ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND CROSSCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The need for crosscultural administration of schools is most valid in international education programs. International people who study in another country over the years could be considered a highly underrated advantage to foreign policy. To educate international students is to have an opportunity to shape the future leaders who will guide the political and economic development of their countries. In order to help people gain an in-depth exposure to the values in our educational system, we must first create an environment where people understand and appreciate each other's cultural values. This review of literature will attempt to show the importance of crosscultural understanding in International education administration and its implications on organizational theory.

Key Words: Crosscultural communication, power, authority, organizational behavior.

INTRODUCTION

The science of administration, as developed in this century, shows insensitivity to culture and its implications. The science of administration, and much of organizational theory, has really been a science of management: how managers handle technical procedures to increase performance and motivation of employees. This type of administration is not adequate for social institutions such as schools that have a tremendous social impact on individuals' lives (Foster, 1986). Immigrants are changing the face of American society. Foreign-born experts pace America's scientific leadership. The American workforce is now multicultural. These realities help fuel U.S. development, but they also create new needs, both for administrators who can think globally, and for tolerance and cross-cultural sensitivity in the administration level of our schools.

The need for crosscultural administration of schools is most valid in international education programs. The millions of people who have studied in the United States over the years constitute a remarkable reservoir of goodwill for our country, perhaps our most underrated foreign policy asset. To educate international students is to have an opportunity to shape the future leaders who will guide the political and economic development of their countries. In order to help them gain an in-depth exposure to American values and to our successful multicultural democracy, we must first acknowledge the differences in their values and learn to respect them (Simons & Connely, 2000).

This review of literature will attempt to show the importance of crosscultural understanding in International education administration and its implications on organizational theory.
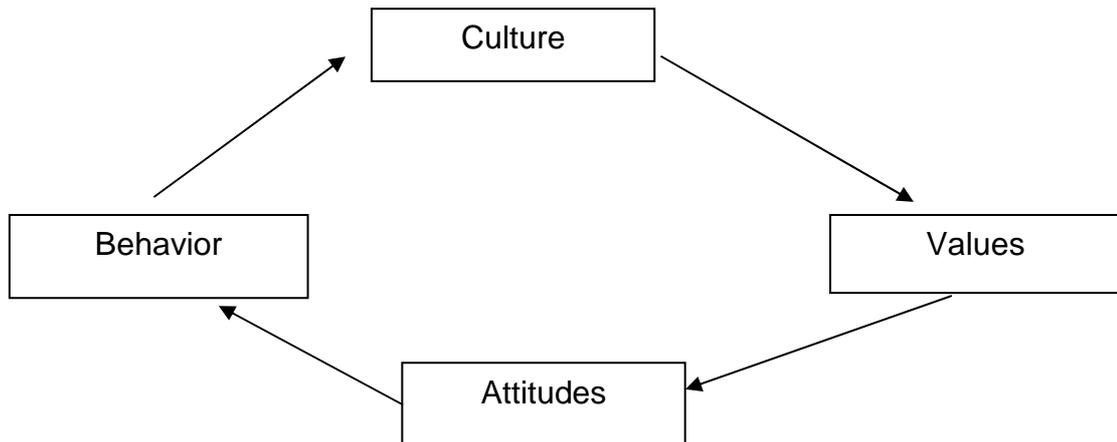
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

A- Definition of Culture

Culture consists of the rules and expectations that come into play when two human beings interact (Thiederman, 1990). A more broad definition would be that culture is a) something that is shared by all or almost all members of some social group, b) Something that the older members of a group try to pass on to the

younger members, and c) Something that shapes behavior and structures one's perception of the world such as morals, laws and customs.

Administrators frequently see culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another…the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influences a human group's response to the environment" (Adler, 1991, p.15). In general, we see people as being from different cultures if their ways of life as a group differ considerably, from the other (Adler, 1991).

Figur 1: Influence of Culture on Behavior (Weaver, 2000, p.117).

B- Problems Associated with Cultural differences
Ethnocentrism
Because people are constantly immersed within their own cultures, it is difficult for them to understand the cultures of others. Investigating to understand the characteristics of cultural values, one comes across an interesting phenomenon: that, in fact, all cultures share a common attitude, which is the perception of one's own customs and beliefs as being the "right" ways. This tendency for every human group to believe that the absolute truth lies within their own culture is called "ethnocentrism" (Ting Toomey & Korzenny, 1991).

