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How Siestas Are Changing Global Business

Jenna Sargent

This paper aggregates information on adapting to the culture of siestas when a Multinational Corporation expands into Spain. There is a brief history on siestas, research on how companies should implement change in foreign environments and an assessment on the benefits of siestas. Orange Mobile and Vodafone are compared on their adaptation techniques within Spain. These techniques can be used as a template for other industries attempting to adapt. The main determining factor on if an adaptation goes smoothly stems from how well the MNC plans their expansion, how well they research their consumers, and how well they explain changes to their local employees. It was concluded that though the future of this cultural behavior is unclear, Multinationals have the ability to determine its fate, as they have a large influence on the business practice of their host countries.

Deriving from the Latin “hora sexta” or sixth hour, siestas have influenced Spanish culture for many years. They are credited to be first invented 500 years ago by Roman Emperor Charles V (The Economist, 1999). Charles V ruled the Spanish Empire from 1516 until he voluntarily stepped down in 1556 (Cavendish, 2006). He was considered a master of this afternoon nap and recommended sitting in a throne, not a bed, with a heavy iron key in your hand. After taking some time to rest, the muscles in your hand would relax (just prior to entering REM sleep) and the sound of the heavy key hitting the ground would jerk you to wakefulness. This would happen approximately 20 minutes into your siesta, signaling that it was time to get up. Though historically a siesta would start at the sixth hour of the day, noon, modern siestas are typically from two to five in the afternoon. This mid-day break has structured Spanish culture, and from that Spanish business practices.

Sleep experts have agreed with Charles V, reporting that siestas are good for both your heart and your brain (The Economist, 1999), but warn that a siesta that is more than 20 minutes long can leave the napper feeling groggy or with a bad temper, again coinciding with the Roman Emperor’s recommendation. The practice of siestas has been seen primarily in Spanish speaking countries and in hot climates, including Mexico, Ecuador, Italy, Greece, the Philippines, Nigeria, and Spain (Slumberwise, 2013). It is thought that they started mostly in an effort to escape the intense heat that these countries close to the equator face in their summer months. The practice has remained relatively the same throughout the years, though the throne and key have been replaced with a chair and a fork, to better accommodate the average person. Some have even opted to replace the chair and fork with a bed and an alarm, though this goes against Charles V’s guidelines of siestas, as the napper may have a difficult time not allowing themselves to enter REM while lying horizontally.

Tension can be seen within the culture of siestas, especially in Spain. As globalization increases, North American Multinational Corporations appear to have the aim to diminish siestas in Spain, believing that their current organizational practices are the most profitable; however, simultaneously the popularity of “work-time naps” has been increasing in North America as more research is put into the benefits of a short, afternoon “power nap”. This has created a shift where siestas seem to be becoming less favoured in Spain than they are in Canada and America.

Multinational Corporations have used different techniques in an attempt to adapt to or change the habit of siestas in Spain as they expand their business, or acquire a Spanish subsidiary. This paper will attempt to better understand how Multinational Corporations (MNCs) should adapt to the culture of siestas according to past research and how they are currently adapting. Additionally this paper will access the benefits of siestas in order to determine if MNCs should be embracing this cultural change, and what the future of siestas is in the increasingly globalized and competitive business world.

With the expansion of global business, research has begun on the sources of competitive advantages. Current research indicates that a firm's advantage against competitors as they expand globally stems from consistent organizational practices and good management of employees from different cultural backgrounds (Bjorkman, Fey, & Jeong Park, 2007). When a MNC is considering imposing or reusing their organizational practices, such as a standard one hour lunch break into Spain, research states that institutional theory needs to be taken into account. Institutional theory indicates that organizations are under social pressure to adapt their practices to the local environment (Bjorkman, Fey, & Jeong Park, 2007). This creates tension between global integration and local adaption for Multinationals as their knowledge transfer is a critical component of their competitive advantage and success in the international business world (Jensen & Szulanski, 2004); however, it is critical for them to be viewed as isomorphic to the new environment with local consumers. This means it is vital for MNCs to adapt their organizational practices to the Spanish context if they want their business to succeed in the long term, as consumers and local stakeholders will be embedded with the cultural values and behavioural norms of the area (Bjorkman, Fey, & Jeong Park, 2007). This implies that as global firms move to Spain they need to be aware that their employees may expect a two hour lunch break, and that their consumers may not be active between the hours of 2pm-5pm, the typical hours of the siesta. The tension stems from the fact that organizations want to keep their business practices standard as they expand, in order to ensure a consistent brand image thereby retaining trust from their consumers, but they need to understand their local consumers and employee's cultural values and behaviours. That being said, the Convergence Hypothesis states that Human Resource Systems are moving towards a global standard, with American-style systems being the dominant choice (Lawler, Chen, Wu, Bae, & Bai, 2011). Though the workday which includes siestas may be reworked to adapt to American-style systems, MNCs need to examine how to implement this change in a way that their local employees will accept. The tension of local versus global is strong for all MNCs, but when they move to Spain, firms should not ignore the culture of siestas, and must have a clear plan on how they propose to adapt.

