

The styles of mediational means in the communication between nonprofit organizations and potential supporters

Koichi Suwa

(Urban Research Plaza, Osaka City University)

In this research, I focused on the style of building relationship between nonprofit organizations and potential supporters, such as donors and volunteers in Japanese context, based on the concept of mediation (Wertsch, 1993). As a conclusion, I pointed out the importance of the mediation by sense and feeling --- not by logic and legitimacy --- as alternative way of communication between nonprofit organizations and potential supporters.

The Japanese third sector is still overwhelmingly weaker and smaller than other sectors in Japan, although the enactment of the NPO Law --- the Law concerning the Promotion of Specific Non-Profit Organization Activities --- in 1998 was one achievement of the Japanese third sector. Of course, Japanese nonprofit organizations were not just idly standing by. Nonprofit organizations are mission oriented organizations, and their missions always should be able to be described logically. Therefore, Japanese nonprofit organizations are also proposed their mission logically and this approach was effective for the people in the big organizations such as press, local/national governments, and private companies.

However, such a kind of logical expression is not always attractive for ordinary people, especially potential supporters. Suwa et al. (2006) discussed the relationship between disaster volunteers and disaster nonprofit organizations based on a case study of relief activity on earthquake disaster in Japan. In the case, the volunteers cannot tell their reason to join the disaster volunteering with coherent logic; and Suwa et al. argued that disaster volunteers' activity does not rely on the logical explanation whereas the disaster nonprofit organization based on it.

Although the previous research described the difference between the interest of individual volunteers and of organization, it does not show the way of approach to potential volunteers for nonprofit organizations. Here, socio-cultural approach in psychology as represented by Wertsch (1993; 1997) argues that we should focus not only on agent but also on mediational means when we analyze human action. In this approach, mediational means includes not only technical tools but also psychological tools, such as language. We should focus on the style of mediational means when we discuss the building communication between nonprofit organizations and potential supporters from the perspective of socio-cultural approach in psychology.

Nonprofit organizations often used mediational means which based on logical coherence and legitimacy, but they also can use some alternative mediational means which relate to sense and feeling. In other word, nonprofit organizations can appeal not only to our rationality, but also to our senses. In this point of view, art and design can change the style of mediational means for creating communication between nonprofit organizations and potential supports.

The author's research project includes a practice for the creation of the way of communication between nonprofit organization and the potential supporters in Japanese context, and this paper reports the part of this project as the preliminary phase of this research.

References

- Suwa, Atsumi and Seki 2006 Disaster volunteers and two types of interest. *ISTR Conference Working Papers Volume V Bangkok Conference 2006*.
- Wertsch, J. V. 1993 *Voices of the Mind: Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action*. Harvard University Press
- Wertsch, J. V. 1997 *Mind as action*. Harvard University Press