



International Business Communications

LCBB6001

Component 1: Coursework: Individual Essay

Student name: Akriti Saini

Student ID: 2224661

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Lecturer: Rexon Nting

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1. Introduction

In the modern era of globalization, multinational companies (MNCs) operate across diverse cultural landscapes, necessitating effective intercultural communication. With businesses expanding beyond domestic markets, successful collaboration between teams from different cultural backgrounds is crucial (Nadiger et al., 2024). Cultural differences often give rise to miscommunication that, in turn, causes inefficiencies, misunderstandings and even project failures (Zhang and Lin, 2019). Thus, these matters must be understood and counted for when there is a will to achieve a successful business relationship.

In multinational companies, there is a crucial need for intercultural communication since it bridges cultural gaps and facilitates effective collaboration (Braslauskas, 2021). This allows its employees to live their cultural sensitivity, effectively build professional relationships without coercion, and work harmoniously amidst differences in language, values, and communication styles. Successful business negotiations, teamwork, and leadership can be enhanced through the ability to communicate across cultures, which would lead to organisational success (Lu, Swaab, and Galinsky, 2022). Hence, intercultural competence is a critical success factor for companies, as it allows for mitigating misunderstandings and establishing work environments that foster innovation and efficiency.

The subject of this essay is the different communication between the teams of the United Kingdom (UK) and Japan, whose cultural orientations are very different (Bojadjev et al., 2023). Here, the communication style of the UK is low context with direct and explicit exchanges, whereas that of Japan is high context with indirectness, lack of verbal cues and a focus on contextual understanding. Such differences can cause difficulties in the process of business relations and, as a result, challenge the right to express an opinion, make decisions, negotiate, and function in the workplace.

The products of Unilever (UK) and Shiseido (Japan) will be examined for our analysis. This essay will critically evaluate the impact of differences in Western and Middle Eastern cultures on business communication through the application of intercultural communication theories such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the high-context vs. low-context framework. It will also discuss ways of promoting teamwork amongst the UK and Japanese teams, such as smooth communication in international business.

2. Cultural Context of Business Communication

Both of these companies are global leaders in the personal care and cosmetics industry. However, they work in different cultural contexts, which determine the style of their communication. This part will critically analyse the effect of such cultural differences on business communication using intercultural communication theories like Hofstede's cultural dimension and the 'high context vs. low context' framework.

Communication styles are different between the UK and Japan because of these countries' cultural traditions and societal norms. The UK has a low-context communication style, which is direct communication that focuses on clarity, explicitness, and efficiency. At the professional level, British people enjoy opening up dialogue; their expectations involve clear instructions, and in a hierarchical setting, they prefer workers to share their opinions as well. On the other hand, in Japan's high context, indirect communication relies on non-verbal means of delivering messages (like silence and understanding of a common culture). Japanese professionals prefer to avoid confrontations and conflicts and keep the group harmonious using group hierarchy and implicit messaging.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions show great differences between the UK and Japan in key areas of communication. The United Kingdom ranks high on individualism, so the employees highlight personal responsibility and independent decision-making for individualism vs collectivism. This is evident in Unilever's corporate culture, which allows employees to be proactive by expressing their ideas openly. Secondly, Japan is a collectivist society, emphasising the importance of group consensus and teamwork. Employees at Shiseido are expected to seek input from colleagues before making decisions because all voices should be heard before a conclusion is reached. For instance, a Unilever manager will expect an immediate, single answer to a poser. At the same time, the Shiseido team would prefer to have several discussions before arriving at a decision.

Power distance is one of the main differences and represents the level to which this or that hierarchy is accepted. British workplaces have relatively moderate power distances, which implies some hierarchy in the workplace, but its senior employees do not participate in the discussions with the junior employees. On the other hand, Japan has a high power distance: deference to seniors is deeply assimilated in Japanese society. Employees at Shiseido may not feel comfortable challenging the authority if they are not in agreement with a decision. This could result in misunderstandings in jointly worked Unilever projects with British employees believing that a

Japanese employee's agreement is being obtained when, in reality, they are silent to the proposal, the absence of which is being interpreted as an unspoken objection.

Out of this high context vs low context communication framework, it can be seen how these two cultures differ. Japan's cultural culture is high context, meaning communication is nuanced through tone, gestures, and vague phrasing. For example, a Japanese worker might comment, 'This idea is interesting.' It would carry positive connotations in the UK, but in Japan, it is a way of giving something rather tantamount to a (subtle) snub. Contrary to this, in the low context, UK communication stands on clarity and directness. A British manager at Unilever might write detailed instructions, expecting employees to ask questions about anything unclear. In contrast, a Japanese employee might not feel comfortable asking as he might regard it as an indication that he is incompetent.

