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STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE INTERACTION IN MULTICULTURAL TEAMS: THE NISSAN CASE

СТРАТЕГІЇ ЕФЕКТИВНОЇ ВЗАЄМОДІЇ В МУЛЬТИ-КУЛЬТУРНИХ КОМАНДАХ: КЕЙС NISSAN

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Крупський О.П., Стасюк Ю.М., Вовчок С.В. Стратегії ефективної взаємодії в мульти-культурних командах: кейс Nissan. Науково-методична стаття.

У статті проаналізовано досвід корпорації Nissan щодо управління багатокультурними командами в умовах глобалізації. Розкрито проблеми міжкультурної взаємодії: мовні бар'єри, різниця в цінностях, управлінських підходах і стилях комунікації. Висвітлено вплив альянсу Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi на корпоративну культуру. Описано стратегії: впровадження корпоративної мови, програми міжкультурної підготовки, стандартизації процесів, управління конфліктами. Узагальнено приклади ініціатив компанії щодо стажувань, ротации персоналу та культурного обміну. Підкреслено роль інклюзивності в підвищенні ефективності, знятті конфліктності та зміцненні ідентичності.

Ключові слова: міжкультурне співробітництво, корпоративна культура, стратегічне управління, Nissan, міжкультурні бар'єри, глобальний бізнес, управління персоналом, мультикультурні команди, ефективна комунікація

Krupskyi O.P., Stasiuk Y.M., Vovchok S.V. Strategies for Effective Interaction in Multicultural Teams: the Nissan Case. Scientific and methodical article.

The article analyzes the experience of Nissan Corporation in managing multicultural teams in the context of globalization. The problems of intercultural interaction are revealed: language barriers, differences in values, management approaches and communication styles. The impact of the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance on corporate culture is highlighted. Strategies for introducing a corporate language, intercultural training programs, process standardization, and conflict management are described. Examples of the company's initiatives on internships, staff rotation and cultural exchange are summarized. The role of inclusiveness in increasing efficiency, reducing conflict and strengthening identity is emphasized.

Keywords: intercultural collaboration, corporate culture, strategic management, Nissan, intercultural barriers, global business, human resource management, multicultural teams, effective communication

In today's world, where globalization is becoming a key component in the impact on the existence and development of many organizations, the ability to work effectively in intercultural teams is gaining significant popularity [1]. Due to the significant increase in the level of competition in the market around the world, it becomes important to manage different cultures in large organizations that aim to take a strong, leading position among competitors. It is the abundance of languages and cultures, and the resulting traditions, customs and values of employees, that present organizations with the greatest and most demanding challenges [2]. The experience of many leading global companies demonstrates that cultural differences are an essential aspect of today's business environment [3]. The inability to work effectively in teams with cultural differences can lead to a significant decrease in productivity and unnecessary conflicts that will act as a brake on the organization's development or become the basis for losing its leading position among other representatives of a similar activity [4].

Nissan Corporation is one of the leading automobile manufacturers in the world and is undoubtedly a vivid example of implementing effective intercultural management strategies to improve its operations [5]. Nissan has production facilities around the world, including Japan (3 plants), the USA, Mexico, India, the UK, Thailand, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Egypt, and Spain. In China, the company operates through a joint venture, Dongfeng Motor Co., Ltd., with five plants. In fiscal 2023, Nissan's global sales increased by 4.1%

compared to the previous fiscal year 2022, reaching 3.44 million units [6] (Fig. 1). This growth was driven by stable sales in Japan, North America, and other regions, including Europe. However, the Chinese market saw a significant drop in sales of 24.1%, which affected the overall financial performance.

Changes in Nissan’s net income showed significant fluctuations during the 2018-2023 financial years (Fig. 2). The decline in 2019-2020 was driven by a decline in demand as a result of trade disputes between

the USA and China and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Starting in 2021, the global economy began to recover, which had a positive impact on car sales. After a peak decline in 2020, the company managed to recover its position and in 2023 reached its highest level of revenue in six years (¥12.7 billion). This demonstrates the effectiveness of the new development strategy, which focuses on the electrification of transport and the stabilisation of global demand for Nissan products.

