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Intercultural Training for Hotel Kämp Front Office

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Abstract

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Intercultural training for Hotel Kämp front office staff was conducted for the first time. The need for the training was expressed via the employees and permission was granted by the general manager Mr Skvorc.

The main objective of the training was to provide the front office employees better tools to interact with Japanese guests and provide them better five star services by conducting an intercultural training at the premises. Possibility of implementing intercultural training as a yearly event for the employees was also in mind. Training was conducted in October 2014.

Training was successful and the main objectives were reached. Positive feedback was received and further suggestions for coming trainings were received. Employees felt the training was well structured and was comprehensive.

The thesis firstly explains the theory for conducting an intercultural training and the main objectives training possesses. The cultural differences between Finland and Japan are examined with the assistance of Geert Hofstede. Discussion of the results by analysing the feedback is conducted and suggestions for the upcoming trainings are provided.

Keywords
Intercultural Training, Japan, Hofstede, Culture

Table of contents

1 Introduction 1
2 Intercultural training 4
2.1 Steps to gain intercultural competence 5
2.1.1 Communication barriers 8
2.2 Objectives of intercultural training 9
2.3 Culture and values 11
2.4 Japan 12
2.4.1 Power Distance 14
2.4.2 Uncertainty Avoidance 15
2.4.3 Individualism vs. collectivism 16
3 Planning and conducting the training 19
4 Results 22
4.1 Interview results 23
4.2 Author's evaluation of the event 24
5 Discussion 26
6 Suggestions for the future trainings and self-evaluation 30
Bibliography 33
Attachments 36
Attachment 1. Intercultural training for Hotel Kämp front office 36

1 Introduction

Hotel Kämp is one of the oldest hotels in Helsinki with a glamourous and spectacular history. The hotel was first opened in 1887 by Carl and Maria Kämp and it was the most luxurious hotel in the city. Famous Finnish thinkers and composers used to sit at the cafe and have a cup of tea or maybe a glass of wine while pondering on their new accomplishments. The interior of the hotel still makes people speechless and the pictures and photographs remind us of the glorious past. Finnish bank owned the hotel premises for a long period of time after the First World War and they found out it was sinking to the ground during the 1960s. They decided to demolish the edifice and to rebuild it. This was not a popular idea among the citizens but despite the uproar the permission was granted and it was torn down and resurrected during the 1960s. The bank could not find a hotel manager to run the hotel after the rebuilding and therefore they kept it only as a bank premises. In the year 1999 it was remade a hotel and it has been working ever since. In the year 2009 Hotel Kämp joined the international Starwood chain and nowadays it belongs to the Luxury Collection hotels. Starwood has altogether 1 162 hotels around the world and therefor it is one of the biggest hotel chains in the world (Augustin & Kolbe)

As the hotel belongs to the international chain Starwood under the Luxury Collection title the service is required to be high quality in order to meet the standards created by the international markets. The author has worked in Hotel Kämp since the fall of 2013 as a receptionist. During the three years of working she has noticed some lacking in the five star services for the international guests. At the front office, which includes the reception and bellmen, the employees are rather young and they have not gained as much experience in hospitality industry as would be preferable. Lack of experiences creates series of difficult customer service situations that could be prevented with proper education and training. This created an idea of an international training for the front office staff in order to perfect their services and that way a product based thesis was born.

The permission and the idea had to be approved by Marc Skvorc, the general manager at Hotel Kämp. Mr Skvorc thought the idea was brilliant and it handled issues that should have been thought of earlier. Permission was given and thus the planning of the training began.

Due to Hotel Kämp being part of an international hotel chain, the hotel guests are mainly from abroad and they consist of business and leisure travellers, depending on the season. It had to be carefully considered and evaluated which culture to concentrate on. Discussion with the managerial level was conducted and their opinions were taken into account. After careful consideration the author finally decided to concentrate on Japan since the amount of Japanese guests is growing fat and they are their culture is considerably different from any western culture the front office has to deal with. The author also considers Japanese culture intriguing and has always felt a need to study it more profoundly.

The framework for the thesis is mostly written information gathered from different sources. Additionally an interview was conducted with the head waiter of restaurant Yume who has lived and worked in Japan for a decade and therefore has valuable first-hand information to provide. The information has been gathered thinking of the front office operations and what would be valuable in order to provide five star services.

The aim of the training was to provide the front office personnel better tools to interact with the Japanese business and leisure travellers. The encounters with the Japanese travellers might have been viewed negatively in the past since there was no comprehension between the guest and the employees. It is normal that everything unfamiliar is perceived as negative. Unfamiliar situations and actions are considered uncomfortable and awkward. There was a need to create a more positive image of the Japanese culture in order to make the front office personnel more willing to assist the Japanese guests.

To gain this information and improve the service it was crucial to comprehend the motives behind the actions by studying the culture and the habits of Japanese. Once the reasons behind the actions are understood and they have become familiar with the

employees, a more positive image is created. By gaining understanding the encounters with Japanese guests become more appreciated and the front office personnel will not view them in negative light anymore. The Japanese guests would also benefit from the training for their guest experience would become more valuable. The Japanese would receive service that they are accustomed to and therefore feel more at home.

It was also in mind to introduce the idea of training the staff further. The possibility to implement an intercultural training in the yearly events of Hotel Kämp was considered as an option.

2 Intercultural training

There are many reasons why intercultural knowledge is needed in today's business societies. The world has shrunk in size; Ways to travel have expanded and the time required to cross the continents has been minimalized. This has brought all the cultures closer to each other and business is done across the borders. Pieces for products can be made in variety of countries while the final product is then built up in another (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 1-2 Tourism has seen immense growth, and it is considered one of the most superficial forms of intercultural encounters. Employees in hospitality industry might learn more about the culture of the tourist than the tourist of the host country. Tourists' quirks and habits are learned and service is adapted accordingly. This might give the employees a wrong picture of the tourists' home country (Hofstede 2001, 452).

People have become more prone to travel since international boarders have all but disappeared. It has also become easy to emigrate from a country to another. Sometimes moving might be temporary but sometimes the emigrants find a home in the new country and decide to integrate. In the case of permanent immigration the family might be in a need of assistance with local procedures and habits. In one working environment there might be employees from multiple different countries and cultures. In this case intercultural training becomes necessary and even crucial. (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 1-2)

When planning any kind of an event the needs of the audience and participants must be taken into consideration in order to have a successful event that meets the needs of the current situation (Rutherford Silver 2004, 29). An intercultural training is normally arranged to take one to two days' time six to twelve hours per day. Arranging the training to take more than one day's time assures that the participants do not receive too much information in one sitting but they can easier adopt everything (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 10).

There are two types of intercultural training: Culture-specific and culture-general. According to Andrea Graf culture-specific training is more concentrated on one specific culture and therefore gives more guidelines on how to interact with one specific culture whereas culture-general training is concentrated in more than one culture (Graf 2003.). It is further specified that culture-specific training is more suitable for people who are planning on immigrating to another country and adapting to a new culture. This way they are given the necessary tools to survive in the environment. However, the negative side in culture-specific training is the fact that all the information and guidelines required for teaching can be found from books, videos and the internet and therefore the training itself is not needed in case it does not provide more specific details and go deeper under the surface (Hofstede 2001, 428).