There is nothing wrong with preferring one's own culture. The problem arises when we allow that culture to distort what we see. For administrators, this distortion often takes the form of misinterpreting the meaning behind the culturally different workers' or client's (in our case the students') behavior. This misinterpretation brings forth an attitude which can ultimately affect the relationship between the administration and the students. Cultural projection can be both ways, of course, however acknowledgment and understanding from the part of the administrators will influence their attitudes and ultimately avoid ethnocentrism to be a problem (Thiederman, 1990).

There are two steps to overcoming ethnocentrism: By learning about different cultures, and by becoming aware of our own perceptions that cause us to misinterpret the behaviors of others. Learning about different cultures does not mean we have to become anthropologists. Just respecting the reasons why some international students behave in certain ways is a good way of starting understanding. Cultural self-awareness, on the other hand is a more difficult task. It requires a deep understanding of our own culturally specific points of view which is hard to separate from personality. We have to keep in mind that personality is also deeply influenced by our cultural and even organizational beliefs (Guirdham, 1999).

Stereotypes
Stereotyping involves holding a stable set of beliefs or pre-conceived ideas which members of a group share about characteristics of other groups (Guirdham, 1999). Stereotypes do not describe individual behavior; rather they describe the behavioral norm for members of a particular group. Stereotypes could be positive-such as

Asians are high achievers- or negative- such as Mexicans are lazy- but both types are equally distorting and destructive (Adler, 1991).

Stereotypes interfere with our ability to see people for who they really are, they negate the individual, and they minimize the likelihood that people will be identified with the traits they truly possess (Thiederman, 1990). In fact, individual members of a culture differ for a variety of reasons such as socioeconomic status, social strata, or education level. An administrator must take these differences into account while relating to people from different cultures so as not to base decisions on stereotypical judgments.

The first step in eliminating stereotypical thinking is to separate our genuine knowledge about a particular group from the inflexible notions that are lodged in our brains. Sometimes the only thing we know about a cultural group is based on stereotypes. We must realize that using stereotypes could be more offensive than admitting that we have little knowledge of one's background. The more we learn about groups, the less able we will be to lump individuals together. Therefore, as Thiederman puts it "Acquiring knowledge can only weaken stereotypical thinking. It is ignorance and lack of familiarity that makes all those sailboats look alike" (1990, p.22).

COMMUNICATION IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

A- Crosscultural Communication

Communication is the exchange of meaning. It consists of any behavior that another human being perceives and interprets. Therefore, communication includes sending both verbal messages and nonverbal messages and involves a complex, multilayered, dynamic process through which we exchange meaning (Adler, 1991). Within this approach, communication and culture are inevitably connected. As we noted earlier, culture is defined as a historically transmitted system of symbols, meanings and norms. It is not the people but the communication that links symbols and meanings together (Guirdham, 1999)

Crosscultural communication occurs when a person from one culture sends a message to a person from another culture. This message is then interpreted or decoded according to the receiver's cultural understanding (Adler, 1991). There are many orientations affecting this cultural decoding system such as attitudes towards beliefs, values, environment, time, space, structure or thinking patterns (Buckley, 2000). Although crosscultural communication is a broad concept and there are many different perceptions of analyzing these cultural orientations, the scope of this paper is limited to a general idea of how communication shapes organizational behavior without getting into cultural specifics.

Crosscultural communication receives particular attention in international education settings where a number of different cultures are represented. Administrators in environments like these must be competent in communicating with people of various backgrounds. Understanding cultural differences can be a very useful tool in achieving better communication skills. Even though we have indicated that experience within one's primary culture influences how one perceives others, to understand cultural differences, one must perceive each culture in terms of its own context (Simons and Connely, 2000).

B- Organizational Communication

Organizational communication is no simple task. There are, however, a variety of orientations toward how it can be carried out most effectively. The process in which *who* should say *what* through *which channel* to *whom* toward *what effect* is considered to be the main components of communication, and exists in the classical theory, social systems theory and open systems theories. The classical theory states that communication is the means to increase efficiency and productivity in a hierarchical and downwardly directed manner. The social systems orientation states that for communication to be effective it has to be a two-way process. The channels can be formal or informal and the meaning of the message can be found in both the sender's and receiver's psychological make-up. The open systems orientation suggests that meaning in communication is collaborated and negotiated. This involves drawing the organization's actions into a close fit with the needs of the environment. The stress in this theory is that the communication must take into consideration social class

differences, cultural values, time orientations and ethnocentrism of all types. Here, communication is the bond that holds an organization together and synchronizes its parts (Hanson, 1996).

C- Barriers to Communication

Communication does not necessarily result in understanding. The greater the difference between the sender's and receiver's cultures, the greater the chance for crosscultural miscommunication. Some of the barriers to communication involves misperception, misinterpretation and misevaluation of the message.

