THE EFFECT OF CULTURAL AWARENESS ON ACCOMMODATION IN AN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CONTEXT

A STUDY ON THE COMMUNICATIVE ADAPTABILITY OF AMERICANS FROM DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL LEVELS TO A COLLEAGUE'S CULTURAL BACKGROUND AFTER RECEIVING CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING.

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Abstract

The present study aimed to investigate whether participants with a higher level of education were able to accommodate better to their Chinese colleague before and after following cross-cultural training. Business between China and the U.S. is worth billions of dollars and communication was identified to be the most important difficulty these two countries have. For this reason, this study was conducted to attempt to improve communication between American and Chinese people by giving with cross-cultural training. The experiment was conducted through an online survey in a between-subjects design with only American participants. The subjects were categorized in two groups: lower level of education and higher levels of education. Moreover, the participants took part in one of two conditions. The first condition included six messages from a Chinese colleague, each message was about a different topic: a compliment, asking for a favor, asking for a deadline extension, asking for feedback, personal relations or an apology. Then participants were asked to choose from two possible responses the one they thought to be more appropriate for the situation. The responses were written in a high-context and a low-context response style. The second condition was similar to the first with the exception that it was preceded by cross-cultural training in the form of raising awareness about cultural differences between America and China. The results showed that the level of education of the individual had no effect on the frequency of accommodating responses chosen. However, following the cross-cultural training did prove to have a positive effect on the frequency of accommodating responses. These results could imply that accommodation can be taught to individuals regardless of education level. Therefore, multinational organizations might consider allowing employees to follow cross-cultural trainings so they can better adapt and learn to communicate with Chinese colleagues.

Introduction

Background

Presently, the trade relations between the United States of America and China supports roughly around 2.6 million jobs across the U.S (Oxford Economics, 2018). This includes created jobs by Chinese companies that have settled in the country. As the Chinese middle class continues to grow, American companies are seeing the opportunity to expand their business to reach this new, growing market. According to the U.S.-China Business Council report by Oxford Economics (2018), U.S exports to China and vice versa comprise billions of dollars annually. This number is expected to grow as the economy in China continues to

prosper. But how do business deals between these two countries with vastly different cultures come to be successful?

The Chinese market is difficult to penetrate. Nevertheless, it has often been taken advantage of by many companies for its low labor cost (Corbin, 2009). Peng (2004) mentions that although American society is based on qualifications and accomplishments, the Chinese is built on relationships and networks. Business in China is based on a principle they call the "guanxiwang", according to Lee et al. (2005). The Chinese place a high value on connections or relationships within the business market. Therefore, those that wish to conduct business in China must remember that the values of trust, mutual reciprocity and harmony are the basis of networks in "guanxinwang" (Corbin, 2009; Lee, et al., 2005). This expectation of mutual trust and interdependence the Chinese do not trust outsiders easily and will exclusively venture on a business deal by a recommendation from the inner network (Corbin, 2009).

For two countries that conduct business together so frequently China and the U.S. differ quite a lot when it comes to cultural norms and values. Edward Hall (1976) describes culture as an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg, which is visible to the eye, are artifacts and behavior such as language. However, culture is also comprised of norms, beliefs, assumptions and values that are deeply rooted within those that share it. The Chinese are considered to belong to a high context culture (Hall, 1980). By this Edward Hall (1980), meant that the Chinese value relationships above all else. Chinese people prefer to rely on the context of a conversation such as the value they place on the relationship with the interlocutor instead of the verbal information exclusively before making decisions (O'Hara-Devereaux, 2020). In contrast, Americans are considered to be part of a low context culture. They value honesty, assertiveness, candidness and a direct pattern of speech above all else (Hall, 1969).

Another difference between China and the United States of America is the view of power distance within the members of the group. In China, responsibility lies at the top of the social structure. Someone's position in the social ladder depends on their age, wealth, or political status (Hall, 1976). There is a large distance between those at the top and the bottom of the social structure. The U.S pertains to an egalitarian society (Hofstede, 1980) where the difference between those at the bottom or the top of the social ladder is not as discernible and responsibility is decentralized (Hall, 1980).

The differences between China and the U.S do not end at different communication styles. For instance, China and the U.S view time differently. Whereas Americans consider time to be monochronic, the Chinese consider time to be polychronic (Hall, 1980). By this it is meant that to Americans, time is ordered and scheduled, tasks should be done in a prompt

manner. Moreover, efficiency is important to achieve immediate results. Whereas the Chinese consider time abstract and not easily scheduled, as long as tasks are being carried out, there is no need to rush. When society views time as polychronic it can result in slow-paced change and traditions that are rooted in the past (Hall, 1976). Americans consider time as linear, therefore, completing a deadline on time is highly valued (Hall, 1980). However, the Chinese consider time to be flexible and do not bind themselves to timeframe to finish a task.

Frictions between China and the U.S. could have detrimental effects on the economies of both countries (Roach, 2018). Roach (2018) has identified three problems that would need to be addressed to improve the relationship between China and the U.S. Communication was first and foremost. The communication between China and the U.S, needs to be improved in frequency for business between them to thrive (Roach et al., 2018). The present study aims to investigate whether cross-cultural training and education level have an effect on the adaptability of American participants communication styles.

