

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMPUTER APPLICATION & MANAGEMENT

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IMPORTANCE OF CROSS CULTURE SKILLS IN MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In today's globalized era, where businesses are totally dependent on internet, no one can refuse the importance of cross cultural skills. In order to avoid business failure because of cultural misunderstanding, the need for cultural awareness and sensitivity has become increasingly important. Cross culture is the interaction of people of different backgrounds and tries to understand the cultural values of others, so they can easily provide services as per their needs and expectations. This cross culture skill is important not only in marketing of goods and services but also in tourism, hospitality, IT sectors and so many other businesses. In the international business this cross culture is a vital issue because the success of international business depends upon the smooth interaction of employees with different cultures and values. This paper aims at emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural skills in management for successful business.

KEYWORDS

cross cultural awareness, cultural values, hospitality.

INTRODUCTION

Cultural factors are very important in the formulation of pragmatic business strategies. It is not prudent for business firms to ignore customs, traditions, taboos, tastes and preferences of people. Such ignorance can cause considerable financial loss in addition to waste of time and energy. Due to economic liberalization and globalization, the world has become a "global village". There is increasing interaction between people of different countries. As a result, food habits, dress habits, lifestyles and views are being internationalized. It is crucial for today's business personnel to understand the impact of cross cultural differences on business, trade and internal company organization. The success or failure of a company, venture, merger or acquisition is essentially in the hands of people. If these people are not cross culturally aware then misunderstandings, offence and a break-down in communication can occur. The need for greater cross cultural awareness is heightened in our global economies. Cross cultural differences in matters such as language, etiquette, non-verbal communication, norms and values can, do and will lead to cross cultural blunders. Terpstran has defined culture as "The integrated sum total of learned traits that are manifest and shared by members of society". Culture, therefore, according to this definition, is not transmitted genealogically. It is not, also innate, but learned. Facets of culture are interrelated and it is shared by member of a group who define the boundaries. The term on which we interact with business have a profound influence on our lives. Work is a central aspect of our lives and the vast majority of employees work in the private sector. We also depend very largely on the private sector to supply the goods and services we consume on a daily basis. It is not surprising, then, that business has major impact on culture. Culture is that which distinguishes life in one group from life in another group, including language, belief, morality, norms, customs, institutions, and physical objects, among other qualities. Culture creates people, when people with different cultural background promote, own and manage organisations, organizations themselves tend to acquire distinct cultures. As business unit go international, the need for understanding and appreciating cultural differences across various countries is inertial. Work motivation, profit motivation, business goods, negotiating styles, attitudes, towards the development of business relationships, gift-giving customs, greetings, significances of body gestures, meaning of colours and numbers and the like vary from country to country.

FIG. 1



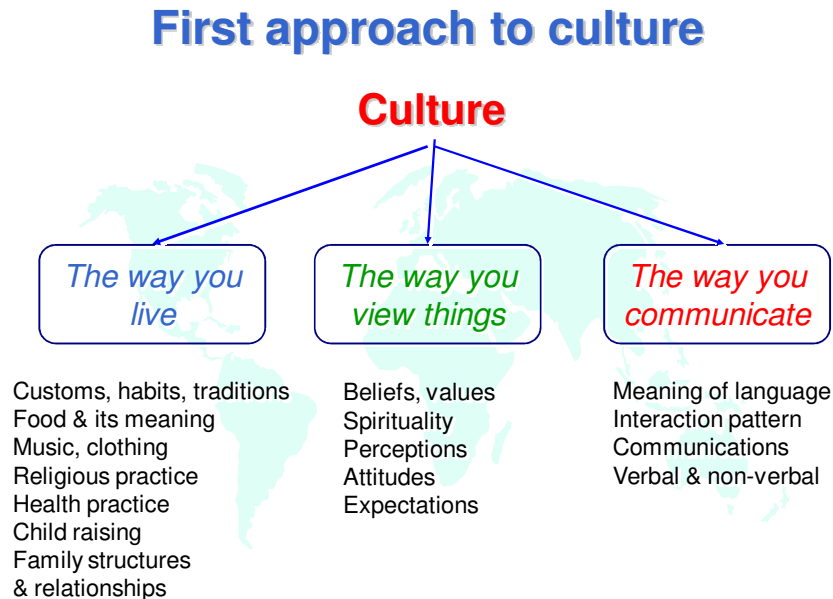
THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENT CULTURES

It is necessary as Cultures have their own way of interpreting things and what is good for one may be bad for others. And what is believed to be an essential for one group may not be necessary for others.

E. B. Taylor defines culture as follows: "Culture of civilization is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, cult, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society." The need for understanding cultural differences across countries is increasing due to globalization of business. Awareness and understanding of the local culture can help business managers like – they can better understand the behavior and conduct of employees

as these are governed by their culture, by observing the cultural backgrounds of people, their response to new products can be predicted, they are able to take quick and better decisions by developing culture sensitivity., they can improve their strategies and business practices through understanding of culture.

