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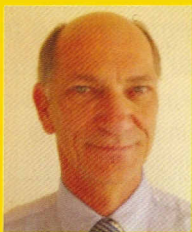


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THE UNTAPPED RESOURCES FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL MARKETING



by MIJND HUIJSER

Here is a tool that helps you understand what is underneath the layers of consumers' behaviours. It elicits their invisible preferences, and thus exposes what it takes to successfully connect. It is a tool that goes beyond 'the measurable' and 'the predictable' of market research data. In this article we will demonstrate that we can do better than that.

A British-Dutch firm had hired a London advertising company for the global branding of its new corporate image. Surveys revealed that consumers worldwide felt irritated by the tone of voice – not only Chinese or Brazilians, but also Americans commented that the language used was 'too British'. Apparently, the chosen communication style targeted only the 'elite', people worldwide who perfectly master UK-English and are acquainted with British culture. This comes as no surprise, as the advertising company, being elite itself, had set its own language as a standard.

We helped the firm to better connect and communicate with its target groups, introducing a tool that is originally meant to improve cross-cultural team performance. This tool, the Model of Freedom, is based on worldwide academic research on preferred communication and leadership styles in national cultures. It addresses the deeper beliefs of people regarding effective communication and trust building, which are also key in marketing.

WHAT IS THIS TOOL?

The Model of Freedom discerns four cultural orientations, each with distinct tendencies for preferred communication styles. Together they categorise all national, organisational and group cultures. I will not go through the model at length. For the aim of this article - finding ways to better connect with your target groups - it suffices to list these groups and their cultural preference.

- Action-oriented cultures, predominantly found in Anglo-Saxon countries, focus on what is concrete. They favour speed and tangible results.
- Process-oriented cultures, predominantly found in Latin countries and in an occasional Asian country, focus on the abstract, enjoy elaborating in discussions, and they need contextualising to give meaning.
- Task-oriented cultures, mostly in northern European countries, have a strong focus on the individual and his rights of self-actualisation. People interconnect through a common task.
- Role-oriented cultures, most Asian and some African countries, emphasise the community aspects of life. People identify with their social obligations.

Of course, within these cultural groups we can discern important differences, but in this article we will focus on the similarities. Over time the Model evolved and became a sophisticated tool, not only mapping national and organisational cultures, but also cultures of specific target groups, such as government bodies, the preferences of age groups and social class, managers in the auto industry, et cetera. And here we find its added value for marketing.

HOW DOES THIS HELP MARKETERS?

If we see signs of an Action orientation among younger people in many Asian countries, it means that they prefer concrete and direct language, and we also know that they loath to the abstract and trust only the tangible ('show it to me'). These are valuable insights for a marketing approach.

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Irrespective of the local market research data, if young people in these countries are your target group, adapt your language and your visuals if you want to be noticed at all.

Process-oriented cultures, as can be found among manufacturers, value abstract systems and intangible knowledge. Marketing efforts targeting manufacturers require a totally different communication style. A 'just do it' approach that works wonders for Action-oriented people will give them an impression of untrustworthiness. You will also need more time to build trust, as you will meet with a 'proof it to me' attitude.

People with a Task orientation are the ones you have to deal with in a campaign targeted towards experts. The use of superlatives to sell services or products would completely fail to convince them, as they feel a deep need for professional equality and distrust all 'heroes'.

In Role-oriented cultures, people have a higher esteem for duties, honour and loyalty than for openly speaking up for their own cause. When communicating with government bodies, for instance, this should be kept in mind.

The pitfall for marketing people is their own cultural orientation, which is generally an Action-orientation. Read any issue of *The Singapore Marketer* and you'll be smitten with the action language ("Bring it to life", "Get the brief right", "Identify your segment").

That is appropriate for the target group of this magazine, but may have little impact on people of other cultural orientations.

We should be careful with setting a standard, like that London advertisement company found out in their campaigns for our client.

Of course, if you have large resources or no competition, you can impose your standards, i.e. the way the American auto industry operated for a long time, successfully (until they met with the Japanese response). If you cannot afford this attitude, beware not to fall in this pit.

Nowadays we have to be more cost effective than ever, and we may therefore also need culture's edge more than ever. We helped that London advertisement company save money by raising the awareness of the position of their language in the world - not being the standard they thought it was. English language, 'purified' from British culture, felt less alien and more acceptable to focus groups worldwide. The Model of Freedom proved to be a powerful addition to the marketer's toolbox.

Mijnd Huijser is the founder of CMC Culture and Management Consulting (1993) and holds an academic degree in philosophy and cultural anthropology. Mijnd is also the author of two books: *The Profit of Peace* (2005), on culture and ethical dilemmas of international business in failing states, and *The Cultural Advantage* (2nd edition 2008), on what it takes to be a successful global team.

Mijnd will be speaking on "The Relation between Effective Marketing and Cultural Intelligence" at the Marketing Institute of Singapore's Marketing Guru Talk on 5 May 2009. Please visit www.i-marketer.org or call 6327 7592 or email membership@mis.org.sg for more information.