Crosscultural issues in hr assignment

Cos outsourcing cross-culture grooming for staff For HR managers in the knowledge driven technology sector, managing a young workforce and training them on cross culture issues, has emerged as a strategic differentiator. Increasingly, for Indian companies, which are serving a diverse set of enterprises, spread across different geographies, grooming their staff on some simple and, yet, tricky culture issues, is getting increasingly institutionalised or becoming an expert outsourced option.

Dr Zareen Karani Araoz, President, Managing Across Cultures, an expert agency offering services in cross culture issues, said, " For an employee who repeatedly takes a conference call from US at 3 a. m. regularly is a major problem area, but he finds it difficult to articulate this to his client or his counterpart in the US, due to fear. In an institutionalised environment, it is easy to learn to be frank, where saying " No" is often appreciated rather than saying " Yes' and failing to deliver on the promise. Speaking at an interactive meeting hosted by the Nasscom here today, Dr Araoz said, " In India, there is this tendency to adopt, which is good. But little do they realise that it is also good to say no in many cases and do what is expected of you rather than promise something that is impossible. When the work is half done, it is seen as a failure. " Often being frank and honest helps rather than promising and not delivering. Typically, in the US, if a person were to be handed out 10 tasks, he would be frank enough and admit that he will be able to handle five and deliver them all.

But in India, there is this tendency to work hard and take all the 10 tasks and end up working hard and completing eight of them. Yet such as person is seen as a failure. It is in such simple issues, training helps. " Our experience

with most of the outsourcing jobs to India shows that we excel in accuracy. This is the case with most of the auditing jobs too. But if we don't take culture issues seriously, this could jeopardise otherwise an excellent work. This calls for trained people to guide," she explained. The challenge is to facilitate employees better manage expectations and cut down on mutual disconnect.

THE CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES IN HRD Cultures are like icebergs; some features are apparent to anyone not in a fog, while others are deeply hidden. Above-the-surface features include overt behaviors: how people – dress eat walk talk relate to one another conduct themselves during public ceremonies such as weddings or funerals. Also included are such things as social distance. Other aspects are so far below the surface that they are hard to recognize. We may see evidence of these aspects, but we usually can't pinpoint them precisely and usually don't have a clue where they came from.

They are hard to define even for our own culture because we take them in with our mother's language. This might include such things as: how we encode and retrieve information What is justice? Music? Proper parenting? Beauty or ugliness? What meaning is attached to " teaching" stories? What does being well educated mean? What constitutes status? OTHER ISSUES INCLUDE -DIFFERENT ASSUMPTIONS -USE OF LANGUAGE -INAPPROPRIATE DELIVERY MEDIUM -CULTURAL SPECIFICITY Communication Miscommunication across cultural lines is usually the most important cause of cross-cultural problems in multinational cos..

Miscommunication can have several sources, including: • differences in body language or gestures. The same gesture can have different meanings in different parts of the world. For example, Bulgarians shake their heads up and down to mean no. In addition, the way people count on their fingers is not universal: The Chinese count from one to ten on one hand, and eight is displayed by extending the thumb and the finger next to it. The same gesture is interpreted as meaning two in France and as pointing a gun in North America. different meanings for the same word. Like gestures, words can have different meanings or connotations in different parts of the world. The French word " char" means Army tank in France and car in Quebec. The word " exciting" has different connotations in British English and in North American English. While North American executives talk about " exciting challenges" repeatedly, British executives use this word to describe only children's activities (children do exciting things in England, not executives). • different assumptions made in the same situation.

The same event can be interpreted many different ways depending on where one comes from. For example, although the sight of a black cat is considered a lucky event in Britain, it is considered unlucky in many other countries. Dragons are viewed positively in China, but negatively in Europe and North America. These examples illustrate dissimilarities between cultures that are both large and simple in the sense that they focus on a single cultural aspect that keeps the same meaning regardless of context. As a result, such variations in communication will often be identified on the spot.

By contrast, subtle or complex differences are often identified much later in the communication process, when corrective action requires considerable

effort and money. Sometimes, this realization takes place so late that there is not enough time to address it, resulting in a missed deadline. In extreme cases, miscommunication can lead to casualties. For example, a few years ago, a plane crash in the northeastern United States was caused–at least in part–by miscommunication between the pilot and air traffic controller. The plane was running short on fuel.

