What problems face a new franchise language school operating in a different country to the 'parent school' and what can a trainer, acting as a change agent do, to counter these difficulties?

David Evans, University of Birmingham, April 2000

1   Introduction

Fullan (1988:24) quotes a group who defined change as 'likened to a planned journey into unchartered waters in a leaky boat with a mutinous crew'. This description is not so dissimilar to an experience that I had, working ostensibly as a teacher trainer in a new private franchise school in Pusan, Korea. It is not about innovation of a particular 'thing', but about an attempt to change a situation of mutual distrust that had developed between the owner and his staff. At the time of my visit I was unaware of theories of change, so this essay will try to make sense of what happened, and how things might have gone better, had I been so. Although it did involve innovation of administrative practices, the real goal was to change perceptions. That it should fail is not really surprising. However, trying to analyse why it should fail is an interesting process. The essay will first outline the situation of the school and the problems. It will then discuss the three main areas which seemed to be responsible for the problems, culture, hygiene factors and the conflict between business and educational pulls. Finally, the attempts of the change agent to solve the problems will be discussed

2.   The school

The school was run by a Korean owner who had previously been a high school English teacher. The school was one year old at the time, and was experiencing financial problems. There were six non-native teachers, three American and three British. There were four Korean teachers of English too. The school was originally meant to be solely a private children's institute, but expanded to become a typical cram school, catering for junior and senior high school students in a variety of subjects. The trainer/change agent had been working in Japan for seven years, both teaching, training and doing administrative work.

3   The problems

This section will outline the problems that were expressed by the teachers and the owner, and my own perceptions too.

3.1   Staff problems
- The owner was autocratic and took no notice of their opinions.
- There were no work guidelines, so staff were asked to teach at short notice, or on days off.
- The school was unprofessional, as demonstrated by pay slips being written on the back of envelopes, schedules changing daily, days off being cancelled etc.
- There was no aim with the teaching other than to make money.
- The accommodation was poor, teachers were sharing with Korean families who spoke no English, apartments smelt awful etc.
- The owner constantly broke his word (including failure to pay a bonus after a year's employment), so there was a lack of trust.

3.2   Owner's problems
- The Western staff were rude, unhelpful and selfish.
- The mothers complained about poor teaching as their children were doing badly in speech contests.
- He was losing students to schools that did well in speech contests.
- He had borrowed heavily and the school was not doing as well as he had anticipated.

3.3   Problems as perceived by change agent
- There was constant friction between business and education goals.
- The owner's lack of experience meant he could only react to problems, not anticipate them.
- The unrealistic aims on the part of the owner, put himself under financial pressure and contributed to the list of broken promises.
- The teachers had no forum to make suggestions to how the school was run.
- The lack of stability caused by the structure and way of management led to a high turnover of staff and dissatisfaction
- The Western staff had a miserable social life, which meant that work problems became more important.

- Employing staff who were used to working in well-established and well-resourced schools expected more than a school in its infancy could offer .

- There was a need for a director of studies in the Korean school.

4   Understanding the problems

It is difficult to divide each of these problems into a distinct area, such as organisational, structural, 'hygiene' etc. as they are overlapping, and indeed culture, underpins the whole spectrum. However all the problems listed are covered by a combination of these areas. This section will look at these areas

4.1   Hygiene

In a study by Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman, (1959) of attitudes towards work, common themes were identified that affected the way employees regarded their work. They found that (1959:113) 'when feelings of unhappiness were reported, they were not associated with the job itself but with the conditions that surround the doing of the job'. This was exactly the situation in Korea, no one complained about the teaching, but about the working environment. The full list given of 'hygiene' factors by Herzberg et al, (1959:113) 'included supervision, interpersonal relations, physical working conditions, salary, company policies and administrative practices, benefits and job security.' With the exception of physical working conditions, all of these points were mentioned by staff as reasons for their discontent. Within the situation of teachers working in a foreign country, it could be argued that not only poor housing, but also a poor social life fall into this category. If teachers are enjoying themselves outside of the work environment then they can be more tolerant if work is not ideal. However in Korea it was evident that the social life was as unsatisfying as the working life, which emphasised the question of why work here .

