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The Influence of Japanese Values on its Business Culture

Ritwik Rathore
ritwik.rathore@bba.christuniversity.in
Christ University, Bangalore, Karnataka

Kanishka Agarwal
Christ University, Bangalore, Karnataka

Siddharth Agrawal
Christ University, Bangalore, Karnataka

ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is both to show the impact of Japanese social values on building and keeping up business connections and to underline the significance of understanding these social values to work together effectively in Japan. This paper emphasizes the influences of the Japanese lifestyle, values, ideals and cultural assumptions and how all these influences the way the Japanese people do business. It expands upon how the corporate culture in japan is largely influenced by the cultural values of its people. This paper will better help in understanding the do's and don'ts when involved in business or employment with the Japanese and how to deal and do business with the Japanese in their own way which might be very different from how any other country or culture conduct business. This helps one understand how crucial the Japanese hold their varied values and ideals which they do not want to be disrespected or disregarded in any way.

Keywords: *Japan, Cultural Assumptions, Values, Influence, Corporate Culture.*

1. EMPATHY AND POSITIVE BEHAVIOR TOWARDS OTHERS

1.1 In Japanese social culture, the people are considered with regards to their social connections and how they choose to behave with others. Connections are vital in Japan's social structure and a complex of unpretentious social standards oversee each sort of interpersonal relations. [1] This teaches the Japanese to be calm and empathetic towards others and also have a very positive behaviour when it comes to dealing with other individuals. They usually tend to understand and value the feelings and situations of other individuals. Hence, when working in a Japanese business environment, one must have patience and empathy while dealing with fellow co-workers and other individuals

1.2 It is also noteworthy how strong values and beliefs are deeply ingrained in the Japanese culture. All business interactions end with the people exchanging business cards, which usually is given by both hands in order to show respect to the other person and acknowledging interest to do business with them. This is also the primary reason why the Japanese often tend to bow to others to show respect, and highly encourage respecting everyone, especially the elders.

2. PUNCTUALITY

2.1 Different cultures in the world give varied significance to time and punctuality and Japan might be considered one of those cultures who hold time and punctuality at a very high prestige. [2] Right from their childhood, the Japanese are brought up in a very time conscious society. Punctuality is so well imbibed in their culture that many might even consider it 'Common Sense' to be punctual. They are taught the importance of time in their daily lives as children. Hence, it is very difficult for them to understand as to how a person can take anything like time for granted or how some people develop an attitude to treat time as an abundant resource. Therefore, in order to blend in with the Japanese society and to get familiar with its business culture, one must understand how valuable time is as a resource to the Japanese.

2.2 It's not just about understanding the importance of punctuality in the Japanese culture but it's more about holding the same amount of importance for a time as the Japanese. In order to accomplish this, a person might have to entirely change his or her way of life or lifestyle. One would have to make sure to be punctual or even be before the time for every business meeting or even for casual meetings and dinners. The punctuality in the Japanese business world is such that even if you were to arrive just on time, you would be considered late as it isn't uncommon for people to show up 10 or 15 minutes prior to the given time as your employer expects you to start your work on the given time and not just show up on that specified time.

3. AVOIDING OPEN COMPETITION AND CONFRONTATION

3.1 The Japanese are often considered to be of introvert nature and might want to avoid any kind of open or direct competition and confrontation unlike many other extrovert cultures such as the United States itself. Contrary to the beliefs of many other cultures, the Japanese believe that open confrontation or competition is impolite and might result in a conflict [3] which is not beneficial to either of the parties involved.

3.2 In the Japanese Culture, Harmony is understood to mean evading one on one or interpersonal encounters or conflicts in daily life. Clashes or conflicts occur from the connection between one individual and others and congruity between groups of individuals is the direct effect of finding the suitable method to adjust one's own wishes to that of others

3.3 Silence is usually considered as an extremely unassuming and respectable virtue in the Japanese social setting or culture. There is even a Japanese saying that goes somewhat like 'Silence is Golden' (iwanu ga hana). [4] Quiet is vital in Japan because of Zen Buddhism. Truth can't be depicted verbally, however, exists just peacefully since, in spite of the fact that words are important to express ideas, dialect blocks a more profound comprehension of the truth that exists stunning.