But somehow the pilot did not manage to communicate the urgency of the situation to the air traffic controller, who put the plane on a holding pattern because of airport congestion. The plane then crashed when it ran out of fuel. Approaches to Problem Solving The approaches used by engineers of different cultural backgrounds to tackle the same technical problem are likely to differ widely. The type of approach used to solve engineering problems is often a reflection of what is emphasized in educational curricula leading to engineering degrees in various countries.

In France and Greece, for example, engineers tend to emphasize theoretical or mathematical approaches over experimental or numerical ones. Other countries, such as Canada and the United States, tend to favor experimental or numerical approaches. Although there is no absolute " right way" to approach technical problems, issues are likely to arise when engineers with different inclinations work together to solve them. On a practical basis, the approaches used by engineers in different countries can also depend on the types of resources available.

For example, high labour costs and the availability of skilled workers make process automation and the use of heavy equipment valuable in developed

countries, while using large numbers of unskilled workers may be a preferred approach in some developing countries. Cross-cultural Differences & Engineering Firms Cross-cultural issues also arise at the organizational level, because companies in different countries organize their daily business differently. Some of the most noticeable differences include the: • relative hierarchy of departments.

The relative power of the various departments within a corporation is often a function of the country where the corporation has its headquarters. For example, the manufacturing departments of German-based companies have influence over their marketing and sales counterparts that many Canadian and American manufacturing departments can only dream of. German manufacturing departments are often able to limit the number of products offered to a few options, thereby optimizing production and improving the quality of the products offered.

By contrast, Canadian and American manufacturing departments tend to follow the lead of marketing and sales departments, which tend to favour a larger number of product options since this increases the probability of attracting a broader group of customers. These differences in the way products are manufactured and marketed create the need for different approaches to selling products and services. The same type of argument cannot be used to win customers in North America and Germany – whether through sales presentations or general marketing efforts.

While North American customers look for flexibility and response speed in the products and services they purchase, German customers want durability,

reliability, and quality. • way information is shared and distributed. The way information moves within a company varies significantly from country to country. For example, in Germany, the flow of information tends to be fairly compartmentalized. Information flows within departments along hierarchical lines, and does not flow easily within a given hierarchical level or from department to department.

In addition, Germans tend to share information with only those people they believe need to know the information. In Canadian companies, information tends to move within departments and to cross departmental boundaries more freely. It also tends to flow along the lines of communication networks used by individual employees. As a result, when working with German engineers as suppliers, partners or customers, Canadian engineers are likely to receive less information than they would generally expect.

A Canadian engineer supplying products or services to a German company may not receive all of the information he or she believes is necessary to fulfill orders or complete projects on time, resulting in either missed deadlines or incomplete orders. • hiring process. Cross-cultural differences are fairly significant in this area. For example, people interviewed for positions in France will be asked personal questions that are considered illegal in Canada, such as their age, marital status and number of children, while German interviewers routinely ask candidates for the profession of their parents.

More importantly, there are significant differences in the types of skills that companies in different countries look for in candidates. In France, for

example, large corporations expect their engineers to work for them throughout much of their careers. They therefore tend to hire graduate engineers who appear to have long-term potential and create jobs for these engineers. As a result, large French companies tend to emphasize specific technical knowledge less and soft skills more than Canadian ones. HOW TO MANAGE CROSS CULTURAL ISSUES Here are a few tips that will help avoid miscommunication: Clarify: When in doubt, ask; if not, ask anyway. It's important to ensure that your foreign colleagues have understood everything you meant to say and nothing else. Ask them to feed you back what you have told them in their own words. This will help you discover and address any major misunderstandings. • Get into the details: Although it's often tempting to agree on general principles and leave details to further discussions for brevity's sake, this can create major problems at later stages. Indeed, an agreement on general principles may turn out to be empty, if it is not tested through negotiation on the finer details. Summarize: The time taken to summarize the decisions made during a meeting and to issue minutes to all participants is often a good investment. It helps to prevent future challenges of decisions reached at meetings and to ensure that action items agreed to at meetings are actually implemented. • Simplify: Use simple words that are easily understood and be consistent. Using synonyms can confuse your non-Canadian counterparts unnecessarily, particularly if they are not native English speakers. For similar reasons, technical jargon should be avoided where possible and explained clearly when it must be used.

