



Compare the business culture of the UK with that of Japan.

How would business negotiations between delegations from the two countries be affected,

Introduction

“Nihonjinron”, literally “the Theory of the Japanese”, has been of fascination for both Japanese and foreigners alike, and the industrialised world seems acutely aware that the Japanese are very different to Westerners, in ideology, religion, and business strategies. There are countless books, articles and websites which attempt to teach people how to communicate with the Japanese in business negotiations. However, these sources can cause further alienation, where the numerous rituals we have to memorise make the Japanese seem obsessively picky or just plain difficult. This may be because we naturally interpret these behaviours through the lens of a Western Christian culture and remain relatively unaware of the religion and history of the Japanese. This essay will examine how UK delegations can better understand and negotiate with the Japanese by learning about both the Japanese and their own national culture and history through literature, folktales and religion. Through this preparation a UK team can discover commonalities between the two cultures, which can help to strengthen the relationship, as well as identify differences that need to be discussed.

The following paper is split into three sections, with the first considering the literature to be discussed, including Morrison et al. (1994), who examine UK and Japanese business cultures and the resulting behaviours. Hofstede (1993) and Trompenaars (1993) observe to varying degrees how business culture is closely tied to national culture using a set of bipolar scales.

The second section will compare UK and Japanese business cultures using Hofstede and Trompenaars’ findings, to explain how negotiations between delegations would be affected.

The third part of the essay will utilise this information, along with stories about cultural origins, to give advice to a UK team preparing for negotiations. It will be strongly suggested that they learn about both themselves and the Japanese, and from this understanding to draw out similarities as well as identify differences, as this will help dissolve the alienating concept of the “foreigner”.

Nihonjinron

Morrison, Conaway, and Borden (1994) summarise specific behaviours of people in 60 different nations, including the UK and Japan. They briefly look at each history and government structure, but focus mainly on particular actions in various situations, from everyday life to business negotiations. Although they do not explicitly analyse the data, the authors organise the information into similar formats for each country, enabling the reader to draw comparisons between the nations.

Following the concept of the interdependence between business and national culture, Hofstede (1993) made a study of 64 nations, from which he created a set of cultural dimensions arranged along bipolar scales, which he argues broadly encapsulates national preferences. They include: Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-term versus Short-term orientation.

Trompenaars (1993) looks at cultural differences in a similar manner to Hofstede, applying bipolar scales, but he adds extra dimensions, including Universalist/Particularist and Specific/Diffuse. These preferences, although useful in gaining a general overview of a country’s culture, do not explain why cultures have certain preferences and how they affect behaviour.

Hofstede and Bond (1988) touch on the influence of historical and religious factors when observing the increasing economic growth of the “Five Dragons”, including Japan. They apply Hofstede’s (1993) first four dimensions to their research, but replace Orientation with Confucian Dynamism, from their conclusions relating to Confucian principles aiding the Five Dragons’ rise in the global economy.

It appears that using only one of the above frameworks is insufficient for people from the UK and Japan to do business with each other, as the analyses only cover only part of what is necessary to truly understand each other's business culture. As a result, the following essay will examine all of the mentioned theories in relation to each other with regards to the question at hand.

Bow, Shake Hands

When the East and West collide in the boardroom, the immediate observable differences between delegations can be a little surprising to say the least. Morrison et al. (1994) list but a few of the extensive number of British and Japanese behaviours (Fig.1).

(* Swirls from Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars (1994))

The Action titles in bold, including **gestures**, **emotion** and **dress**, indicate similarities between the two





Actions	UK 	Japan 
Greeting	Handshake, eye contact	Bow, eyes on floor, palms on thighs. Consider status
Title	Mr/Mrs/Ms first, then first name basis	Always second name, followed by "san"
Hierarchy/ Seating	Less formal, CEO may sit at head of table. Generally all are equal	Stringent rules: leader sits at head of table, sit down after he does, sit along table according to status
Gestures	Don't point, gesture with head, don't talk with hands in pockets, avoid lengthy direct eye contact, avoid dramatic gestures	Don't point, gesture with palm facing up, don't blow your nose, avoid eye contact, avoid touching and dramatic gestures
Emotions	Don't overtly express emotion	Don't openly express emotion
Gifts	Only give gifts if invited to someone's home	Always bring gifts representing your country
Cards ("Meishi")	Exchange of business cards not essential, though useful if name is unusual	Always exchange bilingual business cards with two hands and a bow. Hold Japanese side towards receiver
Speech	Direct, get to the point and work outwards to less relevant points:*  criticise role, not the person	Diffuse, talk around the subject and work inwards towards the matter at hand:*  avoid direct criticism
Thinking	Sequential, linear, absolute concepts, base arguments individual judgment and on objective facts. Emphasis on getting job done quickly	Holistic, experiential, quantitative concepts, base arguments on group consensus and subjective interpretation. Emphasis on building relationships
Entertainment	Business lunch in a pub, dinner in restaurants. No discussion of work at dinner	Only in restaurants, bars, and hostess bars. Some discussion of work at dinner
Dress	Conservative	Conservative

Fig. 1.