Theoretical framework

In order for business transactions to work between the American and Chinese cultures that differ, it is necessary to adapt to each other's cultural and ethical preferences. Individuals have the tendency to switch between converging and diverging with their interlocutor by changing their communicative behavior, also referred to as 'accommodation' (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991). Accommodation can be defined as the act of adapting one's non-verbal, paralinguistic and linguistic behavior to become more similar to the person one is interacting with. An important reason for accommodation is the need to gain approval from the other party (Byrne, 1971). The more significant the similarity to one's/the conversational partner the more respect and social rewards can be expected. Moreover, accommodation enhances the effectiveness of the communication act. In contrast, divergence is to emphasize one's speech and nonverbal communication differences from the other (Giles, et al., 1991). The motive for refusing to adapt to the conversational partner is usually the need to accentuate one's distinctiveness from them and to create space (Giles, Mulac, Bradac, & Johnson, 1987).

When China and the U.S. decide to conduct business deals, a certain level of adaptation to one or the other culture is necessary for it to be successful. Studies such as that conducted by O'Connell, McNeelly and Hall (2008) established that personal adaptability and education level was positively related. O'Connell et al. (2008), identified two possible

implications for the positive correlation between personal adaptability education level. Firstly, adaptability may be an elitist concept to a certain level. Perhaps there are certain aspects of adaptability key to management careers that may not be easily accessible to workers with a lower level of education (Hall, 1983). Secondly, the strong relationship between level of education and adaptability could be seen as a teachable concept. The question is whether the ability to adapt at work is due to years of extensive learning and accumulation of knowledge or whether there are ways to frame this into a concept that is understandable. If it is the latter, then it would be possible to provide proper training or coaching to be able to teach adaptability to those with lower educational levels.

Katan (1999), explains that most people see other nationals as compatriots rather than belonging to a specific culture. This leads to the belief that the culture they live in is considered a 'standard' and the rest of the world can be categorized into different cultures. According to Hofstede (1991), two culture group's opinions of each other is based on cultural and historical background and the direct with each other in a political and/or business context. The reasons why business transactions between two different cultural groups fail are often differing expectations, stereotypes, lack of experience or a previous negative experience, a lack of cultural sensitivity or differing business objectives (Rosen et al. 2001). Rosen and Dingh (2001) argue that in order for international business transactions to prosper, managers must have some degree of global literacy. This means that managers should see, think, act and mobilize themselves in culturally mindful ways.

Cross-cultural trainings have shown to be an effective solution to stimulate the adaptability of businesspersons in transnational settings (Ashamalla and Crocitto, 1997). Previous studies have shown that expatriates that were given cross-cultural training had a higher success rate than those who did not (Hogan and Gooson, 1990). In a comparative study conducted by Qin and Baruch (2010) between American and Chinese expatriates it was shown that Chinese people adapt more easily to American low-context style of communication than the Americans to the Chinese high context style. A reason for this was because of the intricacies of high context communication that are difficult to grasp for the American expatriates. Moreover, it was shown that American expatriates appreciated these cross-cultural trainings and saw the true value of them (Qin et al., 2010).

Moreover, it has been found that businesspersons who follow some cross-cultural training experience less cultural shock. Expatriates that were given cross-cultural training were able to adapt to their environment better, faster and more smoothly (Esbach et al., 2001; Oberg, 1960). It was also shown that expatriates who followed a cross-cultural training were

better able to cope with uncertainty and pressure, thereby enhancing their ability to fit better into their new environment (Caliguiri et al., 2001; Zakaira, 2000). For this reason, multinational companies should invest in proper cross-cultural training for their employees, especially when cultures differ so much like China and the U.S.

Research question

The present study aims to find out whether highly educated Americans who follow cross-cultural training show more willingness to accommodate to a high-context style than those with a lower level of education. Previous studies have shown that Chinese people adapt more easily to American low context communication styles (Qin et al, 2010). However, it has not been investigated whether education level could be a factor that makes the accommodation process easier or if cross-cultural training could potentially be a solution for the communication problems that arise between American and Chinese exchanges. If this were the case and education level truly facilitate communicative adaptability, then perhaps accommodation truly is the elitist concept only reserved for those with more worldly knowledge as O'Connell et al. (2008) had feared.

Moreover, cross-cultural training has shown to be effective in the integration of Chinese and American businesspeople as an introduction to each other's culture. It has helped integration, diminished culture shock, improved success rate and enhanced adaptability (Caliguiri et al., 2001; Esbach et al., 2001; Oberg, 1960; Zakaira, 2000). Subjects who take part in cross-cultural training, would be expected to respond in the low context style, unless the subject has completed a degree in higher education (Hall, 1980; O'Connell, et al. 2008). In contrast, if the subject does not participate in cross-cultural training they would be expected to accommodate to the Chinese colleague and choose the responses that are high context, instead of low context (Qin, 2010).

The research question and hypotheses read as follows:

RQ: Does level of education have an effect on the accommodative adaptability of American participants when cross-cultural training has been followed in an international business context?

H1: Participants with a higher level of education choose more accommodating responses to a colleague from a different cultural background.

H2: Cross-cultural training has a positive effect on the participant's accommodating responses.

Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of cross-cultural training on participants from different levels of education that followed cross-cultural training. The participants took part in an experiment where they were subjected to one of two conditions, with cross-cultural training in the form of raising awareness about cultural differences between the U.S. and China (appendix D). The second condition was similar with the exception that it did not include cross-cultural training.

Materials

The experiment was conducted on the basis of an online questionnaire that was distributes through several platforms. The conditions (with cross-cultural training & without cross-cultural training) were comprised of six messages from a Chinese colleague. The reliability of the type of message comprising six items was satisfactory at $\alpha = .58$. This level of reliability is expected for the experiment was designed by bachelor students and has not been previously tested. The trials were split into six categories: a compliment, asking for a favor, asking for a deadline extension, asking for feedback, personal relations or an apology. The messages from the Chinese colleague were also the same in both conditions.

When it comes to communication and the importance "guanxiwang" in Chinese culture, it is typical that Chinese prefer face-to-face communication over cold emails (Lee et al., 2005). If face-to-face communication is not possible it is important that emails or messages start with a warm introduction, placing value on the relationship first and business second (Corbin, 2009). When relationships are valued above all else it is important to note that something that might seem simple to an American such as providing feedback becomes a task that could cause a strain. Although Americans might prefer straight-forward feedback due to the value they place on direct communication (Hall, 1980). Chinese people prefer negative feedback to be given in one-on-one settings instead of larger groups, in order to save face. Feedback should be given face-to-face instead of per email and trying to find a solution rather than pointing out the problem is the best way for it to be accepted more easily (Tang, 2019).

In addition, participants were given two options to choose from a high context response and a low context response. The order that the responses were presented in was randomized in each trial. To ensure that the wording of the messages and responses was accurate and appropriate for each culture the questions meant to be from a Chinese colleague

were validated by five Chinese professionals. The suggestions were taken into consideration and the responses were adapted to match the Chinese response style as closely as possible. Additionally, native speakers of American English were asked to analyze the low context responses to ensure that they do not differ from what an American person would normally say. Their feedback was implemented in the questionnaire and all responses were adapted to fit an American response style.

Subjects

The participants for this study were native speakers of American English and at least 25 years old with some experience in business, the average age of participants was between 25 – 35 years old. The study amassed a total of 225 participants which were then reduced to 59 after removing those that did not comply with the requirements to participate. In addition, 54.2% of participants were female. The experiment was conducted by a group of researchers whom each had specific requirements for participation. For this reason, participants who were younger than 25 years old or had no previous experience in business were excluded from the final study. Moreover, participants whose native language was not English were also excluded from the final experiment. In addition, if the participants that took part in other conditions were not included in the present study. Chi-square analyses for gender χ^2 (1, 59) = .07, p = .78 and level of education χ^2 (3, 36) = .02, p = .89 showed that both of these background variables were distributed equally across both conditions with and without cross-cultural training. Table 1 shows the frequencies of the highest level of education finished by the participants. Additionally, an independent samples T-test t (57) = .22, p = .78 showed that age was distributed equally across both context and no context conditions as well.

Level of education

	N	%
High school graduate or equivalent	6	10.2%
Associate degree	5	8.5%
Bachelor's degree	23	39.0%
Professional degree	3	5.1%
Master's degree	19	32.2%
Doctorate degree	3	5.1%

Table 1. Level of education of participants in the study

Design

The present study was conducted in a 2 (level of education: high vs. low) x 2 between-subjects design (cross-cultural training: not trained vs. trained). Each participant was assigned to one of two conditions (with or without cultural context) and the education levels were divided in two groups (lower and higher education). Participants were not made aware of the conditions or the manipulation beforehand. Participants that finished high school, vocational, trade or bachelor's degree would be categorized as lower education. Master's, professional and doctorate degrees are higher education levels. The messages in both conditions remained the same with the only difference being the presence of cultural context of the colleague the participants were to interact with. The control group for this study were the participants that took part in the condition without cross-cultural training.

Instrumentation

To investigate how well the participants from different levels of educations accommodate to people from a different cultural background the frequency of high context responses chosen was counted. Whether the participant would choose to respond in a high context manner to a coworker from a Chinese background when given information about the norms and values of Chinese culture. Each participant was asked to indicate the highest level of education they have completed starting at high school, associate degree, bachelor's degree, first-professional degree, master's degree, doctorate degree, vocational/trade or technical training degree, and professional degree (appendix B).

The accommodation was tested by the frequency of high-context replies chosen by the participants. If the participant chose in five out of the six trials a high-context response to the Chinese colleague, it could be said that the accommodation was high. However, if the frequency of high-context responses is low it means accommodation to the Chinese colleague is also low.

In the condition without cross-cultural training (appendix C), the participants were asked to respond in the way they believe most appropriate for the situation followed by two possible replies. One of the replies was a high context reply and the second reply was a low context reply which is more common in American culture. For example, the participant read the following message from Li Wei, a colleague born and raised in China: 'I have seen your speech on communication improvement you gave to the board, and you really hit the nail on the head with it. You can be very proud, and I hope you can teach me about those speaking skills sometime'. Then the participant would be asked to reply accordingly by choosing one

of the following options: 'Thank you, I agree. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you' or 'There is always room for improvement. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you'. The second option would in this case be considered the most appropriate one because the Chinese prefer to be modest about their own accomplishments instead of accepting the compliments (Hall, 1980).

