

Cross-Cultural Sensitivity Training

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In a business setting it is important that not only everyone is comfortable in their work setting, but that they respect one another in the workplace. When dealing with a diverse group of employees they have to incorporate different personalities, skills and cultural backgrounds. As one starts a new job, training is an introduction into the business and creates the foundation of that particular career. There are all types of interactions whether it is with a coworker or with a boss and has to be handled with caution and understanding. Cross-cultural sensitivity training is a framework that allows one to not only keep their own sense of self but also be aware of others personal identity. Living in America which is also referred to as “The Melting Pot” of cultures, gives social training a lift in the importance of having a better experience at work. Training has evolved over time and has given workers skills that are not only useful for their particular job, but social preparation for different situations. Implementing cross-cultural sensitivity within the workplace will allow growth and avoid negative productivity.

Sensitivity in the workplace is an asset to keep equality and cultural differences at bay. Cross-cultural sensitivity is defined by (Paul, 2011) as “the ability to decipher others' values (Schein, 1981) and understand a new environment using emic and situated knowledge structures (Shapiro, Ozanne, and Saatcioglu, 2008).” This term has become relevant over the years as technology has become stronger and companies have gone more global. Dealing with an international market that has a hand in multiple countries comes with the responsibility to understand where and what to sell based on culture. This is similar within the workforce of the company. If a company has different locations all over the globe, the way that one trains the managers has be adjusted accordingly based on the cultural accustoms. It’s when all the cultures are in one location that it becomes a challenge. In the *Journal of International Business and*

Cultural Studies, the researchers created surveys on cross-cultural sensitivity and corporate social performance that were distributed to college students. The results from this survey were, “Cross-cultural sensitivity was found to be highly dependent on an individual’s personal background, such as living abroad and speaking a first language other than English. Being a native English speaker, having conservative political beliefs, and living few years outside the United States were associated with low levels of cross-cultural sensitivity. One of the more interesting observations was the very strong relationship between political beliefs and the Interests factor of cross-cultural sensitivity (Paul, 2011).” The outcomes display that when it comes to this type of sensitivity in the workplace not having any cultural experience such as coming from different backgrounds can have an effect on your work. Political affiliation shouldn’t be seen as a factor but as a distraction because of its negative effect on breaking down cultural barriers. One part of the results that was more unusual to see is that even with living a few years out of the country it didn’t have that much of an impact on how the participants had an outlook on the topics of interest. This resonates that when being stationed in one location and not having that type of exposure to other cultures it can effect their perceptions of others.

When working in a business that deals with a well diverse consumer market, one should be able to handle cross-cultural interactions. There are concepts that need to be in order to know what steps need to be taken for the greatest outcome in customer satisfaction. The types of interactions can scale from simple conversations with a customer to an executive business meeting all deal with communication and can be with one of another background or culture. An example of this was in a study (Sizoo, 2005) that covers, “The effect of intercultural sensitivity on employee performance in cross-cultural service encounters.” This study entails five Florida hotels and how employees the interact with foreign guests. The researchers discovered that,

“This research, however, showed that interculturally sensitive service were not more motivated about work, nor did they feel they receive greater primary rewards than employees with low sensitivity (Sizzo, 2005).” These results reveal in this case that even with the training, it didn’t affect the way an employee had put in effort towards their job. Taking into account the line of business that was studied, cross-cultural training should still be implemented regardless of the results. The way that an employee interacts with a customer/employee can make a lasting impression¹ and this training will make sure that cultural barriers will not be an interference with that first encounter.

Cross-cultural sensitivity gives off a notion that the solution is the understanding of cultural differences. If there is anything to take away from this term, it is to know that there is more to define than what is on the surface. In a Harvard Business Review article, *Cultural Differences Are More Complicated than What Country You’re from*, the foundation of taking in the cultures is discussed, but the article presents that further steps need to be taken in order to have a better grasp on how to interact with other cultures. When discussing culture, it’s important to discuss the region itself, “Just as it is useful to learn something about culture norms when diagnosing your situation, it is good practice to learn something about region norms (Molinsky, 2016).” Regions can effect a manager with the way that employees might not even recognize. The United States has different regions such as the Midwest, Southwest, Northeast, Southeast and West where their lifestyles are completely different. Regions are similar to people in the way that they are all in one location but they still are unique. A reason to have region norms part of this type of training is all about the specifics. It would be emphasizing that it is the small details that make a difference and that norms do have a heavier weight on a company than one would expect. The article also discusses how a

company can be affected by the culture itself. An example of this is, “imagine the cultural norms of a global consulting firm like McKinsey that also happens to be in Riyadh.

Because the consulting firm is a global organization with norms influenced both by the local culture and by its Western “DNA,” chances are that the firm would have norms that are actually slightly divergent from the Saudi norm (Molinsky, 2016).” Sensitivity training that is mainly focused on the employees can also be accounted for in the company itself. The employees make up the business and outside culture is embodied within the company. The takeaway from this example is that there is so many influences that make up the dynamics of this firm but it displays the importance culture has on a business. This global business shows that the location does have a heavy undertaking in the company and how it is managed.

Implementing Cross-Cultural Sensitivity training isn't a simple task. The obstacles that are faced with comprehending cultural norms are: how to come to accept them and make them part of the business culture. There are many companies that have employees of different backgrounds and it has come to attention that training is necessary. There are already training programs for this and a trainer has thought of questions that managers need to consider. These include: “How is trust built differently in this culture? What is the most constructive way to provide criticism? These things vary greatly from country to country,” Meyer says. “These are the differences that impact a workplace the most, because even employees who work frequently with international colleagues may be totally unaware of them (Chebium, 2015).” These questions represent the ways that culture can affect the workplace atmosphere. It creates a divide with the way communication flows between the employees and can overall effect the way a job and or project is executed. This type of training can help employees achieve, “When to adopt a

“transactional,” or businesslike, approach, and when to cultivate relationships with overseas clients. How to read the mood of a room. How to pick up on what foreign staffers really mean despite what they publicly express. How to correctly interpret body language and other nonverbal cues when dealing with clients of differing nationalities (Chebium, 2015).” The combination of verbal and nonverbal communication are key factors in this kind of training and will overall create a more cohesive group of employees. In established companies this could be the answer for a divide that might be among employees that isn’t recognizable. Overall training employees in this will only be beneficial as it creates a path to success and shows how different cultures can lead to a stronger business.

In the workplace having a strong business all comes down to having a well rounded group of employees. Having a cultured group allows a business to have different perspectives and approaches to situations that will bring prosperity. This advantage can also be a disadvantage. This is an opportunity break boundaries and open new windows but can also be difficult for close minded people. The training would be part of the business as a bonding activity within the company and will bring the cultural gap a little closer. While training might seem tedious, it is a tool that can be used as an asset and give a company a stronger representation of itself in the business world.

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