

Working and Communicating Effectively with Indians

Insights for Human Resources Professionals

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Overview

- ❖ Impact of culture on Human Resources Practices
- ❖ Demography of Talent
- ❖ Core Indian Values
- ❖ Comparison of Indian & U.S. Values
- ❖ Differences in Indian & U.S. Work Styles
- ❖ Cross-Cultural Dialoging
- ❖ Strategies for Improving Communication
- ❖ Who Needs to Change?

Impact of Culture on Human Resources Practices

- ❖ Employee Retention
- ❖ Employee Engagement
- ❖ Designing HR policies and programs
 - Compensation
 - Benefits
 - Rewards & Recognition
 - Performance Evaluation

Demography of Talent

❖ Population

- 2nd largest: 1.2 billion
- Young population
 - ✓ 0-14 years – 30.5%
 - ✓ 15-64 years – 64.3%
 - ✓ 65+ years – 5.2%
 - ✓ Average age – 25.9 years

❖ Regional Differences

❖ Languages

- 17 languages
- 877 dialects

❖ Tier I and Tier II cities

❖ Corporate culture



Core Indian Values

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ Religion
- ❖ Hierarchy
- ❖ Education

Values Comparison: India & U.S.

India

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Relationships
- ❖ Religion
- ❖ Hierarchy
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Face
- ❖ Focus on the Past

U.S.

- ❖ Individualism
- ❖ Equality
- ❖ Time & Efficiency
- ❖ Rules
- ❖ Focus on the future

Work Style Differences



Hierarchy

Equality

Relationship

Task

Indirect

Direct

Cyclical

Linear

Caution

Risk

Group

Individual

Best Practices for Bridging Differences

- ❖ Executive Briefings
- ❖ Consulting
- ❖ Training
 - Working with India
 - Working with the U.S.
 - Indian & U.S. Team Integration
- ❖ Coaching
 - Individual
 - Group

Human Resources Best Practices

- ❖ Employee Retention
- ❖ Employee Engagement
- ❖ Designing HR policies and programs
 - Compensation
 - Benefits
 - Rewards & Recognition
 - Performance Evaluation

Communication

- ❖ Cross-Cultural Dialoging
- ❖ Strategies for Improving Communication
- ❖ Who Needs to Change?

Cross-Cultural Dialoging

“Miscommunication is serious because it can cause an erosion of trust, undermining interpersonal relations and jeopardizing collaboration.”

- Craig Storti,
Speaking of India

- **How can we avoid it?**

Cultural Differences

- ❖ Situation: 18 young Indian programmers in Minneapolis
 - 3 teams/6 programmers with American managers
 - 1 manager brought in pizza
 - No one would eat it.

Why not?

Explanation

- ❖ The Americans thought the Indians were vegetarians, and they didn't eat it because it had meat.
- ❖ This was not the reason!
- ❖ The reason? ... The other 2 groups had no pizza, and the group that did was not willing to eat in front of them.

Purpose of Communication

- ❖ For Americans:

- To exchange information

- ❖ For Indians:

- To preserve harmony and avoid giving offense in order to strengthen the relationship

= Potential Disconnect

Communication “mantras”

- ❖ To Americans:

“Say what you mean and mean what you say.”

- ❖ To Indians:

“Don’t hurt anyone’s feelings and create harmony.”

Answering Questions

- ❖ Interviewer: “Are you interested in relocating to southern CA?”
- ❖ Indian interviewee: “Southern CA? Is that where the job is?”
- ❖ Instead: “I would prefer not to relocate. Are there any opportunities in the Bay Area?”

Cultural Take

- ❖ Repeating a question to an American may imply the question was not understood. It may also imply the interviewee is not taking ownership of the responsibility to answer (US culture).
- ❖ Repeating a question to Indians is more respectful than saying “no.”

Coaching for both sides

Coaching Indians in the workplace:

- say “no” when you mean it
- Indians tend to give a long explanation and not actually say “no” to a request s/he can’t or chooses not to fulfill.

Coaching Suggestions

- ❖ Frame your suggestions as “speaking in a way Americans are likely to respond favorably to” instead of learning to do it “their way.”
- ❖ Give alternative responses as examples.

Instead of: “Is that where the job is located? Is that the only job you have?”

