

Effective Diverse Culture Workforce Styles

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Introduction

It is a well understood fact that agricultural enterprises in the US have begun managing cultures to build better teams and more effective and efficient workforces. Ag businesses are challenged to produce positive results through management of diverse cultures. These businesses are not alone, as their external consultants, such as veterinarians, nutritionists, and other industry providers, are also facing interaction with people of diverse cultures. Language differences and cultural differences cause the communication challenges in this business environment. There also have been challenges due to managers and owners being put into a position of managing larger and larger groups of people for the first time. There have also been challenges due to the fact that a culture in itself is built, or needs to be built, within the agricultural enterprise when a group of people or employees come together. A lot of progress is being made in our businesses from leaders and employees alike taking on the challenge of learning from each other and trying to create better places for people to work and produce outstanding results, which should be two of the main objectives of any agricultural business today. Following are some aspects we need to consider to effectively manage the diverse culture workforce styles to build stronger organizations.

What We have in Common

Many references in the literature allude to the fact that so many differences exist among people in the world. This is true. Many differences exist, say, between Americans and Hispanics or between Americans and Mexicans, or between other groups. Differences exist as we know even within countries, like differences between people from New York and Texas, as well as in Mexico between people from Chihuahua in the north and Oaxaca in the south. Just as important, we often do not recognize that there are also a lot of things we have in common.

*Yes, in order for us to effectively manage diverse cultural workforce styles to build stronger organizations that deliver better results, we do need to understand differences, but we also need to recognize that there is so much we have in common, and we can build on that to motivate and lead our organizations.

Examples of what we have in common in American and Hispanic cultures.

We are all humans	Family oriented (particularly in agriculture)
Seek peace in the world	Have goals in life
Faith and tradition	Want a better future for ourselves, and family
Have a purpose in life	Celebrations (Mother's Day, Christmas)
Customs	Symbols

What is Culture?

Let's start by understanding what culture is. Culture, in general, is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave, individually and in groups. Broadly and simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which you share common experiences that shape the way you understand the world. For example, the culture in agriculture appreciates the value of hard work in the field and its rewards.

The same person, thus, can belong to several different cultures depending on his or her birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, family status, gender, age, language, education, physical condition, sexual orientation, religion, profession, place of work and its corporate culture. A person from Mexico has a nationality of origin; the same person working in the US will express some of his nationality from Mexico and will adapt to the culture of the business where he works.

Culture is the lens through which you view the world. It is central to what you see, how you make sense of what you see, and how you express yourself.

Communication and Culture

Bovine veterinarians who want to be effective in their work with their clients must understand the importance of open communication. Can workers come to you anytime, or are they driven by fear and refuse to talk? What culture do you want to establish with your client and client's workers? What culture does your client have in his or her operation? How often do you meet with clients' employees as a group, by department and individually? These are critical questions in working effectively with diverse culture styles. If you build

relationships on respect and trust, it should be natural to encourage people to come to you with their ideas and problems. Make sure you are a good listener to your employees. Take the opportunity to talk to employees, and when we listen to them we can address their concerns. When people feel heard, a lot of good can happen.

One of the particular aspects of working with multicultural workforces and different culture workforce styles is that veterinarians many times don't take the time to learn the cultural differences between their clients, clients' workers and themselves. The following table shows some of the differences between low context cultures (i.e. Anglos and Americans) and high context cultures (i.e. Hispanics). If the focus of the Anglo American in general is business before relationships and trust, it will be displayed in daily behaviors of showing up first thing in the morning, sometimes maybe not even greeting, and jumping right on the tasks at hand and work that needs to be performed. The employees of Hispanic background, being that their focus is relationships and trust before business, will read this as cold, this person does not care, or is upset probably at me because of something I did wrong. This can be a serious misinterpretation. Similarly, an Anglo American person will misunderstand as laziness or lack of caring for the work if a group of workers are visiting and relating socially while they work. We as veterinarians must understand these differences in what is important and valued in the different working and communication styles, because serious problems and mistakes can result from this.

