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Introduction

To cope with the competitive business environment, organizations are more focused on expanding business activities throughout the world so that they can have a large market share and competitive advantage over their rivals. Though companies get several advantages and opportunities in the international marketplace, several challenges and threats can harm the productivity and performance of the organization, and communication barriers are the major threats in international business. For this reason, organizations are incorporating several intercultural communication training programs that are more effective in breaking down several cultural and communication barriers among countries by building making them aware of a particular country's cultural norms, beliefs, ways of communication and working that ultimately can enhance communication skills of the employees of an organization (Bauman, 2018). BT Group plc is a multinational telecommunication company that has its headquarters in London and currently operating its business activities in more than 180 countries in the world. The company is planning to expand its business in a developing country, Iran. This report includes a detailed analysis of the communication barriers and ways of overcoming them while operating business in Iran, applying several communication theories in the international business environment. It also includes a critical evaluation of the cultural sensitivity while doing business in the developing country, Iran. Finally, this report suggests several communication strategies and other recommendations regarding operating business in the international marketplace so that BT Groupo Plc can be successful in attaining its goal and survive in the selected marketplace.

Business environment in Iran

Numerous business opportunities existing in Iran attract multinational organizations to expand their business in this location. Despite having several political pressures and economic fluctuations, Iran provides organizations with easy business expansion facilities and a perfect business environment. though this country has some uncertainties regarding business expansion, Iran is considered as one of the top countries in the middle east in respect of the growth possibilities (Warren, 2017). As this country is abandoned with a large young population, this location provides the organizations with ample skilled labor force that is the key to the success of a company. While assessing the political environment of this location, organizations have to focus on the unique religious factor of Iran as it has an Islamic republic on which the political system is based. The government of this location provides all people with equal opportunities and respect. The country has successfully maintained its economic links by revolution but this country has a higher corporate tax rate that is a great threat for organizations to expand business there.

Several economic factors like inflation rate, exchange rate, growth rate, GDP, unemployment rate, etc are quite favorable for business expansion in this location. As the economic condition of this country is good, the company will get easy funding for financing its investment in business expansion projects there (Welbrock, 2019). The social environment of the country is also favorable for business expansion as social and business network is better in this location and the communication channels are more effective in developing smooth relationship among the society and business organizations. This country promotes friendship that supports business expansion and creates several job opportunities that improve the social financial condition and the overall economic growth of the country. Besides, the country is becoming more concerned regarding environmental sustainability, and the organizations operating there must have CSR programs that will help to ensure social, environmental, and community sustainability (Abugre, 2018). The technological environment is also very supportive of business expansion in this location as the country has advanced technologies that can increase organizational productivity and performance. Besides, this country had been successful to keep its economic growth despite facing an international financial crisis in 2009. The country has several threats like poor price control of products and services that harm the whole economy and worsen the economic welfare. Besides, having the presence of organizational corruption that is highly related to private growth potentials

can harm the business growth in this location and it can be considered as the major threat for business expansion in this location.

International and intercultural communication of Iran

Business expansion in the international market has become more challenging because of cultural differences among the countries and the differences regarding communication and working ways. For expanding business in a location, an organization must assess the culture of this location and try to incorporate several strategic plans so that the organization can cope with the different cultures (Fan, 2015). BT Group Plc can use several theories to have detailed knowledge about the cultural practices of Iran. Hofstede's cultural dimensions can be used for understanding the cultural differences based on six dimensions and to select several strategic plans to cope with different cultures. The power distance index is low in Iran which indicates this location has a culture that promotes organizational structures and supports a decision-making approach that is not centralized to some people.

