

BUSINESS *Monday*

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Cross-cultural management: must tool in globalization

THE INFAMOUS PHILIPINO TIME. GERMANS setting up a meeting at exactly 6:02 pm. The American way of working smart versus the Japanese philosophy of working hard. These are just some of the perfectly illustrated diversities in cultural behavior in the workplace.



If you are in a global business involving people of different cultures and races, a lot of deeply ingrained cultural behavior has to be valued, and chances are that clashes may occur any time a difference in a learned business practice surfaces in a foreign business organization.

With the rise of BPOs and the impact of globalization, De La Salle University Professional Schools, Inc.-Graduate School of Business (DLS PSI-GSB) recently mounted a significant lecture series citing the importance of understanding cultural backgrounds in doing business with the rest of the world.

Dr. Glenn Miyataki, Ph.D., president of the Japan-America Institute of Management Science (JAIMS) in Honolulu, Hawaii, in his lecture series entitled "Cross-Cultural Management: Trends and Issues in Business Practices" states that to be more competitive on a global scale, organizations should pay attention to cultural attitudes and behavior and be more entrepreneurial in nature.

"Business persons need to develop and understand cultural sensitivity in doing business within their companies and in other countries. For instance, in Japan and in India, relationships come first and then the deal, but in Germany and the U.S., the deal comes first before any relationships are built," Dr. Miyataki said on what companies must consider in doing business overseas and in dealing with multi-cultural business partners.

Non-verbal communication

Dr. Miyataki, who is primarily responsible for policy development and implementation of academic programs and activities in inter-cultural management education at JAIMS, says managers need to learn how to communicate with different cultures and to understand behavior in a multi-cultural workplace. It is not enough to hear what is said or to use an interpreter for translation in business dealings. It is equally important to understand non-verbal communication.

Managers who are working overseas to supervise foreign personnel must also understand how behavior varies in the workplace. In the U.S. for example, American workers focus on individualism and self-identity. Americans seem to be more committed to themselves, while in India and the Philippines, there is a focus on collectivism wherein employees gain identity through group membership.

"Workplace behavior, relationships between the manager and employees, the need for structure and security, career life goals for different cultures, and even philosophies for ethical decision making must be taken into full consideration in multi-cultural business practices," Dr. Miyataki stressed.

Without following these simple guidelines, the perils of cross-cultural communications will contribute greatly in stampeding a global company's objectives for business growth. Parochialism, ethnocentrism, and stereotyping are the most common mishaps in cross-cultural management.

“Parochialism is when you only see things through your eyes without regard to the opinions of foreign co-workers. Ethnocentrism is when you believe that your culture is superior to others, and stereotyping is when you treat an employee as a stereotype even if he is not,” Dr. Miyataki explained.

To prevent these perils, Dr. Miyataki recommends that companies should conduct cultural diversity training, including how to read cultures, communications, work behavior, and ethics. Companies must define clearly their global domain and the kind of business professionals they wish to develop. Professionals must also have the prototype or model for change in a culturally diverse workplace and the will to implement these changes.

Looking at behavior

“Cross-cultural management boils down to looking at behavior, and the basis of your behavior is the culture where you were raised. To get across to others beliefs in culture, religion, ethnicity, value systems, believe that each school of thought is just a different way of looking at things,” Dr. Miyataki concludes.

Dr. Miyataki believes that a businessperson will excel in a global company once he applies the right business language and learns various business functions, develops cross-cultural sensitivity, keeps abreast of computer applications and global issues.

Aside from Dr. Miyataki’s lecture series, examples of cultural diversity programs were also presented by Joel Esguerra, Shell Philippines’ General Manager for Human Resources; Ruchira Mehrotra, Sykes Asia’s HR Director for Asia Pacific; and Ernesto Espinosa, Fujitsu Computer Products’ Vice President for HR and General Affairs.

The two-day Cross-cultural Management lecture series spearheaded by DLS PSI-GSB was conducted at the RCBC Plaza and Astoria Plaza, Ortigas Center, Pasig.

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