FIG. 2



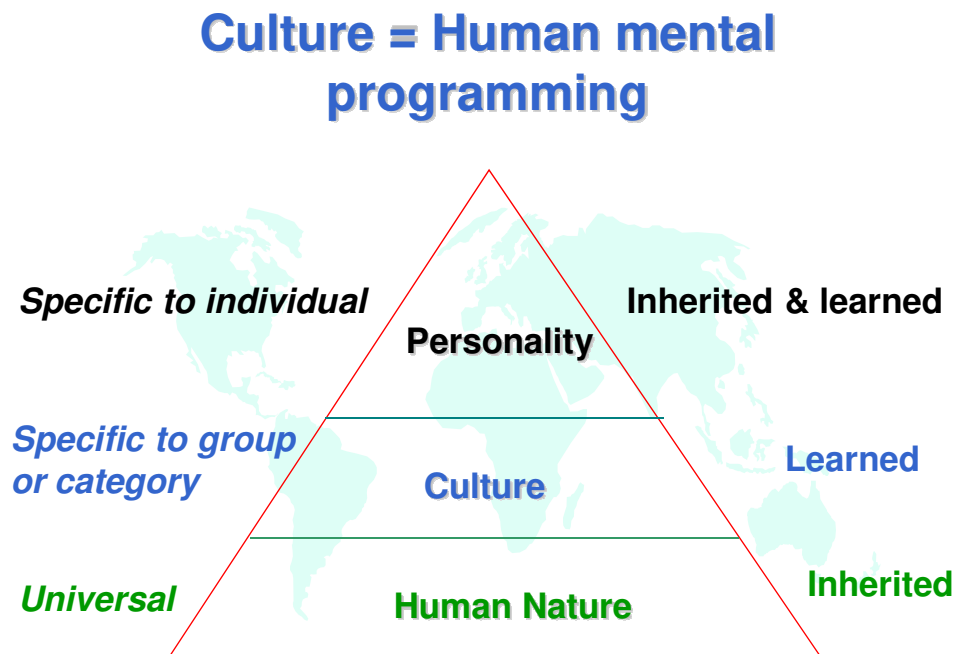
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KEY BENEFITS TO GET BETTER CROSS CULTURE MANAGEMENT SKILLS

- Improve your communication across different cultures
- Build the confidence to influence clients, suppliers and colleagues from a variety of countries
- Benchmark your individual management style against preferences from around the world – and
- learn to adapt accordingly Learn how to lead across international matrix systems and other organizational structures•

According to the Geert Hofstede, "Culture is the software of the mind – the social programming that runs the way we think, act and perceive ourselves and others. In other words, your brain is simply the hardware that runs the cultural programming."

FIG. 3



Source: G. Hofstede 5

BARRIERS TO CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Some common cross-cultural issues for those entrepreneurs developing relationships with individuals or businesses from different cultural backgrounds:

- Not being proactive and adapting to different cultural business expectations. It's all too easy to get off on the wrong foot and become reactive.
- Not understanding how formality, hierarchy and timing can affect business. These things have a tremendous impact on negotiations and decision-making.
- Being perceived as too aggressive or even impatient in your business approach. Business often takes longer with different cultures and countries, so plan accordingly.
- Many cultures are more team-focused or "we" oriented. This can really impact your business style and marketing material. Also, avoid being egocentric or "I" oriented.
- A big taboo is unintentionally offending someone with your body language. This can be very difficult to recover from. A basic guideline is to use "opened-handed" gestures. Don't point with your index finger, use the OK sign or thumbs up and thumbs down.
- Lack of cultural understanding
- Ways to improve cross cultural communication
- Know yourself and your culture
- Know your audience
- Be open to new ideas and appreciate cultural differences
- Avoid using difficult idioms
- Pay attention to body language
- Be a learner

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE CROSS CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

1. Be proactive. Start by focusing on creating trustful partnerships, not on the business at hand.
2. Use some cultural rapport. Adapt your marketing material and business approach as needed.
3. Organize productive interactions that ensure a "win-win" for all parties.
4. Develop strategies for relationships and business cycles based on appropriate levels of formality, business hierarchy and timing.
5. Learn the "do's and don'ts" of the country and cultures with which you're partnering. In short, be well prepared.
6. Slow down and speak clearly
7. Listen actively without interrupting the other party
8. Avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations
9. Show respect for each other

HOW CAN YOU PROACTIVELY PREPARE FOR MULTI-CULTURAL BUSINESS?

- Awareness is the first step! Observe how people communicate with you in person, on the phone and by e-mail. Notice if they are more formal and expressive or more direct and to the point.
- Know your facts. Be aware of relevant historical data, economic issues, major industries, cities and geography, to name a few. There is nothing more embarrassing than not knowing your geography while working in a new country!
- Hone your cultural rapport. For example, when Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah visited then-US President George Bush at his ranch, they were photographed strolling hand in hand through the bluebonnets. This was an important sign of their friendship and trust. Sometimes when managing international business relationships, you need to go beyond your personal comfort zone!
- Keep in mind that we are homogenizing as a global culture, so we can't ever take cultural tendencies for granted.

CONCLUSION

Each culture has a different way of looking at things and it is indeed a challenge for managers who work cross-culturally. It is very essential for managers to be conscious of cultures with whom they interact. Organisations believe in diversity as it helps them to tackle diverse set of problems. People from different cultures bring in different skill sets to table. This diversity in turn brings in competencies to compound present skills to be more competitive and flexible in finding solutions. And the best way to make these cultural issues work for Manager's benefit is by building a strong relationship through personal rapport and reputation, being motivated and caring for others. Cultural differences need to be seen as an asset, not a liability. Managers need to be culturally aware and flexible in their leadership styles. Cross cultural communication can be effective when people are sensitive to different cultural backgrounds.

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