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CULTURAL AWARENESS IN BUSINESS

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1.INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a key role in international business. This work-based thesis undertakes a case-study research of an information management software introduction process from Sweden to China. To design interview questions, the author used Prof. Hofstede's cultural dimensions as the base theory and reviewed a number of literatures which apply this theory in the IT area. After interviews with both Swedish and Chinese sites, the results were analyzed with the theoretical data to examine how cultural differences influence people in a software introduction process. The author also applied software culturalization from Marble and Lu. Compared to the author's own experiences and interview data, a recommendation list is stated as a guide of how to succeed in software introduction under different cultural backgrounds.

2.CULTURAL AWARENESS IN BUSINESS

The world is getting smaller due to the advancement of communication technology and transport. The development of world economy brought people together from different cultures, languages, backgrounds and nations. People are doing business, meeting and communicating each other more than before. This advancement in technology helps us to understand each other more intimately and the cultural differences between people are diminishing now-a-days. But actually it is not the truth. As we come closer to each other our differences become highlighted, when we realize rest of the world is not as same as we believe. This problem is more prominent in the field of business. While dealing with foreign colleagues, customers and clients, only few businesses will withstand the requirements of the industry over a period of time. If a business organization wants to grow and become international, it has to offer international standards. Very little competition was faced by the European, British and American organizations while doing business abroad about twenty years ago because of the lack of competitive industrialized nations. At that point of time doing business was easy. But today countries like India, Korea, Japan, China, Brazil and Mexico are some of the world's largest economies. More countries are involved in business and therefore competition is also there for getting business. According to western organizations, lack of cultural sensitivity can affect the business performance.

When traveling to other countries to transact business, Americans usually attempt to make a favorable impression and do their professional best. Unfortunately, behaviors, comments, time orientation, social practices, and etiquette that are considered appropriate professional behavior in corporate America may be perceived as arrogance, insensitivity, overconfidence, or aggressiveness in another culture. This could result in the American business person being perceived as insensitive to other cultures and jeopardize that person's working relationship with international counterparts.

In the domestic market, Americans are comfortable in knowing what to do and how to do it. But to achieve the same objective and success with a minimum of interpersonal and professional errors abroad, advanced preparation is crucial. American corporations have a long way to go in developing executives to function abroad successfully. One retired senior vice president from a major U.S. corporation reports, "We have the technology and we know the business but we are not prepared as a country to deal with cultural differences....I have seen relatively little progress over the past 30 years."Recent literature cites an acknowledgment by business executives that understanding cultural differences is absolutely essential for doing business abroad. Unfortunately, this same literature reports that surveys of major corporations indicate that relatively few offer this type of preparation for their people. According to one such survey by the consulting firm of Moran, Stahl and Boyer, only 12 percent of the respondents of 51 multinational U.S. corporations indicated that they offered seminars and workshops on crosscultural differences and doing business abroad (Callahan 1989).

Training alone will not solve the problem. Many conditions influence the success of doing business abroad; the individual is merely one variable in the equation. It is perhaps the most critical factor, however, for we know that inadequate attention is being given to this important aspect of executive development.

Other factors that influence success abroad include the nature, scope, and location of the project. Of particular note is the location, as studies have shown that although 18 percent of those sent to London will fail, this increases to 36 percent in Tokyo and 68 percent in Saudi Arabia. Such statistics point to a need for companies to carefully consider the unique nature of differing cultures and direct their executive preparation initiatives accordingly.

This article examines many cross-cultural differences among 25 or more countries in which there is a practice or behavior dissimilar to that in the United States. They rank among the many complex subjects that must be considered by corporations when designing or contracting training for cultural awareness. Among the cultural elements that will be examined are language and communications, aesthetics, time orientation, social institutions, religion, personal achievement, personal space, social behavior, and intercultural socialization.

Cultures include all types of learning and behavior. They are learned, they vary, and they influence the manner in which people behave.