They also observe (1959:9) that 'an individual's attitude to his work can certainly be affected by his position within the structure of the group' and this was a factor in the school. As the role of the parent school in Japan was to supply trainers, on a two-month basis, there was no chance for promotion to this position within the Korean school, and perhaps more importantly their input was considered less important than the trainer, who had no experience of working in the school, or Korea. Furthermore the trainers from the parent school were also often less qualified than the teachers at

the Korean school, again heightening their dislike of the set up.

The lines of communication within the Korean school and with the parent school, although clear in theory, were confused in practice. The owner of the parent company delegated responsibility for communication to a director within his school. The Director was responsible for training the trainers, talking to the Korean owner, and keeping a record of the developments and problems within the school, so that the next trainer could be briefed. An inherent problem with this management structure was the lack of stability it engendered, as the 'trainer' changed on a regular basis. For the teachers in Korea the structure seemed to emphasis that they were not valued.

Diagram 1
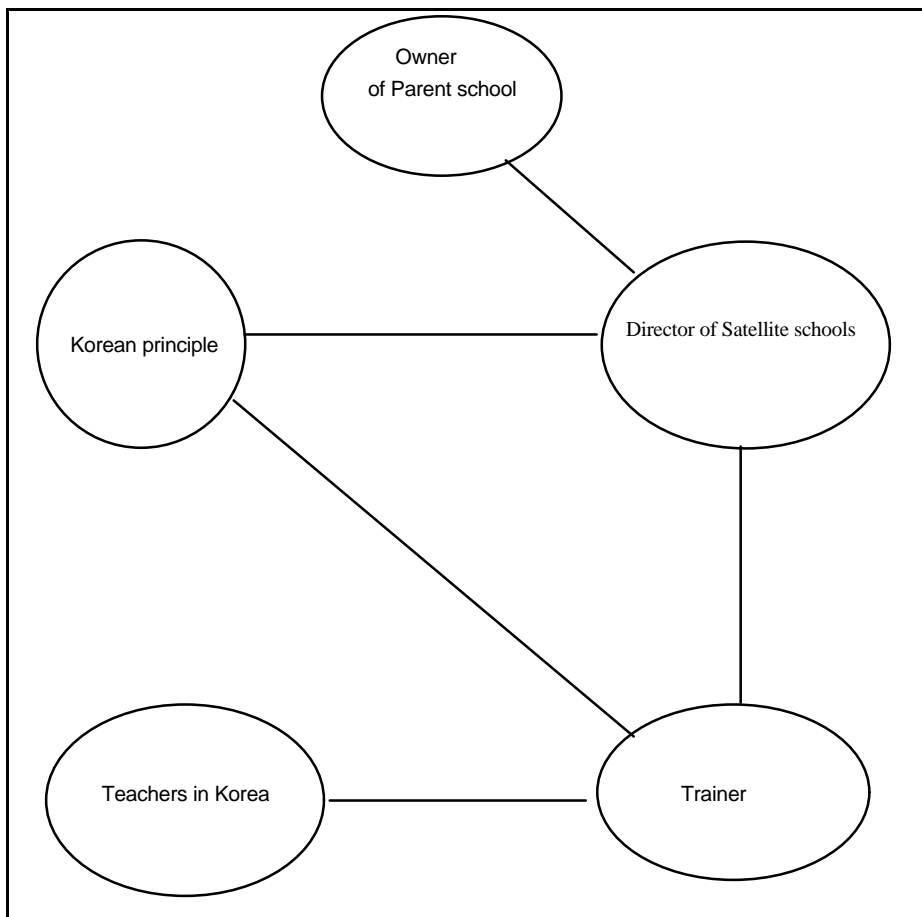
4.2 Culture

Hofstede, (1991:5) refers to 'culture as mental software' which he defines as 'the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another'. His work, which was based on a survey for IBM to see what implications differences in culture would mean for their business, provides some interesting assertions. Hofstede believes that the answers supplied by the

nationals of over 50 countries provide insights to the way these societies are organised. He uses the following categories to explain the difference in answers to the questionnaires by different nationalities.

