REVIEW OF INDIAN WORK CULTURE AND CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIANS IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

Soniya Jhunjhunwala
S.K.Somaiya College of Arts Science and Commerce Department of Accountancy,
soniyajhunjhunwala@gmail.com

REVIEW OF INDIAN WORK CULTURE AND CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIANS IN THE ERA OF GLOBALISATION

SONIYA JHUNJHUNWALA

S.K.Somaiya College of Arts Science and Commerce
Department of Accountancy
E-mail: soniyajhunjhunwala@gmail.com

_____

ABSTRACT

WORK CULTURE may be defined as the rules/regulations, policies, Practices, traditions/rituals and values/beliefs of the organisation. The business culture of India is a reflection of the various norms and standards followed by its people . In the United States, the work environment is professional and causal . Today's companies have a world of opportunities. The challenge lies in accessing them. Technology has made it possible for companies to expand into international markets. The advent of globalization made business enterprises and employees to work across the borders of various countries, thus providing exposure to cross cultural working environment to both the organizations and employees. This eliminated the huge gap between the work culture of India and other countries to some extent.

This paper is outcome of a review of Indian work culture and work culture in U.S.A. This paper examines some differences between Indian work environment and American work environment .There are differences in working hours, work- life balance, relationship between Boss and subordinates, performance appraisals, accepting changes etc. It raises challenges that are being faced by Indian offshore teams in working with Americans- language barrier, hierarchy in Indian organisations , indirect communication style, time orientation, hard work vis-à-vis smart work etc.

INTRODUCTION

Work culture is a consequence in an organization formed by a set of values and beliefs, carried forward from long time and has substantial impact in the behaviour, quality, and quantity of work done by the employee in an organization.

A decade ago, the work culture in India had a vast difference as compared to rest of the world, especially western countries. But, now there is a paradigm shift due to enormous growth of MNC's in IT sector India, BPO's etc. The advent of globalization made business enterprises and employees to work across the borders

Of various countries, thus providing exposure to cross cultural working environment to both the organizations and employees. This eliminated the huge gap between the work culture of India and other countries to some extent. However, in fields other than IT and Government sectors of India the work culture differs a lot from that of other countries.

A good work environment addresses the culture of the group and the humanity of the individual. It also acknowledges that some habitat needs are universal.

INDIAN WORK CULTURE:

The business culture of India is a reflection of the various norms and standards followed by its people. Indians have various cultural yardsticks, which extend to their business culture too. Thus, it is important that a person visiting the country has an idea of the business culture of India. Thus, it is important that a person visiting the country has some basic idea regarding the business ethics and customs followed here. Having a good grasp on Indian business culture will ensure that you succeed in maintaining a well-earned affinity with your business counterparts. If you are unsure of how to deal with an Indian when it comes to business, we are here to simplify the task. Read on to know about the things that are to be strictly adhered to, while forming any kind of business associations with Indians. The 'namaste' forms an important part of Indian etiquette and is generally used while greeting and saying good-bye. This gesture is akin to the act of genuflection in some countries and is formed by pressing the palms of both hands together (fingers up). The folded hands are placed below the chin and accompanied with a bow. However, educated Indian men and women, who are acquainted with western customs, prefer   shaking   hands.   Moreover,   while

greeting any individual use his or her title (if he has any). To mark respect, you may also suffix 'ji' to the name of a person.

•   A sound knowledge of India's cultural practices and business etiquettes is necessary for any trade or business venture within the country. A proper understanding of culture and business etiquette would not only demonstrate a respect for India but will also create a feel good factor amongst the prospective clients.

•   In India guests are treated with utmost respect and courtesy. International travelers can expect to enjoy the Indian hospitality. At the same time culturally and as a mark of politeness, Indians have difficulty in saying no, this could be a stumbling block in negotiations and in closing contracts.

•   The notion of time, time management, punctuality is still an anathema in India. It is more to do with the mindset and ingrained in the Indian culture. It would not be surprising if meetings are postponed, re scheduled, cancelled or organized at a very short notice.

•   The proficiency over the English language for the average middle class is commendable. Official communication-letter faxes, emails are generally received without any hitch, but it would be prudent to cross check if the transmission has reached the receiver.

•   Bureaucratic hurdles and a laidback approach to work in the government circles could result in delays in processing, overload of paperwork and a general lack of confidence in the system. Therefore immense patience is very much necessary for any business transaction in India.

