Cultural Values and Personal Ethics

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Abstract

The effect of cultural values has been studied in number of ways. As today, world has become a global village and continue to shrink, cultures of different parts of world collide. It is essential for all of us to become more sensitive, more aware, and more observant to surrounding culture. Cultural values and personal ethics affects heavily in decision-making process. It is discussed along with how to respect and handle cultural differences.

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A culture is a complex thing. "Culture, not only, includes the way a society use things like tools, weapons, shelter, clothing, but also includes its language, morals, manners, religion, science, art, economics, family relationships, its ways of sitting down, making love and talking" (Swanish, 1964, p. 1).

Even a definition of culture depends on culture. "In the German, Scandinavian, and Slavic language groups, the word culture tends to mean a particular way of life, whether of a people, a time period, or a group. But in Italian and French, the word refers more to art, learning, and a general process of human development" (Williams, 1976a, p. 81). Both meanings exist today as the word is used in English. The word 'culture' is used in its more general social sense to mean the customs of a group or a society.

Out of all possible human behavior, each society picks and emphasizes segment as 'normal' behavior and to discourage all other behavior as 'abnormal'. When people encounter a new culture, they can see, hear, feel, and otherwise sense the existence of a culture that differs from their own. When such changes are very dramatic, they say they experience "culture shock" from the jolt of so many unfamiliar activities. It takes time to adjust to the different tempo, social styles, food, and activities.

Culture is defined through individual values. Values provide broad social guidelines for general ideas people share about what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Values are acquired in childhood and manifest themselves as permanent perceptions that shape and influence the nature of our behaviors. Values involve emotion, knowledge, thought, and ultimately choice of response. Values vary between individuals and, because values govern behavior, they color the way individuals view and respond to

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their world. While values can, and do, change over time, they represent a significant

component of personality.

When working with people in organization, it is imperative that we appreciate that

each person's intrinsic values are different. Because values are so ingrained, we are not

often aware that our responses in life are, in large part, due to the values we hold and are

unique to our own culture and perspective. Furthermore, we seldom reflect on the fact

that the people with whom we associate hold their own unique set of values that may be

different from our own. Sometimes these are, or seem to be, conflicting.

One article ("Ethics and Decision Making", 2001) noted that ethics means making

decisions based on cultural values. To be truly comprehensive, organization must address

ethics and the role culture and values play in ethical decision-making. Ethical standards

are what the majority of people accept as good, and the way they behave without imposed

rules and regulations. Within our societal structure, sanctions are often imposed on those

who fail to follow ethical standards, and laws dictate consequences for those found guilty

of unethical behaviors.

Ethical thinking involves the intricate process used to consider the impact of our

actions on the individuals or institution we serve. While most decisions are routine, we

can unexpectedly face an ethical dilemma when unusual situations occur suddenly for

which an immediate response is needed.

To be ethically successful, it is paramount that we understand and respect how

values impact our social environment. Without the emphasis on ethics, organizations can

miss the opportunity to reinforce responsibility for their internal and external

environment. This failure can lead to an outcry of negative public opinion, or even worse,

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legal issues. The measure of ethical success within organization has always been important and all individuals are accountable to it in a legal and moral sense.

Awareness of cultural differences doesn't have to divide us from each other. In fact, we can learn to collaborate across cultural lines. Becoming more aware of our cultural differences, as well as exploring our similarities, can help us communicate with each other more effectively. Recognizing where cultural differences are at work is the first step toward understanding and respecting each other.

Marcelle DuPraw and Marya Axner (1997) explained the methodology to respect cultural differences and process of working together.

> Learning about different ways that people communicate can enrich our lives. People's different communication styles reflect deeper philosophies and worldviews, which are the foundation of their culture. Understanding these deeper philosophies gives us a broader picture of what the world has to offer us. Learning about people's cultures has the potential to give us a mirror image of our own. We have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about the 'right' way of doing things, and consider a variety of approaches. We have a chance to learn new ways to solve problems that we had previously given up on, accepting the difficulties as 'just the way things are'.

If we are open to learning about people from other cultures, we become less lonely. Prejudice and stereotypes separate us from whole groups of people who could be friends and partners in working for change. Talking with people of different culture gives us hope and energizes us to take on the challenge of improving our communities.

Culture is central to what we see, how we make sense of what we see, and how we express ourselves. Organization has culturally diverse workforce. Different cultural values have different issues and we all need to think about how those differences can impact positively to organization. Much of it is simply use of good management skills with focus on self-awareness and self-evaluation.

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