Of all the cultural elements that an international traveler must study, the language of the host country is among the most difficult to manage. Although it is beneficial for individuals to know the language, one also needs the competency to recognize idiomatic interpretations, which are quite different from those found in the English dictionary. All cultures have verbal and nonverbal communication systems, and each country's vocabulary reflects its primary value and composition. Words spoken by an American may not have the same meaning when translated into another language.

When visiting a country in which English is not spoken, executives often use an interpreter to translate for them. Yet numerous gestures, facial expressions, and motions send different signals, and an interpreter might not be capable of articulating the full intention of the message. For example, Americans are often direct in their conversations, expecting the truth with no hint of deception. At the same time, Americans also tend to be uncomfortable with silent moments. People in some other countries, though, may prefer not to be direct and may shift their eyes away from the American. To them this is a sign of respect. To the American, however, it may be seen as a gesture suggesting withholding of information. And in some cultures silence is appreciated, giving discussants or negotiators time to think and evaluate the situation.

One of the most damaging demands that can be made of an Asian is "Give me a yes or no answer." Although an American would view this as a mild form of confrontation and would expect to get a "yes" or "no" response, Asians rarely say no. This is because of their reluctance to displease another with a negative answer and also to save them the embarrassment of having to admit an inability. There is no word for "no" in Thailand. Similarly, the French often say "no" when they may actually mean "maybe."

In some countries, if a question is asked, the visitor may be told whatever the native thinks the visitor wants to hear. If you ask for directions in Mexico, Lebanon, or Japan, and the natives don't really know the answer, they may still give you one simply to make you happy. In countries such as Paraguay or Pakistan, if directions are requested, regardless of the distance, the answer is likely to be "not far."

In America, a person who is reluctant to maintain eye contact is called shifty-eyed and arouses suspicion. But in some countries an attempt to maintain eye contact may be perceived as a sign of aggression. Accordingly, in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and other Asian countries, maintaining eye contact is not an acceptable behavior. On the other hand, in Saudi Arabia, eye contact and gestures of openness are important and could facilitate communications.

Most people who transact business abroad may not be proficient in the spoken language of the host country. However, nonverbal communications, such as signs, gestures, and body cues, can be learned in a short period. The value of knowing what to do and what to avoid should not be underestimated, so that one will not transmit unintended messages. According to several business executives interviewed, these issues are of much greater importance to closing the deal than actually knowing how to speak the native language.

One executive reported that the English language is used in many regions of the world as the accepted form of business communication. In some countries such as the Philippines, you would be expected to use English or risk being considered of a lower class. Even though they risk isolation from the rest of the world, Filipinos no longer require English as a second language for their young, leaving only the upper class the ability to learn it in private schools or from tutors. Power brokers in most of the developing countries recognize the importance of understanding English. In Singapore, for example, it is not unusual to hear the language spoken in the home just for the purpose of further developing the skills of young people.

In the same respect, such regions as the Middle East may prefer that visiting business people not attempt to use the native language, unless they have a high degree of proficiency. According to one source, it is quite common for Arab businessmen to speak English, because their formal education is likely to have come from Western universities. However, it is also recommended that if a company is intending to do a significant degree of business in the Middle East, its employees should be trained in Arabic. Dialects and accents aside, its written form dominates the region.

3.THEORY

This chapter describes the theories used in this dissertation. Three theory aspects are used in this dissertation. One is the Cultural Dimensions by Prof. Geert Hofstede (Hofstede, 2001), the second is research contributions from the literatures using Hofstede's theory, and the last is the Software Culturalization Model by Marble and Lu (2007) who based their studies on the findings of Kersten, Kersten and Rakowski (2002). According to

Leidner and Kayworth (2006) Hofstede's theory is the most widely used to conceptualize national cultures. Leidner and Kayworth reviewed eighty-two (82) articles related to IS/IT area and found that over sixty percent (60%) applied Hofstede's theory.

