

Situation For international managers who have to write reports which are read in different countries. Or have to set a standard for report writing which affects several countries.

Objectives Styles of reporting to management vary considerably from culture to culture. The aim of this exercise is to raise awareness of the potential problems and pitfalls, and to suggest strategies for coping with them

Extra Material none

Duration Approx. 30 minutes

Procedure

1. Read through the text and the reports. Remember that the case study content was presented once only to all four cultural groups together. There was only one set of information.
2. Fill in the Reports Review sheet, using a scale of very important, ++ , +(+) , + , 0 , - , -(-) , to -- meaning really unimportant, fill in the chart.
3. Compare yours answers to that of the “Experts”
4. Read the Feedback section
5. Check some report written previously in your company, determine your company style and decide how you will write your reports or how you want your subordinates to write reports for you

Feedback After you have read the reports, made your own evaluation, and compared it with the *expert* view. Do you feel reassured, frightened, fascinated, or are you simply reliving past reports with an *ah ha* effect. What is important in one culture is non-existent in another:

German report:

Purely factual and impersonal. It is a decision-making tool for superiors, who will take impersonal decisions based on it, without involving the writer.

American report:

Short on negatives, hoping nobody notices, skimpy on hard facts, and closing upbeat. *I'm the right man in the right place. Trust me.* Mind you, he doesn't relate how he is going to get out of trouble, even if he knows, not that he is worrying about it.

British Report:

Full of understatement and subtlety. Reading between the lines, the writer is saying, *You've got the right man in the right place. It's a lousy situation here, but if anyone can fix it, it's me. So, don't even think of interfering.*

Latin American Report:

In the Mediterranean and Latin American world, there is a much higher level of personal contact, very many informal spontaneous get-togethers, with not only small talk, and plenty of it, but also exchange of valuable information, a lot of talking, but more importantly very active listening, so why should we write reports? *I've written a letter to him outlining the problem. That's enough until his next visit. If he's worried, he'll come sooner. But he trusts me.*

If you are German or American, you probably like each other's reports best, after your own. Both have a direct style. However, you may well have problems digging out the embedded facts in the British report. Your business cultures are so direct that you probably do not have the necessary antennae. Southern Europeans, Latin Americans, Arabs and Asians should find it easy, since they are even more indirect than the British.

If you are British or Latin American, you will probably like the personal style and indirectness of each other's reports. Saving face is far more important than stating the truth with hard facts. You probably dislike the German report because it does just that, and is totally impersonal. If you are British, you probably don't like the American report, because it is trying to conceal the problems, and is too upbeat about the future, without any possible justification; typical American hype.

If you are the American boss of the British writer, you are reaching for the phone before you finish reading, and organizing a better man to replace him on the next flight out.

Experience/Remarks

In many intercultural workshops we have presented this case study of an airport construction project which had been running for eight months. It was now time to write the second milestone report to our managers back home. Each cultural group, from the USA, UK, Germany and Latin America sat down and wrote reports to their respective managers. We requested them to avoid writing according to their own personal preferences, but much more to write a standard report as members of that culture for a standard boss in that culture. As you will see, to everyone's great surprise, we then had four different products.

Each of our groups was convinced that they had really written a true report for their culture. Many nationals of each culture/ country have in the meantime confirmed this. Almost everyone prefers his own cultural report to the others, quite naturally. Perhaps you will too.

Of course this is not to say that all reports in each country are always written in the same style, naturally there are exceptions in every case. Here we are referring to cultural or corporate norms.

USA

To: James Wilson, Overseas Operation

From: James Garner, General Construction Manager, Nysatuka Project. Re: Half-Yearly Report.

This report is a brief review of the construction period from January 1st to August 31st, 2006, concerning the Nysatuka Airport Project.

1. Work completed: suitable area for terminal is settled. The rehousing of the peasants and removal of cattle ran smoothly. However, problems with concrete delivery caused a delay of two months in completing the site access roads.

2. Work in progress:

The attitude of the locals to work has had a negative influence on progress. As a result of this delay, we didn't start to level the ground and dig the foundations until the middle of August.

3. Future Action Plan: long religious festival caused further problems which will lead to the delay of the following stages:

- building of air terminal
- construction of control tower
- installation of interior fittings

The remaining steps will be completed on time as scheduled. The outlook for the future is considerably brighter.

