Cross-cultural perspective can help teamwork in the workplace

August 10 2010

In this era of globalization, many companies are expanding into numerous countries and cultures. But they should not take a "one size fits all" approach to their business and management styles. As the authors of a new article in a special section on Culture and Psychology in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, point out, people in different cultures think about work in different ways. Being aware of the cultural environment that their coworkers come from may help people work together better.

For example, people have different expectations about teamwork, says Cristina B. Gibson, of the University of Western Australia, who cowrote the paper with Dana M. McDaniel, of the University of California, Irvine. Gibson has interviewed people to understand how they conceptualize teams. "In the United States, people used a lot of sports metaphors. Elsewhere, that just wasn't a common metaphor." In Latin America, for example, many people talked about the work team as a family. "If you just use those two contrasts and think about what you might expect from your family versus what you might expect from your sports team, you start to see the differences." Families are involved in all parts of your life, and are expected to celebrate with you socially. "Your involvement in your sports team is more limited. Less caretaking, more competitive."

Another example is in the realm of leadership. Many people assume that charismatic leadership is a good thing—using a strong personality to inspire loyalty in others. But that's not going to work for everyone,

Gibson says. "The very same behaviors that are deemed desirable from a leader in one culture might be viewed as interference or micromanagement in other settings."

The main point is that employers and researchers should question assumptions, says Gibson. "We're just saying, 'hey, wait a minute.' Particularly in a work setting, organizations, teams, and individuals may have different values and preferences." And as this research continues, she says, people should consider that cultures can vary a lot within countries, too, especially as large numbers of people continue to migrate between countries. "We can't make these assumptions that everybody in the United States is like this and everybody in China is like that."

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

Citation: Cross-cultural perspective can help teamwork in the workplace (2010, August 10) retrieved 26 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2010-08-cross-cultural-perspective-teamwork-workplace.html

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