Culture & Conflict: Intertwined with International Business

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Abstract

International business has grown day by day as a powerful part of the world economy since the development of separate nations in ancient times. Today international transactions have become a very common entity in the business world. With this newfound trend comes the need to understand the complexities of culture and conflict management in order for an international business to succeed with a competitive edge. Both factors hold the potential to either mercilessly crumble an unprepared organization or richly reward a company for prodigious forethought and management skills. As a result, the link between the fragility of culture adaptation and the preeminent demand for conflict management holds the key to boundless success in the world of international business.

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Introducing the World of International Business

The understanding of international business stands as an irrefutable necessity today for members of the world's global economy. The ability to compete in international business stands as a notable necessity for all organizations to adopt and master. No longer does business hesitate to reach beyond the borderlines of nations, but easily spreads over seas and stretches its hands around the globe due to the type of encompassing market prevalent today. "Multinational corporations," "trade agreements," and "globalization" have all become common terms frequently used and understood by any professional seeking success in the world of business. This overarching line of thought has shown evidence of existence in society since the beginning of international commerce itself. 1 Kings 5 records in the Bible that the building of Solomon's Temple required the use of international trade in the tenth century before Christ. Solomon, king of Israel, and Hiram I, king of Tyre, held a trade agreement, exchanging timber from Lebanon along with a supply of labor in return for food for Hiram's royal household (Satterlee, 2009, p. 12). The formation of the temple would not have been possible without the use of resources of foreign lands. Even at such an early point in history, international trade had proven itself to be essential and fundamental for the improvement of current projects already underway for royalty.

Another example of international business's ever-present importance lies in the story of the great Roman Empire. This infamous domain formed and declined through its mastery of the various linkages of business that would allow the empire to flourish exponentially and encourage additional nations to support its reign simultaneously.

International business served as the threshold for powerful Roman success, providing an impactful legacy on thought, knowledge, and development that continues to ripple today (Czinkota, Ronkainen, & Moffett, 2000, p. 5). However, the global economy has only magnified as a conclusive force in recent history as it takes domestic, as well as international, business into account as they influence and build upon each other, bridging relations between more and more countries. This present rush of international trade activity demands a global mindset for organizations hoping to thrive because even the most recently formed companies are now stepping into the world's foreign markets with minimal experience (Gillespie, Jeannet, & Hennessey, 2007, p. 9). And so, international business will continue to grow as long as companies indirectly encourage the global economy to remain dominant in attempts to boost their own success.

International business consists of transactions that are formulated and produced across national borders in order to fulfill the desires of individuals and organizations (Czinkota, Ronkainen, & Moffett, 2000, p. 4). Such business opens the world of new markets to industrious companies, like The Coca-Cola Company, McDonald's Corporation, and Nike, Inc. By combining local and distant trade, international business presents opportunities for expansion, growth, and income that would have never been feasible on a merely domestic level. Furthermore, business conducted across multiple countries pushes global markets to expand rapidly, forcing them to strive for excellence in productivity and compounding value. At this point new levels of success are made attainable for corporations as well as new difficulties because international business opens the door to an entirely new division of conflict through macroenvironmental factors that demand attention through conflict management on a complex, cross-cultural level.

Fitting Conflict Management into International Business

Understanding Conflict for Better Business

The idea of welcoming the need for conflict management has only recently become an established tactic in the business world, especially in the international industry. Terms such as “conflict management” and “conflict resolution” have consistently been linked with a negative connotation, giving the common businessman the traditionally accepted thought that conflict means failure and a general corruption of relationships (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 282). However, successful companies today embrace the eminent fact that conflict remains inevitable and choose to handle the problem in a constructive way that pushes the company in a positive direction. In a world running on an expanding global economy, companies cannot afford to shamefully manage conflict and yet still compete effectively. Every country and every organization face “dilemmas in relationship with people, dilemmas in relationship to time, and dilemmas in relations between people and the natural environment” and share the ultimate fate of having to endure the different challenges of mere existence (Trompenaars, 1996, p. 52). No company stands exempt from this rule. The solitary idea that declares the majority of people can maintain productive relationships while completely avoiding conflict is increasingly unrealistic as the world of business grows and diversifies (Chen, Tjosvold, & Fang, 2005, p. 268). And so the international manager must first realize the problem at hand and then begin the problem-solving process in order to reconcile the dilemmas and transform the company into a more successful entity.

Research documents that the manner in which conflict is managed show more about well-being of a corporation than the original conflict itself. On the international level, approaches to difficulty will most likely focus a grand amount of concentration on one area, such as overcoming biased attributions, in other words, surpassing the obstacles presented by cultural differences (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 305). Every person on the face of the earth holds some learned form of culture that cannot be shaken from their perception of the world. However, the gradual cultivation of values, attitudes, and symbols, when combined together, encourages upfront mutual understanding and learning by both parties involved (Holtbrügge, 2004, p. 268). First, it must be understood that culture is defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another…the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment" (Adler, 1983, p. 40). Also, culture sets people apart because it conditions people to think, feel, and behave in certain ways according to the preconceived concepts of their inner thought process. The various forms of culture are embedded in elements of society such as religion, language, history, education, law and government, family, attitudes toward time, and social relationships (Gillespie, Jeannet, & Hennessey, 2007, p. 54). Individuals make every single decision based upon their unique culture. Consequently, organizations, which generally compose themselves with a variety of individuals making up their diverse composition, are expected to confront a great deal of conflict with relative poise and ease; however, experts agree that managing such conflicts in such a way that people respected through their identity and values is actually quite challenging (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, pp. 294-295). Varying cultures and value systems between managers and employees have only proven to make the discussion of conflicts in a productive light more difficult. However, the efforts put forth by an organization to develop a frame of reference in forming a common cultural platform within an international business setting are theorized as the foundation for a productive cross-cultural interaction (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 305). In the end, the more culturally encompassing the conflict management proves to be, the more beneficial the experience will result for all components involved in the process.

Values and Trust as They Relate to Conflict Management

Understanding the diversity of values of those in the global workforce stands as a crucial factor for any international business in the world today. The deep, essential core of culture consists of encompassing, traditional ideas and especially their accompanying values, which cause interpretive behavior by all parties involved in events of interaction (Kozan, 1997, p. 341). Researchers frequently identify values as one of the main barriers involved in intercultural work because they guide beliefs on how life 'ought' to be lived whether this line of reasoning is recognized or not. Values are composed of particular preferences and predominant priorities that reflect what is important to workers and do not include ethics, morals, principles, judgments, virtues, attitudes, needs, beliefs, or emotions, but rather explain their existence (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 286). A typical value system can be defined as "an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). When working in a cross-cultural setting, a group must remember the differences in value systems from one society to another, indoctrinated in the minds, as Hofstede would describe, of members of certain cultural backgrounds. Conflict arises easily when individuals hold diverging ideas about what exactly is important and what exactly should be the answer to any problem requiring a resolution. Because values are believed to uphold the basis on which organizations are constructed, the general temperance and control of individual values must be harnessed in order to progress the purpose of the organization involved (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 291). Basically, the values involved in a conflict can be managed in such a way to boost morale or break the company involved.