The culture-general training, on other hand, is said to be more for employees in an international work environment and people who must interact with different cultures in their everyday life. The training focuses more on the bigger picture and gives knowledge that can be implemented for many different cultures instead of only one. This training is more useful and gives the trainees broader knowledge than culture-specific training. Negative aspect of this is that it touches the surface of many cultures but the trainees do not gain full competence in any culture (Hofstede 2001, 428).

2.1 Steps to gain intercultural competence

According to Geert Hofstede there are three steps that the students must reach during the intercultural training in order to gain the desired competence. As figure 1 states the first step is being aware of the differences, then comes the knowledge of the reason behind the differences, and, lastly, the skills to interact with different cultures. Once these three steps have been mastered, intercultural competence is reached (Hofstede 2001, 427-428).

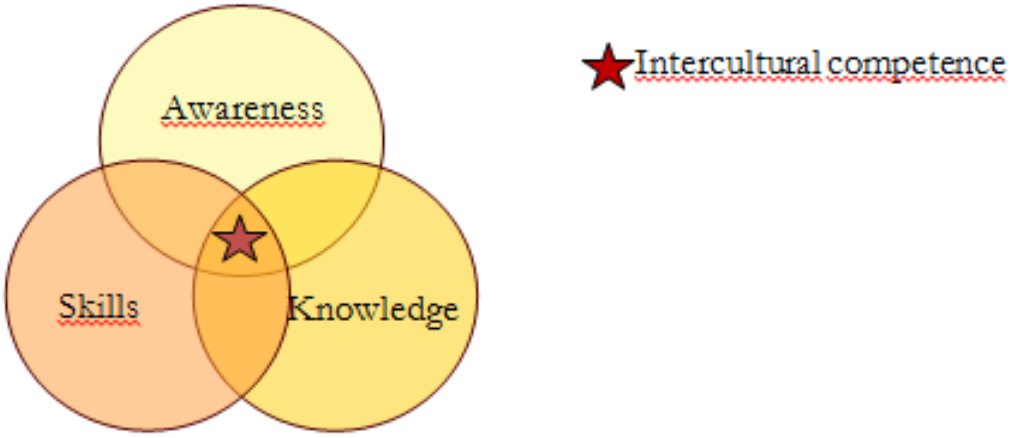

Figure 1. Steps to gain intercultural competence (Hofstede 2001, 428)

Culture is often taken for granted and one does not spare thoughts to why situations are always handled in a certain way (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 5-8). First step to gain intercultural competence is to realise that everyone is different and the reason behind the actions is in upbringing; all the habits are taught from an early age on. This first step must be realised by oneself. The realisation cannot be forced on anyone and if there is indifference regarding the matter this step cannot be reached (Hofstede 2001, 427-428). This realization and awareness is reached in the beginning of the training.

It is said that the key elements for gaining awareness is separating observation and interpretation. Meaning when members of two different cultures have first encounter it is important not to judge the way the other acts with pre-existing knowledge and it is crucial to gain knowledge of the culture in order to interpret the actions correctly. Previous meetings and prejudice should not be thought of (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen 2002, 17).

The second step is knowledge of why people act the way they do. In this part habits of another culture are explained. Different culture's heroes, symbols and rituals need to be understood and accepted but knowledge does not mean the rituals and ideas must be shared or believed. Understanding and accepting the differences is the key element in step two (Hofstede 2001, 427-428). In some cases understanding the reason behind the differences might become necessary for survival. As an example the differences

between right and wrong can vary greatly between different cultures; punctuality is greatly appreciated in Japan as in Spain it is normal to be always late. These cultural differences need to be accepted and respected in order to immigrate to the culture and become part of it (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 5-8).

The third step is the actual interaction skills. To move to step three the cultural differences and the reasons behind them must be understood because during this step practising what has been learned starts. Practising the differences might cause frustration and anger in the beginning. It would be preferable to have everyone acting the way the person in question has become accustomed to. Unfamiliar situations might be considered awkward and stressful. To avoid all this unnecessary frustration and stress in the actual real life situation the scenes and exercises need to be repeated more than once. Once the habits have been practised thoroughly the stress level will decrease and the situation no longer feels as awkward as before (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 5-8).

As shown in figure 1 after mastering the three steps the intercultural competence may be achieved. But it should be kept in mind that practicing the skills is an on-going process that requires longer period of time. The two day training does not mean the skills have been fully mastered. (Graf 2003)

Geert Hofstede states in Training in Intercultural Competence that some people are more gifted in learning the cultural differences than other. People who have tendency to be racist or who are somehow emotionally unstable are not able to understand and reach the desired competence. Furthermore, people who are highly uncertain of themselves and do not have a healthy confidence do not master the competence as quickly as people who have more confidence and are sure of themselves (Hofstede 2001, 248). This can be further explained by the fact that the training challenges people's emotional stability by forcing them to understand that what they have held as right and wrong in the past are not universal truths. Intercultural training questions all the habits we have learned (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 5-8).

2.1.1 Communication barriers

There are five communication barriers which need to be taken into account when interacting with a foreigner. The first barrier comes with the language. As Hofstede states, language plays a crucial role in cultural encounters and is also one of the most common reasons for a cultural clash (Hofstede 2001, 425). Every culture and even every family has their own language, a language that is taught from the early age on. The language spoken, or mimicked, is part of identity and culture and one word used in a certain culture might have a completely different meaning when translated in to another language. Words might have multiple meanings depending on the situation and to understand these meanings it is important to understand the culture. Due to this it is crucial to study the language and also observe the people and ask questions why certain words are used in different ways. Only thus is it possible to become fluent in a language (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen. 2002, 17-18). Understanding these communicational differences in culture is one of the ways to show respect towards people. It shows that time has been consumed to study their culture and an understanding of it has been created (Prince & Hoppe 2000).

The second barrier is non-verbal communication. It is crucial to understand the non-verbal gestures in order to have a discussion between different cultures. Non-verbal communication refers to all the motions a person creates without using words. As an example of what non-verbal communication evaluates are how good posture is, are the hand crossed or hanging, and whether person is looked in the eyes or is are the eyes wandering around the space. All these are clues of the other person's feelings, and what should be interpreted in addition to what is said. All the cultures have different set of non-verbal communication methods and therefore it is important to know how to act in a manner that it is not insulting towards the other person (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen. 2002, 18).

Stereotypes are also a great barrier between cultures. There is a great need to categorize unfamiliar and through stereotypes we create an image of a culture without it being necessary correct. A bad experience with one representative of a culture could give a negative image of the whole culture and its people. To overcome this barrier, previous

encounters must be re-evaluated and the culture studied more profoundly (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen. 2002, 18-19).

Like mentioned above, awareness is the first step in gaining intercultural competence, and in this step it needs to be learned that before interpretation you need to have proper knowledge of the culture. If a person interprets the culture without knowledge it leads inaccurate evaluation of the situation. Besides being one of the states in awareness it is one of the five communication barriers. Evaluating the culture based on your own values leads to misinterpretation and it needs to be avoided. Values are more explained further in the thesis. It is important not to judge without studying the reasons behind the actions (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen. 2002, 19).