The difference in communication between members of these companies can pose various challenges when a business interaction occurs between Unilever and Shiseido. One breed of common misinterpretation is silence. British employees are likely to want verbal responses immediately; Japanese employees will likely reflect or politely disagree if they are silent. Furthermore, there is a big difference regarding decision-making speed; the UK team at Unilever may respond promptly, while Shiseido may deliberate for a long time due to their preference for group discussions. The feedback styles vary as well, considering British managers usually offer direct criticism of a type, while Japanese professionals choose indirect, conflict-avoiding, face-saving criticisms. Unilever executives may openly criticise a presentation because they believe it leads to improvement, but a Shiseido executive would not find this approach sufficiently delicate or motivational.

Therefore, it is important to understand and address these cultural contrasts if they are why Unilever and Shiseido cannot work together effectively. Companies with operations in both countries have to institute intercultural training to help close the communication divide and promote cultural sensitivity and, consequently, hybrid communication strategies that allow for both direct and indirect communication approaches. To further improve teamwork, mutually understood communication protocols need to be established, e.g., clear expectations concerning response times, the decision-making process and the feedback methods. By realising and accommodating these differences, Unilever and Shiseido can form a more cohesive and productive international business partnership.

3. Key Differences in Communication Styles and Their Impact

A partnership between multinational businesses needs a proper communication setup to work effectively; how people communicate impacts how successfully teams work together and makes decision-making harder during negotiations (Stahl and Maznevski, 2021). Japanese and UK business partners struggle with communication because Japan uses different methods when making decisions and giving feedback at work. The cultural comparison based on Hofstede is presented in the Figure 1. The following part checks the communication style differences and their results in business transactions.

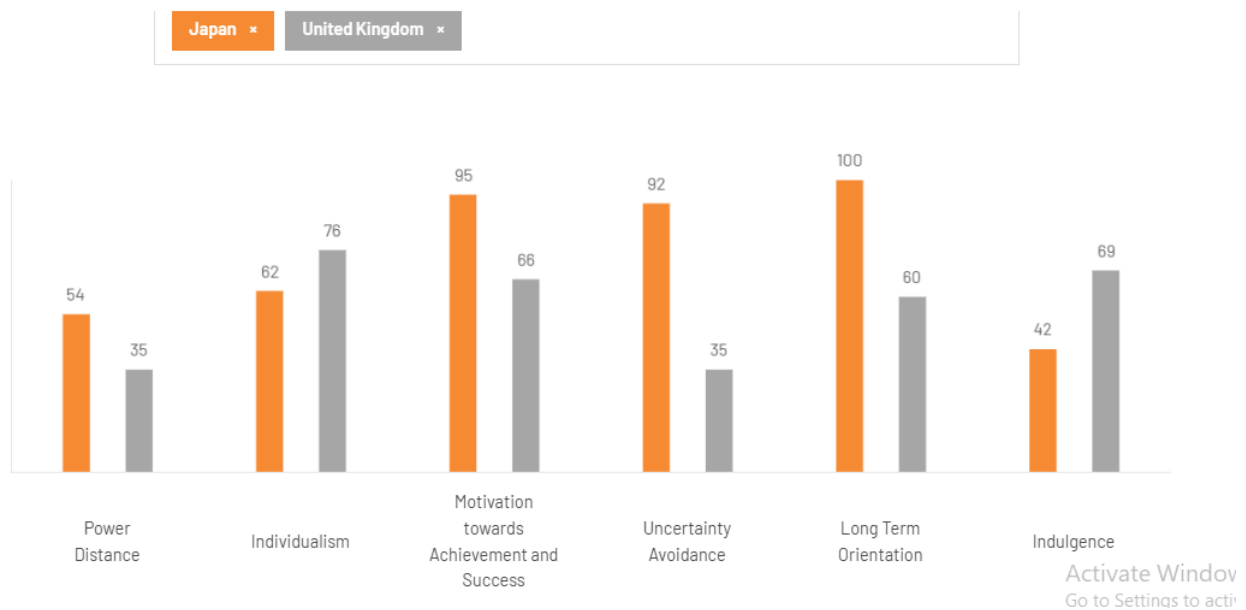


Figure 1 Country Culture Comparison (The Culture Factor, 2025)

Direct vs. Indirect Communication

UK and Japanese companies communicate differently regarding business practices. UK businesspeople communicate directly to reach easy-to-understand results. British professionals prefer direct speech without filtering their opinions since this helps them prevent misunderstandings (Zhai, 2022). Japan uses subtle nonverbal communication to share messages since it responds differently than the direct language approach used by the UK. The Japanese business world considers direct speaking disrespectful and confrontational, especially within organizational ranks.

