

Cultural differences between the u s and mexican cultures business essay



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In 2006, the Mexican foreign-born made up almost 5% of the total civilian labor force in the United States. The American business owner, manager, or supervisor today must take into consideration that the work force is diverse, and the people in the workforce often times have different cultural values and motives which influence their work ethic. To maximize employee morale and efficiency, it is important to understand these differences and incorporate them into the rules of the workplace. This paper will relate the differences in cultural values in Mexico to try to understand how to best run a company in the United States that has a high percentage of Mexican workers, and also work effectively with Mexican business counterparts. .

Even though Mexico and the United States share a common border, the cultural differences between the two are significant. Mexico has a very different history than the US, and thus different ways of doing and looking at things. The phrase “ The American lives to work, and the Mexican works to live”, illustrates one of the many ways that the work ethic varies between the American worker and the Mexican worker. In Mexico, for example, leisure is considered essential for a full life. Does this mean that a Mexican is lazy? Absolutely not - but unlike the stereotypical American worker that tends to put work before “ play”, the Mexican worker takes leisure and spending time with family very seriously. Their sense of “ immediacy” is not the same as the one the American adheres to. Understanding the differences in employee motivation, rewards, and sanctions between the two cultures is imperative if a business, whether in Mexico or in the USA, is to be efficient. The Mexican worker’s outlook stems from their upbringing, which is formed as well by their laws.

Mexican Culture

This is an excerpt from the book “ Mexico: The Trick is Living Here” by Julia Taylor (2008), who is originally from the United States and now lives and works in Mexico with her husband:

My coworkers began to give me stony-faced looks and say less and less to me. I've been in Mexico long enough to recognize this as a sign of trouble. No one was short with me. No one confronted me. No one disguised a comment about my behavior as a joke. No one took me aside to ask what was the matter. They just got really quiet. Don't expect Mexicans to tell you that they have a problem. They won't.

This demonstrates one of the significant differences in Mexican work culture and the culture that we are used to in the United States - the power differential. Mexico is a country that has a high power differential; that is, workers are, in general, more tightly knit and usually take direction from a strong leader/supervisor. Employee participation in decision-making is not encouraged, and it is not considered to be appropriate for workers to voice an opinion with their supervisor or manager. (Earley & Erez, 1997).

To try to quantify exactly how values in the workplace are influenced by culture, in order to help make sense of these differences, Professor Geert Hofstede conducted a comprehensive study using a large database of employee values collected between 1967 and 1973 covering more than 70 countries. From his initial results and his later additions, Hofstede developed a model that helps identify four primary dimensions that assist in differentiating cultures:

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Power Distance (PDI): the extent to which the less powerful members of an organization (the laborers) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally between them and their supervisors.

Individualism (IDV): Versus its opposite, collectivism. The degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. Cultures with high individualism have loose ties between individuals; everyone is expected to look after him/herself. Cultures with low individualism are usually raised in a culture that embraces strong, cohesive groups and unquestioning loyalty to one-another.

Masculinity (MAS): the degree to which society values assertiveness, performance, ambition, achievement, and material possessions. A masculine society generally is very competitive and assertive, whereas a society that has a higher femininity dimension tends to be more caring and modest.

Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI): The UAI dimension refers to a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. It indicates to what extent the member of a culture feel comfortable or uncomfortable in unstructured situations and when facing change. Cultures with a high UAI index try to minimize the possibility of uncertainty by enacting strict laws and rules, and tend to be very religious. Cultures with a lower UAI are more accepting of change and variety in the workplace, and generally are more willing to accept opinions that are different than what they are used to. (Itim, 2003)

The following graph is an illustration of the Geert-Hofstede dimensions in Mexico:

From the above graph, we can draw some conclusions. Mexico is a country that has a high power differential (PDI), where workers tend to be more collective than individualistic (low IDV); in other words, they are interdependent upon each other and work well in groups. The Mexican culture is highly masculine (MAS), where men generally hold higher status roles than women in society and government; many women are expected to stay at home to watch the children and take care of the home rather than work. Lastly, the Mexican culture is one that seeks to avoid change (high UAI), (Itim, 2003). Unlike the United States, which is considered to be a “melting pot” of religions and cultures from all over the world, Mexico is rather homogenous. The Mexican people tend to be very religious, mainly Roman Catholic, and strict when it comes to their rules and their daily behavior. (Nicol & Taylor, 2008).

