyal to the company. In turn, it would be impossible to reward such disloyalty through promotion, and therefore the employee languished for years with either no promotion or one of minimal importance. A typical reaction was, predictably, that the employee who was not promoted then left the company for a better opportunity. That, in turn, simply validated the view of the Japanese managers. “You see, he was not loyal. He left the company. It was good that we did not promote him.” That cycle repeated itself more times than I would prefer to recall.

We would hold sessions with each group individually, then as a group, to try to work through the differences in perspective. Occasionally, we would have a very progressive Japanese manager sent from Tokyo who understood the problem and was flexible or confident enough to redefine loyalty or performance in terms more consistent with the local cultural expectations. High-performing employees were promoted and remained at the company for their careers. But that was the exception. By the time I left in mid-1991, a crushing recession, and pulling back from progressive management policies to more conservative ones under the more difficult financial conditions became the norm.



The All-important Karaoke Session After a Fujitsu Training Program

Working with Japanese companies was often stressful as it required developing training programs that would render the participants more effective in an international or intercultural workforce but doing it the Japanese way. For example, most countries in the western world are less hierarchal than Japan. And while there are hierarchies in the western workplace, they tend not to be as rigid, and allow for open discussions and not infrequently vigorous, and even passionate presentations of ideas or programs. In Japan, the dictum of “the nail that sticks up gets hammered” prevailed. Thus, while trying to divine from, say, a group of senior managers in a company what the major issues were that should be addressed, or what the most vexing problems were, people rarely spoke up—at least until the senior person would comment.

I remember few if any, situations where anyone would contradict or even offer an alternative view about a given matter, once the top dog had spoken. Consequently, I had to intuit what was really on the mind of the managers—and this was just to determine what would be addressed in a training program. I learned that having a few, well, more than a few, drinks in the evening was often the best route to find out what people truly thought. Sometimes I would get it right or close to right in my written

proposals in response to those sessions. And sometimes I missed the mark, and occasionally, was clueless as to what was on the minds of people.

For example, in trying to prepare a program for a Japanese firm with offices in Australia, I felt reasonably certain that the issue would be the Australians' well-known contempt for authority and hierarchy. I had been told that many of the local staff were "disrespectful," and not loyal to the company. I came to learn that two cultures were operating in the Australian offices: the local and the Japanese. And rarely did they seem to meet. I looked forward to this program as I knew I could count on the Australians to speak their mind. And by working through some case studies with blended groups of Japanese and Australians, we could not only address the different views but make some progress in coming to a meeting of the minds on how the office would operate in the future with our new-found insights.

I missed that one badly. What the Japanese were interested in was having their staff be better at business development. They had not an iota of interest in addressing what I thought was the big fat elephant in the room: classic culture clash. Of course, that is precisely what the Australians wanted to talk about. But they had no input into the program. We delivered a multi-day program on business development, about which the Australians felt they were reasonably competent, and avoided entirely local Japanese management practices, which the Aussies felt was essential to address.

The result was that the Japanese were pleased with the program, but the Australians felt, while the program was well-done, the core problem had not been addressed, and therefore, nothing would change. The implied consequence was that if things did not change, there wasn't much point in staying with the company.

I remember an instance in Sydney where a general manager in the office said he had instructed a local staffer to change the way he was servicing his client. The staff member told him to "bugger off." The Japanese manager, even when relating the incident to me, was incredulous that someone his junior had the temerity to tell him, in essence, to stuff it.

One of the perils of working on training sessions across cultures is that sometimes the most obvious things fall through the cracks.

This one is a gem. We were asked to conduct a series of training programs on Okinawa for the Department of Defense. Relations between the Okinawan workers and American supervisors, both civilian and military, were complicated by language and cultural barriers. One of the problems that American managers said that drove them crazy was that the DOD has specific regulations on jobs as to what kind of equipment was to be used. The Okinawans preferred their hand tools, often handed down from one generation to the next. They were comfortable using them and felt it was the best way to get the job done quickly and safely. The DOD opted, where possible, for power

tools, and required their use where appropriate. If an inspection were to occur, the Okinawans would trot out the power tools and put them on full display. After the inspection, the workers rolled up the cords, placed the tools in a corner, and resumed with their hand tools. I don't think we ever resolved that one but at least managed to get it on the table for discussion.

For one upcoming session, we had an ambitious plan to tackle some of the major cultural barriers that were getting in the way of effective working relationships. We had designed some case studies; had a plan for assigning people to workgroups; and would see how far we could get with some recommendations for "accommodation" by everyone. It was not our first seminar in Okinawa, and we felt comfortable with the Personnel Office as they knew our style and approach.

The big day came and we were loaded for bear, or so we thought. We started with introductions. Great start. We then proceeded in a very deliberate way to lay out the course of the program for the next few days. We thought it sounded pretty damn good. No reaction. Then we talked about the benefits that would accrue to everyone. Still no reaction. Finally, we asked what the participants hoped to get from the training session. Silence. Silence, that is, until a man toward the back of the room slowly rose from his seat and said haltingly. "No speak English!" Holy Crapola. Pat Wallace was the co-instructor for the program. Our hearts sank. We tried to look passive in the face of information that might well have meant the cancellation of the program. If ever there were a time to punt, this was it.

