Research Paper

Competing Across Borders and Cultures

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We now live in a hyper-connected world, where cultural borders have become blurred with the adoption of technology and the increase in diversity in our workplaces. Without a doubt, successful entrepreneurs and global leaders need not only understand these cultural differences but embrace them as well for the many benefits they offer businesses and their organizations.

Companies tend to forget that it's very important to understand that culture has a significant impact on performance. You have to get the mutual understanding from whatever culture you come from. Instead of trying to push your culture into a foreign place, why not do something strategic and think out of the box. Try to see if your company culture can fuse with the country's culture.

Some of the common mistakes leaders make when dealing with other culture is trying to incorporate your culture to a foreign place. Next, people assuming you can only learn about someone else's culture by reading lots of books and using what they learn from those books as tools.

The world is becoming a smaller place. Many businesses, in order to thrive, must enter the global marketplace and become global organizations. As a result, the people in these organizations will cross cultures and encounter all the complications that entails. **By providing insight into communicating, doing business effectively with people from other cultures, this article will be a help to leaders of emerging global organizations and their leaders in avoiding culture clashes.**

The beauty of working internationally, are the different cultures from which we learn every day! Different opinions, different ways of management, how you do business, you learn this daily. When different cultures lead, they tend to have the attitude of **"we" and "them." This is how "we" do it.**

So it's important to be sensitive to different cultures and you have to develop this skill by working across cultures daily. The way to deal with it is by recognizing what are the strengths and weaknesses. Then you have to find out what's the strategy and objectives to have.

I remember my encounters in an European country when I first visited the place for a meeting and conference, people were very inquisitive and noisy. I was not used to it. They asked me which school I went to, where my wife was, how old I am, et cetera. I was shocked and thought "it's none of your business!" I had to adjust to the local culture, that it was them getting to know me better so that they can build a relationship with me so that it will be easier to work with me later. I remember another incident in South Africa. An older man took a younger man with him for the meeting with the South African director who was rather senior. The South African director was offended when the more junior staff was asked to negotiate with him. In Asia and Africa, it's about status. You can only speak with someone who's the same status level as yourself. Europeans need to be aware of this or it could be a loss of potential business. It's about hierarchy.

A client I worked for, a large Singaporean organization acquired a Northern European one. Top management decided to go 50–50 in terms of culture. Rather democratic one would think, and it may even seem like a good idea. However, it bombed. They ended up with parallel management because they could not handle cultural diversity. This was cross-cultural misunderstanding. The employees were all demotivated and frustrated with top management. The best employees started to leave the company quickly. As their consultant, I coached the top management as a team and individually too, with rather interesting results.

As organizations continue to shift from more hierarchical, command-and-control models to more networked, decentralized platforms, a clear, consistent, and trustworthy culture will become even more important. Culture is what keeps people doing their best work and working well together, regardless of title or status. Culture is one of the most liberating investments we can make – it nourishes and unleashes our core humanity and connects us with others. Our humanity is something that technology cannot replace and is the superpower that will allow us to adapt and thrive in a dynamic world.

The "Across culture competency" needed to be exhibited by leaders, who will operate in a number of culturally different markets, includes the following attributes:

– Mindfulness

To communicate effectively, we must be thoughtful and look closely at the unique attributes, attitudes and behaviors of people before making predictions about them. In other words, we must listen and understand from where the other person is coming.

Many of our communications are habitual as we hardly pay attention to our communication behavior. However, when we face a new situation, such as a cross cultural encounter, we seek clues to guide our behavior. As we become comfortable in the new situation, we revert back to more habitual communications, and are no longer mindful of the other. We often categorize people with whom we communicate based upon physical and cultural characteristics, or their attitudes and beliefs. The problem with categorizing is that it creates blinders in us that prevent us from truly hearing and knowing the people with whom we are communicating.

To improve the effectiveness of our communications with all people, in particular, people of other cultures, we need to be aware of how we communicate – we must be mindful. Awareness of our communications and the related competence can be described as a four-step process:

1. unconscious incompetence – we misinterpret others' communication behavior but are not aware of it;

2. conscious incompetence – we are aware that we misinterpret others' communication behavior but choose not to do anything to change;

3. conscious competence – we are aware of what we think about communication behavior and modify our behavior to make the communications more effective - we become mindful of our communication behaviors; and

4. unconscious competence – we have practiced the skills of effective communication and it becomes second nature to us.

