



Culture and Its Implications in Business Today

by Ir. Chew Weng Yuen

Ir. Chew Weng Yuen is currently a committee member in Engineering Education Technical Division (E2TD).

The Engineering Education Technical Division had co-organized a talk titled “Culture and Its Implications in Business Today” with Engineers Australia Malaysia Chapter, and the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Malaysia Branch, on 30th April 2019, at Wisma IEM. The talk was delivered by Ir. Dr. Ling Chen Hoe who is currently the Senior General Manager and Director of Meiden Malaysia.

There were 27 participants in the talk, and Ir. Dr. Ling commenced by defining culture as the beliefs, behaviors, objects, learned values and norms, and other characteristics shared by groups of people. Engineers Australia reported in November 2018 that amongst the characteristics employers are looking for in new hires were emotional intelligence, creativity and innovation, communication and interpersonal skills, teamwork, strong work ethic, willingness to take initiatives and responsibilities, and cultural fit.

Numerous types of corporate culture were shown and discussed. These vary from a culture that discourages dissent amongst its employees; a culture that practices reflexive obedience that is, a reluctance to question authority, groupism, devotion to ‘sticking with the programme’, and insularity; to a culture that emphasizes on strong teamwork, and customers’ prioritization.

It was informed that culture has a multitude of aspects namely values, customs, symbols, and language. Cultural factors include geography, age, socioeconomic status, religion, gender, education, and politics, amongst others. Culture is dynamic and national culture is a key characteristic of society and can differ significantly across and also within national borders.

Ir. Dr. Ling also discussed on how organization cultures are formed. It stemmed from the actions and behavior of the leaders, what leaders pay attention to, what gets rewarded and what gets punished, and the allocation of attention and resources. It was informed that whilst strategy is the guiding path of an organization, culture is the driving path of the same. Several notable examples of corporate failures that were resulted from a toxic corporate culture, and the lack of understanding of the national culture of its operating environment were shown to the participants.

Cross cultural communication relates to the framing, nurturing, and enhancing the relationship with people who belongs to different culture than oneself. It was pointed out that different cultures have different communication styles, and in that context, the differences between a high-context culture and a low-context cultures were briefly discussed. The six fundamental patterns of cultural difference namely, communication styles; attitudes towards conflict;

approaches to completing tasks; decision-making styles; attitudes towards disclosure; and the approaches to knowing were also illustrated to the participants.

In some instances, culture can have dysfunctional aspects and may be a barrier to change, diversity, and mergers and acquisitions. *Lewin's Three-Step Change Model* and sources of organizational resistance to change were discussed and a graph depicting emotional response to change was shown.

Ir. Dr. Ling emphasized that culture is an important factor to be considered during the formulation of corporate strategy. This is because the assumptions and beliefs of employees drive behavior, the collective behavior of employees will determine results, and the results measure performance and indicate if strategic business objectives have been achieved. Hence, corporate culture can affect the value creation process of an organization, either positively or negatively. Organizations that had failed to incorporate the prevailing culture of its operating environment into its strategies will suffer adverse consequences. Several examples of these effects were illustrated to the participants. It was reiterated that the optimal organizational style is contingent upon various internal and external constraints, for example, the culture that is prevalent in its operating environment.

The implications of culture in business today are vast. The value system and norms of a country can affect the cost of doing business in the said country. International businesses need to develop cross-cultural literacy by employing the host country nationals, build a cadre of cosmopolitan executives and be wary of the danger of ethnocentric behavior. Organizations need to be aware that culture is dynamic and always evolves. Economic progress and globalization are amongst the important engines of cultural change.

Ir. Dr. Ling concluded by saying that organizations need multi-cultural teams to provide multiple perspectives to solve the global complex problems of today. Cultural differences are an asset and not a liability, and today's managers need to be cross-cultural savvy, and flexible in their leadership styles. The talk was interactive throughout the session with the participants actively engaging the speaker and it ended with the presentation of a memento to Ir. Dr. Ling by the session chairman.



Ir. Dr. Ling Chen Hoe receiving a memento from the session Chairman after delivering his talk on “Culture and its Implications in Business Today”