Culture within different countries also plays a key role in the level of trust exerted in an exchange relationship especially when pertaining to the international business industry. The role of trust in an exchange relationship develops when vulnerability, risk, and some level for sheer opportunism present themselves and explain the moves made by each party involved (Elahee, Kirby, & Nasif, 2002, p. 803). Trust has many dimensions including sincerity, lack of caution, lack of suspicion, desire for close relationship, reliance on another person, belief in equality of power, expectancy of good relationship, predictability of good behavior, consistency of future behavior, and general agreement with other which all contribute to intentionality and behavior (Sullivan, Peterson, Kameda, & Shimada, 1981, p. 810). When working in an international setting, cultural differences tend to be the source of dispute for negotiations and conflict, hindering the amount of trust extended to the opposing sides. The interactive behavior of the negotiating parties is implicitly regulated by their cultural values and causes trust to be more likely involved when similarities in culture can be found (Elahee, Kirby, & Nasif, p. 804). And so, while culture can cause dissent between members of different cultural groups, it can act like a magnet for those of cultural groups where similarities can be easily established.

Meanwhile, trust can be formed through quality of information and communications, which tends to be only be made valid through a critical mixture of precision, timeliness, and utility or quantity of information and also typically displays the organization's sentiment of feeling adequately informed (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009, p. 290). In other words, proper communication induces trust within an organization. This pertinent level of information occurs through the amount of communication in which members of the organization are willing to participate, which links back to the behavioral differences established by the cultural backgrounds held by the involved members. And so, trust allows open communication between employees who willingly discuss their opinions and ideas, which correlates to their individual level of interpersonal trust due to their innate culture (Thomas, Zolin, & Hartman, p. 291). In the end, cultural compatibility enriches overall understanding and trust between partners, leading to a rise in communication and effective conflict management (Holtbrügge, 2008, p. 265). Conflict management through adequate communication caused by trust vitally provides a competitive advantage for companies to succeed on a global scale.

Five Foreseeable Forms of Conflict Management

Authors agree (e.g. Kidder & Goodpaster, 2005; Plunkett & Adler, 1983) that theories of conflict management will not apply to each culture of the world. In order for an organization to succeed, managers must determine which form of conflict management best fits their situation in order for the conflict to be categorized as functional and beneficial to the organization. Traditionally, managers have quickly seen conflict as a negative aspect of their group and discouraged growth of conflict without question. However, more contemporary views of conflict welcome the challenge because both the comparative and interactive aspects of conflict management across cultures gain great importance due to the workings of a progressively globalized work environment (Kozan, 1997, p. 338). Because of the diversity of cultural settings in the international business industry, five distinct forms of conflict management exist: avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration.

First, the avoidance strategy completely ignores the conflict at hand, allowing for no resolution to the disagreement due to the traditional view that conflict demands elimination of all controversy. When managers see the issue as unnecessary and possibly even harmful to an organization, they utilize this ineffective route of conflict management and cause a reaction of fear that eventually leads to failure for the entire group involved in the problem (Plunkett & Attner 1983, p. 428). The avoidance strategy ignores the real source of the conflict, leaving the situation unresolved, which finally draws significant attention away from the work at hand and makes the conflict worse than its initial state (Satterlee, 2009, p.179). Avoidance, which is low in assertiveness and cooperation, basically side-steps the issue and relieves the parties involved from open discussion (Kozan, 1997, p. 340). Avoidance does not solve the problem effectively or efficiently, showing a poor example of conflict management.

Second, the accommodation strategy also falls between the lines of the traditional view of conflict, stating that the problem must be handled as quickly as possible in order to return back to normal interactions. In this form of conflict management, one individual simply acquiesces to the demands of the other in order to maintain harmony (Satterlee, 2009, p. 179). Meanwhile the wishes of the submitting party go ignored, causing an ineffective attempt at conflict management where the dominant party continues to rule over the compliant party, who may not work as cooperatively in the future. The underlying problem with this approach to conflict management is that it never reaches the point that makes the analysis conclude and the resolution arise (Kidder & Goodpaster, 2005, p. 87). Accommodation may be high in cooperativeness but certainly proves itself as an inefficient form of conflict management that opens the door to future problems and needs for better resolution.

Third, the competition strategy can be referred to as the interactionist view where the manager openly admits that, no matter how well a company is developed and organized, conflict will always rear its inevitable head in organizations and has even been found necessary for overall organizational health (Plunkett & Attner, 1983, p. 427). Competition occurs as individuals in the conflict at hand attempt to maximize their own gain; however, competition can quickly escalate into a match of greed instead of an opportunity to benefit the organization as benefits for the individual seemingly outweigh the benefits for the group involved. This form of conflict management oftentimes proves to be ineffective since the two sides of the present debate generally concern themselves more with winning than arriving at the best solution for everyone (Satterlee, 2009, p. 179). Competition can also lead to a loss of confidence since communication becomes frustrated, resulting in either a deadlock or an imposed solution, which ultimately leads to a failure to solve the problem and work productively (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 298). While competition is high in assertiveness and can spark short-term interest within the organization, the long-term effects of this management can mean a distracting attitude and a thirst for more competition. Though the interactionist manager seeks to maintain a productive level of conflict in order to keep employees within the organization happily inspired to continue working, he must be continuously sensitive and monitor the work environment to allow conflict to multiply itself (Plunkett & Attner, p. 431). In the end, competition may work well for immediate conflict management, but it will ensure future problems that will require close attention.

Fourth, the compromise strategy occurs when both parties are willing to give and take because they are genuinely concerned not only about their own ambitions but also about the objectives of the organization, causing an ability for the conflict to turn effective (Satterlee, 2009, p. 180). The manager of a conflict resolved by compromise must be careful to assert opinions into the situation that can be universal and easily accepted by each stakeholder in order to reach the best agreement because each party is winning some while losing some simultaneously (Kidder, Goodpaster, 2005, p. 84). This way everyone involved in the conflict can set aside their differences and remember the common goal of the group, making compromise easier to attain. Compromise serves as a very efficient use of conflict management as long as each party involved fully understands the ultimate goal of working for the best interest of the organization.