Cultural Considerations in Communications
Low and High Context Cultures

Some cultures are low context and some are high. This refers to the communication process. A high-context communication process is where most of the information being communicated is in the physical context or in the person and not in the message. A low-context communication process is where the information being conveyed is in the communications – clear and direct. The United States is a low-context culture, where communications are direct and complete. They have sayings such as "get to the point" or "say what you mean" that clearly demonstrate the low-context. On the other hand, Japan, China and Korea are high-context cultures where people make a greater distinction between insiders and outsiders and where the individual communicating expects the hearer to know what is bothering him without being specific. There are advantages to high context cultures in that people raised in high-context systems expect more of others than do the participants in low-context systems. For low-context communicators, they want things clear and out on the table, and they get annoyed by communications done in an indirect fashion. The point here is that it is important to understand the form of communications that predominates in a culture in order to correctly interpret and understand the behavior of those with whom we are communicating.

Monochronic and Polychronic Cultures

A monochromic culture is one where people have involvement in one event at a time. A polychronic culture is one where people are involved in two or more events at the same time. In extremely monochronic cultures, people focus on a single task or project and see anything outside of the task or project as an interruption. Conversely, in more polychronic cultures, people have involvement in several activities, moving back and forth between them easily. In a polychronic culture, an unexpected customer dropping in would be considered part of the normal flow of tasks and not considered an interruption. In Arab nations, it is common for a leader to have several people in his office discussing and working on separate and unrelated tasks. For monochronic Americans, they have their agendas and work through each item, one at a time. It would be a large distraction to be in an office where they have business to discuss with someone and there are five other people transacting different business, and all happening at the same time. Again, the point here is that it is important to understand the predominate mode of operation in the culture in order to correctly interpret and understand the behavior of those with whom we are communicating, so we can adjust ourselves.

Take advantage of different cultures because if you do that, you would have a competitive edge.

I am reminded of a manufacturing company in Bangalore India who is in partnership with a design company in Portland Oregon, USA. There was a specific technical problem that was preventing the manufacturing line from flowing smoothly. Because of the issue, they lost a bunch of cash. During a

brainstorming session together, from the American team came the comment that they didn't understand why the Indian team didn't want to focus on how much they had done well together. The Indian team expressed severe disappointment that the American squad was simply unable to comprehend how the connection worked and how essential it was to this procedure.

Nothing worked well together from the Indian point of perspective. No connection existed. The issue was to be solved all the Americans intended to do. It's not constructing a connection. From the American point of view, they saw all the money flying out of the door for every hour that they sat in meetings. So, why not fix the problem now and then worry about relationship later?

Building relationships is important. If you wish to collaborate or gain a customer, you need to build relationships.

Strategies to Success:
1. LEARN: Learn about yourself
The development of social agility begins with knowledge of where you are. Without getting a powerful understanding of your own lenses through which, you see the universe, building a bridge to those less like you demonstrates to be hard.

Learn about your family
Culture is the behavior observed, broadly speaking, by a group of people sharing a set of values. The household is one of the organizations that we often fail to glance at when it goes to our moral code. Have you ever regarded auditing the standards and traditions of your community?
Were there certain subjects at the meal table that everyone realized would never be discussed? Have your relatives expected you to be a pupil or a part of your community? Many of the positions we slide into and attitudes we display arise from our nearest colleagues and our family's first individuals of power. We were instructed what was deemed correct and incorrect and what was deemed great and evil.

Learn about your country
When requested to define our home nation's culture, many of us face trouble. We only understand what it implies to be, for instance, French, U.S. American, or Nigerian when we step out of our renowned stomping grounds. Confrontations, disputes or frustrations overseas or when operating with peers from a distinct domestic context clearly draw a vivid image of the statement "There is more than one route to achieve your objectives." To create personal agility in our strategies, it may be useful to know more about the culture of our own country to a) understand the impact it has had on your fashion and b) articulate why you are doing so.

Learn about your company and learning institution
Wherever you have been trained (and how you have been trained), your society can be influenced and how you interact with them. It also affects your manner of working, training, and managing. Just as you spend a moment to observe your nation, your friends, and yourself, glance at your business as well for how it affected you and your own cross-cultural trends.