Due to all the barriers mentioned there might be a stress factor involved in the encounters. This is the fifth barrier stated by Hofstede, Hofstede and Pedersen. Stress occurs when the situation is not familiar and there is no knowledge of what to expect from the situation. When proper cultural knowledge has been gained the stress level decreases and situations are more easily handled without unnecessary stress (Hofstede & Hofstede & Pedersen. 2002, 19).

2.2 Objectives of intercultural training

The main goal of intercultural training is to make adjustment to one's own culture in order to better communicate with other cultures' representatives and survive in different surroundings. An unpleasant cross-cultural experience is never desirable and might lead to avoidance. Intercultural training assists in overcoming the obstacles and barriers mentioned above in order to make the encounter more pleasant and positive. Everyone has a basic desire to develop oneself professionally and feel satisfied with their work effort and therefore it is important to have a positive image of intercultural encounters. This applies especially to hospitality industry since the work day is full of international encounters and demanding customer situations (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 4).

One of the goals for intercultural training is to establish a positive relationship between two cultures. The more powerful culture in the destination country needs to obtain a positive image of the mingling culture in order to maintain an accepting and positive atmosphere. It is intercultural competence to allow a member from another culture to get to know you in a personal level despite the differences (Graf. 2003). This goal is mainly designed for expatriate families since both parties achieve more cultural knowledge. As an example an international coordinator in school ought to have training in order to receive exchange students who have as well received training in their own home country. This goal can be set also for an international work environment where employees are from multiple different cultures (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 4).

Another goal for intercultural training is to assist people to perform their work tasks more efficiently and therefore lessen the amount of stress and culture shock. Culture shock is something all the immigrants and expatriate families will undergo when moving across borders. Culture shock is experienced due to the differences and the sudden change in the habits. People feel stressed and uncomfortable in new situations and they need to go through a process in order to adapt to the situation. Training cannot prevent the feeling of being completely lost and clueless but instead it can assist in overcoming these negative emotions quicker by explaining differences in traditions and rituals (Brislin & Yoshida 199, 4).

In intercultural situations the old traditions must be adapted to the new culture. The easiest way to accomplish these goals is to change habits (Duhigg 2012, 62). This can be accomplished by observing the people with whom the intercourse is taking place and modify the actions by reading the signs of discomfort (Prince & Hoppe. 2000). To understand the sings of discomfort the non-verbal habits and gestures need to be understood and comprehended correctly. There is no need for a person to create completely new habits since modifying the old one is enough. The old habits can be used as a base for the new ones and the new traditions can be built on top of them. Only the way a person used to act needs to be slightly changed in order to gain success (Duhigg 2012, 62).

2.3 Culture and values

Before going deeper into the precise culture on hand a few terms must be explained in order to increase the competence. The terms further explained are culture and value. They are further explained due to the many definitions the professionals have developed and to be made sure it is understood which definition is used here in the matter.

Culture is a complex term to explain for it contains multiple different levels and therefore there is not a clear definition made for it. Anthropologists have not been able to agree on one definition and it has been counted that there are over 160 different explanations. One of the suggestions taken into account in this thesis is that culture is a set of indistinct attitudes, behaviours and beliefs in addition to values that one group shares and by which other members are interpreted (Spencer-Oatey 2002, 4). Other suggestions for the definition of culture comes from Geert Hofstede; "The collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede 2001, 9). In Geert Hofstede's interpretation of culture he defines the mind as a set of heart, head and hands. He further explains that these meaning feeling, thinking and acting.

In both of these definitions the culture is said to be a shared basis of ideas of what is right and wrong and by these assumptions the members interact with each other and evaluate life. It is stated as well that culture is not defined by the nation one is born into, but rather by socialization. This means that there are many different cultures in many different levels and a person can belong to more than one culture at a time. These cultures are, for example, business environment, different organizations, nation or family. All these culture are learned through interacting with different people and all the cultures have different values and rituals (Pankaj & Reiche. 1-3). In this thesis culture is defined as the culture of a whole nation instead of any smaller group.

Culture consists of many levels of which only the basic one can be seen. The tip of the iceberg which is visible to others is the behaviour of the members and the symbols, heroes and rituals. Symbols mean all the words, gestures and pictures that are typical for the culture in question. Heroes are items and people the culture looks up to. For

example, cartoon character Asterix is great hero for the French and the Finns look up to Teemu Selänne in a similar way. The ways of greeting people paying respect towards other people can be considered rituals as well, activities that are unnecessary for the outcome but are considered essential by the culture (Hofstede 2001, 10). Prayer said before an athletic performance can be an example of a cultural ritual for certain athletic or saying "break a leg" before a live performance for actors.

Culture is also defined as a fuzzy concept since the members are unlike to share the exact same set of attitudes and beliefs. In other words members of a culture are all individuals (Spencer-Oatey 2002, 4.). Below the surface, all the members have set of values which are programmed in from an early age on, since birth. Plenty of different definitions can be found likewise for values. Geert Hofstede defines values as a choosing process between good and evil, right and wrong, and safe and dangerous among multiple others. A set of individual values can be also in conflict with the values the culture sets (Hofstede 2001, 5-6). Values drive the person from inside and make them act the way they do, they work as a motivation for performing. Values are not necessarily connected to the culture and can be both individual and collective. (Hechter 1993, 4-5)

The most well-known person to have studied cultures is Geert Hofstede. He has developed five dimensions to assist in comparing the differences in cultures and their habits. These five dimensions are individualism versus collectivism (IDV), Power distance index (PDI), uncertainty avoidance index (UAI), Masculinity (MAS), Long-term versus short-term orientation (LTO) and indulgence versus restraint (IVR) (The Hofstede Centre). These dimensions will be further explained in the following chapters.

2.4 Japan

As stated earlier travelling has become more common since the ways to cross nations have developed. As the author has mentioned Japanese businessmen are travelling more to Hotel Kämp than before. Due to this it is crucial to understand how Japanese culture works in order to provide the customers the best possible service. In order to understand the cultures better, Hofstede's cultural dimensions are studied.

In this thesis three of the dimensions are studied further, due to these dimensions containing the most pronounced differences between Japanese and Finnish cultures. These three dimensions are PDI, UAI and IDV. The scores for each of the dimensions are measured from 0 to 100. Power distance is used to measure the relationship between the employee and employer. The lower the distance is, the closer the relationship between the ordinate and subordinate; People are more comfortable among each other and they do not feel the necessity for formal behaviour and therefore it is common to communicate on first name basis. The figure 2 shows the comparison and differences between Finland and Japanese with these cultural dimensions (The Hofstede Centre).

