EKONOMI
HÖGSKOLAN
Lunds universitet

"Welcome Herr Professor Doctor Schmidt"

-REPRESENTATION WITH CULTURAL KNOW-HOW

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1. INTRODUCTION

A meeting with Asians should always begin with the exchanging of cards. The card should be given with both hands while looking at the receiver. Similarly, it should be received with both hands. After the card has been received, it is important to study the card and the name, and learn how to pronounce the name.

A meeting with Germans should always begin exactly on the scheduled time. A person from German wants the timing of every activity to planned into detail, and that that plan should be followed.

This is an essay on the cultural differences one must learn to understand and cope with, when working in a multinational company. It was written with the kind help of Perstorp Flooring, and it is in their cross-cultural preparatory work that the focus of this essay lays.

1.1 THE AIMS OF THIS ESSAY

This essay provides an attempt to answer the following question:

In what manner should a multinational company behave in order to minimize the problems and misunderstandings that may evolve when interacting with people from

- Germany

- South East Asia

1.2 THE PURPOSE OF THIS ESSAY

The purpose of this essay is to gain knowledge of the differences, which can be found within different countries' cultural behavioral patterns. With this knowledge as a background, individuals, as well as corporations can minimize the problematic issues that may occur in conjunction with multicultural cooperation.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 THE MAP-MODEL

By analyzing a number of distinctive characteristics of a culture, one can get a rather clear overview of the culture's central aspects. One way of doing this, is with the aid of the MAP model. Once these characteristics have been specified, the model can be used to compare different cultures. The MAP-model involves these aspects; relation to nature, orientation to time, view of human nature, mode of activity, relationships, and relation to space.

Relation to Nature	Orientation to Time	Human Nature
Different cultures regard nature differently. Generally, a culture either considers itself having power over nature, or nature having power over the culture. These three categories can be found: • Subjugative • Neutral • In control	Cultures have different understandings of the concept of time. While some cultures regard time linearly, with measurable units and a starting and an ending point, other cultures see time more organically without manmade divisions. These are the two categories: • Monocronic • Polycronic	While some cultures regard the basic human nature as good and trustworthy, other cultures have a belief that human nature is evil and therefore humans need to be supervised. Again, there are two categories. • Good • Evil
Activity	**Relationships**	**Relation to Space**
In some cultures, people live to work, while in other countries, people work to live. This has to do with the culture's mode of activity. These two categories can be found: • Doing-cultures • Being-cultures	While people of certain cultures are used to living, working and socializing in groups, people of other cultures are more used to an individualistic lifestyle. These categories exist: • Group • Individualistic	Closely linked to the aspect of relationships, there is the aspect of space. People of some cultures are used to sharing space, while people of other cultures demand more privacy: • Public • Private

2.2 THE HOFSTEDE MODEL

Before someone is to encounter a new culture, it is important to both be able to understand and learn about intercultural communication.

Hofstede writes about three different phases that a person has to pass through, in order to be able to learn about this kind of communication. The three different phases he calls *awareness, knowledge* and *skills*. The awareness phase simply deals with the fact that you have to be aware of the existence of cultural differences. In the knowledge phase you get to know what is different in different cultures. And skills refer to the practising of the knowledge you have been taught. Expatriates or business people that are going to make affairs with other cultures can acquire this knowledge in different ways. Hofstede means that there are two ways of learning these things, i.e. through acquiring specific knowledge or awareness and general knowledge. The specific knowledge deals mostly with how to live in another country. Even though we can learn a great deal through education at home, the best way of getting this specific knowledge is to learn the local language on location in the foreign country. The awareness and general knowledge is more about how to work in another cultural setting than the one is used to.

2.3 THE GUDYKUNIT / YUN KIM MODEL

Gudykunit and Yun Kim write about what is happening when the actual communication takes place. They have developed a model for studying communication between strangers. The model helps to isolate and identify the elements influencing our communication with people from another culture. It is not a descriptive model, more a way of organising the elements influencing the process in a systematic way. The elements included in the model are encoding and decoding of messages and cultural, sociocultural, psychocultural and environmental influences on the communication process.

The communication is not static. We process incoming stimuli and decode at the same time as we are encoding the messages. The cultural, sociocultural and psychocultural influences serve as conceptual filters for the encoding and decoding of messages. The filters limit the predictions we make about strangers' reactions to our behaviour and also delimit what stimuli we pay attention to and how we interpret those.

We are now going to explain in some more detail about the different parts of the model, i.e. encoding and decoding of messages and the different cultural layers.