2. EXPLORE
It is not possible to unconsciously acquire social and cultural agility and understanding about other societies and the individuals residing in them. We need to constantly search for fresh data and integrate trends and habits into our thinking. A job that is daunting but enriching.

Read
Reading is a wonderful place to begin as you try to acquire more social knowledge about your digital peers, your fresh nation of home, or just other individuals.

• Read stories from overseas media outlets (e.g. overseas journals with an English-language segment such as Sueddeutsche, Al-Jazeera, Politikken, blogs, online magazines (e.g. Huffington Post) to look at what's going on in the globe differently.

• Read books or other fictional literature bits that portray the culture in place at distinct times, or for distinct subcultures. Some examples, by country, are Tim Winton for Australia's Cloud Street; Wild Swans, Jung Chang's Three Daughters of China for China; Marianne Fredriksson's Simone and the Oaks for Sweden; and Kathryn Stockett's Help for the USA.

• Read cross-cultural leadership papers from Harvard Business Review on best practices in the workforce, such as "How to Build Trust on Your Cross-Cultural Team."

• Use the Globe Smart R internet software to match your private data with the picture of your country. Where are you comparable and where are you different from average?

• Join a network or partnership to introduce you to a fresh culture or subculture. Immerse yourself in a fresh setting by entering a fresh group and earning fresh mates.

• Take a step. Take a more effective role if you are already part of an organization and abandon the comfort zone of being a faceless participant. Leave your convenience area and become the secretary, arrange the fresh parliament, run the financing commission.

• Take a lesson. In discovering a school that can introduce you to a fresh culture, let your fantasy flow insane. Think about Vietnamese baking courses, Japanese origami, Swahili linguistic courses or bachata music courses to mention a few!

• Inscribe and communicate with the worldwide society in an online learning session. Whether it's a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) on a subject you need for the job (e.g. project leadership, educational layout) or a subject you're interested in (e.g. aerospace, sociology, advertising), there's a class for everyone. The amount of commitment is quite big and the active search for teaching associates relies on you. Some locations to search are Coursera, LinkedIn's Lynda, iVersity, Khan Academy, HBX, and/or EdX.

3. REFLECT AND CHANGE
Building the ability to function with individuals around the globe effectively and effectively is a trip. It needs patience and the capacity to address the ambiguity. Cultural agility needs us to understand that only one manner to see the universe is what we understand and have been learned. Reflecting what we have experienced and obtained during this trip is essential to retaining and strengthening understanding, abilities, and views. You will most probably favor one over the other depending on your character and work style:

Journal
Keep a notebook or digital note-keeping tool (such as Evernote) and develop a practice of reflecting on your interactions as you know about yourself and other societies as you study them.
Some individuals consider it useful to create a moment to write down three brief texts each night that they want to think about their knowledge of teaching. Others use video recordings to carry out their ideas while traveling. Find what operates for you and maintain a record of thoughts stable. Review them once a year (or twice a year if you're anxious) to see the evolution you've experienced.

Work with a mentor/coach
If you need a responsible spouse or someone to move you forward, then it is a good idea to reflect with the assistance of a mentor or coach to create a powerful basis for social agility. Look for a mentor or coach who does not discuss your history in the phase of becoming a (prospective) uniquely flexible leader to define your blind spots.
Crossing languages can generate a range of tremendous difficulties for people and organizations; for national and global multicultural managers; for leaders of multinational entities; and for professionals in foreign tasks. This is because there are distinct norms, principles, and methods of doing stuff for people and organizations in distinct social settings.
Finally, the challenge of cross-cultural leadership is getting even more crucial. That's why you have to use these customized tools to work with. However, those tools need to be put into practice and understood. We are still dealing with people and there is much sensitivity. It is important to understand this, otherwise the toolboxes won't work either.
I hope that more organizations start to understand the importance of reconciling the different cultures within and outside the organization and the impact it has to the success of the organization. Cross-cultural management training tends to be pushed aside and I hope more people know that they should stop pushing it to the back burner. A company's success depends on their people. The more motivated they are to come to work and perform, the higher the success rate.

About the Author
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