

The Culture of Business - In Perspective

Conflict Management

By: Stephen G. Wright

“The work you will have to do to overcome the cultural error and then establish a locally defined relationship is exponentially greater than if you were more culturally sensitive from the start.”

The statement above is from the end of last week's article. The problem of perception now is that this is not reactive enough! I am reliably informed that you wish to focus on how to resolve conflict after it has been established there is conflict. I think perhaps some do not fully comprehend what it is that people in my profession do.

The initial goal is the proactive assessment of potential areas of cross-cultural conflict and the establishment of best practices to minimize conflict from the start and maximize the potential for a long-term presence here. But, we are way beyond that stage. You are here and you have made the mistake in procedure, policy or cross-cultural adaptation, so what good is this proactive approach to you? The answer is relatively simple. In order to accomplish “Relationship Management” at this stage your organization needs to create a major shift in paradigm of both expatriate workers **and** local residents (internal and external). This is more than just public relations. I am saying you need a complete, top to bottom, overhaul of your mission, goals, human resource policies and company practices in order to realign yourself with the local environment as defined by the local constituency. Please bear in mind you are the guest and your norms and values cannot be required, asked for, demanded, or assumed to be acceptable within this region, or anywhere!

For organizations that have established a positive relationship then the proactive methodology is very applicable. Such organizations need to create a long-term plan for sustained relationship management that anticipates and allows for changes in the local environment.

Allow me to illustrate my point in a different way. In my previous article I recommended that you read: “Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth from Conflicting Values” by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner. Now this is what people are buying! I am told by many of my colleagues that the market is responding to a phraseology that reflects a reactive approach, leaning toward conflict management. Many years ago I became acquainted with Fons Trompenaars. We have spoken on a few occasions, in Amsterdam and by phone from the States. We have compared theories and ideas concerning the state of human interaction. Our conversations were interesting and illustrated that we both saw similar problems and potential solutions. I enthusiastically utilize some of his work in my lectures and seminars. My approach is complimentary but takes a different path.

Conflict management identifies and defines the areas of conflict that are occurring and suggests patterns that will adjust your current negative interactions to a more positive interactive relationship. This approach assumes that ALL involved parties perceive the value of the training or consultant recommendations and that you are applying the end result on the broadest scale possible. Guess what, to a large degree your local colleagues do not view the world as you do and hence the cause and effect outcome of conflict management is a short-term bandage not a cure. This region is not in a mind set to embrace Western values and methodologies (contrary

to popular thought of some expatriates). The answer is not in conflict management (as this suggests fault on the part of one or both parties) but in a realignment of your corporate or organizational thinking with a goal to illustrate and prove that your presence here is in their best interest, not your own. Thinking and believing that you are in fact doing that now is a message that just is not getting out to the general public effectively. We are beyond the band-aid, time for surgery!

You need an integrated, holistic program of **bi-lateral behavior modification**. The first step is to answer this question:

How can we better understand and adapt to our partners, the local community and their national interests to create trust and hence secure long-term success for clients, partners and subsequently our organization?

Every day you are losing money, opportunity and patience for want of an integrated and systematic program for relationship management (that's relationship in terms of human relationship not strategy building as one organization envisions it).

You prefer to deal with conflict, okay you got it and if you wait a little longer someone will turn up the heat for you. I promise.

Here is my personal e-mail; I welcome you to let me know what will work better!
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<p>Mr. Wright has 12 years of field experience in 5 nations of the F.S.U. Some of his clients for seminars in cross-cultural relations, business communication strategies and "Understanding the U.S. Culture for Strategic Advantage" include, Gazprom, The Ministry of Transportation and Defense of Saudi Arabia, Bechtel, USDA Graduate School, and Georgetown University. Between 1996 and 2002 Mr. Wright was a member of the Associate Faculty in the MBA Program at Johns Hopkins University, School of Professional Studies in Business and Education. In the 1979 Mr. Wright received his undergraduate degree in Political Science from The American University and in 1990 he completed graduate studies in Management at Cambridge College. He is now doing research for a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of South Australia.</p>
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