•   In India, Companies follow the hierarchical system and decision making is usually from the top to bottom. It could at times be time consuming, International companies show respect to this. The lack of infrastructure and inadequate supply chain management can also act as bottleneck for foreign investment.

WORK CULTURE IN U.S.

In the United States, the work environment is professional and causal as well. Don't be surprised if you see people bring their pets to work! The work culture and dress code in U.S. is different. People prefer to dress casually (unless the company policy states otherwise),

• common for people in US to eat at desk. People tend to eat at desk to save time and catch up on work and leave

work schedules are flexible and overall the work atmosphere is informal.

Office Environment

The office environment is informal, and there is no apparent hierarchy between managers and their subordinates. Employees are treated as equals and independent views are welcomed. American work culture involves a lot of meetings. These meetings need not deal with big decisions, but are more like discussions, and are centered on analyzing, planning and reviewing of a project. Opinions and ideas are shared and objections are made. Water, aerated drinks, tea, coffee and vending machines are available at all offices.

Working hours:

•Working hours are flexible as far as IT companies are concerned. Normal office timings go from 9 AM to 5 PM.

•If you are a contractor, then you do need to maintain a minimum of 8 hours per day or 40 hours per week. Results matter more than anything; you must be able to deliver the result.

•Contractors and temporary employees may have to fill up weekly time sheets, which are signed by their Manager.

•Few IT companies allow telecommuting where an employee can work from home, as and when required.

•Americans are very time conscious. They believe in the principles of time-management. They come to office early and leave on time. You will rarely find them working late hours, or on weekends. They plan their weekends ahead of time and value their privacy.

• Meetings are an integral part of corporate work culture in America. People tend to schedule lot of meetings to discuss and plan a variety of things. Meetings are usually started exactly on time. If the meeting request says 9 AM, it is sharply 9 AM.

• This may not be generalized, but for the most part people tend to allot around 30 min for their lunch time. Typically, people go out for a quick lunch, or bring in their lunch box from home. Some of them prefer to eat at desk to save lunch time and do parallel work or do something   else.   It   is   very early. Unless you are on a team lunch meeting, people tend to eat quick in 30 to 45 min. Sometimes, if there is

a meeting scheduled during lunch hour, people eat lunch in meetings, they would just put in meeting request, lunch meeting or bring in your lunch unless the company is ordering. If there is cafeteria or lunch room at work, people tend to go to them and eat there or buy lunch and come back to your desk.

American Behaviour

•Generally, Americans are very polite, friendly and helpful, but have less tolerance for people who interfere in their private lives.

•They value their leisure time, health and hygiene.

•You may find it difficult to discuss everything with an American friend, at least, when you are getting to know each other.

•Exercising is important, and they usually go for aerobics, swimming, tennis or a jog a few times during the week.

•Dont be surprised if strangers greet you. Be polite and greet them back.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIAN WORK CULTURE AND WORK CULTURE IN U.S.

• In all the Western countries, especially USA, people strictly adhere to the time. They work in the office for eight hours a day. They attend the meetings sharply in scheduled timings. . They take lunch break for half an hour.
    On the contrary, in India, people do not adhere to the timings. No doubt, they work for long hours approximately for 10-12hrs a day and sometimes even on weekends, but take long tea breaks and lunch breaks. They are not very imperative on deadlines and keep negotiating for extension of timeline. Some times scheduled meetings are canceled, due to absence of some key persons.

• One more major difference is the work-life balance. In Western work-culture, they give more value to the time spent for their personal life. They do not carry the workplace pressures or stress to home. Eventually work is a part of their life, but not the life itself. Nevertheless, they stay back at office occasionally, when they need to work.
    Most of the Indians think workplace as an opportunity to build their future and put forth extensive efforts to climb the corporate ladder and earn monetary benefits. They work day and night beyond limits, which results in losing work-life balance .This also makes them encounter a lot of pressure ,as the demands at work place and family are almost opposite. There may be a greater sense of ownership of work in Indians and they value work more than that of personal life.

• The relationship between the boss and subordinates is believed to be more formal and hierarchical in India. People in power openly display their ranks according to which importance is given. Employees are not supposed to expect clear guidance from the managers and they are often not assigned with important work. Subordinates are expected to take the blame for things that go wrong. The relationship between boss and subordinate is rarely close/personal. In general company meetings only few people dominate, even though their decisions are wrong. However, it may vary from company to company.
    Whereas in western work culture the relation between boss and subordinate is not more formal and hierarchical, superiors treat subordinates with respect and do not demonstrate ranks. Subordinates are entrusted with important assignments. Blame for things that go wrong is either shared or is often accepted by the superior, due to it being their responsibility to manage. Managers often socialize with subordinates. Meetings are interactive sessions to arrive at best decisions.

