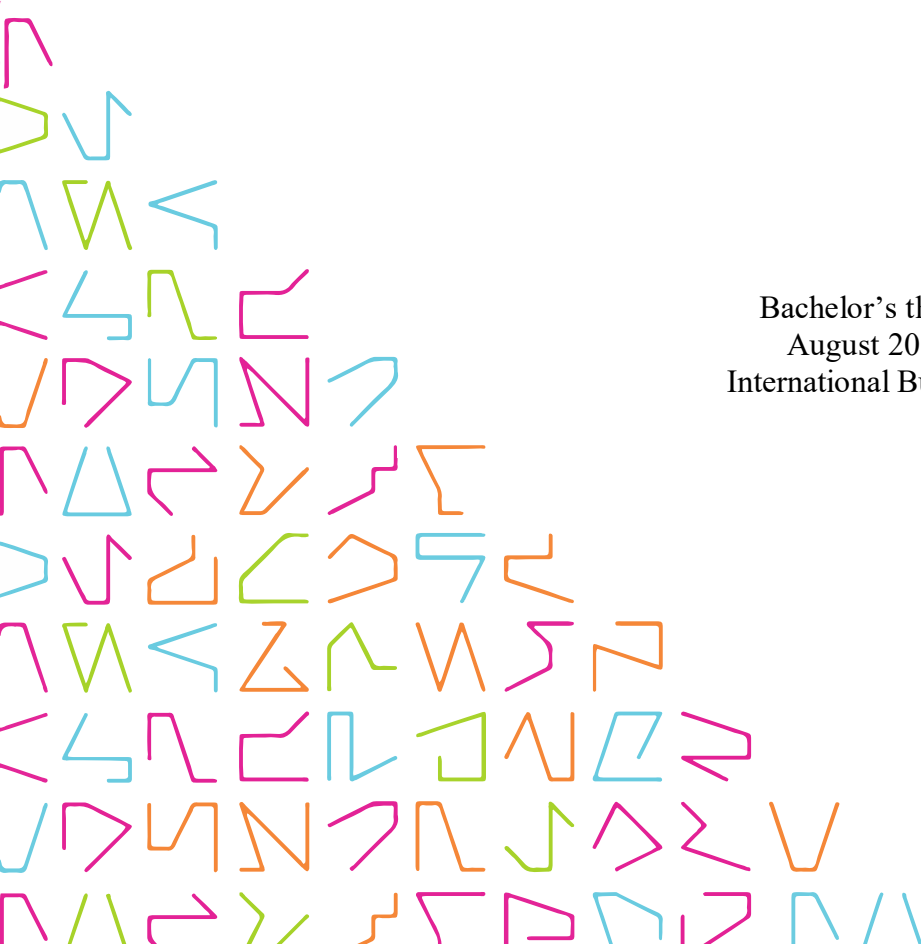


Communication Strategy Plan With Japanese Companies for Helmee Imaging Oy

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis's commissionaire was Helmee Imaging Oy. The company develops software for glossy surface inspection. They are also manufacturing inspection devices with their software and selling them. They want to expand their business to Japan, however they do not have experiences working with Japanese companies.

The author has studied about intercultural communication's various kinds of aspects and Japanese culture from online sources and books. In addition to it, the author has conducted qualitative interview research to find current existing cultural barriers between Japanese and foreign companies. Two groups of people were interviewed. One was Japanese people who have experienced business to business negotiation with foreign companies. The other group was composed of non-Japanese people who have experiences dealing with Japanese companies.

From research based on existing theories, the author found various kinds of cultural aspects containing possibility to be obstacles for smooth negotiations. The questions for the interviews are structured based on those potential barrier factors. As a result, the author was able to determine those which affect communication.

Communication strategy plan for the Helmee Imaging Oy is based on the interview research. First step is to look for Japanese companies who connect the commissionaire and potential Japanese customers. Having connections is vital in Japan as it gives trust easily. Another way of getting trust efficiently is meeting with Japanese people in person. In addition to it, understanding Japanese culture and adaptation will give positive impression to them. To minimize the miscommunication, English should be adjusted to their level and maintaining long term relationships with same people should be encouraged. This will eventually make them feel more at ease and communication smoother. The results of the study will be useful for the commissionaire in the future when deciding the path to enter Japanese market.

Key words: intercultural communication, culture, Japan

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1 INTRODUCTION

The definition of internationalization according to the Localization Industry Standards Association is “internationalization is the process of generalizing a product so that it can handle multiple languages and cultural conventions without the need for re-design. Internationalization takes place at the level of program design and document development.” (Esselink et al. 2000, 2) In the past decades, the internationalization has become more and more important especially for firms aiming to sell their products and services in international markets.

As the globalization advances, an effective intercultural communication is becoming more and more important success factor in today’s globalized workplace. (Rumsey D.) Intercultural communication is defined as “communication between individuals or groups of different linguistic and cultural origins.” according to The LanQua. Basically, the objectives of intercultural communication are to understand the logic and the behaviour of people who come from different cultural background. (Rumsey D.) Reaching these goals will improve working conditions, and people are able to work more efficiently together.

As the globalization has a positive impact economically, commissionaire would like to expand their business to other countries. One of their target countries is Japan since there are numerous potential clients for them. Therefore, this research about intercultural communication is aiming to find a way to carry out negotiations with Japanese companies.

2 THESIS PLAN

This chapter will explain what this research is about, how the theme is decided and what is the goal of the study. The core questions are introduced here, as well. It also introduces theories which will provide insight into the topic. Hereafter this chapter will suggest which method will be applied for conducting the research and how the theory will be used for analysing the data.

2.1 Thesis topic

This thesis will focus on expectations of Japanese people from foreign companies in business negotiations. Uniqueness of Japanese culture has been explained in books from foreign perspectives. (Bucknall, 2005) However the information about Japanese needs in business negotiations is limited. In here the definition of negotiation is “Bargaining (give and take) process between two or more parties (each with its own aims, needs, and viewpoints) seeking to discover a common ground and reach an agreement to settle a matter of mutual concern or resolve a conflict.” (Business Dictionary) The commissioner is interested in entering Japanese market, however information about Japanese culture is limited, thus understanding Japanese people’s expectations from foreign people will help the commissioner to minimize the risks of misunderstandings and conflictions.

