Addressing Cultural Challenges to Doing Business in a Global Marketplace

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INTRODUCTION

Culture: Those sets of values, language, religion, cuisine, social habits and norms, music, art, expected behavior, and measures of success. Most people tend to think in terms of national or regional culture, yet the reality is far more complex. In addition to regional subcultures, there are subcultures defined by profession, organizational position, political affiliation, ethnic group, sexual identity or preference, income, social status, social identity, and perhaps more importantly, age group. Adding to this complexity is the bias inherent in those belonging to a culture or subculture. The biased lenses with which we view others often complicate our understanding of their expectations, needs, and desires. The challenges of understanding various cultural identities when doing business in a global marketplace can, therefore, be exceedingly complicated. Cultural differences, after all, are often the root of miscommunication (Brownlee, 2020).

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CHALLENGES: UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATING IN-HOUSE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Where to start? The first challenge is understanding the cultural perceptions nearest the center of control. People often assume that those working in a position of management within the same company share the same cultural identity. While this may have been true in the middle of the twentieth century when company managers were more demographically and culturally homogeneous, we now live in an increasingly diverse environment, complicated by an apparent bias against those whose view of the world is different from our own. The increase in racial diversity alone can be seen by looking at the percentages of White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and other racial groups within each age group in Table 1.1.

While only 6% of Generation Z (Gen Z) in the U.S. are immigrants, they are more likely to be the children of immigrants, with 22% of them having at least one immigrant parent. The Gen Z population is predicted to become the majority nonwhite population by 2026. Gen Z workers are also more likely to support gender neutral or gender flexible perspectives, with nearly 60% indicating profiles should include more than male and female gender options. Although the perspectives of Millennial and Gen Z workers are very similar, they are vastly different than those of the Baby Boomers, and these differences and biases can create management issues unrelated to the work performed on the jobsite.

The second challenge is understanding that diversity and cultural biases can lead to significant issues for distant and local marketplaces in how we treat the perspectives of others and how we expect them to react to

Table 1.1 Racial distribution by generation

Years	Generation	Study	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic (%)	Asian (%)	Other (%)
1946–1964	Baby Boomer	1969	82	13	4	1	1
1965–1980	Generation X	1987	70	15	12	<1	3
1981–1996	Millennial	2003	61	15	17	4	3
1997–2012	Generation Z	2019	52	14	25	6	5

Note Percentages rounded to nearest whole number

our actions and communications. Senior managers are often the victims of confirmation bias when they treat silence to their opinions as confirmation of their perspective, when it is often simply a desire not to express a different opinion. This is particularly true when senior managers make comments that go unchallenged by the younger or distant workforce, yet create a potentially hostile work environment that leads to decreased performance and high employee turnover.

The third challenge is recognizing generational differences in perception, expectations, and measures of success. Baby boomers tend to project their work ethic on those they supervise, not realizing that generational differences alone suggest doing so can create discord in the workplace. Baby-boomers (1946-1964), for example, believe hard work and company loyalty will lead to success because they came of age when that was the societal paradigm. Gen X (1965-1980), Millennial (1981-1996), and Gen Z (1997-2012) workers, however, came of age with a different economic reality (Beheshti, 2018). Millennials and Gen Z workers grew up and are growing up in a time of increased technological change, where social media is a common venue for communicating and sharing experiences. As such, they prefer email and texting to phone calls and value flexibility in work arrangements, especially where they can work remotely. This is due to the fact they cannot count on a single employer to shape, structure, or advance their career, nor be sure of the geographical location of their next employer. Their perspective is important to the baby boomers who represent the current core of upper management, since projections suggest Millennials and Gen Z workers will represent 75% of the global workforce by 2025 (Beheshti, 2018). The willingness and capability of these groups working from remote locations were shown to be an advantage to businesses who employed these workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. While baby boomers perhaps struggled with the technology required to work from home, millennials and Gen Z workers quickly adapted to the new normal because they have been raised on the technology and for them it is second nature. However, the economic perspective of Millennials and Gen Z workers differs. Whereas Millennials grew up during a period of recession, the oldest of the Gen Z workers in the U.S. came of age in a strong economy with record low unemployment. This all changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, where Gen Z workers were hard hit in the early months of the pandemic. A March 2020 Per Research Center survey found that 50% of the Gen Z workers in the 18-23-year-old age group reported that either they or someone in their household had either lost their job or took a pay cut due to the shutdown resulting