We had been painstaking in preparation and assumed that since our previous sessions were in English this one would be, too. We learned that there had been an "internal communications problem" in the personnel office with no one passing on the word to the workers or their supervisors that the session would be in English. In retrospect, I should have known something was fishy when we had a room full of Okinawan workers. From my experience in teaching in Okinawa previously, I didn't remember the widespread use of English among the Okinawans on base unless they were working directly with Americans, perhaps in the base exchange or commissary.

After a quick consultation with the personnel office, we were able to locate a translator, adjust the curriculum for the sessions, and use the snafu to focus on—what else? The importance of effective communications and how language and cultural barriers get in the way of precisely that. Bullet dodged, UMUC style.

One of the things that was striking to me in Okinawa, was not only the strong and ever-present role of tradition and history but how it shaped almost every aspect of Okinawan identity. For centuries Okinawa sat in that unenviable geographical location that places it between East Asia's two major powers: China and Japan. Thus did Okinawans suffer the consequences of, as they were fond of saying, living between the

hammer and the anvil. And as many would quickly add, in that situation you learn to be very flexible. It reminded me of how certain counties in Europe, the Netherlands, and Belgium, for example, suffered similarly, positioned as they were between the often-warring great powers of Europe.

In the case of Okinawa, the insistence on using traditional hand-tools when from an efficiency standpoint power tools would be superior makes sense—and so did their willingness to, at the appropriate time, bring out the power tools during an inspection of a job. In the first instance, it was a way of ensuring that they were a part of a long and sacred tradition of continuing with a craft developed over hundreds of years—one that they were determined to carry on. But their nod toward authority also showed the necessary flexibility in using the power tools when eyes were on them so that the base could, in the broadest terms, state they were complying with DOD policies, and therefore, it would not reflect poorly on the American managers. I suppose one could say it was their way of rendering to Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God, what is God's.

The importance of tradition also had a direct impact on how the Okinawan workers viewed their relations with American supervisors. Okinawa is a traditionally hierarchal society. Therefore, respect for authority is important. But respect for tradition is very important as well. The difficulties occurred when the two values clashed, as when an American supervisor would request or order that something be done, or some action is taken that simply did not square with other Okinawan values. For example, if an American ordered an Okinawan supervisor of a work crew to discipline or call out one of his men (they were all men—except for the ubiquitous presence of the women who, swathed in layers of clothes with the broad-brimmed straw hat, handled the weed-whackers that keep the base grounds immaculate). The supervisor would go to great lengths to avoid doing it.

To be clear, if the Okinawan supervisor was unhappy with the performance or action of one of his workers, he was not at all hesitant to deal with it in his way. Which brings up another interesting point about how understanding Okinawan culture—actually, the culture throughout the Ryukyu Islands—was important in understanding the mindset of the people.

In the Ryukyus, I was told many times that the single most devastating fate to befall anyone was to be banished from the island where he or she was and raised. The prevailing belief was that there would be absolutely no reason to leave one's home unless ordered to do so. Of course, the formal legal system cannot impose that sanction. But, especially in some of the outlying islands, the informal system of social control has the power to force—or perhaps pressure would be a better term-- someone to leave. Thus, if someone from another island shows up on the one where you live, the assumption is that he or she was banished which makes it almost impossible for that person to survive. Hence, people will go to extraordinary lengths to accommodate

others and not be excluded from group and community life. It is an incredibly powerful mechanism of social control.

On mainland Japan, while the issue of banishment in a literal sense is not a threat, I was told countless times of people who were “internally banished” inside their company.” They were not usually fired, but given a seat by the window, with nothing to do, and were ignored by everyone—including the “office ladies” who routinely came around and served tea during the day. The tea server would walk past, pretending not to see the person by the window. If he called out, “sumi masen” or excuse me, she would, of course, apologize and say she didn’t see him sitting over there. From a western perspective, it seems unnecessary, counterproductive, and mean. From the Japanese perspective, it is a way to punish transgressors and a very effective reminder to others of the cost of not going along with accepted group norms.

The above examples point to the many reasons that IBMI was able to offer programs useful not only to the Japanese companies who hired us, but to the many employees of these companies all over the world who often knew very little about Japanese life and culture and often struggled with life in the company culture, and with achieving a work-life balance that would satisfy the worker and his or her families, as well as meet the expectations of the company.

Benefits to UMUC

I believe that UMUC derived many benefits from the IBMI experience. We demonstrated that the UMUC culture of entrepreneurship and innovation could be more broadly applied to international settings, as well as to military installations overseas. The ability to adapt programs to a particular set of circumstances and audiences was long a UMUC strength.