Effect of USA’s Self-Focused Culture on the Workplace

If we take a look at the Geert-Hofstede dimensions for the United States, on the other hand, we can see a strikingly different cultural makeup:

There are only seven countries in the Geert-Hofstede research that have Individualism (IDV) as the highest dimension - and not surprisingly, the United States ranks the highest out of those seven countries. This indicates that the culture of the United States is one that embraces self-reliance and independence. The results comparing the United States and Mexico show minimal differences in Masculinity, but significant differences in all three of the other dimensions:

U. S. Mexico

Power Distance 40 81

Individualism 91 30

Uncertainty Avoidance 46 82

Masculinity 62 69

In contrast to Mexico, the United States ranks relatively low on the Power Distance index, indicating a greater equality and cooperation between levels in society, including government, organizations, and families. The movement toward more female power is generally accepted throughout the USA, which may explain why the USA has a lower-than-average Uncertainty Avoidance index. The low UAI indicates that our society has fewer rules than Mexico, and does not attempt to control all aspects of society. The United States is generally more tolerant of others' ideas, thoughts, and beliefs (Nicol & Taylor, 2008).

The fifth dimension, LTO, or Long-Term Orientation, was a later addition to the original four Hofstede dimensions. The LTO dimension was found by using a questionnaire designed by Chinese scholars that dealt with Virtue regardless of Truth. The questionnaire was conducted in only 23 countries and measured long-term values associated with thrift and perseverance versus shorter-term values such as fulfilling social obligations, respect for tradition, and protecting ones " face". These values tend to be embraced more heavily in far-east Asian countries that have a Confucian heritage, such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan. (Itim, 2003).

Managerial Implications of Cultural Differences in the Workplace

Mexican immigrants in America are here to follow a dream, and they can be extremely loyal and hardworking if they are made to feel comfortable and appreciated in their work environment. A U. S. business owner, worker, or manager that is negotiating in an environment with Mexican employees must take into consideration how values differ between cultures and the way that these values influence the way a Mexican employee thinks and reacts.

It is very easy to forget that the way someone else acts in a given situation is based on their cultural upbringing, which in the case of the Mexican worker versus the American worker can create misunderstandings that undermine how an effective company is run, and how negotiations are performed. For example, an American that is negotiating with a Mexican counterpart might not understand why he or she avoids direct eye contact during the conversation. To most Americans this is a sign of disrespect; however when we look at the Geert Hofstede scales we begin to realize that for the interviewee it is not disrespectful at all – quite the opposite, actually. In Mexico, lower-class worker's are culturally “ trained” not to make direct eye contact with a person in an authoritative position, because of the high power differential that exists in the Mexican culture (although this eventually diminishes once a relationship of trust is established between the two sides). An American business owner must take care in how they acknowledge and work with their Mexican counterparts in a way that will be the most effective in creating a harmonious workplace. (Schuler, R., Jackson, S., Jackofsky, E., & Slocum, J., 1996).

Abraham Maslow, in his 1943 work entitled *A Theory of Human Motivation*, introduced the concept of a hierarchy of needs (ePyschology. us, n. d.). This hierarchy of needs is illustrated as a pyramid consisting of five levels, each representing the different needs that all humans have regardless of national origin: physiological, safety, social, esteem, and self-actualization needs:

The pyramid is built upon physiological needs, which are the most innate needs of all human beings and must be met before the next level, safety needs, can be met. This is important for someone who works in a multicultural environment to understand because knowing which needs someone must have satisfied can help in negotiations as well as working with that culture. As mentioned earlier, the Mexican culture has a high uncertainty avoidance, which means that security of employment, resources, and family are extremely important to keep stable if a Mexican employee is to feel a sense of satisfaction in their job.

A need is a force that motivates an individual to act in a certain way.

Everyone has needs; however, societal values interact with and influence how individuals choose to satisfy their needs. Furthermore, understanding that cultural values determine how each need is met will help the worker to avoid cultural misunderstandings and participate in a work environment that is fulfilling for all employees (Mendenhall, Punnett, & Ricks, 1995).

