

# Cultural Differences and Marketing Success

*A major problem facing business dealing internationally is the need to become more sensitive to foreign cultures. There are numerous stories of the "blunders" in marketing as a result of companies thinking that the foreigner's "mind-set" was similar to their own – both as marketers and consumers. Such blunders are even more important in cross-cultural management in the various partnerships and production facilities located abroad. Managers in no country have shown pervasive ability or willingness to learn about or adjust to the management styles or cultures in other countries – despite, or because of, long colonial attitudes.*

Culture determines the ways in which people think, formulate rules of behavior, observe others, learn, negotiate, and manage their business activities. Unless American management becomes sensitive enough to appreciate these differences and become comfortable with them, it will not achieve the international competitiveness it seeks – for it will continue to "offend" even when it is not consciously "judging" others.

Such offenses do not have to be personal; an entire foreign culture is sometimes "offended" by cultural penetration from the abroad (American, British, German, Russian, or whatever) through styles of dress or communication, movies and TV, music, management styles, advertising and media. For example, Canada and France have attempted to prevent unwanted penetration from US media and entertainment, as have Russia, Singapore, China, and others. It is advisable both for the benefit of business and the development of mankind not to generate a seamless consumer culture for the world. And business should play a role in maintaining desirable diversities.

## Societal Similarities and Differences

All societies have similar types of activities, so observation can be fo-

cused on these particular aspects in order to learn from the comparisons. The learning should be aimed at discovering lessons which will benefit our own growth and ways in which to bridge the differences.

The three major activities, as distinguished by the American philosopher Hannah Arendt, are Work, Action, and Contemplation.<sup>1</sup> These are reflected in the fields of economics, politics, and academia, though they extend beyond each.

– "Work" relates to what is needed for humans to survive and to advance materially.

– "Action" is all communal efforts – neighborhood, city, state, and national – for other than economic objectives.

– "Contemplation" encompasses all mental activities which are in pursuit of learning the truth – for the advancement of individuals and the society. Each of these activities can, therefore, be pursued by an individual or collective entities.

Despite distinctions, they are merely parts of One Whole. Arts and science support Work, and Contemplation gives it a wider purpose; arts and science inform Action, and Contemplation gives it direction; and spiritual development and philosophy are subjects of Contemplation, which itself should enhance love and lead to greater wisdom in pursuit of the truth. Each is

supportive of the others, and if a society focuses mainly on one of these activities, it will become unbalanced and not reach its evolutionary potential.

The modes for the pursuit of each differ widely among the cultures of the world, but tolerance and understanding require a recognition that each is "where it is" as a result of a series of causes. And it is not appropriate to "judge" their responses to these challenges unless one can probe deeply into the psychology (both mind and soul) of the

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<sup>1</sup> See, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1958; also, Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book*, London: Collins Harvill, 1988

peoples involved. It is clearly appropriate for peoples to live in different types of houses around the world, to produce different consumption goods, to use different techniques, to pursue industrial research or not, to organize work differently, and to establish different authority systems.



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It is even appropriate that countries (and cultures) approach science differently, for it is merely an agreed approach to pursuit of truth, being quite subjective. A scientist cannot examine the mind with which he/she is examining objects or events, because he/she is that mind. And, as Heisenburg proved, the observer and the observed are the same event; the observed will act differently because it is observed – its environment has been changed, and it reacts to that fact. And the mind of the observer can influence the reaction of the observed through its anticipation – to say nothing of “seeing” what was expected or “seeing” only what the mind or instruments can recognize or measure. The inadequacies suggest the need for a high degree of humility in making comparisons among the scientific pursuits of different cultures.

The criteria of what is “appropriate” will be different among peoples, as Carl Jung noted while visiting in (and researching) an African village. He observed that a young man, leaving his hut to go hunting, stumbled on the threshold of his hut. He then turned back into the hut, where he remained all day. For Westerners this act would probably been seen as “superstitious”, but Jung reasoned that, for a hunter, it was imperative that his senses were sharp enough to see a viper in the grass on among the leaves of the trees, and to see small game early enough. Not to see the threshold of his hut meant that he was not prepared to hunt safely or successfully that day. Work differs!

The issues which communities decide to address collectively and the methods and organization for doing so reflect their objectives and their propensities. Some are more discursive than others – video, Hungarians, Poles, and Italians; some are more meditative – as the Hindu and some Islamic; some are more hierarchical; some are more combative; and some are more corrupt in their procedures and distribution of benefits among participants. The corruption of

community leadership has a serious impact on work and its benefits to the society by altering motivations and response of the public to taxation and government expenditures.