Fifth, the collaboration strategy begins when the manager takes a vital, initiative step in handling the issue already set. In this method of conflict resolution, both parties involved strive to satisfy their personal goals by not making allowances but rather by cultivating a pleasing solution leading to a win-win situation (Satterlee, 2009, p. 180). The full collaboration process uses many tools to help accomplish or manage work activities, which in turn, promotes team building and a healthy work environment. The manager must remember that he sets the tone for the organization's personality, which causes the organizational climate, which means in simpler terms the "internal environment in which the organization members function" (Plunkett & Attner, 1983, p. 406). A stable working environment could easily eliminate any potential conflict before it even reaches the group. Several authors describe collaboration as the strategic creation by a community of people dedicated to a collective purpose (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 282). And so, the collaboration strategy stands high in both assertiveness and cooperativeness, involving the presentation of any germane issues and concerns for all to see, and reaching an answer that smoothly assimilates the different points of view that once exhausted each other (Kozan, 1997, p. 340). Collaboration definitely serves as the most effective and efficient form of conflict management as it takes care of short-term problems and eliminates the possibility of future conflict stemming from the current situation.

International Examples of Conflict in Action

Coca Cola serves as an excellent example of conflict management in the world today of international business. Today Coca-Cola serves as one of the most well-known and easily recognizable international brands in China, leading the soft drink industry for the specified market (Shijiazhuang, 2013, para. 9). However, the company launched two bottling plants in Tianjin and Shanghai, China in the 1980's, meeting much adversity in respects to the political and cultural backgrounds found. Coca-Cola has since withstood various challenges during its entry into the highly versatile local market environment, bringing along a relatively extensive history of investment in China since 1979, when economic reform was implemented under the de facto leadership of Deng Xiaoping (Mok, Dai, & Yeung, 2002, p. 40). These obstacles range from facing sharp competition with Pepsi-Cola to enduring the ordeal of penetrating an unfamiliar market holding the critical potential to either sink or soar for the beverage giant (Mok, Dai, & Yeung, p. 40). Not shaken by any wearisome setbacks, Coca Cola decided to collaborate with the Chinese Ministry of Light Industry through a cultivating relation with the government agency directing policy issues with regards to foreign investment directly into the consumer sector in China (Yang, 1998, p. 646). Coca Cola continued to feed this relationship, even with the stumbling block of the Chinese government forming new health regulations, and began reaching into the Chinese community, donating as the biggest sponsor to the Asian Games held in 1990. Additionally, the Coca-Cola business system has shown generally positive impacts on the advancement of labor, capital, and product markets in China (Mok, Dai, & Yeung, p. 40). Today, the easily recognizable logo can be quickly spotted on pushcarts throughout busy commercial streets laced through major cities and excavated on the walls of small shops found in the most remote neighborhoods of rural villages as bottles are produced from forty-three plants located within in the large nation (Shijiazhuang, para. 9). Because Coca Cola held on with patience and persistence, working collaboratively with the Chinese government the company is now able to hold twenty-three operating bottling plants by 1997 and Coke stand as one of the most popular drinks among Chinese consumers.

Motorola faced a conflict in the 1980s of deciding whether or not to venture over into China to increase the consumer range. One senior Motorola manager in the Beijing office comments, “It was very difficult in the 80’s to justify coming to China on the basis of any feasibility studies or the market assessment. But in 1986 our chairman came to the (Chinese) market and said we needed to be in that market. We decided to go ahead. Our timing was extremely good" (Yang, 1998, p. 642). The company was unsure whether they would be successful with the Chinese market and faced much turmoil within the firm over expanding. However, the company utilized effective conflict management to their advantage, instead of avoiding it, inspiring many expatriates to venture forth into China, and found that their timing for entry to China was optimal. By the 1990s the company was able to establish the first entirely owned telecommunication equipment factory in China. In a matter of a few years, Motorola was able to become a not only a household item but also a lofty symbol of professional success among the young people of the immense nation (Yang, p. 643). The CEO of Motorola was able to see a vision and inspire his employees to follow suit, involving them in the strategic formation process, keeping communication and trust high as the plan was implemented.

Conclusion of Conflict Analysis

Without a doubt conflict has the full potential of contributing to a team's effectiveness in the world of international business. However, the success or failure of an organization amidst the looming storm of conflict heavily depends upon the management in charge of the operation. Fortunately, cross-cultural research has served as a welcomed reminder that team members must negotiate and develop relationships as well as means of interaction that are both applicable and appropriate for their respective situation, task at hand, and cultures involved (Tjosvold & Wong, 2004, p. 307). In order to succeed in the international business industry, companies must remember that conflict is inevitable, especially because their individual firm consists of cross-cultural assets, and they must learn to manage the conflict for the unified best interest of the organization including a healthy investment in values and trust. Many authors agree that "when the organization's mission and purpose overlap with the personal mission and vision of the employees based on common values, motivation and satisfaction of employees will be high and result in greater success of the organization" (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 297). Finally, when international businesses manage conflict effectively and efficiently, they will increase the top line, customer satisfaction, and value imminently, leading to unbeatable success in the consistently growing global economy.

A Closer Look into Culture

Understanding Culture for Better Business

It cannot be denied that people make up the most integral component of a company's design. Whether the company produces computers, burgers, ballpoint pens, running shoes, or cosmetics, the firm must remember that it needs people to hold any substance in the business industry. Mary Kay Ash, founder of the successful international cosmetics company Mary Kay, Inc. displays the common understanding among global business managers that people, along with their respective cultures, come first in business when she announced, "A company is only as good as the people it keeps" (BrainyQuote). The expectations and norms of different cultures cannot be ignored for the sake of ease and convenience, but instead, must be included in the calculation of business plans before implementation in foreign countries. Though no single definition exists, Hofstede concludes that culture defines the overall mindset a certain group of people possesses that remains distinguishable enough to separate that group from the rest of the people groups around the world. This mindset induces dynamics of the human disposition that influence character traits such as certain behavioral tendencies and reactions that prove to form a pattern within a people group (Hofstede, 1980, p.13). In expansion from this idea, people belonging to particular cultures are typically differentiated from each other based upon their lifestyles, should the lifestyles differ to such an extreme extent. (Adler, 1983, p. 40). And so, culture separates people through aspects like their values and practices, which cannot be shaken because the various aspects are already ingrained in their line of thought. These differences are great enough to cause specification of people groups as being grouped by certain backgrounds and should receive adequate attention in order to allow an international business to perform at optimum levels.