"Culture is more often a source of conflict than of synergy. Cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster." Prof. Geert Hofstede, Emeritus Professor, Maastricht University

Prof. Geert Hofstede became interested in national cultural differences by chance in the late 1960s and has been able to collect a large data to study them. Between 1967 and 1973, Hofstede analyzed a large data collected by IBM. The data was based on employee values scores covering seventy-four (74) countries and regions. From the studies, Hofstede was able to develop four (4) primary dimensions to describe cultural differences. The four (4) initial dimensions are: 1) Power Distance (PDI), 2) Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI), 3) Masculinity (MAS) and 4) Individualism (IDV). Later on around 1985, Hofstede added a fifth dimension which is called Long-Term Orientation (LTO). This dimension is based on Confucian dynamism and was inspired by an additional international study with Chinese employees and managers. With these five dimensions, Hofstede conducted a comprehensive study on how culture influences the values under various environments, such as family, school, workplace, etc. In this dissertation, I would only focus on the aspect of workplace. After introducing the general idea of cultural dimensions, I also view a number of literatures using Hofstede's theory. Combined conclusions from those literatures and the values of cultural dimensions of Sweden and China, there will be logic result on how people from different countries behave differently in IT area.

3.1.POWER DISTANCE

The first dimension of national culture is called Power Distance (PDI), which Hofstede (2001) defines as *the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally*. Simply speaking, power distance index is used to measure the degree of inequality in society.

Workplaces high in power distance index are based on hierarchical system which supervisors and subordinates cooperate unequally. Power is centralized and underling staffs

are expected to be told what to do. Numbers of supervisory personnel are large and structured hierarchically. Co-workers report to each one according to the tall hierarchical system level by level. Salary ranges from top to bottom are large which means superiors may have much more income than subordinates.

Workplaces low in power distance index, on the other hand, also have hierarchical system while only for convenience and the roles may change. Supervisors and subordinates consider themselves equally and they may change their roles the next day. There are not many supervisory personnel and their powers are decentralized in the flat hierarchical system. Salary system show narrow gaps between top and bottom.

Table 3.1 shows the scores of Sweden and China toward their Power Distance Index with the ranking among the seventy-four (74) investigated countries. The larger score number is, the higher power distance will be in the country. Data in the table shows China is higher than Sweden on PDI. In workplaces, this higher value indicates more unequal feelings between different levels in hierarchical system in China compare to that of Sweden. There would be more supervisory personnel in a Chinese company and the salary range between higher and lower levels is higher. Subordinates in Sweden have more tendencies on consulting while Chinese ones tend to be told what to do. Research on attitudes toward people with disabilities in different cultures (e.g., Danseco, 1997b) points to differences in the meaning of disability. Findings indicate that the same condition may or may not be perceived as a disability in different societies and that certain conditions may carry more of a stigma than others. For instance, some Yoruba families perceive physical conditions such as goiter, hunchback, and albinism to be punishments for offenses against God and therefore a disgrace; conversely, hydrocephalus is neither a stigma nor a disability (Walker, 1986). Some Asian families consider having a child with a developmental disability a sign of good fortune in the future, others view it as a punishment of past sins, and many consider it an act of God that cannot be changed (Miles, 1997). Findings also reveal that the value attached to a certain disabling condition differs depending on societal expectations and the established parameters for normalcy. For example, among the Manus of New Guinea, because being able to handle a canoe is a necessary survival skill, the loss of an arm is much more of a disability and much more stigmatizing than the inability to read (Edgerton, 1970). Conversely, technological availability of prosthetic devices and societal expectations for literacy in the United States combine to create exactly opposite perceptions of the same disabilities. An analysis of education and rehabilitation policies also indicates differing interpretations of disability (Barton, 1996; Fulcher, 1989; Mehan, 1988; Skrtic, 1995b). For instance, in many capitalist economies, nonproductive people -- that is, those who do not contribute to the growth of the economy -- are perceived as dependent or disabled. Disability is a disputed category. This is clear when we look at welfare state and education practices. Its relevance is disputed: Is this, or isn't it, a case of disability? And if so, how much, how disabled? Is this person feigning incapacity? Is this doctor working to lower the company's liability? Or is he/she, the doctor, making an unbiased judgment? The way social institutions should respond (segregate or integrate?) and how (with what resources?): These are all contentious issues. Disability is thus *struggled over* in social practices in a range of arenas; it is a *procedural and political category*. (1989, p. 24; italics in original)