2.3.1 ENCODING OF MESSAGES

An Organizing Model for Studying Communication with Strangers

E = Encoding of messages   D = Decoding of messages
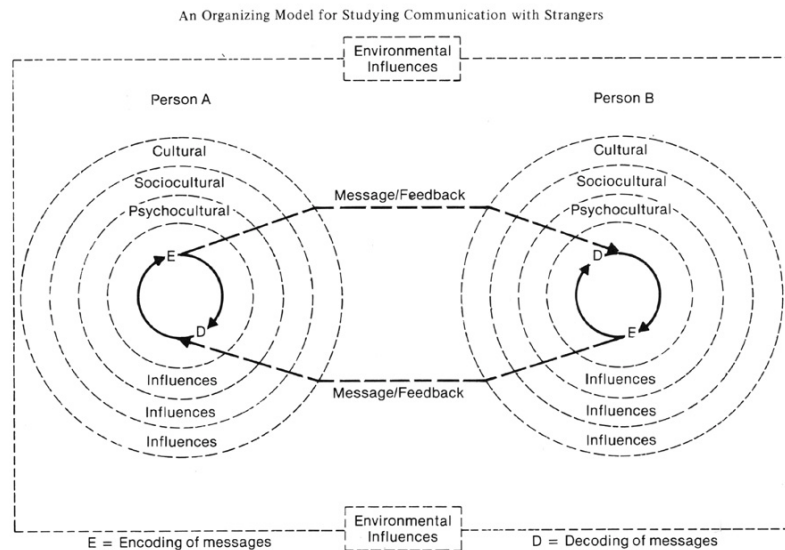
There are many forms of encoding messages, but the two most relevant in the intercultural communication are language (verbal codes) and non-verbal behaviours. "The language we speak will influence what we see and think, and what we see and think in part influences our culture." This means that even if two different cultures may share the same language (e.g. American and British) there may still be grounds for misunderstandings due to the different meanings each culture can attach to certain words or expressions. There are four levels of rules that influence language; phonemic (the sounds of language), syntactic (relationships, like logic and grammar), semantic (meaning of words) and finally the pragmatic level. This last level deals with the unconscious part of the verbal communication. Even if someone that is not a native speaker can learn the three first levels perfectly, there is still room for misunderstandings since the pragmatic level deals with what language may be used in which context. This could be quite hard to learn unless we spend a greater

length of time in the foreign country. The non-verbal behaviour is mostly unconscious, as opposed to language that mostly takes place on a conscious level. Non-verbal behaviours include things such as gestures and facial expressions.

2.3.2 DECODING OF MESSAGES

The decoding is affected by the same factors as the encoding of messages, but the conceptual filters also influence the interpretation. These filters limit us from understanding different meanings and nuances in the sender's message.

2.3.3 CONCEPTUAL FILTERS

a) Cultural influences
The cultural influences consist of three components. The first is unconscious assumptions that we are taught as a part of our socialisation into a culture. The second are social and cultural values that are shared beliefs of what is important and unimportant, good and bad. The third component is norms and rules that specify what is acceptable and unacceptable in the everyday social behaviour. All these components influence how we decode and encode messages.

b) Sociocultural influences
There are three major sociocultural influences; memberships in social groups, role expectations and definition of interpersonal relationships.

1. Social groups: We could belong to many different social groups at the same time, some we are born into, and some we have joined later on in life. All groups have sets of norms and rules that guide behaviour and the members also share some core values.
2. Role expectations: When it comes to role expectations we expect certain people in certain positions to behave in certain ways, but these expectations may vary across cultures.
3.   Interpersonal relationships are about the approach you have to different people. For example, we probably behave differently towards a boyfriend/girlfriend than in the communication with our boss.

c) Psychocultural influences
The major affective variables influencing our communication with strangers are our attitudes, especially ethnocentrism and prejudices. This could lead to misinterpretations of messages if we expect strangers to behave in the same way we do.

d) Environmental influences
The environment we live in certainly affects our behaviour. The environmental factors include things such as geographical location, climate and architectural settings. This makes us interpret incoming stimuli in different ways across cultures. In a Swedish bank or post office it is understood that you are not allowed to smoke and noone does it, while in Greece in the same setting everyone smokes.

