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Assignment 1 Essay

Collaboration Across Oceans: A Cultural Examination of Crabtree & Evelyn and Tatcha's Partnership

Valentina Petkova 2232604

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1. Introduction

1.1 Crabtree and Evelyn

Crabtree and Evelyn, a renowned British skincare and home fragrance company, has established a strong brand presence over the past four decades. Known for its commitment to natural ingredients and artisanal craftsmanship, the company has enjoyed success through its distinctive product offerings, which range from skincare to home fragrance products. With the rise of global trade and changing consumer preferences, Crabtree and Evelyn has strategically decided to expand its operations and reach new markets, particularly in Asia, where demand for high-quality skincare solutions has seen exponential growth.

Crabtree and Evelyn is expanding its operations into Asia through a partnership with Tatcha in Japan. As part of this collaboration, it is essential to recognize and understand the cultural differences that arise between the teams from the UK and Japan. Miscommunication can lead to misunderstandings that hinder project implementation and ultimately affect business outcomes. By applying cultural theories such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the high-context versus low-context communication framework, this essay will evaluate the communication differences between UK and Japanese teams, providing insights into effective intercultural collaboration.

1.2 Overview of Tatcha

Tatcha, established in 2009, is a premium skincare brand based in Japan that draws inspiration from traditional Japanese beauty rituals. Known for its focus on utilizing natural ingredients and artisanal techniques, Tatcha has gained a loyal customer base not only in Japan but also internationally. The brand emphasizes quality and heritage, tapping into centuries-old practices that resonate deeply with consumers looking for authenticity in their skincare products. Tatcha's intricate understanding of Asian beauty standards and practices

presents a fertile ground for collaboration with global brands like Crabtree and Evelyn (Tatcha, 2025).

1.3 The Asian Market: Opportunities and Challenges

The Asian market, particularly Japan, presents vast potential for expansion in the beauty and skincare sector. An increasing number of consumers are seeking sophisticated products that cater to their skin's needs, creating excellent market opportunities for brands that can adapt quickly to local demands and preferences. However, the challenges include navigating complex cultural norms, diverse customer preferences, and establishing effective cross-cultural communication within collaborative efforts. A successful partnership will require not only product development and marketing expertise but also deep cultural understanding to resonate with the local audience (Yamauchi, 2015).

2. Cultural Landscape of Japan and UK

2.1 Historical and Socio-cultural Overview

The UK, with its rich history, has cultivated a culture characterized by individualism, pragmatism, and a structured approach to business. The society values straightforwardness and often prioritizes efficiency in both conversation and decision-making processes. In contrast, Japan is known for its collectivist culture, reverence for tradition, and emphasis on harmony. The influence of Confucian values has led to a strong focus on respect, group consensus, and social hierarchy. Understanding these contextual differences is essential for fostering effective collaboration between Crabtree and Evelyn and Tatcha (Hall, 1976).

2.2 Business Etiquette and Practices

Business etiquette in the UK often emphasizes punctuality, directness, and a degree of informality. Meetings typically lean towards frank discussions and straightforward exchanges

of ideas. Conversely, Japan places high value on formality and protocol. Bowing during greetings, exchanging business cards with both hands, and the consensus approach during decision-making meetings reflect the importance of respect and relationships. Recognizing these differences in etiquette can avoid cultural missteps that might tarnish relations between teams (Hall, 1976).

To navigate the intricacies of communication, it is crucial to first understand the cultural environments in which Crabtree and Evelyn and Tatcha operate. The UK culture is primarily characterized by individualism, low-context communication, and a direct style of interaction. Members of the UK culture often value clarity, transparency, and an efficient exchange of information (Hofstede Insights, 2020).

In contrast, Japan adheres to a collectivist culture where the prioritised are aligned to group harmony, consensus, and mutual understanding. This high-context communication style emphasizes non-verbal cues, relationships, and context, which can lead to misunderstandings if not recognized by those accustomed to a low-context environment (Hall, 1976).