4.2.1 Hofstede's distinctions

1   Small power distance-large power distance.

In this the relevant differences are that small power distance societies are characterised by a belief that inequalities between people should be minimized, there should be interdependence between less and more powerful people, subordinates expect to be consulted, and more educated people hold less authoritarian values than less educated people. Large power distance societies hold the opposite positions.

In relating this to the situation at the school, both the America and Britain tend towards being small power distance societies and Korea is right between the two poles. Hofstede says of Korea and other Asian countries that (1991:40) 'people in these countries accept and appreciate inequality, but feel that the use of power should be moderated by a sense of obligation'. In the Korean school there was very little consultation by the owner with the staff, and whilst this was not a problem with the Korean staff, it always as with the Western staff. Also, if a 'sense of obligation' means providing employment, then the Korean owner did so. The school itself was modern, the pay was the highest in the region, and the teaching hours were considerably lower than in many schools. If 'obligation' is interpreted as providing work that enabled teachers to grow and become better at their work and to have input into the running of the school, then he did not.

2   Individualism - Collectivism.

Hofstede (1991:51) says; ' Individualism pertains to societies in which ties between the individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after himself of herself and his or her immediate family. Collectivism, as its opposite, pertains to societies in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty'. On this scale both America and Britain were highly individualistic and Korea, distinctly collectivist. This throws some light on the uneasy relationships between the Korean owner and his staff. Hofstede (1991:58) writes that 'In most

collectivist countries direct confrontation of another person is considered rude and undesirable. The word no is seldom used, because saying no is a confrontation...the word 'yes' should not necessarily be seen as an approval, but as maintenance of the communication line'. This would certainly account for owner's view of staff as rude and aggressive as saying 'no' , was common to what the Western staff saw as unrealistic demands (e.g. adding a new class to their schedule on the same day, asking them to work on days off). Similarly if the manager was saying 'yes' does not mean approval then this would explain the staff's view that he made false promises.

3   Masculinity- Femininity

The differences here are what are traditionally regarded as the differences between the sexes, but this category seems to be on less secure footing than the other distinctions he makes. The main differences that are relevant to the situation in Korea are that in masculine societies the dominant values are that, men are ambitious and tough, women are tender, failing in school is a disaster and that managers are expected to be decisive and assertive. According to Hofstede's findings (1991:84) both Britain and America are predominantly masculine, which is surprising, and even more surprising is that Korea is meant to be largely feminine.

 Hofstede explains this by saying, (1991:90) 'the difference is noticeable in classroom behaviour. In masculine cultures students try to make themselves visible in class and compete openly with each other. In feminine cultures they do not want to appear too eager and mutual solidarity, although not always practiced is seen as the goal.' At the top of the list for masculine societies in Japan, but the quote above for feminine cultures seems to me far more accurate for Japan, and the masculine description more accurate for Korea.

4.2.2   Limitations of Hofstede's work

Holliday (1999:237) points out the limitations of Hofstede's work, arguing that 'this large culture approach results in reductionism, overgeneralization and otherization of foreign educators, students and societies'. He explains otherization (1998:212) as 'the process whereby the 'foreign' is reduced to a simplistic, easily digestible, exotic or degrading stereotype. The 'foreign' thus becomes a degraded or exotic 'them' or safely categorised 'other''. Holliday is right to point out the dangers of stereotyping,

and to point out that 'small' cultures will vary within any society and that these do constantly change. In Korea for example, the language school that I have described will be very different to other language schools in Korea. The personalities of the owner and staff will vary. Yet at the same time, anyone who has lived in a foreign country will be aware of generalised attitudes which are held in that country. There are of course regional differences, and in multi-cultural societies especially, the variety might be so great that any generalisation becomes worthless. However, if the aim of Hofstede's work is to inform of the potential pitfalls or problems that a non-native might experience in that country, rather than to say 'they are all like this', then the work seems valuable.

