Australian culture vs japanese culture management essay

Cross cultural communication involves focusing on the communication of two different cultures so the two can be compared. Cultural communication styles are analysed in terms of its' own values and practices, making similarities and differences become visible upon comparison. Intercultural communication occurs when two or more people from two different cultures interact, and involves interpreting what is occurring at the point when communication is taking place (Varner & Beamer 2010). The purpose of this essay is to describe the international behaviour from the Australian culture and advise how they should modify their cultural behaviour to negotiate successfully in Japan. In negotiations between dissimilar cultural contexts there is an increased likelihood that the information exchange will be adversely affected by the complexities with regard to noise (Varner & Beamer 2010). For this reason, the two cultures must be compared and described using cultural generalisations from etic research studies as a basis for comparison. These are referred to as cultural value dimensions. It is these studies about whole cultures that can give us conclusions about the culture, using a positivist approach (Varner & Beamer 2010). This essay also aims to inform the reader on how Australian culture members should bridge the gap for successful negotiation between the two cultures.

Geert Hofstedes' Power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of organisations and institutions accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The Australian culture has a power distance index of 36 which is considered relatively low and "…indicates a greater equality between societal levels, including government, social organisations, and even within families" (, n. d). " This orientation reinforces a cooperative

interaction across power levels and creates a stable cultural environment"
(Wiseman, Pilton & Lowe 2005, p. 5), in the way that every voice has equal
weight and members are willing to listen to diverse viewpoints. Cultures with
low power distance tend to focus more on earned status (LeBaron 2003).

The Japanese culture has a high power distance index which translates the
culture as having some members with a lot of power and some very little.
They view role and status hierarchy as normal and management do not wish
for the participation from their employees. Cultures with a high power
distance have some members who are considered superior to others
because of their social status, gender, race, age, education, birth, personal
achievements or family background and generally have an ascribed status
(LeBaron 2003).

Another difference between the two cultures to be discussed is their
uncertainty avoidance index. Uncertainty avoidance "…indicates to what
extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or
comfortable in unstructured situations" (www. geert-hofstede. com, n. d).
The Australian culture has a low index of 38 which implies they are more
open to different opinions and accept other people's way of doing things. The
Japanese culture is anxious about finding the one right way of doing things
making their uncertainty avoidance index high. They prefer structured
circumstances and employees show a high level of commitment to a
company by remaining longer with their current employer. (Hofstede 2001).

The Australian culture reflects a high level of individualism with an index of
90, making it the second highest score of any country in Hofstedes' survey,

after the United States of America. " Individualism refers to the extent to which people are expected to stand up for themselves and to choose their own affiliations" (www. geert-hofstede. com, n. d). This is reinforced in their daily lives with emphasis on individual achievements and rights, and the right to make decisions for one self. Although a collectivist culture such as Japan places a strong emphasis on group harmony and interdependence and act chiefly as a member of a long-life group or organisation, they are also regarded as a masculine culture. (Hofstede 2001). According to Hofstede (2001), masculinity versus femininity refers to the distribution of roles between genders, and Japan with a masculinity index of 95 and Australia 61, assures that both cultures value assertiveness, material success, self-assurance, power, strength and individual achievements. The Australian culture does not object to the display of emotion making them an emotional culture whereas, in a neutral culture such as Japan, members are taught not to display their feelings. They accept and are aware of their emotions but are in control of them for the sake of saving face (Adler, Doktor & Redding 1986).

Australia is a universalistic culture where rules and laws can be applied to anyone and agreements and contracts are used as the basis for doing business. Rules are used to determine what is right and wrong and there is a strong belief contracts should not be altered or broken (Varner & Beamer 2010). Japan is a particularistic culture where an emphasis on relationships is considered more important than rules, and agreements are changeable. Contracts are made based upon relationships and rather than rules

distinguishing right from wrong, the situation is looked upon to determine what is acceptable (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner 2007).