2.2 Thesis objective, purpose and official research questions

Business etiquette in Japan includes numerous things to consider, such as the clothes you wear, wording, the ways of sitting or standing and the posture of your body. From those factors Japanese people interpret how important you are for the business and treat you accordingly. (Bucknall, 2005, 62) Therefore when foreigners deal with Japanese people or companies, it is essential for them to understand what kind of matters may have an effect on business. The aim of this thesis is to find ways to smooth negotiations between Japan and foreign companies in business. The research question in this thesis is as follows.

“How to make negotiations smooth between Japanese and foreign companies.”

The questions for supporting the question above are as in below.

“What kind of factors are important in negotiations for Japanese companies.”

“What kind of factors will give positive impression to Japanese people from foreign companies.”

By answering these questions above, the commissionaire will be able to figure out to what they need to pay attention during their business interaction with Japanese companies. Ultimately this understanding of difference may give a positive impression and helps to build trust in business relationship.

2.3 Concepts and theory

This chapter will explain various kinds of theories regarding the concept of culture. At first this thesis will introduce theories related to the culture to give outlook towards practical research. These theories seek to provide new perspective for readers to help them better understand Japanese culture.

2.3.1 Relationship between cultural difference and decision-making process

Martinsons conducted a research about the comparison of American, Japanese and Chinese decision style. (2001, 1) It concluded that Japanese people tend to have behavioural decision style in comparison to other two countries which means they judge information emotionally and intuitively, so relationships count in decision outcomes. Reasons for this come from its high collectivism tendency and from the fact that the power and responsibility are shared in a group. (2001, 8) Therefore they tend to involve a great number of decision makers and are slow to make decisions. (2001, 8) Another study also claims there are numerous factors which influence ethical decision making. (S. Vitell et al. 1993, 759) For instance, high masculinity country such as Japan tends to be less likely to discern ethical issues in comparison to a feminine country. (S. Vitell et al. 1993, 758) Those studies show that the culture contains factors which influence decision making process. These theories will be supportive in seeking what kind of cultural aspects influence decision making.

2.3.2 Relationship between language and decision making

Reiter also states that using foreign language will take emotions from decision making.

Using foreign language will lead to an emotional distance so that it lets people do sensible decisions. (2017) Some companies in Japan, have changed their working language into English. So far, no significant changes have been found, but there is anecdotal evidence to imply that there is some impact on internal culture. (Translate Media, 2017)

The reason behind this is the difference in how we learn mother tongue and foreign language. Hayakawa states how we commonly learn mother tongue as a kid, so it is a part of the family and culture. On the other hand, people tend to learn foreign languages in a less emotional environment, such as a classroom and it may even require some effort. (Ingmire, 2014) Translate Media claims that the most important emotion that an organization has, is empathy, as understanding customers' feelings is the key for better serving them. (2017) Using language according to the occasion may be a useful tactic. Business.com states bringing emotional side to sales is right as typically people make decisions for complex and expensive purchases based on emotion. This is significant especially when the company size is smaller than the customer so that you need to build trust by showing that you are caring about your clients. (2017) Japanese people may think rationally, as especially English proficiency in Japan is low. Their EPI (English Proficiency Index) score is low in comparison to Asian countries' average level of English according to EF Education First EPI and their English level is ranked 37th out of 80 countries. (2018) Unfortunately EP study found their English skills have not improved during the last six years because of the teaching style of the Japanese schools. (JapanToday 2014) Therefore, using English is likely to lead Japanese people to think less emotionally which may have effect on the outcome of the decision making. These studies are useful for testing whether the language does have an impact on the decision-making process.

2.3.3 Feeling empathy to same ethnic group

Correlation between ethnicity and empathy was studied by N. Gutsell and Inzlicht. This study found that we experience more empathy when we see someone from our own ethnicity. (2009, 844) This study suggests ethnic group may have an impact psychologically on Japanese people. Since the majority of the commissioner's employees are not East Asians, the ethnicity may need to be considered as a one of the barriers for business negotiations.

2.3.4 Working with foreigners in Japan

A research company Disc conducted research about the employment of foreign workforce in Japan. In the statistics, more than half of the Japanese companies expect a business level Japanese language skill. (Disc, 2014) More than half of the Japanese companies stated that hiring foreign workforce activates internal environment, lets others understand significance of globalization and leads to understanding of different cultures. (Disc, 2014) On the other hand, they are struggling with cultural differences including values and mindsets. Also, language barrier is big enough to make hiring foreign labours feel troublesome. (Disc, 2014) Unfortunately, still 90% of companies stated that they are not planning to hire foreigners. (Disc, 2014) CEO of Seven Eleven stated that Japanese superiors find it difficult to direct their foreign subordinates. Japanese language is indirect thus it is sometimes hard to get the message through for foreigners who are not used to such subtle and ambiguous expressions. (Takagi,K 2010) According to him, to avoid miscommunication in the future, Japanese superior positioned people may have to change their way of delivering a message. (Takagi,K 2010) Although the study focuses on having a foreign person as a co-worker within the same company, not conducting negotiations with someone outside the company, it can still be disclosed from the study and the article that Japanese people do find working with foreigners inconvenient because of the cultural differences. Thus, looking for factors which can cause friction when working with foreigners seems worth studying.

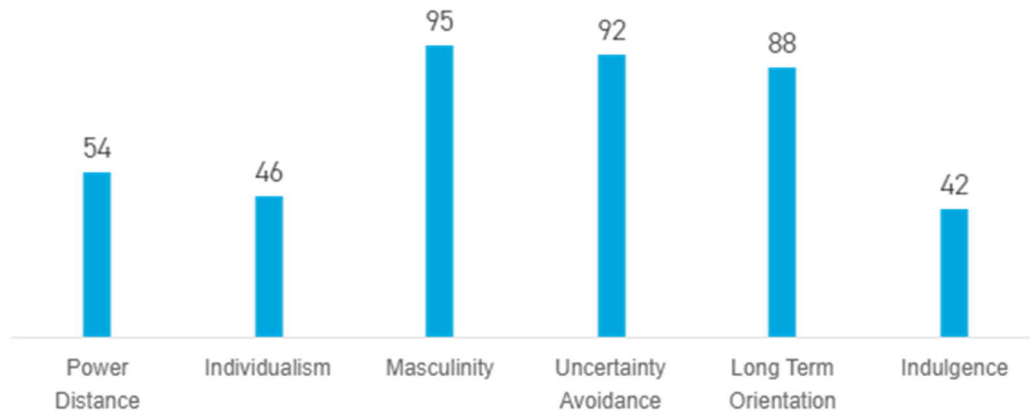
2.3.5 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

In Hofstede's opinion, variety of culture depends on groups and classifications of people. He classified culture into following five categories.