Multinational Corporations must also acknowledge the probability of Spanish employees accepting the changes to human resources that a global firm may bring, as research suggests that employees will adopt new practices to varying degrees (Kostova & Roth, Adoption of an Organizational Practice by Subsidiaries of Multinational Corporations, 2002). It is recognized that knowledge transfers are the primary source for competitive advantage for MNCs, however these transfers are still not always smooth, nor successful (Kostova, Transnational Transfer of Strategic Organizational Practices, 1999). It has been shown that the economic conditions of the country that an MNC wants to expand into can predict the successfulness of knowledge transfers. Countries who are experiencing quick economic growth are more likely to accept changes to their systems. This is due to acclimatization to change, because as their country's economy grows there are frequent changes in competition, many changes in technology, and sometimes even changes to business law constraints (Lawler, Chen, Wu, Bae, & Bai, 2011). Spain, as an economically developed country, will be less receptive to changes in their common organizational practices (Lawler, Chen, Wu, Bae, & Bai, 2011) having used the same systems for years with employees who have not experienced huge changes within their businesses or their competitor's businesses. That being said, if the employees feel a strong relational link, stemming from a feeling a dependence, trust, or identity to their employer, they may accept new organizational changes (Kostova & Roth, Adoption of an Organizational Practice by Subsidiaries of Multinational Corporations, 2002). Employees may feel dependence to a MNC when they feel as though their country's employment rate is low, and finding another position would be difficult. Trust in employees can be gained with managerial honesty and by including employees in decision making processes. Finally, identity within the employee is gained from the relationship the employee has with their company. If the employee feels a strong personal purpose from their job, they will feel identified with it and therefore with their employer.

When implementing changes, the MNC must have a solid plan which they do not intend to change drastically. Employees and lower-level managers are quickly frustrated with new programs of change continually starting and stopping (Kostova, Transnational Transfer of Strategic Organizational Practices, 1999). This frustration and lack of receptiveness to continuous changes is due to a lack of trust. Kostova and Roth say that a high level of trust is

necessary for foreign subsidiaries to accept new and different organizational practices (Adoption of Organizational Practice by Subsidiaries of Multinational Corporations, 2002), and implementing new and “better” programs consistently will lead the Spanish employees to believe that the original ideas were faulty, thereby losing trust in the firm’s decisions. If an MNC would like to change the culture of siestas in their Spanish branch, it is essential that they are able to explain to their employees the benefits of not having a siesta during working hours. This explanation needs to embody the values consistent with Spaniards in order for the new practice to be internalized and embraced (Kostova & Roth, Adoption of an Organizational Practice by Subsidiaries of Multinational Corporations, 2002). For example, Spanish nationals place more value on their relationships than North American’s do. A company could attempt to stop siestas with the explanation that a short lunch break would mean that the employee could leave work earlier, and therefore be home with their family earlier in the evening. By understanding the values of the Spaniards, explanations can be more personal, and have a higher degree of success and embodiment within their employees.

Telecommunications is Spain’s main industry of global success. Telefonica, is Spain’s top Multinational Corporation in terms of market capitalism and is also one of the biggest private telecommunications companies in the world, with 322 million clients in 21 countries (Telefonica, 2016). With telecommunications appearing to be Spain’s main area of expertise when it comes to global business, the adaptations that competing telecommunications companies have had to make when entering into Spain is interesting. The strategies that these companies have used to adapt can be extended to other business to consumer organizations as well.

