

BA ASSIGNMENT SPECIFICATION

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Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

Module Learning Outcomes (from module syllabus)
• Demonstrate a systematic understanding, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge of intercultural communication theories • Critically select strategies to overcome potential challenges in business communication

Research on Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges and Response Strategies in Business Cooperation between the UK and Japan

Abstract: This report looks at the problems and coping methods of cross-cultural interaction in British - Japanese business collaboration from the standpoint of British firms. The paper carried out an analysis of major differences on culture dimensions and communication modes based on the theoretical basis from Hofstede, Trompenaars and Hall. The study finds out the main obstacle in certain business situation, such as direct/implicit communication style conflict, decision-making process difference, and difference of time concept. These differences will inevitably result in negotiation deadlock, inefficient cooperation, tension. The research also made targeted strategic suggestions at the levels of preparation, communication practice, organisation and scenarios. In the research conclusion, it is emphasized that the British enterprise needs to take the lead in adapting to high-constancy communication, respect the Japanese decision-making process, and invest in long-term relationships to overcome cultural differences and succeed in their cooperation.

Keywords: cross-cultural communication, British-Japanese business cooperation, cultural differences, coping strategies

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1.0 Introduction

In today's increasingly globalised business environment, cross-cultural communication ability has become a key determinant of the internationalisation success of enterprises (Gardner, 2021). Business relations between Britain and Japan is not just about trade. It's a full-fledged economic partnership that includes shared strategy, an institution for cooperation, and cooperation on the forefront of technology. In July 2025, the two sides signed a clean energy investment agreement worth approximately 10 billion US dollars, together promoting offshore wind power, hydrogen energy, and other projects (GEID, 2025). The cooperation has been upgraded through the high level strategic dialogue on economy (2+2), to make sure that there is a resilient supply chain and the global economic rule can be shaped (Xiang, 2025). These cooperation proves that the cooperation between British and Japanese has surpassed the previous trade relations of commodities and has reached the strategic level of joint setting of industrial standards, maintaining the supply chain safety and promoting technology development. But the large cultural differences between Britain and Japan usually result in miscommunication, inefficiency, or failure of cooperation, which not only causes economic losses directly but also more likely to lose the long-term opportunities.

Cross-cultural communication has difficulty due to different deep cultural values, business practices and communication habits. The British business culture focuses on being direct, individualistic and quick decision making. Japan focuses on implicit expression, collectivism and long-term relationships (Trompenaars and Hampden, 2012). In reality, these differences are often presented as some specific problems such as negotiation deadlock, the difference in understanding of contract, and difficult teamwork. Therefore, it is very meaningful for British companies to enter and develop the Japanese market and to deepen mutual business cooperation to deeply understand the theoretical basis of such cultural differences and to take practical coping strategies. This piece of work, apart from acting as a handbook for British business community, to be able to communicate and work with people in different cultural backgrounds. I

also aim at making a contribution towards increasing the pool of cross-cultural management knowledge with a particular focus on applied research.

This paper studies the cross-cultural communication problems of business cooperation with Japan in Britain. The research aims are divided into three parts. 1. First, use the theoretical framework of Hofstede, Trompenaars, and Hall to explore the root causes of cultural differences between Britain and Japan. 2. Identifying obstacles in business meetings, negotiations, and daily communication, and evaluating their impact on cooperative relations. Thirdly, provide operationally communicative strategies to British enterprises on the basis of theoretical and practical research.

2.0 Cross-cultural Communication Theoretical Framework and Comparison between British and Japanese Cultures

2.1 Core Theory of Cross-Cultural Communication

To understand in an organized way the challenge of doing business communication between the UK and Japan one needs to be based on a mature cross cultural theory. Hofstede's cultural dimension theory gives a classic model for cultural difference quantification (Hofstede, 2011). Power distance is the extent to which a society accepts that power is distributed unequally. British society is tending to be flatter and more questioning of authority. The Japanese society is more hierarchical respectful but it is complicated to coordinate. Individualistic. Emphasis on individuality, independence, directness and tasks. Japan is a country which is based on the concept of the collectivism, since they value the harmony of the group and group consensus as well as maintain the long-term relationship(Beugelsdijk, et al., 2017). These basic differences directly impact on how we make decisions and how we are incentivized. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, the two countries differ greatly. UK is high on tolerance for ambiguity and see rules as flexible guide. Japan belongs to one of the most cultures with high level of uncertainty avoidance globally, which aims to maintain stable environment, have clear procedures and plan in detail to avoid unexpected risks.

