

International Business Communication

LCBB6001

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Introduction

The United Kingdom has an established position internationally and it is considered to be very competitive market in the world. The United Kingdom is one of the largest market and excels at many business sectors, being among the world leaders, and leading the higher education sector. London is representative for the international finance and dominates along with New York UK-based legal firms retain their pre-eminence as global players. Lately the United Kingdom has faced different challenges such as Brexit, Pandemic, political changes, increased inflation and going forward has to find the resources to overcome obstacles.

Doing business in the United Kingdom (UK) can be attractive, but as other countries it has strong and representative culture which should not be overlooked. Business communication in the UK should take into account various aspects related to British approach to business.

The selected organisation for this report is AstraZeneca UK. It is an international company based in the UK and has a major presence in the domestic market, being a constituent of the FTSE 100 Index. Their mission statement is to deliver life-changing medicines by collaborating with scientific institutions, healthcare providers and business communities in the UK. According to their official website (2023) the organisations employs “over 8,700 employees across five sites in the UK and support just under 66,000 jobs in the UK economy”.

The organisation is a British-Swedish pharmaceutical and biotechnology international organisation with headquarters in the UK. It has been founded in 1999 through the merge of the Swedish company Astra AB and British company Zeneca Group. Meanwhile it has made various corporate acquisitions such as “Cambridge Antibody Technology (in 2006), MedImmune (in 2007), Spirogen (in 2013) and Definiens (by MedImmune in 2014)”. It has a complex activity in the industry such as “oncology, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, infection, neuroscience, respiratory, and inflammation. It has been involved in developing the Oxford–AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine” (AstraZeneca, 2023).

Theories of international and intercultural communication

Hofstede has developed a theoretical model for the cultural dimensions and it is framework for cross-cultural communication. The theory emphasis the impact of a society based culture on the values of its members. It looks at the values impact on their behaviour, identifying six characteristic models to measure a culture in cross-country society. “The cultural dimension represents an independent preference for one of the above circumstances other countries that distinguish countries (not individuals) from one another” (Hofstede, 2003).

Initially the theory was proposing four dimensions in regards to the cultural values: *individualism-collectivism* which represents the “degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups”, the *uncertainty avoidance* index is defined as “a society’s tolerance for ambiguity, in which people embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo” (Wu M, 2003). The *power distance* (strength of social hierarchy) is defined as “the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 2003). The *masculinity-femininity* (task-orientation versus person-orientation) where masculinity is defined as “a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success” (Linkedin, 2014). Its counterpart represents “a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life”. Further research has led to a fifth dimension which is the *long-term orientation* which associates the connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges, and in 2010 a sixth dimension, *indulgence versus self-restraint* where “a society that allows relatively free gratification of basic and natural human desires related to enjoying life and having fun”. Its counterpart is defined as “a society that controls gratification of needs and regulates it by means of strict social norms” (Accounting Binus, 2021).

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are widely used to understand etiquette and facilitate communication across cultures in areas ranging from business to diplomacy. In the UK, *Power Distance dimension* can be identified a low score, less powerful members accept that power is distributed unequally, British considering that inequality should be minimised. That is why in the working environment the flat team structures are more and more common and hierarchy is for convenience only. Staff will use the first name of the managers to address them and manager will be open to direct contact, easy access. Some managers practice inclusive organisational culture and People will be on first name terms with managers, expect easy access to them, and managers will encourage staff to be participative to the meetings and the decision making. *Individualism*: the

extent to which people feel independent versus collectivism. UK has high levels of individualism. People from such societies tend to value privacy, think for themselves, and pursue personal fulfilment. *Uncertainty avoidance*: society's tolerance for uncertainty where UK is more able to adapt to ambiguity, British are comfortable with uncertainty and can tolerate a lack of information about what the future will hold. *Masculinity vs femininity*: The UK is considered a fairly 'masculine', despite that women are now accessing more and more male led sectors. *Long-term orientation*: UK has a pragmatic orientation, clings to traditions and norms and can be hostile to social change. *Indulgence vs restraint*: freedom and human basic pleasures fulfilment, UK has high level of indulgence towards leisure and fun (Brand Minds, 2021).

According to Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2009) intercultural communication involves "interaction between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication event. The intercultural communication refers to the process of negotiations between two or more individuals with different cultures in an interactive situations. Negotiating shared meaning can be influenced by their culture and their behaviour. Issues with intercultural communications can appear because of the differences between their cultures, meanings and symbols and ways of doing things. According to Jameson et al (2007) "to complement past emphasis on understanding other cultures, the field of intercultural business communication needs a stronger focus on understanding oneself. Cultural identity is an individual's sense of self derived from formal or informal membership in groups that transmit and inculcate knowledge, beliefs, values, attitudes, traditions, and ways of life". Cultural identity changes over time and evokes emotions. It is intertwined with power and privilege, affected by close relationships, and negotiated through communication.