Observed behaviours during negotiations
in the UK and Japan (Morrison et al. 1994)

cultures' manners, which suggest that both the British and the Japanese are quite formal and restrained in their business conduct. This concern for formality suggests that both peoples can respect the other's rituals, as they will already have established some common ground on which to work. However, there are abundant differences, the reasons behind which need to be addressed.

Fig.2 presents a table of Hofstede (1993), Trompenaars (1993), and Hofstede and Bond's (1988) scales, which compare the UK and Japanese in terms of general cultural preferences, helping to explain the reasons behind the actions described in Fig.1.

(*Hofstede (1993), **Hofstede and Bond (1988), ***Trompenaars (1993))

Power Distance: Japan scored highly in the Power Distance dimension, which correlates with the strict hierarchical system at the negotiating table, from bowing to seating arrangements. On the other hand, the UK scored lower and, although important members are recognised, it is not as important.

Individualism/Collectivism: The British are highly individualistic in their thinking, displayed by their using inner judgement to make decisions. In addition, a sequential form of thinking, such as discussing issues by their individual parts, points to an individualist culture.

The Japanese scored lower on this scale, identifying their collectivist tendencies and explaining their consensus-based decision-making and tackling problems holistically. The strict rituals they follow may be linked, as a group mentality enforces conformity to social rules. Their diffuse manner of speech is also


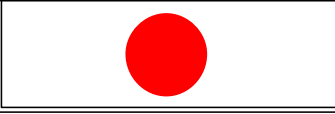
Preferences	UK 	Japan 
Power Distance*	Lower – 35	Higher – 54
Individualism/Collectivism*	Very High – 89 (Individualist)	Lower – 46 (Collectivist)
Masculinity/Femininity*	Lower, but still quite high – 66	Very High – 95 (Masculine)
Uncertainty Avoidance*	Lower – 35	Very High – 92
Orientation*	Low – 29 (Short-term orientation)	High – 80 (Long-term oriented)
Universalist/Particularist***	Universalist	Particularist
Specific/Diffuse***	Specific	Diffuse
Confucian Dynamism**	Low, but still applies – 25	Very High – 80

Fig.2
Cultural Preferences of the UK and Japan,
using bipolar scales

indicative of a collectivist demeanour, as there is more risk in causing insult when addressing a group, rather than an individual. If one person is offended, the whole group, in turn, is offended. With regards to actions, if one does not exchange business cards with individuals in the proper manner, this can be taken as an insult to the whole group.

Masculinity/Femininity: The Japanese appear to be very masculine in cultural preference, which may be for example expressed in the hierarchical system observed in the seating arrangements. This implies a paternalistic culture, where the leader is a father figure, both commanding and protecting his subordinates (Cleary, 1991). The UK is still fairly less masculine, but less so as indicated by the more relaxed approach to a hierarchical system.

Uncertainty Avoidance: The Japanese appear to be very risk adverse, perhaps due to their collectivist nature and subsequent stringent rules, as more people need to be taken into account when taking risks. The British have lower uncertainty avoidance, implying that they are more likely to take risks. This may be linked to their individualist manner, as they perhaps do not have to consider the resulting effects on other people to the same extent as the Japanese. An individualistic culture also has fewer social rules to follow and thus fewer to break.

Orientation: The sequential thoughts of the British, of tackling issues in smaller parts and resolving negotiations as quickly as possible, may be a symptom of their short-term orientation, as “saving time” is given precedence. The Japanese seem are far more long-term orientated. This is manifested in their holistic,

group-orientated thinking, which requires more time and patience for the group, rather than an individual, to agree on the whole issue (Buruma, 1995).

Universalist/Particularist: The British are universalist in nature, as they follow established regulations and live by concepts of absolutes, such as good and bad, which apply to all situations. This both explains the formal behaviour of the British and highlights the superficiality of the similarity with Japanese formalities, which are based on stringent social rules. Cleary (1991) compares the universalist behaviour to the Japanese, who place more of an emphasis on the group and building mutually beneficial relationships, meaning that rules are likely to be more particularist to accommodate constantly changing social situations.