Hofstede's work does seem surprising at times, and it is debateable if the questions asked by IBM really are indicators of the categories he gives. For example, according to Hofstede (1991:81-2), wanting 'the recognition you deserve when you do a good job' is categorised as a masculine trait, whereas wanting 'a good relationship with your direct superior' is feminine. It could be argued that anyone who has experienced a poor relationship with a direct superior would definitely regard it as important regardless of nationality! Having said that, as a rule of thumb, these generalisations do seem insightful, especially in the context that I have been describing. However, whether being aware of the cultural differences actually does lessen the potential cultural conflict or not, is another matter.

4.3   Educational versus Business goals

The private language school constantly needs to balance educational goals against the fact that it is a business and needs to make money. White R et al (1991:166) point out that 'there is an important distinction between the public or state-funded and the private sectors. Whereas the measurable outputs of the former will tend to be in terns of academic achievement, the outputs of the latter will necessarily have to include the financial as the academic, since a privately-funded language school will have to generate profits in order to remain financially viable'. However teachers in the private sector seldom seem to view this as a factor. As Fullan writes (1995:10-11) that many teachers go in to the profession to 'make a difference' and that 'teachers are agents of educational change and societal improvement'. This would seem to be particularly true where teachers have taken qualifications, and see EFL teaching as a career rather

than as a temporary distraction. One complaint I heard was that the school had no 'mission statement', and although the term originates from the business world, its application in this case was that there was, as Fullan would say, no 'moral purpose'. For the owner of course, it was first and foremost a business, so this was another reason for the mutual distrust.

5   The process of change

This section will discuss what was done by the change-agent in an attempt to bring about change, and related the problems encountered to the theories behind change and to the opinions of the experts.

5.1   Lack of effective conditions for change

Buchanan and Boddy (1992: 14) say 'ask any management group to list from their experience (positive and negative) what they would regard as the preconditions for effective change in organizations and the terms involvement, participation, ownership, communication, commitment and trust invariably emerge'. In the situation in Korea these were lacking, and perhaps the fundamental mistake was that, with the exception of one group meal, the staff and the owner never came together as a group to discuss the problems.

Fullan and Hargreaves (1991:74-5) emphasise the same point saying that 'trying to understand the people with whom we work is important for building these relationships. ...If we do not relate appropriately to other people, we increase the chance of conflict, alienation and mismatched responses or strategies'. This was certainly the case in Korea and was compounded by the fact that "teachers' meetings" were explicitly out of bounds as the owner had conveyed this strongly before my visit, for they threatened his authority.

As a result my first action on arriving was to talk to the individual teachers and formulate a list of their grievances (see section 3.1) and then to talk to the owner about them. These meetings were held informally, which, with the benefit of hindsight was a mistake. By talking to teachers one to one, instead of doing so in a group, the chance for collegiality was denied. Furthermore these 'chats' took place in coffee shops and therefore lacked legitimacy in the eyes of the teacher.

Dalin (1998:82) says, when talking of leadership, 'create structures that and processes that lay the groundwork for an open two-way communication...create a climate in which the work of the school is perceived to be everyone's responsibility...be able to appreciate those values and norms that are at the root of conflict situations'. That there was no two-way communication between the owner and the staff, but instead via the change agent meant that the core problem was never addressed.

5.2   Impartiality of change-agent

Kennedy, D (1999:36) says that 'foreign trainers need a culturally sensitive approach to the management of change and must take care not to threaten the management structure of the organization'. This is undoubtedly true, but in this particular case, it could be argued that by carefully observing the wishes of the owner, my position as the bridge between him and the staff was weakened, as I was perceived as being 'on his side'.

