

Comparative analysis of british and chinese culture management



A Comparative Analysis of British and Chinese Culture and Identification of Management Strategies for Chinese Cultural Environments

Introduction

The United Kingdom and China at first glance seem very different cultures, they have very contrasting histories. Chinese culture has been influenced by thousands of years of similar social structures and is heavily influenced by Confucianism, putting emphasis on family and relationships. UK culture on the other hand has been influenced by more liberal economical developments such as market deregulations resulting in more short term profit seeking and individualism. As organisations become multinational, they encounter the effects that culture has over business and are faced with problems such as how best they can operate in these cultures.

Comparative analysis of British and Chinese culture

When examining British culture under the lens of Hofstede's dimensions the UK shows cultural traits that are similar to its north American counterpart the USA, Yet very dissimilar to Chinese culture. The UK scored 35 in the Power Distance Index, which is well below the world average of 55 (iTim International, 2009). This shows us that power is distributed more equally than the majority of other countries. Groschla and Doherty (2005) accredit the low power distance score to Britain's democratic organisational and societal structures. An example of low power distance existing in British culture is visible from Keren More and Shay Tzafrir's (2009) study investigation employees trust in their superiors. They highlighted the procedural justice routes available for UK employees for holding their

supervisors and superiors accountable for their actions, a trait which is not evident in high power distance cultures where authority and trust from superiors is unchallenged.

This is very different from China's extremely high Power Distance score of 80. This score indicates, unlike in the UK, power is distributed much less unequally. Reasons for this high score could be the effect of China's paternalistic culture (Bhasin, 2007) or perhaps due to inaccessible private networks or 'Quanzi' (Liu and Porter, 2010).

This large difference in Power Index score may prove a culture shock to British managers when they are first introduced to authoritarian management environments with hierarchical structures. British managers will encounter problems that they might not have encountered back in their home culture such as little feedback from subordinates (Hurn, 2011).

Hofstede's IBM survey exposes UK culture as being predisposed to a high level of individualism scoring 89, a very above the average score of 43 (iTim International, 2009). In individualist societies more emphasis on the pursuit of individual interests with more emphasis on independent actions. Andrew Barron (2010) cites Randlesome's (1995) research in confirming British individualism through UK citizens' ethos of individual freedom and democracy.

China on the other hand scored one of the lowest scores at 20, on par with a number of other east Asian countries such as South Korea, 18, and

Bangladesh, 20. Balbir Bhasin (2007) states that there is no place for

individualism in China, due to China being a collectivist society that has roots
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going back through the countries history dominated with family hierarchical structures.

Nations that have been heavily influenced by British culture historically all have a disposition for high levels of individualism, this may have been due to a diaspora of British culture over the centuries. Evidence for this is in Hofstede's survey results: USA scored 91, Australia scored 90, Canada scored 80 and New Zealand scored 79 which are all above average and comprise the majority of highly individualised countries.

When operating in a collectivist society, British managers would have to integrate well with in-groups to gain rapport with Chinese colleagues, which is paramount (Dong and Liu, 2010). Other barriers, complications and differences a manager might encounter due to this collectivist culture is group participation.

Culture has been seen to be reinforced through education (Hurn, 2011), the methods and differences in education has resulted in differences being displayed by students at university level. Hurn (2011) continues by explaining that British education reinforces monochromatic behaviours such as punctuality and regulations. He contrasts this with Chinese students who experience more home education systems which neglects developing they're critical skills and group interactions. This lack of criticising other peoples ideas could lead to problems in developing group projects and improving ideas as there is an unwillingness for employees to pitch in their views.

UK has a slightly higher than average masculinity score of 66 compared to the worlds average of 50 scoring (iTim International, 2009). This indicates <https://assignbuster.com/comparative-analysis-of-british-and-chinese-culture-management/>

that British culture is very competitive in nature and its people generally more assertive than other countries. This aspect of British culture is very similar to Chinese culture which is also predisposed to competitiveness and achievements, their masculinity scores were identical.