from the pandemic. This percentage was higher than the 40% of Millennials, 36% of Gen Xers, and 25% of the Baby Boomers. Gen Z workers tend to be more racially and ethnically diverse, while being the most well-educated group. Gen Z workers are digital natives who, like their millennial counterparts, are progressive, pro-government, and less likely to see the U.S. as being superior to other nations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020).

As open-minded and adaptable to change Millennial and Gen Z workers may be, they are just as likely to be subject to the same biases as their predecessors. Specifically, those who belong to the same age demographic tend to believe they share the same values with others of the same age. This is a misconception, especially when viewed from a global perspective with political, geographical, religious, ethnic, or sexual preferential differences are nuanced by culture. So, how does a manager deal with such a variety of perspectives, expectations, work ethics, and measures of success? They must first establish their own corporate culture that is sufficiently flexible as to not alienate any group, while being focused on the company's goals.

The fourth challenge is the creation of a company culture that accommodates a broad spectrum of differences resulting from increased diversity. Companies cannot change personal preferences or perspectives, yet they can establish organizational expectations that set a common goal. Understanding the cultural perspective of their employees certainly allows them to tailor how they avoid cultural faux pas while establishing corporate goals and measures of success that serve to focus work processes, so the business environment does not adversely impact the cultural expectations of the workers. Creating an environment where employees are unafraid to voice their ideas or issues requires active listening and a willingness to appreciate diversity of opinion and perspective. This does not mean managers must treat everyone differently based on their cultural expectations; it simply means they must take those differences as acceptable variations while treating everyone equally, regardless of their cultural alignment.

Next Steps

Once an organization has put its own house in order, the next step is to identify cultural issues in their satellite venues and address them in similar fashion. This is not always as easy as it may sound because the degree of cultural acceptance in some areas of the world is drastically more inflexible than in others. Dress codes of the West are often unacceptable to those

in the Middle East, as too are cultural norms of the society at large. It is, therefore, critical that organizational leaders understand the baseline culture of populations socially and geographically distant from their own. Once that baseline is understood, the next steps would be to identify the relative subcultures that exist within that venue and work within the limits set by society in that location.

These efforts will take time, which may not always be available. It will often be necessary, therefore, to identify key people in the distant location that better understand the expectations of the local workers and express the company's expectations to them so they can translate those expectations into actions that align the distant venue's values to the company's goals and measures of success. Globalization requires accommodation, rather than institutionalization. History shows that populations with very different cultures, goals, and measures of success can often work together toward a common goal. It is, therefore, paramount that the goal be articulated in such a way as to bring different parts of the organization together without attempting to make all the parts look and act the same.

Understanding the organizational workers and stakeholders is the first step in understanding the global marketplace (Gabel-Shemueli, Westman, Chen, & Bahamonde, 2019). Trying to sell miniskirts in Saudi Arabia might sound like a good idea if the only consideration is the lack of miniskirts in Saudi Arabia. However, understanding the culture and social norms of that society should make a company realize that attempts to sell miniskirts in that area would prove disastrous, not only in a lack of sales, but by creating a negative image of the company attempting to market such an item in their society. Social taboos, associations with words or concepts, can either enhance the marketability of products and the company's image, or do just the opposite. It is, therefore, important to consider hiring local managers or cultural experts that can educate the home workforce on the cultural nuances of the target marketplace, workplace, or production site. These individuals can mentor those employees who must interface with or visit the host country, ensuring such engagements work to the company's advantage by avoiding cultural faux pas or insults. By the same token, using local managers instead of importing home country employees serves the dual purpose of ensuring effective communication between supervisors and employees in the host location, plus avoiding cultural clashes that might exist while the imported employee is gaining an in-depth understanding of the host country's culture.