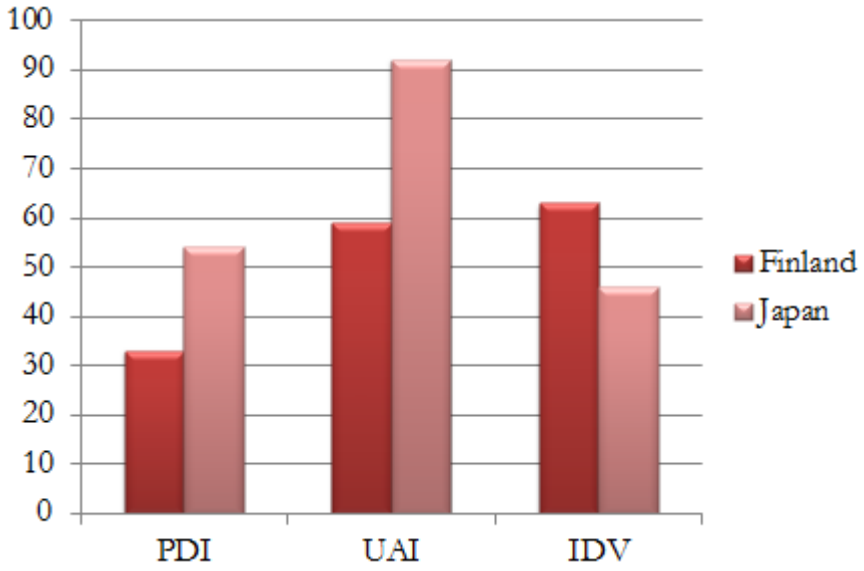

Figure 2. Comparison of dimensions between Japan and Finland (Hofstede Centre)

Uncertainty avoidance describes how the nation handles the unknown and the future. Lower uncertainty avoidance nations are more prone to take risks and they do not fear what will happen in a few years' time. If the distance is high the nation prefers to know what the future holds ahead and therefore creates a high set of rules and regulations to control everything. These rules must then be followed strictly in order to achieve the desired outcome (The Hofstede Centre).

Individualism versus collectivism shows the relationship between peoples in the nation. If the score is low it depicts that the nation is collective and therefore concentrates on "we". Whole extended family is to be taken care of and decisions are made on the basis

of what is best for the whole team. If the score is high, the emphasis on the "me" and other people do not need to be taken into account. Here inly the immediate family is taken care of and one need not consider their opinion while making decisions of one's own life (The Hofstede Centre).

2.4.1 Power Distance

As can be seen on figure 2 Japan has higher PDI than Finland with a score of 54. This means that Japan is a borderline nation; they are conscious of hierarchy and they respect it, but decision making is slow and permissions need to be acquired from all the levels before making a final resolution. Communication is vastly indirect and no negative emotions are expressed out loud. On the contrary, Finland, with a score of 33, is a low PDI country and has hierarchy more for convenience, and communication can be direct and on first name basis (The Hofstede Centre).

In order to show respect towards the person higher on hierarchy the Japanese have certain rituals that must be conducted. As an example the Japanese have a certain way of bowing and by bowing they show respect towards the elder or the superior. A good bow also reflects good education and proper upbringing. Although bowing is important for the Japanese, they do not expect the westerners to know the correct way, a slight and polite nod is sufficient (Hijirida 1987, 27). A respectful sign is also to provide fast service and not keep the guests waiting. If they do need to wait it is highly important to remember to show respect by being humble and apologizing for all the inconvenience (Hijirida 1987, 170). It is considered respectful towards the other, no matter their status, to hand everything with two hands. This is one way of showing complete trust and respect and it can give the impression that all the attention is focused on the person with whom communication is taking place.

When communicating with Japanese attention must be paid to the rhythm of the conversation. Interrupting the Japanese midsentence is considered highly rude and disrespectful. This is unlike in the Latin countries where interruption is considered normal and it is almost expected (Hijirida 1987, 66, 209-214). While having a conversation with the Japanese it must be likewise remembered that Japanese do not enjoy talking Eng-

lish. They might consider the language crude as it does not possess the same smooth rhythmic note as Japanese does. Due being a humble nation, Japanese might not feel comfortable presenting their skills in front of foreigners if the accompany Japanese do not possess similar level of language skills (Zimmermann 1984, 53).

It is important to pay attention to the non-verbal gestures the Japanese guests make. Due to the strict and regulated life the Japanese have been taught to not show emotions. Yelling or showing negative emotions is considered disrespectful and it could lead to losing one's face, and therefore most emotions must be interpreted through eyes and other non-verbal signs. Emotions are mostly expressed through actions and gestures rather than words. Regardless of being taught to show no emotions, the Japanese culture is highly emotional one. It could be mentioned as an example that the Japanese have a tendency to laugh in awkward and situations other than happy ones. This way they do not make the other person feel awkward and there for they try to make the situation more comfortable (Hijirida, 1987, 236-237).

The non-verbal gestures and actions are different in every culture. Japanese have different ways of gesturing and these need to be studied in order to avoid misinterpretations and to act respectfully. As an example, the sign of OK for the westerners by forming a circle with the index finger and the thumb is a sign of money for the Japanese (Hijirida, 1987, 236-237).

2.4.2 Uncertainty Avoidance

Japan is one of the countries to with the highest uncertainty avoidance index. As can been seen from the figure 2 Japan has a score of 92 when Finland has score of 59. The high UAI has been explained with the fact that Japan has to suffer from many natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes and therefore the Japanese have a certain need for knowing what to expect from the future. Finland has rather high UAI as well, and that can be interpreted as a need of rules and regulations. As an example, a high set of regulations are in place regarding consumption of alcohol and selling it. Time is also considered to be money and there is an inner urge to be constantly busy (The Hofstede Centre).

High UAI for the Japanese can be seen in the way the families plan the lives of their children. All the steps are thought beforehand and the children are expected to follow the planned path. Furthermore, everything is highly ritualized in the Japanese culture; Wedding and funerals always follow the same pattern and if this pattern is not followed it creates confusion and stress (Hijirida 1987, 209-214). Uncertainty avoidance cannot be confused with risk avoidance although they are linked. Due to the high UAI the decision making process takes vast amounts of time. Every step must be thoroughly examined and interpreted to avoid any mistakes. (Hofstede 2001, 145-148)

During the years working at the front office the author has noted that during the holidays the Japanese travel groups have rather strict timetables starting early in the morning. Every minute must be planned well beforehand. Reason for this is in the UAI; knowing what will happen brings comfort and secure feeling for the travelers and they expect everything to be done according to the given schedule. If this schedule is not followed, or some changes arise, it creates stress (Sorvoja-Bonnard). In addition to feeling secure due to the schedule, the Japanese only have few off days from work, therefore increasing the importance of timetable (Hijirida 1987, 232-234).

High uncertainty avoidance means that the Japanese have a vast amount of rules and regulations as mentioned above. These rules and regulations among with the fear of losing one's face are the reasons for low crime rates in Japan. The low criminality level in Japan creates challenging situations for the Japanese travellers. The tourists have a tendency to leave their personal items unattended to the lobby area or restaurants, forgetting that criminality are common in the western countries. Because of this the Japanese guests are easy targets for pickpocketing and other criminal activities on their vacations (Hijirida 1987, 216-217).

2.4.3 Individualism vs. collectivism

As figure 2 states Japan has an IDV score of 46 and Finland a score of 63. In an individualistic nation such as Finland, the high IDV can be seen in how persons take care of themselves instead of the whole family. While applying for employment one's own

merits are what counts, not the relationships one has. In Japan however connections are important and family name represents the whole family instead of oneself (Hofstede Centre). It has also been stated that high uncertainty avoidance can lead to collectivism since there is high anxiety among the people. Due to the anxiety they have a need to find safety among others (Hofstede 2001, 145) and this leads to complex situations such as not being able to make decisions alone. While doing business the Japanese prefer to have at least two officers involved in the decision making process and contract signing. This way, they can lean on each other and do not have to make decisions alone (Zimmermann 1984, 10).