Similarly, education policy requires that students be evaluated to determine their eligibility for special education services, a process that results in labeling some students

by disability category. As a result, 10.4% of all children between the ages of 6 and 17 are identified as having special education needs and receive some services (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997). When we examine who acquires or who is more likely to acquire the identity of being disabled, however, we discover an overrepresentation of 1) poor (McDonnell et al., 1997), 2) culturally and linguistically diverse (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; McDonnell et al., 1997; Mercer, 1973), and 3) male (Athans, 1998; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1998) students in special education. It would appear that the assessment process results in the labeling of many students as having a disability, even though they may not have an impairment.

The two sections of this chapter examine the implications of the cultural specificity of the models and meanings of disability for families whose points of view may differ. The first section consists of two parts. First, it identifies some of the values that underlie special education law and policy in the United States, specifically the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 (PL 101-476) and its amendments of 1997 (PL 105-17). Next, it discusses the implications of this value embeddedness for families from contrasting traditions. The second section also has two parts. First, it identifies certain assumptions about the meaning of disability contained within the dominant epistemological paradigm, the medical model, within the context of the overrepresentation in special education of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Next, it shows how these meanings may contrast with the beliefs of minority families.

3.2.AESTHETICS

Aesthetics refers to attitudes toward beauty and good taste in the art, music, folklore, and drama of a culture. The aesthetics of a particular culture can be important in the interpretation of symbolic meanings of various artistic expressions.

It is important for companies to evaluate in depth such aesthetic factors as product and package design, color, brand name, and symbols. For instance, some conventional brand names that communicate positive messages in America have a totally different meaning in another country, which may substantially stigmatize corporate image and marketing effectiveness.

3.3.TIME ORIENTATION

Americans are clock watchers. We live by schedules and deadlines and thrive on being prompt for meetings and "efficient" in conducting business. In many parts of the world people arrive late for appointments, and business is preceded by hours of social rapport. In such places, people in a rush are occasionally thought to be arrogant and untrustworthy.

In the United States, a high value is placed on time. If someone waited outside an office for half an hour or so beyond the appointed time, it would be seen as a signal of his or her lack of importance. In the Middle East, a business person may keep a visitor waiting for a long time. But once the host begins the meeting, it may last as long as required to conduct the business at hand. Of course, others with later appointments on the same day also must wait their turn.

Americans are also deadline-oriented. If a deadline is mentioned to an Arab, however, it is like waving a red flag in front of a bull. Forcing the Arab to make a quick decision may very well cost you the deal. What appears to be inefficiency and muddling on the part of Arab businessmen may be a signal of displeasure with the way things are going. Experienced negotiators recommend slowing down and looking for signals that suggest that negotiations are not going well.

Western cultures view time as a resource that is not to be wasted. The efficient use of time is emphasized in such phrases as "Time is money" and "Time is the enemy." In contrast, Eastern cultures view time as unlimited and unending. In America, meetings sometimes begin with phrases such as "Let's get started" and "Let's dispense with the preliminaries." In Japan, casual conversation precedes business matters, because the Japanese are generally more interested than Americans in getting to know the people involved in the transaction. Furthermore, it is important to the Japanese that consensus be reached and any misunderstandings be cleared up before proceeding on any problems that may surface in negotiations. The Japanese process of consultation (ring-seido) could bring to the surface problems not appreciated or known to Americans. This will require further consultations to remove obstacles.

Many cultures value relationships. Europeans and Asians place a high regard on long-term relationships rather than on short-term gains, which runs counter to what most Americans perceive. Excessive emphasis on speed and time may give the impression that the transaction is more important than the person. This is a fundamental error in professional judgment in many regions of the world.

4. SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Social institutions--business, political, family, or class related--influence the behavior of people. In some countries, for example, the family is the most important social group. So

social structures must be examined to understand the culture, because family relationships sometimes influence the work environment and employment practices.