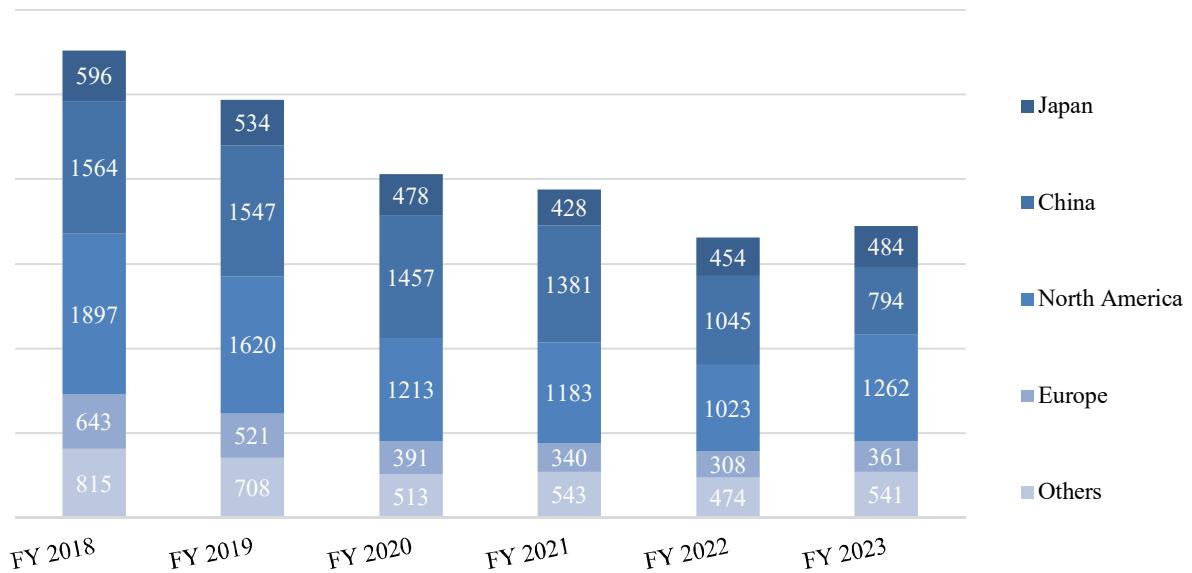


Figure 1. Dynamics of Nissan’s sales in the 2018-2023 financial years (the financial year at Nissan Motor Co. begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March of the following year) Source: compiled by authors on materials [6]