Reality and Perception: Subjective Vs Objective

Objective reality does not exist as far as human perception is concerned (Fedrizzi & Proietti, 2019). We live in a subjective reality, where what we see, hear, feel, smell, taste, or think is the product of our entire life experiences. These experiences create biases that further distort our view of reality. If someone in California sees a picture of a woman in a bikini, their perception of that person is vastly different than someone viewing the same picture who lives in a more modest culture. Social experiments also show we have a color bias, not just skin color, but a basic bias toward or against certain colors for clothing, signs, buildings, and a host of other objects. One study showed more people assisted a woman asking for directions on a busy street when she wore a red dress than when she wore a white dress. This bias, however, would only be true for the people in that area of that country. Another study showed those in the U.S. have a bias toward yellow and red for fast food signs. The study revealed this bias is due to the association of mustard and ketchup with the notion of fast foods. These studies clearly show we have an unconscious bias toward color.

Other studies have shown similar biases based on the style of clothing and the association of images and sound. The Stroop effect, for example, is where we find ourselves challenged to state the color of a word that does not match the word, for example, the word "red" in "green" text. Our brains seek logical alignment and are confused or frustrated when such alignment does not exist. This can be an issue when translating advertisements into a foreign language, especially if certain colors do not evoke the same connections. This is especially true in the Lev Kuleshov effect, where associations between images change the way the images are perceived. For example, a video that shows an image of a woman taking a bath followed by an image of a man smiling. Depending on the cultural perception of the woman taking a bath, the perception of the smiling man can be interpreted different ways. Movie makers often use this effect to impart meaning to images that viewed independently would not have such an association. It is, therefore, important to understand how such associations are made in order to avoid misinterpretations when trying to export images or video advertisements to populations that do not share a common baseline culture.

Cultural lenses are the result of subconscious biases imparted by societal *group think*. A dog may be perceived as a pet to one society, and

a menu option to another. The fact that something is culturally unacceptable to one society simply means the unacceptability is due to that society's norms. The fact that something is acceptable or unacceptable to another society should not, therefore, be treated as a universal truth. Companies wishing to do business on a global scale need to understand and accept these variations or choose not to do business within that society.

Culture, however, is dynamic and subject to evolutionary and revolutionary change. Exposure to different cultures, especially over longer periods of time, tends to create cultural drift, where differences in culture become less pronounced. In addition to these slower cultural drifts are the cultural changes driven by technology, virtual connections and communication between cultures previously separated by geography, fashion trends, and the spread of self-determination into previously autocratic cultures. The implication for businesses choosing to work in a global marketplace is that they need to stay up to date with these changes and adjust their marketing strategies and product introductions accordingly. What may have been unacceptable in the marketplace a dozen years ago, or even last year, may have become a desired product today. This awareness requires companies to continuously evaluate the marketplace and the workforce within the context of cultural awareness. At times, this may also mean attempts to move the cultural dial by introducing products that may fall into a gray area of cultural acceptability. Trendsetters are those who exploit these areas and are often the ones who, although taking a degree of risk, often reap the greatest rewards by being the first to enter a certain product into the new marketplace.

Lost in Translation

A significant part of any culture is the language used to communicate concepts and ideas. While most of that communication is readily understood by others outside the culture, mistakes occur, sometimes with a humorous outcome, and sometimes with a costly one. New products are often introduced by video or televised advertisements. While it may be expeditious to dub an advertisement into various languages, it can prove counterproductive. For example, the McGurk effect can affect the way the word is heard, and even change its meaning. This effect occurs when the visual image of lips saying the word does not match the sound heard, resulting in a word being heard that was not seen in the image nor heard

in the dubbed voice-over. Considering the nuances of language and how closely words with different meaning have similar sounds, the result can be the hearing of a word that has a drastically different connotation to the one intended. It is often, therefore, far better to have the advertisement re-shot using someone who speaks the language than dubbing an advertisement for expediency.

