



LaJolla Software, Inc.

TEACHING NOTE

Purpose of Case Study

1. To introduce students to the communication issues involved in the global marketplace.
2. To help students recognize the importance of intercultural communication skills in business.
3. To encourage students to think about strategies for communicating across cultures.
This case study lends itself best to classroom discussion and is useful for highlighting the issues involved in communicating cross-culturally.

Identify the Business Problem

As LaJolla Software enters the global business arena, it must be careful not to alienate those with whom it wishes to do business. The quickest way to alienate a group of people is to ignore their customs and cultural norms. Not only does Todd Batey need to educate LaJolla's workforce on Japanese customs and culture, but he must also tactfully convey relevant information about the American culture to LaJolla's Japanese visitors. The success of LaJolla's joint venture depends on its ability to understand and incorporate Japanese customs in its business dealings.

This teaching note was prepared by Cynthia Maciejczyk under the direction of James O'Rourke, Concurrent Associate Professor of Management, as the basis for class discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

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Forecast the Most Desirable Outcome

The most desirable outcome in this situation is for Todd Batey to develop an education program that addresses not only the needs of the Japanese visitors, but also the information needs of LaJolla Software employees. Only through an understanding of each other's cultures will these two groups be able to form a successful business alliance.

Identify the Critical Issues

These are the main issues involved in this case:

- LaJolla's strategic business objectives;
- LaJolla employees' knowledge of Japanese culture;
- The Japanese businessmen's knowledge of American culture;
- How cultural differences may influence the development of a strong business relationship.

Stakeholder perspectives include:

- LaJolla Software, Inc.;
- Ichi Ban Industries;
- Shareholders;
- Business partners;
- Customers.

Identify and Discuss Possible Solutions to the Problem

Todd Batey must develop a plan for educating LaJolla's employees and also helping the visiting Japanese understand American culture.

1. His first course of action is to research Japanese culture and in particular business customs (possible sources for information include books, articles, Web sites).
2. Todd should also spend time researching North American standard business social practices. As a young employee of a nontraditional company, it's safe to assume that Todd is not well versed in standard American business protocol. This is a good opportunity for him to educate himself and his coworkers.
3. Additionally, Todd should find out as much as he can about each of his visitors before they arrive. It is possible that Mr. Yakura, who has been to the U.S. before, can be a resource. This knowledge will help him design a more targeted program.

4. Once he has a better understanding of what is important in Japanese culture, Todd can begin to develop a plan for educating LaJolla employees. This plan may include a detailed memo to all employees, small-group meetings or training workshops, or a series of e-mail messages.
5. With regard to the Japanese businessmen, Todd will need to develop a more interactive plan. These visitors will need to be handled carefully so they do not feel overwhelmed. Todd's plan should gradually introduce different aspects of American culture over a period of two to three weeks.

Teaching the Case

At the beginning of class

Because this case does not involve complex facts or events, you can distribute the case at the beginning of the class period in which it will be discussed. Give the students 10 minutes to read the case and ask them to think about the following issues:

- What preparation can be accomplished in the limited time frame (one week)?
- What are the company's goals for the visit?
- What might LaJolla employees know about Japanese culture?
- What might the Japanese businessmen know about American culture?
- What is important to know about each culture for a successful business partnership?
- Worst-case scenario: what could possibly go wrong with the visit?

For the remainder of the class

Have the students discuss the issues listed above. The discussion questions that are included in the case offer an excellent starting point for students' thoughts about this case. Some additional points to consider:

What could go wrong. Have students think of worst-case scenarios and identify ways to prevent these scenarios.

Have students think of specific events that would illustrate important aspects of American culture. (Sports and entertainment events, business presentations, university outings.)

Students should consider how Todd will communicate his plan to LaJolla Software management and employees. Is it important for the entire company to be involved?

Identify the stakeholders in this case and their separate interests and concerns:

LaJolla Software, Inc. The company has a lot to lose if they do not successfully merge the two cultures. In order to grow the company, LaJolla's management must take advantage of a window of opportunity in the Far East. Without a strategic Asian business partner, the company will face an uphill struggle in that market.

Ichi Ban Industries. Ichi Ban will work to make the partnership a success. After getting the blessing of shareholders, business partners, bankers, and Keiretsu executives, Ichi Ban does not want to risk a public failure.

Shareholders and business partners. Both companies have a duty to shareholders and business partners to make the venture work. Both groups will watch the partnership closely, and make investment decisions accordingly.

Customers. LaJolla Software must continue to serve its customers in the same way it has in the past. Customers will be interested in this joint venture for the potential effect it will have on new product development and customer service.

Last 5 minutes of class

Conclude the discussion.

The key to this case, as with nearly all other management communication cases, is to let the students speak freely, but guide their comments toward the situation facing Todd Batey and the communication issues the case presents.

Writing Assignments

Following are a few suggested writing assignments for this case. These assignments call for students to do some research into Japanese business practices:

1. Have students assume Todd Batey's role and write a memo to LaJolla Software upper management, outlining his plan for teaching the Japanese businessmen about American culture. Included in this memo should be a plan for teaching LaJolla employees about Japanese culture.
2. Have students assume that Todd has just heard of the impending visit by LaJolla Software's Japanese business partners but that management has not made any special arrangements beyond the Zoo and a Padres game. Have students write a memo to persuade LaJolla management of the need for an education program for both the Japanese visitors and their own employees.
3. Have students compose an "all-hands" memo to LaJolla Software employees informing them of some important etiquette issues in Japanese culture and their implications for how the employees should interact with their Japanese guests.