- national level
- regional, ethnical, religious, linguistic level
- gender level
- generation level
- social class level

Out of these five levels of culture, Hofstede classified national level of culture into six dimensions. They are power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoid-

ance, long term orientation, indulgence. Hofstede insight research organization did research about more than 70 countries including Japan.



PICTURE6. Japanese Hofstede's cultural dimensions

Power distance: Japan is categorized as one of the hierarchical society. Usually decision making takes time in Japanese business because they need to reach an agreement and this process takes time. Consensus requires several people from other groups. They also have unique way of agreement called *Nemawashi* which is pre-consultation for carrying agreement smoothly. (Bucknall. 2005. 56.) However, Japan is relatively less hierarchical in comparison to other Asian countries. (Hofstede Insights. 2018)

Individualism: Japanese society has collective aspects though they are not as strong as in other neighbouring Asian countries. According to Benedict and Lebra, Japan is highly shame conscious culture thus, Japanese tend to be concerned what others think about them (Mille R. 1990. 281). This harmonizing culture makes expressing own opinions hard as they include a group of people when they talk about "we", and not just their family as is the habit of western countries.

Masculinity: Japan has masculine culture which means the people in the society value highly achievement, fearlessness and forcefulness. Thus, in this society success is expected and well rewarded. Being successful is considered a positive matter and this makes the whole society competitive. These facts are visible in Japanese business manner as how they take seats in a meeting. The most important person is the one who enter the meeting room at first (Bucknall. 2005. 66.).

Uncertainty Avoidance: The level of uncertainly avoidance is quite high in comparison to rest of the world. It can be explained as Japan has to face natural disasters thus Japanese

people would prefer to be certain about the situation in case something was to go wrong. Japanese people have harmonious way of living (Cultural Atlas) and prefer to avoid embarrassing situations (Atherton). Thus, clarifying ambiguous rules and rituals are significant in this culture. As Bucknall states in his book, they appreciate detailed information otherwise they do not make decisions in business. High level of uncertainty avoidance explains why changing the society is challenging in Japan (Hofstede Insights. 2018).

Long Term Orientation: Japan is one of the longest term-oriented countries. This means that in Japanese society, people like to be prepared for the future. Therefore, the companies tend to invest time and money for development even if the economy is not stable (Hofstede Insights. 2018).

Indulgence: Japan has tendency of restraint in their culture. Which means that the country has strict social rules to control satisfaction of the desires. Also, this society does not value leisure time (Hofstede Insights. 2018). This may explain long work days of Japanese working culture (The Japan Times 2016).

Those six dimensions classified cultural aspects thoroughly and this theory has been used in numerous studies regarding the culture. Therefore, Hofstede's theory will be applied for reasoning why and how certain cultural aspects influence the decision-making process in this research.

2.4 Working methods and data

Raplay states qualitative interview is simple and it does not require explanations, since we ask questions and answer to them on a daily basis, thus this way of research is easy and neutral. (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium, Silverman 2004, 16) Various kinds of interview styles exist, a face to face interview is useful especially when the aim is to collect sensitive information regarding socially unpleasant experience. (Gubrium & Jaber. 2012, 77) The non-Japanese interviewees are asked about any uncomfortable situations they may have had when dealing with Japanese people, thus a face to face interview is an effective method.

The needed data for this thesis will be collected by interviews. The target of the interviews will be Japanese companies who have been working with foreign companies. After the interview, collected data will be analysed based on applicable theories.

2.5 GAP analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994, 10) state that there are three activities included in the data analysis process. First step is the data reduction. In this process, the collected data is organized by simplifying, summarizing and transcribing them into text base. In this process, unnecessary data will be discarded so that the collected data becomes more trustworthy. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 10) Second step is the data display. The data needs to be arranged into an accessible form such as a matrices, graph or chart. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 11) Reassembling information helps an analyst to better understand the data gathered. The third step is the conclusion drawing and verification. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 11) Sometimes the conclusion is vilified while the data is processed as the analyst review the note or record from the interview. (Miles & Huberman 1994, 11)

As one of the tools for data display process, GAP Analysis is used. This method is useful to find concrete action plans to close gap between current situation and desired status (What is Gap Analysis?: 2018 SWOTAnalysis.com). As the objective of this study is to create a communication strategy plan for the commissionaire which would let the commissionaire to succeed in Japanese market, this analysis method would be optimal for this research.

2.6 Thesis process

This chapter explains how this thesis is structured. The first chapter presents the topic and the research shortly. Second chapter states the thesis plan. It delves into the sources of the thesis and theories which relate to the topic. This chapter also includes methods of collecting data. The chapter three will state the commissionaire and delves into the current situation regarding negotiation with Japanese customers. Also, it includes reasons why Helmee Imaging Oy chose Japan as its market to enter and Japanese cultural aspects. In the chapter four, the objectives, methods and validity of interviews will be presented. Detailed information about interviewees and their answers are also presented

in the same chapter. In the chapter five, the interview results are compared with presented theories in chapter two. Results will be examined using GAP analysis. The sixth chapter presents the conclusions of the study and potential improvements for conducting future interviews.

3 The case company & Japanese culture

3.1 Helmee Imaging Oy

The commissionaire of this study is Helmee Imaging Oy. The commissionaire is a small to medium sized company and established in 2013 which means that the company is quite young. However, they do have a research background for ten years at VTT since 1990 prior to the establishment.

Helmee Imaging Oy is developing software for machine vision system for glossy and matt surface inspection. They also build inspection devices and sell them by themselves. Their target customer is any company who is manufacturing parts which have glossy or matt surface. Currently their main customers are automobile part manufacturers all over the world.

So far, they have had customers mainly from Europe like from Germany and France. They also have customers in Hong Kong. Some of the deals were made through local agents who assist the company in finding potential customers.