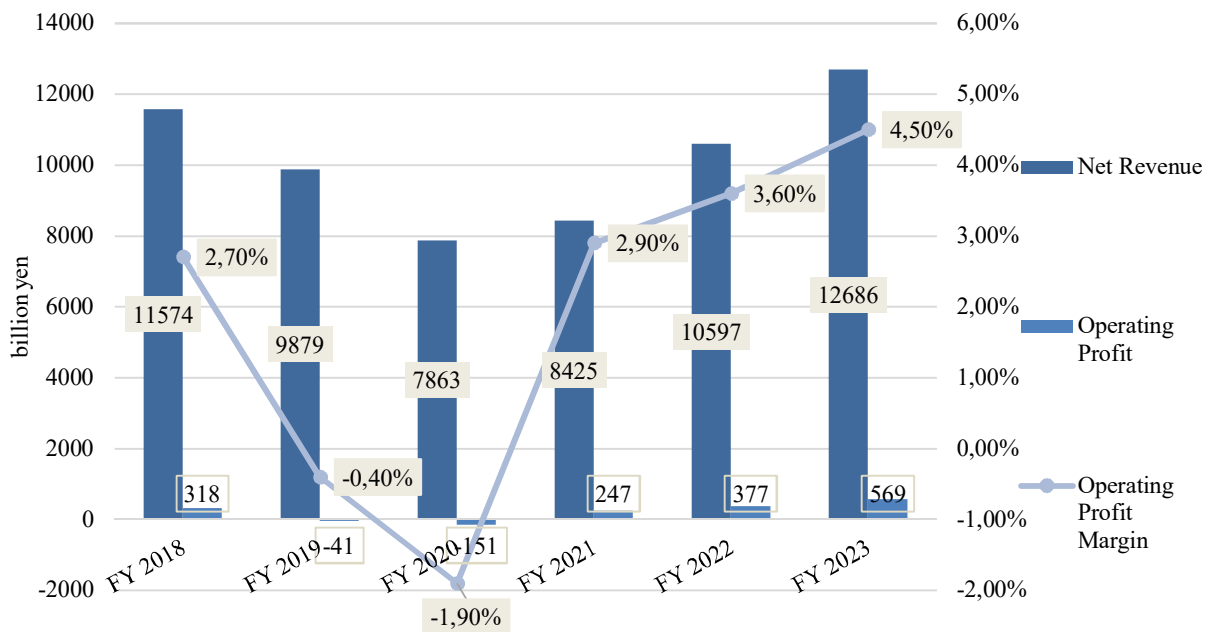


Figure 2. Nissan’s revenue and profit dynamics in the 2018-2023 financial years (the financial year at Nissan Motor Co. begins on 1 April and ends on 31 March of the following year) Source: compiled by authors on materials [6]

The company has a diverse workforce, a multinational team and an extremely large customer base located in different parts of the world; therefore, there are certain individual strategies to overcome cultural barriers [7]. Today, Nissan, as a global automotive company with a diverse team of employees, is actively working on the development and implementation of strategies for effective management of intercultural cooperation [8].

The main aim of this study is to examine the existing strategies and approaches of Nissan Corporation that help the corporation to effectively manage and establish workflow in multinational teams. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to consider the following important aspects of this issue:

- to explore the history of Nissan Corporation and find out why it is a global player today;
- to analyse the challenges of intercultural cooperation in Nissan Corporation;
- to find out what role the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance plays among the challenges of intercultural cooperation;
- to consider Nissan's strategies for overcoming barriers in teams and avoiding conflicts in the internal environment of the corporation; to provide specific examples for each strategy and analyse them;
- to develop recommendations for companies that can also use these strategies to overcome their own intercultural conflicts.

Fulfilling these tasks will help companies to prevent intercultural conflicts, create an inclusive working environment that will be comfortable for each employee of the company, and establish effective communication between employees from different cultural environments.

Analysis of recent research and publications

Research in the field of intercultural management and corporate culture is an important direction of modern science, as globalization forces international companies to adapt their management practices to a multicultural environment. Accordingly, several main approaches to the analysis of intercultural interaction in global business have emerged in the scientific literature.

One of the most well-known models for analysing cultural differences is Hofstede's cultural dimensions model [9, 10], which identifies six key aspects of culture: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, long-term orientation, and indulgence or restraint. Hofstede's research is based on the study of corporate culture and its impact on intercultural interaction in international organizations.

Another important concept is Hall's model [11], which distinguishes between high-context and low-context cultures. In high-context cultures (Japan, China, Arab countries), communication is indirect and context-dependent, while in low-context cultures (the USA, Germany, Scandinavia), information is presented openly and without hidden meanings. It plays a crucial role in Nissan's communication

processes, where people from different cultural groups work together.

It is also worth mentioning the theory of intercultural adaptation [12], which explains how employees adapt to a new corporate culture and what mechanisms can facilitate their effective integration into international teams.

Corporate culture plays a key role in creating a unified management approach in multicultural companies. According to Schein (2010), corporate culture defines the values and behavioural norms that influence decision-making and organizational effectiveness [13].

Research by Deal and Kennedy (1982) demonstrates that a strong corporate culture contributes to increased productivity and employee engagement, which is especially important in multinational companies such as Nissan [14].

