

## **Diversity of Thought and Service Development Emerging from an International Internship Program within “en Japan inc.”**

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### I. Introduction

One of the largest staffing and recruiting agencies in Japan, en Japaninc. merged with Wall Street Associates, one of the largest international talent recruiting agencies in Asia in March 2012. Three years after the merger, en Japan was still struggling to integrate the newly purchased business, both in terms of operations as well as in terms of culture. Following the 2012 M&A, Wall Street Associates changed its company name to en World Japan, inspired by the mother company en Japan. In Japanese, “en” refers to serendipity, *karma*, the combination of relations and circumstances which bring people together beyond understanding. Despite taking a new name, in January 2015 en World had not changed much else. Most operations were still carried out in English within a modern office located in the Kyobashi area, 10 km away from Nishi-Shinjuku, where the parent company carried business as usual in Japanese. It goes without saying that the physical distance between the two buildings contributed to the psychological gap between the two organizations, but it was not only that.

It was also the type of business conducted in the two offices that contributed to the mentality gap. Although both businesses were servicing seekers of new career opportunities, the type of candidates served was completely different. en Japan was mainly looking after young Japanese candidates, people who had less than five years of experience with their employer. Most of en Japan’s candidates would end up changing working from one Japanese company to another. en World International, on the contrary, was mainly providing career services to English speaking mid-career international employees with a minimum of eight to ten years, professionals who would end up moving from one international company to another, sometimes even experiencing cross-border relocation.

In 2015, the language spoken within the two offices created an even deeper mentality gap. In en-Japan, Japanese was the main language of operations, while English was predominantly spoken within en World. Although both languages were considered “official” for major communications, there were only six bilingual employees, managers and directors who had functional command of both languages. There were 2,386 employees working for en Japan within the Nishi-Shinjuku office, as well as other offices around the country. Out of these, only six could speak and write business English in order to communicate with their colleagues working in the newly acquired organization. Within en World International, although 668 out of the 676 of the total employees were either bilingual Japanese nationals or international professionals completely fluent in Japanese, all official communication with the parent company was going through a group of three integration experts who would meet

periodically to exchange statistics and other corporate information.

In an effort to bridge organizational culture and to help speed up the integration of the international associates working in “en World“, en Japan decided in March 2015 to welcome a small group of eight intern students coming from overseas to experience life and work in Japan and to help communications between the two organizations. Four out of the eight new comers were to be located in monolingual en Japan office, while the other four were expected to join the international working environment of the en World office. All of the interns were coming from prominent academic institutions across Asia, majoring in Humanities, Liberal Arts and Social Studies.

This company is one of the youngest and most dynamic career services provider in Japan. Emerging as a spin-off coming out of Recruit, one the oldest and largest career services providers in Japan in July 1995, by January 2015 en Japan Inc. grew to be the third largest player within the industry, after only Recruit and Intelligence, the other two larger competitors, with a capital of 112 million JPY. A single-minded and noveltyaverseone-man owned company, en Japan prospered bychanging operations from a traditional print-based recruiting model to an on-line business service and, back by the booming IT developments of the late 1990s, it grew at dazzling speed, becoming the third largest player in the country within less than twenty years after its inception. En Japan entered JASDAQ in 2014.

## II Research Objective, Method and Objects

### Objective

The main objective of this research is toillustrate the benefits for corporates in hosting students majoring in Humanities and Social Sciences through internship programs in Japan. Humanities and Social Sciences internship programs have not made the object of corporate attention, as it has been hard to determine what clear benefits there were for the hosting organizations.

### Research Objects

En Japan Inc., aJapan-based career services provider with 2,386 employees in Japan, with regional headquarters (HQ) in Tokyo and main operational offices in Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka and sales offices all majorurban areas throughout the country. (HQ offices employ 1,686 people)

### Research Method

We conducted research based on case studies. Additionally, one of the authors of this research engaged in first-hand participant observation(Yin2003) of this management process. Therefore, we could observe the stages of corporate confusion, the decision making process and the whole procedures of organizational and cultural integration with the eyes of a full-time team member from the start of the project until the end.