Cross-cultural training organizations can also shorten the learning curve by delivering training to companies in a timely and targeted fashion. The necessary cross-cultural information should be shared with all employees involved in international ventures, rather than being limited to those who have already had experience with them. Cross-cultural training organizations are experts in the area of cross-cultural relationships and can provide training on many topics, including how to: • do business in a given country or region; • make presentations in a given country of region; • select the right people for international assignments; prepare employees for expatriate assignments; and • improve the productivity of multinational teams. *BUILDING A SHARED CULTURE *CONCENSUS AGREEMENT ON IMPORTANT MATTERS *BUILDING AN UNDERSTANDING CLIMATE *IDENTIFY / USE THE RICH POINTS IN EACH CULTURE. *CONCENTRATE ON THE THINGS YOU KNOW. *UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS RELIGIOUS PRACTICES *UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS FOOD PRACTICES *UNDERSTANDING VARIOUS DRESS PRACTICES *SHOWING PATIENCE ALWAYS *SHOWING GOOD MANNER ALWAYS *SHOWING SENSE OF HUMOR ALWAYS *SHOWING TOLERANCE ALWAYS *SHOWING RESPECT ALWAYS Cross-Cultural Awareness

Effective managers can recognize and adapt to different work styles and cultures. Getting work done through others requires a free flow of accurate information and open, productive relationships with employees. But that's easier said than done in a diverse workplace where many cultures collide. Many a manager has been frustrated by the employee who nods in apparent understanding of a direction, then does just the opposite. Or there are the staff members who grow cold and distant after receiving feedback on their

work, as well as the team members who clam up at meetings when asked for suggestions.

But culture is behind our behavior on the job. Often without our realization, culture influences how close we stand, how loud we speak, how we deal with conflict–even how we participate in a meeting. While many cultural norms influence a manager's behavior and subsequent reactions, five particularly important ones are hierarchy and status, groups vs. individual orientation, time consciousness, communication and conflict resolution. By failing to understand how culture impacts individual needs and preferences, managers often misinterpret behaviors. Nurturing a Safe, Inclusive Climate

When we ask people to describe a desirable work climate, we tend to hear very similar answers–regardless of geography or industry. Responses include words such as " high trust," " collaborative," " accountable," " feeling connected," " effective problem solving" and " feeling valued. " But trying to create a climate in which complex work groups feel the same way about these matters is not easy. Consider the norm of hierarchy and status. If you want all people to feel valued and to participate in problem solving or decision making, differences in this norm could be inhibiting.

An employee who has been taught deference to age, gender or title, might–out of respect–shy away from being honest or offering ideas because offering suggestions to an elder or a boss might appear to be challenging authority. The manager also may need to structure a climate that balances preferences for group and individual work. The employee who can't or won't subordinate individual needs or desires for the good of the group may perform better

working alone. A culturally competent manager will create opportunities for individuals to take some risks and explore projects that don't require coordinating with others.

Doing so can encourage employees with a strong individualist bent to draw attention to important matters, such as policies or procedures that don't work. On the other hand, when managers place too high a premium on avoiding workplace discord, even individualistic employees may be discouraged from providing potentially constructive feedback. Time-conscious managers may see people whose cultures take a more relaxed view toward deadlines as being less committed to team goals, as well as less dependable, accountable and reliable. Or, consider the employee who nods " yes" but doesn't mean it.

Both individuals are not only operating according to their own rules of communication, but they also are interpreting each other's behavior through that lens. If you are a direct communicator, you probably expect a " tell it like it is," response from the employee. But the employee may be an indirect communicator who expects you to read the contextual clues to understand his response. His cultural background might require you to pick up on nonverbal cues to understand that his nodding and affirmative response is a polite, face-saving gesture, not an indication of agreement or understanding.

What happens with the team that clams up? Your egalitarian approach and individualistic orientation expects teamwork between manager and employees; you expect people to think and speak for themselves. But for staff members with a more hierarchical and group orientation, taking the

initiative to make suggestions to an authority figure would be awkward for all involved. They may expect you as the manager to demonstrate your leadership by making decisions and giving directions. Recognizing the Role of Culture So what can you do?