In Latin America and the Arab world, a manager who gives special treatment to a relative is considered to be fulfilling an obligation. From the Latin point of view, it only makes sense to hire someone you can trust. In the United States, however, it is considered favoritism and nepotism. In India there is a fair amount of nepotism. But there too it is consistent with the norms of the culture. By knowing the importance of family relationships in the workplace and in business transactions, embarrassing questions about nepotism can be avoided. According to the director of sales in the Mideast for a U.S.-based communications company, nepotism is commonplace in this region. He reports that not only are you forced to deal with "large groups of families," but these families often represent the country's aristocracy. Such individuals typically hold high positions in the local government and can rather easily skew a deal in one direction or another. As an outsider, a visiting business executive must learn not only to tolerate but also to appreciate the purpose of these relationships. It is not for us to judge the virtue of these conditions, concludes the sales director, but to adapt and work within the local norms.

Americans should also be cautious of being judgmental or intrusive in the local political structure. Particularly in South America, where each country functions as a distinctive nation-state, it is a mistake to presume that a single political ideology prevails. Rather, these countries have foregone the benefits of functioning as a single market in favor of autonomous units. This results in separate infrastructures of military, customs, currencies, and legal systems.

5. RELIGION

Religion is of utmost importance in many countries. In America, substantial effort is made to keep government and church matters separate. Nevertheless, there remains a healthy respect for individual religious differences. In some countries, such as Lebanon

and Iran, religion may be the very foundation of the government and a dominant factor in business, political, and educational decisions.

In the United States, employers are required by federal law to "reasonably accommodate" individual religious beliefs that conflict with job demands. There may be quite a number of them, however, because multiple nationalities, ethnic groups, and religions are represented in the diverse U.S. work force. In other countries, there may be fewer religions, but the dominant religion must be respected in professional, supervisory, managerial, and other business behavior. When abroad, any effort to compare religions should be avoided.

When supervising a work group in some countries, an attempt to modify a policy, behavior, or process that is grounded in religion would not only draw the attention of national corporate officials but that of government officials as well. In Saudi Arabia, for example, during the month of Ramadan, Moslems fast from sunrise to sunset. As a consequence, worker production drops. Many Moslems rise earlier in the morning to eat before sunrise and may eat what they perceive to be enough to last until sunset. This affects their strength and stamina during the work day. An effort by management to maintain normal productivity levels will likely be rejected, so managers must learn to be sensitive to this custom as well as to others like it. Eating pork is forbidden by law in Islam and Judaism. So if hot dogs are an American's favorite lunch, all-beef hot dogs would have to be substituted for pork. The pork restriction exists in Israel as well as in Islamic countries in the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran, and Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

Islamic religion also frowns upon excessive profit, which is considered a form of exploitation. This is an important consideration in pricing products and services. The role of women is also different in Islamic countries. They are, among other things, required to dress in such a way that their arms, legs, torso, and faces are concealed. An American female would be expected to honor this dress code while in the host country.

Islamic worshippers pray facing the holy city of Mecca five times each day. Visiting Westerners must be aware of this religious ritual. In Saudi Arabia and Iran, it is not unusual for managers and workers to place carpets on the floor and kneel to pray several times during the day. Although Sunday is a day of rest for most countries in the world, there are several countries in which the rest day is not Sunday. Figure 2 lists several of these countries.

6. PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT

For the most part, Americans strive to achieve, be competitive, land the best job, earn the most money, and be promoted. They consider their position in the organization for which they work as an indication of status. We are an individualistic society and have built a nation based on our tenacity to get things done in as little time as possible and with

minimal disruption. By contrast, Hindu teachings suggest that acquisition and achievement are not to be sought, because they are the major courses of suffering in one's daily life. In Japan, positions are not arranged in a status hierarchy, and promotions are determined based on seniority rather than merit, although there is some evidence of movement from seniority-based rewards. Japanese workers are encouraged to work as teams. Cooperation is an art in Asian countries. It is said in Japan that "the nail that sticks out will be pounded down" (Adler 1986). This illustrates that individual competitiveness is less desirable than teamwork and team spirit.