At this point, I want to recognize the contributions of Pat Wallace to IBMI. It is no exaggeration to say that without her, the IBMI experiment would have been greatly diminished. Her mastery of computer models for business development, management schemes, and overall excellence in the development of material and delivery of world-class sessions to very demanding Japanese managers cannot be overstated. Added to that, her ability to “own” the all-important, after-class, late-evening karaoke sessions more than sealed the deal. I’m quite sure that for an entire generation of Japanese managers for the leading corporations in Japan, Pat introduced to them what a professional woman could do. I suspect she did as much for the Japanese feminist movement in the 1980s as any American woman living in Japan in that era.

IBMI gave UMUC a great deal of exposure in an important region of the world. In the 1980s Japanese manufacturing and the export-driven economy hit its zenith. That UMUC was trusted to work with and train the most important and successful Japanese companies was a testament to a core strength of UMUC: that of providing appropriate

education and training to adult learners. That we were able to do so for adult learners in different cultures speaks to the flexibility, and most importantly, the effectiveness of the UMUC model.

The IBMI experience also demonstrated to some of the other campuses in the UM system, that UMUC had expertise that was not necessarily found in other institutions. I remember speaking on several occasions with faculty in the UMCP School of Business when they learned of IBMI's activities in Japan and worldwide. They seemed astonished that the "evening school" --which was not intended as a compliment-- was able to make inroads that eluded them. I was once asked by someone on the faculty there why I was with UMUC and not over at College Park. I viewed it as a clumsy attempt at a putdown. "It's easy," I replied. "At the business school, you teach innovation and entrepreneurship. At UMUC we practice it."

I was asked to sit on UMCP business school advisory boards and to occasionally lecture there. Some of the articles that Pat Wallace and I co-authored in the *Asian Wall St. Journal* and the op-eds I wrote for *The Washington Post* were used in classes at UMCP. I would like to think that there developed a greater respect for UMUC among our cousins across the street in College Park.

Perhaps the icing on the cake for UMUC's newfound respect at UMCP was at the official ceremony in 1991, when Ben Massey accepted a check for \$1 million from Itochu Corporation to establish the UMUC Institute for Global Management. UMCP Business school representatives were invited, and it was not difficult to see just a tinge of envy. One of the famous Japanese Trading Companies, Itochu was at the time the largest company in the world in revenue.



Jim Cramer and Pat Wallace at Itochu Corporation HQ in Tokyo

Over and above organizational accomplishments, IBMI afforded Ben Massey, as president of UMUC, the opportunity to meet with high profile corporate and governmental organizations in Japan. Each time he would visit, we would arrange audiences with former prime ministers or current ministry heads, and his counterparts in the private sector. It was also functional for IBMI in that it allowed me to arrange for

my counterparts in the companies to get face-time with their president—something that was highly valued, and placed a spotlight on the good work of the training and business development departments. Ben would always complement the work of the company's training and education staff and press the hot buttons of "internationalization" and "global managers." That in turn helped ensure that we would continue to work closely with the company into the future.

Finally, I believe IBMI, was, as Julian Jones liked to put it, proof of concept that UMUC could do well in international programs outside the traditional DOD contracts. My view was that our core competency was that of effectively reaching adult learners and meeting them where they were—in location, background, experience, and perspective. I think Julian, Joe Arden, Paula Harbecke, Pat Wallace, and Mary Baron shared that view and were instrumental in enlarging the culture of UMUC to embrace the international opportunities that would follow IBMI.

Personal Postscript

In looking back over my career, the UMUC experiences in Europe and Asia pried open a world that I barely imagined in my youth. A sociologist by training, the experience of living and working abroad provided an unparalleled laboratory to study and better understand human behavior, especially in unfamiliar circumstances. The principles of personal and group identity, decision-making, fostering change, leadership, tribalism, and adaptation to the currents of change were on full display.

Returning to UMUC in Adelphi in 1991, there was a great deal of interest in all things Japanese. The IBMI experience, and the knowledge I had gained, opened doors for UMUC and me that otherwise would have remained shut. It led to a senior position in the School of Business at the University at Albany, SUNY, and later at UC Berkeley. Those positions, in turn, landed opportunities to serve as President of two different global organizations. None of it would have been possible without my experience at UMUC. I have commented from time to time that I'm not sure I could have ever been successful as an administrator at UMUC and thus did not likely have a promising career there. But whatever successes I enjoyed elsewhere could be directly traced to my years at UMUC.

Those of you who knew Ben Massey have a pretty good idea of how he managed and operated as the head of UMUC. And there were times when I think he wondered why in the hell he continued to give me rope and space to operate. Maybe to hang myself. But in my years after leaving UMUC, we developed a less complicated, more relaxed, and cordial relationship. We would joke about some of the earlier "issues" that arose from time to time throughout my tenure at UMUC. I would like to think he took some measure of pride in that one of his former "pupils" had enjoyed a few successes and that perhaps his judgment in keeping me around was not entirely misplaced. I owe

much to Ben and UMUC, as well as to Julian, Joe, Paula, and Pat. Looking back, it was an exhilarating and eventful ride.