The Influence of Cultural Background on Employment Behavior

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Abstract: Cultural background plays an important role in the organizational environment and has a wide and profound impact on employee behavior. Based on the cultural dimension theory proposed by Hofstede, this article attempts to explain more clearly from a theoretical perspective the predictable effects that different cultural backgrounds may have on cooperation in cross-cultural teams. This article also refers to a research report that investigated the cross-cultural after-sales team of "DM Company". It attempts to use this study as an example to explore the impact of different cultural backgrounds on sales work in cross-cultural teams, and to explore the impact of other cultural backgrounds on work. This paper aims to explore the impact of cultural background on employee behavior, including communication style, decision-making style, work attitude and so on. By analyzing how different cultural backgrounds shape employee behavior, it can help organizations better manage diverse employee groups and improve work efficiency and employee satisfaction.

Keywords: cultural background, environment, employee, behavior

1. Introduction

In today's globalization, organizations often include employees from different countries, regions and cultural backgrounds. This diversity creates a rich mix of cultural backgrounds within an organization, which also affects how employees behave and interact. Cultural background is a collection of personal cognition, values and social norms, so in the work environment, different cultural backgrounds will lead to different behavioral characteristics of employees. As far as we know, many large international companies have employees from all over the world who have received different cultural education since childhood. For example, Sony Interactive Entertainment, which is headquartered in California. Many of its management teams come from Japan, Europe, and other regions, and it itself needs to accept the jurisdiction of Sony's headquarters in Japan. The results produced by such a team are often gratifying. SIE has produced many works that are both loved by Americans and cannot be put down by Asians. But it is obviously not easy to manage such a large multinational company with employees from various cultural backgrounds. For example, Japanese people prefer to communicate in implicit language, while American people are more willing to express their feelings directly. This will lead to some occasions that Japanese employees think they are offended. In terms of working hours, Asians are willing to accept long overtime work, while Americans often think it is unacceptable to encroach

on their own rest time to deal with work. There are many similar problems caused by different cultural backgrounds. This paper will mention and analyze them in this article.

2.   A brief introduction to Hofstede's cultural dimension theory

In the late 1970s, Dutch scholar Hofstede conducted a survey of 116,000 IBM employees in more than 40 countries and regions and classified cross-regional culture into four types, namely: power distance (PD), individualistic or collectivistic tendency (IND), uncertainty avoidance (UA), rigid-flexible tendency (MAS), in subsequent research in Hong Kong, based on the study of Chinese culture, Hofstede A fifth dimension, Long term-Short term, was also proposed. These dimensions briefly and comprehensively explain some common problems caused by different cultural backgrounds.

The first dimension is power distance. Power distance refers to the degree to which people with low status in a society accept the unequal distribution of power in a society or organization. Divided into authoritarian and democratic.

The second dimension is individualistic or collectivistic tendencies. Individualists prioritize the interests of themselves, those close to them, and habitually consider the pros and cons before making decisions. They will emphasize horizontal (i.e. peer-to-peer) relationships rather than vertical relationships. Collectivists prioritize the interests of the group and the organization and consider the norms of behavior established to regulate the group. Generally speaking, they are more submissive than individualists.

The third dimension is uncertainty avoidance. Refers to the extent to which the culture can tolerate future uncertainty. Some cultures prefer to avoid uncertainty and impose many restrictions on informal behavior; other cultures let uncertainty take its course and impose no restrictions on informal behavior.

The fourth dimension is rigid-flexible tendency, also translated as male-female tendency. A culture with a high degree of masculinity pays more attention to achievements and task completion. In contrast, a society with a high degree of femininity pays more attention to interpersonal relationships, cooperation, care for the weak and the quality of life.

The fifth dimension is long/short term orientation. Refers to the extent to which members of a culture are willing to delay the gratification of their material, emotional, and social needs. Or whether these people have a tendency to judge their behavior in a future-oriented way.

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is based on a large amount of empirical data and is highly scientific and universal. However, as the times change and new research results emerge, it also needs to be constantly updated and improved. Based on the literature, this article summarized some problems that cross-cultural teams may encounter.

3.   Influence on employees' communication styles

The cultural background has a profound effect on an employee's communication style. People are educated and socialized in different cultural environments, shaping their preferences and communication methods. This influence is particularly important in cross-cultural teamwork.

3.1. High Complexity Culture vs Low Complexity Culture

In some cultures with high complexity, people tend to consider others who are different from themselves, while in cultures with low complexity, people lack understanding of people who are different from themselves and sometimes involved in some sensitive issues. For example, in a video advertisement released by McDonald's (Japan) on the social media "X (formerly twitter)" on September 20, 2023, only an Asian family of three appeared, so there are some retweets believing that McDonald's (Japan) does not consider the feelings of LGBT people, birth control activists, and

interracial families. [1] This is because people in East Asia have less complex cultural backgrounds, which makes them more inclined to consider the moods of individuals similar to themselves. In team collaboration with a cross-cultural background, some employees from high-complexity cultural areas may feel that employees from low-complexity cultural areas do not consider their own feelings in terms of speech and other aspects. These factors will cause a certain degree of communication conflict.

3.2. High-touch culture vs low-touch culture

Societies in high-touch cultures emphasize emotional expression and physical contact, and pay more attention to non-verbal factors in communication, such as facial expressions, gestures, and voice regulation. This leads to employees in high-touch cultures being more emotional and closer in their interactions. In contrast, low-touch cultures place more emphasis on words and the clear delivery of information, and they prefer to use direct and unambiguous language to avoid ambiguity[2]. This creates misunderstandings in team communication, with employees in high-touch cultures feeling a lack of attention and employees in low-touch cultures feeling overly emotional.