The second condition included information about the cultural background of the Chinese colleague. The messages from the Chinese colleague were preceded by a short introduction to Chinese culture divided into several bullet points. For example, "Modesty is important in the Chinese culture, which results in compliments being downplayed. Agreeing with a compliment can be perceived as arrogant". After the information about cultural context the participants were asked a control question to make sure they had read and understood what they were told. Subsequently, they went on to read the messages from Li Wei.

Procedure

This experiment was conducted through an online questionnaire on the survey platform Qualtrics. The participants were approached through social media platforms such as Reddit, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and on survey exchange platforms. Moreover, family members and connections were approached and asked to share this survey with friends and family. The participants were sent a link that would direct them to the Qualtrics website showing the introduction page of the experiment, which contained the confidentiality agreement and prerequisites for participation. After agreeing to the terms and conditions the participants were taken to the questionnaire. The survey was compartmentalized in three different sections. The first section was the introduction to the survey and the first background variables (e.g., gender, age, business experience, native language, education level and employment status), see appendix B.

Subsequently, the participants were assigned to one of two conditions without cultural context or with cultural context in which they had to read messages from Li Wei, the Chinese colleague. The participants would then be shown a page with short instructions on what to do in the following section with or without the information about the cultural background of the colleague with whom they were to interact. After the page with instructions the six messages from the colleague would follow separately in a randomized order. Lastly, the rest of the background questions were shown to each participant and then they were directed to the end

of the survey where they were dismissed and thanked for participating. The average length of the experiment was 8 minutes and 26 seconds ($M = 7.86$; $SD = 6.54$).

Statistical Treatment

Once the data had been collected it was assembled into one file to be analyzed in SPSS 27.0. In order to investigate the accommodation of the American participants with high and lower levels of education to the Chinese colleague when taking part of cross-cultural training two-way ANOVAS were performed. Chi-square analysis for independence were conducted to test the relation between education and accommodation.

Results

The present study aimed to analyze whether Americans with a higher education accommodate better than those with a lower level of education in an international business setting before and after cross-cultural training. A two-way ANOVA for accommodation with education level (high or low) and cross-cultural training (trained or no training) showed a significant main effect of cross-cultural training (F (1, 55) = 4.08, p = .003) on accommodation to Chinese colleagues. Table 2 shows the results obtained from the two-way ANOVA. Participants who took part in the cross-cultural training accommodated more to their Chinese colleague (M = 4.70, SD = .25) compared to those who did not (M = 3.71, SD = .20). There was no significant effect of level of education on accommodation (F (1, 55) = 1.41, p = .24). There was no significant interaction effect between the participant's education level and cross-cultural training conditions (F (1, 55) = 1.47, p = .23). Figure 1 shows a bar chart with the estimated means of high and low educated participants with cross-cultural training and without. Lastly, a chi-square test for independence showed no significant relation between level of education and accommodation ($\chi^2(5)$ = 6.74, p = .24).

Table 2. Means (*M*), standard deviations (*SD*) and number of participants (*n*) for accommodation in conditions with and without cross-cultural training.

	No training			Trained			Total		
	M	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*
Frequency of accommodation									
Undergraduate or below	4.09	.21	21	4.69	.33	13	4.39	.21	34
Graduate or higher	3.33	.30	15	4.70	.37	10	4.02	.24	25
Total	3.71	.20	36	4.70	.25	23	4.22	.22	59

Figure 1. Estimated means of frequency of accommodating responses per level of education for participants with cross-cultural training and without cross-cultural training.
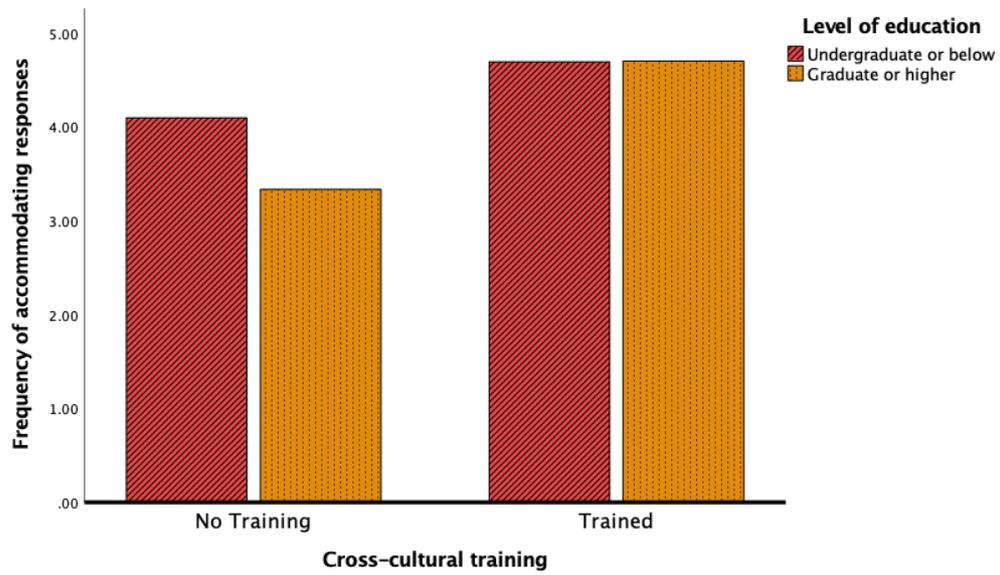
Discussion/Conclusion

