

## **How the Client Service Department in Local Advertising Agency Manages Relationships with Multinational Client: An Intercultural Business Communication Perspective**

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**Abstract:** A business institution and the individuals who are involved is often faced with a situation where business partners have the cultural background from different countries. How to manage communications for good business relationship in such situations? This research examines the strategies undertaken by the client service department in an Indonesian local advertising agency in managing business relationships with multinational client from one of Europe countries. Using the case study method by interviewing clients and client service persons as well as observing the situation in the agency's work environment, researchers found that in building relationships, client service department applies the strategy of macro-micro contexts. In the macro-context, client service department builds the inter-institution relationships and communications by understanding both the industrial and the country-of-origin cultures behind the client's corporate organizational culture whereas in the micro-context, client service department manages the relationships through interpersonal communication with cultural understanding of the person-in-charge of the client. The 4Cs strategy is used to succeed the agency-client's relationship, namely chemistry, communication, conduct and change.

**Key words:** Client service department, local advertising agency, multinational client, intercultural business communication, macro-micro contexts

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The ability to communicate well and effectively becomes the main weapon to create the relationship with society that comes from all over the world. But this communication ability must be supported with the knowledge and the understanding of various cultures. The comprehension about the background of the various cultures becomes the important factor to avoid the misinterpretation in order to achieve the desired communication goal.

Hall Samovar says that there is no boundary between culture and communication. Culture is communication and communication is culture. In other words when we talk about culture and communication, it is difficult to decide which one are the sound and the echoes. The reason is because we "learn" about the culture through communication and in the same time communication is the reflection of our culture.

The intercultural communication involves the interaction between people who have different culture and symbolic system in communication process. The intercultural communication also learns about the cultural

values, language and tradition and also the understanding of verbal and non-verbal communication that is owned by certain culture. In Indonesia, there are a lot of cultures that must be known by the society. The understanding of a culture is not an easy thing, especially in business context. It should be underlined that the understanding of intercultural business communication is not just about the international culture but also the cultures that exist within the territory of a certain country.

According to Curtis, business communication is a communication within business colleagues that contained the process of sending and receiving messages between two people, small group of people or in an environment in order to influence the behavior within an organization. Business depends on the flow of communication within networks. Business communication also includes the understanding of communication ethics in business and culture that exist in companies that are partners of cooperation. With good communication and relationships, everything can be resolved including critical situations which sometimes come in a sudden and cannot be denied (Suharyanti and Sutawidjaya, 2012).

At this time, the world is experiencing the globalization, so there are various business associates that are obtained by a company or organization and it is not only domestic companies but also foreign companies. For this reason, according to Hall, there is a new term that must be understood related to business and cultural communication which is called intercultural business communication. This is a new term in the business world and it is conceived as the communication that exists in the business world where the employees come from different cultural backgrounds. So, if we talk about intercultural business communication, several things that must be concerned are the communication strategy, business strategy and the cultural issues. It is not only concerning about the how to communicate and cultural backgrounds that must be understood but also learn about the business aspects in communication.

In marketing communication, the business aspects that can be determined are aspects that related to advertising agency business. Nowadays, the advertising agency business in Indonesia is growing more rapidly in so, many different kinds and it is divided into local and multinational advertising agency. Local advertising agency is an advertising agency in a small scale and owned by individual or a group of domestic people. Meanwhile, the multinational advertising agency is a big advertising agency in a big scale and its offices are spread in some countries in all over the world. According to American Association of Advertising Agencies (Arens, 1999) an advertising agency is an independent organization that consist of creative people and business which have specialization in developing and preparing the marketing and also planning the advertising, ads and another promotion tools. As the development of technology and globalization era that has so many business chains, many advertising companies are found in Indonesia nowadays. These advertising companies tend to think fast, smart, innovative and creative (Wijaya, 2012) in order to satisfy the clients and the agencies will get the benefits from their works.

To run the business, an advertising agency has a division that has the duty to establish and manage the relationship with the external clients. This division called client service department that consists of account managers who became the representatives for the advertising agency. This division divided into some different levels such as associate account director, account director, account manager, senior account executive, account executive and junior account executive. Each level has its own duties but they have similar role as mediator and maintainer of the business communication relationship with the existing clients and the new clients.