Another reason for this was that I found it difficult to separate what I saw as 'real' problems from the 'trivial' ones, as the morale of the staff was so low that everything was deemed to be a problem. Fullan (1995:26) says that 'problems need to be taken seriously, not attributed to 'resistance' or the ignorance or the wrong-headedness of others'. However, it could also be argued that in a culture of complaining, mountains are made out of molehills, and some complaints are best ignored, or even confronted. Months after leaving, one of the staff did confess that she was unwilling to accept that the school could be improved because of the owner, and had complained too much over trivial matters. Fullan says (1995:27) 'conflict is essential to any successful change effort' yet the distinction between the 'conflict' that Fullan regards as beneficial and what Slater (quoted by Edwards 1999:43) deems indicative of a 'diseased organization' is difficult to draw. Perhaps more significant is the reactions of the individuals after conflict. Fullan and others rightly say that blame should not be personalised, but it is very difficult to prevent this.

The problem of impartiality was increased by my refusal to directly criticise the owner but to try to explain the difficulties as being 'cultural' rather than that of an individual. Furthermore I would never make promises, as I did not wish to duplicate

mistakes made by the owner. Although I had the owner's trust, it was his school and unless he was in favour of implementing any proposed changes, the chances of success were nil.

5.3   Negotiating with the owner and the response to change
The second phase was to meet the owner and see if solutions could be found to the problems encountered by the staff. First of all these related directly to practical shortcomings, the 'hygiene' factors that could be readily changed such as implementing systems for schedules, payment, holidays. These were readily agreed to, and a note was put on teachers' desks informing them of these changes.

This impersonal way of presenting the information was another mistake. In a school with only six teachers this information should have been relayed in person, but by presenting it as a typed sheet it was seen as 'another edict from on high'. Interestingly, I had expected the staff to be pleased, but in fact the response was similar to that reported by Carr et al (1996:71) in a company where management corrected the complaints made of themselves by the workers. It reads, 'We had naively thought that when we took these steps everyone would be pleased. Everything we did was strongly opposed. When we removed the clocking-on system people said "We won't be able to prove that we've been to work, so they'll be able to cheat us on our pay,..". This point is made eloquently by Herzberg et al (1959:132) 'the slogan could almost be raised "Hygiene is not enough"'. They explain that whilst hygiene problems cause unhappiness, their removal does not lead to happiness. Motivating factors or 'satisfiers' (1959:80) include recognition, achievement, advancement, responsibility and work itself'.

It soon transpired that the agreement with the owner was not being kept, classes were being added on the same day and the staff were rapidly losing confidence in my ability to implement change. Pascale (1990:20) writes 'not surprisingly, ideas acquired with ease are discarded with ease'. The reason appeared to be cultural, in one respect he did not want to offend the 'visitor' to his school, and in another, after consultations with Korean friends, he was keen to show the staff 'who was boss'. A second meeting was arranged with a Korean confidante of the owner and this time many problems not mentioned in the first meeting were raised. After a lengthy

discussion the changes were agreed to, but with a fuller understanding on both sides of the difficulties.

White (1998:146) says 'it is not the role of the co-ordinators to impose their own ideas...' and a major problem was that by implementing practices in the parent school I was transferring ideas that were not necessarily suitable for his school. Fullan (1999: 64) says of transferability, 'successful reforms in one place are partly a function of good ideas and largely a function of the conditions under which the ideas flourished'.

Korean School	Parent school
1 year old	18 years old
Profit motivated	Educationally motivated
New contracts on a daily basis	Contracts negotiated to fit in with school
Desperate financial problems	Financially secure
High turnover of staff	Many senior teachers
No Director of studies to help with emergency situation	Seven senior staff to cover unexpected developments

Table 1

As Table 1 shows, the differences in situation of the two schools was great in many aspects, and many of the factors that enabled the parent school to adopt stable working conditions did not exist in the Korean school. The need to have a Director of Studies within the school to deal with unexpected developments was identified as a crucial step for the well being of the Korean school. It was also agreed to introduce free Korean classes for the staff, and to advertise for adult students, to help overcome the isolation of the staff.