Furthermore, corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an integral part of building an effective corporate culture. Carroll (1999) notes that the integration of CSR initiatives contributes to the creation of an inclusive environment, which is especially important for companies with a diverse workforce [15].

An important aspect of intercultural management is the experience of successful international companies such as Toyota, Volkswagen, Google and IBM. Research by Cox and Blake (1991) shows that companies that effectively manage diversity have competitive advantages, including improved decision-making and increased innovation [16].

Leadership also plays a crucial role in overcoming intercultural barriers. House et al. (2004) in their GLOBE study identified leadership styles that contribute to the effective management of multicultural teams, emphasizing the importance of managers' communicative competence and adaptability [17].

One of the most complex aspects of managing international teams is overcoming language barriers [18]. Research by Charles (2007) indicates that language difficulties can cause conflict and reduce efficiency in global companies. [19] Accordingly, Luo and Shenkar (2006) recommend the implementation of corporate language policies that ensure uniform communication standards in large companies [20].

The introduction of specialised training in intercultural competence is also an effective tool for increasing productivity. According to a study by Thomas and Inkson (2017), companies that invest in the development of their employees' intercultural skills demonstrate a higher level of adaptability and communication effectiveness [21].

In modern international companies, such as Nissan, an important tool for shaping corporate culture is using innovative communication methods that help the employees adapt to corporate values and promote effective intercultural interaction. Storytelling plays a key role in maintaining organizational culture, helping to convey a company's values through stories, to increase employee engagement, and to create a unified corporate environment [22]. At the same time, another study highlights the effectiveness of using comics as a means of simplified visual communication, which can

be utilized to integrate new employees, train staff, and explain complex management concepts in an accessible manner [23]. Furthermore, some studies emphasize the importance of digital leadership in corporate structures, which enables companies to adapt to a dynamic business environment, increase management efficiency, and promote technological innovation [24]. Using these approaches at Nissan contributes to a better understanding of corporate policy among multicultural teams, increased communication efficiency, development of leadership competencies, and creation of an inclusive work environment.

The results of the literature analysis indicate that intercultural management is a key success factor for international corporations. Nissan, as one of the leading automotive companies, actively implements strategies to overcome intercultural barriers, reinforcing the relevance of the studied scientific concepts. Research shows that the use of a corporate language, the standardization of communication processes, and the development of employees' intercultural competence all contribute to the effectiveness of international teams.

The inclusion of additional scientific sources broadens our understanding of the challenges faced by international companies and supports the development of effective management practices that facilitate the successful integration of multicultural teams in global business.

The research in the field of cross-cultural management has shown that large corporations, including Nissan, are actively developing effective strategies for managing multinational teams. Practice demonstrates that the solutions implemented, such as systematic training, are both appropriate and effective in the context of modern intercultural management. Companies place significant emphasis on effective communication methods in multicultural environments, fostering tolerance toward individuals from different cultural backgrounds, and developing practical intercultural skills [1, 25].

The research methodology. This study uses a comprehensive approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. The main research methods used are content analysis of scientific sources, comparative analysis of intercultural management practices, as well as methods of structural and functional analysis.

The study also analysed Nissan's corporate policy, including employee adaptation programs, communication strategies, and conflict resolution mechanisms within multicultural teams. The findings provide a basis for formulating practical recommendations for international companies aiming to enhance their intercultural management practices.

The main part

Nissan Motor Corporation is a company that has an extremely large number of achievements and discoveries in the automotive industry and deserves to be called the world's leading car manufacturer. The history of Nissan trace back to 1911 with the opening

of the Kwaishinsha car plant in Japan. However, the official date of the foundation of Nissan Motor Corporation is considered to be 26 December 1933, when the predecessor company Jidosha Seizo Corporation was established, which eventually changed its name to Nissan Motor Corporation [26]. At that time, no one could have imagined that a small car plant would later gain great momentum and become one of the world's most famous multinational corporations, as its production facilities are spread across almost every continent of the globe. The company has transformed into a key player on the global stage [6].