2.4 A SYNTHESIS OF THE HOFSTEDE AND GUDYKUNIT/YUN KIM MODEL

When someone is to be sent to another country on a company's behalf, the first the company should do is to provide means for the employee to acquire the knowledge and skills to be able to manage in another culture. Hofstede talks about two different means of doing this, through aqcuiring specific

knowledge (how to live) and general knowledge (how to work). When encountering people in the other culture, we could use these skills to navigate through the worst grounds of misunderstandings. That is, if we are aware of and know about the cultural differences, we could easier decode the messages that are sent to us, and we could also be able to encode our messages in such a way that the other party more easily could understand us. What we then have learnt is what the different conceptual filters in the Gudykunit/Yun Kim model are made up of in the other cutlture, and we could be more receptive to incoming stimuli than we would have been without the awareness and knowledge of the differences.

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5. WHAT HAS PERSTORP FLOORING DONE TO MINIMIZE CULTURAL CHOCKS?

Perstorp AB is a multinational company that produces different kinds of floors. Perstorp Flooring belongs to one of four sections in the Perstorp concern: Perstorp Surfaces.

For a couple of years ago, nobody at Perstorp had the finally responsibility when foreign customers visited the company. For example, what position they had at their company CEO or Technology Manager. Perstorp was not sure of what purpose the customer had with their visit or to which culture they belonged to. Perstorp had the same schedule for all their customers. That is a bit problematic, while for example the French like to have lunch for two hours and the Germans only for fifty minutes. Another problem was that they only used English at their meetings. Both the Germans and the Asians like to speak their native language and feel embarrassed over their week English.

For approximately four years ago Perstorp Flooring understood that they had to do something to solve the problems. They hired Britt-Marie Ljungfelt, the spider in the net.

Instead of educating the hole company about cultural differences they concentrated on one person. Except Britt-Marie's own experiences with other cultures from her former work, she took lessons in cultural behavior. The company also send her to a language course in Germany. She knows how to behave in specific situations in foreign countries and her job is to learn and inform her colleagues. She also plans the hole visit, schedule, food, presents and leisure activities.

Today Perstorp has interpreters in most contacts with their customers. It is a step in the right directions. But their, or at least Britt-Marie's, goal is to skip the interpreters and that the employees of Perstorp learn to talk more languages than just English and Swedish. This is a way to make the encoding and decoding of messages easier for both the employees at Perstorp and their visitors, according to the Gudykunit/ Yun Kim- model. We think that it is a good idea if they want to minimise the risks of misunderstandings through an interpreter. It is easy for an interpreter to get the phonemic- and syntactic levels right. But the problems arises because of the difficulties to express the senders sematic- and pragmatic levels. As Britt-Marie said "the customers understands that we have to use interpreters. But we get plus point if we communicate in their language."

We think that Perstorp has reached the phases of awareness and knowledge, according to the Hofstede model. This because that they are aware of the existence of cultural differences. They faced their problem when they started to loose orders after unsuitable behaviour towards customers. In order to repair the damages they hired Britt-Marie. Britt-Marie brought the

knowledge phase into the company. Through her experience in culture differences her task is, together with other employees, who works abroad, to implement the knowledge on the other employees. It is hard to say that Perstorp has reached the skills stage, since even if Britt-Marie, and some of the other employees, has the skills and uses them during the visits, it is hard to motivate all the employees. To make them realise how important this issue is.

3. ANALYSIS – SWEDISH VS. ASIAN CULTURE

3.1 THE ASIAN CULTURE ACCORDING TO THE MAP-MODEL

Relation to Nature	Orientation to Time	Human Nature
In Asia, the general view is that nature is in control of humans. This means that in this aspect, the Asians are subjugative.	Time is polycronic according to the Asian view.	The basic view of humans beings in Asia, is that human beings are good.
Activity	**Relationships**	**Relation to Space**
Most cultures in Asia are being-cultures, although it is interesting to see that on countries like Hong Kong and Singapore, the is a strong focus on getting results.	Due to the general lack of space, most Asian cultures are group-cultures.	Again, linked to the matter of the limited space, space is considered public.

3.2 THE ASIAN CULTURE ACCORDING TO THE GUDYKUNIT / YUM KIM MODEL

 In order to apply the Gudykunit Yun Kim communication model that was mentioned in the theory part we will describe the cultural values of Asia and Sweden divided into the influences of cultural, sociocultural and psychocultural areas. This will help to compare the different areas and the communication process between individuals from the areas in question. It should also be mentioned that this research is based on a Western set of cultural values and thus the comments made about Asian cultures already reflect the observed differences, but from a Western point of view. Thus a totally impartial comparison and analysis between communication processes of Asian and Swedish individuals could only be reached with the help of a neutral third party.

