

Work And Business Across Cultures

Possible answers and solutions

Die Lösungen sind nur Beispiele, die mögliche Lösungsansätze repräsentieren. Sie sollen Anregungen im Hinblick auf sprachliche Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten geben und inhaltliche Ansätze darstellen. Sie repräsentieren ein relativ gutes Leistungsniveau und erheben weder den Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit, noch sind sie ausschließlich und alleingültig.

Comprehension

1. State the intercultural differences McDonald's had not prepared themselves for.

To begin with the only research McDonald's carried out was market research, i.e. they only investigated whether the market was appropriate. After they had been successful for two years, they did not worry and felt at ease. Deriving from western culture they relied on contract law which was supposed to enforce their lease. Thus when asked to move they kept on relying on the rights they inferred from their own cultural background and they experienced a cultural clash when they were refused what they considered their almost natural rights.

They had not considered the importance of relation-building in Chinese culture and as a result they missed the chance of getting economic influence as well as political influence at the same time.

Analysis

2. Analyse the clash of concepts and values illustrated in this example with any background knowledge you have.

This example illustrates the 2000-year old unwritten rules that still persist in China in spite of a long period of communism; all of them are more or less based on the importance of hierarchy and loyalty to one's greater family, resp. to one's community. In terms of Hofstede who published his famous cultural dimensions in the nineteen-seventies, Chinese culture has a High Power Distance and is a collectivist society. Basically this means that existing hierarchies cannot be ignored or easily broken into and long-standing relationships have to be considered, otherwise social sanctions will follow.

In order to face up to such obstacles McDonald's should have sought the assistance of mediators, even if this had cost a lot of money. The text refers to the fact that the Chinese form of consulting would be considered bribery in western countries. This is a very revealing example of the extent of adaptability that is sometimes necessary when dealing with other cultures.

From the fact that in Asian/Chinese culture 'yes' may mean 'no' the non-acceptance of the lease has to be understood. Accepting the verdict of the court without further appeal would have been much more efficient in the long run because in that case McDonald's would have done the Chinese a favour. Thus they could have expected a favour from the other party. This principle is revealed in the film 'Rising Sun' where O'Connor, the expert of Chinese culture, exploits this principle.

Last but not least there is the necessity of giving the opposing party the chance "to keep face" which means that losing a legal case would be considered a shame much more than in western countries. And this fact alone would have meant that McDonald's had never had a chance to win it.

3. Examine what means and structure the author uses to show how important cultural awareness is.

The metaphor in the headline already stresses the importance of relationships that cannot be ignored, they are "ties that bind". Set against this Asian culture McDonald's symbolizes the economically powerful West, resp. the USA. But ironically roles have changed: McDonald's becomes weak in front of the overwhelming power of Chinese business culture. This also reveals the use of juxtaposition in order to emphasize the contrast in cultural perceptions.

The author uses this case as a striking example of the lack of cultural awareness economically powerful companies often reveal, which is more impressive than just writing about this lack.

The frequent use of the term 'guanxi' stresses the fact that language belongs to culture and cannot simply be translated without loss of meaning.

A lot of background information and expert knowledge serve to convince the reader of the plausibility and correctness of the author's issue.

The frequent use of nouns and verbal nouns is a stylistic means giving the impression of a sophisticated kind of business language.

Finally, the whole text consists of statements, no questions are asked. Together with the lack of direct speech this may convey that the issue is no matter of opinion, but a matter of fact that has to be accepted or failure may ensue.

Comment

- 4.1. Comment on the Chinese way of dealing with McDonald's referring to your own cultural background.

Zunächst einmal ist eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Verhaltensweise der Chinesen nötig, um diese dann in Bezug zur eigenen Kultur setzen zu können. Dieser Bezug kann sich zum Beispiel auf den Umgang mit der Nichteinhaltung von Versprechen oder der Missachtung von legalen Vereinbarungen beziehen. Es reicht nicht aus, eine persönliche Meinung abzugeben. Der kulturelle Zusammenhang muss hergestellt sein, dann erst kann eine Wertung erfolgen.

Creative Writing

- 4.2. The American executive in charge sends a letter to his family after the verdict of the Chinese court. Write that letter.

Der Brief muss von Ton und Form her einem privaten Brief entsprechen. Die im Text dargestellte Situation muss Berücksichtigung finden. Auf dieser Grundlage drückt der Amerikaner wahrscheinlich seine Empörung über die Missachtung der Vereinbarungen durch die Chinesen aus. Eventuell kommt er aber auch zu dem Schluss, dass man sich vorher mehr um kulturelle Unterschiede hätte kümmern müssen.