For example, the commonly known fast food giant, McDonald's Corp., changed its menu in India due to religious differences that prohibit the population from consuming both beef and pork products. In order to comply with the host-nation's dietary demands and yet still maintain a successful business venture, McDonald's created new menu items like the McVeggie Burger, the McSpicy Paneer, and several chicken entrées to substitute for its normal products. The *Wall Street Journal* commemorates the firm, saying that McDonald's retains part of its success globally by quickly adapting to local cultures by respecting their tastes and formalities without losing its highly marketable brand image (Gasparro & Jargon, 2012). Fortunately, a globally astute company like McDonald's can place the cultural elements of its target audience first and continue to grow as a prosperous, internationally acclaimed business. However, neglect of the intricacies of culture will impede productivity and lead to the ultimate failure of foreign business relations for the firm seeking international success.

The Dimension of Communication

The first dimension of culture to be given close attention when dealing in business internationally is communication. The communication that takes place within a certain culture is particular to that group and cannot be found exactly the same in any other cultural structure. The individuals within the cultures of the world have inherently learned to use the communication styles unique to their people group effectively (Satterlee, 2009, p. 40). However, communication holds the key to trust between individuals and groups, especially when business is included and profit risks may be at hand. Though no single definition of trust can be pinpointed, it is certain that trust is built through information as it forms views and feelings about the opposite party (Fann, Zolin, & Hartman, 2009, p. 294). Low communication causes low information sharing, low information sharing causes low trust, and low trust causes low amounts of interaction, which are vital to a business's well-being, which directly effects global competitiveness and profitability. Communication is key.

Nevertheless, communication cannot simply happen between two cultures in an international business because several cultures contain specific differences that hinder the flow of communication. International business stresses the importance of acquiring an adequate level of care and appreciation of other cultures containing foreign values and beliefs because a lack of familiarity with these new cultures could lead to ineffectiveness in communicating their members (Penrose, Rasberry, & Myers, 2004, p.19). Before effective communication can occur between members of two separate cultural backgrounds, the representatives must gain an understanding of one another's mindset and then proceed to work together to reach full understanding of each other. Skipping any step in this process can lead to embarrassing and awkward interactions that could have easily been avoided. At the worst, such mistakes may confuse or even offend the people involved, making the conclusion of business deals or international agreements difficult or impossible.

No doubt exists that cultural differences affect the interactions between members of varying cultures, either positively or negatively (Harvey, & Griffith, 2002, p. 465). In preparation of such concerns, British Telecom went to great lengths to audit and examine the attitudes and communication, due to cultural differences, presented by the AT&T workforce before beginning cooperative programs. Other companies, like Pepsi Cola, have not been so meticulous in every opportunity to prepare for international communication when their campaign "Come Alive with Pepsi" told their Taiwanese audience the unsettling news that "Pepsi brings your ancestors back from the grave." A huge mistake had been made along the lines of proper translation and cultural adaptation. Obviously, marketing blunders can occur in translation of language as well as interpretation of non-verbal communication that typically would not be given a second thought. The smallest of incidents may lead to a loss of future business relations, such as a sign meant to congratulate a coworker conveying an offending message in the coworker's foreign culture. The complexities of communication have the potential to deteriorate an international business firm if an international business manager with experience in handling this environment does not heavily study all forms of communication before use.

The Dimension of Religion

Religion can carry many different meanings due to varying interpretations of the concept, making it susceptible to misinterpretation among differing cultures. Generally, religion has been defined as actions and behaviors that reflect beliefs or desires to appease one or many divine powers or greater beings; these practices indicate a certain faith that contains regulated observances and worship patterns (Satterlee, 2009, p. 43). Individuals in distinctive cultures, holding their separate religious views, may have preconceived notions about others' religious standings or may have little to no knowledge at all about them. And so, misunderstandings and possible offenses may ensue if proper research and examination have not been previously conducted for education in the world's various religions. It is for this reason that McDonald's, as previously stated, altered menu items in order to better appeal to their Indian market holding strict Hindu views that prohibit the consumption of beef and pork products. As a result, the company can now continue to expand its target audience base within the nation's borders and grow along with its popularity.

However, clear correlation exists between religion and behavior in the realm of business. With religion viewed as an independent variable, traits such as "work ethic, honesty (and hence trust), thrift, charity, hospitality to strangers and so on" affect the economy, though they are rooted in the depths of religion, and could lead to substantial economic growth through investments if enlarged and encouraged by means of greater devotion to religious beliefs (McCleary & Barro, 2006, pp. 50-51). Religion therefore holds the potential of encouraging economic performance. In international business, varying religious beliefs between cultures directly cause varying amounts of influence for economic performance due to foundational principles that enforce a variety of ideals. Max Weber summarizes in his work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, that behavior and personal conduct have proven to flow naturally from ethical burdens produced from religious beliefs due to their teachings, making religion a powerful influence in the behavioral aspect of business (1930, Introduction). Weber extensively explains several aspects of Wesleyan views that push "gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can," correlating strongly with the example of Christian tenets, which include working hard, saving money, and helping those in need, with economic behavior (McCleary & Barro, p. 51). He concludes that religious beliefs are of utmost importance for positive economic results.

Meanwhile, the uniqueness of the religions of the world causes multitudes of differing rules of behavior and conduct, which in turn cause variations in the potency of religion in the aspect of shaping cultural influences on economic activity, especially in international trade (Lewer, 2007, p.2). Differing religious philosophies normally cause contrary economic incentives that hold important repercussions for human welfare due to fundamental, but adverse, beliefs on eternal salvation and life after death. For example, September 11, 2001 marks a day the world will not forget as religious terrorists crashed into the World Trade Center on a mission to destroy a key link in the global economy. The bombing caused many to question as to whether the growing pace of globalization of the world's economy would encourage such acts of religious zealotry and whether these acts would prove to improve or hinder the workings of the global economy (Lewer, p. 1). In this example, Islamic beliefs caused erratic behavior in extremists that changed lives and tipped the scales of international business relations with the US. As a result, border controls tightened, security costs increased, and continued globalization of economic activity became discouraged due to the perceived risk of working with groups of similar religious background. So whether the culture of a nation includes Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shinto, or any other form of religion the world offers, differences are inevitable and will cause rifts, if not complete failure, in the conduction of business if the international business manager does not take diverse views into account.