Asian countries are often thought to be highly collective countries and according to the western standards also Japan is rather collective. While studying the Asian countries with the help of Hofstede it can be seen that compared to the other countries Japan is not as collective. Figure 3 states the different levels of collectivism and it can be seen that the comparing countries have half of the score Japan has. A slight difference to other Asian nations is that Japan has paternalistic system, meaning the oldest son inherits and the other sons must go search for their fortune elsewhere. This is not typical of collective nations and therefore the score for individualism is higher than for example for China, and according to Asian levels it is not considered as very collective (Hofstede Centre).

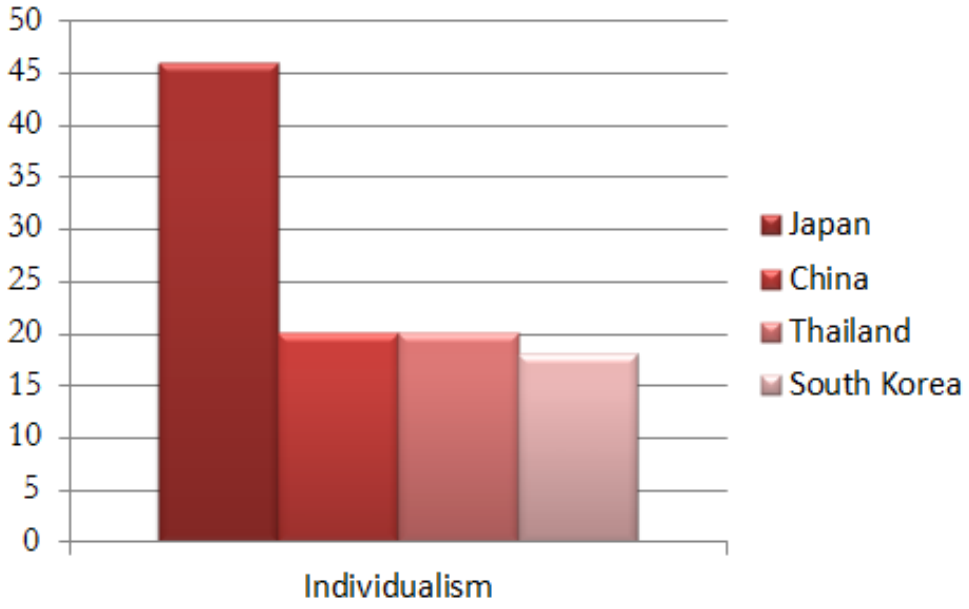

Figure 3. Individualism (Hofstede Centre)

For the Japanese, travelling has started as for all the other nations: spiritual journeys and pilgrimages were the first journeys to be experienced. Nowadays travelling is part of their yearly lives. From an early age on the children participate in excursion as school excursions. These excursions are constant, and even companies arrange them for their employees. In the old days travelling was only for the privileged Japanese and due to the high costs and travel distances only one person from the family would experience the journey. She or he would bring souvenirs such as pictures, food and handicrafts along in order for the rest of the family to experience parts of the journey. Most of these journeys are done in larger groups. Reason for this can be found in the low IDV score. The Japanese have a need to connect with each other and feel belongingness. Therefore the journey is not the highlight, but rather the fact that it is experienced together with others (Hijirida 1987, 233-235).

When meeting a new person, the Japanese prefer to be introduced to each other. This introduction can be conducted by a person both parties are familiar with. If there is no one to introduce the parties, a letter of recommendation is also acceptable. Talking with a complete stranger can be considered disrespectful and rude (Hijirida 1987, 29).

3 Planning and conducting the training

The period between receiving the permission from the hotel for the training and holding the training was rather short, only two and a half weeks. This created hurry to do the necessary research in order to gain competence. Information needed to be gathered from as many sources as possible. The author had conversations with staff member at the hotel premises who was known to have first base knowledge with the Japanese. These conversations were important since the knowledge gained was fresh and also based in the hospitality industry since the employee had worked in restaurant industry in Japan. In addition the author used lot of literature and internet researches as sources. The author was able to do enough research to hold the training after busy and intensive few weeks.

The training took place at Hotel Kämp on October 6th 2014 from 1pm to 3pm at the second floor conference centre. The training was held during the front office meeting planned already before anyone knew there would be training. The meeting was planned to take two hours of which the training would be one hour. There was a slight confusion among the management level regarding the starting hour of the meeting, due to which the general manager, Marc Skvorc, was not able to attend the first moments of the meeting. The meeting could not be prolonged due to shift changes and schedule of the management team. Here fore, it was crucial that the training would not take more time than the hour reserved for it. The information gathered for the training needed to be carefully evaluated in order to include the most important parts that were most valuable for the front office. The training was held as a power point slide show and due to the time limitation of preparing the training, no separate homework or study sheets were prepared for the audience.

As can be seen from the figure 4 the training was divided in three main parts. Firstly the theory behind an intercultural training had to be explained to the audience, since this was their first ever intercultural training. They needed to have understanding what were the main goals in intercultural training and how intercultural competence could

be reached. In this theory also different definitions, such as culture and values, were explained. As the last part for the theory Hofstede's study is explained. Here the different dimensions are gone through and it is explained how they measure cultures.

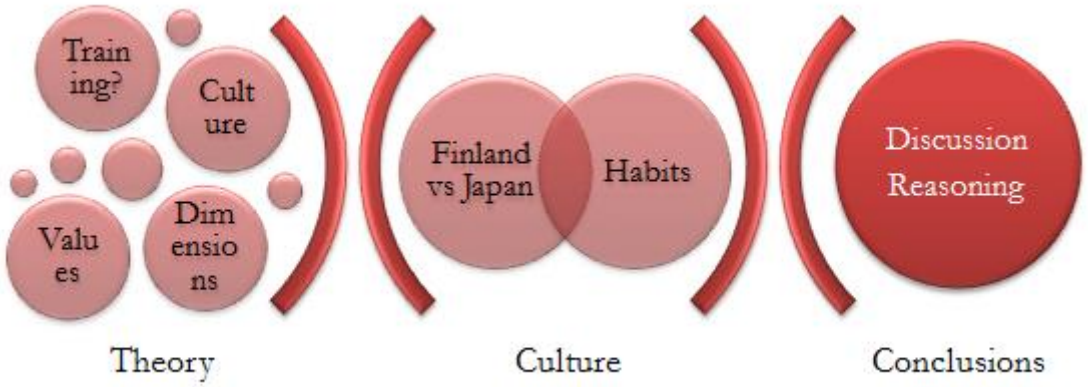

Figure 4. Process of Training (Känninen, T. 2014)

The next part of the training looked the differences in cultures. These differences are explained with the assistance of Hofstede's dimensions by comparing Finland and Japan. Before going deeper in to the culture of the Japanese, some discussion was held regarding incidents the front office had had with the Japanese guests. The main idea of this discussion was to activate the memories in order to have a proper discussion in the end. The audience was able to give their own examples and experiences with the Japanese guests. This part created a lot of discussion among the audience and some old stories and happening at Hotel Kämp were gone through. After looking at the differences in theory, some examples were shown and habits of the Japanese were gone through. These examples included habits the Japanese have in their everyday life and in encounter with different people, such as greeting and offering different objects as can be seen from the attachment 1.