Helmee Imaging Oy has been longing to enter the Japanese market for quite some time. The cultural barrier has held them back from dealing with Japanese companies previously. However, they have now been in touch with a couple of Japanese companies during past few months. Thus, learning and reaching a deeper understanding of the Japanese culture is more important for them now than ever before.

3.1.1 Why Japan?

According to the European Automobile Manufacturers' Association (ACEA) (2018, 11) Japan's passenger car production industry's market share is 10.2% which is the second largest globally after China. Also, the number of manufactured automobiles has been increasing from 2016 to 2017 whereas in the United States which is third biggest automobile manufacturing country, the production volume has decreased 11%. Therefore, Japan has great potential for the commissioner. Moreover, The Global AgeWatch Index (2015) shows Japan has the biggest share of elderly people in the world and estimates that 42.5% of population will be over 60 years old by 2050. Meanwhile, Japan's GDP grows most

slowly amongst the G7 countries. (Financial times, 2018) These facts imply younger people's responsibility will be heavier in the future and machine automation could be one of the solutions for the Japanese economy.

3.2 Japanese unique aspects in negotiations

Cultural differences can be visible in various kinds of forms. In this paragraph, potential visible aspects of Japanese culture focusing on communication are listed and how these aspects can have effect in practice is explained.

3.2.1 Spoken and Written Language

Obviously, language is a barrier for communication in business negotiation. Knowing language leads not only to overcoming the language barrier but also to understanding of the culture. (J.Wild, L. Wild 2016, 85) However, unfortunately Japanese language is difficult to learn for foreigners. Bucknall states that when foreign companies have a meeting with Japanese people, bringing interpreter is a smart move and unavoidable. He also recommends sticking to using of English unless the foreign people are fluent in Japanese and understand slight differences of the expression in the language. However, knowing some simple words is helpful for building good relationships in Japan. (80) If foreign companies prepare meeting materials in Japanese and if they have a native Japanese speaker with them, it may be beneficial for the companies. How the language barrier affects business negotiations is a question worthy of research.

3.2.2 Eye contact

Although eye contact is considered as a sign respect in western countries, in Japanese culture it is better to avoid staring intensely at the speaker. Some may take staring as a sign of aggressive or challenging attitude. Thus, looking away sometimes from the speaker and nodding or saying yes will give a positive impression to Japanese people. (Bucknall, 2005, 98)

In some extreme cases, Japanese senior employees may close their eyes and apparently seem not to follow what is going on during the meeting. This habit of closing eyes is quite common in Japan and Bucknall claims that this is one of the ways to avoid eye contact and to concentrate on conversation. (2005, 98)

3.2.3 Silence

Silence is common in meetings in Japan. Bucknall states they remain silent when they need to consider thoroughly the matter and when they are waiting for the superior person to speak. Sometimes it can also be used as a way of pressuring the foreigners psychologically and in some cases, they need empty space in the conversation. (2005, 106) Though Indian people do not mind being interrupted by other speakers, Finnish and Japanese people prefer to ponder in silence and feel more at ease when no one disturbs them while they are speaking. (Nishimura, Tella, Nevgi 2008, 793–794.) Therefore, this may not be an issue for the commissionaire which means Japanese may appreciate the similarity in this aspect.

3.2.4 Giving gift

Giving gifts is a common custom of building trustful relationship in business culture. However, there are some differences between cultures. For instance, a knife is not a suitable gift in countries like Russia, France and Germany. In Japanese culture, gifts must be wrapped nicely, and the receivers should not open the gifts in front of them. (J.Wild, L. Wild 2016, 75) Also, it is customary to offer gift by saying “It is something little but please take this.” This statement emphasizes that the relationship is more significant than the gift itself. (Bucknall. 2005. 115)

3.2.5 Clothing

Japanese people always pay attention to clothing. The most senior and superior people are expected to dress the most nicely. (Bucknall, 2005, 62) This expectation is in proportion to age which means that the older you are, the more strictly you are expected to follow the dress code. Young people may be allowed to have more options for way of dressing. Bucknall states that only dark formal suits are acceptable for doing business in Japan. For instance, bright coloured or tartan patterned clothes are not acceptable. Casual clothing indicates that the person is a non-serious person who does not have the respects towards the right kind of behaviour. Therefore, it is better to avoid dressing casually in Japan. (Bucknall, 2005, 53)

3.2.6 Business card

Business card is more necessary in Japanese working culture than in the western culture. Exchange of the business cards can take place once the senior person has started it. It is the best that the cards are kept safe at the card holder inside of the jacket pocket. Once people start the exchange, take out the business card from the card holder and place it on top of the card case towards the receivers. Visitors must initiatively exchange the business cards. It is recommended to keep the business cards in a lower position than host of the meeting or superior person does. While the giver is presenting the business card, state the company name, title and name. After that, the receiver takes the business card with both hands and then both the receiver and the giver bow. The business card should not be put away immediately, instead place it on the top of the card holder. The right timing for putting the cards away is when the meeting is over. The card must be put into the card holder, not to the wallet nor directly to back pockets. (Bucknall. 2005. 73) Business card is a face for Japanese people thus, the attention should be paid to the treatment of the card so as not to make them lose their face.

3.2.7 Type of document

The Japan Times indicates Japanese business culture has old-fashioned aspects. (Murai 2017) Mr. Koeda who is the president of DocuSign offering electric signature services stated Japan is struggling to go paperless even though technologies have brought many changes to the society. (Murai 2017) In Japan, facsimile machines are commonly used still while they are displayed at museums in the United States. (Murai 2017) The article also mentioned that curriculum vitae is commonly written by hand and stamped with personal seals. (Murai 2017) As a matter of fact, Japan Paper Association's statistics show the demand for paper used for documents increased 1.3 percent in 2016 compared to previous year. (Murai 2017) At the same time, the association predicted the demand will grow in 2017. (Murai 2017) Unfortunately, hourly productivity in Japan is ranked 20th out of 35 OECD countries according to the Tokyo-based think tank Japan Productivity Center. (Murai 2017) A professor from Niigata university pointed out how the change takes place slowly in Japanese companies and reasoned this as Japanese companies' cultures are collective and highly masculine. (Coulmas, 2013) These articles may indicate Japanese people prefer to use paper over digital materials because of their tradi-

tional way of utilizing papers. On top of that, they are slow to change their ways because of the cultural dimensions. This can be one of the significant facts which may have influence in smoothing the negotiations.