Product names are also an important consideration because concepts and vocabulary vary by culture and geographic location. Literal translation of product names can result in negative perceptions of a company's product. Karahadian (1994) considered the choice of using the correct descriptive terminology to express the appropriate connotations requires understanding the cultural and ethnic perceptions of acceptable attributes perceived by the consumer in the target marketplace. For example, the Chevrolet Nova was a popular car and name in the U.S. because the word "Nova" had a connotation of an exploding star. That same name, however, had a completely different connotation in South American, where "Nova" is heard as "No va" or "Nao va," which means "No go" in Spanish and Portuguese. Fiat made a similar mistake when trying to sell their "Uno" sports car in Finland, where "uno" means "garbage" (Muñoz & King, 2007). When the Japanese imported their "Pocari Sweat" to the U.S. they failed to understand that while "sweat" represents a healthy, hard-working body in Japan, the thought of drinking "sweat" in the U.S. was not so appealing.

In addition to misunderstood names due to translation, advertising and technical instructions converted into a non-native language can either project a positive or negative image of the company's competence. Multinational companies make concerted efforts to ensure their advertisements and instructions are accurately translated, yet it is not uncommon to see instructions translated into English that fall short of correct grammar and word choice. Words in English do not always translate well into another language, especially when idioms, slang, and industry specific words are involved. For example, the captain of a US Government vessel docked in Jebel Ali, UAE met with the ship's agent upon arrival. The ship's agent was knowledgeable yet inexperienced in dealing with vessels in support of US military operations. The ship's captain asked the agent if he had any trouble filling the LOGREQ (logistical requirements requisition) to which the agent responded that there were two items that were giving

him some trouble. The ship's captain asked which items were problematic and was told, "The cherry pickers and breasting camels…I was able to find some Pakistani women with ladders, but it is very difficult to find a lactating camel this time of year." The ship's captain asked the agent if he was joking and quickly realized the agent was serious. The ship's captain informed the ship's agent that a cherry picker is slang for what they call a man-lift and a breasting camel is what they commonly call the Yokohama fenders being used between the ship and the dock. The lesson both parties learned is that words matter and not every word or concept can be translated directly into another language with accuracy.

This type of misunderstanding and miscommunication happens even between people speaking the same language. For example, an engineer once asked a supply officer for a snake. The supply officer asked him if he wanted a python or an anaconda. The engineer responded that he wanted a snake to clear a drainpipe and was told that the proper name for such a tool is an auger, not a snake, regardless of how the item might be marketed to the general public. Another example can be found during the Los Angeles riots of 1992. The governor of California called in more than 10,000 California National Guard troops and 2000 active military troops to quell the riots. This was not considered enough, so the governor called President Bush and asked him to send in the US Marines. During this time, a group of Marines had been called into assist the Los Angeles police department in response to a domestic dispute. A police officer was hit by a shotgun blast of birdshot and called for the marines to "cover" him. The marines immediately began to lay down 200 rounds of cover fire. The police officer just wanted the threat of M-16's pointed at the house to discourage the shooter from firing again, and while the National Guard would have understood the request, for the marines it meant to lay down active covering fire (Stillwell, 2019).

The same holds true for directions, instructions, and advertisements translated from another language into English. While these mistranslations are often the subject of humor or ridicule, the result is a diminishing perception of the company being advertised or having written the instruction. For example, the Web site Boredpanda.com provided numerous examples of failed translations. An Italian sign read, "Per un corretto servizio pregait di accendere l'aspiratore quando usate la doccia," meaning people should turn on the exhaust fan when using the shower. However, it was translated to read, "For a proper service, please turn on the vacuum (sic) cleaner when using the shower." A French sign read,

"Le non respect du reglement entraine l'exclusion," implying those who do not obey the pool rules would be asked to leave. However, the English translation read just the opposite: "Anyone obeying the swimming pool regulations may be required to leave." A sign in Spanish asked people not to feed the "Llamingos" (Llamas), then translated it into English using the word "Flamingos." A Filipino sign read, "Manok ng ina mo!" meaning chicken like your mother makes. However, the translation read "Chicken of your mother."

These errors provide a degree of unintended humor, yet instructions that have similar mistakes can result in situations that could be dangerous or confusing to those who try to follow the instructions. For example, a mistake in translating English into Arabic that occurred 30 years ago has resulted in incorrectly implementing items into Kuwaiti construction projects, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in unnecessary construction work (Kamal, 2018). These mistakes also happen when native language speakers write instructions with homonym mistakes, such as flower instead of flour. Units of measure present another issue, when gallons of water are incorrectly converted into liters of water within a country using the metric system. There is a significant difference between twisting, turning, or rotating something, and how those concepts are translated into another language is critical. This is especially true when terms have an industry context and may not be translatable. It is therefore important that organizational managers fully understand the technical and cultural nuance of language in their advertisements, instructions, and policies.