Even the former Soviet Union encouraged teamwork. If a work group failed to meet production goals, no one was rewarded. But if a group exceeded its quota, everyone would benefit. Although cash rewards are often given to high achievers in America, a Japanese, Chinese, or Yugoslav would be humiliated to receive one. A great deal has been written in U.S. management literature over the past 10 to 15 years on teamwork and a participatory environment of decision making. The currently popular Total Quality Management movement would suggest that more U.S. companies are adopting this ideology. However, some researchers say that the U.S. cultural orientation on this subject is too embedded for us to adapt the normative working relationships of, say, the Japanese. On this comparison, one individual stated, "Harmony has long been important in Japan and is used as a building block to develop consensus in decision-making." In addition, whereas the individual is still the primary unit in American society and the educational system, group welfare prevails in Japan (Fram 1985).

6.1. PERSONAL SPACE

Different cultures have varying rules on personal space and touching. Americans sometimes touch others on the hand or arm or shoulder when talking. In some cultures, such behavior may not be appropriate, especially with the left hand when in the Middle East.

The distance between individuals when talking is another issue that must be known and respected. Although one may not be able to define the exact distance if asked, most individuals have a specific amount of space that they maintain between themselves and others when conversing. Americans are typically made uncomfortable by the close conversation distance of Arabs and Africans. In the same respect, Arabs and Africans may feel rejected by the lengthy personal distance Americans maintain.

Indonesians operate with less empty space than Americans require, and some touching is permissible. However, an Indonesian should not be patted on the head, and a person of the opposite sex should never be touched. It is important to know the rules for personal touching and space of the culture in which a visit is planned. In some cases, personal touching can be viewed as an extreme act; in addition to violating the norms of a culture, it may even be viewed as a criminal offense.

6.2. SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

There are a number of social behaviors and comments that have different meanings in other cultures. For example, Americans generally consider it impolite to mound food on a plate, make noises when eating, and belch. However, some Chinese feel it is polite to take a portion of every food served and consider it evidence of satisfaction to belch.

Other social behaviors, if not known, will place the American international traveler at a disadvantage. For example, in Saudi Arabia, it is an insult to question a host about the health of his spouse, show the soles of one's shoes, or touch or deliver objects with the left hand. In Korea, both hands should be used when passing objects to one another, and it would be considered impolite to discuss politics, communism, or Japan. Also in Korea, formal introductions are very important. Although in America it might be acceptable to initiate a visit to a corporate or government office to meet an official, in Korea it is not considered in good taste. In both Japan and Korea, ranks and titles are expected to be used in addressing hosts. In the United States, there is not a clear rule on this behavior, except in select fields such as the armed forces or medicine. In Indonesia, it is considered rude to point at another person with a finger. However, one may point with the thumb or gesture with the chin.

When greeting someone, it is appropriate in most countries, as in the United States, to shake hands. In some countries the greeting includes a handshake and more. In Japan, a handshake may be followed by a bow, going as low and lasting as long as that of the senior person. In Brazil, Korea, Indonesia, China, and Taiwan, a slight bow is also appropriate.

In some countries, the greeting involves more contact. For instance, in Venezuela, close friends greet each other with a full embrace and a hearty pat on the back; in Indonesia, a social kiss is in vogue, and a touching of first the right then the left cheek as one shakes hands. In Malaysia, close friends grasp with both hands; and in South Africa, blacks shake hands, followed by a clench of each other's thumbs, and another handshake.

In most countries, addressing someone as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. is acceptable, but this is certainly not universal. Monsieur, Madame, and Mademoiselle are preferred in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg, while *senor*, *senora*, and *senorita* are the norm in Spain and Mexico.

It is sometimes the case that conversation occurs as greetings are exchanged. In Sweden, the greeting is "goddag"; in the Netherlands, it is "pleased to meet you"; in the United Kingdom it's "how do you do"; and in Israel it is "shalom." Other greetings vary by country.