4. Influence on employees' decision-making

Cultural background has a significant impact on the way employees make decisions, reflecting individual priorities when approaching problems and making plans. Different cultural values and mindsets shape employees' preferences in the decision-making process, which in turn affects their behavior and role in the organization.

4.1. Direct decision-making vs consultative decision-making

Some cultures tend to emphasize the leading role of leaders or top management in decision-making [3]. These cultures are more inclined to make decisions directly and decisively , emphasizing the authority of leaders. Other cultures place more emphasis on consultation and consensus, valuing the participation and input of team members. In cross-cultural teams, this difference leads to dissonance in the decision-making process, where direct decision-making employees feel that other team members do not respect their authority enough, while consulting decision-making employees feel that direct decision-making people lack openness.

4.2. Cautious decision-making vs brave decision-making

Highly prudent cultures emphasize fully considering variety and risk before making decisions. Workers in these cultures are more inclined to weigh decisions slowly, making sure that the option chosen is the safest. On the other hand, some cultures emphasize decisiveness and courage in decision-making and are more willing to take certain risks in pursuit of greater opportunities. This difference in decision-making leads to different attitudes toward risk assessment, with prudent employees worrying that brave people are too risky, and courageous employees thinking prudent people are too conservative.

5. Influence on employees' work attitude

The cultural background has a profound impact on employees' work attitudes, shaping their views on work, values, and emotional experiences related to work. Different cultures have different attitudes toward work, which affects employees' work commitment, career development goals, and emotional attitudes toward work.

5.1. The balance between individual achievement and teamwork

In some cultures, personal achievement and excellence are widely emphasized, and employees are more concerned with personal performance and achievement at work. This leads them to pay more attention to individual contributions in teamwork, and even tends to compete[4]. Conversely, some cultures place more emphasis on teamwork and shared success, and employees are more willing to sacrifice individual fulfillment for the sake of overall goals. In a team environment, this difference affects how well employees collaborate and support each other.

5.2. The pursuit of stability and career development

Some cultures pay more attention to job stability and long-term career development, and employees are more willing to work in a relatively stable position and accumulate experience and status. On the contrary, some cultures encourage employees to seek opportunities for career development, and are more willing to switch between different positions and organizations in order to pursue better opportunities and development[5]. This affects employees' long-term commitment to the organization and motivation to work .

6. An Instance about DM Company

A research team in Beijing conducted a 10-day investigation on DM Company [6]. Some of their findings are shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Findings of the investigation on DM Company

manifestation of cultural tendency	Total		Chinese		German		Singaporean	
	amount	percent %	amount	percent %	amount	percent %	amount	percent %
Individualism	19	63.3	8	53	9	90	0	0
Collectivism	11	36.7	7	47	1	10	3	100
High-context	17	56.7	11	73.4	1	10	3	96.6
Low-context	13	43.3	4	27.0	9	90	0	3.4
Linear concept of time	16	53.4	4	27.0	9	90	1	33.3
Flexible concept of time	14	46.7	11	73.4	1	10	2	66.7
Hierarchical culture	15	50.0	9	60.0	4	40.0	2	66.7
Democratic culture	15	50.0	6	40.0	6	60.0	1	33.3

Data from DM pointed out that employees from different cultural backgrounds also have these interesting characteristics:

(1) Individualistic culture: The German team's after-sales technical service team is individual-centered, attaches great importance to personal development and literacy, direct communication, transaction-oriented, divided service awareness and personal responsibility.

(2) Collectivist culture: China's after-sales technical service team is collective-centered, attaches great importance to teamwork and coordination, cooperation orientation, group decision-making, and face-to-face push-type work processes.

(3) Cognition of social framework: China's after-sales technical service team adapts to a high-context culture, focuses on corporate culture and trust relationships, is people-oriented, and comprehensively assesses employee performance. Germany's after-sales technical service team adapts to a low-context culture, focusing on work ability and data analysis, distinguishing public from private, linear reasoning, and direct expression.

(4) Differences in communication methods: German after-sales technical service teams are adapted to low-context communication methods. They like direct communication methods, pay attention to the key points of speech, complete work efficiently, and choose personnel with similar cultural backgrounds. China's after-sales technical service team likes indirect communication, does a lot of preparation, focuses on the efficiency of teamwork, and selects personnel with different cultural backgrounds.

(5) Linear concept of time: Germans have a strong linear concept of time. A linear time concept culture emphasizes time planning, work efficiency, punctuality and future development, and solves problems in a straightforward manner.

(6) Flexible concept of time: Chinese people have an obvious flexible concept of time. A flexible time concept culture focuses on service strategies, details, communication and long-term relationships, and responds to problems in a flexible way.

(7) Hierarchical culture: Chinese people pay attention to hierarchical culture, which can correspond to the long "power distance" proposed by Hofstede. A hierarchical culture emphasizes the distribution of power, reporting relationships, division of responsibilities and the inability to skip levels.

(8) Democratic culture: Singaporeans prefer democratic management. A democratic culture emphasizes evaluation criteria for competence and cooperation, two-way communication, equality and respect, openness and transparency, and teamwork.

There are still many differences caused by cultural background. In the context of globalization, multinational companies should pay more attention to dealing with those cultural issues they have to face.

7. Conclusion

The cultural background profoundly impacts employee behavior, from communication styles to decision-making styles to work attitudes. Organizations should recognize this impact and take appropriate measures to promote the harmonious coexistence of cultural diversity. By respecting and understanding different cultural backgrounds, organizations can maximize the potential of their employees and improve overall performance and creativity.

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