The cultural dimensions provided by Trompenaars offer a supplementary perspective (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012). On the universalism and particularism dimensions, the UK leans towards universalism, advocating that universal rules should be equally applicable to all situations. Japan is more inclined towards particularism, believing that specific relationships and contexts should influence decision-making. In terms of achievement orientation and affiliation orientation, the British society mainly assigns status based on individual performance and achievements. The Japanese society places more emphasis on affiliation attributes such as seniority, age, and educational background, which are particularly evident in business etiquette and promotion systems (Woolliams and Trompenaars, 2024).

Hall's high-context and low-context theory is key to understanding the differences in communication styles (Kittler et al., 2011). The UK belongs to the low-context culture that emphasizes explicit and direct expression of information. Japan is a very high-context country where communication is based on understanding things by implication, the value of silence, and tone as well as the relationships and “atmosphere” of the situation. This difference also makes it possible for the British business person to misunderstand the implied expressions and silence of the Japanese partner as well as for the Japanese partner to find the directness of the British business person too abrupt.

2.2 Comparison of Business Environment Characteristics between the UK and Japan

British business organizations are generally more streamlined and flexible. Decision making power does not highly centralized or project-orientated. (Bloom and Van Reenen, 2007). On the other hand, Japan retains some elements of the “keiretsu” system. Enterprises often have close cooperation networks. British business organizations generally chase for making decisions efficiently. Authorization and individuals are clear, the decision-making process is faster. Japanese enterprises generally use the system of prior communication and writing requests (Lincoln and Gerlach, 2004). The decision-making process is all about layer by layer decision

making coordination in an organisation for widespread agreement. Although it is a slow process, it is good for quick implementation after the decision has been made.

The role of the government is not quite the same in each of these nations. The British government is mainly the role of the market regulator and service promoter. Technological innovation is mainly led by the market and enterprises. The Japanese government and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is also more actively involved in formulating industrial policies. It's tech development plan usually shows bigger picture direction and planning done at a national level (Aoki, 2012). Such differences can affect the strategic plans, international cooperation methods of the companies from both of these two countries.

3.0 The core challenges in business communication between the UK and Japan

3.1 Differences in language and communication methods

British business communication favors direct and clear expressions, regarding such expressions as efficient and professional. In meetings, the British side is quick to cut to the chase and express their position openly. On the other hand, the Japanese side is often conveying the information in an indirect manner with euphemistic language to maintain harmony (Keser, 2024). The meaning of silence varies depending on the two different business communication. In the British meeting, the silence is often interpreted as agreement, or not participating. People will usually speak in order to avoid being awkward. In Japan, people who remain silent could be thinking deeply, keeping their opinions to themselves, or out of respect. In terms of nonverbal communication, the British are relatively simple. The emphasis is on handshaking and eye contact. Japan has an advanced nonverbal system: bowing etiquette and the Usunier and Roulin (2010) business card exchange ceremony. Giving out your business card, both hands should be used to hand it out, read the card carefully. Seats have a hierarchy as well. If the British side does not abide by these etiquette rules, for example, when they receive a business card with one hand and place it randomly, it

may be seen as rude by the Japanese side, thereby affecting the formation of business relationships.

3.2 Challenges in Key Business Situations

In the specific British - Japanese business interactions, cultural differences become a number of observable situational difficulties (Saka, 2004). Business meetings in the two countries operate on completely different logic. British meetings always have an agenda and have very clear time limits, they like to do debates at the spot and want immediate decisions. On the other hand, Japanese meetings put a higher emphasis on information sharing and relationship building, and the actual decisions are made through pre-communications. Therefore, if the British participants push for a resolution to come up during the meeting, they may be seen as a person who is causing trouble by the Japanese and is not patient (Clausen, 2007).