In many countries, men do not shake hands with a woman unless she extends her hand first. In India, women, or a man and a woman, greet each other by placing the palms of their hands together and bowing slightly; and in Mexico simply by a slight bow. In some countries, such as India, it is not advisable for men to touch or talk alone with a woman.

Although many of the social behaviors mentioned vary slightly from the American norm, negative judgments should not be made about them. When trying to explain what took so long in closing a deal, home office executives need to understand that drinking tea,

socializing, and relationship building are important components in accomplishing corporate international goals.

6.3. INTERCULTURAL SOCIALIZATION

In addition to knowing specific courtesies, personal space, language and communication, and social behavioral differences, there are numerous intercultural socialization behaviors that an international business traveler should learn. Knowing a culture means knowing the habits, actions, and reasons behind the behaviors. Americans often make assumptions about what is culturally proper or incorrect based on their own experiences. For example, in the United States the bathtub and toilet are likely to be in the same room. Americans assume this is the world norm. Some cultures, however, such as that of the Japanese, consider it unhygienic. Other cultures think it unhygienic even to sit on a toilet seat. It is not always necessary for an international business traveler to understand the "whys" of a culture, but it is important to accept them and to abide by them while on foreign soil. However, if the time is available, becoming thoroughly aware of the culture in which you will be visiting or working will pay excellent dividends.

7. CONCLUSION

The nature of our workplaces has changed. We have moved away from the monochromatic make-up of our offices to one that is now coloured by team members from all over the world. With this new multicultural make-up come differences in cultures which in turn bring differences in areas such as communication styles, approach to time, managerial styles and a plethora of other cross cultural differences.

Cultural awareness is now crucial if multicultural teams within businesses are going to maximise their potential. Although cross cultural differences do not always cause obvious problems, it is their more subtle manifestations that can and do lead to a lack of clear communication and poor performance.

Why is Cultural awareness necessary?

Cultural awareness is important to help members of a multicultural team identify where things may be going wrong or how to best leverage their differences. Without some sort of formal cross cultural awareness training it is difficult for multicultural teams to identify areas that need attention.

Cultural differences manifest in many ways. Within a multicultural team, a person's cultural background will impact how they act and behave. There will be differences in areas such as communication, attitude to towards conflict, approaches to task completion and decision making styles. Unless people come to realise these differences between them through cultural awareness, problems can continue and even intensify.

Cultural awareness in a multicultural workplace

Building real cross cultural synergy is only accomplished through properly considered cultural awareness training. However, below are some tips for people working in multicultural workplaces who wish to implement some basics.

Build your cultural knowledge: Try and learn a bit more about other cultures and countries.

8. LITERATURE

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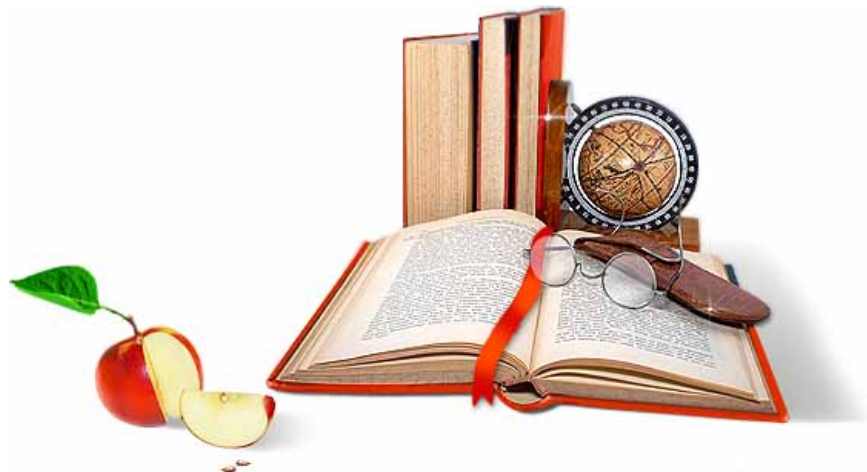
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