After first gaining the understanding of the training and then having the theory behind the habits and cultural differences, the discussion was brought further. The last parts main idea was to go through the earlier mentioned experiences and analyse what could have done differently and how they would handle the situations now. These three parts can be further studied in the attachment 1.

It was planned that the theory of the training would not take too much time from the actual training away. The theory of the actual culture in questions with the discussion parts were the most important parts of the training. During these parts it can be analysed whether the audience I able to reach the desired intercultural competence and therefore these parts of the training needed to be highlighted.

4 Results

Success of the training was mainly measured by the feedback given by the participants and by observing the participants during the training. Since the participants are well known for the author it was effortless to observe them and their gestures and motions were smoothly interpreted. Mr Marc Skvorc gave feedback already at the premises right after the training took place. Due to the training taking place at the work environment during the working hours the participants had other engagements afterwards and the feedback had to be collected during following weeks after the training. Feedback was given verbally to the author during different situations at Hotel Kämp and during personal time.

Feedback received was mainly positive. It was mentioned that the training was comprehensive and well structured. It had three main parts, as can be seen from figure 4. First, the theory was explained. Then the habits and differences were analysed and finally, some discussion of the topic was conducted. The author explained the terms well and made sure that everyone had understood the matter in question. This made the training pleasing and easy to follow.

The author was able to attract the attention of the participants and included them in the conversation. Making the audience part of the training made it a more positive experience and they became more motivated. Since the author was well known for the participants they were able to assure that the nervousness was not audible and the author seemed calm and professional. Positive feedback was received regarding the outcome of the event. The participants revealed that they were able to interpret the difficult situations experienced after the training and they felt comfortable to face new difficulties since they had gained a fair amount of knowledge and confidence.

Negative feedback was also mentioned. More time would have been needed in order to gain more competence and broader knowledge of the matter. Some of the time was spent explaining what an intercultural training is, as can be seen from the figure 4, and

this time could have been spent learning about the culture instead. Unfortunately it was necessary to explain the concept of intercultural training for the participants had no previous experiences with the matter.

Negative feedback was also brought up regarding the time limits on the actual practicing of the manners. Due to the limited time the matters were only explained and the participants did not have time to practice.

In addition to the authors own goals for the training, there are several other goals that are normal goals for intercultural training. These goals are mentioned earlier in the chapter Objectives for intercultural training. Partly these goals were reached during the intercultural training at Hotel Kämp. It was noted while receiving the feedback, that the participants were able to overcome stereotypes and they now have better understanding why the Japanese have a certain way of behaving. Due to this understanding the situations at Hotel Kämp are no longer viewed as negative, but rather as positive encounters.

The stress level will also diminish in the future because the employees now have understanding about the culture. Since the stress level will diminish the experience will become even more positive for both of the parties and also the cultural shock that might have otherwise been rather large will become smaller.

Due to the time limitations practicing the skills had to be left out and no homework was given. Therefore the third phase of gaining intercultural competence, skills, was left out and could not have been reached as well as possible. It could be argued that leaving the third phase away from the training the employees did not reached the wished level of competence and have still some manners that need to be addressed.

4.1 Interview results

Due to misunderstanding with the conference time Mr Skvorc, the General Manager of Hotel Kämp, was unable to attend the first part of the training. He arrived approximately 45minutes late to the training and was able to participate in the ending. Due to

this inconvenience feedback regarding the first 45 minutes was received from Ms Tina Kaikkonen, Assistant Hotel Manager, for she was able to attend all of the training. Material was given to Ms Kaikkonen beforehand so she was able to familiarize herself with what was planned.

Feedback received from Ms Kaikkonen stated that the training was well done and well-structured as was stated also by other participants. Ms Kaikkonen stated as well that she was able to notice the nervousness in the beginning and it had some effect to the first few minutes, but the author was clearly able to relax after a while. She praised the amount of information and stated that it would be beneficial not only regarding the Japanese travellers visiting Hotel Kämp but as well for the other guests. Ms Kaikkonen was able to show the time limitations for the author during the presentation and stated that she had anticipated the training to last longer due to the vast amount of information she had received before the training. Despite of the prolonged training the feedback received from Ms Kaikkonen was overall positive.

Mr Skvorc stated as well that the information provided would be beneficial not only for the Japanese. Emphasis was put on respectfulness and how greatly important it is to be visible in five star service. He was impressed by the vast amount of information and was proud of the participants due to their ability to evaluate the previous encounters with the new knowledge and depict what had been done incorrectly. Mr Skvorc mentioned the possibility for further training and the helpfulness of intercultural knowledge on the field of hospitality. He considers knowledge of other cultures crucial in order to provide five star services for the guests. Mr Skvorc had no negative feedback to give at that time and the author has not been able to see him after the training was held for further discussion due to a hectic timetable.

4.2 Author's evaluation of the event

The author feels that the event was successful and the participants were enjoying themselves. None of them seemed disinterested and all showed enthusiasm towards the training. In the beginning it was challenging to involve the participants, but since the situation was new for everyone it was chalked up to confusion. After a few mo-

ments discussion became more vivid and the participants felt more comfortable to express their own experiences and ideas. These experiences were drawn from the everyday working life of the staff and therefore the examples used were familiar to everyone.

Due to the time limitations the training had to be hurried to the end. It was not counted that the participants would comment and discuss as much as they did. Also, initial timetable confusion with Mr Skvorc in the beginning made the training last a bit longer than expected. This was noted in the managerial level and negative feedback was given regarding the time management.

The feedback received from the participants confirmed the author's evaluation of the training. The training was viewed as a positive event for the employees. The main objective of the training was to give the participants better tools to act with the guests at Hotel Kämp and regarding the feedback the goal was met. Possibility of continuing trainings was mentioned as well and the managerial level felt it was beneficial for all the parties. Few issues need to be addressed if any further training would be held, but this will be discussed further in the following chapters.

5 Discussion

This was the first ever intercultural training held for the employees of Hotel Kämp and therefore the situation was new to all the participants including the author. No one knew what to expect, or if the training would be useful for further use. The purpose of this training was to give the employees of the Hotel Kämp front office better knowledge and tools to make the stay of the guests of Hotel Kämp more memorable and valuable.

All in all the training was successful and all the parties were able to benefit from the event. Therefore it can be seen that there was a great need for an intercultural training for the employees and this event was planned according to the needs of the employees (Rutherford Silver 2004, 29). The positive feedback explained that the information gained was new and it can be clearly implemented to everyday working life.

To gain the intercultural competence the three steps must be followed and explained to the trainees (Hofstede 2001, 427-428). These steps were taken into account when planning the training and the participants felt that the flow of the training was satisfying. It was structured so that it was effortless for all to follow and understand.