In the process of negotiating, the most important difference is on what the contract is. British negotiators consider contracts to be detailed legal documents that are clear and precise about rights and obligations, highlighting the clear and closed nature of the terms. The Japanese negotiators would look at it as a starting point of a long-term relationship rather than a set of rigid terms, the focus is on trust and building relationships. Such a difference results in the British side believing that the Japanese side is not strictly following the contract during the execution process, whereas the Japanese side believes that the British side does not have sufficient flexibility and trust (Moni, 2006). The style of writing differs greatly. British business emails are efficient, direct and concise. In Japanese business written communication, they are very formal and have long greetings and thank yous at the start of an email.

The concepts of conflict resolution of the two countries is completely opposite. British culture enables the use of arguments for positive purposes and looks at feedback in the form of giving someone or something direct criticism or advice in order to solve it. In contrast, Japan is a 'harmonious' culture where to be openly

against each other would be a disruption to the harmony of the group (Annas and Miller, 2024). criticism must be carried out in a very implicit, not face to face, and without revealing the person's name. In addition, people's function of informal communication in social settings is also being ignored. Japan's "drink meeting" (dining after work). It is a must for all business, and the best opportunity to form mutual trust and test each other.

3.3 Conflict between time concept and working style

The British business culture is a very one way time orientation with schedules and deadlines and completing everything as fast as possible (Mole, 2001). British managers are inclined to set up rigorous time schedules, expecting the project to be carried out according to the plan, and the decision-making process focuses on speed and efficiency. The time orientation is one of individualism, where individuals have the power to make decisions for themselves to speed things up (Hofstede, 2001). On the other hand, a Japanese working style emphasizes the completion of the process. decisions need to go through several levels of approval and agreement from everyone. But, it is time-consuming but it makes sure the comprehensiveness of the decision and organizational commitment (Matsushita, 2023). Relationships established differently. The British have a short term Transactional orientation and Partnerships are easily formed. Trust is based on the terms of contract. And also japan values the relationship between two companies in a long-term way, so a cooperation deal will not take place until a mutual understanding has occurred.

3.4 The potential impact of communication errors

Cross - culture communication failures may result in some really bad business impacts (Siewert et al., 2016). The most immediate is relationship break down, in Japan long-term trust is a key part of business relations. Cultural misunderstanding might be viewed as a lack of respect or professionalism, and the Japanese party would terminate the cooperation negotiation. economic loss is often greater than expected. Opportunity costs arising from negotiation failures include missed market entry opportunities, wasted invested resources, and foregone potential profits. Brett(2007) pointed out that the failure rate of cross - cultural negotiation is about 30% higher

than that of same - culture negotiation, and misunderstanding of communication is the main reason. Brands' reputations have taken damage as well. Cultural errors that British firms commit on the Japanese market could quickly go viral via social media and business networks, which might impact future collaboration possibilities. For instance, publicly criticizing Japanese partners or violating business etiquette may be remembered for a long time within the industry, damaging the company's reputation throughout the Japanese market. Such effects were also interrelated and created a negative loop, thus the company could hardly establish a foothold in the Japanese market.

4.0 Response strategies and best practices

4.1 Preparation stage strategy

The successful cooperation of the British Japanese Business Cooperation starts with thorough preparation work. Dive in for cultural research and cross-cultural training is the basic investment (Zhu et al., 2006). Provide a series of training to employees who go to Japan, such as Japanese business etiquette training, Japanese decision-making process training, Japanese communication style training, etc. Training shouldn't only focus on the theory side, we also need role play or analyze a few cases, workers will get the real situation to observe the different culture. Hiring cultural consultants or experts for the Japanese market can be very helpful. Building Local Partnerships is also a key aspect. You can have local Japanese companies, or local intermediaries who help you get a feeling for the market, who bring you to the customers, and also who can be cultural intermediaries. This partnership can help British businesses to be part of the Japanese business network faster, and make the risk of first-time culture conflicts less. Investing a lot of time and effort into preparing before will greatly improve the chance of succeeding at the next cooperation.

