

## Note from the Authors

The working title of this book was simply *Kiki*, 危機, which means “crisis” in Japanese. We chose that title because it represents the situation facing many U.S.-based Japanese companies today. These companies are often characterized as being ideal marriages of the best aspects of Japanese and American cultures. The reality in many cases, however, is that some of the worst aspects of each culture—or, at least, those elements which cause conflict through mutual misunderstanding—end up as the dominant influences in U.S.-based Japanese companies. These cross-cultural conflicts constitute a relatively serious threat to successful corporate operations, and this threat is presently strong enough to warrant the use of *Kiki*. But there is more to *kiki* than meets the eye. The two characters or sounds that make up the word have a different meaning if read independently of each other. The first *ki*



character 危 means "danger." The second ki character 機 means "opportunity." Thus, within every crisis situation lies some element of opportunity as well as danger.

It is in this juxtaposition of danger and opportunity that we wish to suggest ways of dealing with the conflicts and misunderstandings that are occurring between Japanese managers and their American employees in U.S.-based Japanese companies—and, indeed, between local and global operations wherever they may be.

Frustration, anger, miscommunication, decreased productivity, lawsuits, and increased employee turnover—all these dangers are inherent in the clash of cultures that is taking place. There is, however, an alternative to the current conflict: Americans and Japanese can seek out mutually acceptable strategies for working together. That is the opportunity within the danger. Pursued diligently and with good faith, the chances of success are great. It is the purpose of this book to provide a tool or vehicle for that pursuit and to entice Japanese and American managers, supervisors, and employees of U.S.-based Japanese companies to examine together the elements of danger and opportunity already at work in their companies.

The greatest danger lies in simply ignoring the profound differences between the two cultures. Predictable patterns of mutually misunderstood behaviors are presented in this book, and we challenge you to compare the issues we examine with the situation in your own company. The most important opportunity lies in recognizing the problem areas and resolving to do something about them. This puts you in a better position to work as a team to develop a stronger organization, one that has the potential to take the best of both cultures and form a more effective hybrid business culture.

It is important to note that the potential for serious cross-cultural conflict in the workplace is not limited to interactions between Americans and Japanese. As the world becomes "smaller," and marketplaces everywhere begin to take on global characteristics, managers will increasingly find them-



selves presented with the challenges of a multicultural working environment. In the following chapters we will focus on conflicts in U.S.-based Japanese subsidiaries, but the lessons we have learned about cross-cultural conflict are potentially applicable to a much wider range of multicultural work settings.

## Part One

### Framework for Analysis