3.2.8 Perception of time

How to use time varies depending on a country. For instance, in Mediterranean culture people are relaxed for using time in business. It is quite common that they show up later than the meeting time and spend more time for building relationship before the negotiation. On the other hand, Japanese and American people are punctual, and they try to use time as efficiently as possible. However, they have different motivations to use time effectively in both culture. In the United States they are aiming to complete work and leave early which means individuals have their own goals to aim for. Whereas in Japan, people tend to not leave work even if their work is done and just keep working. They want to show their commitment to their bosses and co-workers which means their motivation comes from spirit of loyalty and harmony towards company. (J.Wild, L. Wild 2016, 88) This difference in attitudes towards time may cause conflictions. Therefore, this factor can be counted as one of the potential causes for cultural issue in business.

3.2.9 Decision making process in Japan

A study regarding the comparison of decision making between the United States and Japan states that the cultural differences between Japan and United States have influence on decision making process. Japanese prefer to work interdependently and keep the internal harmony. (T. Pascale, 1978, 91) Also, Japanese managers communicate utilizing a consultative decision-making process which means they communicate quickly up and down in internal hierarchy. (Yoshino, 1968) The study found Japanese companies tending to have more often face to face meetings in comparison to American companies. They organise plenty of meetings to communicate between lower and higher positioned people, but also amongst peers. (T. Pascale, 1978, 105) The reason why they prefer to have face to face meetings is that the Japanese language does not sit well for mechanical word processing. Therefore, they write down the text on a paper by hand. However, superiors tend to think that having face to face meetings is more efficient than going through the documents. At the same time, employees from various levels are working at an open space in Japan. It allows them to discuss easily and solve issues by face to face communication.

(T. Pascale, 1978, 106) Potential Japanese customers would seem to prefer to have a face to face meeting with commissionaire. This aspect maybe something the commissionaire might need to consider in the future.

4 THE DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

4.1 Research objectives

The starting point for the research is to determine the appropriate method of data collection and analysis and whether the qualitative research such as an interview is suitable or not is up to what this study is about. Marshall and Rossman claim if the theme is about individual lived experience, language and communication and society and culture, the qualitative research will have great fit because they are about individual experiences. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 47)

In this interview, the aim is to find what kind of factors affect negotiation between Japanese and foreign companies. The aim is also to find out how these factors affect negotiation process based on the interviewees' experiences. As Brinkmann claims, to complement the study, getting other sources of data such as cultural objects, observations and documents is also important to better understand the whole picture in addition to the qualitative interview research because this method is an effective method for studying certain perspectives but often not sufficient alone. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 48) Thus, different theoretical aspects in chapter 2 and 3 are introduced to provide perspective and to complement the picture and the interview research will be used for validation of those theories.

4.2 Designing & conducting the research

Once the objectives are set, the interview methods must be decided. The interviews were conducted in individual interview. Usually interviewees feel comfortable to tell personal and sensitive topic as the individual interview allows the interviewer to create an atmosphere of trust. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 27) As this study is about their personal opinions and experiences in relation to a certain culture, this style does have great fit to this study. In this study, mainly two medias were used for conducting the interviews. One is a face to face interview. Brinkmann states interviewers are able to gain richest source of information from interviewees as both sides can be present. For instance, the interviewers are able to see their body language and facial expressions in addition to verbal communication. Therefore, transcribing the interview is helpful to optimise the information they have got. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 28)

The other one is a telephone interview. Shuy claims this way of interviewing is useful when the questions are standardized and when people who are interviewed live far away from interviewers. In addition, this way will minimize the cost for conducting the interviews. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 29) In this research, some interviewees are living far from the interviewers, thus this style of interview is fitting to this study. To be able to review the interview results, the author recorded the conversations during the interviews.

4.3 Validity, reliability & limitations

The more interview does not promise the more validity and reliability in the qualitative research. Kvale & Brinkmann state interview has to be conducted to as many subjects as necessary to find out what the study needs to know. Therefore, even if the number of conducted interviews is small, there can be enough for the study as long as interviewees are selected carefully. (S. Brinkmann, 2013, 58)

In this study Japanese and non-Japanese people who have experienced B to B negotiations between Japanese and foreigners were chosen as interviewees. Interviewing both Japanese and non-Japanese sales employees will give both perspectives to the study and support to the comparison the result. Also, experiences from B to B negotiations are useful source as the commissionaire is having B to B negotiation in their business. In B to B negotiations, bigger number of stakeholders are involved, the decision-making processes last longer and more long-lasting relationships are required in comparison to B to C business. (C. Cohn, 2015) Therefore, the communication style will also be altered according to the business model.

4.4 Analysis

In this chapter, the results from the interviews are analysed in detail. The expectations of Japanese people towards non-Japanese people and those of non-Japanese people towards Japanese people are compared to find the differences. These results are applied for creating GAP Analysis in commissionaire's case to develop concrete strategy plan for Helmee Imaging Oy, which will hopefully help them to enter the Japanese market in the future.

4.4.1 Japanese participants for business negotiation with non-Japanese companies

As mentioned in the research conducted by Martinsons, Japanese decision-making style shows strong tendencies of behavioural decision-making style in comparison to Chinese and American culture. (2001, 8) In his study he investigated the correlation between the Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede Insights. 2018) and decision-making and found the decision-making style influenced by cultural aspects.

Therefore, questions to Japanese people are formed to find out what kind of cultural preference Japanese people show in negotiation process.

All Japanese interviewees are working in business to business level. Some of them are working for sales and some are working for purchasing. Since the questions contain sensitive topics, the commissionaire's potential Japanese customers have not been interviewed. The four interviewees are selected from the author's acquaintances.

Based on the interview results, all Japanese employees see language as one of the biggest barriers when interacting with foreign companies. One of the answers was "Communicating in English is sometimes difficult. Of course, it would be great to communicate in Japanese, if possible." Although English is the common language between non-Japanese enterprises, it causes difficulties in communication. Even if some of Japanese employees are ok to deal in English, sometimes they need to spend time afterwards explaining, translating and going through internally what they have negotiated. Therefore, it takes time while English documents are being read and processed. Some of interviewees show preference to communication and documentation in Japanese language. However, one of the respondents answered English is easier to use for communication than Japanese language as he can express his opinions directly whereas he feels Japanese language is vague. He states, "I can deliver my opinions straightforwardly in English whereas I need to deliver them indirectly in Japanese language."