The British executive at Unilever asks for direct feedback from Japanese colleagues at Shiseido about the effectiveness of the marketing strategy. Based on the Japanese corporate culture, an executive might initially accept but dismiss a new concept through polite language (Figure 2).

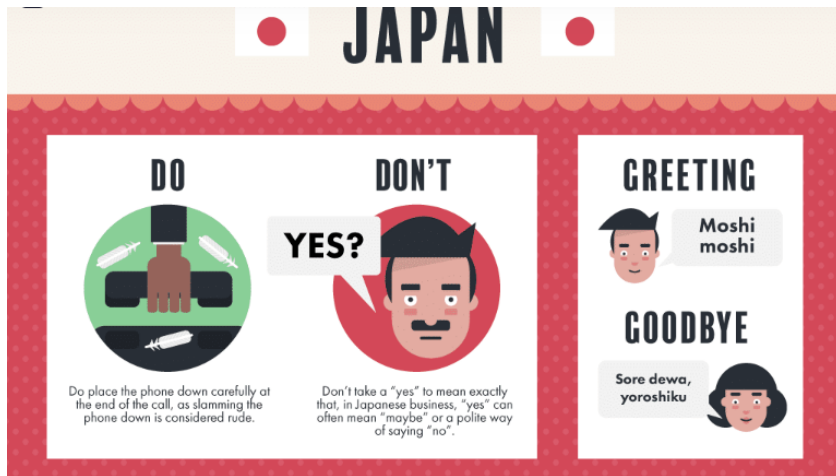


Figure 2 Japan Communication Style (Temelkova, 2022)

British managers unfamiliar with Japanese communication would take agreement when their colleagues merely acknowledge a business strategy. British staff normally voice their opinions during meetings, but Japanese staff maintain harmony by staying silent or hinting at their disagreements.

Decision-Making Processes

The UK and Japanese organizations make their decisions differently because they value individualism strongly versus groups (Figure 1). Hofstede rates the UK highly for individualism, which means businesses value quick individual decision-making power. British professionals base decisions on fast personal assessments that they can adjust later (Vargas Sánchez, 2023). At Unilever, meetings focus on finding new solutions and then weighing their benefits and disadvantages to arrive at a quick solution.

Japan prefers to decide by group consensus through the tradition of *nemawashi*, which requires widespread feedback and full agreement before making a choice (Chau and Nacharoenkul, 2023). As a Japanese company, Shiseido puts huge effort into group discussions because they help minimize risk at all company levels. Japanese collaboration methods take longer to solve problems since British employees expect immediate results. When Unilever and Shiseido release a new product to market, the UK team suggests quick launch strategies, but the Japanese team needs group-wide discussions to agree. The Japanese management team accepts this approval process as a way to achieve better results, while the Unilever executives view it as wasted time.

Attitude Toward Silence and Feedback

Business culture regarding silence functions uniquely between UK and Japanese companies. When people are silent in UK interactions, others naturally respond to avoid confusion since silence means a lack of interest or understanding (McKearney et al., 2023). British business professionals want spoken feedback and expect quick feedback during their meetings and talks.

Japanese employers view silent behaviour as respect for others or time to contemplate. During pauses in conversation, Japanese professionals demonstrate their thought processes. Silence helps Japanese professionals avoid confronting someone directly while showing their disagreement subtly without creating discomfort (Shen et al., 2024). A British Unilever manager may mistake silent feedback from Shiseido executives for agreement when the Japanese members need time to ponder the proposal.

Feedback styles also differ significantly, as the UK culture welcomes detailed observations that help employees improve their work results. British leaders at Unilever can freely criticize presentation performance because their staff accepts feedback as job-related. Japanese organizations put group unity before all else, so team members deliver feedback through polite suggestions to keep participants comfortable (Garg, 2023). Shiseido supervisors share unspoken tips and advice instead of specific feedback to let workers determine the needed modifications. For example, one manager at Unilever tells a staff member their work needs major improvement, yet the supervisor at Shiseido tells their team they need to rewrite certain parts, yet leaves the purpose unclear. The Unilever executive team needs to understand this communication method to catch when reports require updates.

Power Distance and Hierarchy

UK and Japanese communication styles differ significantly regarding handling organizational structure since UK companies have lower levels of power distance than Japan (Iwashita, 2023). Workplaces in the UK follow official ranks, yet employees can openly voice their thoughts. The people in British workplaces do not face major obstacles when communicating with top leaders, and they favour debate despite their opposition to business choices. Unilever motivates its inexperienced staff to speak up against their thoughts and propose rival views during meetings with their managers (Amin, 2024).