Nissan's global presence allows it to effectively meet consumer needs in different countries and adapt products to specific cultural and market conditions. This allows the company to be closer to its customers and increase efficiency in developing new products [27]. The company strives to form multinational teams, bringing together employees from different cultures who have unique professional approaches to the automotive industry. This allows for innovation and a deeper understanding of consumer needs in different countries. This "non-standard approach" is both a competitive advantage and a significant challenge for the company [7].

Cultural diversity in teams can stimulate innovation and promote success in international business, but it also creates challenges that require effective management strategies. Research confirms that a multicultural environment enhances creativity and the ability to innovate, especially under conditions of well-defined communication standards [28] and consistent communicative expectations [29]. In addition, leadership plays a crucial role in overcoming intercultural barriers, as demonstrated by the success of the Renault-Nissan alliance as opposed to the failed DaimlerChrysler-Mitsubishi merger. [30] Local workers' adaptation to foreign corporate culture can occur with the help of regular interaction with expatriates, which affects work productivity and interpersonal relationships [31]. Nissan effectively leverages cultural diversity by considering employee behaviour patterns, fostering trust, developing a shared corporate identity, and establishing a common language of communication. These efforts create stable, virtuous cycles and open up new global opportunities [25]. According to Furusawa, the foundation of Nissan's success in overcoming intercultural barriers lies in its organizational culture, which promotes global corporate values, standardized staff assessment methods, and employee mobility across divisions [32]. Furthermore, to fully harness the potential of multicultural teams, organizations should implement intercultural competence training, assess cognitive styles, and apply appropriate team management techniques [28].

Challenges of intercultural cooperation at Nissan. As mentioned above, Nissan Corporation strives to bring together employees from different parts of the world to adapt new crossover models to the local needs of consumers in various countries [7, 25]. The multinational composition of Nissan's team of

professionals creates a powerful environment for innovation and is regarded as a competitive advantage that cannot be easily replicated. Despite the positive aspects of such diversity, it also presents a number of challenges that significantly impact the effectiveness of team management and decision-making processes. The main difficulties that hinder cooperation include:

- A language barrier that significantly hinders communication. It can cause misunderstandings in communication between employees; it can hinder the correct understanding of work tasks, corporate goals, and values. Teamwork becomes much more difficult. It is almost impossible to negotiate effectively due to a lack of knowledge of the required language [33, 34]. In such situations, people are often afraid to speak in order not to make mistakes, and this significantly reduces their activity in communication.
- Different perceptions of time can become a challenge for various cultures. Some value punctuality highly, where even a one-minute delay may be seen as a sign of deep disrespect, while for others, being late is considered completely normal [35]. Differences in planning approaches may also arise, as some cultures tend to focus on long-term planning, which can significantly complicate the development and implementation of joint projects. Similarly, differing attitudes toward deadlines can lead to disagreements and conflicts within teams [36].
- There are different approaches to problem solving [34]. In this regard, we can talk about an analytical approach with a thorough analysis of all components and an intuitive approach, where the main weapon is human intuition; focus on a long process with coordination of each step and focus on a quick result, even if it is necessary to take risks; different ways of solving problems; adherence to strict rules and flexibility and adaptation to the situation.

Furthermore, the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance significantly complicates the task of managing intercultural cooperation. The merger of three major automakers with different cultures and corporate values requires the companies to work together to create a unified corporate culture and implement an effective management system. To achieve this, the companies must operate as equal partners, constantly working together to align all processes that occur in and around the internal environment at the external level [37].

In order to overcome these challenges, Nissan has specially developed strategies that include cross-cultural training and introduce uniform, unbreakable corporate standards throughout the Nissan environment.