The practices in Contemplation vary through both academic and religious pursuits. Japan and France are the only “meritocracies” in the world in that they alone have national examinations to determine the “merit” of each student through all grades of education; those of highest merit are supported by the state in their attendance at the highest universities (or Grands Ecoles in France). And these favored few are guaranteed top position upon graduation, permitting their rapid rise to the top in business or government. In other countries, education is for the rich; in others, for all, with few distinctions as they are passed readily along the grades with little real education.

Private contemplation is a matter of spiritual development, which can range from revelation from snake handling to revelation is one's “sanctum sanctorum” while in meditation. Even the acceptance of “revealed truth” varies among cultures, with those more “scientifically” oriented rejecting and knowledge received in that way – despite much evidence that many advances in science have come unexpectedly and while the scientist was engaged in other pursuits.

Acceptance of such differences would arise more readily if there were general recognition of the unity of mankind and its unity with nature. Not only would the orientations in philosophy change, but also the questions and methods of science would shift (from the partial, reductionist modes in Western science to the more holistic approaches of the East), and the divisions in Academia would be eliminated in favor of unifying the body of intellectual knowledge and of instituting the pursuit of wisdom, truth, and love.

This collective pursuit will be better guided if there is a realization that there is purpose to the universe and to life therein. Norbert Wiener, the father of cybernetics, in his lectures on God and Golem,<sup>2</sup> concluded that there had to be a prior design for man, for he is much too complex to have arisen by chance, and the fact of a design implies purpose – else there would be no reason to design in one way or another. The view that the universe arose in its form by chance is merely a statement that we do not understand how it was done. Albert Einstein stated that “All I want to know is how God did it; all the rest is detail.” But, a more fundamental question is “Why God did it,” which cannot be answered by science and involves an examination of “purpose” to reach an answer.

Further, to state that the universe was created by chance implies a contradiction, for science asserts the existence of a law of chance (or probability). But a law is coercive; that is, the movement from cause to effect must be the same under similar conditions, or there is

<sup>2</sup> God and Golem, Inc., Boston: MIT Press, 1964

no law. If chance obeys a law, then the law was set by some highly intelligent "being", and for purpose. Einstein concluded also that "God does not play dice."

If, therefore, there is a purpose in the existence of life and the Universe, it behooves mankind to seek to know that purpose. And a major element in that pursuit is that there appears to be no single route to finding it or achieving it. There are many paths up the mountain but only one summit. The multiple manifestations imply that there are many ways to seek and that man is also given a freedom of will to choose among them. This freedom is not only to follow a path but also to carve new paths; mankind is a co-creator with The Creator.

Even the concept of the Origin/Creator differs among the cultures, with "the Lord God", "the Almighty", "the Ancient of Days", "the King of Kings", "Jahweh", "Jehovah", and "Father" as the names in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and "Allah" in the Islamic. These three are the only religions (or religion-philosophies) which consider that the Maker is a separate and distinct being – opposed to and contracting with mankind, yet also loving and merciful. Others meld the deity with ancestors or nature itself (as in Shinto and Voodoo). Others consider the origin/creator as unknown, unidentifiable, inseparable from all creation, indescribable, and unnamable – in Hindu philosophy, it is merely "That" with no gender or traits which distinguish it.

Although there are "religions" based on polytheism, or many gods, there is a hierarchy even so. While the gods of ancient Greece fought and schemed among themselves and over mankind, they were reflecting the same conflicts on earth. Though some religions today hold to poly-theism, there is a fundamental recognition of unity – a Oneness – at the foundation; that is, a common, singular, and creating "Ground of Being" from which all "life" emanates. There cannot be more than one "ground" nor one fundamental law; if there were, for order to exist at all, there would have to be a single reconciling principle above (or below) them. And other does exist. It is not necessarily a pretty or stable order; evil does exist, as it must, if we are to distinguish "the good" and seek it. And all movement is by cycles, so that prediction is not easy – or even possible unless we knew the fundamental law.

Given that there is one "Ground of Being" and one "Law", what is the best approximation we can make to their nature? The answer given in each culture as direct effects in the ways in which the social /economic/political life is developed, and business should examine these different expression to determine their best means of answering the fundamental economic questions of production and distribution.

If there is to be order and evolution, one aspect of the law must be that all things (manifestation) have an affinity for some other things; this is the law of attraction. If there were no such law, all things would fall away, leading to destruction – no building would occur.

At the same time, not all things are equally attractive to all others; if they were, condensation would be so extreme that nothing could move or develop. Therefore, there are two aspects of the fundamental law reflecting and requiring balance to avoid destruction.