Though this is obvious, the language barrier they face is dependent on their intercultural experiences. The respondent who preferred English is working between Japanese and various non-Japanese companies for seventeen years. This person's company has about two hundred employees and has branches in United States. On the other hand, another respondent prefers to communicate with Asian people and the interviewee is mostly dealing with Asian companies. This interviewee stated "I used to communicate with Southern Asian people, so I can understand their English with their accents better than people from other culture. I also know their culture well as I have communicated with them so often." This is understandable as this person's company has twenty thousand employees and it has branches all over the world. Therefore, employees are assigned to negotiate with certain areas or countries.

4.4.2 Non-Japanese participants for business negotiation with Japanese people

Non-Japanese people who have experience of dealing with Japanese people were asked what kind of barrier they have experienced between Japanese people based on their experiences and what are their expectations from Japanese people. Used questions are the same as the ones to Japanese people but against to Japanese companies. Two Finnish and one Czech were interviewed in this study. They are all working for Finnish companies doing B to B business with Japanese companies. They are selected utilising the connections of the commissionaire.

They answered having experienced inconveniences during the negotiations with Japanese companies. There are two reasons for this. The first is the language barrier. Some stated that some Japanese business people are used to speak English, thus there is no issue in relation to communication. However, when communicating with higher positioned people who make the decisions, there can be difficulties if they are not used to communicating in English. In those occasions, interviewees need to adjust their level of English accordingly. For instance, some needed to simplify their language and speak more slowly for smooth communication. An interviewee testified this by stating “Sometimes those people who speak good English are not the ones in the position of making the decisions. And decision makers are usually older, so when we visit Japan to have a meeting, we need to adjust our English to the way they speak or ask the third party to be an interpreter in the meeting.” Another reason is understanding context. All interviewees have experienced the hesitation of the Japanese in delivering message directly. For instance, non-Japanese people have experienced Japanese people saying yes even when they have not understood what has been communicated. In their experience Japanese try to avoid saying no straightforwardly. Though the interviewees know this habit derives from Japanese politeness, it is still hard to tell what Japanese people mean. In those cases, two interviewees stated that the local Japanese person joins the meeting and acts as a middle party to assist in negotiation.

All the interviewees know how the business manner in Japan is formal, so they acknowledge the dressing manner, how to give a business card and how to apply these into practice. Some have experienced giving gifts to Japanese people as they know this is part of the business culture in Japan. An interviewee said, “I know very well about Japanese culture and I can see they seem happy when I act as Japanese people do.”

4.4.3 Comparison interview results and theories

From the interview results we can see that the theory according to which the decision-making process is influenced by the cultural differences is verified. As Martinsons states, Japanese people feel comfortable to share responsibility within a group. (2001, 8) For instance, one of the Japanese interviewees said, “I prefer to visit customers with somebody as this will give less responsibility for each party.” One of the non-Japanese people also answered, “I found Japanese people seem to be comfortable being within a group.”

Most of the interviewees stated Japanese language as the best way for communication, although they stated there is no difference in decision results dependent on whether the communication is in second language or in mother tongue. For instance, one of the Japanese respondents stated, “I think the result is not correlated with communication language.” Therefore, the theory regarding the relationships between language and decision making (Reiter 2017) is not verified based on this study.

Although Gutsell, J & Inzlicht, M. state people feel empathy to same ethnic group (2009, 844), it does not seem to apply to everyone. Some of the Japanese interviewees responded that appearance does not affect communication. On the other hand, one of Japanese people stated, “Talking to Asians makes me feel comfortable as they understand jokes and food culture are the same.”, for the question “Is it for example easy to work with other Asian people?” (Appendix 1)

All Japanese interviewees have experienced difficulties working with non-Japanese people. Mostly, they put it down to the language barrier. One of the Japanese interviewees stated, “Japanese language is indirect so that the message is harder to get through in comparison to English.” On the other hand, non-Japanese people are struggling to understand Japanese people’s honest opinions because Japanese people express opinions indirectly. Therefore, as Takagi. K states, Japanese people may have to change the way of delivering message. (2010)

Some of the six dimensions from Hofstede's cultural model were visible through the interview. Sometimes, Japanese interviewees are answering to the questions as a representative of their companies, while Czech and Finnish interviewees are answering based on their experiences. This difference may come from the difference in individualism. Japanese culture has strong character in high uncertainty avoidance. (Hofstede Insights. 2018) This aspect is also visible in dressing manner in Japan. There are not many options for dressing in the meeting in Japan as maintaining harmony is important in their culture.

All the non-Japanese interviewees stated they prefer to ask a Japanese native speaker to join in the meeting held in Japan. This is in line with Bucknall's statement (2005, 80). One of the respondents explained, "This is to avoid miscommunication and to let Japanese attendees feel comfortable." The author also experienced that Japanese people prefer to use Japanese language when the topic is complicated and when they want to avoid delivering message straightforwardly.

The interviewees from neither side mentioned about the eye contact when they were asked about the inconveniences in communication though Bucknall states looking into eyes is not recognized as positive attitude. (2005, 98) However, the author experienced Japanese attendees avoiding eye-contact and looking away, thus this could be truthful. Similar results were gotten from the interviewees regarding the silence. Keeping silence is common in meetings with Japanese people. (Bucknall, 2005, 106) Though silence was not mentioned during the interviews, the author witnessed Japanese people comfortable in silence.

Bucknall states dressing and giving business card in formal way is vital for Japanese people, so that even non-Japanese people must adopt their way of doing. (2005, 62) The interviewees proved this is partly true. All Japanese interviewees admitted Japanese business manner conducted by non-Japanese people gave positive impression. However, one of the Japanese interviewees stated, "We are supposed to wear suit as I am Japanese, but I do not expect the same from foreigners. Most important thing in the meeting is the content, not the dress code.", as a response for "What kind of dressing do non-Japanese guests have for the meeting? How important dressing is for you?" (Appendix 1) On the other hand, another said "I believe dressing shows their attitude towards the

business.” Therefore, casual dressing may be taken negatively in some cases. Acknowledging Japanese culture and applying its customs in practice is recommendable, however it is not mandatory.