Each account managers in client service department must have the ability to do the business communication well with interpersonal approach, it aims to understand the cultural background of their clients and adjusting with the culture they owned. If the relationship management goes well, it will be very beneficial for the advertising agency, especially for the local advertising agency which is still in the developing stage such interface brand communication which became the object of this study. Local advertising agency must compete with multinational advertising agency with multinational clients. The competition between local advertising agency and multinational advertising agency requires expertise and ability to conduct intercultural business communication with the multicultural clients from the account managers in client service department, so they can give the best services for their multicultural clients.

One of the role that must be possessed by every account manager is establish and maintain the relationship (communication aspect) and also understanding the cultural background of their clients (cultural issue) in order to develop the advertising agency business (business aspect). The understanding of client's background such as the origin of the companies, personal understanding of the client, company culture, company CEO's leadership style, communication style, cultural context and the understanding of time that exist in certain company. With this knowledge, the account managers can arrange several ways to establish intercultural business communication with their clients. Account managers in client service department must represent their selves in a culture that represent their company but they also have to adapt with the culture of their clients.

**Intercultural business communication:** Hall by Varner (2000) stated that "intercultural business communication is a new term in the world of business which may be defined as the communication that take place within business whereby there are employees from different cultural backgrounds". According to Purwanto for some business doer, the good understanding of culture in certain territory or country becomes very important in order to reach the business goals. In other words, intercultural business communication is communication that used in the business world as well as verbal or nonverbal communication that concern to cultural factors in certain region, territory or country. The definition of intercultural is not only about foreign culture but also the culture that born and develop in so many regions in the territory of a country.

Bolten by Varner (2000) said, "when two business people from two different cultures interact, they bring

their own backgrounds with them but they also step outside their own culture and business environment and create new context". According to Lewis, we can understand foreign client well as if we recognize that our "cultural glasses" coloring our view about them. After we recognize that we are a little bit different, so it is the time for us to understand the subjective character of our ethnic values.

Varner (2000) summarizes the research conducted by Hall, Hofstede, Victor, Beamer and Trompenaars to identify the values that can affect the cultural understanding strategy and to understand the culture in business context such as: individual, the role of hierarchy, attitudes towards formality and status, high context versus low context orientation, time orientation, attitudes toward risk and uncertainty, the relationship of individuals to the universe (race and nationality) and feelings of a culture's own importance as expressed in the self-reference criterion.

Some values like the relationship of individuals to the universe (race and nationality) and high context versus low context orientation have the relevancy with the relationship between local agency and the multinational client because when conducting the business relationship with people that come from different culture, we need to understand about their culture. The first thing that we should know about our business colleague is related to the race and nationality to simplify us to conduct the intercultural business communication. The business colleague's race and nationality are the social identities that are owned by them. When we know about their social identity, it is important to know about their habits and their communication style that affected by their cultural background, especially the communication context (high or low). All of these values must be understood in order to reach good intercultural business communication.

**Identity and cultural background:** The relationship between individual with the world is related to social identity that is owned by each individual. The social identity that has been chosen by someone is related to the race and nationality. According to Ting-Toomey, identity is a self-concept or self-image that explain from what family, gender, culture, ethnic and individual process we are derived. Basically, identity refers to reflective view about ourselves or the perception of people about us. The social identity is the representative of a group where we belong such as race, ethnicity, occupation, age, hometown, etc. The social identity is a product of the difference between a member of particular social group and not member of any other social group (internal and external group).

Race is social conception that arises from the effort to categorize people in some different groups. According to Collier, race has been used in academic, government and political fields to identify people as foreign people. All port identifies that anthropologist initially divided the race into three big groups: Mongoloid, Caucasoid and Negro but another one added. At this time, racial identity usually related to the physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, facial appearance and the shape of the eye balls.

The national identity refers to the citizenship. Most of people associated their social identity with the country where they were born. But national identity also can be obtained through immigration and naturalization. People who become the citizen of a country that different from where they were born can adopt some or all of the aspects of their new country's identity, depends on their relationship with their new country. The concern of the national identity is so big in France, so the government built the ministry of immigration and national identity which has duty to integrate the new comers and protect the France identity.

National identity that is owned by people will affect how they act and communicate with the culture that exists because the values that explained are related to one another. So, when people know about where their business colleagues are derived, explicitly it refers to communication context that is owned by their business colleagues and it may become high or low context communication.