Previous literature has shown that businesspersons with a higher level of education show better adaptability or accommodating skills than those with a lower level of education (O'Connell et al., 2008). The consequence of this finding is that it becomes unknown whether these highly educated persons are more adaptable due to their accumulated knowledge over the years or whether this adaptability skill can be taught in the form of a training or coaching session. The research question in this study was:

Does level of education have an effect on the accommodative adaptability of American participants when cross-cultural training has been followed in an international business context? To answer this research question two hypotheses were formulated.

H1: Participants with a higher level of education choose more accommodating responses to a colleague from a different cultural background.

Surprisingly, the results of this study showed that education level had no significant effect on the frequency of accommodating responses chosen by highly educated individuals in comparison to the individuals with a lower level of education. Participants with a lower level of education accommodated on average as frequently as the highly educate participants in both conditions with and without cross-cultural training. Hypothesis 1 can therefore be rejected. Previous research has shown that highly educated individuals show better accommodation skills than participants with a lower level of education. These findings are not in line with previous research and are perhaps an indication that accommodation skills are not an elitist concept (O'Connell, et al., 2008). The results could possibly indicate that accommodation is not a skill solely achievable by individuals that have more accumulated knowledge. Therefore, if cross-cultural training shows to have a significant effect on frequency of accommodation, it could be an indication that accommodation could be taught persons from all educational levels. However, this inconsistency may have been due to the fact that the present study was done at a smaller scale than O'Connell, et al. (2008). The sample size could have had an effect on the representation of the target groups in the study.

H2: Cross-cultural training has a positive effect on the participant's accommodating responses

Cross-cultural training showed to have a positive effect on the accommodating skills of the participants of the study. The cross-cultural training in the present study was done by highlighting important aspects of a high-context culture that differ from the low-context

cultures. A series of facts about Chinese culture were given to the participants at the start of the experiment. The participants were, therefore, able to adapt their response style to the messages from the Chinese colleague. Participants that took part in the condition that included cross-cultural training showed better accommodating skills than the participants who did not. This finding broadly supports the work of others in the area linking cross-cultural training with improved accommodation (Caliguiri et al., 2001; Esbach et al., 2001; Oberg, 1960; Qin, et al., 2010; Zakaira, 2000). Participants who were part of the condition with cross-cultural training showed better accommodation skills than those who were not. This type of training has also shown to have a positive effect on expats' ability to cope with pressure and uncertainty (Caliguiri et al., 2001; Zakaira, 2000).

Implications of the study

Due to the growing trade relations between the United States of America and China, communication difficulties between these two countries need to be addressed and improved (Oxford Economics, 2018; Roach, 2018). Coming in contact with people from a different culture, specifically Chinese culture, is not a phenomenon reserved for the highly educated. Any person that finds themselves in an international business setting is likely to come in contact with a someone from a different culture. Rejecting the first hypothesis is a possible indication that adaptability is not a skill reserved for intellectuals and the highly educated. The results have shown that individuals that have not reached a certain level of education could possibly also develop the skills to adapt to their interlocutor when they are from a different cultural background.

In addition, cross-cultural trainings could have a positive effect on the accommodation skills businesspeople that come in close contact with a different culture. In the case of American expatriates in China, cross-cultural training was shown to be positively related to the success rate of the job and improve adaptability skills (Hogan et al., 1990; Ashamalla et al., 1997). The results of this study showed that cross-cultural training had a significantly positive effect on the accommodation skills. This would be a positive indication for organizations to decide to invest in cross-cultural trainings for employees that are sent abroad to a country with a culture differing from their own or anyone who works in an international business setting. Cross-cultural trainings were also shown to lower the culture shock and make the transition into the new environment more efficient (Esbach et al., 2001; Oberg, 1960). Although American were shown to have more difficulty adapting to Chinese communication style than vice versa cross-cultural training could be a solution to the

accommodation difficulties American present. Previous findings have also shown that businesspersons who took part in cross-cultural trainings could appreciate the value of what was taught (Qin et al., 2010).

Limitations and future research

The present study was conducted as a multilevel questionnaire where several researchers analyzed different aspects of the results. For this reason, many participants were excluded from the final analysis conducted in the study. This resulted in a small sample size that could threaten generalizability of the results obtained. Moreover, the method used was not based on previous research that has been done. It was not properly pre-tested with American participants to analyze how they would respond before the final survey was shared; thus, the internal validity of the trials was low.

Further studies need to be carried out in order to investigate whether the type of training has an effect on the accommodation of participants. The differences between online trainings and physical trainings, for instance. The content of the trainings could also be analyzed to find what type or cross-cultural training is more valuable and useful to the participants. Whether cross-cultural trainings have long-term effects on the accommodation of the participants whenever they come in contact with a person from a Chinese background. Moreover, future research could conduct smaller scale qualitative study with open responses so the participants can fill in their own response after following cross-cultural training. Instead of the pre-formulated responses that may have been an easier choice for the participants. The study investigates whether the participant can truly adapt their response style to fit a high-context culture.