Doing Business

Muñoz and King (2007) suggested consumer product testing across cultures and countries need to consider the basic differences between the home-culture and host-culture. The key areas to be explored and considered include social etiquette, religious practice, dietary and culinary traditions, political, governmental, legal, and regulatory conditions. The collection of this information requires using formal governmental and private institutional sources, in addition to focused market research using those considered a part of the host-culture or subculture as data collectors. In addition to the market research, the company also needs to consider importation, exportation, customs, and transportation requirements of both home and host countries. Expediting products through

customs may require actions deemed inappropriate in the home-culture, and legal requirements between home and host countries may require hiring legal representatives from both areas in order to facilitate and execute the proper forms, permits, and documents.

Health and safety regulations can also vary between home and host countries, especially in the use or production of products lacking GRAS (generally recognized as safe) status for the host country. The liability associated with health and safety concerns must be considered and a risk assessment made in conjunction with a host country legal representative. While health, safety, and liability concerns may seem obvious, conducting market research and testing in a cross-cultural setting must also consider the implication of religious values and practice, especially in the observance of religious holidays, gender differences, disciplinary and dietary practices, gift giving and other forms or compensation (Asay & Hennon, 1999; Laverack & Brown, 2003). Catholic observances in Latin cultures, Buddhist observances in Asian countries, and Muslim observances in the Middle East will vary uniquely within the host-culture and require accommodation by the company wishing to do research and product introduction into those cultures. Research also must consider the verbal and written proficiency of the test population to ensure the collection of data is perceived as positive and inoffensive. Coordinating and consulting with local, onsite representative from the host-culture is, therefore, an important consideration.

In addition to product and market testing, the identification of local venders is of equal importance. The use of research venders with multi-national or regional affiliations will assist in ensuring alignment between product and market testing with distribution. Some countries have government agencies that oversee product development or testing, so it is important to determine which regional or local government agencies need to be involved before such testing can begin. This returns us to the topic of accurate translation. Translation must focus on the intended concept, not a word-to-word translation that might not impart the same meaning or intent. The best way to test accuracy of translation is to have the translated document translated back into the home country's language to ensure the translation has not changed the intent or concepts contained in the original document. The wording of documents targeted for translation should be simple and appropriate for the targeted culture being tested or for whom the product is to be marketed. In addition to accurate translation, the host country's translator, or a member of the

host country that reviews the translation, needs to provide feedback as to whether the translated material will be seen in a positive or negative light. Even accurate translations may have a negative cultural impact that is unexpected from the home country's perspective.

Baby boomers also tend to project their work ethic on those managed at a distance in other countries, not realizing that a failure to understand national cultural differences can create discord and animosity in the remote workplace. Senior managers may find it difficult to understand the work ethic or cultural environment existing in different countries yet must be willing to accept the fact that productivity depends on accommodation of different work models. For example, once a product has been researched and market-tested in compliance with all government, regional, and local authority's requirements, the act of doing business in the host country needs to be aligned with their cultural expectations. A half-hour lunch break taken at the worker's desk somewhere between 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm in the U.S., or working through lunch in some cases, may be inappropriate for an office in Italy or China, where lunch is regarded as the most important meal of the day, lasting two hours from somewhere between 11:30 am to 2:00 pm. The timing of meetings between host and home offices need to take such cultural differences into account. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates the average US worker puts in 44 hours per week, or about 8.8 hours per day. The average Japanese workday is 10.5 hours, with after-work drinks often running late and passing on them is considered rude behavior. Japanese workers are expected to arrive early and work late without compensation, whereas in the U.S. the average hourly worker is compensated for work above 40 hours per week, and only salaried workers in upper management are expected to work long hours without additional compensation. Employees in Nigeria, Cameroon, and South Korea commonly work 12-hour shifts, while their counterparts in Canada and Finland work an average of 6.75 hours per day, with Finland's workers taking three 20 to 30 minutes breaks per day. Spain's summer siestas result in workdays that may not end until 8:00 pm. Saudi Arabia's work week begins on Sunday, not Monday, and lunch is a 3-hour affair, with the workday broken up by five prayer times (Ryerson, 2018).