From an initial management perspective, a UK manager may not feel that they would need to alter their management strategy concerning competition or achievement elements, however the identical use of deadlines in a Chinese cultural environment may come across complications. These complications could stem from British culture being monochronic contrasting Chinese polychronic view on time (Bhasin, 2007). A British manager in China may wish to address this issue by becoming more flexible to allow for changes and to maintain strong relationships with colleagues to assure people are committed to achieving the deadlines.

Another similar trait of British and Chinese culture is the way they approach uncertainty, both scoring below the world average in Hofstede's IBM survey (iTim International, 2009). This perhaps, meaning these cultures are both adept at accepting risk in business. Andrew Barron (2010) cites Perlitz and Seger (2004) highlighting proof of British culture being capable of handling uncertainty by examining the legislative aspect of the nation, finding fewer written laws when compared to other countries. [Such as France for example]

Rodrigues and Kaplan's (1998) research suggests that there is a trend that countries with low uncertainty avoidance scores consist of low formalised organisations. They continue by explaining that these organisations would

have more lenient rules, laws and regulations. This would have implications of management practices operated in the UK and China, managerial decisions are more reliant on the manager's discretion rather than following procedure or protocol. [I disagree, there are still a lot of rules governing how managers and employees act – Human resources initiatives, health and safety practices etc]

Criticising this analysis, the use of Hofstede's work which includes many assumptions may not provide an accurate due to changes cultures, Bhasin (2007) notices a change in individualism in the new generation of Chinese people. Hofstede's concepts have stopped being further researched and are simply accepted as fact on further cultural studies (Dorfman and Howell, 1988; cited by Swierczek, 1994). Further more, there is a risk of stereotyping nations when addressing culture. However, Fons Trompenaars (Lloyd and Trompenaars, 1994) believes that stereotyping is not bad, as long as negative connotations are avoided and the user of the stereotypes has the knowledge to use them correctly.

Management Strategies in Chinese Cultural Environment

When dealing in Chinese cultural environment, a manager must understand the concept of 'guanxi'. Liu and Porter (2010) explain that personal networks exist in Chinese cultures, individuals in these networks have 'guanxi' or 'relationships'. Developing 'guanxi' with colleagues is crucial for managers to gain contacts and to improve their working relationship. Due to personal relationships are needed to succeed in China, developing these personal ties are needed for nationals and expatriates to do business

(Bhasin, 2007). This brings the question of how managers could develop
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guanxi with their Chinese counterparts; Yanxia Zhu et al (2007) demonstrates that effective negotiations always start with preliminary meetings before the actual negotiation begins. Therefore, by having preliminary meetings and networking a manager could overcome barriers such as information exchange and accelerating decision making procedures (Dong and Liu 2010).

Following on from guanxi is the managerial need to address the concept of quanzi. Whilst guanxi relates to two people's relationship, 'quanzi' relates to personal networks of many of these relationships. These personal networks can form irregular organisational and hierarchical structures that differ from western organisation structures (Liu and Porter, 2010). Liu and Porter continue by advising the introduction of incentives by organisations to stop this practice such as elevating cooperative staff and by introducing industry best practices. Their study concludes that an organisation must change the culture of its employees, however trying to change people's predispositions due to culture could seem an unattainable goal. Liu and Porter's (2010) statements could be seen as contradictory to Natale et al's (1994) view that successful cross cultural management involves realistic objectives, which changing employees culture may well be.

Natale et al's (1994) state that the issue of communication is fundamental in managing a different culture. This brings into debate which communication strategy is best used in workplaces with Chinese cultural environments.

Using a 'Tell' communication style would be appropriate in this instance, when taking in consideration several characteristics of Chinese culture. Their

high power index score indicates that there is little dialogue or feedback from subordinates when taking business decisions.

Conclusion

British and Chinese culture displays very different key traits, however under further scrutiny there can be many similarities prevalent: These two cultures share competitive and risk taking attitudes to business that managers from each culture can appreciate when working in the others environment.

Major differences in management techniques exists, partly due to the paternalistic Chinese culture of hierarchy that puts excess respect on age and status and the more equally distributed power distance in the UK. The cross cultural strategies, such as overcoming guanxi and quanzi problems are specifically aimed at combating these in-groups and cliques.

However there are many small changes managers can make in their strategies, such as changing their style of communication and the way they personally behave in their counterpart culture.