No two cultural groups see the world in exactly the same way. For example Mexican children and American children viewed pictures of a bull fight and a baseball game simultaneously, American children only remembered seeing the pictures of the baseball game, Mexican children remembered only seeing the pictures of the bull fight. This shows that perceptual patterns are selective, learned and culturally determined. The distorting impact of perceptual filters causes us to see things in a different way. This misperception can cause miscommunication among people of different cultures.

Interpretation is when we give meaning to our observations. It is the process of making sense out of perceptions. Interpretation organizes our experience to guide our behaviors. For example an office worker might interpret the direct language of an international student as rude, when in fact it might be the communication style or lack of language that might have caused the directness. It is the interpretation that employs the meaning on the action. Misinterpretations also cause communication to break down.

Even more than perception and interpretation, cultural conditioning strongly affects evaluation. Evaluation involves a judgment action. It is culturally affected and we use our cultural beliefs as a standard of measurement. We arrive at conclusions of good or bad as a result of our view through our own cultural lenses. For example, when an administrator evaluates the quiet demeanor of one cultural group member as good and the persistent behavior of another as bad, this is an evaluation. The behavior might very well depend on the formality, respect and simply cultural boundaries of social behavior (Adler, 1991).

Improving Communication

When studying the process of communication and trying to determine how it can be improved, it is important to develop the skills of communication analysis. Analyzing communication involves four different areas of concentration: 1- situations of communication, 2- intentions of communication, 3- logistics of communication and 4- consequences of communication.

Each situation involves a different kind of communication. The special requests of an international student with the administrator calls for a different kind of *situation* than reprimanding a student's actions. This is closely connected with the *intent* of communication. When communication is initiated, there is usually a purpose such as giving information, sell an idea, change an opinion, defend one's argument etc. The administration must keep in mind the purpose and intent of communication, as well as the receiver's understanding of it.

Logistics also plays a role in communication analysis. This involves questions of the channels and networks used, completeness of networks and time required. In school administration logistics is very important as the wrong channels might not get the message across such as written messages in complicated language if language is a factor.

Educational systems tend to function with limited feedback, and that's why it is difficult to see the consequences of the communication process. However, it is possible to strengthen communication by considering analysis of the formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal and crosscultural elements of communication networks in an educational organization, and is essential to improve its effectiveness (Hanson, 1996).

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

A-Power and Authority

Authority and power both are means to social control. However, they differ in fundamental ways. Power is defined as the ability to control something or someone. It is the mechanics of social organization. Power is conveyed by giving resources such as rewards or punishments. It is not a product of inner compulsion. Authority, on the other hand, could be defined as power exercised under conditions of social approval. It is created in social relationships under mutual trust and is intrinsically meaningful. Authority in fact is the substance of a person's character, and is exercised through a feeling of intimacy. Power is derived from authority because of symbolic displacement. Things that really matter for humans start getting interpreted by symbols. The people who have the capacity to manipulate those symbols have power over us.

Leaders need to know how to lead with authority and power. Power is needed to impose school reforms on the political and administrative level. Authority is needed to lead the students, community and teachers when the reform is placed on the schools. Effective leaders learn when to use their authority and their power.

Communication is the key when considering power and authority. Without effective communication, it would be impossible to exercise power or authority in an educational organization especially in an international setting where the understanding of authority is culturally determined (Stone, 2002).

B- Multiparadigm Approach to Leadership and Organizational Behavior

According to Kuhn, paradigms are explanations of world views within a community. They are considered to be a set of intellectual assumptions that are supported by research and data. Paradigms themselves cannot be tested; however the theories that are within paradigms can be tested and proved (1996).

In educational administration four paradigms represent the four different theoretical approaches. These are: structural functionalist, interpretivist, radical humanist and radical structuralist. Researchers concerned with organizations and administration often follow a one paradigm approach; that is, they base their epistemological and methodological work under one theoretical approach (Capper, 1993). However, field of education is comprised of several areas that co-exist with each other. Therefore, the field of education rarely has one defined community to agree on all aspects of a certain paradigm.

The Structural-Functionalist Paradigm

The structural-functionalists are interested in understanding how institutions work and how they might work more efficiently while maintaining the existing structures intact (Capper, 1993). Structure in an organization determines the blueprint for formal expectations like a building's framework. When expectations are clear, efficiency increases (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

The Interpretivist Paradigm

Interpretivist paradigm is rooted in the idea that organizations are socially constructed and exist only in the perceptions of people. This approach focuses on social interactions and there is no objective reality. Structural functionalists are mainly concerned with how organizations operate, whereas interpretivists are concerned with how people experience them (Capper, 1993). Overall, more effective administrators tend to be high on both consideration and structure (Bolman & Deal, 2003).