**High context vs. low context:** Communication that happens in business and cultural communication divided into two, high context and low context communication both are affected by the culture of each country. Anthropologist hall (Samovar *et al.*, 2012) gives another effective way to observe the difference and the similarity of culture in perception and communication. He categorizes the culture as high context or low context, depends on what comes from the scope compared with the meaning of the conversation. Hall's basic assumption is that one of the roles of the culture is to provide the selective screen between human and the outside world.

**High-context communications:** It is a communication where most of the information known by people and just a little that shared as a part of the message. In the high-context culture (American Indian, Latin America, Japan, Arabian, China, African-America and Korea), the meaning of the information that exchanged during the interaction should not be communicated with words. According to Gudykunst because "message" used by

high-context cultures, the member of the group, sometimes “indirection communication”. They depend on “how” something is said; more than “what” is being said and cautious to nonverbal cues. In this culture, people who depend only on verbal message from information which are considered less reliable. The communication mode of this culture sometimes seems blurry, indirectly and implicit:

In high-context cultures, the listener is already “contexted” and does not need to be given much background information. High context cultures are more likely to be intuitive and contemplative. Communicators in high context cultures pay attention to more than the word spoken. They emphasize interpersonal relationships, non-verbal expression, physical setting and social setting. They are more aware of the communicator’s history, status and positions. Communication cues are transmitted by posture, voice inflection, gestures and facial expression. High context communicators, however, may use spiral logic, circling around a topic indirectly and looking at it from many tangential or divergent viewpoints

**Low-context communications:** It is a communication where the amount of the information is bigger than what is being said. In low-context cultures (Germany, Swiss, Scandinavia and North America), the population is more homogeneous, so the people tend to share their interpersonal relationship. The lack of this experience means that “every time they interact with others, they need background information”. In low-context cultures, verbal message contains a lot of information and just a little bit that embedded in people’s mind. According to Lynch, low-context communication tends to speak a lot, faster and sometimes increasing their intonation. The character tends to be direct and explicit:

Low-context cultures tend to be logical, analytical and action-oriented. Communicators in low context cultures depend little on the context of a situation to convey their meaning. They assume that listeners know very little and must be told practically everything. Low context communicators tend to use linear logic. They proceed from point A to point B to point C and finally arrive at a conclusion

The differences in language and culture, both high and low-context communication affect the ways how people define the status organizational structuring

and the role of leaders and prepare the business messages. Based on the ideas above, this research aims to study the relationship management in the context of intercultural business communication conducted by the client service department of a local advertising agency, interface brand communication with its multinational clients, Aqua Danone.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research uses a case study approach. The case study is a method conducted by using intensive observation to a location organization or campaign. The case study is usually combined the theoretical framework and various methodological approaches. The purpose of the case study is to increase the knowledge about contemporary communication phenomenon that real in context (Daymon and Holloway, 2011). According to Yin (1994), case study is an empirical inquiry that investigated the phenomenon in the real life context, especially when the context does not seem firmly, so that the various sources used to reveal it.

Meanwhile, the research object is the intercultural business communication held by client service department of interface brand communication which is a local advertising agency that is developing and engaged in the field of below the line communication, giving the services to the client in order to communicate the brand messages through the events that directly touch the target consumer such as brand activation, marketing event, point of sales, mobile roadshow, press conference and others. In the client service department of interface, there are associate account director, account director, account manager, senior account executive, account executive and junior account executive. Each of account managers has their own responsibilities that differ from each other but with one similar role that is maintaining the business communication relationship with the client. Moreover, the current client that is owned by this advertising agency comes with the different cultural background. In this research, the client that becomes the case study is AQUA Danone, a global company from France. Meanwhile, all the names of informants deliberately are changed in the form of an acronym to protect the privacy of informants.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Macro-context:** Before talking about the client, AQUA Danone, the account managers of interface explain about the origin background of AQUA Danone in Indonesia. AQUA Danone is a multinational company that grows

and develops in Indonesia. The AQUA Danone national identity in the early development of this company is an Indonesian company that is engaged in the bottled water business in Indonesia. As the time goes by AQUA Danone takes the strategic steps to bring the brand of AQUA Danone internationally. The strategic steps had taken by cooperation with the Danone Group. Danone Group is a multinational company in the field of consumer goods that derived from France. The merging of both companies then changed the identity of AQUA Danone became a French multinational company and then changed its name to AQUA Danone, led by Charlie Capetti who also came from France. Nowadays, AQUA Danone in Indonesia become one of the branch company of Danone Group in Indonesia and now AQUA Danone is no longer a company with Indonesia as their national identity but has become a French multinational company operating in Indonesia.