• In mentoring, Indian managers are a bit soft in critical assessments. Seniors tend to lean more on positive feedback during an appraisal, leaving the criticism unsaid. In India either due to the appraisal process or due to the lack of skill of the appraiser, the much-needed critical assessment is often held back.
    In the US, there is a better balance in practice.

• In Indian work-culture, people do not accept change easily; lot of resistance is encountered in order to implement change.
    In western work-culture, people are adaptive and conductive to change implementation.

CHALLENGES FACED BY INDIANS WORKING WITH AMERICANS.

India has become the offshore outsourcing capital of the world. In the current wave of global economic change, location in India of information technology, business process or other value chain activities or services is not an option any more, but a strategic reality. Cultural differences between Indians and your employees can significantly add costs to your Indian engagement and create a negative impact on your benefits.

The importance of differences in national and organizational cultures in offshore IT development initiatives is often underestimated. Many companies have ventured into India without recognizing the criticality of these differences for creating unified and effective cross-cultural teams of its IT professionals.

However, without a proper understanding, intercultural differences between team members based in India and the United States and other parts of the world can lead to numerous areas of difficulty, frustration and reduced productivity.

Developing global cultural competency is one of the most challenging aspects of working globally. Managing the myriad work and management styles that companies face across geographies, businesses, functions and projects can be daunting. What is effective in one culture may be ineffective, or even inappropriate, in other cultures. In addition, multicultural diversity at home is now the rule, rather than the exception.

Apart from language barrier(American vs. Indian English),there are five elements of American business culture that pose special challenges for Indian teams interacting with their American counterparts – whether in the ITO, BPO or call center environment.

1. Mindset about Management Hierarchy

In American business culture, rank and title aren't as important as they are in India. Hierarchical forms of behavior are frowned upon. The expectation is that subordinates will speak up, offer suggestions, push back and take initiative rather than just do what they're told. Decisions tend to be less top-down, authority is more delegated, and managers expect team members to take responsibility and assume ownership of results.

2. Attitudes Towards Appointments and Deadlines

For Americans, strict adherence to time commitments is seen as a basic principle of professionalism and courteous behavior. Because everything tends to be strictly scheduled, delays in one appointment or deadline can have a serious ripple effect on a colleague or customer's other work commitments. The more flexible and open-ended approach to time of Indian business culture can create tensions and unfavorable impressions on American counterparts.

3. Meaning of Agreements and Commitments

Americans have a preference for clear, detailed agreements and are uneasy with vague expressions of general commitment. In business interactions, commitments are taken literally and seriously. Failure to follow through on them precisely is viewed as a sign that a person isn't trustworthy. Indian business culture tends to view agreements more flexibly as intentions and guidelines for future action.

4. Results vs. Process Orientation

In Indian business culture, following the rules and implementing correct processes is highly valued, but in American business culture, it's all about results. There is impatience with individuals who come across as more concerned with following established processes correctly than with achieving the desired goal. Americans don't like to be told all the procedural reasons why something can't be or hasn't been done.

5. Directness — Especially in Addressing Disagreements

The American style of communication is characteristically direct, candid and relatively unconcerned with face-saving or the avoidance of conflict. The expectation is that questions will get answered with a clear "yes" or "no," and that disagreements will be dealt with openly and straightforwardly, in a "tell it like it is" manner. Indians and people from other cultures that tend to avoid conflict and loss of face often find it hard to say "no" or raise problematic issues effectively with their American counterparts.

CONCLUSIONS:

Work culture is important for the growth of a company, in turn the growth of a country depends on the companies. There exist many differences, pros, and cons in work culture of any country. We have to pick and adapt the best practices of work culture around the globe and implement them in our organizations.

REFERENCES:

1. http://blog.wisdomjobs.com
2. http://www.hermanmiller.com
3. Sinha, J.B.P., (1990). 'Work Culture in Indian Context.' New Delhi: Sage.(published)
4. http://www.delhibusinessreview.org
5. http://www.delhibusinessreview.org
6. http://www.culturalsavvy.com/india_training.htm.
7. http://www.path2usa.com/office-environment-work-culture-in-us.
8. http://redbus2us.com/work-culture-in-usa-working-hours-lunch-time-meetings.