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BA(Hons) Business Management
Intercultural Communication in
International Pharmaceutical
Partnerships: A Critical Analysis of
AstraZeneca UK and Daiichi Sankyo
Japan

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1. Introduction

The growing globalisation of the pharmaceutical sector has elevated intercultural communication from a valuable managerial asset to a strategic competency that directly impacts organisational efficacy. Multinational strategic alliances allow businesses to merge complementary scientific knowledge, technical advancements, and global market insights; yet, their success hinges on the capacity of culturally different teams to effectively communicate, collaborate, and make choices. Current cross-cultural management studies acknowledge that variations in communication styles constitute a major obstacle to knowledge dissemination, trust formation, and efficient collaboration in global organisations, especially when personnel function within diverse cultural contexts (Mushaathoni, 2025).

The tactical partnership between Astra Zeneca UK (2025) and Daiichi Sankyo (2025) Japan serves as a pertinent case study for analysing these difficulties. Employees from both businesses engage in substantial collaboration across research, regulatory, clinical, and commercial functions through their global partnership in the discovery and commercialisation of new oncology therapeutics (Astra Zeneca, 2026). Although British and Japanese employees strive for same organisational goals, their cultural expectations lead to divergent methods of workplace communication, affecting the transmission, interpretation, and reaction to information. These disparities could influence the efficacy of decision-making, the establishment of relationships, and the execution of projects if they remain unacknowledged and inadequately addressed.

This paper rigorously examines the disparities in communication between British and Japanese teams via the lens of Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory (1989) as the primary analytical framework. Hall's thesis offers a significant viewpoint for analysing the impact of implicit and explicit communication styles on multicultural interactions in multinational corporations (Cardon, 2008). Nonetheless, the discourse will also rigorously evaluate the degree to which Hall's paradigm encapsulates the intricacies of modern

international commerce, acknowledging both its pragmatic significance and its theoretical constraints. The essay seeks to assess the impact of communication disparities on organisational efficacy by synthesising theory with empirical data from the AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo partnership, while also exploring how enhanced intercultural awareness might foster more robust collaboration and superior project results.

2. Company Background

AstraZeneca PLC is a global biopharmaceutical company headquartered in Cambridge, United Kingdom, specialising in the research, development and commercialisation of prescription medicines, particularly within oncology, cardiovascular, respiratory and rare diseases (AstraZeneca, 2025). Daiichi Sankyo Company, Limited, headquartered in Tokyo, Japan, is a leading pharmaceutical organisation recognised for its expertise in innovative cancer therapies, particularly antibody-drug conjugate (ADC) technology (Daiichi Sankyo, 2025). Through their strategic collaboration, both organisations combine complementary scientific capabilities and global resources to accelerate the development and commercialisation of innovative oncology medicines, strengthening their competitive position within the international pharmaceutical industry.

The pharmaceutical sector is characterised by extensive global collaboration, requiring organisations to combine specialised scientific expertise, advanced research capabilities and worldwide commercial knowledge. As argued by Aylor et al. (2018), strategic partnerships have become essential for accelerating pharmaceutical innovation while reducing the financial and operational risks associated with drug development. Within this context, the alliance between AstraZeneca PLC and Daiichi Sankyo Company, Limited represents a significant example of international collaboration focused on developing and commercialising antibody-drug conjugates (ADCs), an innovative class of targeted cancer therapies (Taylor, 2026). Although both organisations operate within the same industry and pursue shared strategic objectives, they have

evolved in distinct national and organisational contexts (Ang and Dyne, 2015). Consequently, collaboration throughout the pharmaceutical product lifecycle requires continuous communication between multidisciplinary teams, where cultural differences may influence how information is exchanged, interpreted and applied during complex decision-making. Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory therefore provides an appropriate framework for analysing these communication differences within the AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo partnership.

3. Theoretical Framework: Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory

Edward T. Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory helps explain how national culture affects international commercial communication. Beyond Culture (Hall, 1976) proposed that civilisations transmit meaning differently through verbal communication or implicitly through environmental signals, collective experiences, and nonverbal behaviours. Hall's theory, originally developed to explain intercultural engagement, continues to shape multinational corporation research because communication disparities cause misinterpretation, decreased cooperation, and organisational discord in culturally diverse teams (Zada, 2023).