Nissan Corporation's strategies to overcome challenges. To address the challenges of intercultural cooperation, Nissan is implementing many modernized strategies [38]. First of all, the company tries to adapt to each employee and create an inclusive work environment where everyone feels valued regardless of

their cultural background and characteristics. Let's consider the main points:

- Nissan Corporation actively invests in its employees' training and development [33]. It offers special programmes aimed at improving its employees' intercultural competence. As a rule, the main part of special programmes is various trainings on quality communication and training on how to maintain leadership positions in various teams. Not long ago, the company began to actively encourage the exchange of experience between employees from different countries, bringing them together to create joint projects [34]. For example, the development of the new Nissan LEAF, Nissan's first in-house electric vehicle, involved specialists from Japan who were knowledgeable about production technologies; the United States, who were focused on battery research; and Europe, who provided insights into market adaptation strategies. As a result, the idea of bringing together employees from different cultures was successful, and the creation of this model opened up a new direction for the company – the production of electric vehicles [39].

"Each person is unique in their individuality!" is the slogan supported by Nissan Corporation, which strives to create an inclusive work environment for its employees [40, 41]. This step shows that the company understands the importance of each employee and makes efforts to make everyone feel valued, regardless of their cultural background and personal disabilities. Special codes of conduct are being developed to regulate the way we treat each other within the company, promoting mutual respect and tolerance for everyone without exception. The official website of the corporation provides vivid examples of the implementation of an inclusive work environment [42]. For example, Peter Haydon's story, a senior supervisor leading the Bumper Paint zone, was one of the 10 team members who committed to an 11-week course provided by Nissan.

"Some people on our team have hearing impairments, which made communication a challenge for our supervisors and our team on the production line," said Haydon, "then the company management said that all people needed to feel included and part of the team, so they did a full review. One thing everyone wanted was to learn how to understand others. Learning British sign language is not easy; it demands focus and perseverance, but on the sixth day of the second week of training, we started to feel the change. It is inspiring! To see the change and to keep working to help others not feel alone because of a disability," said Haydon.

For Michael Connolly, one of the deaf operators on the team, the impact has been profound. "In the past, there was a breakdown in communication due to a language barrier" said Connolly. "That barrier has now been removed. Morale among the team is improved. It's fantastic to see the team so enthusiastic about learning British Sign Language". On top of the team's new ability, and to further improve accessibility, the paint zone physical area was overhauled so events like training, meetings and briefings can use visual aids.

Sign language interpreters also come to Nissan regularly to conduct training sessions.

Michael Jude, Human Resources Director at the Nissan Sunderland Plant, said that the team members learning sign language represent more than just a communication initiative – it is a powerful expression of Nissan's core values. "This team has not just made adjustments – they have gone much further," Jude said. This example of people coming together, the actions of a few within a large organization, creates opportunities for everyone to grow and pursue the same career paths as others. "Communication is key to teamwork," Jude added, "but we also want all our people to feel included and be their very best at work" [42].

This shows that team cohesion can be a driving force for progress and innovation. Nissan employees have voluntarily learnt sign language to help teammates with disabilities. Their actions reflect their commitment to teamwork and their loyalty to Nissan, an organization that encourages the development of their abilities. Thus, Nissan breaks down communication barriers and ensures that everyone feels valued.

— Nissan is successful in markets in many countries, so it pays great attention to marketing campaigns.

The corporation is trying to adapt its automobiles to local conditions and consumer needs. For example, Nissan's division in America rented Toyota RAV4 cars so that customers could directly compare this car with the Nissan Rogue model. This campaign demonstrates Nissan's confidence in its product and openness to comparison with similar models from other automakers [7]. This example demonstrates Nissan's desire to take into account the cultural characteristics of different markets and effectively communicate with consumers. This is an opportunity not only to increase sales, but also to strengthen its position in each of the markets.

Nissan's globalization and international expansion have necessitated effective management of multicultural teams. Working in an international environment is accompanied by a number of challenges, in particular language barriers, different approaches to communication, differences in corporate values and decision-making styles.