The cultural value differences between the Australian and Japanese cultures create an increased likelihood that the performance outcomes of cross-cultural negotiations between culturally dissimilar negotiators will be negatively influenced (Simintiras & Thomas 1998). For effective intercultural communication to take place, it needs to be understood what cultural variables create noise in the communication process, as this knowledge will enable the Australian culture to take steps to minimise noise, and so improve communication. Cultural noise refers to impediments to successful communication between two cultures, when a member of one culture sends a message to a member of another culture (Moran 1988). The message contains the meaning intended by the encoder but when it reaches the receiver, it undergoes a transformation in which the influence of the decoder's culture becomes part of the meaning (Kirkman, Lowe & Gibson 2006). Persons involved in intercultural communication should be aware of the barriers which may affect the message from being interpreted in the way the sender intended. " This requires a special understanding of the communication process and the various sources of cultural noise which may impede" (O'Connell 1999, p. 67).

There are many behavioural characteristics that may prove troublesome for effective intercultural communication between two different cultural groups. The particular aspects that create noise between the Australian culture and the Japanese culture to be discussed are non-verbal behaviour including

kinesic and para-language, and the context in which the communication takes place.

Non-verbal communication is behaviour that communicates without the use of words and includes the use of body language, kinesics and para-language. ' Kinesic behaviour' includes body movements such as posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact. While these gestures are common universally, their meanings are often culturally specific (Abercrombie 1968). The Japanese feel uncomfortable when faced with eye-contact (Oculesics), as they are taught at a young age to bow their heads out of humility, whereas the automatic response from the Australian culture is to look at the person who is speaking to them (Abercrombie 1968). During negotiations, this should be acknowledged.

The term para-language refers to how something is said rather than the content and includes the rate of speech, the tone and inflection of voice, laughing and even silence. In the Japanese culture, silence may be a way of saying no, of being offended or of waiting for more information to make an informed decision whereas, the Australian culture may get uncomfortable or impatient (www. businessmanagementclassonline. com/businessmanagement-102-communicat

ion-nonverbal-communication. html). During negotiations, it is especially important for culture members to understand the Japanese cultures behavioural characteristics of para-language and what the sender's intended message is implying (Fisher 1980).

The context in which communication takes place affects the meaning and the interpretation of the message. Antonis, Simintaris and Thomas (1998, p. 10) suggest "...the cultural context of an individual is manifest in the communication used in negotiation" and considers Australia a low-context culture where the meaning of the message is in the words. Low-context cultures tend to be rule-orientated placing more importance on written information and references to handbooks, contracts or other written documentation. They focus on explicit messages and an importance of precision is placed on verbal communication (Antonis, Simintaris & Thomas 1998). Japan is a high-context culture where the meaning of the message is spoken through the use of body language, eye movement, para-verbal cues, and the use of silence, making face-to-face communication necessary for effective communication. Indirect communication that draws heavily on non-verbal cues is preferable in the Japanese culture as it allows for multiple meanings, saves face, leaves room for group input into decisions and displays interdependence (Varner & Beamer 2010). Feelings and thoughts are not clearly articulated and one has to read between the lines to get the message, also placing a strong importance on face-to-face communication (Poland & Pederson 1998). High-context cultures expect others to understand unarticulated moods and often identify people from low-context cultures as talking too much. In low-context cultures such as Australia where business and personal relationships are more divided, communication channels have to be clearer, making communication between the two cultures especially difficult in relation to decoding the intended message (Ratcheva & Vyakarnam 2001).