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Appendix A

BA Thesis Accommodation

Dear participant,

Thank you for wanting to participate in this experiment that improves our knowledge about communication in international business settings. This experiment is conducted by a group of Bachelor's thesis students of International Business Communication at Radboud University Nijmegen (NL).

The experiment consists of three parts and will overall take approximately 5 minutes.

The research data will be made anonymous and safely stored according to the research data management guidelines of Radboud University and conform to General Data Protection Regulation. As soon as possible, any personal data will be deleted. The researchers involved in this study will use the research data for academic publications and presentations. The data will not be used for other studies.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. This means that you can withdraw your participation and consent at any time during the data collection period without giving a reason.

Should you have any complaints regarding this research, please contact the

m.troncosoruiz@let.ru.nl or contact the confidential Advisors Academic Integrity via email vertrouwenspersonen@ru.nl

Thank you again, Anna Bos, Amelia Gilardi Tenés, Fritz Köster, Sanne van Lieshout, Julia Strooper & Andrea Vivas Aguilar

----

You have taken note of and you understand this information.

○ Yes

○ No

You voluntarily agree to participate.

○ Yes

○ No

You are at least 18 years of age.

○ Yes

○ No

By clicking the arrow in the bottom right corner you will proceed to the survey.

Appendix B

Please indicate your age category (e.g., 36 - 45).

○ < 25

○ 25 - 35

○ 36 - 45

○ 46 - 55

○ 56 - 65

○ 66 - 75

○ 76 - 85

○ > 85

Please indicate your gender.

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

○ High school graduate or equivalent

○ Associate degree

○ Bachelor's degree

○ First-professional degree

○ Master's degree

○ Doctorate/Phd degree

○ Trade/Technical/Vocational training

○ Professional degree

Is American English your native language?

○ Yes

○ No

Are you currently employed?

○ Yes

○ No

Do you have experience in business/corporate? If yes, please indicate how many years in a number. (e.g., 6)

○ Yes _____

○ No

Appendix C

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as Li Wei. He was born and raised in China. You are currently working on the same project together.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I have seen your speech on communication improvement you gave to the board, and you really hit the nail on the head with it. You can be very proud, and I hope you can teach me about those speaking skills sometime.

How would you respond?

○ Thank you, I agree. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

○ There is always room for improvement. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I am sorry to bother you, but last week I started a new project, and it seems like this project is not in line with my expertise. However, it is related to a project you are working on. I know you are busy, but it would be amazing if you could help me out.

How would you respond?

○ Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I do not have the time, but I hope you will manage.

○ Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I will try my hardest to see if I can make some time for you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

It is my brother's birthday party tomorrow. I have to go because family is really important to me. I will work on the conference later this week instead of tomorrow.

How would you respond?

○ Thank you for informing me. It is a shame that you cannot meet the agreed deadline because we planned this long before. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

○ Thank you for informing me. Enjoy your time with your family. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

Last week, I finished the banners for the business fair, and it would be perfect if you could check the content. Now I finally have time to finish other tasks.

How would you respond?

○ I will step by your office when you are available.

○ I will step by your office when it is convenient for you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I am sorry to bother you, but I think it is time to make some final decisions with regard to the division of our department's budget. I am sure we can figure it out quickly, so I propose we go out for dinner tonight. Then we can also talk about how your weekend was.

How would you respond?

○ That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. Let's discuss that tonight.

○ That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. I would love to hear about your weekend too.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

This morning we had a meeting about our project where we talked about next week's deadline. Our manager expected everyone to attend, and I assumed you would be there too.

How would you respond?

○ I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. What a shame... This will not happen again.

○ I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. I am really sorry… This will not happen again.

Page Break

I have adapted the way I respond to Li Wei.

○ Yes

○ No

Page Break

Please respond to the following statement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think Li Wei is a friendly person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix D

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as David Cooper. He was born and raised in the USA. You are currently working on the same project together.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

Wow, I have never heard someone speak so well as you did during the press conference last night.

How would you respond?

    ○ Thank you, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

    ○ You are so kind, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I have a favor to ask you. Could you send me the paperwork regarding the business deal we closed last week?

How would you respond?

○ Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. Can I send it to you when I am back in the office?

○ Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. I will take care of it.
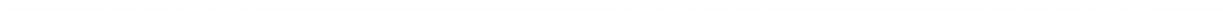

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I am sorry to inform you that I have not been able to finish the presentation for the board of partners due to some personal circumstances.

How would you respond?

○ I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Things come up in our lives, but please let me know as soon as possible in the future if you cannot meet a deadline.

○ I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Let's set another deadline.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

As you know, I had my first product presentation today for the board and colleagues. I was wondering whether you could give me some feedback.

How would you respond?

○ Sure, I will send you my feedback after today's sales meeting.

○ Sure, I will come by your office after today's sales meeting.

- -

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

The deadline for the security plan is coming up soon. I think it is a good idea if we have dinner to plan the last tasks that need to be finished.

How would you respond?

○ I agree. Also, I have some questions that I would like to discuss.