The Dimension of Ethics

Every culture possesses its own standards of conduct and norms of behavior based upon their ethical values. Ethics, meaning the personal moral compass each individual holds and follows when navigating through the decision making processes of life, which typically leads to conformity to society, correlates to the moral obligations and justice found within a group of people (Morf, Schumacher, & Vitell, 1999, p. 265). Though one culture most likely does not hold the exact same set of moral standards and common behavioral practices as the next, some universal codes of ethics stand throughout the nations, such as those dealing with lying, cheating, stealing, killing, and so forth. These sinful acts are considered unethical in most any setting and can often be categorized as falling to corruption. Furthermore, the business world holds ethics to an extremely high rank in the level of importance as much profitability pivots on ethical standards and practices, making the knowledge and understanding of these codes of behavior pivotal for the health of any international business (Mahdavi, Mokhtari, & Parhizgar, 2006, p. 305). The benefits of conducting business internationally come linked with the responsibility of studying foreign ethics because companies that refer to themselves as being truly global must have already acquired an understanding of the legal and moral circles in which their companies work (Mahdavi, Mokhtari, & Parhizgar, p. 306). Any hint of corruption plus the appearance of a lack of corporate social responsibility can injure relationships between international businesses and their consumers quickly and even permanently.

For example, the government of a Third World nation may find no problem with exploiting children by forcing them into labor, but US professionals would face severe allegation if they conducted business with companies that condoned such a lack of ethical morality. In cases with high media coverage, the American public may choose to boycott products made by such measures, such as child exploitation, that directly contradict the responsibilities set forth by the US government. Recently, Victoria's Secret, America's largest retailer of lingerie, has faced several attacks that claim the company has succumbed to the pattern of exploitation previously stated. Much of the company's cotton supply comes from Burkina Faso, a nation where child labor is growing to become vastly common in the production of its chief crop export since the tags of "organic" and "fair-trade" cotton have become popular in its market, encouraging an overwhelming amount of exploitation (Simpson, 2011). Trade scandals like that of Victoria's Secret can cause barriers of trade to be established by industries and product demand to decline. Therefore, the engagement with businesses containing faults in ethical standards can prove to be detrimental to international firms and even the impoverished nations supplying the raw materials for the business transactions. One of the most recently cited reasons for governments refusing to extend foreign aid or desperately needed debt relief resides in the plague of corruption because supplying aid to a foreign nation run by corrupt leaders would only support the immorality already in action (Satterlee, 2009, p. 49). As a result, ethics play a huge role in the success of international businesses, causing any international business manager to recognize the necessity of studying the ethical standards of cultures involved with their business and being prepared to respond in appropriate ways when concerns are raised.

The Dimension of Values and Attitudes

A discussion of culture entails a discussion of values and subsequently attitudes; however, the present importance of these two aspects of the culture lies in their relation to international business. First, the understanding of the diversity of values of those in the global workforce stands as a crucial factor for any international business in the world today. Traditional ideas, followed by their inherent values, comprise the deepest core of culture, causing distinctive interpretive behavior (Kozan, 1997, p. 341). Researchers frequently identify values as one of the main barriers involved in intercultural work because they guide beliefs on how life 'ought' to be lived whether they are consciously performed or not. Values are composed of preferences and priorities that unveil the unstated partialities of workers and explain the social norms of a society that develop common decision making skills (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 286). Moreover, a typical value system can be defined as a compilation of beliefs that consists in distinguishing choices made in relation to conduct or lasting forms of existence along a pattern of personal decisions of importance in life (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). When working in a cross-cultural setting, the strategic international business manager must remember the differences in value systems from one society to another, indoctrinated in the minds, as Hofstede would describe, of members of certain cultural backgrounds. Conflict arises easily when individuals hold diverging ideas about what exactly is important and what exactly should be the answer to any problem requiring a resolution. Because values are given the label of being foundational to the workings of organizations, the general temperance and control of individual values must be harnessed in order to progress the purpose of the organization involved (Fitzpatrick, p. 291). Basically, the values involved in a conflict can be managed in such a way to boost morale in international business or break the relationship between nations.

Branching from the idea of values, attitudes can generally be described as mental positions, feelings, or emotions about a specific person or object. Values and attitudes interrelate since they extend from the prior existence of the other. Differences in attitude cannot be denied when interacting through international business since attitude affects many facets of work relationships, holding the capacity to not only influence the task at hand but also the manner in which the task is accomplished. The attitude differences can range from feelings about time, the purpose of work, the ability to change, gender, social status, conflict management, and many other intricate details that play a part in business relations. Since cultures tend to hold attitudes as a whole, undoubtedly each culture will find reasons to argue that its approach rises above the rest as worthy of being followed (Fritz, 1999, p. 210). South American cultures may find tardy meeting attendance to be commonplace, but American workers would see this act as a waste of valuable time allotted for a specific purpose. Persian cultures still struggle with allowing women the same rights as men, but Western society would find such behavior, like requiring women to wear veils in public, appalling if not insulting. Indian culture continues to follow the hierarchy of social classes, limiting citizens to their innate class, while most Americans continue to believe getting ahead in the United States can most importantly be attributed to working hard and social status means little to nothing in the wake of determination (Hansen & Zogby, 2010). In the end, different cultures hold varying attitudes that carry expectations, which will directly impact motivation and organization within cross-cultural relations. The trick is to utilize these attitudes for the advancement of the international business because the correct anchoring of these principal values and attitudes through adequate responsiveness and cooperation will result in greater success of the business venture.

Two Cross-Cultural Analysis Models

Geert Hofstede, the father of modern cross-cultural research, completed the first of two major analysis models that greatly shaped the understanding of the cultures involved in the international business world today. By studying values scores collected by the corporation International Business Machines, IBM, in over seventy countries, Hofstede was able to formulate four clear categories of culture that influence the workplace around the globe (Satterlee, 2009, p. 57). The model of Cultural Dimensions became a basis for research in the cross-cultural field as it provided a widely cited method for analyzing the differences among cultures through the study of several disciplines, covering a great deal of aspects forming cultural designs, including international management (Minkov & Hofstede, 2011, p. 10). First, the dimension of individualism vs. collectivism focuses on whether society encourages personal efforts to benefit the individual or the collective society. Second, the dimension of large vs. small power distance questions the degree of equality given to the people of a society, or lack thereof. Third, the dimension of masculinity vs. femininity studies the degree to which a society urges the traditional culture of male-dominant thinking leading to gender differentiation. Fourth, the dimension of strong vs. weak uncertainty avoidance picks apart the degree to which a society will tolerate uncertainty and question within situations by correlating the society with either rules or opinions. Finally, the dimension of short vs. long term orientation was added to the model for its similarity to Confucian Dynamism because of its analysis of whether a society holds true to the devotion to tradition, stating the importance of long-term value, or allows quick change as traditions lose their value (Satterlee, p. 57). Confucian Dynamism centers solely around the idea of long-term orientation, which focuses culture on progressively positive, dynamic, and future oriented actions guided by the four “positive Confucian values,” persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame” (Fang, 2003, p. 348). Hofstede’s model has helped the world of international business grow and develop because the understanding of workforce mechanics through values and behaviors saying a culture may change or remain static is timelessly a variable of success in the relentlessly changing world of global business (Richards et al., 2012, p. 611).