Because of the cultural differences and the impact of cultural noise on effective communication, it is advised the Australian culture adjusts and modifies their behaviour to coincide with the Japanese normative style in order to negotiate successfully. A successful negotiation is a process that leads to an agreement both groups are willing to fulfil (Hodgetts, Luthan & Doh 2008). The first phase is the development of a relationship with the other side to establish trust, which is particularly important to the Japanese culture. The second phase requires an exchange of information about the topic under negotiation to determine common ground and to clarify the information. This phase gives the Australian culture the opportunity to show they are listening, to reveal their interest and to raise potentially sensitive issues. The third phase, persuasion, is where an attempt is made to persuade counterparts to accept a settlement that ensures the parties get what they need, and finally the fourth phase turns concession into agreement. Aspects of communication style are employed during the four phases of negotiation, creating a cultural gap between the two groups. In order to bridge the cultural gap for successful negotiation, knowledge about the culture should be collected and the different communication and information-processing styles the Japanese culture adopts should be recognised (Varner & Beamer 2010). Companies from universalistic cultures negotiating with a potential partner in Japan must recognise that relationships are paramount and take time to develop. They form the basis of the trust that is necessary in order to effectively negotiate whereas in particularistic cultures like Japan, contracts are only a rough guideline or approximation (Furnham 2005).

' Voice quality' refers to the manner in which a verbal statement is presented and should have rhythm, volume and pitch for emphasis and pauses should be used before important points. Because of the difficulties with the noise created by para-language, it is suggested Australian culture members adopt a tone that avoids reflecting psychological arousal, emotion or mood as it may carry social information such as sarcasm, superiority or a submissive manner of speaking (Mohan et al. 2008). For the purpose of successful negotiations and communication one might suggest enunciating clearly, pausing more frequently and utilising visual aids such as pictures, graphs, tables and slides (Adler & Kiggundu 1983). It should be noted the Japanese culture prefer the use of oral channels, as memos and written messages are often perceived as impersonal and unfriendly. Members of oral cultures place high priority on face-to-face communication as it is not possible to see the non-verbal behaviour through written messages (Varner & Beamer 2010).

Rather than a personal verbal communication style where the language is individual-centred, a contextual style that focuses on the speaker and relationship of the parties should be considered as this is often associated with high-power distance, collective, high-context cultures such as Japan. A contextual style is a role-centred language where a strong emphasis is placed on role identity. This includes different ways of addressing culture members according to their status, and one might suggest Australian culture members consider adapting to situations where hierarchical human relationships are apparent (Hodgetts, Luthan & Doh 2008). In achieving this, knowledge of the organisational structure should be gained and a realisation

of the downward communication flow that is apparent within the Japanese culture would be beneficial. It should be realised the decision-making process is collective by middle line management with team consensus rather than top-management teams as demonstrated in the individualistic Australian culture (Mohan et al. 2004).

A succinct style where people tend to say few words and allow understatements, pauses, and silence to convey meaning is common in the Japanese culture where considerable uncertainty avoidance is apparent and is recommended for the purpose of effective negotiations. Silences between words carry meaning and is particularly appropriate in the contexts of uncertain and unpredictable situations as it saves face (Hodgetts, Luthan & Doh 2008). Japan's' concern with face-saving is one reason that politeness is so important and confrontation is avoided within the culture. They tend to use power in indirect ways consistent with their cultural value dimension of femininity with a strong emphasis on establishing relationships, as preferred in collectivist cultures. The culture places a high value on emotional sensitivity and hides emotions behind calm exteriors, in turn saving face (Miyahara et al. 1998).

In summary, cross-cultural communication has shown to create many barriers in negotiations between the Japanese and Australian cultures including language, para-language and the context the communication takes place just to name a few. The cultural value dimensions and elements of noise create a cultural gap and for negotiations to be effective, an attempt at gaining an understanding of how the Japanese culture communicates should be explored. In negotiations with the Japanese a member from the Australian

culture should be dedicated to the job and win respect and confidence from Japanese culture members. It should also be noted one should act with integrity, demonstrate listening skill and show verbal expressiveness as it is these traits that assist in building a business relationship. Relationships are the basis for doing business and can facilitate goal attainment therefore the Australian culture needs to focus on building business relationships with Japanese culture members to form a degree of trust. Saving face is also particularly important and in cross-cultural negotiations, the Australian culture should refrain from disrupting the harmony of the group to protect this important aspect. If knowledge and a clear understanding of the implications that cause trouble in successful negotiations are obtained, negotiations between the two cultures will be more effective.

Reference List