Japan displays a strong power distance in its society because Japanese workers strongly respect and hold authority over senior company personnel (Kokubun and Yasui, 2021). Shiseido expects

its staff to respect executive superiors properly and accepts limited leadership challenges as rude behaviour. Subordinate staff avoid sharing direct opinions because their communication mostly goes from the top down.

During a combined Unilever-Shiseido meeting, a British junior employee feels free to pitch marketing ideas to top executives, while a Japanese junior staff member needs senior management approval before offering opinions. UK employees often engage in all talks because Japanese employees avoid participating actively. Executive members of Unilever could deduce that their Japanese partners are unwilling to act, which would strain their partnership.

Two companies face difficulties running their joint operations because of different work habits. When different nations team up for business, it becomes harder to work well when staff members have distinct ways of speaking. Team members from both sides fail to connect when UK staff think Japanese co-workers are slow and passive, yet Japanese staff see UK workers as excessively demanding and unprofessional. Unilever and Shiseido must run staff training to help employees understand communication conventions at different locations. Strategies such as organization trains staff about different communication methods through cultural sensitivity programs. It also employ combined communication methods that let employees share messages directly yet prevent misunderstandings. The two parts need to define particular meeting standards that cover work deadlines, decision-making rules, and feedback methods. When Unilever and Shiseido modify their methods to handle cultural variations, they create better teamwork and gain more mutual respect while running their global partnership.

4. Strategies for Effective Cross-Cultural Communication

Social cooperation between global companies needs clear communication to achieve business results. Because of the contrasting UK and Japanese cultural standards, Unilever and Shiseido should use specific methods to help their teams work together better. This section explains essential methods to connect different cultural teams and strengthen communication methods, whether people meet virtually or in person.

Bridging the Communication Gap

When employees understand cultural intelligence and adapt their communication skills, they can bridge the gap between direct and indirect talking methods. Cultural intelligence helps people recognize and fit into different values and speaking patterns in each culture they meet (Sternberg

et al., 2022). Through cultural training, Unilever and Shiseido show employees how to understand specific communication patterns and match their communication styles to different situations.

Unilever UK employees should receive training to understand the Japanese meaning of Shiseido's statements during negotiations. These Japanese employees may use indirect speech, such as saying, "We will think about it", which signals disagreement rather than agreement (Ye, 2024). Each day, Shiseido workers would master specific ways to deal with direct remarks from their British team members who wanted honest feedback to help them advance.

Organizations succeed with cross-cultural teams when their managers use adaptive leadership approaches (Perera, 2025). Unilever and Shiseido leaders need to design leadership techniques that work for employees of both British and Japanese backgrounds. To manage Japanese teams well, British managers need to endorse group harmony and consensus-building alongside their typical direct authority style. Japanese managers should also allow junior staff members to share views during meetings with British colleagues.

Enhancing Team Collaboration

Using cultural liaisons, translators, and mediators produces strong results in addressing communication problems between UK and Japanese business partners. A cultural liaison bridges language barrier between cultures when working with staff from Japan and the UK. They provide communication support during important meetings and talks. This approach works well in demanding exchanges, protecting business relationships from misreading (Nadiger et al., 2024). The input of a cultural liaison at this meeting ensures Unilever executives understand Shiseido's team decision-making preference before these delays cause frustration. A mediator can help Shiseido staff communicate their objections properly to keep essential issues from being ignored in the strategy acceptance stage. Setting shared communication guidelines benefits collaboration more than using cultural liaisons alone. To prevent confusion, companies create and use uniform guidelines for how meetings work, how decisions should be made, and how feedback should be given.

In worldwide business, email and video conference rules differ, plus digital connection preferences create problems between teams that work from different countries. When communicating, Unilever must adjust email practices to serve British directness and Japanese formality. British workers should tone down their direct emails to build better working relationships, while Japanese workers need to write answers that are easier to understand. Adapting business protocols and

adopting translation tools and project management systems will help teams overcome cultural barriers between UK and Japanese business practices.

5. Conclusion

A successful collaboration between Unilever and Shiseido demands effective measures to overcome their cultural differences when communicating. Organizing effective intercultural training plus using adaptive leadership methods, cross-cultural ambassadors, and formal communication systems creates better employee relationships. Technological tools let these companies create better ways of working together while improving digital and face-to-face contact to make effective partners out of diverse cultures. These approaches will help companies run their operations better while achieving greater success in overseas markets.

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