

MANAGING GUEST EXPERIENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

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Executive summary

Cultural differences between different countries lead to important implication for the service expectation and delivery in the hotel sector. Radisson Blu, Durham located in the UK serves international guests and thus, it is significant for the hotel staff to have knowledge of the cultural differences and its implication for the behaviour towards different visitors. This report critically analyses the cultural differences between the UK and Japan using Hofstede's cultural dimension framework. Based on the comparative analysis of the two countries 'Do's' and 'Don'ts' for the service staff regarding behaving with the Japanese guests have been summarised in the report.

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Introduction

For improved customer satisfaction and ensuring customer loyalty hotels along with meeting the basic lodging needs of the guests need to enhance the guest experience by identifying their needs. International hotels like Radisson Blu, Durham needs to ensure culturally appropriate behaviour to the international guests which are informed by cultural intelligence and sensitivity. In this report, a critical evaluation of cultural intelligence and sensitivity using cross-cultural theories and models has been provided for understanding the importance of cultural sensitivity and intelligence for the guest service implications for Japanese guests. The culturally appropriate behaviours and the inadequate behaviours have been listed as a briefing document for the staff.

Critical evaluation of cultural intelligence and sensitivity

The hotel staff of Radisson Blu, Durham, UK need to be aware of the different guest preferences for visitors from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Mok and Armstrong (1998, p. 384) note that cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour and attitude can be noticed in the hospitality industry as customers from different cultures can have different expectations and needs for hotel services.

Cultural intelligence and sensitivity are pivotal in effective guest service experience which can be assessed using cross-cultural theories and models. The role of national culture in shaping individual behaviour can be understood from Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. Torres *et al.* (2014, p. 8) noted that Hofstede suggested five dimensions which are power distance, masculinity/ femininity, long-term/ short-term orientation, individualism/ collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance which provides an effective framework for service experience. Using this framework, cultural differences can be understood from a country perspective. Arora and Rohmetra (2010, p. 219) note CQ or Cultural Intelligence is the ability of a person to function effectively in culturally diverse situations. The cultural dimensions according to Hofstede (2009, p. 2) are:

Power distance index

Power distance index indicates the extent to which individuals in the lower level of the hierarchy level accepts the power inequality Hofstede (2009, p. 2). It suggests that the society's level of inequality is promoted by the followers along with the leaders.

Individualism

Orr *et al.* (2008, p. 2) noted that individualism vs collectivism illustrates the relationship between individual and the group in a society. Individualism means people are more concerned with their interest and only consider the close relatives and family members. Collectivism indicates higher ability to perform in-group activities and better team cohesion.

Uncertainty avoidance

Taras *et al.* (2010, p.6) noted that uncertainty avoidance index suggests the extent to which a particular society feels threatened by the uncertainty and attempts to avoid the uncertainty. However, it does not imply an individual's tendency of avoiding risks.

Masculinity vs femininity

This dimension identifies the level of masculinity in a society in terms of the values like assertiveness and achievement motivation. Femininity is contrasting to masculinity indicates the culture that emphasises on the holistic wellbeing rather than profit, success, and social status (Dartey-Baah, 2013, p. 42).

Long-term orientation

Long-term orientation means the past and present oriented values in different cultures that differentiate one culture from another. Some cultures are short-term oriented and people in those culture focus on short-term goals rather than focussing on the long-term vision (Taras *et al.* 2010, p. 7).

Country A (UK)

Power distance	35
Individualism	89
Masculinity	66
Uncertainty avoidance	35
Long term orientation	51

Table 1

(Source: Hofstede Insights. 2021)

The UK has a lower ranking in PDI which indicates in this society people believe that inequality among people needs to be reduced. In terms of individualism, the country fosters an

individualistic society where people are supposed to look after themselves and their direct family. With a higher individualism score British are individualist and private people (Hofstede Insights. 2021). The UK has a high score in masculinity index and it suggests that the dominant values of the society are masculine which means people are success-driven and achievement oriented. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, the UK has a low score that indicates British people are comfortable with uncertainty. The long-term orientation score of the UK indicates the orientation of British people can vary.