In order to ensure effective interaction between employees from different countries and regions, Nissan implements comprehensive strategies that help minimize cultural differences and improve teamwork [43]. The main challenges and corresponding strategies to overcome them are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Challenges and Strategies of Intercultural Cooperation at Nissan

Challenges of intercultural cooperation at Nissan	Strategies to overcome the challenges
Language barriers and differences in communication styles	Implementing a corporate language of communication (English)
Different cultural values and approaches to work	Supporting global corporate values and standards
Mismatch of expectations regarding team roles	Standardization of the personnel assessment and management system
Trust issues between employees from different cultures	Building trust through regular meetings and open communication
Differences in decision-making approaches	Training leaders in cultural sensitivity and adaptability
Difficulties in adapting local employees to a foreign culture	Conducting training sessions on intercultural competence and integration

Due to these approaches, Nissan is trying to ensure harmonious cooperation between employees of different cultures within its corporate structure.

Conclusion

As practice shows, the implemented strategies aimed at overcoming intercultural barriers and creating an inclusive work environment have brought Nissan significant results in the international arena among automobile manufacturers. Owing to the effective management of multicultural teams, the corporation was able to significantly strengthen its position in the global market, to increase its adaptability to changes in the world economy, and improve its internal corporate culture.

One of the key positive results was the growth of the company's innovation potential, which contributed to the development of advanced technologies and new car models, including modern crossovers. Additionally, the increased level of communication and interaction between employees from different regions helped to improve the quality of products, which in turn had a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

It is also worth noting that Nissan's effective intercultural policy has helped to reduce staff turnover, as the company has created comfortable working conditions for employees from different cultural backgrounds. The successful integration of specialists from different countries has helped to create highly effective teams that can quickly adapt to the challenges of the modern market and generate innovative solutions.

Nissan's experience can be useful for other automobile manufacturers and multinational companies seeking to improve intercultural management in their organisations. Investing in employee training programmes, implementing corporate language standards, developing leadership competencies and creating a supportive work environment are all steps that can help to increase teams' productivity and effectiveness.

Nissan's shows that investing in the development of intercultural competence and creating an inclusive corporate environment is not only a socially responsible initiative, but also an effective business strategy. Companies that successfully manage the diversity of their teams have a higher level of innovation, a better reputation in the international arena and a competitive advantage in the global business environment.

Abstract

In the modern era of globalization, effective management of multicultural teams has become a crucial success factor for international corporations. Employing professionals from various countries and cultural backgrounds provides companies with access to unique competencies and fosters innovation. However, it also presents challenges related to communication barriers, differences in management approaches, and perceptions of work processes. This article analyses the strategies employed by Nissan to overcome intercultural barriers within multinational teams operating across various countries worldwide.

The study addresses key issues arising in intercultural collaboration, including language communication difficulties, variations in cultural values, decision-making approaches, work ethics, and the organization of joint activities. Special attention is given to the impact of the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance on the formation of Nissan's corporate culture, particularly mechanisms for adapting employees to new management approaches and the demands of the global business environment.

The article examines Nissan's primary strategies in the field of intercultural management, which include the introduction of a corporate communication language to ensure effective team interaction, the development of programs to enhance employees' intercultural competence, the establishment of an inclusive work environment, the standardization of communication processes, and the creation of conflict management mechanisms for multicultural teams. Additionally, the paper highlights successful company initiatives, such as training programmes focused on intercultural interaction, the organization of internships and staff rotations between regional offices, and policies promoting cultural exchange and the integration of new employees.

The study highlights that the adoption of systematic intercultural management strategies enables Nissan to improve team productivity while fostering a more cohesive and efficient organizational environment. Such strategies have been shown to reduce internal frictions, streamline decision-making processes, and strengthen corporate identity – factors that are critical to maintaining competitive advantage in global markets. Furthermore, the development of an inclusive corporate culture is essential for ensuring equitable employee engagement across diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby enhancing overall organizational performance.

The findings of this research may offer valuable insights for managers of international companies aiming to enhance the efficiency of multicultural teams, mitigate risks associated with cultural diversity, and adapt management practices to the demands of the global market. Nissan's experience illustrates that the integration of intercultural approaches into corporate governance not only strengthens a company's competitive position but also supports effective talent development and contributes to the achievement of long-term strategic advantages within the international business environment.

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