4.2 Communication Practice Strategies

British businessmen have to adapt to a high-context style of communication actively. This means learning how to interpret information that is not stated explicitly and nonverbal signals as well instead of depending only on its literal meaning. From a

practical perspective one has to be careful of how a group behaves together (meeting atmosphere), one should not take control of a talk or start talking because it is very silent. Using a more stepwise approach for relationship building matches Japanese business culture. The British side should not press for a contract sign on the first meeting. Instead of doing that, you should spend your time in many meetings, parties and chats to earn trust slowly. Respecting the Hierarchy and Decision making process too. The British side should be aware of the Japanese organizational structure, communicate at the right level of the organization. Nemawashi, ringi decision-making mechanisms require patience, one shouldn't urge for quick decisions. written confirmation, plus follow-up after follow-up can help close the communication gap. Send a detailed summary after the meeting so you can understand it. Important decisions should be repeatedly confirmed by many people in order to reduce the risk of misunderstanding.

4.3 Organizational-level strategy

Strategies at an organizational level can provide the structure that individuals are working with. Setting up cross-cultural teams works, with people who know both cultures on the team. Ideally, they are Britons who have worked in Japan, Japanese people who have received an education in the UK, or those with dual backgrounds. Creating a cultural adaptability communication policy will make the best practices into institutions. It needs to make clear the standard for communication with Japanese counterparts, like what format of emails, how to behave in meetings, how to give feedback etc. This way, all of the company's employees follow the same cultural sensitivity standards, and individual mistakes don't harm the entire relationship. Using technical equipment to help communicate may ease some of the problems. Video conferences enhance the visibility of nonverbal signals, cooperation platforms give written records, and translation software aids in language barriers. A lot of the things that we could have as a strategy within the organization will be great and will result well if everyone works on them for a very long time.

4.4 Specific Scene Response Techniques

Different business situations need varied target response strategies. On meetings, the British side should first talk with the Japanese side in an informal way, before holding the real meeting. In this way, they could get to know the position and ideas of the Japanese side. This is respectful of the “nemawashi” process. During the meeting, do not suddenly bring up new topics or require immediate decisions. Prepare the meeting materials in detail, and distribute them in advance so that the Japanese side has enough time to prepare. Meeting, pay attention to seating arrangements, show respect for the hierarchical order, let the seniors go first. Being in a negotiation means that the most important thing to possess would be to be patient. The British side need to adjust their time expectations, building relationships is given more importance than quick transactions. First negotiation: Mutual understanding, not the details of the contract. To drink after work in social activities. They offer good chances to make our relations closer. Avoid using time pressure or ultimatums which are very negative in Japanese culture. Feedback needs to be given indirectly so as not to damage the other person's dignity. Public criticism is considered to be a very serious offense against manners in Japanese culture. Negative feedback should be given individually and privately, it is better to use soft language, such as "Maybe we can try another way", don't directly point out the mistakes. it is sometimes more suitable to deliver some sensitive information by means of a third party. Positive feedback is also not advisable. Do not overly praise people but neglect to mention the contribution of the team, making the praised person embarrassed.

5.0 Conclusion

This study made systematic analysis on the cross-cultural communication obstacles to business cooperation between the UK and Japan from a British perspective. The main discoveries showed that cultural differences between the UK and Japan come from big parts like power distance, how much a group sticks together, and fear of not knowing what will happen. The biggest hindrances to cultural misunderstandings are the distinctions between high-context and low-context communication, resulting in the misunderstanding of messages and poor relationships. Some business scenarios

have quite different processes for meetings that make decisions, the pace at which they negotiate, the forms of written communications, and how to resolve conflicts. The concept of time has different conflicts between efficiency orientation and process orientation and short-term transactions and long-term relationships. If the above situation happens, our business connection will be broken. Brands' reputation and money losses are expected. The main content of the study is the fusion of theory and practice. The theoretical framework is to grasp the root and the systematic nature of cultural differences, and the practical strategies are for solving cultural differences. Cultural training and expert recruitment in preparation stage, high-context adaptation in communication and gradual relationship building within organization, cross-cultural teams and policy formulation at organization level, response techniques for specific situations, all of them make up a multi-level response system. Successful UK-Japan business cooperation not only requires understanding cultural differences, but also requires actively adjusting behaviors and expectations, seeking effective communication bridges while respecting the cultures of both parties.

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