In Madrid, international telecommunications company Orange has adapted to the culture of siestas in a unique way. Orange, a French owned company, adapted their stores not only to local Spanish culture, but by the demographics of each store’s location. By understanding the average Spanish consumer will not be active during the classic siesta times, Orange has acted as a local business in the less touristic areas of Madrid. For example, the neighborhood La Latina is on the outskirts of the main tourist area of Madrid. This area is described as a genuinely authentic Spanish neighborhood and is primarily inhabited by locals. The Orange store in La Latina shuts down its operations from 2pm-5pm every day, and is closed all day on Sundays. This is a classic representation of the average local Spanish business. That being said, Orange also does not want to lose business from the abundant potential international clients, so keeps its store located in the main tourist area, Puerta del Sol, open all day, including Sundays. Other store locations are not closed on Sunday but have differing hours to fit their local consumer’s needs. This is seen in the store located in Madrid’s Gran Via neighborhood. This neighborhood, though not as touristic as Sol, is a popular area for expatriates to live, so Orange has adapted their hours of operation to not include siestas. This unique style of adaptation allows for Orange to keep their employee’s happy, stationing staff, who still believe in the culture of siestas, in stores located in neighborhoods which are closed for them. However, it also does not lose out on potential profits by keeping one store open in the area most likely to gain business at that time, thereby staying competitive. Employees who work in the tourist area’s shop are required to speak English, and also get paid more than employees not required to be bilingual, according to Orange Store Sales Manager Victor Barrero Vazquez (October, 2016).

Vodafone, a British competitor to Orange, has a similar strategy of adaptation though it is not as specific. Vodafone does not have as many stores in Madrid as Orange does; however, as a huge multinational telecommunications firm operating in 28 countries around the world (Vodafone, 2016), it is a definite competitor to Orange. Instead of adapting its stores to each neighborhood, Vodafone has adapted to each city it is in within Spain. Vodafone’s strategy for adapting to siestas in Madrid is to ignore them all together. Though all their stores are closed on Sundays, they are open every day from 10am-9pm. Vodafone chose to integrate their own global practices into Madrid, opposed to adapting to the differences in culture like competitor Orange, because they see Madrid as the big city with employees who do not have the same values as other nationals from smaller cities. Seville, with seven hundred thousand inhabitants opposed to Madrid’s three million, is an example of Vodafone’s city to city adaptation. Though Seville is still a tourist destination, the majority of inhabitants are local and have stronger stereotypical Spanish values. Vodafone has taken this information and adapted all of their stores located

in Seville to close for siestas from 2pm-5pm. This less specific form of adaptation has its pros and cons. It is easier for Vodafone to paint each city with a wide brush: Madrid is large and metropolitan, Seville is small and traditional. It will be cheaper for Vodafone as they will not need to put in as much time or resources into research. That being said they may be paying employees in Madrid for three hours (2pm-5pm) to stand around, as it is possible that no customers will be walking through the door during this time in certain areas of Madrid.

In contrast to MNCs having to adapt to Spain, currently large Spanish businesses are attempting to adapt to the world. Spanish businesses want to keep up in the closely integrated business world in the European Union, and with the quickly increasing globalization of business. With this they are having to adapt their midday break schedule to a more standardized, global timetable (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). Siesta takers are beginning to be viewed as slackers, among modern Spanish business workers, even though they are still given the time to take them. Jose Ortiz, the Human Resources Director for Banco Bilbao Vizcaya states “those who can take siestas do, but those who are really serious about working do not” (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). This new stigma towards siestas has created a change in the terminology when discussing them, as some Spaniards have begun to use American vernacular, referring to siestas as ‘power naps’. This change shows that the MNCs that have opened their business to Spain, have already begun to make a drastic imposition of their organizational practices. The siesta still survives and thrives in rural and small towns, especially in the south of Spain where 3 hour afternoon siestas are common (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005), but in the northeastern region, big-city dwellers are more likely to have a standard North American work day. Madrid’s business setting has begun to view siestas as a sign of weakness, according to a director of a MNC there, who states “siestas are for the weekend only” (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005).

Though it seems that the culture of siestas may be diminishing from MNCs imposing their western practices, more research continues to surface on the benefits of siestas, both to the individual’s health and cognitive performance, so siestas are beginning to be seen as a source of competitive advantage in North America. The length of the siesta is important, five to fifteen minutes naps have almost immediate benefits that last for between one to three hours, while a longer nap of more than thirty minutes may leave the napper feeling groggy when waking up, but more alert for a longer period (Lovato & Lack, 2010). As Charles V first thought 500 years ago, a siesta should be no more than twenty minutes, this ensures that the napper will not enter REM sleep, thereby eliminating any irascible post-siesta effects. Additionally, as Spanish culture has done for years, Broughton reported in 1989 that the most beneficial time to nap is in between the hours of 1:00pm and 4:00pm. Research has also shown that a mid-day siesta provided longer lasting improvements to alertness, mood, and productivity, and short-term memory, when compared to improvements to the preceding components following consumption of caffeine (McNerney, 1995), implying to some that the classic North American coffee break should be replaced with a “siesta-break”. The idea of sleeping for a short period is not new to North Americans, with 74% of young and middle-aged adults living in the US reporting napping at least once per week, compared with up to 84% of adults napping once a week in countries located close to the equator where siesta culture is typically seen (Lovato & Lack, 2010), so introducing siestas into North America would not be an incredible change.