3. Differences in Communication Styles

3.1 Direct vs. Indirect Communication

The style of communication significantly differs between the UK and Japan, with direct communication being prevalent in the UK while Japan prefers a more nuanced, indirect approach. UK team members might express their viewpoints directly and expect a quick response in return. On the other hand, Japanese team members may communicate their ideas subtly, relying on hints and non-verbal cues to convey their messages. This difference can lead to misunderstandings, as UK team members might perceive Japanese contributions as

reticent or disinterested, while Japanese members may find UK counterparts too blunt and lacking in nuance (Liu, 2016).

3.2 Non-verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication has a key role in conveying meaning in Japan. Facial expressions, gestures, and even silence can hold significant weight. Conversely, UK culture leans towards a more literal interpretation of communication where verbal clarity is critical. These differences can complicate interactions, as gestures or pauses may be misinterpreted, leading to confusion or frustration among team members (Yamauchi, 2015).

3.3 Misunderstanding and Miscommunication

Misunderstandings can arise when direct communicators interact with indirect ones. For example, during meetings, a UK team member may propose a new idea directly, expecting robust discussion, while a Japanese team member might withhold immediate feedback, temporarily leading to an assumption that the proposal lacks interest or meritorious value. Acknowledging and addressing these potential miscommunications proactively is paramount to fostering an effective collaborative environment (Yamauchi, 2015).

4. Cultural Dimension Theories

4.1 Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a theoretical framework that aims at the assessment of the differences occurring amongst the UK and Japan across several dimensions as outlined below.

Hofstede's Cultural dimensions
1. Power Distance
2. Individualism vs Collectivism
3. Masculinity vs Femininity
4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long-term vs Short-term orientation
6. Indulgence vs restraint

An evaluation of the above three highlighted dimensions reveals critical insights into how communication styles may vary between the UK and Japan. Further explanation will be provided in the below paragraphs (Hofstede Insights, 2020).

Power Distance

According to Hofstede the term “power distance” describes the range between less powerful members of a society and more powerful ones. Japan scores higher in power distance compared to the UK. This means that in Japan, hierarchical structures are more respected, and communication often flows in ways that honour these hierarchies. In a UK context, communication tends to be more egalitarian, with individuals encouraged to present ideas openly regardless of their position (Hofstede Insights, 2020). In a collaborative project, UK team members may expect more direct participation, whereas Japanese team members may withhold opinions until a consensus is formed, leading to potential frustrations on both sides.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

The UK is characterized by individualism, valuing personal achievement and autonomy. Japanese culture, however, is rooted in collectivism where the group's well-being takes

precedence over individual aspirations. In collaborative efforts, UK team members may push for individual recognition and contributions, while Japanese counterparts focus more on group harmony. This fundamental difference can lead to a perception of self-centeredness from the UK side and a lack of initiative from the Japanese side when it comes to voicing opinions (Hofstede Insights, 2020).

Uncertainty Avoidance

Japan's high uncertainty avoidance indicates a preference for structured conditions and predictability. This may influence their communication style, leading to a more cautious and deliberate approach in expressing uncertainty or disagreement. The UK demonstrates lower uncertainty avoidance, with a greater tolerance for ambiguity and openness to evolving discussions. This discrepancy can result in British team members interpreting Japanese restraint as indecisiveness, while Japanese members might view British assertiveness as a lack of decorum (Hofstede Insights, 2020).

4.2 High-context vs. Low-context Communication

By using Edward Hall's theories about high-context and low-context communication further insights can be drawn. Japan embodies a high-context communication culture, where messages are often implicit, laden with context and emotional undertones. Conversely, the UK adheres to a low-context communication style, favouring explicit verbal clarity. Understanding this dichotomy will facilitate smoother interactions and enhance partnerships through tailored communication strategies appropriate for the cultural milieu (Hofstede Insights, 2020).

4.2a High-context Communication in Japan

In Japan, communication is heavily reliant on contextual elements. Messages are often implied rather than explicitly stated, and a significant amount of information is carried by non-verbal cues (Hall, 1976). The Japanese team may prefer to communicate in subtleties, using gestures, tone, and facial expressions to frame their messages. Silence or hesitation can be employed to indicate thoughtfulness rather than uncertainty. Consequently, if UK team members do not pick up on these signals, they may misinterpret the Japanese team's intentions, assuming disinterest or agreement where there may be a lack of clarity (Hall, 1976).

