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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The cultural context in which the business operates in a particular region.....	3
Individualism vs. Collectivism	4
Uncertainty Avoidance	5
Masculinity vs. Femininity.....	6
Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation.....	6
International communication style based on cultural differences	7
High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication	7
Direct vs. Indirect Communication Styles	8
Task-Oriented vs. Relationship-Oriented Communication	8
High Uncertainty Avoidance vs. Low Uncertainty Avoidance	9
The Impact of Cultural Differences on International Communication	10
Conclusion	10
Reference List.....	11



Introduction

Cross-cultural management is crucial as businesses adapt to globalization, but challenges arise when team members from diverse organizational, and cultural backgrounds differ in communication approaches. This paper aims to discuss major communication elements that may cause strain on UK and Japanese joint teams of collaborating companies such as Unilever – a UK-based multinational and Shiseido – a leading Japanese firm. Communications analysis draws on the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensions which compares, and contrasts the basic concepts of power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term perspectives. Direct communication significantly differs in people with permission to make decisions, build new relationships, and perceive risks, and opportunities that can conflict with UK and Japanese team members when these factors are not properly addressed (Bailey, 2021). This article has attempted to investigate the perceptions of Japanese and UK teams on communication style using Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions.

The cultural context in which the business operates in a particular region

Considering the fact that today's business environment is gradually shifting from a national to an international one, the necessity of building effective intercultural communication between separate teams is in the foreground (Varner and Beamer, 2021). In trying to compare and contrast the communication processes between the UK-based Unilever and the Japanese Shiseido teams, one has to look at the cultural acclimation of each identifying factor like interaction and decision-making. Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been used for the subsequent discussions here.

Power Distance

Power distance is a measure of how much the lower-ranked employees in an organization can expect and accommodate the unequal distribution of power (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Whereas high power distance cultures assume and nurture the hierarchical order and acquired authority, low HD cultures assume and encourage equal distribution of power and decision-making.

The UK tends to operate at a low power distance, hierarchal structures are present but are not strictly followed. The employees of the Unilever UK team, unlike those in other organizations, believe that they should be allowed to participate in discussions in a way where everybody in the organization gets an utterance opportunity. On the other hand, managers are more likely to interact with their inferiors on a collaborative plane and enter into discussions within an organization. Restructuring will thus entail bringing about a low power distance culture that is in sharp contrast with Japan's high-power distance (Meyer, 2014). Traditional Japanese communication may be felt in the communication within the Shiseido team, staffs may avoid using direct words but rather use indirect suggestions to convey their message.

Hence the UK team may consider the Japanese team subservient and probably fail to understand that they respect their superiors and do not intervene in the discussion. At the same time, the Japanese team can regard the non-subtle temper of the UK team and their rather unceremonious treatment of hierarchy as improper. Problems can occur when the UK team members believe in the free environment of discussion while the Japanese subordinates follow the concept of strict hierarchy and half-worded signals (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2019). The teams might establish certain communication guidelines to bridge the divide, allowing for flexibility while yet adhering to the established hierarchy.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

This dimension investigates the relative importance of people or groups in a culture. In a collectivist society, taking a risk or following through on something is only done for the sake of the group's reputation and unity. In an individualist culture, the individual must always take the risk or follow up on anything. Because of this, the UK is an individualistic nation that values self-reliance, individuality, and personal achievement. UK team members may feel comfortable speaking to the point and may be inclined to assume individual responsibility for the accomplishment of tasks. Such an attitude fosters the absorption of personal responsibility and identity in sharing project discussions, thus leading the UK team members to champion their egos and, therefore, self-promote more often (Varner and Beamer, 2021). Japan scores well on

collectivism; it prioritizes group decision-making and unity over individual freedom. Japanese teammates may be devoted to the team's goals, even if it means sacrificing their reputation. They may also avoid conflict to keep the peace within the group.

Therefore, the UK team members may consider their counterparts in Japan to be equally willing to freely express their views, but this may not work well since the Japanese team may feel uncomfortable doing so (Hall, 2019). On the other hand, the politeness of the Japanese team members may be perceived as the UK teammates' demonstrations of individualism and bluntness in their communications as blatant rudeness or disorderliness. Hence the leaders could consider setting up verbal and non-verbal communication protocols targeting especially communication signals which may infringe on the Asian group peoples' harmony practices and feedback practices that allow free expression while still respecting other people's opinions.

Uncertainty Avoidance

This translates into the degree to which individuals in a given culture are threatened with novelty or inability to predict their environment. Practical cultures reducing uncertainty have set and structured patterns whereas theoretical cultures embracing toleration of ambiguity have no barriers to experimentation.

The UK is rather high on masculinity, which means that the companies are competitive and focused on their tasks; assertiveness and performance are essential. UK team members may demonstrate a work-related communication dominant communication style which is characterized by the pursuit of tasks purposefully without concern for the development of interpersonal relationships. Japan is somewhat more masculine but has more of a focus on relationships while engaging in communication (Gratton, 2021). It is possible for the Japanese team members who will be participating in the process to be very much concerned with the interpersonal aspects of the events rather than specific work-related items.