Acting Prime Minister of Spain, Mariano Rajoy is proposing outlawing siestas (Burgen, 2016). This prohibiting of siestas would be in an attempt to increase foreign direct investment by lowering cultural differences and thereby appealing to North American MNCs, and according to the Prime Minister, would also increase the quality of life for Spanish nationals (Reilly, 2016). Though siestas are definitely lowering in popularity, the majority of Spaniards are still working a longer day which is split into two parts, separated with a long break during the typical siesta time. This means that though many Spanish nationals may not be sleeping in the afternoon, they continue to take an elongated break in the middle of the day and work until around 8pm on week nights. Though this seems late to North Americans, it is important to remember how ingrained siestas are in Spanish culture. Due to the tradition of siestas, children’s classes at school also typically go until this time of night. Even the eating habits of Spanish nationals are created around siesta habits. Due to a later time returning home from work, Spanish people

do not have their dinner until approximately 10 or 11pm. The lifestyle in Spain almost entirely stems from siesta culture, so an MNC's adaptation process is critical.

With the empirical benefits of siestas gaining more acknowledgement, combined with the necessity for MNCs to adapt locally, perhaps it is premature to say "adiós" to the siesta. Workplace napping in North America is beginning to emerge, though slowly, and even starting to be prescribed by consultants (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). Previously in North America where the "you snooze, you lose" culture was strong, showing weariness was sign of working hard, and worn as a badge of honor; however, business consultants are beginning to preach the benefits of integrating naps into worktime hours (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005), promising fewer workplace accidents and more productivity. MNCs struggle with this concept as the "Time is money" mindset has been ingrained so heavily into Canadian and American culture, leaving corporate directors only understanding that if their employees are sleeping, they are not working, and therefore are not making their company any money. In order for siestas to be fully accepted by North American Multinationals, it is necessary that more research is conducted on the benefits of siestas in terms of business. This will show directors the empirical evidence that siestas will bring specifically to their company's bottom line.

If siestas are to establish themselves into the western business culture, the problem of how to integrate them stands out. Are employees given longer lunch breaks, with the intention of them utilizing this time to go home and sleep, as is the case in Spain? Or do employees sleep in their offices, or office building? Requiring employees to take their siesta within the office building benefits the MNC as the time allotted for the siesta can be shorter. That being said, if siestas are to be taken in the building, investments will need to be made in terms of furniture and space. Consultants have offered different ideas ranging from strict control and regulations, to a trust based system that is governed with peer pressure (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). In the beginning strict control and regulations may be needed as with our current culture in place, longer lunch breaks may be used by employees as a chance to gain a leg-up on their colleagues. Elongated breaks may be seen by employees as a chance to work on projects, or to work in order to show their dedication, thereby eliminating the entire purpose of the break.

The future of siestas is in MNCs hands as they have an incredibly strong influence on the standard business practices in the countries they are located. A de-institutionalization can occur in countries that MNCs move into as the legitimacy of existing practices are challenged (Kwok & Tadesse, 2006). Multinationals are companies that by definition have been incredibly successful. Their organizational practices can be seen by local businesses as a picture of what works, so it is easy for them to decide to copy these practices. This implies that just the presence of MNCs not allowing their employees time for siestas, can reduce the amount of Spanish businesses allowing for them as well. It is likely that Spanish business will stop this behaviour to stay competitive, and to raise their International Business reputation, hoping that a Spanish business can be viewed as one to watch out for.

Claudio Stampi, a researcher on short naps in extreme conditions, believes that the primary factor in managing employees is understanding "what is the minimal sleep duration necessary to maintain an acceptable level of performance" (1992), which perfectly embodies North American "work hard, sleep later" culture. MNCs need to change their mindset, and instead of wanting their employees to work hard and produce mediocre results, they should want employees to take their time but produce outstanding work. Unfortunately, this sleep deprivation culture has cost businesses a combined US\$150 billion a year on sleep related fatigue causing high stress and reduced productivity, according to The National Commission on Sleep Disorders (1993). Additionally, in 2000, 51% of American adults reported that sleep deprivation negatively affects their job performance (Baxter & Kroll-Smith, 2005). This points to the fact that introducing siestas into North American work culture could be an important investment. Having energized employees would decrease workplace accidents, increase productivity and creativity, and increase employee job satisfaction.