### III The Integration Process

Upon their arrival in Japan, the students were separated into two even groups of four, one group joining the en Japan office in Nishi-Shinjuku, while the other group joined the en World in the Kyobashi office. Both teams were given the mission of helping the two organizations create a common business culture, in order to better integrate service development and communications.

The two teams started working right away. They decided to run a weekly series of “jam sessions” with their respective HR, Marketing and Sales teams and to reach out to each other on a weekly basis to share findings and discuss further steps of collaboration and integration. Both teams were expected to report to Global HR, the President and the Founder of the company once a month to share findings, to discuss possible solutions and propose next steps.

In order to better understand the current situation and to be able to monitor progress, the interns developed and deployed an employee engagement survey, which was shared on-line to the whole existing employee population, both in English and in Japanese. The ratio of respondents was a surprising 82%, 64% of which clearly indicated that they had no understanding of the corporate philosophy, that they were not happy with their working environment and that they would not recommend a friend or a relative to work for the company.

Two weeks into the program, after having run 4 jam sessions per team and location, the interns reunited to discuss the first series of findings. The results ranged from the necessity to align the two organizations in terms of business objectives, corporate Mission, Vision and Values, to a common understanding of customer needs.

### IV. Discussions and Actions

The first common discussion with Global HR, the President and the Founder of the Company revealed compelling business realities, such as the need to better understand customer and candidate needs, but also to go beyond language barriers and develop a common set of business values to share within both organizations and within the region, with associates working in other overseas offices. The interns proposed a series of actions, such as setting up a “Customer Complaint Purchasing Center”, a new function which would pay 1,000 JPY for each complaint registered from existing customers. This function allowed for an instantaneous connection to the “Customer’s Voice”, leading to a total of 3,806 complaints, comments and requests for service improvement coming directly from the customers in the span for 6 weeks.

Alternatively, the Founder of the business took it upon himself to develop and plan the communication of the new corporate philosophy, detailing on the concept of “en” (serendipity), the historical perspective of that philosophy and the vision for future common growth within the region. The interns helped with the development of the English, Mandarin Chinese, Korean, Thai and Vietnamese versions of the corporate philosophy and they created a series of communications

materials, such message posters, managers' tool kits, a cartoon based "Philosophy Book" and corporate image videos, which were shared with associates within the region. The videos featured real employees talking about the corporate philosophy, concrete business situations, emotional episodes, personal aspirations and commitments. The employees featured in these videos took pride in being selected for this campaign and shared the video materials with their colleagues, customers and families.

The interns joined the President and the Founder of the business in townhall meetings across the region to discuss with local associates and customers the newly developed philosophy and the alignment with their business realities.

Three months after the beginning of the internship program, the students launched a last round of employee engagement surveys on-line to monitor progress with the deployment of the organizational culture. This time, 86% of the employee population responded, with only 8% indicating that they do not understand or agree with the corporate culture (Hofstede eds. 2010), while only 6% indicated that they would not recommend the company as a place of employment to a friend or a family member.

## V. Conclusion

Although the internship program was a run for a three-month period of time, the following main results could be observed throughout the post M&A corporate culture integration process:

- ① The involvement of the international students propelled the company in its efforts to align organizational values
- ② They helped integrate organizational communications
- ③ They played key innovative roles in developing and deploying corporate culture and value penetration
- ④ They involved employees from all sides of the business in the philosophy dissemination process.
- ⑤ They proposed and implemented a series of organizational architecture development and cultural integration projects new to the company, projects which were visually engaging and simple to connect with, generating innovative ideas propelled the diversity of thought brought in by liberal arts and innovation management students.

The customer suggestions and requests for service improvement collected through the "Customers Complaint Purchasing Center" developed by the intern students is still in usage, continuously supporting the company in collecting valuable customer information related to existing business shortages, emerging needs and expectations. The Founder of the company himself was surprised to the change in employee engagement, as indicated by the two surveys run before and after the program, as well as by impact of the integrated communications actions developed and deployed by the group of international interns. All interns were offered employment by the company upon graduation and were invited to help support the further growth of the business within the Asia-Pacific region.

The internship program benefitted en Japan in organizational culture integration by enhancing

communications and bringing down organizational silos through innovative customer information collection and service development efforts.

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