The implication of these differences for any company doing work or marketing around the world is that the diversity in work periods, coupled with the differences in time zones, requires a great deal of flexibility and accommodation on both sides, with the priority assigned to either

the producer, marketer, or supplier depending on the unique aspects of their relationships. For example, a marketer may desire a product in high demand, and as such, may be more willing to adjust their schedule within the norms of their culture. If the producer is the one who is trying to introduce a new product into a marketplace that has not shown a marked desire for their product, the producer may be the one who needs to show the most flexibility. If the supplier is trying to increase deliveries from the producer in order to meet competing demands of marketers, they might be required to be the most flexible. Ultimately, however, each business element needs to understand and appreciate the need for flexibility when doing business in a global marketplace.

Cultural Adaptation

To further add to the complexity of cultures and expectations is the reality that some cultures may want to adopt the work practices of the home company as opposed to maintaining those of their own. A recent McKinsey Global Institute report projected the number of workers in the global workforce may reach 3.5 billion by 2030, yet there may still be a shortage of skilled workers (Neeley, 2017). This implies an intensified global competition for talent, requiring many of these skilled workers to enter workplaces of different cultures, or work remotely for companies belonging to a different culture. Promoting positive indifference (Neeley, 2017), the ability to overlook cultural differences not worthy of attention in the workplace, can assist the assimilation of workers from different cultures toward the company's goals when the employees are open to learning about how cultural diversity can add to a company's prosperity in a global marketplace. Neeley (2017) commented on how a French employee found commonality with a Japanese coworker by recognizing both cultures were results-oriented and prone to analyze processes for ways they could be improved. An Indonesian engineer found commonality with the company's practice of spending five minutes each day to clean their desks, equating that with his own practice of washing his hands and feet when entering a mosque, as both rituals signified a feeling of commitment and responsibility to the location. This feeling of commonality promotes organizational identification as opposed to identification with the local component of a global organization. To feel a part of a globalized organization creates a sense of belonging to something that operates and expands on a global scale. An important part of this feeling

of commonality is the efforts made toward increasing communication between different locations. Neeley's research suggests when interactions between distant locations are high, there is a greater degree of trust development and shared vision.

Perhaps the most important concept in any attempt to address cultural challenges is the recognition that these challenges are simply opportunities for growth and improvement. Overcoming these challenges is a process of improvement, and in that process an organization can learn to exploit and leverage cultural diversity in ways they may have never anticipated. For example, a US worker that needs to spend more time with their family may be the ideal candidate to interface with the company's counterparts elsewhere in the world due to the differences in time zones. An employee who speaks the language of both the host and home organization may prove an invaluable resource when it comes time to understand the other's culture or translate documents into more than one language. A company trying to expand their operations into another country may find that one or more of their employees come from the other country and may have business contacts, or relatives with business contacts in the target country. Cultural diversity and its associated challenges, therefore, represent a pathway to improve a company's global exposure and promote the company's image in unexpected ways. Engaging other cultures expands awareness and allows a broader perspective of how a company can benefit both the marketplace and the company's sustainability on a global scale.

Developing Cultural Intelligence and Competence

The application of cultural knowledge is cultural intelligence (CQ), which has a positive correlation with work engagement (Gabel-Shemueli et al., 2019). Cultural intelligence is derived from three primary concepts: cultural knowledge, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. Cultural competence combines these three concepts and adds operational effectiveness (Brownlee & Lee, 2020). Cultural competence is nonthreatening because it involves everyone in the process and avoids blame and guilt by uniting different elements in achieve a harmony aligned with the company's goals. This requires a paradigm shift where organizational leaders must value the organizational diversity and respect the different cultures that make up their local and distant workforces. These same leaders must encourage the workforce to conduct a

cultural self-assessment as part of their cultural awareness education. Part of this education is learning about different cultures and understanding the dynamics of the differences that exist between cultures. This understanding should lead to the development of policies and goals that do not conflict with cultural identities or expectations. Conducting cultural exchanges and openly accepting dialog that includes different perspectives allows the individual to learn other ways of doing business in a collaborative way. There are many ways to accomplish a task, and learning new ways opens the door to process improvement by incorporating the lessons learned in other cultures.