○ I agree. Also, I am curious to know how you and your family are doing.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I have unfortunately not yet received the details of the brochures for the business fair next month that you had promised to deliver. Can you send them to me as soon as possible?

How would you respond?

○ Sorry, it slipped my mind. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

○ I am so sorry. I must have missed your email. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

Page Break

Please respond to the following statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think David Cooper is a friendly person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix E

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as Li Wei. He was born and raised in China. You are currently working on the same project together.

- Since Li Wei has a Chinese background, his way of communicating is different from how Americans tend to communicate.
- Modesty is important in the Chinese culture, which results in compliments being played down. Agreeing with compliments can be perceived as arrogance.
- Li Wei is used to not asking for favors, as the Chinese culture requires members to seek answers for themselves.
- In Chinese culture, deadlines are flexible. They tend to be discussed in an implicit way resulting in room for their own interpretation.
- Indirect communication is common in China. They prefer discussing things face-to-face personally, which takes more time.

- Feedback is given implicitly and in a positive manner. Suggestions are preferred over negative feedback.
- Personal relations are formed over dinner with colleagues. Not only business is discussed, but also personal topics like family, hobbies, dreams, and wishes. Personal relations are fundamental to creating a successful business relationship.
- Apologies are giving very explicitly. People from a Chinese culture tend to blame themselves instead of others.

Read the following messages from your colleague and choose the response you find most appropriate for the situation.

Communication in China is preferably done in an indirect manner.

○ True

○ Neither true nor false

○ False

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I have seen your speech on communication improvement you gave to the board, and you really hit the nail on the head with it. You can be very proud, and I hope you can teach me about those speaking skills sometime.

How would you respond?

◯ Thank you, I agree. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

◯ There is always room for improvement. I hope the speech will be useful for the company and of course I would like to help you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I am sorry to bother you, but last week I started a new project, and it seems like this project is not in line with my expertise. However, it is related to a project you are working on. I know you are busy, but it would be amazing if you could help me out.

How would you respond?

○ Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I do not have the time, but I hope you will manage.

○ Unfortunately, I cannot help you because I have a deadline coming up. I will try my hardest to see if I can make some time for you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

It is my brother's birthday party tomorrow. I have to go because family is really important to me. I will work on the conference later this week instead of tomorrow.

How would you respond?

○ Thank you for informing me. It is a shame that you cannot meet the agreed deadline because we planned this long before. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

○ Thank you for informing me. Enjoy your time with your family. I hope to receive the notes as soon as possible.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

Last week, I finished the banners for the business fair, and it would be perfect if you could check the content. Now I finally have time to finish other tasks.

How would you respond?

○ I will step by your office when you are available.

○ I will step by your office when it is convenient for you.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

I am sorry to bother you, but I think it is time to make some final decisions with regard to the division of our department's budget. I am sure we can figure it out quickly, so I propose we go out for dinner tonight. Then we can also talk about how your weekend was.

How would you respond?

○ That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. Let's discuss that tonight.

○ That sounds good. I already have some ideas about the budget division. I would love to hear about your weekend too.

Page Break

Message from Li Wei:

This morning we had a meeting about our project where we talked about next week's deadline. Our manager expected everyone to attend, and I assumed you would be there too.

How would you respond?

○ I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. What a shame... This will not happen again.

○ I did not realize the meeting was supposed to be today. I am really sorry… This will not happen again.

Page Break

I have adapted the way I respond to Li Wei.

○ Yes

○ No

Page Break

Please respond to the following statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think Li Wei is a friendly person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix F

In this part of the survey, you will read some messages to which you will be asked to respond. Imagine that you work for an international company with colleagues such as David Cooper. He was born and raised in the USA. You are currently working on the same project together.

- Compliments are accepted as a sign of gratitude and shared with the rest of the team.
- Deadlines are met on time and planned ahead. There is little room for flexibility.
- Explicit communication is preferred. This results in very direct replies in order to be clear when asked for a favor or feedback.
- Feedback is given explicitly by mentioning both positive and negative elements and including tips. Opinions are not perceived as bad because honesty is appreciated.
- Business meals are mainly used for business purposes and include little chit-chat.
- Apologies are given implicitly in American culture. They tend to describe the circumstances of their shortcoming rather than explicitly saying sorry.

In the following section, you will be asked to respond to some emails that David sent you in a way you think most appropriate for the situation.

Directness and honesty are appreciated when giving feedback in American culture.

○ True

○ Neither true nor false

○ False

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

Wow, I have never heard someone speak so well as you did during the press conference last night.

How would you respond?

○ Thank you, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

○ You are so kind, I really appreciate your feedback. It would not have been such a success without the speechwriter.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I have a favor to ask you. Could you send me the paperwork regarding the business deal we closed last week?

How would you respond?

○ Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. Can I send it to you when I am back in the office?

○ Sure, but I unfortunately do not have access to the paperwork today. I will take care of it.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I am sorry to inform you that I have not been able to finish the presentation for the board of partners due to some personal circumstances.

How would you respond?

○ I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Things come up in our lives, but please let me know as soon as possible in the future if you cannot meet a deadline.

○ I hope all is well and thanks for letting me know. How do you suggest we get this finished? The partners are coming tomorrow, but we can postpone the meeting. Let's set another deadline.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

As you know, I had my first product presentation today for the board and colleagues. I was wondering whether you could give me some feedback.