Critical Theory (Radical Humanist and Radical Structuralist Paradigms together)

Critical Theory, being rooted in Marxist thought deals mainly with societal advantages and oppression. Current structures of social class, race and diversity is how meaning is managed in educational organizations. Leadership is based on empowerment and transformation of society. There is an emphasis on morals, values, intellectual thought and rationality. These areas are extremely culture laden areas and exist in administration's leadership and policies (Capper, 1993).

In the social sciences, there can be more than one paradigm at a time. In educational administration, especially in a multicultural environment, an administrative approach of following one paradigm will be inadequate and unfitting in certain circumstances. For example, while a structure is needed by all educational organizations, without considering the human element and the social justice elements, the structure alone will not carry the institution. Complex organizations like educational institutions must be flexible enough to apply a multiparadigmatic approach to serve as an example of valuing multiple ways of viewing a situation from different epistemologies and methodologies (Capper, 1993).

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

A-Target of Change
According to Hanson, if one really wants to learn how an organization works, one should try to change it. In this attempt of change, the most important process is the *targeting process* which includes the focus level, potency and impetus for change.

Focus of Change
When implementing change, administrators need to keep in mind what the focus of the change involves. By *focus of change*, we mean change in: task, structure, technology and people. In this approach, we need to distinguish between individual or organizational level change as well. Individual change involves personality needs and values whereas organizational change involves the structure of the organization.

Level of Change
In organizations there are different levels of reality. Wilfred Brown has identified four levels of an organization: Manifest organization, assumed organization, extant organization and requisite organization. Manifest organization involves the formal structure that the leadership presents to the world. Assumed organization is revealed in the conventional wisdom of how the system actually works. Extant organization is how a system actually functions and requisite organization is the ideal type of organization and reflects how an organization should be like. In targeting change, knowing the level of change will also diffuse misunderstandings.

Potency of Change
Potency in the sense of organizational change involves the degree of significant departure from the existing conditions. The level of potency is useful because it suggests the degree in which resources, time, energy, power and goodwill required for the change.

Impetus for Change
The targeting process cannot be carried out independent of the impetus behind the change. Targets usually differ depending on whether the prime mover is external pressures, reaction to events or voluntary.

B-Planned Change
Planned change is usually seen as a tool for adopting new innovations, resolving conflicts, clearing communication channels, upgrading instructional quality and so forth. These are all important targets for change but individually they are limited. A more expansive solution lies in to establish built-in problem solving capabilities that create experimentation in educational organizations.

Change is a learning process that is loaded with uncertainty. In this sense, change is more of a journey rather than destination where adjustments must take place. Problems along this journey should be welcome rather than avoided; after all, educational change is a problem solving process. Successful change is usually systematic. That is, any reform must not only concentrate on formal components of change, informal components such as culture must be considered (Hanson, 1996).

MANAGING AN ORGANIZATION WITH A CROSSCULTURAL APPROACH

Managing an organization in a multicultural environment such as an international education institution can require increased cultural sensitivity in the governmental process. The government of the organization can take