The second of the two major analysis models, created by Fons Trompenaar, shaped the international business world by studying how different cultures choose certain resolutions to solve the dilemmas they face. Trompenaar’s model can be divided into three subsets that see problems as “those which originate in relationships among people, those which originate in the passing of time, and those which deal with the environment in order to better understand the framework (Satterlee, 2009, p. 58). First, the universalism vs. particularism dimension of culture weighs whether a society places greater value on the law itself or the needs of the people following the law. Second, the individualist vs. communitarian dimension questions which of the two options takes precedence over the other: the happiness of the single person or the well-being of the entire society. Third, the specific vs. diffuse dimension focuses on whether culture views life beginning with the small parts that make up the whole where separate components stand apart but configure the entirety of life, or views life first as the whole that has small parts within it where all parts of life are interrelated. Fourth, the affective vs. neutral dimension measures the degree to which society approves the display of emotion affectively or hides emotion within neutrality. Fifth, the achievement vs. ascription dimension studies the way people gain recognition, either by the level of individual action and work or by natural circumstances like birth or gender. Sixth, the sequential vs. synchronic dimension looks at the society's view of time, either as a perpetually moving, tangible object that provides room for planning and strong commitments or as a cyclical, flexible aspect of life that allows for change and individual interpretation of commitment levels. Finally, the internal vs. external dimension analyzes how society relates to the natural environment around them through their personal control of destiny; internalistic people see nature to be very structured as personal effort determines outcomes whereas externalistic people see nature as an overpowering entity to which their lives fall prey as their actions are simply adaptations to the environment. In summation, cultural differences often naturally cause great clashes in international negotiations and hinder the allotment of trust to others (Elahee, Kirby, & Nasif, 2002, p. 804). In order to actually provide this trust, effective international business managers realize the different expectations an individual may possess due to their cultural background, and they cultivate their actions involving that individual.

Conclusion of Culturally Based Discussion

Without a doubt culture has the full potential of contributing to a team's effectiveness in the world of international business, but careful study must be conducted for it first. However, the success or failure of an international organization amidst the many intricacies of culture heavily depends upon the management in charge of the operation. Fortunately, unnecessary mistakes can be avoided by prior preparation and familiarity with the issues at hand by trained experts, fostering a deeper understanding through the accumulation of knowledge of foreign cultures, leading to the acceptance and seamless relations through peace in the international sphere (Hummel, 2009). In order to succeed in the international business industry, companies must remember that culture differences will arise, especially because their individual firm consists of cross-cultural assets, and they must learn to manage the diversity for the best interest of the organization as effectively as possible. Many authors agree that the overlapping of missions, based on common values and priorities, between the organization and the individual leads to unbeatable satisfaction of employees and greater success of the organization (Fitzpatrick, 2007, p. 297). Finally, when international businesses manage cross-cultural industries effectively and efficiently by paying close attention to the many facets of culture found in a global corporation, they will increase the top line, customer satisfaction, and value imminently, leading to unbeatable success in the consistently growing global economy.

Adapting to Cultural Conflicts in International Trade

Bringing the Two Spheres of Influence Together

International relations have increasingly grown into a crucial portion of the everyday life of businesses everywhere. Globalization currently impacts the economies of the world at soaring levels, bringing increased merging between consumer markets and the various effects that ensue. The iconic American industrialist and major sponsor of the development of the assembly line technique of mass production, Henry Ford, once said, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success" (Muñoz, 2010, para. 3). In other words, many businesses will trade internationally and face difficulty here and there, bringing together multiple cultural groups, but the larger obstacles to overcome accompany the idea of continuing to work together peaceably. Furthermore, the ability to work alongside another group of people from a foreign background with different customs merits the stamp of success due to its challenging nature. Along with the numerous positive results of the growing presence of international marketplaces and multinational firms comes a reflective amount of negative consequences. Pros bring cons, agreements bring arguments, and convergences bring conflicts. As a result, the professional international business manager must work ahead of time to adapt to, and possibly avoid, any cultural conflict that may arise amidst trade.

A Changing World of Business

Recent history has proven to show vast, multiplying changes taking place in the world of business and commerce today. The market is not at all what it used to be. In fact, world trade has more than doubled in dollar value in the past decade, despite crumpling setbacks like economic recessions and complete collapses (Kerin, et al., 2011, p. 124). After considering the market collapse that began in 2007, it is easy to see how the results of government action prove to be prevalent in helping to prolong such crises. The financial crisis of that point in time became dire on Aug. 9 and 10, 2007 because money-market interest rates rose dramatically causing interest rates to spread, such as the complications arising from the difference between three-month and overnight interbank loans, and jump to extraordinary levels (Taylor, 2009, para. 7). From here, a year of similarly mistaken prescriptions for the exact problem occurred and the crisis rapidly worsened in September and October 2008, causing a severe credit crunch, which weakened an economy already distressed from the haunting impact of the oil price hike and housing bust (Taylor, para. 14). In the end, pure devastation and unprecedented obstacles have sprung up into the path of economic prosperity, but the market continues to change and morph in order to stay alive and running.

Companies find themselves needing to apply global marketing techniques in order to survive the deep competition swarming nearly every market. Many sources agree that foreign trade today is a prime aspect of globalization, which is the main phenomenon prevalent in current business (Epstein, et al., 2007, p. 100). As a result, companies desiring to hold any significant stake in the world of trade must invest greatly in their international existence. International trade has even been regarded oftentimes as the "engine of growth," pushing economies towards success and nations towards higher attainments (Jensen & Wong, 2012, para. 1). And so, simple recognition of the several distinct factors leading to the overall modifications made in world trade and global marketing would serve a global firm well.

First, individual countries are decreasing their amount of economic protectionism against other nations. With protectionism being clearly defined as "the practice of shielding one or more industries within a country's economy from foreign competition, usually through the use of tariffs or quotas," it is easy to see why countries want to preserve their own trading strength (Kerin, et al., 2011, p. 124). Economic protectionism serves many purposes like preserving jobs, leading to a higher GDP per capita; discouraging dependency on other countries by encouraging the development of domestic business; and procuring a nation's political security by not becoming intertwined in the web on economic deals and secrets. However, the use of economic protectionism greatly diffuses the potential of world trade while it temporarily sustains unprecedented global effects as a clear and present danger of short- sighted behavior (Faruqee, et al., 2008, p. 2689). For this reason, the one hundred and fifty-three industrialized countries of the world, including the United States of America, formed the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 in order to address many world trade issues being brought into light (Kerin, et al., p. 124). Altogether this organization accounts for around ninety-seven percent of world trade and makes its own rules regarding tariffs, quotas, and other means of economic protectionism amongst its member nations. As a result, the individuality of the nations declines yearly.