Throughout my stay in Korea, the owner seemed to be caught in a constant battle between, on the one hand, the change agent, the parent school, and the Western staff, and on the other, the Korean staff, Korean friends and Korean culture in general. This is illustrated in Figure 2.
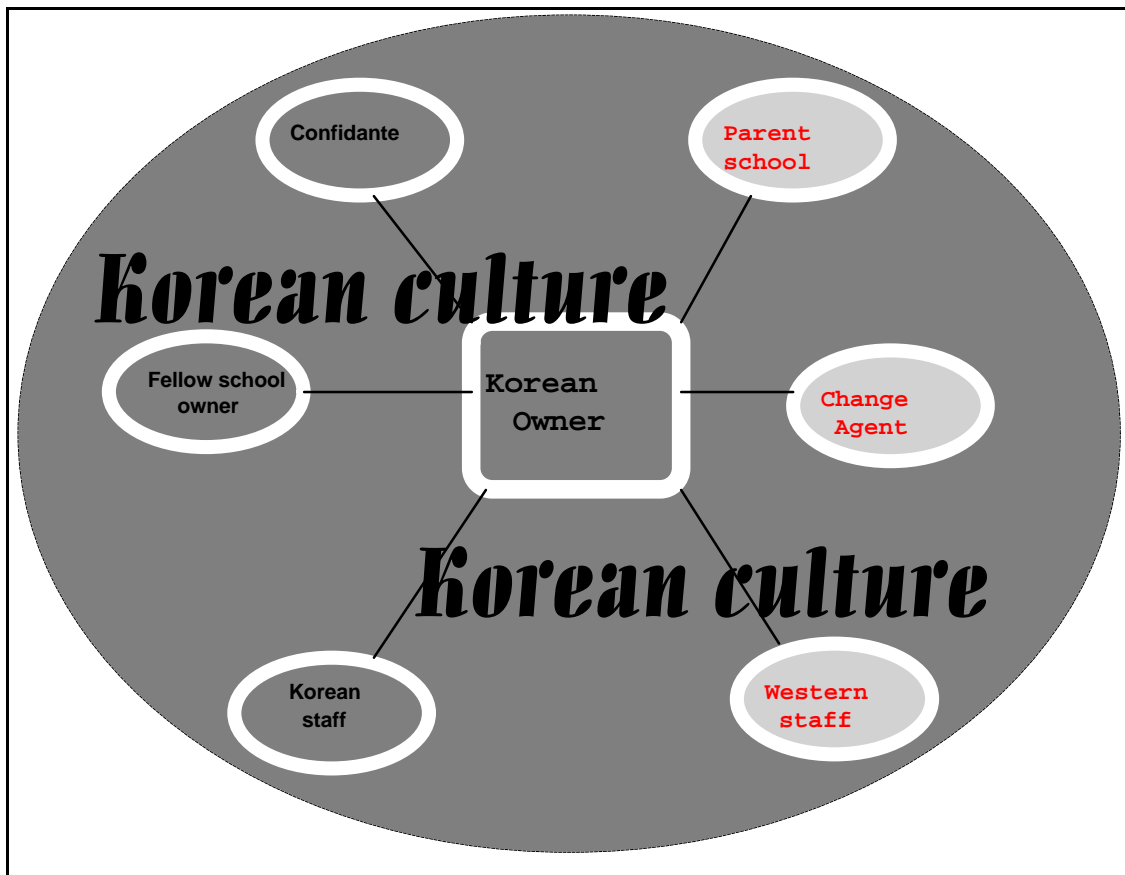
Figure 2

5.4   *Training of teachers*

Whilst these attempts were being made to improve the running and infrastructure of the school, the initial reason for going to the school, training was also happening, but in a less central role than had been intended. It became almost peripheral, as compared to the angst that existed amongst the staff, it soon became obvious that it was a low priority.