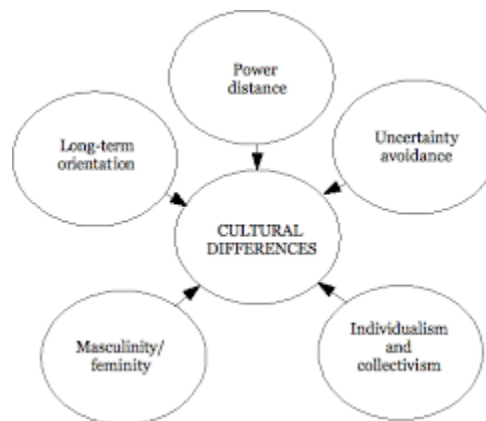


Figure 1: Hofstede's cultural differences (Leung, 2016)

The participative form of leadership helps the organizations in this location to reach the ultimate success and emphasize power distribution. The organizational culture in this location supports collectivism as the employees of the organizations give greater importance to the overall success of the organization rather than their interests. Besides, the country has a low uncertainty avoidance index that supports the organizations of the country can tolerate uncertainty, and take risky projects with several rules and regulations like tax rules, employment regulations, etc (Moran, 2019). As an Islamic republic country, it has practiced masculinity but it has been changing gradually and the culture is supporting femininity with fluid work roles irrespective of gender, supporting

modesty, and concerning to provide happiness. The organizational culture of this country is slightly long-term orientated as it focuses on the future growth of industry supporting short-term achievements and long-term success with persistence and perseverance. BT Group Plc must consider the restraint culture of this country highly focused on social norms.

According to the intercultural communication theory of Samovar, organizations must ensure successful interactions among several cultural practices in several locations to run business operations successfully and it is highly positively correlated with the work performance of the employees and customer attraction (Robinson, 2019). For reaching the goal, BT Group Plc must incorporate effective and appropriate communication and behavior to cope with intercultural situations. The company must understand the non-verbal communication, language style, refusing styles practiced in the location. For example, Iranians use indirect communication styles and look for non-verbal signals. They focus on speaking allegorically for making a point. They use to take a long time for making their point and adopt indirect refusals. They consider direct refusals as behaving rudely and may consider as a signal of ending a relationship that may result from a misunderstanding (Wu, 2016). With having detailed knowledge about the communication style of Iran, BT Group can avoid communication barriers and misunderstandings in the workplace. According to Jandt, BT Group must focus on the history and culture of Iran so that it can have detailed knowledge about intercultural communication and communication skills to cope with Iran. According to the intercultural communication theory of Jandt, personal experiences, and observation have a significant impact on a proper understanding of intercultural communication style (Muhaiza, 2016). The theory suggests that BT Group must focus on communication skills needed to adjust to the Iranian culture for practicing intercultural communication. Besides, this company must focus on technology so that it can understand the overall impact of incorporating new communication technologies in practicing intercultural communication.

Cultural sensitivity regarding international business in Iran

Cultural sensitivity can be defined as the inclination of recognizing core differences among cultural practices in several nations without building any value conclusions of the finding differences. Business organizations must be culturally aware and operate their international business operations having a proper understanding of the organizational culture in the foreign marketplace including employees, suppliers, customers, etc who are part of the same culture

(Zareen, 2020). Iranian marketplace is more culture-sensitive and requires all foreign organizations to have a proper understanding of the Iranian cultures so that the organizations can accept both differences and matches and effectively communicate with stakeholders for building strong relationships.

Effective communication is the key to success in business organizations and the differences among cultural practices make communication more difficult as people have different mindsets, beliefs, language styles, non-verbal signs for practicing different cultures. For example, Iranians practice indirect communication, non-verbal signs that can be more difficult to understand for the people of another nation (Weber, et al, 2016). The Iranian employers and business organizations give more importance to cross-cultural sensitivity and require the organizations to take proper care of the cross-cultural communication skills while dealing in the international marketplace. To adjust to the Iranian culture properly, BT Group must provide its employees with proper training regarding the nature of Iran, its cultural and behavioral scopes, language styles, core values, and beliefs (Jin, 2016). For example, the employees of BT Group must learn the way by which Iranian people show respect toward others, politeness, and love in the organizational environment and foreign business transactions.

