

Kita-josanjima Intersection Improvement Process

The first experiment of "importing" consensus building processes to Japan.

Backgrounds



The Kita-josanjima Intersection is a major intersection of National Route 11 and other trunk roads in Tokushima, Japan. Because of overwhelming traffic and other structural reasons, it is inundated with a number of traffic accidents. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT) is required to improve the intersection in 2006 for better safety. There was a potential of dispute over the reconfiguration of the Intersection between government agencies and local residents (neighboring businesses, parents, physically challenged people).

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The Experiment

The 5-step consensus building process was applied to formulating a short-term improvement plan for the Intersection. It was the first full-fledged experiment of importing consensus building to Japan from the U.S. The MLIT convened the process. Prof. Hideo Yamanaka (University of Tokushima) was instrumental in organizing the effort. Commons (a local NGO) assumed the role

of nonpartisan neutral. Masa Matsuura had provided them a 3-day training session on consensus building processes in the summer of 2004.



The "transfer" model: Process Adaptation (PA) and Organizational Change (OC)

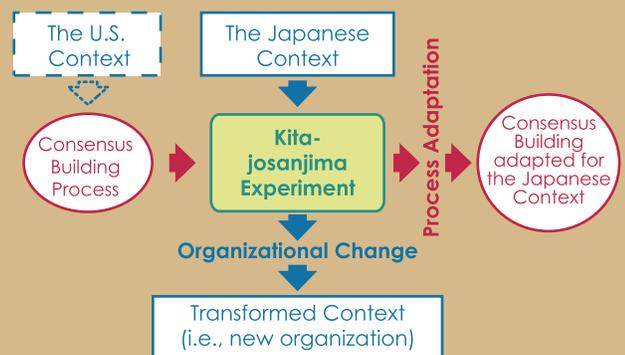
Any effort of transferring consensus building (or any other model for deliberative policy making) from the U.S. to other countries should involve

- (1) Process Adaptation and
- (2) Organizational Change

Consensus building has been developed in the last 30 years under the influence of the U.S. context. Because of contextual differences between two countries, consensus building must be modified in the target location so that it is acceptable and functional in a foreign context. At the same time, the context (i.e., the local

environment) has to change in order to maintain the core concepts of consensus building in the U.S. In other words, consensus building should not be adapted to the extent that an adapted version lacks the key ingredients.

For example, if a "consensus building" effort in a foreign country systematically excludes certain underprivileged stakeholders because of the "local context," should we endorse such an undemocratic effort as consensus building?



The Process

Conflict assessment was conducted between January and March 2005. The neutral team interviewed 54 individuals. The final report identified a few key issues related to the Intersection and recommended that the MLIT convene a stakeholder dialogue. A stakeholder committee, involving 21 stakeholder representatives, was convened in July 2005.

2005.01	Stakeholder interviews
2005.03	Report published
2005.07	First meeting
2005.09	Second meeting
2005.10	Third meeting
2005.11	Fourth meeting
	Interagency agreement
2006.02	Fifth meeting
	Final agreement



The Outcome

The stakeholder group reached a consensus on 8 specific recommendations to the MLIT. These are likely to be implemented by the MLIT in 2006. Because the dialogue focused on short-term improvements, the recommendation could not include measures for improving disability access; however, physically challenged people agreed with the recommendation provided that the MLIT would continue the dialogue for improving accessibility in the area. Generally speaking everyone was satisfied with the process and the outcome.



PA-OC in Kita-josanjima

Adaptations to consensus building were necessary for stakeholders and neutrals to move forward with the process.

Three categories of adaptation were identified in the experiment: Choosing right persons based on the Japanese context, Adapting processes to accommodate the needs of government agencies, and Adapting processes to maximize their effectiveness. For instance, the neutral team incorporated "workshop" meeting techniques--with Post-it notes and small group discussions--into the stakeholder dialogue.

Organizational change was indispensable in using the "consensus building" process.

At the same time, the convening agency and stakeholders had to transform conventional norms and rules. Three instances of organizational change were observed in the experiment: Traditional the "ko-atsu" (-retainer) relationship between government agencies and consultants was broken; representatives spoke for their interests in public meetings; and NGO was able to function as a process manager rather than as an advocate for particular interests.



Post-it notes were used to capture and summarize the inputs from all stakeholder representatives.

Lessons Learned

If you are "exporting" consensus building...

- ✓ Be open to adapting consensus building to the unique context of each country/region.
- ✓ Adaptation is "learning by doing"--design a flexible work plan and adjust it as incompatibilities arise.
- ✓ Find a right partner who is familiar with the local context (including implicit norms and rituals).
- ✓ Too much adaptation is inappropriate: local organizations have to assume a new set of norms and rules in order to use consensus building.
- ✓ Stimulate local government agencies for a change if necessary.

For more information about the project, please refer to my Ph.D. dissertation, which will be available on-line soon at my web site (<http://www.mmatsuura.com/>).

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