The training normally takes one or two days, six to twelve hours in total (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 10), and therefore the time limitation was a challenge. The time set for the training for Hotel Kämp was only one hour and this made the planning of the training challenging since it needed to be clearly examined what information was important and what could be left outside for the time being. As mentioned, the training stretched to be longer than originally planned due to the high participation of the trainees.

It is stated that although the training brings more awareness everything cannot be taught during the sessions; Learning is an on-going process and therefore the competence cannot be fully reached during one or two days. It would be necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the training after a while in order to see whether it is beneficial to have more practice sessions (Graf 2003). In case of the training for the Hotel Kämp

this evaluation will not be done due to time limitations with the thesis. To note whether the employees remember to implement their newly added skills would be necessary before arranging any further trainings. Since Mr Skvorc has mentioned that there is a possibility for further trainings this must be brought to his attention.

Due to the time limitation of only one hour it became more challenging to involve the participants in the training and in an intercultural training it would be necessary to make sure the participants are not merely listeners but to make sure they act as well and practice their skills during the training hours (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 10). Some conversation was possible and the participants shared challenging situations of their own experience. There was a possibility to analyse few of these situations after the training with the gathered knowledge. The participants also analysed and pondered the knowledge gathered during the week after the training during their work hours. More of discussion would have been needed during the training in order to gain more competence, but unfortunately this was not possible.

The final step of skills was not reached and it must be trusted for the trainees to perform this step on their own during the working hours without any assistance except from their colleagues. Due to the time limitation homework was also out of the question. Homework is usually given to the trainees in order for them to be able to evaluate and research the culture themselves (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 10).

Objectives of the intercultural training were met. The employees now feel more comfortable to experience intercultural encounters with Japanese guests since they have gained the needed tools in order to avoid communicational issues and barriers. The employees have gained somewhat crucial information in order to avoid the possible obstacles and they know how to adjust their own culture to match with the Japanese one (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 4).

The employees at Hotel Kämp have received a more positive imagine of the Japanese culture which was previously not as familiar for them as some western cultures (Graf 2003) and this supports the situations handled every day in front office. The situations

are no longer perceived as stressing but instead the guests are welcomed with confidence that all their needs can be met and the situations are no longer exhausting to neither of the parties (Brislin & Yoshida 1993, 4). To perform without stress is crucial for the employees in order to give the guests a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere and five star services.

As discussed during the feedback sessions the employees feel as well that they are prepared to understand the non-verbal signs of discomfort shown by the guests. To understand the non-verbal signs is important (Prince & Hoppe. 2000) and once they are handled with certainty the employees are more aware of the mistakes they make in their performance and become ready to change their habits (Duhigg 2012, 62). To be able to adjust the habits is important in hotel business since all the guests are different and have different needs and expectations. Once the habits of the front office employees are changed to meet the needs of the guests the service becomes fine-tuned and the guests feel more appreciated.

It can be argued that the information the author has would be outdated since the main sources used are from the 1980's. Culture is constantly changing and evolving and although it might take a longer time to notice the changes (Pearson Higher Education, 14) the time span of 30 years can be considered enough to note the differences. When studying a culture it must be noted that the behavior that once was typical might not be so after few decades (Pearson Higher Education, 24).

In the 1980's Japan had just opened its gates to other countries and were learning to interact with them. Therefore as an example the language barriers might have been so great and the culture was so introverted. According to Johanna Sorvoja-Bonnard most of the behavior mentioned in the thesis can still be seen in the everyday life of the Japanese; respect is highly appreciated and communication between the Japanese is still rather stiff. Japanese still appreciate too much service and everything is highly ritualized. In a documentary Japanin Eläkepommi (Yle Areena) it was mentioned that the company loyalty is still strong in Japanese culture and the values of hard working are still strong in the minds of the younger generation. Regarding the interview and the

documentary it can be argued that the culture has not changed as rapidly as could be expected and therefore the information gathered from the main sources is still somewhat valid.

Geert Hofstede has been criticized as well with his studies of cultural dimensions. It is stated that the study does not concentrate on culture but more to employees' satisfaction at a highly masculine environment in one precise company. It is argued further that the results gained have become outdated and the scores would be different if the research would be conducted in today's society (Silverhorne 2005, 15). Therefore we can questions whether the dimensions mentioned in the thesis are still valid and can be used as a tool to compare cultural differences.

6 Suggestions for the future trainings and self-evaluation

As can be noted from discussion above there is plenty that can be developed for further training. The training held was the first for all the participants as mentioned above and therefore it had the air of a training of a training itself. The next training held at Hotel Kämp will be more efficient and will have even more value for the employees.

The time reserved for planning and executing the training was not sufficient. The event held place 2,5 weeks after the first discussion with Mr Skvorc. The time came as a surprise for the author and, therefore gathering the information had to be hurried. Because of this the culture was not studied as closely as was necessary. The reason for the training taking place on such a short notice was the timetable of the front office. In the future the trainer needs to be allowed more time to gather his or her information and gain more competence him or herself in order to be more professional.

The duration of the training must be lengthened in order for the trainees to benefit from the training and gain more competence. Activities must be implemented to the training in order for the participants to practice the culture and therefore note the differences that must be made in the habits. As mentioned above it is crucial to be able to practice the habits in order to gain competence and overcome the obstacles. Preferably the training should take more than one day and homework should be given for the trainees. Follow up must be done in order to evaluate the need of the training and see whether it is beneficial for the company to arrange these events.

It would be beneficial to make the training compulsory for all the employees. Only 10 people attended this training session, and the information did not necessarily reach all the front office employees, receptionists and bellmen, although the training was later sent to all of them via email.

All the concepts need not be explained thoroughly since they have become familiar for the employees via the first training and this saves more time to concentrate on the actual learning process of the culture. The culture to process must be thought carefully

by evaluating the guests arriving to Hotel Kämp, in order for the training to be more profitable and relevant

This was the first intercultural training for all the participants including the author. Because of this there were many obstacles to overcome before the author was able to even start with planning the training. Due to the short preparation time the author had to learn how to do time management in order to gain the most of the 2,5 weeks and gain as much competence as possible. Schedule had to be made and a timetable should have been followed.

The shortage in time created some stressful situations and frustration in the author. Different types of meditation had to be practised in order to maintain a professional touch to the training and not lose hope. Help from the supervisors was crucial regarding the success and they provided a vast amount of sources to be used. The author was able to handle the stress well and was able to overcome the obstacles. It was learned that stressing over matters does not make them any better but simply gives a headache. It was understood that everything cannot be controlled and some things have a tendency to sort themselves out, given enough time.

It was revealing to see how much preparation and work arranging training requires and how much needs to be taken into account before the due date. Small things matter and surprises wait just behind the corner. Even though an effort was made to take everything into account, some things always manages to surprise: in this case the sudden change in the managerial level attending the training and mix up of schedules. Regarding the future training, it could be said that controlling every part is impossible, and trainers need to be prepared for all the sudden changes.

Procrastination was found to be useless and everything ought to be done when there is time. Saving tasks for later makes the situations even more stressful and creates unnecessary hassle. The help given has to be used as well. There is no reason to try and find out everything on one's own if there are plenty of professionals around. Questions need to be asked out loud and brainstorming with co-workers was found to be useful.

