

CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES AFFECTING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY USE IN LOGISTICS

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Introduction

Logistics is an area that extensively utilizes Information Technology (IT) in the daily performance of logistics tasks. Globalization has resulted in many organizations having facilities located in culturally diverse countries. The employees of these organizations bring to the workplace unique values conditioned by the cultures the employees were raised in. The organization must find a way to integrate these culturally diverse employees into a cohesive unit. That is usually accomplished by having employees internalize the organization's unique culture. Differences still persist however, because various societies imbue diverse values that produce culturally unique orientations toward life and work. Experts state that 25 percent to 50 percent of an employee's job behavior is culturally determined. This makes it imperative that organizations understand the cultural values behind the employee, and what motivates peak performance.

The Study

This paper reports on an on-going research effort which studies the culturally based work values of logisticians around the world, and the factors that explain the motivational ideals that they prefer in an organization. A survey was sent to a sample of members of the Society of Logistics Engineers (SOLE), a professional group with chapters in nineteen countries. All nineteen countries are represented in the 131 responses received. The information collected includes both demographic and value based data. The study utilized the Chi-Square test in analyzing the data.

The Findings

The various responses on what constitutes an "ideal job" clearly indicate many similarities as well as differences between logisticians from around the world.

The Americans tend to favor individually based values as most important while the non-Americans lean more toward group based values. The differences in culturally anchored values can cause communications difficulties within an organization in terms of both understanding and motivation. Additionally, these value differences can result in both divergent cultural attitudes toward technology, and more varied, culturally distinctive ways of implementing and utilizing information technologies.

This abstract reports on an on-going research effort that studies the work values of employees from around the world. It identifies those factors that explain the motivational ideals that they prefer in an organization. It has long been recognized that there are significant differences in orientation and motivation based on cultural values. For example, American culture places a strong emphasis on personal choice and personal achievement. This emphasis is in direct contrast with the value that many other cultures place on the demands and accomplishments of groups, such as families, clans, or villages. Compared to other societies where birth derived status and prestige are important, American culture believes that individuals should be rewarded and recognized on the basis of their personal achievement. While this belief may have pressured people to compete for success, it has also encouraged the development and use of individual talents and skills. These may have been overlooked in more rigid and stratified societies.

Specifically, this abstract reports on the work value orientations of logisticians from the United States and other countries around the world. These logisticians are all members of a professional group called the Society of Logistics Engineers (SOLE) that has worldwide membership through over 130 chapters in 32 districts encompassing 19 countries. Survey questionnaires were sent to members in all countries. Responses were received from 131 SOLE members composed of 64 Americans and 67 non-Americans. Tentative findings based on analysis of the data indicate that there are some important differences between the two groups that have implications for the organizations employing them and for their motivation. Some of the more interesting findings on value and demographic data are provided below.

1. The most important value for Americans was having challenging tasks to perform, but for non-Americans it was having an opportunity to make real contributions to the success of their company or organization.
2. Of the five top rated values, Americans and non-Americans shared four of the five, but the order of ranking was different. On the fifth they disagree. Americans ranked having sufficient time left for personal or family life third. While non-Americans ranked working with people who cooperate well with one another fourth to round out the two groups top five.

3. Americans clearly ranked having an opportunity to earn higher wages as the least important value. The Pearson Chi-Square value on this question with three degrees of freedom was at the .044 significance level. Non-Americans thought that having a job with little stress and tension was the least important value.
4. Only 54.7 percent of Americans felt it was important to work in a prestigious, successful company or organization compared to 67.2 percent of the non-Americans.
5. Females represented only 4.5 percent of the non-American respondents, but they represented 21.9 percent of the Americans answering the questionnaire. The Pearson Chi-Square with three degrees of freedom on this question had a .022 significance level.
6. The non-American logisticians were younger with 61 percent being 49 years old or below while only 48 percent of Americans were in that age group.
7. Only 7.8 percent of American logisticians did not possess an undergraduate degree compared to 16.4 percent of the non-Americans.
8. Of the non-Americans, 82 percent classified their job as managerial while only 56 percent of the Americans listed themselves as managers.
9. Americans agree that people should work together in any way necessary to insure that the organization's tasks are accomplished. The Pearson Chi-Square value on this question with three degrees of freedom was at the .049 significance level. Non-Americans thought that people worked together when coordination and exchange were specified by the formal organization system.
10. Non-Americans felt that decisions should be made by the one who carries the responsibility while Americans felt that the decisions should be made by the person or persons with the most knowledge about the problem. The Pearson Chi-Square value on this question with three degrees of freedom was at the .046 significance level.
11. An overwhelming 86.9 percentage of American respondents felt that in an appropriate control and communication structure information about task requirements and problems should flow from the center of task activity upwards and outwards compared to only 67.9 percent of Non-Americans who felt that way.

Conclusion

The various responses on what constitutes an "ideal job" clearly indicate many similarities as well as differences between logisticians from around the world. The Americans tend to favor individually based values as most important while the non-Americans lean more toward group based values. The differences in culturally anchored values can cause communications difficulties within an

organization in terms of both understanding and motivation. Additionally, these value differences can result in both divergent cultural attitudes toward technology, and more varied, culturally distinctive ways of implementing and utilizing CMC technologies.

This places the onus on management in companies that operate on a global scale to find ways to bridge the differences that exist among their culturally diverse employees. If the organization is to achieve a strong internal culture, then it must find a way to either work around or homogenize the differing external cultural values that employees bring into the organization. This is the great challenge of globalization for organizations. They must find a way to resolve it or advances in information technology and their promise may be underutilized.