The UK has a moderate uncertainty avoidance index which means that Unilever's team does not feel unique towards the uncertainty and innovation. It is possible that UK team members feel more positively about flexibility, and are willing to pursue reasonably risky and dynamic environments (Hofstede, et al., 2010). Conversely, Japan enjoys a high uncertainty avoidance which is a manifestation that the team member in Japan prefers order, formality, and specificity of the planning. It also seems that employees from Shiseido will appreciate structured approaches, and optimism, in this case, will be much lower than in other, more innovative

organizations since people are not inclined to experiment and are concerned with using techniques and methods that have proved to be effective in practice. Hence, one possibility in this analysis is that such a relaxed attitude to uncertainty and willingness to work in conditions of instability may be discomforting for the Japanese team, who may expect detailed plans and clear instructions (Ting-Toomey and Chung, 2022).

Masculinity vs. Femininity

This dimension measures how much a culture embraces toughness and winning (operationalized with the variable masculinity), or the well-being of people, and their ability to provide for their families.

Masculinity is quite moderate in the UK; people do care for performance and results but at the same time for quality of life. UK team members may well be motivated by a competitive spirit and also may be motivated by cooperation and individuals' particular attention paid to work-life balance. This makes Japan highly masculine, the characteristics of which include concern with success, competition, and determination by work (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2019). Loyalty and commitment towards work are possible with Shiseido having norms that embrace working hard to achieve a particular goal and recognition by fellow employees in the company.

Therefore the UK team members might be expected to be moderate in their approach by being assertive and cooperating a lot whilst this may be perceived as the Japanese team members' lack of commitment and vigorous competitiveness (Hall, 2019). On the other hand, the UK team can consider the Japanese approach too competitive or rigid and vice versa concerning work expectations and speed. To counter such differences, it is recommended that team leaders strike a balance in that team members should spend some time getting to know their other teammates while at the same time, ensuring that they complete their tasks fully and effectively.

Long-Term vs. Short-Term Orientation

This dimension splits cultures with a long-term view based on planning for the future from cultures that expect immediate returns on effort and replicate old practices. The long-term orientation is high in Japanese culture; they have stressed future perspective, tenacity, and establishing a long-term engagement relationship. Japanese might prefer deciding on strategies for the long run rather than focusing on immediate results; this point of view makes

them tend to choose sustainable approaches and hesitant in communication (Ting-Toomey and Chung, 2022). The UK with a blend of both logistic and time orientation may lean toward time orientation hence more pragmatic solution oriented. This may sometimes result in UK team members wanting an immediate outcome and immediate feedback which may be inapplicable in Japan's forward-looking oriented society.

The UK has a short-term orientation, although people concentrate on the outcomes and traditions of their business. Unilever's team members may appreciate the clarity of objectives, quantitative targets, and performance as well as a shorter time in between results (Unilever, 2024). However, Japan is characterized by a long-term orientation popularised by the country's willingness to wait for growth and not give up easily. Shiseido's team can very well approach things in a more conservative manner where, for example, they stress sustainability, and that they are more interested in long-term outcomes and partnership with the client.

International communication style based on cultural differences

Culture plays a major role in how messages are sent, received, and even reacted to across different cultures during international communication. It is important to have such distinctions clearly in mind because all these aspects can raise conflicts or misunderstandings which are practically inevitable in today's multinational teams (Samovar, et al., 2017). Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer tools for understanding how cultures begin, continue, and end, formally or informally, emphasizing the relation or the task.

High-Context vs. Low-Context Communication

High-Context Cultures: According to Hall, there are high-context cultures, including Japan, China, and much of the Middle East. Most of the meaning is embedded, and people are even told to interpret most of the information between the lines (Bennett, 2013). Indirect communication, relationship-building, and a heavy emphasis are the preferred methods of communication in these cultures.

Low-Context Cultures: The low-context communication cultures include countries such as the United States and other European countries like Germany, most countries in Western Europe are low-context countries (Lewis, 2016). Here, people like clear communication when the message of a topic is contained in the words without any inference associated with it. Low-context communication is suitable in commercial and organizational cultures that are individualistic, assertive, and very concerned with time.

Direct vs. Indirect Communication Styles

Individualistic Cultures: Individualistic Cultures, for instance, the UK, prefer a direct approach. People appreciate simplicity, frankness, and direct communication, and they don't hesitate to voice their viewpoints. This style is characteristic of the tendency to self-reliance, and the desire to solve matters as directly as possible.

Collectivistic Cultures: Collectivistic Cultures like Japan will choose indirect Communication as an option due to an emphasis on Group & Company Harmony. It is important to avoid negative feedback and assertive language since it is a collective culture that may lead to more fights (Neuliep, 2017). For instance, the Japanese conversation is marked by unrealistic gestures which is an indirect way of disagreeing hoping to uphold relations rather than asserting one's individuality.