The Asian cultural values reflect the multiple philosophies and religions that have ruled the area through past centuries. One of these philosophies is named Confucianism and it has held an important position in Asia for hundreds of years. Confucianism is basically a set of pragmatic rules for every day life. However differences inside the regional area can also be discerned. For example Japan and Hong Kong are a very unusual mix between a modern high-tech society and a traditional country. This diversity makes the encoding/decoding of messages even tougher and can easily lead to misunderstandings.

3.2.1 CONCEPTUAL FILTERS

The following is a description of some of the most characteristic differences between Asian and Western cultures (where Sweden belongs) divided into the three areas influencing intercultural communication. The description themselves already hold the comparison between the cultures as they are made on a Western bias.

a) Cultural influences

The unconscious assumptions are reflected in area of status and titles that are essentially important in interpersonal communications. The Asians must get to know you as a person before the business transaction is made, which is often related to trust. Planning is long-term and future orientated. Flexibility is also emphasized in interpersonal communication. An example of this is the Asian perspective on written legal contracts. It is acceptable to alter the contract according to changed circumstances without formal authorization from the counterpart.

A phenomenon that is known to most westerners is that Asians never shake your hand during their presentation, they always bow which is related to the respect for one another that Asians have. If you violate these rules it has very serious consequences for your relation with them, for an example; if you give your newfound friend a tap on the shoulder it symbolizes that you're treating him as a pet. If your business partner has brought his wife, never ever touch her in any way, don't even shake hands with her since she's the mans "property". Westerners have a habit of getting to know their counterparts during the negotiations; with the Asians this is not so.

b) Sociocultural influences

1. The membership in a social group is highly valued in Asia, where the basic social group is the family. What happens inside the family is considered most important and a constant harmony should be kept up between family relationships. This also leads to the phenomena of "keeping face" which may be considered as unpractical and irrelevant from a Western point of view. Networks and relationships outside the family are all based on personal relations.

2. Role expectations are dictated on a status and title basis. You are expected to act according to your formal status and title, which define the correct and discrete ways of expressing yourself.

Respect for social status and the obligations that come with ones position are important. A sign of this is the importance of business cards. The cards tell the Asians how to greet you with proper respect and who's suitable to be your counterpart.

3. Interpersonal relationships are often complicated and hard to earn. Asians and especially Japanese value persistence and thus giving up easily is not common and foreigners are sometimes deliberately tested by making issues as complicated as possible. This applies also to the tying of personal relationships – one should not give up easily. Organizational relations are centered over the worker group, which is the core of an organization. Life-long employment is aspired.

c) Psychocultural influences

Psychocultural influences including our attitudes towards others are an important aspect when it comes to cross cultural communications and relations with other countries. The high context attitude in the Asian culture should be kept in mind when communicating.

The following are examples of some of the prejudices and ethnocentric factors affecting the psychocultural area of communicating. One should bear in mind while doing business with Asians to control your temper. Asians fear conflicts, especially open ones, and they are very afraid of loosing face. More generally you have to keep your feelings to yourself and not show them openly like many westerners have a tendency to do. When it comes to symbols in our everyday life Asians take this very seriously and therefore you have to take certain precautions not to give them a negative symbol. This is often a problem since Asians are very keen on exchanging presents with each other. To illustrate this, review following situations:

- Never give an Asian a knife since knives means that they should commit suicide,
- Labor in Asian countries is practically free, hence craftsmanship symbols low value,
- Asians are fond of small crystal and glass sculptures, but never give them any animals. Every animal in Asia represents something; they even have their year divided with animals.
- Never give candles as a present to an Asian since candles are associated with death.

3.4 SUMMARY

On the whole, the encoding, decoding and transmittal process of a message from person A (Asian) to person B (Swedish/Western) becomes dependent on the mix of non-verbal and verbal actions. As Swedish one should consider all the influencing factors of sociocultural, psychocultural and cultural dimensions mentioned above and act accordingly. They affect the non-verbal and verbal coding of messages as well as the decoding of the counterpart. Also the fourth influencing factor, the environment surrounding the interchange, should be regarded. Vice versa holds true for the Asian counterpart and the exploration of similar Western communication influences should be done on an Asian bias, even though the differences mentioned above will also be seen as differences from the Asian point of view.

