
Cultural Environment Analysis on Taiwan

High context cultures communicate indirectly through contextual elements. The Taiwanese emphasize values such as saving face, which means to uphold the dignity or maintain the balance of a group. Speaking bluntly or mentioning opposing views can embarrass and affect how people perceive that individual, which is why understandings are internalized during communication. Due to the effort gone towards maintaining these relationships, known as *guanxi*, they are usually longer and extremely valuable in operating within this culture. There are strong boundaries due to the lack of explicit rules; however, insiders are already aware of the ways to network. Taiwan is a particularist culture because relationships regulate behaviors.

The rules come second to the context because maintaining the dignity in a relationship is more important, which is why knowledge is situational. For example, a receptionist in an office makes a mistake that everyone is aware of but is not directly reprimanded in front of her colleagues because the employer is saving face. With relationships being placed at the forefront, Taiwan leans towards communitarianism where actions are planned for the group benefit. Taoist teachings of filial piety towards the extended family of “humankind and between all beings that make up the universe” can be seen by strong networks that tend to each other in exchange for loyalty; destroying one connection can affect the relationships between others as well. Also it is not uncommon for extended relatives to live with family under one roof, displaying that freedom of individual choice is not incredibly important. As a diffuse culture, work relationships can carry over to personal life because of the time and effort invested. A Taiwanese factory owner that invites a future business partner home may go out of his way to please them, now turning the relationship into a personal one.

Taiwan is a neutral culture; conservative conduct is expected in order to save face, which upholds reputation and credibility. People’s perceptions are relevant in this society and outwardly showing emotions could affect one’s *guanxi*. As an ascription culture, this society places importance on who a person is in terms of their background, age, and other attributes. In senior-junior relationships at school or work, respect is automatically given to the senior, despite not having met or disagreeing with them. For the attitude towards time, this society is past focused with a balance of Western culture. The Eastern Asian philosophy and religious values are still respected, but the new generation is starting to have freedom to make their own choices for schooling and marriage. Time is polychronic in this society; they are more flexible towards schedules and tasks. In addition, relationships are deemed just as important, so lunches can run longer than anticipated if discussions are still taking place. It is also common for people to take phone calls during important meetings as well. So far there have been consistent underlying themes of unity and rapport within this society and this indicates their attitude of

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external direction, where people adapt to the environment as nature controls their destiny. Taoism emphasizes that “man should place his will in harmony with the natural universe”. Concepts such as yin yang and wu wei, strongly forms the attitude of exercising a mental state of aligning one’s actions with the flow of the universe. Its significance is not only seen at work by being more responsive towards external forces, but also through practices such as feng shui and meditation. The mantra of the American Dream indicates the major differences between these two countries. While individuality is celebrated in the US, Taiwan marks the importance of a collective whole and is heavily reliant on relationships. It may be difficult for the investor to network at first, due to the barriers to entry without explicit stated information.

Furthermore, the culture’s patterns for relationships may be uncomfortable in regards to the collision of both work and personal life and having the group’s best interest in mind at all times. Despite the many challenges that this environment imposes, opportunities lie in the midst of difficulty. Influenced by culture, the turnover for product sampling marketing is more efficient in Taiwan due to indirect communication and saving face. These future consumers are less likely to answer negatively as it is a failure to control one’s emotions and show respect to individuals. There are also opportunities to implement multi level marketing to products or services such as nutritional supplements at Herbalife, which will prove to be effective as this high context culture is known to cultivate long term relationships and have many intersections with others. To navigate the cultural environment, the organization should conduct research and train employees on Confucian teachings such as filial piety and li. Unlike the low context culture of the US, speaking directly and disregarding the context can be seen as blunt and overbearing when, for instance, asking opposing questions during a business meeting.

In Taiwan, context is heavily used to save face of the group; research on filial piety tells one that upholding dignities extend towards humankind, not only one’s circle. It tells that Taiwan is a collective society; it is imperative to communicate with context to uphold these relationships. The teachings of li write of the proper way to interact with others, stating that harmony is the most essential social value. Training employees on the foundational teachings of li and how this plays into speaking, gesturing, and interacting can help avoid mistakes when actually meeting future partners in this country. The investor should also conduct research and train employees on corporate culture to understand the differences of how Taiwanese companies operate. Topics such as power distance, psychological environment, and task culture can reveal attitudes on time, unity in a group and communication styles. As the US is an individualism and specific culture, employees can start to practice putting the group benefit before the individual and work on turning a work relationship more personal. Comprehending the frameworks behind people’s behaviors in a culture will help avoid misinterpreting once in Taiwan.

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