According to Murai, Japanese companies have old fashioned aspects in the business. (2017) Japanese interviewees stated they are using facsimile machine at work. One of them gave the way of giving signature as a reason for this. “Usually facsimile is used when our customer orders our products. Since we are using personal seals, paper is the best way for handling. Also, physical material such as paper is useful for making sure if the order is processed internally.” The author estimates that this aspect may affect communication style between non-Japanese companies. However, all interviewees showed preference towards handling electronic documents. One of them stated “I prefer to receive PDF or excel format as this is compact.”, for the question, “What format of the documentation do you prefer to have?” (Appendix 1) At the same time this person said, “I print out presentation slides to the paper at work so that everybody can follow while a presenter changes the slides in front of the audience.” The author also encountered Japanese people using paper format documentation during the meetings. They are using papers and pens for making notes. Therefore, statements of Murai are verified. However, it does not affect their expectations from non-Japanese companies.

As J. Wild & L. Wild state Japanese people are punctual. (2016, 88) This is testified by both Japanese and non-Japanese interviewees. One of the non-Japanese responded “I always keep my promises with Japanese customers as I do not want them to lose their face. I am always on time for the meeting so that I can build the trust with them.”, for the question “How important punctuality is for you?” (Appendix 1) One of the Japanese people claimed, “I do not want to deal with someone who cannot keep their promises since I would not be able to trust that person then.” Thus, non-Japanese people need to pay attention not only to punctuality but also to keeping promises.

T. Pascale states Japanese companies tend to hold face to face meetings. (1978, 105) As the answer for “What is the best way of the communication during the negotiations?” (Appendix 1), one of the Japanese respondents said “Of course, if I could, I would like to communicate in person because then I could see the product with my own eyes.” Also, one of the non-Japanese respondents stated, “Dealing with Japanese involves so

many face to face meetings thus having local people in Japan is effective for our company.” Although keeping internal harmony, as T. Pascale stated, is one of the purposes of the face to face meetings, keeping harmony is not mentioned in the interviews. Probably because the meetings aiming to keep harmony are held internally.

4.4.4 Gaps between Japanese companies and non-Japanese companies

Both sides claim language barrier as one of the key issues creating inconvenience. However, there are differences in other factors they pointed out. Japanese companies listed unchangeable matters as inconvenience factors for working with foreign companies, while Finnish companies listed up changeable aspects. Specifically, non-Japanese people find understanding what Japanese mean from the context inconvenient, whereas Japanese people find time difference and geological reasons inconvenient. The reason behind this can be found from the old-fashioned Japanese business culture. Through the interview, Japanese interviewees showed old fashioned preferences in various aspects. For instance, they prefer to build trust by meeting with people in person and to use facsimile at work. Some also state using physical papers is easier than dealing with emails. One of the reasons behind this is using physical stamps instead of signatures.

Japanese people do not expect nice dressing from foreign visitors as much as foreigners think. All the interviewees stated, “Dressing does not matter in negotiations.” While Japanese people expect a certain business manner from Japanese people, it does not apply to foreigners. That is the reason why Japanese will be positive surprised if the foreign people know Japanese business culture such as greetings, giving gifts and business card.

Although Japanese business culture has old-fashioned aspects, any obvious differences were not found in communication tools. Both Japan and non-Japanese companies prefer to use Email as a communication tool since it is useful for sharing information and for later revision. Both sides are satisfied with the current way of receiving and sending digital format of document. However, in Japan, the companies use papers for delivering presentation. They show materials through projectors but at the same time they print out slides of the presentation or lists of data or drawings and distribute them to the participants. On the other hand, papers are rarely used for delivering presentation in Finland.

5 Communication strategy plan for Helmee Imaging Oy

5.1 Gap Analysis

Gap Analysis is a tool for identifying the current status, setting objectives for the future, finding the difference between them and for creating an action plan by closing gap between the current status and the desired future status. In here, the commissionaire's current status and their desired status will be applied in this analysis to create them a concrete action plan with which to reach their objectives.

Current Status

In current situation, Helmee Imaging Oy has English and German materials but not enough materials in Japanese. They do not have yet solid connections with Japanese companies and they do not have any experience of working with Japanese companies. Thus, they are looking for the best way to negotiate with Japanese companies.

Future State

They aim to increase their prominence in Japan to have more customers. By being known in Japan, they are able to create trust and to attract customers. Also creating more connections with Japanese companies is their objective. Creating connections will create fame in Japan.

GAP

In the GAP, the gap created by the difference between current and future states will be closed. In the first place, Helmee Imaging Oy needs more connections with Japanese companies. Japanese people appreciate the stability and trustworthiness of the big companies, thus if they could create connections with those companies, it would give a good impression and help to build trust with the potential Japanese customers. Another GAP factor that is missing, is knowledge about how to communicate with Japanese business people. This affects all kinds of things related to creating connections with Japanese companies.

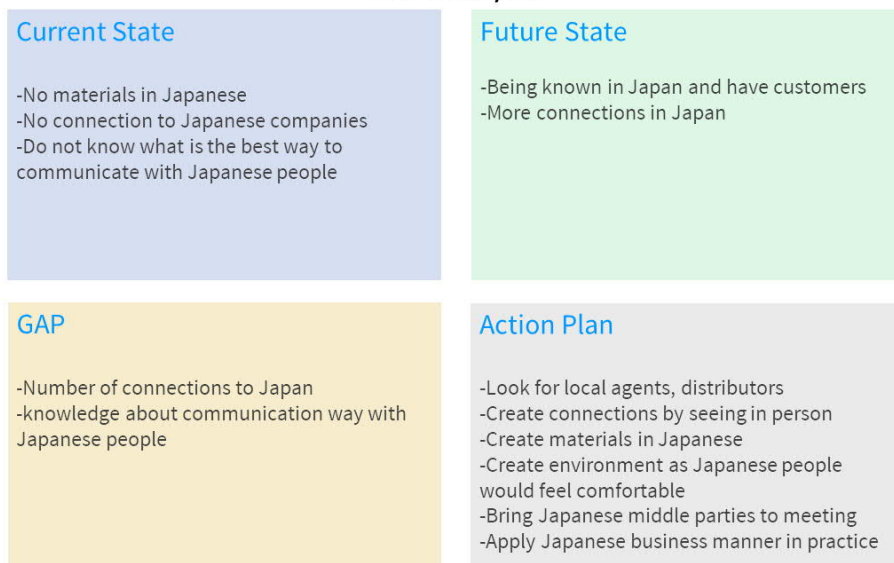
Action Plan

The action plan is a concrete plan for reaching the desired future status. As Japanese people find the language as one of the biggest barriers, bringing materials in Japanese is helpful for improving the efficiency of the information sharing.