Latin America

Dear Juan-Xavier,

I hope you enjoyed the summer holidays and are now back in the office. We also had a nice time here although I had to come back to the office two days early because we had some problems,

As you already know, we had some difficulties in getting concrete, but they have now been solved. Furthermore there were some delays due to strikes by the workers. Although the strikes have ended, we are about one month behind schedule. Despite the situation we think we are able to complete our plan in time. We are sure we can solve the problem by concentrating our activities on the construction of the runway and the foundations of the buildings by interrupting the final construction work of the site access roads and the apron and taxi ways. Further measures could be to use more machines like bulldozers and gutter presses and to engage more workers being able to work in two shifts.

This would involve increasing our budget by approx. Euros 5000,000 per month.

In order to make a final decision, I would like to invite you to come to Nysatuka to get a personal impression of the situation. Please keep me informed, so that I can take care of the necessary arrangements.

Cordially yours

Gilberto A.

United Kingdom

To: J. Preston, Dept. 2B, Slough, UK

From: D.Maguire, Nysatuka

Re: Nysatuka Airport Project: Milestone Report 2, Jan. - Aug. 2006

Situation: The project to date has not been without its difficulties; it could well be described as a learning situation for the local partners as well as for ourselves.

We are happy to be able to report that the project began well and our targets were met for the first two months. It may well be that we were lulled into a false sense of security during this phase.

The following report sets out some of the main factors which should help you to understand the situation on the ground here; the difficulties we had, the stage we have reached and our aims, short, medium and long term.

Details:

The following difficulties were met in relation to:

- Availability of ready-mix concrete which stopped construction work completely for one month, caused by political manoeuvring locally, and ended by our intervention.
- Long local religious festival which reduced output by 70% for one whole month (month 7): month 19 will be similarly affected.
- Substandard concrete which resulted in having to destroy 2 weeks' construction work, subsequently rebuilt.
- New working schedule to improve output by working continuous day i.e. without *siesta* lead to walk out of 95% of local labour. They only returned after our undertaking not to attempt to reintroduce such a scheme in the future.

Time loss: 1 Month

Conclusion: At present the situation is stable and work is proceeding at 80% of original schedule. It would not be unreasonable to assume that similar problems will occur throughout the duration of the

International Reports

project. For this reason we would ask you to accept our revised schedule (attached), which reflects the realities as experienced here.

Any further attempt on our part to speed up the process would only aggravate our already difficult situation, and probably lead to further setback. We shall, of course, continue to make every effort to minimise disruptions which might lead to further delays.

I can give you an interim update when we meet in London in mid-October.

As ever

Germany

Nysatuka Project - Milestone Report - 8 months:

The aim of this report is to reflect the status of the Nysatuka airport project after a period of 8 months and to present objectives for future activities.

The plan for this period consists of the following activities:

- commercial preparations with banks
- preparation and clearing of the area
- levelling of the ground
- access roads
- foundations
- and also starting with the construction of the control tower.

During this time we have been facing the following difficulties:

- Low efficiency of work
- No delivery of concrete
- Unexpected additional delay caused by a long local religious festival

These difficulties lead to a delay of approximately 2 months

We can describe our present situation as follows: The preparation, clearing and levelling of the area is finished. The construction of the access road is almost completed. The digging of the foundations, which has just started, is two months late.

In spite of the delays we assume that the project can be finished in scheduled time if no further interruptions occur. This is due to the fact that some buffer time was taken into account in the original plan and that we can intensify activities by working overtime.

Reports



International Reports

Your Vote	D	GB	US	Latin America
Inform				
Review / Survey				
Raise Awareness / Sensitize				
Present Facts				
Warn				
Recommend				
Reassure				
Set Objectives				
Persuade / Convince				
Educate				

Reports

International Reports

Expert	D	GB	US	Latin America
Inform	+(+)	+(+)	+	-
Review / Survey	+(+)	+(+)	(+)	-
Raise Awareness / Sensitize	(-)	++	-	+
Present Facts	++	+	+(+)	- (-)
Warn	--	+(+)	--	+
Recommend	- (-)	+(+)	--	++
Reassure	+	+	++	0
Set Objectives	-	+	+	-
Persuade / Convince	-	+(+)	+(+)	+(+)
Educate	-	++	- (-)	-