First, recognize the role culture plays in interactions and try to identify the critical elements of the cultures involved. What are your preferences and expectations, and what are the norms and preferences of your employee? Second, don't interpret their behavior through your cultural background. Most employees don't intend to be deceptive, difficult or unproductive; they are simply adhering to their cultural programming. However, to get the information and effective communication you need, you have to find alternative approaches that are more in line with the employee's culture.

Here are some suggestions: * Avoid yes/no questions such as " Is that clear? " or " Do you understand? " Give the employee options from which to choose. Ask for specific information, such as " Which step will you do first with this new procedure? " * If time allows, perform the task along with the employee or watch to see how well he understands your directions. Try using passive language that focuses on the situation or behavior, rather than the individual. For example, " Galls must be answered by the third ring" or " All requests need accurate charge codes in order to be processed. * Give employees enough lead time to collect their thoughts before a meeting so they can feel prepared to bring input. * Have employees work in small groups, generating ideas through discussion and presenting input as a group. Developing Employees One of the most important functions of a manager is developing and grooming employees for promotion. Cross-

cultural norms have a huge impact on this job because of the underlying assumptions a manager might make about an employee's potential. To determine promotion potential, managers consider such questions as: How is initiative demonstrated? What behaviors show commitment?

How much is high potential determined by accomplishing the task and how much is determined by good interpersonal skills? How do employees get to use and showcase their unique talents? In answering these questions, a manager aware of the influence of hierarchy, time consciousness, communication and group orientation will make fewer assumptions about the motivations and drive of certain employees. Initiative won't necessarily be defined as acting without waiting for directions but seen perhaps through the lens of a good team member who kept the group moving, made some contribution and helped preserve harmony in the face of expected differences.

Commitment may not be defined in terms of meeting deadlines but also as encouraging further exploration of an issue, and thus more creative or flexible in striving to get a best outcome. Perhaps an employee will never openly challenge ideas at a meeting but instead will offer back-door suggestions that can influence the direction of a project. A manager who is aware of different cultural norms is less likely to incorrectly interpret behaviors and prescribe ineffective courses of action when developing people.

Toward this end, here are some suggestions for managers to consider: * Teach employees to interpret the culture of the organization by pointing out

factors such as how people dress, recreational patterns and the formality or informality of communication. Employees can make effective choices when they clearly understand the informal rules of the organizational culture. * Help employees understand the difference between deadlines that are non-negotiable and those that are more elastic. Get an accurate sense of the person's planning and organizational skills.

Then, set clear expectations that help the employee perform better and build in follow-up sessions. * Coach employees who are uncomfortable acknowledging their own individual work to talk about accomplishments through work group performance. As employees try to move up, the need to sell oneself in an unassuming way as part of a work group is a comfortable way to show one's part in a group's accomplishment. Focus on relationship building. An employee can learn that giving a manager feedback is an act of loyalty and help. But this is a paradigm shift that requires rapport, safety and trust. Conflict: Dealing with Differences

Conflict is difficult to manage for most of us, and it becomes more so when employees and managers have different rules about how to handle it. Along with conflicts about schedules, work projects or assignments, differences in approach can spark conflicts. Some employees will prefer direct discussion of differences. Others will find this approach upsetting and disruptive to smooth work relationships. In addition, differences in attitudes toward status may influence how people deal with conflict. Begin the awareness process by helping employees recognize these differences and share their preferences with one another.

This proactive approach helps avoid unnecessary rubs by building a common base of understanding about the best ways to deal with each other. Beyond understanding, taking specific steps to resolve conflict in culturally appropriate ways is critical. Here are some suggestions: * Hold team development sessions where employees can learn more about their own and each other's conflict styles and preferences. * In one-on-one sessions, help employees understand cultural differences that may underlie the conflicts they are experiencing. * Consider using a third-party intermediary to help resolve conflict in a face-saving manner. Create a norm that says conflict is a normal part of any workplace and that resolving it requires give and take on all sides. * Work to create solution strategies that meet both your objectives and those of your employee. Lee Gardenswartz " Cross-Cultural Awareness". HR Magazine. . FindArticles. com. 24 Sep. 2008. http://findarticles. com/p/articles/mi_m3495/is_3_46/ai_71969378 Cross-cultural issues: The same, only different As globalisation continues apace, the need to know more about other cultures is growing – which is where training and learning and development come in handy.