However it is interesting to note that while training the Korean staff was both enjoyable and productive, the training of the non-native staff, was unsatisfactory and perhaps alienated the staff further. The Korean staff were comparatively happy with their work situation and were eager to discuss ways of dealing with educational problems at the school. The meeting were not compulsory, but all the staff attended each meeting The way in which the training was conducted was also more collaborative than that with Western staff, as the training involved all Korean staff at the same time. The sessions centred on what they had identified as being a problem, which was how to combat the problem of fierce competition amongst the children

they taught. (Something which is not predicted by Hofstede's work, as this is meant to be an attribute of masculine societies, whereas Korea is classified as a feminine society.)

Being the trainer and not having previously taught in Korea, this was a completely new problem, as in comparison the children in Japan were far less competitive. As a result, not having any ready formulated ideas, this meant that the meetings were conducted as colleagues, rather than as an expert giving advice. Ideas of how to solve the problems were pooled and regular meetings were held in which suggestions as to how to combat the problem were evaluated and refined. This was by far the most rewarding part of my stay in Korea.

The meetings with the Western staff were also optional but only a few staff would attend. This could be an example of what Handy (1995:158) calls 'negative power' and the 'symptom of deeper discontent'. The training sessions were perhaps the best opportunity to develop a collaborative atmosphere, which could have benefited both the teachers and the organisation, but this did not happen.

Also, the way of teaching children was highly prescriptive, with one course book being used, which had a particular rationale, which needed to be followed. This again seemed to emphasis the powerlessness of the staff. Furthermore, individual classroom observations were conducted with feedback forms, and though the content was deliberately made as positive as possible, it did evaluate, which in the climate was a mistake. White R (1988:149) writes 'what seems to be clear is that evaluation can be regarded as threatening, can lead to misconceptions and can be destabilizing because evaluations are... political: by definition they entail value judgements, and there are a number of political danger-zones'. A further drawback was that there was no opportunity for the Western staff to observe the trainer, which would have made the process two-way, and therefore less judgemental.

6   Six months later

The situation had improved in some respects. A Director of Studies had been appointed within the Korean school. He had arrived two days before I left and I had told him honestly about the situation, both good and bad, and asked him to make up

his mind without being unduly influenced by the existing staff. His attitude was quite different from the other non-Korean staff. He had been working in Korea at another institute, teaching forty hours a week, loved Korea, and could speak some Korean. On his first day at the school, he wore a suit, was very respectful to the owner, and paid for dinner for the owner and myself. This cultural awareness made him instantly popular with the owner.

The three most critical staff, two of whom had the RSA Diploma and the other a Masters, had left the school. Whilst this was a loss in terms of what they could have contributed, it improved morale, and seemed to indicate that the school had not reached a sufficient point of development to match the their expectations. In his desire to have 'the best school' the owner had employed staff who wanted more than his institution could offer in its 'formative' stage.

A further advantage was that the staff had developed a good social life, and with the implementation of a system to enable staff to take longer holidays, there was comparative stability. There were still occasional complaints about the owner, but the not on the same scale as before.

7   Conclusion

 In trying to apply the wisdom of theories and experts to the experience I had in Korea, the most illuminating have been those that help to make sense of individuals actions, Hofstede's, Herzberg's and Fullan's work in particular have been valuable. These show the problems that a new school should anticipate.

 However, there are still issues that are confusing; particularly the role of the change agent when confronted with a 'them' and 'us' environment. To what extent conflict is healthy would seem to depend on the individual's concerned and whether they can 'forgive and forget' or whether grudges are borne. Fullan says of change (1998:255) 'even the best ideas do not, indeed cannot, tell you how to get there, because that requires working in specific settings with their unique combination of factors and personalities that play themselves out in unpredictable ways'.

The following points seem to be key ones from my experiences in Korea;

- both teachers and management should be aware of the conflict in private language schools between business and education
- an understanding of the cultural norms in other colleagues' cultures, 'small' or 'large', will reduce misunderstanding
- removal of hygiene factors is not a sufficient condition to make teachers happy
- transferring ideas that work in one environment is no guarantee of success in another
- resolution of problems should be done face to face, not through an intermediary
- involvement and ownership for all staff is vital for a successful work environment

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