Second, the economic integrations and free trade among nations are continuously rising and regenerating. There is no question that Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) open up foreign markets to each other through the reduction of barriers, protection of national interests, and creation of more transparent and conductive trading environments ("Free Trade Agreements," nd, para. 1). Without FTAs many countries would suffer being deprived of the ability to import and export freely, which would otherwise greatly benefit their economies and economic well-being. Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) are definitely not a new concept, with the most recent wave having begun in 1990, yet their weight in global economics and political affairs grows day by day (Lynch, 2010, p. 1). Not only is the significance of RTAs amassing, but their sheer numbers are as well. RTAs are multiplying for several primary, but overlapping, reasons:

> To increase market access, to promote investment, to shield against unfair use of trade remedies, to guard against slowed multilateral liberalization, to increase support for multilateral liberalization, to achiever "WTO-plus" levels of integration, to solidify

domestic reforms, to increase competitiveness in global markets, to increase clout in international negotiations, to achieve economic stability, and to meet other strategic goals. (Lynch, 2010, p. 2)

In the end, recent years have produced several transnational trade groups and signed trade agreements between similar countries with similar economic goals for the two-fold purpose of enhancing individual economies and endorsing free trade among the member nations (Kerin, et al., 2011, p. 124). These numbers will only continue to climb as non-member nations witness the direct success of member nations and long to emulate such achievements.

Finally, competition among global companies for promising consumers and the emergence of a newly networked marketspace in the global realm have both contributed to the dramatic changes in world trade and global marketing. The destruction of economic borders has led to the new actuality that business professionals must accept. This actuality indicates that world trade derives itself from global competition that finds power in global companies and their consumers around the world. Not only do companies now have to guard their territory on local levels, but they must also defend their claims on the global level as they compete internationally. Global competition in the twenty-first century stands as a complex creature, filled with bright opportunities and impending threats, causing companies with extensive global experience, presence, and success to find themselves able to fall prey to the kinks in their systems (Toma & Marinescu, 2013, p. 419). Additionally, goods, services, and information can be exchanged from anywhere and delivered to anywhere at any time of day for the networked global marketspace.

Global strategy has become as important now as it has ever been for the illustrious guarantee of success.

Pinpointing Sources of Cultural Conflict

With international business running at an all-time high, conflict between cultural groups will inevitably weave itself into transactions and relations. International business opens the door to entirely new levels of cultural influences that must be approached with the utmost amount of study and evaluation before engaging in the world of global commerce. Cultural conflicts can present themselves in varying forms and formats, from large, passionate arguments to small, minute dissimilarities. In order to best understand how the wide range of cultural conflicts can affect global businesses and their desired success, the global business professional must be able to adequately distinguish the challenges between: acceptance or rejection of different tastes and preferences, balance for moral imperatives and legal requirements, and tolerance or intolerance of different values (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 693). In the end, most conflicts between cultural groups are rooted in the inability to sift out the real facts from situations in order to discover the truth as it genuinely is. And so, the challenge remains in determining "how to run a successful transnational organization in an efficient and effective way while accommodating differences of opinion from location to location" (Sanchez-runde, et al., p. 692). Realizing the meticulous task at hand can save many global business professionals a lot of time in picking up the pieces after losing to undesirable risks previously taken without foreknowledge.

First, the type of conflict that arises over the acceptance or rejection of different tastes and preferences can be influenced by the extent to which each party included opens their minds to compromise. Obviously, people of different cultural backgrounds will possess different tastes and preferences, some more simple than others. Tastes can be extremely personal, and preferences can be particular, allowing for oversight and the avoidance of issues. It is in these situations that people can opt to agree to disagree, even if they feel the opposite party is from another planet (Shiller, 2013, para. 16). However, soon enough these tastes and preferences begin to affect others in fairly direct ways, making them harder to ignore and pass over. It is at this point that professional international business managers must think on their feet for ways to resolve the conflict under the increased pressure and move beyond a possible stalemate situation.

Second, the type of conflict that naturally floats to the surface of the pool of tension comes in the form of trying to find a balance for moral imperatives and legal requirements. When making a decision between moral and legal tendencies, people have to choose to either follow their conscience or follow the laws and regulations already presiding (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 693). Whereas one pulls at the spiritual strings of the heart, the other pulls at the logical implications of enforcement and punishment. Many times the necessity to choose between ethical and lawful behavior produces a dichotomy that works against itself if the two systems contain any substantial number of contradictions, which almost never happens in practice (Sanchez-runde, et al., p. 693). To make matters worse, international businesses must research what is moral and legal in the countries involved because, many times, the standards vary greatly and affect the behavior of the parties conducting business immensely. The keen professional international business manager must learn to balance where their decisions will fall, either simply complying with the legal requirements, or exhibiting a higher ethical standard that transcends the law. However, they will most times give precedence to the ethical over the legal, following the personal conscience over the robust law.

Finally, and probably the most prevalent in international business today, the conflict over tolerance or intolerance of different values marked by other cultures presents troubles in determining how much compromise each party will allot to the situation. Many times international businesses will witness conflicts that are overstated and dramatized when they could have been regarded as non-competing values (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 695). Cultures that pride themselves in great heterogeneity and integration of varying viewpoints tend to bring about the most conflict in this way. They see the great degree to which their group can be defined as truly dynamic as exclusively beneficial, when this very aspect of their group turns out to cause the issues found. The irony brings a minimal amount of surprise. Also, all cultures do not place the same amount of gravity on certain values they hold, making the harmonization of cultures presented through globalization a more difficult task to undertake (Sanchez-runde, et al., p. 695). In other words, the value being argued may be similarly held on both sides of the fence, but how important the value proves to be in decision-making may be greatly contrasting. In the end, the professional international business manager must contain the attributes of character and integrity, altruism, collective motivation, and encouragement, though the degree to which each attribute is esteemed in each country varies, of course (Sanchez-runde, et al., p. 695). Compromise has proven to be the safest road to conflict management in the international business setting, and the business professionals in charge of each situation needs to be aware of how their decisions will impact the cultures involved in each battle of tolerances.

