



The Real World Culture Clash

We live in a multicultural world where globalization is much more than a buzzword. Understanding cross-cultural communication has become a necessity for conducting business. Although many people view the challenge as being external to their business, for many companies, the true challenge is dealing with the cultural clashes within.

We were aware that any time people operate multiple locations or divisions, they are subject to a potential culture clash. But in preparing to help a build a team within a multinational client, we realized this can apply to much smaller organizations, even those operating locations across the street from each other.

As you review the list that follows, think of these elements as being on a continuum of sorts. Where would you place the various departments of your organization and the personalities that run them?

Waits for relationships to mature vs is proactive and tolerates higher risks. How do people mentally approach new situations and people?

Deferential vs highly assertive. How do people tend to operate when they disagree with authority figures?

Hierarchical vs self-directed work teams. How are decisions usually made and implemented?

Punctual to the second vs we will get there when we get there. How do people approach the notion of being on time?

Always looking to help others save face vs engages in direct, frank communication. How do people speak with each other and treat the other's ego?

Avoids confrontation vs believes that confrontation is expected and okay. What is their tolerance for, and appreciation of, confrontation as a tactic to get things done?

Never wants uncertainty if it can be avoided vs thrives on the unknown and the thrill of the hunt. How comfortable are people with the notion of uncertainty?

High reliance on the team's instincts and resources vs high reliance on individual efforts. How do people initially expect any challenge to be overcome?

Growing revenues vs controlling costs. Is there a default operating style and mantra when faced with a challenge?

Do it right the first time vs we will have time to do it over. What is the most common answer when push comes to shove?

Maintaining unwavering quality standards for our customers vs maintaining the production schedule or timeline. Which outcome do people believe is usually rewarded with the biggest bonus or promotion?

Operating with a process vs operating by seat of the pants. Is planning, thoroughness, and professionalism rewarded or just barely tolerated?

Watching functional metrics vs watching business metrics. Does each area operate as a fiefdom with numbers that trump the enterprise's numbers in importance?

As you are mentally assigning people and areas to the descriptors above, think about

how quickly misalignment and disagreement about what is "right" can negatively impact an organization's ability to function at a high level.

In a large organization, the same production department in two different locations can be operating as though they are distinct corporate entities with very different cultures. How many unnecessary battles will have to be waged by other departments just to get things done? What is the magnitude of the hard and soft costs being absorbed there?

When each department operates to suit its desired style, hiring and grooming someone who will succeed at the company over the long term can be challenging. As people change functions or get promoted, the characteristics they were praised for by their previous manager can get them criticized in their new role.

This can lead to people being gun-shy about taking on new internal assignments for fear of committing self-imposed political suicide. They may see it as more desirable to leave your organization, in which case all the training dollars invested in them may end up helping your competition.

Rather than leaving organizational culture development to chance, why not manage it like any other resource?

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