Lessons Learned

My father would sometimes buy coconuts and suggest various ways to open them. We tried drills, saws, hammers, a vice, and even slamming them against the pavement, never understanding how others could open them into equal halves. Our understanding of coconuts was limited to knowing we needed to open them to get the milk/water out and gain access to the white fruit from which we could make dried, shredded coconut, known also as copra. We believed that coming from a technologically advanced society we knew the best ways of opening coconuts. Imagine my surprise when I visited the Polynesian cultural center on Oahu, Hawaii, where they demonstrated how Hawaiians had been opening coconuts for centuries. I could not believe that such a *primitive* culture could have found such an easy way to open coconuts and thought perhaps the demonstration might have used a trick coconut. To test my hypothesis, I made a local grocery store my first stop after leaving the cultural center. I bought a coconut, went into the parking lot, picked up a small stone that I might have chosen to skip across a pond, targeted the ridge that runs between the two dark dots, commonly called the *monkey's eyes* and with a sharp rap of the stone, created a small horizontal crack in the coconut. I proceeded to hit the coconut with the small stone along the line of the crack and quickly had split the coconut into equal halves; one full of coconut milk/water, and the other empty…without spilling a drop. The lesson learned that day was that no matter how technologically advanced a society or culture, there is always a different way known to another culture for doing even the simplest of tasks, and failing to understand that is nothing short of cultural hubris. We gain knowledge and perspective by recognizing and embracing cultural differences and

challenges as opportunities, not by rejecting them or trying to change them.

Any company or organization wishing to be successful on a local or global scale must understand that increasing diversity is a reality that must be embraced rather than fought. In short, diversity is inevitable (Hobby, 2015). Senior management must avoid the hubris that is common among those who have been at the top for decades and would like to see a return to some previous status quo. Studies have shown the benefits associated with diversity, yet apart from those benefits, the world is becoming smaller and more integrated as technological advances cross virtual borders and the workforce is no longer confined to homogenous geographical areas. The shift from homogenous to heterogeneous workforces is similar to any other change in that those who fail to recognize the shift in paradigm with go the way of those who made buggy whips for horse-drawn carts instead of adapting to the concept that they were in the transportation business, and the introduction of the automobile would change the marketplace. I was an intern for the Bechtel Corporation in 1979 during the construction of the nuclear power plants in San Onofre, California. The vice president of the power division told me he often hired mechanical engineers into his electrical engineering shops and electrical engineers into his mechanical engineer shop. When asked why, he said, "We need a different perspective at times…an electrical engineer thinks a synchronous motor is the solution when a mechanical engineer realizes a simple cam would suffice." This is an example of how diversity can assist and improve processes and products, even within a single national culture. The inclusion of workers from different countries, ethnic groups, religions, and sexual orientations allows organizations to have a broader perspective of the workforce and the marketplace, but only if they are willing to adapt their model so it respects and includes each culture and subculture within the organization's culture. Diverse cultures can come together and accept their differences as long as they share a common goal, and it is up to senior managers to define that goal in a way that incorporates the needs of the customer and those who provide the products or services.

Perhaps the most important concept to understand is that cultural challenges are felt by every company, from the small business owner doing business on a local scale, to the large multinational company doing business on a global scale. The businesses that accept these challenges as opportunities, take improving cultural awareness seriously, and

make efforts to understand and leverage their understanding of the challenges and potential benefits of cultural diversity will gain a marketable and productive advantage over companies that only see these challenges as obstacles to improved business models. The ability to incorporate cultural awareness and accommodation into a company's business strategies avoids cultural missteps and faux pas while gaining insights that will improve market strategies, workforce productivity and engagement, and ultimately the company's sustainability and profitability (Gabel-Shemueli et al., 2019).

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