4. ANALYSIS – SWEDISH VS. GERMAN CULTURE

4.1 THE GERMAN CULTURE ACCORDING TO THE MAP-MODEL

Relation to Nature	Orientation to Time	Human Nature
Activity	Relationships	Relation to Space

4.2.1 CONCEPTUAL FILTERS

One might think that there is no use comparing Swedish and German differences, when the countries are located so close to each other. But the experiences say the opposite. We will try to explain the stages of the Gudykunit/ Yun Kim-model in a Prestorp/ German perspective.

a) Cultural influences
Cultural influences are important components when you compare different cultures. In Germany it is important to confirm the invitation with a written letter. They want the hole time-schedule in good time for their arrival. It is more common in Sweden to communicate more informal, by for instance telephone.

The German expects to be invited home to his equivalent Swedish business partner. Which could be problematic, since the Swede often is a younger, hard working man with small children that he wants to spent time with. His wife is also often working long days and has not got the time to prepare for big business dinners. Instead he might consider taking the German out for a formal dinner at a restaurant.

Another issue has to do with an old German tradition. They want a "private sphere", which also is typical for the Swedes. That is important to remember when booking hotel rooms for German visitors. They can not, unlike the Asians, even think of sharing room. This also has to do with the importance of status for Germans and therefor they want to stay at the finest hotels possible. This is also mentioned in one article from Edward T. Hall.

b) Sociocultural influences
1. Social groups: The German hierarchy is important. They form social groups according to position in the company and background. Also according to Friday education is important and partly makes out group belonging, which also has to do hierarchy.

   Business cards are a way for Germans to point out their educational level and their position in the company. They also want to be addressed with their hole titles. It never comes in question to address an older, or more educated person with something else than "Sie". This is hard for Swedes, because they are more informal also in their business communication.

   The Germans enjoy showing their status by driving big, expensive, German cars and having luxurious private houses. This is also something that Schneider writes about. Swedes might think that this is to show of and that is wrong according to the "jante law".

2. Role expectations: You need to be aware of the expectations within the social groups. Germans are very formal dressed at work and they make fun of the "Swedish suit", the cardigan. At a formal presentation and meetings the Germans get irritated if the speaker is quiet for some seconds. Then they immediately speaks up them selves. This is also something that Eva Blomquist and Christian Heger have noticed.

3. Interpersonal relationships: The Germans are very straight forward in their business communication in general. This can be frustrating for a Swede, who is used to a more discrete way of handling things. Both Hall and Friday also underlines this.

c) *Psychcultural influences*

Because of the awareness of culture misinterpretations, Britt-Marie stresses the fact that you have to be aware of the culture differences when communicating with a person from another country. This is especially important when Swedes communicates with Germans, because they might believe that they are just the same as they are. But the cultural differences are, as pointed out earlier, often rather big.

d) *Environmental influences*

The Germans are, maybe because of their history, very interested in politics. It is therefor normal to discuss this subject at the dinner table. They are also very cultural interested and most of them enjoy participating when Swedes celebrates traditions like lucia or midsummer. They also find pleasure in doing other cultural things like going to a museum. This is good to know when planning the Germans leisure time during the visit. The most important issue for Perstorp is to remember that Germans like to buy native products. This is the most common reason why Perstorp invites Germans and therefor they also have daughter companies in Germany. This is common according to Mughan.

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6. CONCLUSION

Based on the information presented in this essay, we have formed the opinion that the two most important characteristics to posses when attempting to interact successfully with people from other cultures, are empathy and curiosity. An individual person, as well as a multinational company are dependent on the ability to feel empathy –to be able to understand what other people are feeling, and on having the curiosity to learn about other cultures and about how other people behave.

When writing this essay, we found the that the Gudykunit / Yun Kim model had very much to teach us. We found it helpful to see the intercultural learningprocess through the levels of awareness, as Gudykunit / Yun Kim do in their model.

When communication between individuals from an Asian, German and Swedish culture takes place, the decoding and encoding of each of the counterparts message becomes dependent on the values that their culture holds. These are expressed in the decoding and encoding of the message through language and non-verbal behavior. The characteristics of the culture should be kept in mind when communicating. When using language remember to pay regard to the discrete and unemotional way of speaking. One should not be too hasty and always show patience. When communicating non-verbally one should, for example, remember to keep up a formal posture and act according to titles and rank as mentioned above.

In our opinion, the multinational company Perstorp Flooring has been successful in its aims to counteract cross-cultural misunderstandings. That they have come a long way is proven by the fact that they have hired specialists in the field of intercultural communication, who have the roles of gaining further information on intercultural communication, and to distribute this information throughout the corporation.

However, it is our opinion that the company still has some work to do when it comes to making everyone involved in the company understand the great importance of intercultural awareness.

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