Cultural variables should be studied before business interactions in order to achieve best results. In the role of the manager employee performance is in connection to the organisational background and in the United Kingdom the workforce is very diverse. Cultural differences affect cultural behaviours, which influence project activities and the management needs to have strong leadership to manage the team accordingly. AstraZeneca UK is proud to have a diverse workforce from 70 countries, who are contributing to the extensive business activity (AstraZeneca, 2023).

Critical evaluation of cultural sensitivity of the business environment in the UK

United Kingdom has a very strong culture and they have a certain way of doing business. It can be compared to the strict characteristics of Asian cultural characteristics regarding the diplomatic language. In the United Kingdom the diplomacy has a great importance before directness in communication. The British business environment is very non-confrontational and consider that directness is confrontational and the bluntness of business communication is perceived as offensive. Therefore in business situations such negotiations, directness can be perceived as negative. At times the British can appear as evasive, but is just the British way of preferring positive statements and avoiding negative comments. The non-confrontational side in business situations is representative for the British, as well as using a coded manner of language for the same purpose of expressing unpalatable things using positive phrases. Even if they disagree with some aspects they will appreciate the statement and will propose their point of view rather than imposing it. For tense situations it is known that British tend to use humour and is present in virtually all-pervasive business situations. The use of humour is not an indication of British not considering the situation seriously, but is rather a tension release mechanism to keep situations “calm, reserved and non-emotional” (World Business Culture, 2023).

Analysis of communication barriers

Intercultural communication issues can appear when the cultural background is very different. Issues such as self-presentation, interpersonal skills and the way is dealt with relationships, fundamental differences in world view can be an impediment, language and discourse differences, cultural stereotypes, assumption of similarities and misjudgement and tendency to evaluate.

Samovar, Porter and McDaniel (2011) refer to the topic of world view as “a culture’s orientation to supernatural, human and natural entities in the cosmological universe and other philosophical issues influencing how its members see the world”. The connection with the culture is imminent because it places the personal culture and the national position. Cultures can hold differing ideas, values and perceptions of national and individual identity. Separating the individualism and the collectivism can be representative for different cultures where individual is valued differently, where the independence and self-reliance can be of value being characterised by personal freedom opposing to ‘collectivism’ which at the end of the spectrum. According to Jandt (2007) communication is dictated by “the way that individuals perceive their position in the world”.

The language barriers is a main barrier to communication. This barriers can appear even if the individual is fluent in the other spoken language required in a proposed situation, as the linguistic conventions can generate misunderstandings such as interaction management, lexicon and politeness forms. The communication style very important aspect to take into account, it can be direct or indirect, with high and low context. The United Kingdom is a culture who prefers an indirect style of communication, tending to infer, suggest and imply for expressing disagreement or direct statements. This intuitive understanding is referred to as context. Cultures such as the British culture the high-context non-verbal communication is of great importance. Personal space, eye-contact, physical contact tone of voice are non-verbal signs representative to the British culture. A different approach to communication would be considered an issue and then a barrier to communications.

Other issues that can represent a barrier to communication can be the way an individual presents to others, as different culture might have different traditions to take into account. The Western culture suggests that the individual has high value, enhancing self concept and self esteem, whilst in Eastern Cultures the self is disregarded within the identity of the group. Appropriateness of the individual behaviour is also dictated by the culture, encountering differences in what is accepted as normal behaviour and is also influencing the way relationships are built. "Given the set of behaviours one must or must not adhere to and the set of allowed behaviours, one may estimate how tolerant persons in the host culture will be" (ResearchGate, 2014). This is why some behaviours will be more accepted in some culture than others. Having certain expectations from the interactional partners can lead to complications and high degree of confusion. In contrast stereotypes can offer a biased perspective and a tendency to perceive selectively. This can lead to misjudgement of the individual's behaviour or rejection when communication can be considered too difficult. Assuming similarities is a risk for communication in general, but especially when participants have different cultures. In order to minimise the risks should be identified the common meanings and construct on that, rather than assuming a non-existing base. It is natural that the individuals will feel their culture is right and will use that screen to make judgements. Understanding why others can have different views and considerations can help reduce the barriers in communications (Chang, Tharenou, 2004).

Communication strategies and recommendations

A manager who has to manage a multicultural workforce should take in consideration the assessment of cross-cultural differences and apply that in their management practices. A starting point is to have an open-ended semi-structured interviews to identify competencies required for a diverse and positive work environment such as cultural empathy, good communication skills, being able to learn on the job, adaptability. However the managers should also have all the above competences, good leadership skills and experience would also be beneficial.

A recommendation for ensuring effective communication is training and development for the work force to ensure staff is in line with the company values. Also performance appraisal practices should focus on identifying and/or developing these competencies, in order for managers to effectively manage a multicultural workforce.

Conclusion

This report has analysed the concept of International Business Communication. It has described the concept and has explained theories of international and intercultural communication. The selected organisation AstraZeneca is a British based company and has been assessed the UK cultural practices in the business environment. Further that is has been assessed the communication barriers and have been developed the strategies that could be put in place to ensure a positive working environment.

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