Try: “My family is living in an area where we feel comfortable with the schools, so we’re not looking at relocation as an option.”

Ingratiating Language

- ❖ Give concrete examples / coach the speaker on how to “craft” their answer:
 - Instead of: “It is so nice to meet you, and I am so grateful for this interview. I would so very much like to work for you.”
 - Try: “I enjoyed meeting with you. Thank you for your time, and I’ll follow up with you next week with the references you requested.”

Why it Matters

- ❖ Ingratiating behavior can send messages that are inappropriate in the workplace.
 - Low self-esteem of the interviewee
 - Willingness to be involved in inappropriate behavior
 - Trying too hard to cover up flaws or hide weaknesses

What Americans can do differently

- ❖ Ask when something can be done instead of creating an expectation and asking if it will work.
 - Instead of “Are you interested in a position in marketing development at XYZ company?”
 - Ask: “What position are you looking for specifically given your background?”

Tag questions

- ❖ “You can be there tomorrow at 3 pm, right?”
 - *Indians will tend to say “yes” even if s/he can’t make it, and call you later with an explanation.*
- ❖ Instead, “The client is requesting that you come at 3 pm tomorrow ... will you be able to make it there at that time?”

Suggestions

- ❖ Have 1-1 conversations (less risk of embarrassment)
- ❖ Avoid “idiomatic” language:
 - Instead of: “That was a close call”
 - Try: “We almost missed the opportunity.”
- ❖ Think about the potential of a misunderstanding:
Awareness is key.

Stereotyping

- ❖ Americans tend to view Indians in general as:
 - Technically competent
 - Easygoing
 - “quick studies” / “fast on the uptake”
 - Loyal
 - Eager to please
 - Respectful

Exercise Caution

- ❖ Cultural behaviors and personality are different
- ❖ Ask specific questions to get beyond the surface
- ❖ Give the person the benefit of the doubt – try harder
- ❖ Pause between “stimulus” and “response” and ask: “Could culture be a factor here?”

Does Accent Matter?

- ❖ Accent on Truth (University of Chicago magazine): <http://magazine.uchicago.edu/1010/investigations/fig-1.shtml>
- ❖ Lev-Ari, S. & Keysar, B. (2010). Why Don't We Believe Non-Native Speakers? The influence of accent on credibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 46,6, 1093-1096.
- ❖ There was also an article in the Mercury News on [Americanizing Foreign Accents](#), syndicated article from the Houston Chronicle.

Parameters for Speech Evaluation

- ❖ Audio recording
- ❖ Speech clubs
- ❖ Awareness
- ❖ Social interaction with Americans
- ❖ % of time s/he has to repeat
- ❖ % of time his/her intent is misunderstood
- ❖ % of time his/her ideas are not given credit

Talking too fast

- ❖ Cultural perception
- ❖ Is slowing down the answer?
- ❖ The role of breath, pacing, and lengthening
- ❖ Recording
- ❖ Practice
- ❖ Focused Feedback from Trusted Sources
- ❖ Awareness!

Sample Dialogue

American Team Leader: Kathy

Indian Manager: Aparna

Kathy: I'd like you to move this project up a week and get it done by next Friday. Is that possible?

Aparna: Next Friday?

Kathy: Yes, that way we can ship it to the customer on time.

Aparna: I see.

Sample Dialogue

Kathy: I know this is a demanding schedule, but the European team is working lots of extra hours to deliver on time too, so we're not asking you to do anything they're not doing.

Aparna: Yes, the European team works very hard.

Kathy: Let me know what obstacles you expect to face so we can work together on how to resolve them, but we need to move quickly on this so we don't miss out on this opportunity!

Sample Dialogue

Aparna: Yes. I was going to talk to you about that. When do you need to roll this product out?

Kathy: As soon as possible since our competitors are working on a similar product, and we want to be the first to market. We're all counting on your team to help us catch up so we can satisfy our customer base and gain more market share.

Aparna: That's right.

Kathy: So, is it possible?

Sample Dialogue

- ❖ Aparna: You think it's possible, then?
- ❖ Kathy: I know it will be difficult, but I'm confident your team can pull it off. Do you see any obstacles we should discuss?
- ❖ Aparna: I'll tell the team about this.

What's happening here?

Thank you

Namaste



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