From the research found that although the identity that is owned by AQUA Danone is a merger between Indonesia and the Western culture which is France, there is no significant element which illustrates a specific influence of French culture. Generally, there is only the influence of Western culture that occurs on the business habits, one of them is the business communication as explained by interface. Since, the beginning of the company was incorporated in Indonesia, then in making or running the campaign project always brought "love of Indonesia" concept that spread through the campaign. For example is the "Dari Kita untuk Indonesia (from us to Indonesia)" campaign that conducted to build a sense of love and care for Indonesian society or "Temukan Indonesiamu (find your Indonesia)" campaign to engage Indonesian society to know better about Indonesian culture through games and Indonesian foods:

We emphasize the company culture, not the French culture but the culture that is owned by our company. It is because when we are talking about the multinational company they would not..." Oh the French people turned out like this", so we brought that French culture, it is not like that. But in this case what we do is more in creating culture, values that brought to all operating countries including Indonesia. So, that are the values that embedded in AQUA Danone Indonesia (AF, Brand Manager of AQUA Danone, interviewed 16 June 2015)

The Western culture in AQUA Danone is seen on the value of leadership that reflects the culture from American-European countries which these values require the employees of AQUA Danone to open, direct, honest,

bold, committed, personally oriented in progress, right on target and professional. These values known as CODE (committed, open, doer and empowered) derived from Danone headquarters in France.

In understanding the client with the different cultural backgrounds, we have to start with an understanding of the origin and the nation that clients have to understand the communication context that used by the clients, is it a high-context or low-context communication. The races and the nations of the clients may help to determine whether the client is using high-context or low-context communication. High-context communication is usually used by clients from Asia such as Japan, Arabic, China, Korea and even Africa. Meanwhile, the low-context communication is usually used by countries in Europe and America such as Germany, Swiss, France, Scandinavia and North America:

So, it is that we observe the culture of the company, how the system is working and what are they look like as organizational and we observe the main man behind the company. Second, we observe about the personality of the client as well as AQUA. Actually it is way more to its PIC (Person-In-Charge), anyway. Because the relationship that occur between companies is related with interpersonal (MN, account director interface, interviewed 12 June 2015)

Danone company values that have European background consist of Enthusiasm, Humanism, Proximity and Openness. All of these values are shared by the employees of AQUA Danone to the business colleagues or the society. As the comparison, Honda company values that come from Asia consist of two parts, respect for the individual (initiative, equality and trust) and the three joys (The joy of buying, joy of selling and joy of creating). The values that exist in Japanese company show that the main concentration that conducted by the company especially for Honda is the trust owned by the company and the trust that owned by the clients. With this trust, Honda can give their innovative services and products that suitable for the consumer needs. The main focus is to cherish and develop the consumer trust.

Meanwhile in the leadership values (CODE) that exist in Danone does not have the specific goal, it is only seen more individual, more open and they will share the enthusiasm to consumers or communities, build personal confidence and build closeness to consumers. Regarding to the context of communication used, it is also apparent in the way they communicate with consumers through the official website of the company where as comparison

Honda uses the context of rigid high-level communication and Danone uses low-level communication that is more flexible.

Although, the interface and AQUA Danone stated that when they are talking about the context of the communication is whether using a high or low context, it depends on the PIC who handles the project. But AQUA Danone emphasizes their professionalism and leadership values which are called CODE (commitment, open, doers and empowered). Based on the observation result, it clearly shows that the context of communication that has been used is the low-context communication. It is because they communicate their request and revision directly and clearly straightforward to the target without any confusing statements. All are structured in accordance with the existing rules, so the agency knows the goals to be achieved. In addition, the AQUA Danone also emphasizes the openness that is straightforward and it reflects the characteristics of Western culture.

The way they communicate with their high or low-context communication also determines the use of formality and status recognition. In the previous comparison also shows that the Japanese culture that is owned by Honda is reflected in its website that looks rigid and formal. This is different from the website of AQUA Danone that is more flexible and informal, there are so many colorful images in its website and it also can be seen from the way they communicate, they use interpersonal communication with informal language.