As business internationalization is becoming a prime way of having a competitive advantage and grabbing a large market share, organizations must have employees who are culturally skilled and have the working ability in the cross-cultural business environment. The Iranian marketplace requires all foreign companies to have proper training regarding cultural practices as it is a highly culture-sensitive country and also requires the employees must have the ability to cope with every situation in the international marketplace (Tayebi, 2017). This cross-cultural knowledge will help BT Group to develop effective communication strategies required for developing strong relationships with the stakeholders and to improve the self-development process. Communication barriers may fail in reaching business goals and it would harm the productivity and performance of a company in the cross-cultural business environment. For example, Iranian organizations respect the privacy of an Iranian and always avoid all activities harming their pleasure (Hosseini, et al, 2016). If organizations don't have this knowledge, they may harm their pleasure unwillingly which eventually harms their reputation and they may fail to survive in the Iranian marketplace. So, BT Group must assess the Iranian culture in detail and incorporate its cultural practices into

the organizational culture so that the company can cope with the cross-cultural environment while operating business in this location.

Communication barriers in the Iranian marketplace

Several foreign business organizations have faced problems regarding cross-cultural communication like misunderstanding, contradiction, and language differences that resulted in ineffective communication that have caused great harm to the overall performance of the companies in the international market including a loss of productivity. The communication barriers have resulted in several negative effects on the organization for the appearance and productivity of business organizations (Khajeheian, et al, 2018). The foreign companies operating a business in Iran have faced numerous problems in the restraint culture in Iran due to the difference among cultural practices. For example, ABE power company has faced language and communication problems while working in Iran that caused significant loss of this company at the beginning.

Iran is a country with an Islamic republic and the main source of its cultural practices includes Islamic notions, religious values and beliefs, and traditions that have a direct impact on the success of an organization. These religious values and beliefs can not be changed as they are preserved and established by the future generation and organizations willing to operate a business in this location must have detailed knowledge about Iranian culture so that they can adjust to the social environment of business in this location (Fashion, 2018). Cultural practices of a particular location can provide an implied philosophy or model regarding the behavioral expectations of people living there in several situations and communication ways are the main behavioral factor that has a direct impact on organizational success. Bust companies often face several problems regarding communication in this location as the Iranian culture is different and misunderstanding can be caused due to adopting improper communication channels that may proper in other locations (Feldberg, 2015). For this reason, BT Group needs to assess the culture and communication ways of Iran before developing business in this new global market and must distinguish remaining differences in cultural practices in this country so that it can take necessary steps to adjust to the new cultural environment and have an effective communication system.

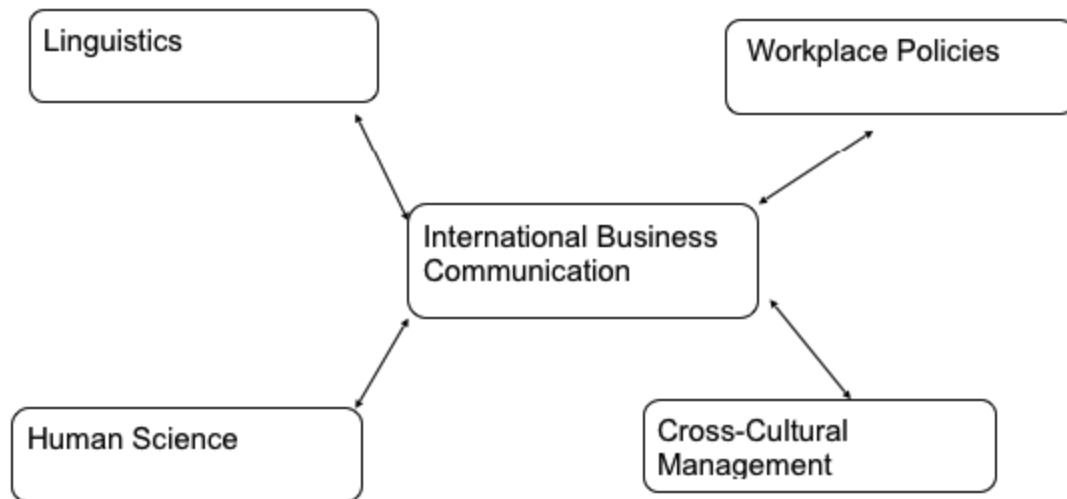


Figure 2: Communication barriers in international business (Sutter, 2019)