Subject	Low Context Cultures	High Context Cultures
Style	Individual achievement stressed	Harmony in the group stressed
Welfare	Individual	Group (family)
Hierarchy	↔	↑↑
Focus	Business before relationships and trust	Relationships and trust before business

There are several differences between Anglo American and Hispanic cultures in how they communicate. These are not black and white differences, but in general, Anglos will use communication purely as an exchange of information whereas Hispanics will use communication to build relationships. Anglos might be uncomfortable with someone talking to them standing really close to them or even touching them, whereas Hispanics will be okay standing really close when speaking to other people

and even using touch on the shoulder, hugs and shake of hands as signs of friendship and appreciation.

A typical reaction an Anglo American veterinarian will get from Hispanic employees at a client's operation is that when giving directions for a particular task, explaining a protocol, or training, Hispanic employees won't look the veterinarian in the eye. The veterinarian feels the employee is being disrespectful, when in fact, it is out of respect and loyalty that the employee is doing so. The following table shows specific differences in communication between Anglo Americans and Hispanics, which also shows the difference and diversity in the cultural styles of work.

Item	Anglo-American	Hispanic
Communication Distance (speaking)	Exchange information 2 feet	Build relationships Closer
Touch	No need, uncomfortable	Sign of friendship, hug, shake hands
Eye contact	Expected	Not necessary, disrespectful?
Meaning	Derived from words	Derived from context (setting, status, non-verbal)

"There are hundreds of languages in the world, but a smile speaks them all." – Anonymous

Diverse Culture Workforce Styles

In terms of the diversity we find in workforce styles, we could also notice some additional differences that exist between bovine veterinarians, clients and clients' employees.

Diverse culture workforce styles.

Item	Veterinarians	Hispanic Employees
Education	Higher degree, veterinary	Average 4th-9th grade
Dairy, beef language	Highly technical	Basic
Attitude toward continuous learning	Very positive, have to	Indifferent to somewhat positive
Attitude toward work	Live to work	Work to live
Importance of compliance	A key part of work	Don't always understand what it is or why
Understanding the why's of every task	An intricate part of the role	Have not grown up in the industry or been taught

Managing Intercultural Differences

You cannot treat everybody the same, regardless of culture, without adverse consequences. In different parts of the world, simple gestures that would be benign or complimentary in one country could be a gross insult in another country. Acts that US citizens perform every day and phrases used routinely with each other would be offensive and judged negatively in many other countries. There are specific aspects of cultural understanding we need to heed as well as those to avoid in our work with people from other cultures. The following five are very important:

1. **Ethnocentrism:** Inability to accept another culture's world view; "my way is the best."
2. **Discrimination:** Differential treatment of an individual due to minority status; actual and perceived; e.g., "we just aren't equipped to serve people like that."
3. **Stereotyping:** Generalizing about a person while ignoring presence of individual difference; e.g., "she's like that because she's Asian – all Asians are nonverbal."
4. **Cultural blindness:** Differences are ignored and one proceeds as though differences did not exist; e.g., "there's no need to worry about a person's culture – if you're a sensitive teacher, you do okay."
5. **Cultural imposition:** Belief that everyone should conform to the majority; e.g., "we know what's best for you, if you don't like it you can go elsewhere."

Successful Bovine Veterinarians Develop Cultural Intelligence

Successful bovine veterinarians are developing what is called Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which is defined as your capability to grow personally through continuous learning and good understanding of diverse cultural heritage, wisdom and values, and to deal effectively with people from different cultural background and understanding. Many veterinarians have gone out of their way to learn and perfect speaking the Spanish language, which is certainly a good place to start. Then they have gone out to develop relationships and understanding of the Hispanic culture. Some key concepts of cultural intelligence that we all need to take into consideration, when thinking of diverse cultural workforce styles are:

Concepts related to Cultural Intelligence

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- C Culture is pervasive. Everyone, every organization, every region, and every country has a culture.
 - U Understanding cultural beliefs, values, and perceptions of others is a key to success. And vice versa.
 - L Learning diverse cultural heritage is rewarding, inspiring and empowering.
 - T Teamwork in the increasingly global and diverse workplace is impossible without cultural intelligence.
 - U "Us" and "Them" cultural programming and divide can be eased through better understanding of "their" perceptions
 - R Rapport starts with understanding of where the other people are coming from and acceptance of their point of view and style.
 - E Exploiting cultural diversity is a key to unlimited innovation and growth.
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Source: Vadim Kotelnikov

Why Cultural Intelligence?