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The fundamental law is the law of Love, which means that all things and mankind are destined to appreciate each other and to learn how to relate to and use the qualities of the other for the search for Truth. If this is recognized, along with the common "Ground of Being", it becomes quite difficult to reject others merely because they are a different manifestation of creation.

Our progress, therefore, depends on achieving a different mind-set, a different worldview, a different fundamental understanding of the origin and purpose of mankind. This understanding leads to the appreciation of the collective interdependence of all mankind and man with nature. The evolution of all is dependent on the elevation of all – physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Not to give this pursuit priority is to live at lower levels than we can reach and even to threaten the existence of human life as we know it. This would not be the end of life on Earth, but it certainly would mean the failure of a "grand experiment". It need not happen, but our fate is in our hands. We have the intelligence, but so far we have lacked the will – which is a quality of spirit.

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### Role of Business

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From these lofty heights of responsibility, it may seem that the role of business is rather mundane or limited. But, the matter is opposite: business in the United States, for example the only really viable institution for cultural reform and advance. The others have been shown sorely wanting and in need of repair: the family is in disarray, the church seems to be increasingly irrelevant in guiding the needed transformation, and government at all levels is in the hands of individuals seeking more to serve themselves and to exercise power than to assist in solving

the problems faced by their constituents – such as education, health, crime, employment, housing, and environmental protection.

All of these problems are focused within the realm of business, affecting its mode of operation and its success. Some companies are assuming a greater responsibility within the community to assist in alleviating these problems; all will eventually have that responsibility thrust upon them – because the other organizations are defaulting and business appears to have the necessary “deep pockets”. (Of course, the customer/taxpayer eventually pays, but the process is perceived as different, both in the way in which income is diverted and how it is spent.)

The recent development of “spiritual guides” within executive development programs for business is a recognition that there is more to the “meaning” of business than mere production and sale of products or services.<sup>3</sup> This meaning involves the growth of the organization through the growth of individuals, committed to the agreed objectives of the company. Such growth involves the “whole being”, extending to the families of employees as well. And this mutual commitment involves the extension of a degree of loyalty and longer-term relationships than has been the practice in the past.

American management faces a transformation of its own, along with that of the society and individuals within it. And it has begun with a recognition that life in incomplete without spiritual content. This recognition, in turn, will assist in the appreciation of other cultures, for it leads to the understanding that all mankind is ONE and that its many manifestations are to be enjoyed rather than decried or placed in hierarchies.

One effort to open the minds of young American managers to the cross-cultural differences and the need to bridge them is the formation by the leading business schools of the Consortium for the MBA Enterprise Corps. It assigns recently graduated MBAs, with several years of prior business experience, to work with small and medium-size private enterprises for a year or more as internal consultants. They assist in the full range of management functions – marketing, finance, production, personnel, sales, distributions networks, pricing, costing, accounting, and so forth.

Some 350 volunteers have been employed by host enterprises in the countries of Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Russia. They have assisted in the transition to a market economy by helping to develop business plans, marketing strategies, feasibility studies, negotiate joint-venture agreements, and so forth. The companies have found this assistance in implementation of change quite useful, but the main benefit is that of building bridges for long-term contacts through greater under-

standing of each other's mind-sets and mode of operation.

The host enterprises are selected by country directors who promote the Corps and determine which applicants are most suitable. They companies pay a local wage and provide housing; the member schools interview candidates from their MBA graduates and nominate those most suitable to helping and to learning from this cross-cultural experience. The companies and MBAs are then matched according to the tasks needed, and the new members of the Corps are given 9 weeks of intensive language training and orientation in country before they go to their assignments.

Over half of those completing their assignments have remained in Central Europe to start their own enterprises, work with local companies, or join Western affiliates. The program has been most successful in infusing cross-cultural understanding among host-country management and the volunteers. It is anticipated that this understanding will lead to long-term benefits to both companies and managers in their future business and in their personal development. Though such understanding will; come a realization that competition is both a conflict and a co-operation, with each seeking to gain an advantage but not to the disadvantage of the other, for only through a continuation of the game of business can all prosper – as is needed for the world market to expand and for sales and production opportunities to continue to multiply.

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#### A LAP MÉRETE A/4

Kifutó méret:	205 x 287 mm
Keretes méret:	180 x 255 mm
1/2 oldal	205 x 143 mm/álló
1/2 oldal	180 x 127 mm/álló

#### HIRDETÉSI ÁRAINK:

1 belső színes oldal:	100 000 Ft
1 fekete-fehér oldal	70 000 Ft
1/2 fekete-fehér oldal:	40 000 Ft

**VÁRJUK JELENTKEZÉSÉT!**

<sup>3</sup> See “Companies Hit the Road Less Traveled,” *Business Week*, June 5, 1995, pp. 82-4.