Specific/Diffuse: The British are reportedly direct in speech, first discussing the topic at hand and working outwards to less relevant points. As above, the British are also individualistic, meaning that there is less risk in direct criticism. The Japanese have a diffuse approach to speaking, discussing the history and background surrounding the problem and gradually working towards the main issue. The pre-eminence of the group over the individual also means that Japanese have greater consideration of others, meaning that they avoid direct criticism. Cleary (1991) relates this to the Japanese concept of inside (“ura”) and an outside (“omote”) (Cleary, 1991 pg125), which is encountered in every aspect of Japanese life. Saving face, from not being directly criticised for example, is extremely important, as the outside antagonising remark can damage the inside of the group.

Confucian Dynamism: Japan scored very highly indeed, pointing to a historical reason behind some of this people’s actions when conducting business. Hofstede and Bond (1988) discuss Confucian teachings, which enforce the honouring of unequal relationships and emphasise the needs of the group. This, at least in part, explains the strict hierarchy and collectivist behaviours of the Japanese in the boardroom. It is interesting to note that, although scoring low, the UK had some elements of Confucian Dynamism. These observations may be due to the similar formal behaviour displayed during negotiations; however, as has been explained, these behaviours are derived from written law, rather than Confucian teachings.

The above information describes the differences between the UK and Japanese business cultures and it has been noted that negotiations may go more smoothly if common ground can be found. Explanations for the differing attitudes of the two nations have been observed via their relation to national cultural traits. However, the analyses only give an overview of cultural preferences. Even armed with this knowledge, negotiations from both British and Japanese delegations would be stunted, as the findings do not include information as to why these cultures have adopted specific attitudes. The fact that Hofstede and Bond realised that Confucius’ teachings still influence contemporary Japanese behaviour implies that there are more historical and religious reasons behind both British and Japanese business cultures. Thus a UK team preparing for negotiations with Japan should perhaps focus on learning the context in which both their own and the other’s culture have been formed, in order to find similarities, which should aid in developing successful business relations.

The Truth vs. the Way

“Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”
(Genesis, 3:5)

State of mind can also be related to Buddhism, which encourages people to strive for inner enlightenment and a harmonious “Way” of life, rather than a search for an external “Truth” (Cleary, 1991). In fact, the terms “to” and “do” (Hendry, pg105) such as Shinto and Bushido (the way of the Samurai, who followed Confucius’ teachings) mean “the way”, a path, rather than a goal (Hendry, 1991). In the boardroom, then, it makes sense that the Japanese think holistically, carefully considering all the available options before coming to any decision. They focus on the path rather than the goal, while maintaining interpersonal harmony by thinking as a group. In addition, as has been discussed, Confucian teachings focus on loyalty to a group, leading to the Japanese viewing the negotiations in multiple ways, where the strengthening of interpersonal relationships are intertwined with, if not more important than, the topic of discussion.

This explains much of the data in Fig.1, such as gift-giving, wherein the Japanese concept of debt and gratitude “On” (Buruma, 1995, pg150) maintains harmonious relationships with reciprocity (Buruma, 1995). In addition, during the Tokogawa reign, the samurai followed the Way of the Sword (Kendo), as well as that of

Confucius, which taught that one was to not show any emotions in battle, as this would enable the enemy to see a weakness (Mushashi, 1982). Indeed, in business the Japanese avoid excessive expressions of emotion, whereas in the UK, the “Englishness” concept of the “stiff upper lip” restrains the Brits from openly emoting during negotiations.

Thus the UK team should conclude that while the British concentrate on the goal, the Japanese focus on the journey. It is the Christian Truth versus the Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian Way. Learning about both countries’ cultural tales and religions means that the UK team should be better able to comprehend the meanings behind Japanese business culture.

Conclusion

Seeing actions without any explanations can make a person from another country seem totally alien; however, learn about their country or better yet, their cultural origins and their actions begin to make sense. It has been shown that there are an enormous number of differences between UK and Japanese business cultures, and that they are tied to differing national cultures, which are in turn rooted in unique “origin of mankind” stories and religion.

In order for business to be conducted smoothly, the UK team preparing for negotiations could be advised to first study their own cultural origins, as people sometimes judge others through the lens of their upbringing, perhaps without knowing it. Learning more about one’s own culture also serves as a springboard for finding similarities, or at least more fully understanding differences of other cultures. Thus the second part of the preparation is to become knowledgeable about Japanese history and religion, as it provides an interesting and not so unfamiliar comparison. As a result, a deeper understanding of the Japanese people can be reached, causing any cultural barriers to breakdown, or at least become transparent and understood.

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