It is carried by interface to balance the style of communication conducted by AQUA Danone. Although, it is informal, the interface still pays attention to the client status which has more power and higher position. It is conducted in order to make the client feel respected. Just like what has been done by interface, the AQUA Danone also do the same thing because in Eastern cultures where the situation is not too formal, the speaker keep on giving the status by calling people with "Mas" (big brother) or "Mba" (big sister) that indicates their respect.

Meanwhile, Lewis categorizes the culture into three types; linear-active culture, multi-active culture and reactive culture. The linear-active culture oriented on task and it is well organized. The people in linear-active culture such as Sweden, Swiss, Netherland and Germany will do one thing at a time, concentrate on it and do it on a scheduled time scale. These people think that by using this way they can complete more jobs and more efficient.

Multi-active culture is very flexible, people in this culture is not interested in schedule or timeliness. They pretend to adopt this timeliness, especially if a linear-active partner insists. These multi-active people do not like to let the conversation left unfinished because they think that completing or finishing a transaction is the best way to invest their time. When people from linear-active culture are doing a cooperation with people

from multi-active culture, they both will feel irritated, unless if one of those parties adjusting their selves to the other party and if they do not do that, there will be a crisis.

Reactive culture groups will listen before act. This culture is the best listener in the world and focusing their attention to what the speaker say and also do not let their mind break out violently, they seldom interrupting the speaker when the conversation still ongoing. People in reactive cultures are introvert, distrust with overrated words but the consequence is that they are capable to do the nonverbal communication and the preferred way to communicate is monologue-pause-reflection-monologue. People in this culture assume that speaker is a person with the extensive knowledge. Reactive people have a lot of backup energies; they move as economical and try not to waste their time.

Cultural grouping that is conducted by Lewis refers to the scope of business interests, making it easier to establish a relationship with business colleagues who come from different cultures. Knowing where our colleagues come from can help us to understand their culture and their perspective, making it easier in conducting the intercultural business communication in order to achieve the business goals.

Country of origin of Danone Group and the values that are embedded by AQUA Danone to the employees make AQUA Danone get into the linear-active culture. They build the communication that oriented to work, not in relationship. Although, in the long term the communication may also have an impact on the relationship but the main orientation remains on works while the relationship is only an additional or bonus from the communication process. However, the orientation of the work will not be able to run smoothly without any interpersonal relationship that is built by both parties. Therefore, both AQUA Danone and interface still have their interpersonal relationship in order to achieve their business goals.

Meanwhile, the context of communication that is used by AQUA Danone is low-context communication in accordance with the cultural values that exist in their country of origin which is France. The low-context communication that is used by AQUA Danone can be seen from how AQUA Danone express their request or work revision clearly and straightforward to its target. It is also can be seen on the communication media and the language that are used by them. As clearly shown on the observation result, they use communication media that is more personal such as mobile phone and email with the flexible and informal language.

The informal communication approach is used through interpersonal communication and the persuasive approach to decrease the stiffness in relationship. Status recognition can be seen through the language that is used

to call people like “Mas” or “Mba” that reflect Indonesian or Eastern culture in order to respect other people that have to be respected or older than others.

AQUA Danone is a company that conduct things in accordance with the time schedule to accomplish more jobs efficiently. For example is when they are talking about brief that given to interface, they will give interface timelines to arrange the creative concept and budgeting and when the creative concept and budgeting are done right in time, the next step is discussing about the concept and its relevant to the target audiences and also the design implementation. It is usually happen continuously until the execution stage accomplished. This cycle always occur during the execution of a certain project. AQUA Danone considers time as something real and rational, so everything has to be done on schedule. But sometimes AQUA Danone still has a tolerance over time with certain terms and conditions. AQUA Danone always follows and obeys the procedures and is also job oriented.

Another characteristic that describes AQUA Danone in linear-active culture is in term of delegating the job to the competent colleagues. This fact expressed by the brand manager of AQUA Danone, AF, he said that when they choose the third party to be their colleague, they will choose it based on the recommendation that comes from friends or colleagues who have experienced the cooperation with those third party because they think that a good and proper result is the most important thing to be seen when they are going to cooperate with the third party, regardless to the pitching that usually used by the company to select the capable and qualified third party.

