

Intercultural communication assignment

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Intercultural Communication Intercultural communication is now a common experience as a result of globalisation. It is extremely important to understanding how culture impacts on employee relationships and communication as it can affect the success of multinational and culturally diverse businesses. Hofstede (1984) defines culture as “ the mental programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another”. Intercultural communication refers to the communication between people from different cultures.

According to Samovar and Porter (1991), intercultural communication occurs whenever a message is produced by a member of one culture to a member of another culture, the message must be understood. Because of cultural differences in these kinds of contacts, there is a large opportunity for miscommunications, misunderstanding and disagreement. To reduce this risk, it is important to know intercultural communication. This essay is about intercultural communication and possible issues which may arise in communication due to the team being made up of two different cultures.

In this essay, it will focus on two cultures where members from Japan and Australia who are working together on a project as a team which has some face-to-face communication and at other times virtual. In the next section, it would analysis the differences of the two cultures using Hofstede’s cultural dimensions and other dimensions of culture and how these dimensions might influence communication between members of the team. Power distance is one of the Hofstede’s dimensions of culture which can examine the differences between cultures.

Power distance refers to the acceptance of unequal power distribution. It is the extent to which power in an organisation is distributed and the extent to which people accept inequality in power and status as normal (Bordia, Crossman & Bretag 2008, p. 303). According to Hofstede's model, Japan is considered as a high power culture with a score of 63 whereas Australia is a low power distance culture with a score of 31. A high power distance score indicates that people accept an unequal distribution of power and people understand their place in the system.

Low power distance means that power is shared and well dispersed. It also means that people see themselves as equals with other people (Dubrin, Dalglish & Miller 2006, p. 432). This means that members who come from Japan, people accept the power inequality in organizations and usually the boss or the leader makes decisions because the boss can and members comply. In a low power distance culture, such as Australia, members do not readily recognise a power hierarchy. People accept directions only when they think the boss is right or when they feel threatened (Dubrin, Dalglish & Miller 2006, p. 32). For the members who come from Australia, freedom and choice are important. This might lead a leadership and decision making issue between the members of the team. For the Japanese members, members might be too afraid to express their doubts and disagreements with the leader as the members accept unequal power. Another dimension of Hofstede's dimensions of cultural differences is individualism versus collectivism. This dimension refers to how people define themselves and their relationships with others.

It refers to how loosely or tightly integrate the society seems. The degree of whether people of the country prefer to act as individuals rather than as members of the groups (Bordia, Crossman & Bretag 2008, p. 304).

Individualists “ see themselves first as individuals and believe their own interests and values take priority” (Dubrin, Dalglis, Miller 2006, p. 432).

People are more concerned with careers than the good of the firm. They tend to put more effort in to their personal interest rather than interest in the organisation and into their work.

Collectivist cultures emphasise responsibilities to the group, are more often homogenous and agricultural and individuals tend to do what the group expects (Triandis 1994, p. 170) Japan is a collectivist culture whereas Australia is an individualist culture. According to the theory, countries with an individualistic have various implications in organisations. This leads to decision making problem between the members of the team. Members from Australia tend to like to work as individuals rather than as members of the groups, which can be a problem as this project requires to work as a group.

Members might not be committed to group, not sharing ideas with other members, individual achievement is emphasised and therefore are less likely to sacrifice personal rights for group benefit. (Triandis 1994, p. 170)

Members from Japan have a collectivist approach. Members tend to put effort to group and emphasise responsibilities to the group. Another issue that might influence communication between members of the team is the differences of how the two cultures express their views.

According to Triandis (1994, p172), individualists express different views openly whereas collectivists don't express views openly as people value more about harmony and personal relationship. For example, if an Australia member doesn't agree on a decision made by the group, the member would speak up whereas a Japan member wouldn't speak up when they disagree as they value more the relationship with other people in the team. This might affect the decision making in the team as Australia members would think that every one were happy with the decisions.

Uncertainty avoidance is another Hofstede's dimensions of cultural differences. According to Geert Hofstede (1994), uncertainty is "the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unknown situations". Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance have strict codes of behaviour, and members tend to resist changes. Cultures with low uncertainty avoidance, risk taking is prevalent, entrepreneurship is encouraged and people change jobs frequently. According to Hofstede (2001, p. 5), Japan is categorized as high uncertainty culture whereas Australia is categorized as low uncertainty culture. Members who come from Japan, members cope less well in uncertain situations whereas members who come from Australia, cope with uncertainty better. Australia has a lower need for uncertainty avoidance and rather avoids too many rules and formalities. People are open for new things and changes, more likely to stimulate innovations and emphasize new ideas. People are more flexible and more acting than reacting on changes occurring inside and outside of business.

In contrast with Japan which has a very strong uncertainty avoidance, emotions are displayed in the way that everything different is dangerous. People are resisting in changes and worry about their future. (Triandis 1994, pp. 170-172) The high context and low context is another culture dimension that might influences communication between members of the team. The high and low context dimension has been used to examine communication style differences and how such differences affect the communication process in intercultural communication.