Country B (Japan)

Power-distance index	54
Individualism	46
Masculinity	95
Uncertainty avoidance	92
Long-term orientation	88

Table 2

(Source: Hofstede Insights. 2021)

In terms of power-distance index 54 score for Japan suggests it is a hierarchical society and Japanese people are conscious of their hierarchical position (Hofstede Insights. 2021). In terms of individualism vs collectivism Japan is a collectivist society that means higher level of harmony in groups and they have a consciousness of losing face in front of other group members. The high masculinity score suggests Japan is a highly masculine society that means Japanese people are assertive, and competitive. In terms of uncertainty avoidance, Japan has one of the most uncertainty avoiding cultures and they are threatened of uncertainties. A high score in the long-term orientation indicates Japan is a long-term oriented society that means rather than short-term goals the Japanese people are more concerned with the long-term goals.

Country analysis

Before focusing on hotel guest service implications for international guests, cultural intelligence and sensitivity are crucial for the front-line employees, managers, housekeepers, and waiters in a hotel because they directly interact with the guests. Mok and Armstrong (1998, p. 384) used the SERVQUAL instrument for measuring service quality and identified that expectations differ in different cultural groups which means what is important for the guests from the USA, might not be as important for the guests from Japan. You *et al.* (2000, p. 6)

noted that understanding cultural differences from the perspective of individualism vs collectivism helps in understanding the difference between Western and Eastern culture

Service implications for Japanese guests need to be informed by the Japanese cultural norms and values, which differ significantly from the cultural factors of the UK. Japanese guests are inclined towards long-term commitment and stability which indicate the scope of developing a loyal Japanese customer base by effective cultural intelligence and awareness. For the front-line staff of the hotel, cultural intelligence and sensitivity are vital for driving satisfaction. Pingitore *et al.* (2013, p. 9) noted that for Japanese guests, accurate reservation has 98%, no billing error has 99%, the problem-free stay has 89% impact in the context of guest satisfaction. It indicates that the receptionist, housekeepers, service providers, and the hotel manager need to ensure the guests do not face problems in their stay. Tabari *et al.* (2016, p. 13) noted that Japanese customers have different practices in the case of tipping as in Japan tipping is considered as disrespectful and they tend to complain only after their stay through a travel agent which indicates their reluctance in complaining about the issues. Heo *et al.* (2004, p. 40) noted that the Asian service style emphasises personal attention and customisation rather than standardisation and efficiency. It indicates that hotel managers need to ensure that the Japanese guests are provided personalised services based on their needs and preferences in terms of food, and accommodation. In terms of communication, from Hall's theory, it is identified that some cultures prefer high-context communication which means indirect, implicit, and non-verbal communication Heo *et al.* (2004, p. 41). Asian cultures like Japanese culture prefers high-context communication which means gestures, body language, nodding, eye-contact, and non-verbal interaction during service encounter are vital. Front-line staff like the receptionists, butlers, housekeepers and waiters need to ensure effective non-verbal communication and quality of interactions. In Asian cultures like Japanese culture non-verbal behaviours including gestures, facial expressions, body movements, eye contact, gestures can be interpreted differently which can cause misunderstandings. Thus, hoteliers who directly interact with the Japanese guests need to recognise the meaning of the non-verbal actions.

Summary

For effectively communicating and interacting with the Japanese guests, the following guideline can be followed by the frontline employees to ensure accommodation of specific cultural norms and requirements.

Do's	Don'ts
• Bowing when bows to you • Bend from the waist keeping the back straight • Bowing lower than the other person while bowing to older people • Be punctual, modest, and polite • Welcome the guests with Japanese words • Be formal • Do provide oriental options and chopsticks • Offer cards with both hands • Be prompt • Provide services with respect, and patience • Be empathetic towards complaints • Accept the inequality between guest and service provider • Do provide equal attention to all group members • Practice instant guest pacification	• Don't bow first • Don't ask for or show an expectation for a tip • Don't consider silence to be rude • Don't monopolise the conversation • Don't interact casually • Don't forget any information • Don't keep complaints unattended • Don't make the guest wait for a service • Don't make errors in bills and specifications • Don't be informal while interacting • Don't greet in Chinese or assume their ethnicity • Don't talk or laugh loudly

Conclusion

Because of the power/distance difference and the tendency of individualism over collectivism the culture of the UK differs largely from Japan. For enhancing guest service satisfaction for the Japanese guests, it is crucial to consider the non-verbal behaviours, and Japanese etiquettes by the staff to ensure culturally sensitive interaction which can have positive guest service implications.

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