The linear-active culture that is owned by AQUA Danone also expressed by MN, he said that they always face the linear, meticulous and structural employees when they dealing with AQUA Danone. This can be seen from the use of time and how they deliver the brief or direction for a project. He also said that AQUA Danone is more straightforward and unemotional:

The culture of the agency is different from the culture that is owned by multinational company. As far as I know, AQUA Danone embedded the linear, meticulous and structural nature to its employees. Maybe it is because the impact of the Western culture that they have. Meanwhile, interface has their own culture that embedded to the employees such as creative, fun and holistic. It is all because the culture of most agencies, we work in the creative world that require creative ideas, so we built the work space as flexible as we can (MN, account director interface, interviewed 12 June 2015)

An understanding of the differences of client and agency organizational culture and also the background of the country of origin that characterizes AQUA Danone make people in the division of client service department of interface which is a local agency can create strategies to manage a good relationship in the context of intercultural business communication in order to accomplish any kind of jobs and projects run smoothly.

**Micro-contexts:** In managing the business relationship with AQUA Danone, it is not only about building the intercultural business communication in macro-context but also in micro-context, such as Interpersonal Communication. According to DeVito (2014), interpersonal communication is a communication that occurs between two people who have relationship between them. Interpersonal communication is about sending a message from someone and received by others with the direct effect and feedback. In practice, this relationship is not only occurs between two people but also all the people who involved in the project that is being implemented.

The interpersonal communication that occurs can strengthen the relationship between interface and its clients. The interpersonal communication indicator that is used in the context of intercultural business communication can be seen from the process or how the representative from AQUA Danone and interface interact in business relationship. In communication they use personal media like mobile phone or chatting application media such as WhatsApp which is more informal in language and the context of communication.

The interface claimed that in establishing the business relationship with AQUA Danone, they are not only focusing on the cultural side that is owned by AQUA Danone but also the background from the Person-In-Charge (PIC) who will run the project. The culture refers to the client background, how they communicate in running the business, how they share the CODE values that is owned by AQUA Danone, the personality of client representative and the traditions or habits that are owned by the client:

It depends on the PIC. They always give the brief and the revisions directly straight to the point, like “I want to be like this or that and so on”. But there is also PIC who always changes their mind such “I want it to be like A and then changed to be like B and then go back again to be like A”. There are a lot of people with different types (SI, senior account executive IF for AQUA Danone, interviewed 12 June 2015)

To know and understand the cultural background of the PIC, the account managers of interface establish the interpersonal relationship with persuasive approach which later will help them in negotiating about the job that they are going to handle together. With this interpersonal relationship they can negotiate in terms of deadline, budgeting and advices that related to design by using persuasive way or another way like negotiating with friends to get some help over the sudden direction with deadline that has to be done with certain terms and conditions:

In the end, we have to use persuasive approach to establish the relationship with the clients by communicating via phone call or email (SI, senior account executive IF for AQUA Danone, interviewed 12 June 2015)

The main goal of the interpersonal communication that occurs with the client is to creating chemistry between both parties. The chemistry can be seen from how both parties express the message and information:

For the sustainability of this business, we tend to have the good interpersonal relationship. For me, a business will sustain if we have chemistry with the client. So, it is such a waste when we deliver the message right on time and always professional if the clients do not have the chemistry with us. Interface always gives the best for AQUA Danone as professional or as interpersonal relationship so there will be no doubt to give the other brand to us (MN, account director, interviewed 12 June 2015)

**The 4Cs in relationships:** After establishing the interpersonal relationship between account managers of interface and the AQUA Danone, then it will continue with maintaining the good relationship of both parties in order to achieve the business goals. The good relationship established between the agency and the client in conducting the business communication is very important, especially with the clients who come from different cultural background like AQUA Danone. From the elaboration of the research results, there are 4C's important factors in establishing the relationship between the agency and the client which are chemistry, communication, conduct and change.

**Chemistry:** A personal chemistry is the important factor in creating the relationship with the clients. In this research, client service department of interface creates

chemistry by conducting interpersonal communication and relationship through personal media such as mobile phone and chatting application WhatsApp. This kind of communication and relationship is applicable to all of the clients owned by interface. To build this closeness, account managers must learn about the characteristics of the clients especially their culture. This method can build the closeness with the clients that are owned by interface because it can decrease the gap between the clients and the agency. So, the account managers are easier to communicate or negotiate with the clients. The language that is used to build the chemistry between both parties is the informal and flexible language, where the agency considers the client as their friend in achieving the same goal. With this closeness, clients will feel glad to communicate with account managers from client service department. It also has the positive impact in the business development of interface. To establish chemistry, the main expertise that has to be owned by account managers in client service department is the ability to communicate well, especially with the clients who come from different cultural background.