It mainly focuses on the communication context, how people communicate with others. According to Hall, high context means that “ most of the information is either in the physical context or initialized in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. ” In comparison to the meaning of low-context communication is “ the mass of information is vested in the explicit code” (Hall, E & Hall, M 1976, pp. 70-79). People communicating in a high context environment, such as Japan, receive more of the information from within the context.

Subsequently, less of the meaning of a message is provided verbally or explicitly. There is a high use of non-verbal elements, voice, tone, facial expression and gestures. In contrast, in low-context cultures, such as Australia, the verbal part of the message itself contains more of the information and the majority of the transmitted information is embedded in explicit verbal codes. Message communicated more by words than non verbal means (Eunson 2005). When members from high context and low

context cultures have to work together, often problems occur by the exchange of information.

For example, Japan members communication in high context environment, members assume that the listener to knows everything and expect other members to know what is bothering them. This can be an issue for the Australia members where people are communicating in a low context environment. Members like to quickly get to the point, the message the people send it's clear as members tend not to search for information from the environment. In contrast low context cultures members argue about each other's opinions within the decision making process and take discussions in people's own hands to come to an agreement.

Monochronic versus polychronic time is other dimension of culture that also effects intercultural communication. According to anthropologist Edward T. Hall's concept of polychronic versus monochronic time orientation describes how cultures structure their time. The monochronic time concept follows the notion of "one thing at a time", while the polychronic concept focuses on multiple tasks being handled at one time, and time is subordinate to interpersonal relations (Hall 1981). Japan is a monochromic culture where people are committed to work and view time almost as tangible.

Australia is a polychromic culture where people are multitasking, easily distracted, interrupted and frequently changed plans. The ways the two different cultures use time can result in misunderstandings and frustrations. For example, members from monochromic time cultures carrying out one conversation at the time, whereas members who use polychromic time carry

several conversations simultaneously, which confuses and frustrates the users of monochronic time (Triandis 2000, p. 149). Japanese members tend to have a monochronic view of time.

People take longer time to make decision for important issues in order to avoid hasty poor decision making. In Australia , decisions regarded with respect as decisive (Greenberg 2005). For Japanese members, members keep a strict schedule of their appointments, and show a strong resistance to deviating from plans. However for Australian, appointments are approximate and may be changed at any time and schedules are not as important as relationships. In Japan, members have a high value and a strict schedule of appointments, as any delay or disturbance in time will influence the whole schedule for other members.

Where in Australia sometimes delays in appointments are expected, tolerated or at least taken into account. Nonverbal communication is also a factor that effects intercultural communication. Drawing on the literature, nonverbal communication can be defined as communication without words. It includes behaviors such as facial expressions, eyes, touching and tone of voice, as well as less obvious messages such as dress, postures and spatial distance between two or more people (Tyler, Kossen & Ryan 2005).

It can influence intercultural communication as result in the differences of nonverbal signals and gestures between different cultures. As mention before, Japan is a high context culture, according to theory, a high context culture, there is a high use of non-verbal elements, voice, tone, facial expression and gestures. Australia is categorized as a low context culture

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where message communicated more by words than non verbal means. Often miscommunications and misinterpretations occur as results of culture differences.

For example, Australian members would often use direct eye contact when interactions, but in Japan, people would experience discomfort with such lengthy, direct stares (Bordia, Crossman & Bretag 2008, p. 303). Silence is another source of discomfort. Japanese people often use long pauses in group meetings as reflection time to reflect upon important points. These pauses show respect and wisdom, these pauses also allow for time to think and help the person avoid saying something stupid.

In Australia, people will feel uncomfortable with silence and may even find it threatening (Bordia, Crossman & Bretag 2008, p. 303). This lead to members in the team to feeling uncomfortable and for the Japanese members might feel that they are not been respect by other members. Intercultural communication is a very important workplace communication skill for organisations. The comparison of Japanese culture and Australian culture using Hofstede's cross-cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, the differences between the cultures can be recognised.

Japan is a high power distance culture where people accept unequal power been distribution whereas Australia is a low distance power culture, people are seen each other as equals. Japanese members tend with a collectivist approach tend to work as group, however for Australian people tend to like to work as individuals rather than as members of the groups. Members who

come from Japan have high uncertainty avoidance people cope less well in uncertain situations whereas members who come from Australia has low uncertainty avoidance. People cope with uncertainty better.

People communicating in a high context environment, such as Japan, receive more of the information from within the context. In contrast, in low-context cultures, such as Australia, the verbal part of the message itself contains more of the information and the majority of the transmitted information is embedded in explicit verbal codes. Japan is a monochronic culture where people are committed to work, view time almost as tangible. Australia is a polychronic culture where people are multitasking, easily distracted, interrupted and frequently changed plans.

Nonverbal communication is a factor that also might intercultural communication. It can effects intercultural communication as result in the difference of nonverbal signals and gestures between different cultures. Often miscommunications and misinterpretations can lead to conflicts and problems in the team work as results of these culture differences. All these dimensions mentioned above showed that understanding how culture impacts on employee relationships and communication is vital as it can lead to the success of multinational and culturally diverse businesses.