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Advantages of Cultural Diversity in the Pharmacy Workplace

Hemant N. Joshi
Prasanna Gore

ABSTRACT. Basic goals for the existence of any profession could be desired profitability, positive growth rate and patient satisfaction. The pharmacy profession, engaged in dispensing products and services with high medical value, seeks to improve its image in the marketplace and in its consumers' minds. Professional leaders are always thinking about different ways to achieve these goals. The labor force is often highly diversified with different skills/education, experiences in life, values and cultural heritage. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

KEYWORDS. Cultural diversity, pharmacy workplace, pharmacy, labor force, intercultural

INTRODUCTION

Basic goals for the existence of any profession could be desired profitability, positive growth rate and patient satisfaction. The pharmacy profession, engaged in dispensing products and services with high medical value, seeks to improve its image in the marketplace and in its consumers' minds. Professional leaders are always thinking about different ways to achieve these goals.

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Materials and labor force are the major functions in producing goods and services. Appropriate usage of these would make or break an organization in terms of survival and growth. The labor force is often highly diversified with different skills/education, experiences in life, values and cultural heritage.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and a major breakdown of the Japanese economy marked the last decade of the 20th century. The United States of America is now, undoubtedly, the world leader. This leadership has provided new opportunities and challenges to the US. The past one or two decades have been marked by major breakthroughs in communication technology, better known as the development of "communication superhighways." Our world seems to have become smaller and all countries in the world have become part of the day-to-day marketplace. The US has always been known to be a land of immigrants. However, the current leadership status and globalization have been attracting significantly more people from other countries to the US. The pharmaceutical industry and the pharmacy profession in the US has always played a major role in the world market in the development, manufacturing and distribution of important and life-saving pharmaceutical products. World leadership status, higher standards of living and phenomenal advancement in pharmacy have therefore attracted considerable human talent from all over the world to the United States.

The main goal of this article is to evaluate the cultural diversity in the American pharmaceutical world and determine if it provides any advantage. The hypothesis set forth herewith is this: people from different cultures have different qualities/skills to offer. An appropriate mixture of employees having diverse and complimentary cultural backgrounds in the professional and business environment would produce a healthy and productive environment.

GENERAL CULTURAL DESCRIPTION

Culture is defined as the sum total of the beliefs, rules, techniques, institutions, and artifacts that characterize a human population from a specific geographic area. Basically, culture is just everything! Culture can be learned, shared, interrelated and inherited.

Value Dimensions

Geert Hofstede,¹ a Danish Psychologist, interviewed thousands of IBM employees from 67 countries to understand different national cultures. From the analysis of this data, four value dimensions were proposed, which are as follows:

Individualism versus collectivism—In the individualistic society, people only look after themselves and immediate family members. On the contrary, in

a collectivistic society, people live in groups and receive benefits for being part of the group and for their loyalty to the group.

Large versus small power distance—Power distance means to what extent members of society accept unequal distribution of power. In a large power distance society, employees accept decisions, right or wrong, of superiors. As a consequence, they lack influence (or authority) in any initiatives to take decisions upon any non-routine work.

Uncertainty avoidance—It is the degree to which employees are willing to accept or are threatened by ambiguity. In a high uncertainty avoidance society, employees would, in general, resist any type of changes.

Masculinity versus femininity—This is the degree to which the masculine or feminine traits are observed in a society. General feminine traits are building relationships, concern for others, and giving importance to overall quality of life. On the contrary, assertiveness, materialistic rewards, and importance of position in the organization are common masculine traits.

Table 1 compares scores of different value dimensions for people from six representative countries. All the countries have similar masculinity scores. Individualism is prominent in countries like Australia, Canada, UK and the US. On the other hand, the South American country, Colombia, has very high uncertainty avoidance. Power distance is lowest in Canada and highest in Colombia. It has been normally observed that countries showing a high individualism index show low power distance.² From this information, one can easily assert that a person from Columbia certainly will have different behavioral traits compared to a person from the UK. It is understood that cultural traits become diluted upon duration in the US for some time. But, one can still easily distinguish or predict behavioral reactions from people of different countries of origin.