Throughout most Mexican organizations, formal rules and regulations are generally not adhered to unless there is a direct manager or supervisor present that the workers trust and respect. The manager's ability to create this respect is of utmost importance in motivating and directing their

subordinates; however, due to the high power distance found in Mexican culture, it is generally thought to be unnecessary to involve workers in decision making. Additionally, a manager should rarely explain “ why” something is to be done when assigning tasks, as this could be indicative of weakness or a lower power distance (Schuler et al., 1996).

In the United States, time is a literal concept. Americans love to make deadlines and commitments, and generally feel obligated to meet them. Americans are taught in school that it is important to plan for the future, and that those activities that do not contribute toward the future are not a worthwhile use of time. This is not true, however, in Mexico, where time is relative. Deadlines are actually much more flexible in Mexico, as the culture values the present time more than the future. This characteristic of Mexican culture is perhaps one of the most difficult for Americans who move to Mexico to adapt to (Taylor, 2008). Although Mañana literally means “ tomorrow” in Spanish, it is common for a Mexican to use the term with a much looser meaning of “ not today”. This sense of “ now” in Mexican culture is important for supervisors to acknowledge because it affects how rewards and acknowledgements are handled. A Mexican employee would much rather receive compensation as soon as possible for work completed, rather than waiting for their next paycheck. Because of this, a daily incentive program as well as a monthly incentive program for meeting production expectations or sales can be used to motivate Mexican employees. (Schuler et al., 1996).

Power in companies is very hierarchical in Mexico and is based on trust

between workers and supervisors. Employees below the manager and <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-differences-between-the-u-s-and-mexican-cultures-business-essay/>

supervisor have very little authority in decision-making, and generally will do their best to complete whatever task they are given. However, it is important for a manager to show a true personal interest and respect for each employee if he or she expects the employee to perform their best - employees look up to someone who treats them in a dignified way yet maintain a professional distance.

Conclusion

The management process is often described as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling (Mendenhall, Punnett, & Ricks, 1995). Although these activities occur in some form within all businesses, the process may differ depending on the environment; in particular, cultural values within a society can influence how a company is most effectively run.

A manager in a U. S. company that works with employees from Mexico can use Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in order to familiarize themselves with the needs of all employees regardless of nationality. In order for an employee to perform at his or her best, for example, he or she must have basic physiological and safety needs met - in Mexico in particular, part of the responsibility of an employer is to make sure that an employee has their physiological needs met such as housing, medical care, and security of employment (i. e. strict termination of employment laws in Mexico). A job in Mexico is more than just a " paycheck" - it is a mutual social obligation between employer and employee.

The Geert Hofstede dimensions are also an indispensable tool for managers in multicultural environments. The Hofstede dimensions can help managers

adapt their thinking and organizational planning in order to maximize the efficiency of the work team. Mexico has a group-focused culture with a high power distance index and a high uncertainty avoidance index. A manager of a U. S. firm with a large number of Mexican employees should therefore implement the following into their management style to achieve the best results:

Encouraging employees to share responsibility for group performance and establishing group incentives and rewards for achieving goals. Due to the Mexican employees' relative view of time, deadlines should be set but with some kind of immediate incentive to get work done by a specific date or time that does not create competition between individual employees.

Planning and decision making should be done at the " top", with employees having little input. At the same time, managers must be sure that employees feel satisfied and secure at work. This can be done by ensuring that employees have a way to make their concerns known to management. Long term plans should be kept within upper management levels and should not be shared with lower level employees.

Employers should create a work schedule that is relatively fixed, rather than having employees on a rotating schedule or one that changes weekly.

Avoiding frequent changes in the work schedule and not forcing employees to work with different co-workers every day or week will help create a sense of stability in the workplace.

Most importantly, and especially when subordinates do not speak much

English, a supervisor should make an effort to learn at least some basic
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Spanish. This will help employees feel less “ out of place” and will help to foster the trust between supervisor and subordinate that is so important in Mexican culture.

International Business is a growing reality today. Especially in the United States with so many different nationalities working together, managers will most likely at some point in their careers have employees from Mexico on their work team. By implementing the above items into their management and business style, and understanding the Mexican culture and its affect on behavior and needs, a manager or supervisor in a U. S. company that oversees Mexican subordinates will be able to fully enjoy the benefits of a hardworking, loyal, and dependable team.