The main barriers in intercultural communication are the difference in cultural practices of Iran and the difference in communication patterns that can result in misunderstanding among the partners and stakeholders. For example, AkzoNobel is a foreign business company having its headquarters in the Netherlands faced communication problems as the cultural practices of the Netherlands and Iran are quite different and the customers in Iran didn't accept this company at first resulting in a huge loss of profit of this company (Bauman, 2018). This company had become successful to operate its business in Iran and establish a strong network thereby adjusting to the culture and communication techniques of the Iranian people eventually changing the working pattern of this company and resulting in better performance. Besides, the Iranian people have their ways of expressing several things, that can be unoffending or offending to a foreign company that can be considered as another international trade barrier. Besides, the difference in gesture also must be considered as it is one of the most significant factors of intercultural communication and can be another communication barrier in foreign trade. The language barrier is the most powerful communication barrier and companies often use translators while doing business with foreign countries (Warren, 2017). The language differences can result in increased confusion regarding business terms that must be with high accuracy. As telecommunication businesses require more detailed business terms, language differences can be a great threat for BT Group to conduct business in the Iranian marketplace.

Communication strategies for cross-cultural business communication



Figure 3: Effective communication strategies (Fan, 2015)

International business communication is the prime concern of companies working in a foreign culture where the marketer tries to adopt the cultural practices and communication ways of the foreign country to inform and encourage the customers to purchase and take its products and services. For operating a successful business in the Iranian marketplace, the company must assess the communication channels and techniques that people use in this location and must develop several strategies to conduct effective communication for the ultimate success of the business (Tayebi, 2017). Several strategies are:

- **Understanding the differences:** BT Group must analyze the cultural, language, and other differences in communication in this location so that it can connect with the Iranian business environment and conduct smooth business in this location. To communicate effectively on the global stage, organizations must understand the cultural differences and take necessary steps to adjust to the cultural and social business environment of a location (Hosseini, et al, 2016).
- **Creating a common culture:** Besides adapting communication ways to adjust to different local norms and cultural practices, BT group also needs to have a distributed global team so that the company can adopt business norms of this location. The corporate culture of this company must provide a shared business environment and culture where effective global communication can be ensured.
- **Keeping simple and being flexible:** The company must consider the mistakes of the employees regarding communication very simple and try to provide them with several

training opportunities so that they can understand their mistakes and overcome them effectively (Abugre, 2018). The corporate culture of this company must be very flexible so that it can adopt several communication and business strategies when needed and adjust to the changing business environment.

- **Having multiplatform:** In this era of globalization and technological advancement, organizations should not limit their communication via some specific channels. Rather, BT group must consider several other channels like online material, social media platforms, newsletters according to the culture of Iran so that the company can develop an effective communication platform.
- **Having a partnership with the professionals:** Intercultural communication often include complex communication pattern that may result in mistakes, unintentional rudeness, and fault (Robinson, 2019). By developing partnerships with the professionals, the company can overcome this problem as it can harm the productivity and success of the business.

Other recommendations

- BT Group must ensure clear and polite communication using simple words and avoiding slang phrases and must consider the communication ways of Iranian people.
- The company can learn about the Iranian culture by asking polite questions as the Iranians are more culture-sensitive. Through learning about cultural differences, the company will be able to foster strong workplace relationships (Zareen, 2020).
- Bt group can share its knowledge so that it can find its mistakes and overcome them and also develop effective diversity training programs for its employees so that employees can improve their communication skills and cope with the diverse working environment of Iran.

Conclusion

To survive in the competitive marketplace, organizations have to expand their business on a global scale. For expanding business in iran, BT Group must understand the cultural and environmental differences in this location so that the company can cope with the changing corporate culture and communication ways. There are several cross-cultural communication barriers that the company may face while operating business in this location and the company have to incorporate several strategies to overcome all these barriers and to make strong relationship with the stakeholders there that will help the company to make a strong business network in this location.

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