**Communication:** Openness in communication between the agency and the clients can make both of them create the same meaning of certain message. If the bad communication between the agency and the clients occurs, it will create misunderstanding about goals, strategies, roles and hopes from the business colleagues. The good communication and the mutual explicit agreement that take place in the same contribution to establish the same benefit in business is the key in establishing the good relationship. In the context of this research, the main ability that has to be owned by account managers in client service department is the ability in communicating with the clients well, capable in delivering the same direction to internal party of interface with the external party (AQUA Danone) and can be a good friend in discussion as well as the medium between the internal and the external parties. It is the same as expected by AQUA Danone as explained by AF before that agency people should not only become the messenger man but also be a good friend in discussion about the ideas or strategies that established by both parties, so the goals from the both parties can be achieved well. The communication that occurs in the interpersonal context also can create the good chemistry.

**Conduct:** The agency always tries their best to give their services. It can be seen from the trust of AQUA Danone on interface to conduct events that hosted by AQUA Danone, such as press conference, internal launch, point of sales, blogger visit, etc. In addition, to know whether



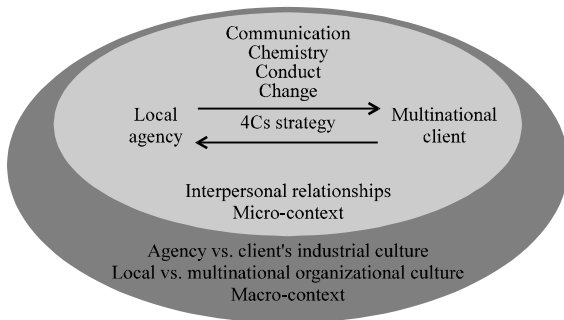


Fig. 1: The retina of relationships strategy in eyeing the agency-client's intercultural business communications

the services of interface are satisfying the client or not, interface has their measurement tool that given to the clients after the events completed that is called Client Service Satisfaction (CSS). This measurement tool is used by interface to evaluate their services is it satisfying or not. It may help the agency to improve their performance based on the critics from the clients.

**Change:** Change is the thing that always occurs in a relationship. It is usually occurring because the market position owned by the clients changed or there is certain corporate policy of the clients. To adjust the context, concept or campaign projects, sometimes the clients change the agency into their partner. But the change that occurs in the context of this research is not the change that caused by the market position owned by the clients or any of obligation in the clients company. The change that often experienced by interface's client service department in conducting the business communication with AQUA Danone is the change of PIC or people who responsible over the program. This change requires the consequences in adjusting how to communicate and understand the new traditions owned by the clients. It is because when conducting business communication with AQUA Danone, the main point is the personality of the employees who work there as known that every people has their own style in expressing the values owned by AQUA Danone (Fig. 1).

### CONCLUSION

The main thing that can help in understanding the cultural background of the clients is by understanding their country of origin and the nationality owned by the clients or business colleagues. After understanding them, it is easier to understand the other aspects in the business communication such as high or low-context communication that is used by the client, client's time

oriented, formality and status recognition. In this research, the understanding of the cultural background of the clients before conducting the intercultural business communication is one of the strategies that used by client service department of interface.

The agency that is represented by client service department of interface tries to establish the relationship with AQUA Danone in macro and micro-context. Macro-context requires the people in client service department to understand the different constellation of the industry culture of the agency and the clients especially in the role and the position, client as the job owner and agency as the job maker, client as the brand owner and agency as the designer of the brand communication. Besides, the agency also tries to understand the organization or corporate culture of clients as multinational company which is different with the organization culture of local company.

Micro-context requires the people in the client service department to establish the relationship and interpersonal communication intensively with the Person-In-Charge (PIC) from the client side. Overall, both in macro and micro context, the agency applies 4Cs strategy in managing the relationship in order to keep it sustainable by establishing the good chemistry, intensive and conducive communication, conducting the good services to the clients, always ready and flexible in facing the changes that may occur, whether the changes in client's policy or strategy or the changes in person-in-charge that often occurs on the clients side.

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