In low-context societies like the UK, communication is basic, direct, and predictable. In low-context communication, the spoken or written word conveys much of the intended meaning without contextual interpretation (Hall, 1976). Employees are required to speak openly, voice their thoughts, and offer constructive feedback. This communication methods help complicated multinational firms make rapid decisions, reduce uncertainty, and increase responsibility. Clear communication defines goals, roles, and performance expectations in global and virtual teams, improving coordination (PL Projects, 2025).

However, high-context civilisations like Japan rely on implicit communication, interpersonal interactions, and context comprehension. Nonverbal cues, silence, vocal tone, and social context convey meaning, according to Hall (1976). Japanese firms value peace, respect, and avoiding conflict, hence indirect communication is common. Therefore, criticism may be delivered indirectly, leaving coworkers to interpret meaning from surrounding signals. Current intercultural communication research affirms the relevance of contextual communication in relationship-focused cultures and that organisational environment and professional experience affect communication practises (The Oxford Review, 2025).

Hall's idea is useful in international companies when cultural differences rather than language obstacles create communication failures. The model shows managers that miscommunications can happen even with exceptional language skills (Shaules, 2024). A British project manager may take a Japanese colleague's reply, "We will consider this proposal further," as preliminary acceptance, yet the speaker may be politely criticising to maintain social peace. Hall's theory explains how contextual factors affect trust, collaboration, and decision-making in culturally diverse teams, making it important to international pharmaceutical collaborations like AstraZeneca and Daiichi Sankyo.

Despite its long-term impact on intercultural communication research, Hall's approach has been challenged for reducing national cultures to high- or low-context categories. Kittler, Rygl, and Mackinnon (2011) found that organisational culture, professional identity, foreign experience, personality, and country culture affect communication behaviour. The development of globalisation, digital communication, and international organisations has pushed people to adjust their communication tactics to corporate demands rather than national cultural standards. Hall's framework is a theory for analysing communication patterns, not a human conduct description.

Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory is still useful for analysing intercultural communication in multinational organisations because it provides a

solid analytical framework for studying how cultural communication preferences affect work collaboration between British and Japanese professionals. The theory may be utilised critically to analyse how contextual communication discrepancies affect information transmission, decision-making, and cooperation in the AstraZeneca-Daiichi Sankyo partnership rather than assuming national stereotypes. According to the press release (Daiichi Sankyo, 2026), Daiichi Sankyo's Japanese research teams and AstraZeneca's international clinical development, regulatory, and commercial teams must collaborate to develop and commercialise ENHERTU and Datroway worldwide. Japanese teams may communicate indirectly and seek internal consensus before making decisions, unlike British teams. Thus, Hall's method can help analyse how these competing communication styles effect collaboration, but it must be considered alongside organisational and interpersonal factors. The following chapter applies Hall's theoretical framework to organisational practise and critically assesses its effectiveness and limitations in promoting effective communication and international collaboration.

4. Critical Analysis of Communication Differences

4.1 Communication Styles: Direct vs. Indirect

Based on Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory, the AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo cooperation shows how different communication styles affect multinational pharmaceutical project collaboration. Hall (1976) claims that British organisations prefer straightforward, low-context communication, whereas Japanese organisations prefer contextual understanding and implicit communications. In the collaborative development and commercialisation of ENHERTU and DATROWAY, research, regulatory, and commercial teams must communicate across different nations (Daiichi Sankyo, 2026).

In regulatory filings and global clinical trials, direct communication fosters openness, fast information exchange, and effective project collaboration. In

contrast, indirect communication builds trust and reduces conflict in long-term cooperation. British workers may view indirect comments as indecisive (British Council, 2022), whereas Japanese workers may view direct criticism as hostile. The AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo partnership's performance demonstrates that both companies have adjusted their communication to meet cultural variations while achieving strategic goals.

