

Cross-Cultural understanding in Business

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How Can Cultural Differences Affect People?

- **Business partners from different cultures usually bring different perspectives and expectations that need understanding.**
- **Not learning about each other's cultures before business interactions often leads to losses of business deals.**
- **If exporting to a new market, awareness of cultural differences starting from familiarity with customs, etiquette, business methods, to history and religious customs will improve the chances for success and to spot new market opportunities.**

Questions we should ask ourselves

- How do members of the society communicate?
- How does society view power distance or hierarchy acceptance?
- How does society view punctuality?
- Is performance seen as an individual or group process?
- What is the political and economic system?
- How do people see strangers and interact with them?
- What is the distribution of gender roles in society?

Potential problems arising from cultural differences in business interactions.

- Cultural difference might cause negative feelings such as disorientation and frustration to employees and their spouses which can lead to poorly executed or failed assignments abroad, outright leaving of the company and losing investments.
- Informal chat sessions between co-workers tend to not provide enough objective data.
- Problems adjusting to a new culture while retaining one's own culture, even in small daily matters.
- In some cultures, there is individualism which allows people to take their own independent daily decisions. In other cultures, individuals simply do not do things as independently and require the involvement of family and friends in many daily tasks.
- English is not necessarily the predominant language in a foreign society.

Ideas for resolving cross cultural differences in business.

- Studying and understanding the culture is key for doing business in another country.
- Offer professional quality cross-cultural training to help people adjust to new countries and avoid costly mistakes.
- Good programs provide important cultural lessons for both life and the work; they address personal and family issues allowing adjustment in the relocation process. The critical adjustment may not be that of the employee, but rather that of the partner, or the teenage daughter.
- Create (when possible) a written policy handbook about expected behaviors in multi-cultural working environments.
- Create an environment of respect for other cultures by not allowing culture-based jokes or discrimination.
- Employees need to be trained on business communication skills, management, decision making, and negotiation in a multicultural environment in order to be more effective with foreign colleagues.

Benefits of cross cultural understanding in business

- Cross-cultural training is low-cost insurance policy instead of actually moving family members and risking their early leave.
- Increases the ability to compete in a multi cultural environment.
- Allows the introduction of new perspectives and new products.

Personal Experience

- Every culture has a unique way of dealing with different situations. What is acceptable in one country may not be acceptable in another.
- Difference of cultures requires that people respond positively and with flexibility in order to achieve mutual respect and overcome any feelings of disorientation.
- Some people travel to other countries and come back without any reflection on the other country while others come back with a rich experience.
- Some people are more flexible in dealing with other cultures: frequent travelers, mixed couples, many intellectuals.

Elements of my experience abroad

- The Place.
- The People.
- Basic Needs (Food / Shopping / Medical Services / Safety / Weather / Way of Life).
- Uncomfortable feeling.
- What I learned.
- Special Notes.

General Impression.

Means of achieving cross-cultural Understanding on the personal level

- **Be Aware of Your Own Culture (You will be asked about your own culture / You will need to set your own boundaries).**
- **Collect Information on the Other Culture (History / Traditions / Etiquette / Taboos) from different sources (Internet / Books / Embassies)**
- **Reflect..... This is the noblest method of acquiring wisdom according to Confucius (Ask yourself some basic questions and see how you feel about some information that you acquire)**
- **Have Emotional Intelligence (Be Culture-Smart / Control your emotions when provoked by moving to another subject or be patient).**
- **Improve your Communication Skills (the 3 V's of communication: Verbal / Vocal / Visual).**

Benefits of Cultural Understanding at the Personal Level

- You will be introduced to new perspectives, products and techniques.
- You will maximize your potential by developing your skills or by acquiring new skills.
- You will overcome boredom and insecurity in your new environment.

What we do at Diwan of Knowledge

- Raising Cultural Awareness through: Training Programs / Seminars / Cultural Magazine.
- Special Programs for Youth:
 - Language Skills (The young translator)
 - Introduction to Different Cultures
 - Tools for learning
 - Skills not taught at school (Time management / organization / safety / healthy lifestyle / Logical Thinking / Cyber Safety / Social issues.
- Our programs take the shape of reading and discussion sessions.