Japanese Business meeting – instructions for use:

1. Use the Description – Interpretation – Evaluation (found on the “culture resources” section of the “for faculty” website) exercise to debrief this case study.
2. Write “Description,” Interpretation,” and “Evaluation” on the smart board in different sections.
3. I usually ask students to state what is happening in this case study and then I decide if their statement is pure description, or if it is an example of an attempt to interpret what is happening, or if it is an evaluation (whether positive or negative) of what is happening in the case study – based on US American culture.
4. I make a check mark in the different sections depending on if it is pure description, interpretation or evaluation (see below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Interpretation</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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5. I then help them interpret what occurred in the case study. What actually occurred is that the boss had held individual meetings with each employee before the public meeting in order to build consensus. This is where individual arguments were made - privately. The public meeting is just a place to announce the result and show consensus when possible, not a place to argue one’s point as in the US. Of course, the US American being an intern, he was not consulted in this way. It is important to point out that there still was one person who publicly expressed disagreement – demonstrating that individuality does exist in Japan. Stereotypes of Japanese people usually promote the idea that individuals cannot express themselves.

This process of “going around the roots” to build consensus is called “nemawashi.”

6. Finally, stress that often we approach a situation like this through our cultural filter, which may impede a proper understanding of what is actually occurring. Interpretations may be incorrect and negative evaluations may get in the way of understanding as well. It’s important to add that we should avoid evaluating and interpreting a situation until we have done our research. One of the ways we can find out what has actually occurred is to find a “cultural informant” - someone, preferably a native but not always so, who can “translate” for us.

JGH: 8/11
Japanese Business Meeting

Alan, a business intern at a Japanese company, was looking forward to attending his first staff meeting. Since the agenda included an issue that would be controversial in an American office, Alan expected to encounter an interesting discussion. The meeting, however, ended up being pretty dull: few questions were asked, there wasn’t any real debate about the issue, and no pro and con arguments were presented. Instead, some of the staff made brief comments in favor or one proposed solution and the few questions that were asked were relatively minor.

Alan was surprised. He had heard earlier that some of the staff disagreed with this proposed solution but in the meeting they didn’t say much. When one committee member did state his objection, there was a moment of silence, and no one responded. Then the chairperson asked if there were any other questions or comments and brought the issue to a close. He didn’t even call for a vote! In the end, Alan thought, they hadn’t discussed anything substantial at all. It was a done deal from the beginning.

Why do you think the staff members were relatively quiet at the meeting and voiced little dissent?