The world may – communication-wise – have become a smaller place, and operating in a global economy is a way of life for many. But, says Richard Lewis, founder of language and cross-cultural training company Richard Lewis Communications, this has not led to a homogenisation of cultures where there is now one universal way of seeing the world. In fact, the very opposite is happening. He says: " As the world gets flatter, culture gets to be a bigger issue. Travel, technology, cross-border mergers and acquisitions, political changes, media advances, global brands and offshoring all bring us

closer together. But change is stressful, and this makes us cling even more tightly to the ways of doing things we acquired first. " And as more organisations globalise, or hit cultural barriers when entering a new geographical market, so more companies are adopting cross-cultural training, he says. Lewis says there are many different circumstances where cross-cultural training is used. Ensuring multicultural teams work together better preparing people who are off to work and live abroad helping leaders to get messages across to a global workforce and recruiting and retaining the best foreign workers are just some areas he mentions.

Lewis, whose company delivers training both on clients' sites or as a residential course at it headquarters in Winchester, has developed a cross-cultural competence assessment that allows users to compare their cultural profile with up to 80 different cultures and pinpoint the areas in which their own communication style differs. Lewis says he has seen an increase in UK companies wanting to understand how Indian and Chinese business people work, while there also continues to be a demand from firms wanting to learn how to conduct themselves when dealing with their US, German and Japanese counterparts.

Leadership development But when it comes to business, a person's culture is not just defined by the country they come from, argues Inger Buus, managing director at the UK office of people development consultancy Mannaz, who says cross-cultural learning is included in the company's leadership development programmes. She believes that, in some instances, a company culture is stronger than national identity, and that cultural divides also exist between different internal functions, such as the sales, IT and

finance teams. " If you look at companies such at Citigroup, IBM and Unilever – they have very strong cultures.

They come from different backgrounds, and have different values and management styles," she says. The understanding of these disparities is fundamental to a good working relationship with partners, ensuring the success of a merger or acquisition, or in enabling change management, she adds. Buus says Mannaz consultants use the model on corporate culture developed by US organisational psychologist Edgar Schein, who identified three distinct levels in organisational cultures: artifacts and behaviours, espoused values and assumptions.

She says: " Artifacts are the visible signs of a company culture – for example, the dress code and mission statements on the wall. Espoused values are a company's plans and strategies and assumptions are ' how we do things around here'. " Better equipped Other examples of cross-cultural training include a recent initiative called Welcome Exchange, where firefighters and members of the police force in Lancashire have been tutored in Polish culture, so they are better equipped to deal with the new influx of migrants from Eastern Europe.

Meanwhile, cross-cultural consultancy Communicaid recently designed a programme for university tutors so they can work better with international students (see case study). At crisis avoidance consultancy The Anvil Group, managing director Matthew Judge says his company comes at cross-cultural awareness from a safety angle. The firm works primarily with companies from the banking, oil and mining sector, whose people are often travelling to

potentially dangerous regions of the world such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa.

Hiding tattoos, being aware of how to behave during religious holidays, how to sit and place your knife and fork and knowing what scams are commonly practised in different countries can all help when visiting these territories. " By not making a cultural faux pas of this kind, workers travelling to hostile parts of the world are less likely to cause offence and to make themselves a target," says Judge. Case study: University of Bedfordshire With more than 3, 000 international students from 130 different countries, the University of Bedfordshire has a reputation for attracting students from minority backgrounds.

According to its equality and diversity officer Shirani Gunawardena, as a cultural melting pot the university is continually developing its strategies in enabling " staff and students to communicate effectively with each other. " Last year, it approached consultancy Communicaid to design a programme specifically for higher education professionals dealing with international students. The programme created centred upon raising awareness of the sensitivity surrounding different cultural backgrounds and increasing the understanding of different behaviours and attitudes.

The training introduced delegates to some of the key cultural differences and offered practical tips and strategies for working with international students. Experienced trainers then took interactive sessions, where delegates were able to practice the new techniques they had learnt. " The programme was perfectly aligned with our objective of raising delegates' awareness of the

degree and depth of cultural diversity, and its impact on relations with

international students," adds Gunawardena.