4.2 Decision-Making and Knowledge Sharing

Hall's theory also shows how communication affects multinational pharmaceutical partnerships' decision-making and information exchange. AstraZeneca and Daiichi Sankyo collaborate on new antibody-drug conjugates by sharing research, regulatory data, and marketing strategies. In this fully integrated relationship, AstraZeneca provides worldwide clinical development and commercial experience while Daiichi Sankyo handles production and supply according to Brennan (2019).

Before sharing choices, Japanese high-context communication fosters trust, long-term relationships, and collaborative accountability, according to Hall (1976). This method improves challenging scientific choices by promoting greater consultation. When fast action is needed, consensus-building may delay decision-making (Laurent, 2023). British emphasis on explicit communication speeds up decision-making and responsibility but may ignore contextual issues that improve long-term collaboration. Therefore, Hall's theory proposes that effective international partnerships balance efficient communication with relationship management rather than supporting one communication style over another.

4.3 Critical Analysis of Hall's Theory in the AstraZeneca-Daiichi Sankyo Partnership

The above findings show that Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory helps explain how cultural communication preferences affect AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo collaboration. The successful co-development of ENHERTU and DATROWAY shows the value of interdisciplinary team

communication in research, clinical development, manufacturing, regulatory affairs, and commercialisation. Scientific skills and intercultural communication to share information across organisational and national barriers are needed for these initiatives.

Hall's ability to explain why communication problems may exist despite professional competence and English language competency is a strength. Cultural differences rather than language limitations cause misunderstandings as argued by Merschdof Helena (The surprising paradox of intercultural communication | TEDxNelson, 2022). British professionals prefer direct feedback and speedy clarification, whereas Japanese colleagues may speak more cautiously to maintain interpersonal harmony, according to Hall's distinction between explicit and implicit communication. These differences can minimise conflict, promote trust, and boost collaboration in global teams.

However, Hulatt (2022) argues that Hall's theory has considerable drawbacks when used alone. Organisational goals, professional expertise, and shared scientific standards influence communication behaviour, as shown by the AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo partnership's success. Both companies operate in highly regulated worldwide environments that need uniform communication, minimising national culture's effect in many operational scenarios. Thus, corporate culture, professional identity, and legal needs must be addressed while assessing communication techniques.

Since its founding, the alliance has increased ENHERTU and DATROWAY clinical use and received additional worldwide regulatory approvals. These results show that shared goals, clear roles, and ongoing information sharing may overcome cultural barriers and enable effective collaboration. Hall's theory remains useful, but it's more informative when supplemented with organisational and industry-specific viewpoints. The next chapter's suggestions are based on this evaluation.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This research has thoroughly analysed the impact of cultural communication disparities on the partnership between AstraZeneca UK and Daiichi Sankyo Japan, utilising Hall's High- and Low-Context Communication Theory. The examination reveals that British and Japanese professionals engage in communication based on distinct cultural inclinations, influencing information sharing, decision-making, and collaboration. Hall's theory offers a significant elucidation of these disparities by demonstrating the impact of explicit and implicit communication on international cooperation. The results further suggest that communication in the pharmaceutical sector is influenced by country culture as well as organisational goals, professional knowledge, and regulatory mandates. Thus, Hall's theory ought to be viewed as a valuable analytical structure rather than a comprehensive elucidation of communicative behaviour.

To enhance future cooperation, AstraZeneca and Daiichi Sankyo ought to introduce specialised cross-cultural communication training that cultivates employees' comprehension of both high-context and low-context communication modalities. Such training would enhance cultural sensitivity, diminish misunderstandings, and facilitate more efficient cooperation among interdisciplinary teams. Furthermore, both entities have to implement systematic communication procedures, including documented meeting recaps, clear affirmation of resolutions, and periodic multicultural feedback discussions. These actions would diminish uncertainty while honouring the communication preferences of both British and Japanese staff. Ultimately, fostering cultural intelligence via global leadership training and interdisciplinary team projects would empower managers to refine their communication approaches more adeptly. These suggestions will collectively bolster information exchange, refine decision-making, and further augment the enduring success of the AstraZeneca–Daiichi Sankyo collaboration within a progressively global pharmaceutical sector.

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