The best way to create connections with Japanese people is to meet with them in person. Also maintaining long-term relationships with the same people is important to win the trust in Japanese business culture. Getting to know business partners also on a personal level, makes Japanese people feel more comfortable and allows them to speak freely.

Having local agents or distributors is significant in Japan for the commissionaire. The bigger the middle party companies, more they trust the commissionaire. The size of the company and its name recognition in Japan give positive impression to Japanese people. In addition, bringing agents or distributors is helpful for Helmee. Especially when the decision makers in Japan seem to feel uncomfortable using English for the communication. Also, local agent will be helpful in reading between the lines which is tricky for non-Japanese people. Eventually, one day when Helmee Imaging Oy has enough connections in Japan, having its own branch in Japan will be effective for Helmee Imaging Oy as Japanese people tend to create trust by seeing in person. Being recognized as Japanese company by having a branch in the country would also give a positive impression to Japanese customers.

GAP Analysis



PICTURE 1. GAP Analysis of Helmee Imaging Oy's Action Plan

6 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this research is to find the way to negotiate with Japanese companies for Helmee Imaging Oy. The author researched related studies, books and publications. This gave more understanding to the topic and eventually it allowed the author to decide focus point for this research.

The main question of this study “How to make negotiation smooth between Japanese and foreign companies.” is answered in chapter five. Also sub questions “What kind of factors are important in negotiations for Japanese companies.” and “What kind of factors will give positive impression to Japanese people from foreign companies.” are answered in chapter five. Language has considerable influence on negotiations. Japanese tend to trust companies who have connections with Japanese companies. Also, well-known company gives a positive impression because of the stability it provides. Face to face meeting is an efficient way of building trust. Understanding Japanese culture and applying it into practice and being punctual will give a positive impression.

These results are applied in Helmee Imaging Oy’s current situation to achieve their goals. Then action plan is listed step by step in GAP Analysis. Creating new connections with Japanese agents or distributors is the next steps in the action plan. Once it has been achieved, agents and distributors need to participate in the meetings with Helmee Imaging Oy and the Japanese customers to support smooth communication between them.

Considering the validity, this could be improved by selecting the right kind of people as interviewees. During the study, four Japanese people working in business to business selling were selected. However, their businesses are in different fields from Helmee Imaging Oy. The validity of the interview results could be better if the interviewees are in the same field as Helmee Imaging Oy. Also, they are working in sales and purchase positions, however if they are in purchase position, the quality of the result would be improved as Helmee Imaging Oy is interested in entering Japanese market.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Interview questions for Japanese participants for business negotiation with non-Japanese companies

General questions

- What kind of business you have?
- How many years are you working in this field?
- What is the company size?
- Does your company has branches in other countries? Where?
- Have you ever been reached out by foreign companies? How often?
- How much do you have international experiences before you start working in this position?
- Have you experienced inconvenience when you work with foreign companies?

Getting contact

- In which way have you ever received contact? Which way do you prefer people contact you? (means, language, the way to get your contact)
- If you use English for communication, is there any difference when you communicate in Japanese?
- Do you know how people have got your contact? Does it matter to negotiations how people got your contact? What is the most trustful way to get your contact?
- Are you interested in if the company is dealing with other Japanese companies?
- Does the size of the company affect to the first impression?

Communication, documentation

- Which methods do you use for communication with business negotiation? What is the best way of the communication during the negotiations?
- What kind of documentation would you like to receive from companies. (Informative, language, visual)
- What format of the documentation do you prefer to have? (digital, paper)
- How useful you find English materials?
- How important punctuality is for you?

Face to face meeting

- Do you know the topic of the meeting and questions in advance? How important knowing agenda before the meeting?
- Do you use paper materials for delivering presentation?
- What kind of dressing do non-Japanese guests have for the meeting? How important dressing is for you? What kind of impression does it give?
- Do foreign guests know Japanese business culture and do they apply into the practice?
- Do you bring souvenir when you visit foreign countries?
- Is it difficult to express your opinion directly?
- If so, what make you to say your opinion without hesitation?

Closing

- In which language do you make contract? What kind of difference you see if the contract is in English instead of Japanese?
- Is it for example easy to work with other Asian people?

Appendix 2. Interview questions for non-Japanese participants for business negotiation with Japanese companies

General questions

- What kind of business you have?
- How many years are you working in this field?
- What is the company size? How many people are working at your company?
- Do you have branch in other countries?
- Have you ever reached out Japanese companies? How often?

Getting contact

- How do you reach out Japanese people? (LinkedIn, email, video call, SNS) Which way is easiest for you?
- Which language do you use when you reach Japanese companies?
- How usually do you get contact about Japanese people? What is the easiest way for you to getting contact?

Communication, documentation

- What kind of channel would you prefer to use for communication with Japanese companies? (email, LinkedIn, face to face, phone call)
- Do you agree time for calling by email in advance? Or do you call without notification?
- Which format of materials do you send to Japan? (digital, paper?) what is easiest?
- What kind of documentation do you send to Japan? Do you send different (special) kinds of materials for Japanese companies? (Informative, language, visual)
- In which way do you send document to Japanese companies? (email, post)
- In which language do you send materials to Japan? Do you think English materials are useful for your understanding?
- Are you punctual usually? Is punctuality important for you in your opinion?

Face to face meeting

- Do you decide agenda before the meeting and share it with Japanese companies? Is this helpful for having meeting?
- What kind of cloths do you wear when you have meeting with Japanese companies?

Do you pay attention to what to wear?

-Do you study about Japanese culture before you see them and apply to practice?

Closing

-what language do you send contract to Japanese companies? What kind of difference you see if the contract is in English instead of Finnish? (Is it faster? do you need to translate internally?)

-Have you experienced inconvenience when you work with Japanese companies compared to working with other foreign companies?

-Is it for example easier to work with other European companies than Japanese companies?