More research could be conducted on how North American expatriates personally adapt to the cultural behaviour of siestas when relocated to Spain. If they attempt to change the culture, or if they adapt to it, and how. This

research could be used as decision making information when MNCs determine whether or not to bring siestas into their common practices. If expatriates perform better, or report feeling more productive it could be extremely valuable information for both consultants who are advising MNCs to implement siestas, and for MNCs to use as a predictor on how siestas would be utilized and perceived by employees in North America. Additionally, more research should be conducted on the best methods for implementing siestas, in terms of where they are taken, how much time should be allotted per day, and how they are regulated. MNCs will want clear cut information on the leading ways and means for putting siestas into effect, because it will be an investment and significant change process for them to make.

At this point the future of siestas is unclear, and appears to be up to what Multinational Corporations determine. As a representation of success to smaller businesses, MNCs have influence over the standard business practices in the host countries they reside in. Though it is clear that siestas can increase performance, productivity, and employee satisfaction, while decreasing workplace accidents, the investment required may be too much for MNCs at this point. It is possible that as more research is put into the empirical benefits of a quick power nap for employees, Multinationals will not be able to deny the advantages and will have to invest in this potential competitive advantage.

Though the acting Prime Minister of Spain is vocal on his position to outlaw siestas, they are so ingrained within the culture of Spain it is doubtful that they will disappear. The pressure for Spain to adapt to the more standard European work day is apparent, however for businesses operating in Spain, it is necessary to understand that siestas will not only affect your employees but also your customers. If a business to consumer store is located in a part of Spain that is not as satiated with expatriates, products will not be sold within the hours of siestas. What this means is that businesses whose consumers are other businesses may successfully dispose of siestas when operating in Spain. It may even be necessary for Spanish Multinationals to do this in order to stay competitive in the European and global market. That being said, businesses who run business to consumer operations need to adapt to the culture of siestas when operating in Spain, as it is likely that it is more cost effective to shut down operations during the typical hours of siestas.

Vodafone and Orange Mobile have used interesting adaptation techniques to adapt to this Spanish cultural behaviour, which other industries can use as well. Vodafone adapted to each city, thereby saving money in research but potentially losing money due to continuing operations during hours when local consumers are not active. Orange on the other hand adapted to each neighborhood. This specific adaptation will save them money on day to day operations, but would have been a large investment when first researching. Both Vodafone and Orange continue to succeed in their operations, both turning a profit in their last annual report, so both forms of appear to be working. In the bigger picture, the fact that both have adapted and that both continue to strive, shows the necessity of understanding their consumers.

When determining how to implement changes, MNCs need to explain to their employees how the changes will benefit them in terms of their quality of life in a way that addresses their employee's values. This will encourage their employees to fully embody any changes, especially ones that may appear to go against the cultural behaviours of the area. With Spain as an economically developed country, changes will not be as embraced as they would be in a country who is rapidly growing fiscally, because locals will not be used to constant change. With this in mind, when implementing changes, a plan needs to be made and stuck to, in order to attempt a successful transfer of knowledge and to keep the trust of the employees.

It is clear that a siesta can be used as a source of competitive advantage for Multinational Corporations. By ensuring that all employees are well rested throughout the day, a company can decrease their workplace accidents and increase their productivity and employee satisfaction. An increase in employee satisfaction would increase employee loyalty and could attract the highest ranking employees for certain positions, saving costs on recruitment. That being said the western business mantra "time is money" is a culture that large corporations

may have a difficult time abolishing. The tension between local adaptation and global integration will also be present. Corporations will have to consistently adapt their practices to some degree to the local culture as their employees and consumers will be ingrained with different values and cultural norms. Additionally, these changes must be explained in a way that encompasses the values of the employees, to ensure full embodiment. Though transformation must occur to some extent when expanding globally, MNCs have also shown to have a strong influence on the international business standards.

Multinationals need to adapt to the culture of siestas by formulating a well thought-out plan and sticking to it to ensure employee trust. Currently, there are successful examples of adaptation by utilizing demographics of store locations, and understanding consumer preferences and lifestyles. The benefits of siestas have been shown, and as more research is published, stronger evidence shows how siestas can bring a competitive advantage to corporations. It appears that siestas should definitely be a cultural change which MNCs should embrace, in order to benefit their bottom line. As of now it seems that it is up to MNCs to determine the future of siestas. There is currently a tipping point as to whether or not they will be abolished or embraced. As more research continues of the benefits of siestas, it is possible that Multinational Corporations will begin a domino effect, bringing the siesta back to a common practice, by utilizing it in their global systems and being an example for other businesses.

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