Holding the training has definitely had a positive impact on the author's self-confidence. It can be seen that the author has more trust on herself and she feels that she is capable to handle more stressful situations than before. Also the rise of the confidence can be seen in professional situations in front office where she can perform better than before.

The author has realised during the process that she has found the way she wants to continue in the professional career. Different cultures have always intrigued her and she wants to do further studies in order to gain more intercultural competence herself. The process of studying for the thesis has only made the urge to further educate her even more pronounced.

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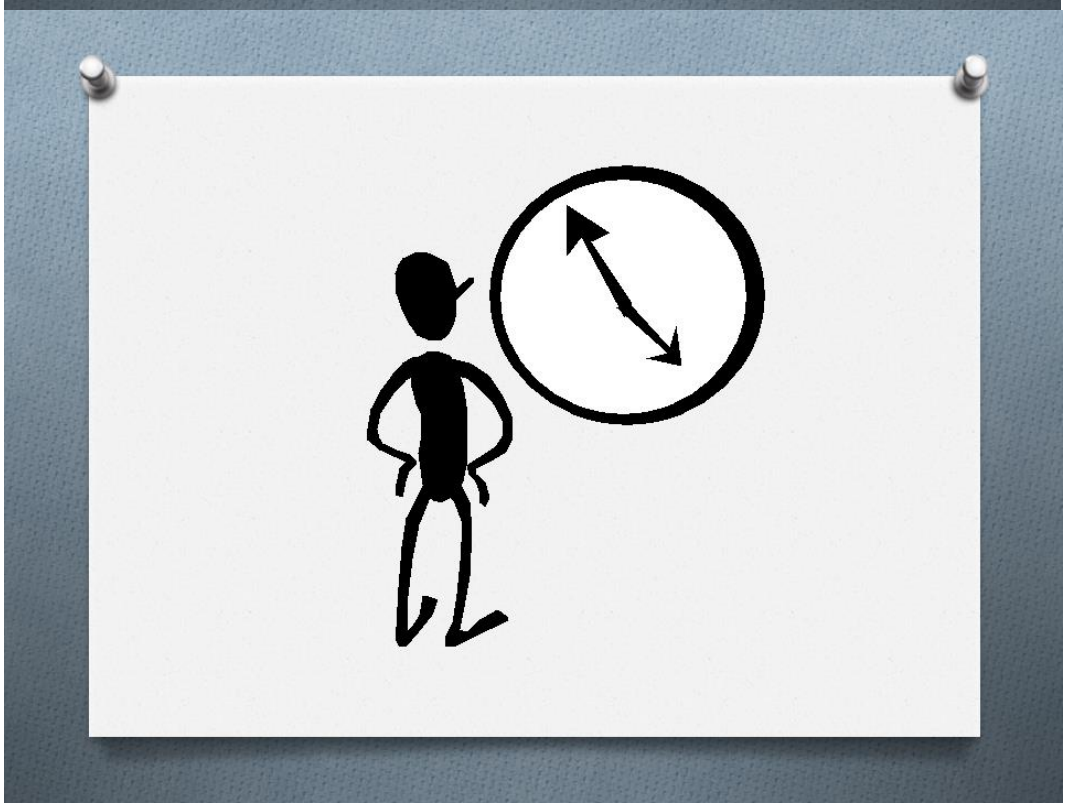
Attachments

Attachment 1. Intercultural training for Hotel Kämp front office



Intercultural Training

- Culture-specific
  - Expatriate families
- Culture-general
  - Awareness and general information about different cultures
- Normally 1-2 days
- Why?

Steps

- Awareness
  - Realization
  - Culture is often taken for granted
- Knowledge
  - We do not need to share ideas, just understand
  - Right and wrong?
- Skills
  - Practice, practice, practice
  - Frustration, confusion

Culture

- Hofstede
  - *"Collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another"*

- Symbols
- Heroes
- Rituals
- Does not mean nationality or ethnic group
- Language

Values

- Hofstede
  - *"a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affair over another"*
- Making choices
- Programmed

Studying Cultures and Values

- Cultural studies are studies of societies
- Studying values is studying individuals

Different cultures

Work
Friends
Music
Religion

Measuring Cultural Differences

Assistance of Geert Hofstede

Six Dimensions

- Power Distance
- Masculinity / Feminity
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Individualism / collectivism
- Long term orientation / Short term orientation
- Indulgence vs. Restraint

PDI/UAI/IDV

- Power distance
  - Superiors – subordinate relationships
- Uncertainty avoidance
  - What future holds for you
- Individualism
  - I or we?

Finland vs. Japan PDI

33	54
Low power distance	Borderline
Hierarchy for convenience	Conscious of hierarchy
First name basis	First name is not used
Direct communication	Slow decision making

Finland vs. Japan UAI

- 59
- Rather high
- Busy and hard working
- Security

- 92
- One of the highest
- Natural disaster?
- Rituals
- Details

Finland vs. Japan IDV

- 63
- Taking care of yourself
- Decisions by merit only

- 46
- No extended family – paternalistic system
- Shame & Loosing face
- Company loyalty

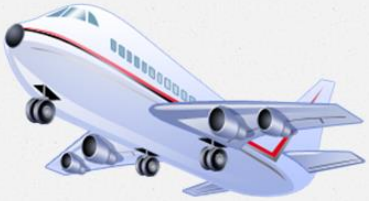
Think of an incident with our Japanese guests

Face

- Pride
- Loosing face is the greatest fear
  - Making mistakes
  - Shaming the whole family

Traveling

- Group traveling
- Belongingness
- No long holidays
- Time to relax and let go



Service culture

- Too much service
- Fast service is good service
- Apologize

Intermediate comm.

- Introduction by someone else
- Who to look at?
  - Eye contact
  - Do not stare!
- Responsibility of mistakes

Bowing

Gesture
Rice plant

Westerns – how to bow?

Firm handshake is repulsive

Talking

- Directness
- Interruption
- Opposite of italian
- Do not stare

Language

- Language and culture are highly intertwined
- Talking English
  - Vulgar and barbarous
- Silent humility
- Hai – I hear you
- Emotions expressed through eyes

Words

- Arigatoo gozaimas(u)
  - Thank you
- Sumimasen
  - Excuse me
- Doomo
  - Multiple meanings
- Kedo
  - Negative sound

Non verbal communication

"Eyes say as much as the mouth"

- Laughter in every situation
- Pointing to yourself
- OK-sign – Money
- Waving good-bye / Come here

Offering

Always use two hands

Total surrender

Security

- Safety in Japan due to the rules

→Issues abroad

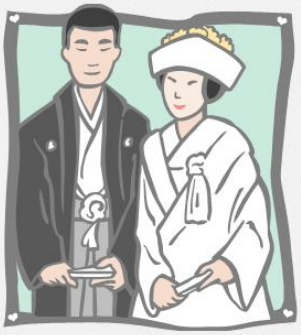
- In case of robbery
  - Emotional support!
    - Creates an emotional tie between the people

Harmony

- Everything moves like rythm
- Formality
- Envelopes
- Kata

Respect

Bowing

Handing items

Arigatoo Gozaimasu!