Specific Cultural Conflict Precautions

Different countries hold different standards for their work environments. Increasing present knowledge on how to best conduct business with a company from a foreign nation could only benefit a prospective business partner. So how should an international business from the United States prepare to do business with its largest trading partner in the European Union, Germany? First, it greatly helps to know that "order, structure, precision and thoroughness permeate work life here, which is why foreigners in business environments could be forgiven for suspecting their German colleagues have a secret set of rules - and are following them to the letter" (Blond, 2013, para. 2). The first way to make a bad impression with a German business associate is to arrive late to a meeting or not even attempt to minimize reputation damage by calling ahead with a solid excuse. From here, sticking to the continuous use of titles and surnames shows respect for the German tendency to take roles and hierarchy seriously (Blond, para. 4). Finally, one important tip for keeping business alive and well with a German company is to present oneself with confidence and reliability, especially with a hearty handshake before and after a meeting starting with the most senior person present and working down the list before leaving (Blond, para. 5). In the end, performing successful business with a German requires patience and respect for their customs and desire to keep business separate from personal life.

Next, doing business with a Mexican company is a completely different range of consideration. Mexico is the United States' largest trading partner and is second only to Brazil as the largest economy in Latin America, climbing the charts for several years now (Fauth, 2013, para. 3). The Mexican economy is growing significantly, contrary to popular belief, and projects a positive growth pattern for sustainability in the decade to come. The first tip to remember with Mexican business partners finds its roots in their exceedingly personal culture: take the time to develop strong, longstanding relationships in order to prove trustworthiness (2013, “Business Culture in Mexico”). Second, hierarchy is a big deal within Mexican businesses, causing most major decisions to be made by a small group of individuals presiding at the top of the chain. This bit of information warns the foreign business companion to ensure that they are dealing with the right people in order to get the best results within the allotted time. Finally, time-conscientiousness is not a crucial piece to the business puzzle in Mexico, and most times, agendas will be completely thrown out in meetings as discussion rolls along with flexibility (“Business Culture in Mexico”). In the end, the best business produced with respect to Mexico surfaces when relationships and hierarchy take precedence over outside necessities like time constraints and personal commitments.

Lastly, the Chinese market has soared to skyrocketing levels in recent years, making it a hotspot for solid economic expansion and strategic business efforts. China has experienced a rapid market transformation and a long list of government reforms, causing business professionals all around the world to desire to take advantage of its consistently low manufacturing costs (Kermeliotis, 2011, para. 2). The first tip to keep in mind when conducting business with a Chinese associate is how important personal relations are to them, especially with honorable people who show respect to whom it is due (2013, “Business Culture in China”). Because all relationships are unequal in China, it is of dire importance to show adequate honor and respect to those of age and seniority, especially if their opinion directly affects any business ventures being taken. Second, Chinese managers will tend to be directive and short, reflecting Confucian concepts that influence the hierarchical status of society (“Business Culture in China”). Finally, Chinese culture relays that debts must always be repaid, so a man who does many favors will have many favors owed to him. These kinds of relations can always come in handy when striving for the most success possible in the operations of business. Saving face and keeping a good name will always take a business professional far in Chinese culture; these are guidelines any international business professional should keep in mind when conducting business with Chinese companies.

A Step Toward Cultural-Conflict Resolution

Conflict is a simple part of human nature that will inevitably show itself in any socio-cultural interaction, professional or casual. It has been said that people who claim to have never experienced conflict in their workplace are either “living in a dream world, blind to their surroundings or are confined to solitary confinement” (Mayer & Louw, 2012, p. 3). Furthermore, focusing on cross-cultural conflict in organizational settings demands a premeditated and theoretical approach to culture, cultural concepts and their respective definitions, and cultural influences on inter-personal interaction, conflict, and its management (Mayer & Louw, p. 4). Though most conflict proves to have varying levels of beneficial results to organizations, the savvy international business professional should know how to handle issues that arise in order to avoid any detraction from company goals and missions.

And so, a basic first step for any multinational firm, which is experiencing any amount of cultural conflict, would be to conduct a cross-cultural analysis, which would study the similarities and differences of the people involved in the business relations, from suppliers to consumers (Kerin, et al., 2011, p. 130). In this analysis, values, customs, cultural symbols, and language can be taken into account before the people involved attempt to relate to one another. Companies cannot simply assume their expectations about certain cultural groups will always be correct without intently researching them to see their values and beliefs in action (Bonn & Tafarodi, 2013, p. 1840). In order to best understand a conflict, companies should work to gain an understanding of the parties involved and their respective roles, expected and preferred, within the organization (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 697). As a result, the company conducting international business has made itself aware of the possible cultural roadblocks that may hinder success in order to plan accordingly around them.

The Quest for Truth

When conflicts arise between people of differing cultural groups, the main focus is normally to dig deep enough to reveal the truth in the situation. However, this quest raises its own set of difficulties as each cultural sector interprets truth independently. For example, “for a German and a Finn, the truth is the truth. In Japan and Britain, it is all right to tell the truth if it doesn’t rock the boat. In China, there is no absolute truth. And in Italy, the truth is negotiable” (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 697). Viewpoints vary greatly on such a fundamental concept. This foundational understanding impacts how people perceive right and wrong and how they apply their demarcated set of responsibilities to themselves and others. People will construct cultural choices that make sense in their own cultural environments but may cause uncertainty along the way of the quest for truth in other societies (Sanchez-runde, et al., p. 698). It is the responsibility of the international business manager to know enough about a cultural group that will allow them to recognize the choices almost before they are made.

One way to monitor whether the choices being made independently by individuals, who are impacting the company, as they implement ideas originating from their own mindset of truth, would be to conduct performance appraisals within the organization. Managers must be careful because performance appraisals that are perceived as unfair can diminish rather than enhance employee attitudes and performance (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011, p. 1694). This method of evaluation should be practiced through objective, pre-made standards that treat each employee with parity and are applied to each employee uniformly (Sanchez-runde, et al., 2013, p. 698). However, such measures require much care and concern since possible conflict can arise that is often associated with issues of values and identity, presenting easily arguments that could escalate easily (Mayer & Louw, 2012, p. 4). As a result, the intercultural business professional does not only perform premeditated work before the different cultural groups interact by studying them purposefully, but also follows up with their work by assessing the performance of the individuals that generate the business. The successful international business manager must pay close attention to the many facets of culture included in running a global corporation in order to achieve maximum profit levels.

In the end, each country will have its own set of cultural hoops to jump through while they demand complete understanding of their specific values and customs. With international business taking over such a large portion of the world’s economy, companies cannot afford to make mistakes that will lead to destructive conflict and hinder their chances of achieving success. As long as the professional international business managers keep the effects of cultural differences and challenging conflicts under control while studying the various countries with whom they expect to begin business, they can raise their chances of avoiding conflict altogether and enhance business relations as a result. Just as Henry Ford said, “Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success” (Muñoz, 2010, para. 3). Beginning business is the easy part; it is staying in business by adapting that takes the real work to achieve success.

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