4.2b Low-context Communication in the UK

Conversely, the UK relies on lower-context communication, where messages are expected to be explicit and clear. The emphasis is on direct articulation of thoughts and ideas. UK team members may become frustrated or confused when faced with ambiguity or indirect communication, which they might perceive as a lack of transparency or engagement. This direct approach can come across as blunt or insensitive to Japanese counterparts who may be accustomed to more nuanced forms of dialogue (Hall, 1976).

4.3 Application of the 7 Dimensions of Culture

	United Kingdom	Japan
Universalism vs Particularism	In the UK rules apply broadly and this leans the culture towards universalism.	Because of the belief that exceptions should be made based on personal relationships, Japan tends towards particularism.
Individualism vs. Communitarianism	Placing attention on individual rights	Emphasizing group harmony and community well-being.
Specific vs. Diffuse Cultures	Individuals separate personal and work lives.	Blends social roles and relationships closely.

Achievement vs. Ascription	Leans towards merit-based achievement.	Values status and ascribed roles significantly, factoring in age and relationships.
Sequential vs. Synchronic Time	Approach is sequential, valuing timeliness and linear progression.	Adopts a more fluid view of time, often focusing on relationships over strict timelines.
Internal vs. External Control	Tends towards an internal focus of control, believing that individuals can control their destiny.	Leans more towards an external perspective, deeming importance to fate and group consensus.
Risk-taking vs. Security	Embraces risk, fostering innovation and experimentation.	Tends to avoid risks, preferring secure and well-trodden paths.

These dimensions create a comprehensive framework for sensitive navigation of cultural differences for more effective collaboration.

5. Implications for Collaboration: Preventing Miscommunication

In order to enhance the collaboration and improve the communication between the UK and Japanese teams, understanding cultural nuances and the degree of their extent is strategically important. Below are strategies to mitigate misunderstandings:

5.1 Building Cultural Awareness

Awareness of cultural differences is the first step toward fostering effective collaboration. Team members from both cultures should undergo cultural sensitivity training to appreciate each side's values and communication styles. Such training will facilitate empathy and adaptability when navigating joint projects (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012).

5.2 Encouraging Open Dialogue

Team members should feel comfortable expressing thoughts and opinions as well as raising questions and this can be achieved in a healthy environment that works as a collaborative system. Encouraging regular check-ins, where team members can discuss their interpretations and expectations explicitly is crucial in order to eliminate the void occurring in between high-context and low-context communication styles (Liu & Wang, 2016).

5.3 Utilizing Visual Aids and Written Documentation

To address potential misunderstandings caused by differing communication styles, it is advisable to use visual aids and written documentation to supplement discussions. Diagrams, presentation slides, and written summaries can reinforce verbal communication and clarify complex ideas (Wang et al., 2019).

5.4 Emphasizing Active Listening and Feedback

Active listening is an indispensable skill in intercultural communication. Team members should be trained to practice reflective listening techniques, ensuring they are attuned to both verbal and non-verbal feedback. Regular feedback sessions can help address misinterpretations early and reinforce collaborative dynamics.

6. Conclusion

In closing, the successful collaboration between Crabtree and Evelyn and Tatcha hinges on recognizing and respecting the differences in communication styles stemming from their cultural backgrounds. By applying Hofstede's cultural dimensions and high-context versus low-context communication theories, this essay has highlighted key areas where misunderstandings may occur due to varying cultural norms.

To foster effective collaboration, it is essential for teams to engage in cultural sensitivity training, facilitate open dialogue, utilize concrete communication tools, and practice active listening. Through these strategies, the UK and Japanese teams can navigate their cultural landscape and work towards successful project implementation, ultimately contributing to the growth and expansion of Crabtree and Evelyn in the Asian market.

In conclusion, the collaboration between Crabtree and Evelyn and Tatcha has significant potential to leverage each company's strengths and cultural assets. However, navigating the intricate cultural landscapes of the UK and Japan is essential for success. By understanding the cultural context, communication styles, and applying relevant cultural theories, we can mitigate misunderstandings and foster robust collaboration. As we work to expand our product offerings in the Asian market, prioritizing cultural literacy and various tailored strategies focusing on engagement, will both enhance our internal communication and resonate positively with our consumers, driving our mutual success.

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