4. COOPERATION AND GROUP WORK

4.1 The Japanese culture follows a more collectivism kind of approach in their daily life as well as their work life, where they believe that working together would yield much better results, unlike some cultures that follow a more individualistic kind of approach.[5] Many of us might think that group work and cooperation usually requires a lot of self-control and patience but the Japanese believe that it carries the rewards of group accomplishments and pride in contributing to the group other than emotional stability and a providing a person with a very strong social identity so that he or she can take pride and feel accomplished associating themselves with the group.

4.2 In a Japanese workplace, this almost goes without saying that one needs to be accepting to all types of people so as to be able to work with them properly and accomplish the team or group goal. Hence, it is very important for every person in a group to empathize with the situation of fellow team mates and understand everyone's personal obligations and only then can the group benefit from the combined effort put in by each member of the team as the Japanese believe that success can only be achieved if each and every member of the team put forward their individual best in efforts to achieving the group goals.

5. COMPETITION

5.1 Even Group work in Japan would require the structuring of proper channels of communications, in which the line of authority and responsibility are established properly and these channels should also impose a degree of differentiation of the members of the group from the nonmembers in order to create a sense of competition among different groups. [6] In the Japanese way of life, Cooperation and performance in the group are factors that are largely dependent on competition between one group and another.

5.2 This competition is fostered in Japan through various different methods, one of them being the use of symbols. The Japanese use symbols such as songs, names, uniforms, banners etc. to differentiate one group from another. It is usually considered a statement to be a part of the group activities in Japan, a statement that conveys that an individual wants to be associated or be a part of the group and has to want to identify himself or herself with the group.

5.2.1 Thus, as a mode of conveying strong affiliation to the group, it is common for the Japanese workers to do a post-work bar Hopping session, as to many, it is their only source of opportunities for relieving social tensions and stress and exchanging Information in order to express their desire to be a part of a group

6. CULTURAL VALUES CONVEYED THROUGH RELIGION

6.1 The Japanese people as a whole follow three main religions; Zen Buddhism, Shinto, and Confucianism and to a very large extent, the values imparted by these religions can be seen in the way the Japanese people carry out their business. Hence, it is not only the history and culture that influence the business environment in Japan, but the religious values also have a very big impact on the business dealings in Japan.

Zen Buddhism	Self-discipline and self-control Flexibility to adapt Everything changes; Nothing is Permanent The importance of silence Striving for Perfection
Shinto	Cooperation within the Group; Membership in a group Harmony with others and between group members Importance of varied circumstances
Confucianism	Importance of relationships Importance of complying with social rules and norms Social hierarchy and respecting age Saving face in Public

7. CONSENSUS

7.1 When talking about Cooperation and working in a group and how important that is in the Japanese culture, it should not be ignored that to the Japanese, the consensus is equally important. The decision making in the Japanese workplaces is such that it is done to satisfy as many people of the group as possible. Decisions in the Japanese culture are often made only after consulting with each and every member of the group. Although it is not necessary that each member of the group should have the same opinion or view on a particular subject of discussion, it is important for them to incorporate the views of every member of the group. [7]

7.2 Consensus in this context does not mean that there should be absolute and universal agreement within the group, instead, it implies that the decision making process should be consultative and should ensure the participation of each member of the group in the exchange of information. This redefines the feelings of group identity amongst the team members and makes decisions easier to implement. [8]

8. CONCLUSION

Cultural values, beliefs, and ethics are all factors which play a very significant role in building and henceforth maintaining business relations in the Japanese business environment. It becomes very crucial to understand that the Japanese are already prepared to deal with the outside world and know how to deal with other cultures and hence it is now time for others to convey the same reciprocity and learn more about the Japanese culture in order to adapt to its environment and carry out business effectively and efficiently.

In Japan, interpersonal relations should be considered of paramount importance as these are the key to carry out business in Japan. Not giving enough importance to Interpersonal relations in Japan directly implies that there is a slack in the business relations of the company or the employee as most of the Japanese values and cultural beliefs impart values of effective and efficient interpersonal relations. Even trust in Japan depends not on written contracts but on verbal interpersonal messages and conversations. Trust can only be gained in the Japanese business community through proper and polite interpersonal communication and relations

As a concluding note, it should be known that even after following the above mentioned precautions and steps, non-Japanese people might face greater difficulty in implementation of contracts before being signed. The Japanese have an edge over other nationals in this regard as they know their culture better and also know the ways of effective communication with their people.

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