Cultural Intelligence is a new domain of intelligence that has immense relevance to the increasingly global and diverse workplace, one that bovine veterinarians can avoid. Agricultural enterprises in the US are certainly an example of the impact of a globalized workforce.

Some aspects of culture are easy to see, the obvious things like art and music and behavior. However, the significant and most challenging parts of other cultures are hidden. These might include our beliefs, values, expectations, attitudes and assumptions. Our cultural programming in these areas shapes everything we do. Most importantly, they help us to decide what is 'normal' in our eyes. It is the perceived deviation by other cultures from our version of normality that causes the problems. In short, "us" and "them" lives on. Instead, organizationally, the "we" is what should prevail if we are to get even close to creating an effective organization where diversity is appreciated.

Cultural intelligence will help you effectively manage cross-cultural differences, in particular:

1. You need to lower the cultural barriers caused by "us" and "them" in order to allow you to predict what "they" are thinking and how they will react to your behavior patterns.
2. Harnessing the power of diversity.

In today's globalizing world, Cultural Intelligence is a necessary tool for every bovine veterinarian and agricultural production facility owner/manager who deals with diverse teams of employees, customers, partners, competitors, government and other business players. We must also recognize the need for employees of diverse backgrounds and cultures to understand the

culture of the country where they have come to work and live, as this will also help them be effective in their work roles, as well as in the communities and personal lives they live.

The Culture of the Organization

Does the organization recognize that the team-based, collaborative, empowering, enabling organization of the future is different than the traditional, hierarchical organization it may currently be? Is the organization planning to or in the process of changing how it rewards, recognizes, appraises, hires, develops, plans with, motivates and manages the people it employs? Does the organization plan to use failures for learning and support reasonable risk? Does the organization recognize that the more it can change its climate to support teams, the more it will receive in payback from the work of the teams? What is the culture the leaders want to institute for the organization? What challenges is the business facing with regards to communication and cross-cultural understanding? How do people feel about the current culture and what would they like to see change? These are some of the things we need to consider when talking about the culture of the organization, very critical questions which leaders and bovine veterinarians consulting with clients must reflect upon and help address. So many times we get wrapped up in the details of differences we have between the American culture and the Hispanic culture that we miss the fact that we have created, and are creating constantly, a culture of our own in the very organization we work for. The leaders must always pay attention to this organizational culture and lead the shaping of it. An effective bovine veterinarian will help support his or her clients in leveraging the diverse culture workforce styles to produce outstanding results.

The New Culture in Communication

The present and future of communications in the culture of agriculture, I believe, include the fact that more and more Americans are learning Spanish, not only because they are seeing the opportunity to better communicate with their employees, but because it is adding to their cultural and personal skills. Also, more and more Hispanics are learning English, not only because they are seeing the opportunity to better communicate

with their bosses and co-workers, but also because they see the opportunities to grow within the organization (many employers are more likely to promote a bilingual employee) and because it helps them in general living in the US. Furthermore, better English helps anybody from outside the US now living in the US integrate better into the culture. Both Americans and Hispanics are also spending time getting to know each other's culture better, and I believe getting a bigger perspective on each other to learn to communicate better and understand each other.

Diversity – Key Workforce Effectiveness

Managing cultures also means managing diversity: managing and leading a diverse group of people. By diversity we mean differences in birthplace, nationality, ethnicity, family status, gender, age, language, education, physical condition, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, profession, place of work and its corporate culture, and just as important, diversity in the way people think. We are not only talking about diversity in the sense of the way we are diverse in the way we look, and because we come from a different place, but we are also talking about diversity in the way we see the world, diverse ideas and opinions, which can provide a very rich foundation for work. Our ability as bovine veterinarians, owners/managers and employees to work with this diversity can provide an excellent competitive advantage.

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