How would you respond?

○ Sure, I will send you my feedback after today's sales meeting.

○ Sure, I will come by your office after today's sales meeting.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

The deadline for the security plan is coming up soon. I think it is a good idea if we have dinner to plan the last tasks that need to be finished.

How would you respond?

○ I agree. Also, I have some questions that I would like to discuss.

○ I agree. Also, I am curious to know how you and your family are doing.

Page Break

Message from David Cooper:

I have unfortunately not yet received the details of the brochures for the business fair next month that you had promised to deliver. Can you send them to me as soon as possible?

How would you respond?

○ Sorry, it slipped my mind. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

○ I am so sorry. I must have missed your email. Here are the details on the brochure. Looking forward to your feedback and I will get this done in time for the business fair.

Page Break

Please respond to the following statement.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think David Cooper is a friendly person.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix G

In the following section, you will be asked some background information about your own experience and working environment. Choose the option that applies the most.

Please respond to the following statements.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have contact with people from a Chinese background outside of a work environment.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I have contact with people from a Chinese background in a work environment.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I tend to take the other person's cultural background into account when I am communicating with them.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix H. Statement of own work

Sign this Statement of own work form and add it as the last appendix in the final version of the Bachelor's thesis that is submitted as to the first supervisor.

Student name: Andrea Vivas Aguilar

Student number: S1026707

PLAGIARISM is the presentation by a student of an assignment or piece of work which has in fact been copied in whole or in part from another student's work, or from any other source (e.g. published books or periodicals or material from Internet sites), without due acknowledgement in the text.

DECLARATION:

a. I hereby declare that I am familiar with the faculty manual (https://www.ru.nl/facultyofarts/stip/rules-guidelines/rules/fraud-plagiarism/) and with Article 16 "Fraud and plagiarism" in the Education and Examination Regulations for the Bachelor's programme of Communication and Information Studies.

b. I also declare that I have only submitted text written in my own words

c. I certify that this thesis is my own work and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation, whether they be books, articles, reports, lecture notes, and any other kind of document, electronic or personal communication.

Signature: Andrea Vivas Aguilar

Place and date: Arnhem, 8 July 2021

Appendix I. **Checklist Ethics Review 2020-2021**

You fill in the questions by clicking on the square next to the chosen answer ☐

After clicking, a cross will appear in this square ☒

1. Is a health care institution involved in the research?

Explanation: A health care institution is involved if one of the following (A/B/C) is the case:

A. One or more employees of a health care institution is/are involved in the research as principle or in the carrying out or execution of the research.
B. The research takes place within the walls of the health care institution and should, following the nature of the research, generally not be carried out outside the institution.
C. Patients / clients of the health care institution participate in the research (in the form of treatment).

    ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

    ☐ Yes → Did a Dutch Medical Institutional Review Board (MIRB) decide that the Wet Medisch Onderzoek (Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act) is not applicable?

    ☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

    ☐ No → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

2. Do grant providers wish the protocol to be assessed by a recognised MIRB?

    ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

    ☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

3. Does the research include medical-scientific research that might carry risks for the participant?   ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

☐ Yes → This application should be reviewed by a Medical Institutional Review Board, for example, the Dutch CMO Regio Arnhem Nijmegen → end of checklist

Standard research method

4. Does this research fall under one of the stated standard research methods of the Faculty of Arts or the Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies?

☒ Yes → 4a standard experimental research into linguistic judgement of language fragments

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist

Participants

5. Is the participant population a healthy one?

☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

6. Will the research be conducted amongst minors (<16 years of age) or amongst (legally) incapable persons?

☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

Method

7. Is a method used that makes it possible to produce a coincidental finding that the participant should be informed of?

☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☒ No → continue with questionnaire

8. Will participants undergo treatment or are they asked to perform certain behaviours that can lead to discomfort?

    ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

9. Are the estimated risks connected to the research minimal?

    ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

10. Are the participants offered a different compensation than the usual one?

    ☐ Yes → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

11. Should deception take place, does the procedure meet the standard requirements?

    ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

12. Are the standard regulations regarding anonymity and privacy met?

    ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

Conducting the research

13. Will the research be carried out at an external location (such as a school, hospital)?

    ☒ No → continue with questionnaire

    ☐ Yes→ Do you have/will you receive written permission from this institution?

    ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

☐ Yes → continue with questionnaire

14. Is there a contact person to whom participants can turn to with questions regarding the research and are they informed of this?

    ☐ No → assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

15. Is it clear for participants where they can file complaints with regard to participating in the research and how these complaints will be dealt with?

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

16. Are the participants free to participate in the research, and to stop at any given point, whenever and for whatever reason they should wish to do so?

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

17. Before participating, are participants informed by means of an information document about the aim, nature and risks and objections of the study? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents).

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → continue with questionnaire

18. Do participants and/or their representatives sign a consent form? (zie explanation on informed consent and sample documents.

    ☐ No→ assessment necessary, end of checklist → go to assessment procedure

    ☒ Yes → checklist finished

If you want to record the results of this checklist, please save the completed file.

If you need approval from the EACH due to the requirement of a publisher or research grant provider, you will have to follow the formal assessment procedure of the EACH.