



THE ASSISTANT MANAGER CONDUCTING REVIEWS IN INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

This case study was written as a part of the Erasmus+ Project Grant ID: 2019-1-UK01-
KA203-061672



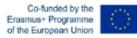
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Narrated case study can be accessed [here](#).



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THE ASSISTANT MANAGER CONDUCTING REVIEWS IN INTERNATIONAL OFFICES – TEACHING GUIDE

1. Synopsis

Narong is originally from Thailand. He has been an assistant manager for BeautyCo, an international health and beauty retailer, for three and a half years. BeautyCo is a multinational organisation based in Hong Kong. Narong is based in London and conducts reviews for business units in other countries. When Narong visited Ukraine in 2016, he had to talk to the local finance director about some issues that were raised. The local finance director strongly disagreed and his female colleague started to cry because she got angry and did not know how to respond to this disagreement. Narong reflected that it was a valuable experience because it taught him to remain calm in unexpected situations. During that time, he asked her to go outside with him to talk, so she could feel safe as the situation had suddenly become tensed.

2. Teaching Strategy and Teaching Objectives

Teaching Objectives:

- Understand the meaning of ‘*cognitive flexibility*’ and discuss its importance when working with people from other cultures.
- Understand the impact of “*cognitive flexibility*” on International Business when dealing with international offices.

3. Target Audience

- ✓ Undergraduate students in all business-related disciplines
- ✓ Postgraduate students in all business-related disciplines
- ✓ Employers

4. Questions for Case Analysis and Teaching

- 1) What is the dilemma in this case? What are the mechanisms you need when you have to deal with disagreement?
- 2) How do you adapt cognitive flexibility into the situation?
- 3) What are the possible causes of conflict when Narong was conducting reviews in the international office in Ukraine?
- 4) How would you react in this situation, if someone stood up and expressed disagreement strongly?
- 5) What have you learned during the case? Where else can this be applied?



5. References and Recommended Reading

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THE ASSISTANT MANAGER CONDUCTING REVIEWS IN INTERNATIONAL OFFICES – TEACHING NOTES

1. Summary of case study

Narong is originally from Thailand. He is working as an assistant manager for BeautyCo, an international health & beauty retailer. BeautyCo is an international-worldwide company based in Hong Kong. Narong is based in London and conducts reviews for business units in other countries. When Narong visited Ukraine in 2016, he had to talk to the local finance director about some issues that they were raising. The local finance director disagreed very strongly, and his female colleague started to cry because she got angry and did not know how to respond to this disagreement. Narong looked back and thought that it was a valuable experience because it taught him to be calm in unexpected situations. Narong asked her to step outside and talk, just the two of them, so that she felt like it was a safe space, because the situation has suddenly become very volatile.

2. Suggested methodology for ‘solving’ case study

The first step is to understand the meaning of ‘cognitive flexibility’ and discuss its importance when working with people from other cultures. The theory slides on ‘cognitive flexibility’ accompanying this material should be reviewed. The second step is to understand how Narong and the team (case study) can apply ‘cognitive flexibility’ when dealing with international offices.

3. Possible answers

Q1) What is the dilemma in this case? What are the mechanisms you need when you have to deal with disagreement?

Narong thinks that the main problem comes from cultural stereotypes. For example, culture in northern Europe might be very direct and a little bit too blunt/direct (e.g., in email communication). If you are very sensitive to how people interact with you, you might find it quite difficult and challenging to work with them. They might not mean any harm or mean to cause offence. By having ‘cognitive flexibility’, such as not having biases and stereotypes, the team can achieve high-openness and understanding, and will be more willing to adapt their thoughts and actions to those of another culture. Through ‘cognitive flexibility’, the team can understand cultural differences and reduce conflict and misunderstandings arising from ‘cultural distance’.

Q2) How do you adopt cognitive flexibility into the situation?

The way to adopt ‘cognitive flexibility’ is to avoid aggressive communication as in the case study where the local finance director disagreed very strongly, stood up from his seat and then expressed his disagreement. ‘Emotional intelligence’ would also help the participants in the meeting to increase their self-awareness and calmness during the specific event. They would be



able to switch cultural frames, and this would help them to think, act, and behave appropriately in this situation.

Q3) What are the possible causes of conflict when Narong was conducting reviews in the international office in Ukraine?

The possible causes of conflict when Narong was conducting reviews in Ukraine might come from stereotypes. There are differences between the cultures in Thailand and Ukraine in that the Thai culture is concerned more about 'saving face' and concealing emotion in communication, whereas the culture in Ukraine is more expressive. However, Narong wrongly interpreted the event from his cultural perspective, whereas he should have been able to switch cultural frames to manage the situation differently. In addition, the Ukrainian finance director and his female colleague should also be able to control emotions during business meetings better.

Q4) How would you react in this situation if someone stood up and expressed disagreement strongly?

It is important that we understand that people from different cultures behave in a variety of ways in formal and informal communication. Collaboration needs knowledge of how culture affects the way in which people work differently and an awareness of any such differences. Demonstrating 'cognitive flexibility' would enable you to remain calm and defuse the situation.

Q5) What have you learned during the case? Where else can this be applied?

The case teaches us that cognitive flexibility is very important as it enables complex skills, such as goal-directed planning, problem solving, and deliberate learning. It is the ability to incorporate both known solutions and innovated or acquired novel solutions in a contextually appropriate manner. This can be applied to other work situations where team members are culturally diverse. For example, people from individualistic cultures deal with disagreements or conflict by emphasising analytic, linear logic. People are very direct and tend to be confrontational. Individualistic cultures tend to deal with conflict by solution and action orientation. This is in contrast to, for example, collectivist cultures.