a traditional approach, which ignores cultural differences or treats them as problems, or, it can take a culturally aware approach and use cultural diversity to create both culturally appropriate and synergistic solutions to the problems encountered.
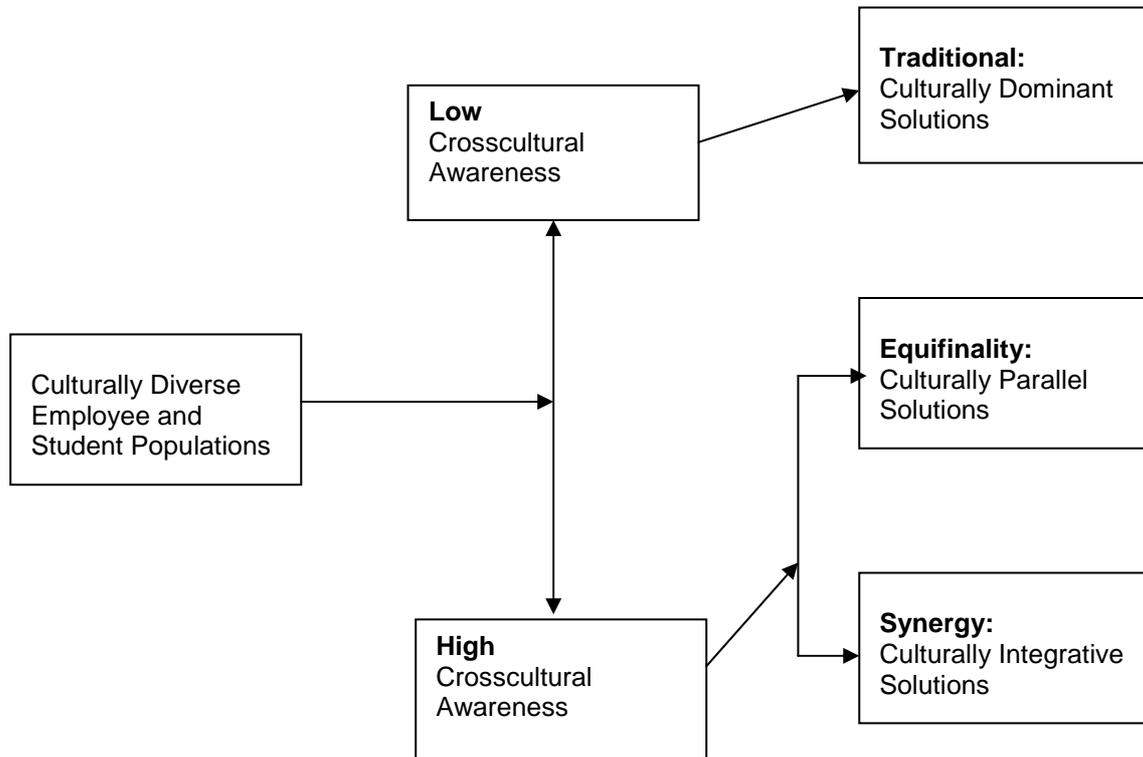
Figur 2: Solutions to Managing Cultural Diversity (Weaver, 2000, p.121).

The Traditional Approach

The traditional approach treats cultural diversity as a problem. Organizations using traditional approach usually attempt to superimpose the dominant culture's ways of managing on all situations and people. This could lead to discrimination, crosscultural miscommunication and/or dissatisfaction in many ways. This kind of approach often causes disenfranchisement and resistance which makes it even harder to solve problems and discover efficient solutions.

The Culturally Aware Approach

The culturally aware organization recognizes the cultural diversity in the population and is conscious of the need to address that diversity. Cultural awareness means that the government of the organization recognizes the similarities and differences in the population of the organization. Cultural awareness alone is not enough to properly address the issues raised by cultural diversity but it is an essential first step in effective action.

Equifinality – The Parallel Approach

Equifinality means that there are many, equally valuable ways of reaching a particular goal. Educational organizations using an equifinality approach create parallel ways of reaching their goals based on the cultural diversity of the student and employee populations. For example, in an international educational institution, a counselor might explain an important point by using a translator for one student and explaining in English for another student that is competent in English. Using parallel solutions might demand additional sources but they are an effective way of getting results.

Synergy – The Integrative Approach

Cultural Synergy is a process in which organization policies and practices are formed on the basis of, but not limited to, the cultural patterns of individual organization members and clients. This approach views diversity as a resource in the design and development of organizations. The process of creating synergistic solutions is challenging because it is not based on past patterns. Employees involved in creating synergistic solutions must 1- recognize the cultural diversity, 2- have an awareness of the cultural similarities and differences, 3- recognize that there may be multiple ways to manage and 4- be able to integrate culturally distinct approaches into new synergistic approaches. The benefit to the government of the organization is that synergistic approaches work well with employees who must work on a day-to-day basis with people from other cultures (Weaver, 2000).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, educational administration, especially international education administration requires approaches that are crossculturally sensitive in the administrative as well as teaching areas. In this globally expanding world, cultural diversity in the educational organizations is not only inevitable but expected as well.

Schools are considered as social systems for many reasons. The roles within the structure of society are established at schools with a commitment to the values of society. Schools exist within the society therefore they model society. If we want to create a society that is open-minded, well-informed and culturally sensitive, we must start from the structural elements of educational organizations. We expect schools and societies to reflect each other, not just in terms of subjects taught, but also in terms of school organization and functioning. Therefore, crosscultural awareness and understanding as a part of organizational behavior will go a long way in uniting the world of students and administrators as well as creating a global impact on future generations.

WJEIS's Note: This article was presented at 4th International Conference on New Trends in Education and Their Implications - ICONTE, 25-27 April, 2013, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 3 Number 3 of WJEIS 2013 by WJEIScientific Committee.

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