Task-Oriented vs. Relationship-Oriented Communication

Cultures that are task-oriented: Most industrialized nations, including the US, have cultures that place a strong premium on completing tasks and reaching objectives.

Communication is therefore specific and oriented towards solving some problems or continuing with the project (Gudykunst, 2013). This approach may be characterized by neglecting the relational aspect of a relationship in favor of the achievement, and feasibility.

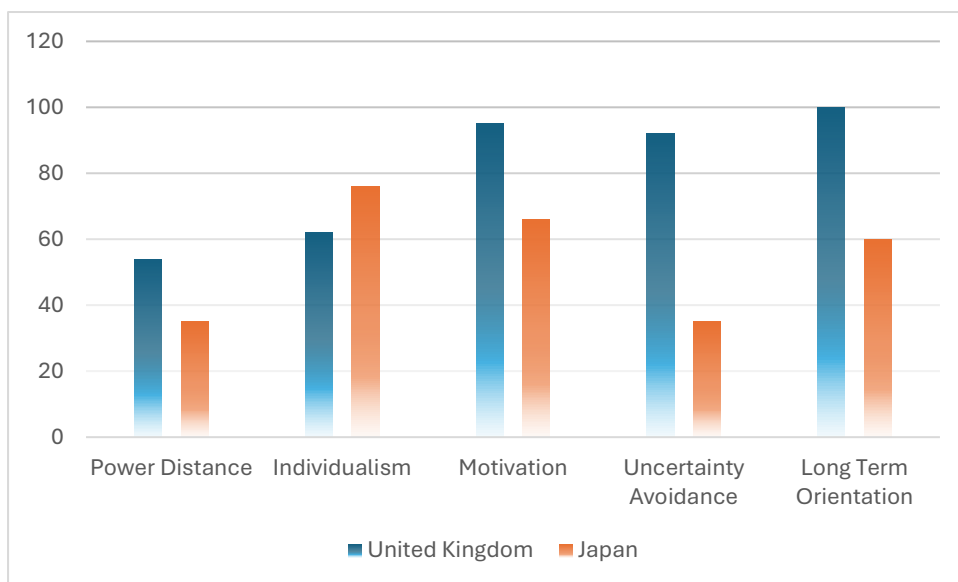
Relationship-oriented Cultures: Business cultures that are relation-oriented such as in Japan expect the establishment of a good relationship as the framework of any business dealings. In these cultures, participants might entertain themselves with discussions, events, or even day-long sessions while building up trust (Adler and Gundersen, 2018). In communication, the dynamics are more formal, people wait for each other politely to make sure that no one wants to start working right away.

High Uncertainty Avoidance vs. Low Uncertainty Avoidance

High Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures: Japan avoids uncertainty and thus, the communication is well-defined, and straightforward. In some of these cultures, the people may be less emotional, and instead of speaking to the point, they will first make some calculations. In these cultures, high degrees of certainty require well-specified norms, roles, and action programs.

Low Uncertainty Avoidance Cultures: Low Uncertainty avoidance culture countries such as the UK are relaxed with uncertainties by as much as they are fluent in several ways of communicating. Team members might be more willing to share concepts that have not been getting completed, if the increments concept is applied throughout the project (Lustig and Koester, 2022).

Chart with data from both countries, that represents each dimension, and compares them with numbers.



(Self-made)

The Impact of Cultural Differences on International Communication

It is still important to note the fact that while promoting globalization; cultural difference helps in communication and at the same time can act as a barrier to its smooth running. When managed effectively, diverse communication approaches can offer complementary strengths: for instance, where high context is applied, undercurrents improve understanding, while where low context is applied, simplicity leads to efficiency (Zakaria, et al., 2014). However, brought forward cultural issues can cause work relationships misunderstanding, frustration, or even perceived disrespect.

Employees working in international teams, for example, may require cross-cultural communications training to allow them to realize that expectations regarding communication are different (Earley and Ang, 2013). To balance different communication styles, they address several general rules. These include the guidelines for a communication structure that allows for some flexibility, feedback, establishing organizational relationships, completing tasks, and respecting the relationships between superiors and subordinates.

Conclusion

The cooperative intercultural working between the UK and Japan's teams, as in the case of Unilever and Shiseido, has its advantages and disadvantages. When following the ideas of Hofstede presented in the cultural dimensions theory, it is understood that differences in communication lead to conflict if brought to attention and discussed. UK groups prefer voice communication, openness, straightforward decision-making, and functional orientation, while Japanese groups are inclined to a hierarchical approach, implicit communication, and network orientation. The two different approaches may cause UK members to think that the Japanese colleagues are too skeptical, or not very expressive while the Japanese colleagues may think that UK members are too aggressive or only thinking too commercially. Thus, such gaps can be closed by providing more attention to the cultural differences and following the strategies based on the balanced type of communication, when benefiting from the UK and Japanese peculiarities. When relationship building is constructed by facilitating opportunities for engagement also ensures that feedback-seeking, and decision-making respect are practiced. This cross-cultural sensitivity avoids misinterpretation as well as improves teamwork which is the cornerstone of this partnership.

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