In a book by Morrison et al.,³ authors described characteristics of people from 60 different countries. In Table 2, characteristics of people from 8 representative countries have been compiled and compared. The characteristics

TABLE 1. Scores for Hofstede's value dimensions¹ (scale 1 to 100)

Country	Power distance	Uncertainty avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity
Australia	49	51	90	61
Canada	39	48	80	52
Colombia	64	80	13	64
South Africa	49	49	65	63
United Kingdom	35	35	89	66
United States of America	50	46	91	62

TABLE 2. Cultural description of people from 8 representative countries in the world (summarized from reference 3)

Country	Cognition Skills	Negotiation Strategy	Value System
Australia	Open-minded, analytical and conceptual, rules and laws take precedence over feelings.	Facts are most important. Little credence given to feelings and emotions. Ethnocentric. Like directness & casualness.	Individualistic, low anxiety in life as stability due to external structure. Egalitarianism. Outward show of equality.
China (most populous country in the world)	Circumspect towards outside sources of information. Process information through subjective perspective. Universalistic.	Faith and feelings are primary. Only senior officials conduct negotiations and may drag them beyond deadline to gain an advantage.	Truly collectivistic. Family, school, work unit and local community are basic social structures that provide stability to life.
Egypt	Open to Western ideas than other Arabic cultures. Associative thinking. Subjective processing of information. Universalistic. Particularistic trait—trusts family members than outsiders.	Faith in Islamic ideology. Highly educated may use facts and reason objectively. Very slow pace of life. Take a long time to make decisions. Love poetic and flowery language.	Male leaders make decisions through consensus of group. Kinship culture/extended family. Fatalism as believes that one's destiny in the hands of god.
England	Very well established education system. Closed to outside information on most issues. Process information in an abstractive manner.	Facts are most important. Faith in few ideologies. Change is not necessarily a good thing to the English. They do not consider themselves as Europeans.	Individualistic. Take responsibility of their decisions. Anxiety over timeliness. Emotions are not shown in public. Women have a great deal of equality.
Germany (German nation is only about 120 years old)	Closed to outside information. Do not freely share it. Analytical and conceptual. Friendship is not developed quickly—deep and selective.	Facts most important. Faith in social democratic ideology. Distinctly hierarchical. Punctuality most important. Do not show emotions.	Individualistic. Cultural history is considered in decision making. Rules and regulations and strong internal discipline give stability to life. Low tolerant for deviant behavior.
India (second most populous country in the world)	Information is accepted openly as long as it does not challenge religion and social structure. Associative thinking. Caste system. Multi languages.	Personal feelings form basis of truth. Strong faith in religious ideologies. Building relationship is critical. Not much concerned about time/deadline.	Moderately collectivistic culture. Less anxiety about life due to strong social structure. Emotions can be shown. Male chauvinistic society.
Japan	About 100% literacy. Close to outside influence, but open to ideas within the group. Subjective and experimental in thinking. Strong group loyalty.	Rely on feelings than facts. Consensus within group is important. Business cards are essential. Response, "I will consider" means "No." High respect to elderly.	Moderately collective. High anxiety about life as need to save faces. Constant pressure to conform to ethical needs. Restrain emotions, male dominance, ethnocentric.
US	Closed to most outside information. Highly ethnocentric. Analytical and conceptual thinking. Innovation often takes precedence over traditions.	Facts are critical. Faith in democracy, capitalism, and consumerism. Punctual. "Bottom Line" is important. Business is done at lightening speed.	Most individualistic. Low anxiety about life due to good external structure and science. Recognition of one's work is the greatest reward. Very strong work ethics. Competition is rule of life.

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have been divided into 3 main types—cognitive skills, negotiation strategies and value system. Knowledge of these peculiarities would be helpful to conduct business transactions in these countries. The following points have to be kept in mind in examining this table—(1) People in a country or region are not exactly identical to others. Inter-individual differences would always exist. However, one can draw 'general' conclusions, if he/she studies the traits of a culture very carefully. (2) One has to refrain from drawing a detailed generalization and especially avoid 'branding' or 'stereotyping' people. While examining traits in a person, the knowledge of 'general' traits in the group could be used, but some individual characteristics may supersede general traits. A good correlation, in general, between Hofstede's analysis and Morrison's data has been observed.

CULTURAL PICTURE IN THE US

Although it is not true, the image of a typical American is always portrayed as a person from the white race. In 1990, 76% of the US population belonged to the white race⁴ (Table 3). Black and Hispanic populations followed this number with 11.8% and 9.1%, respectively. Table 3 also shows projections from the census bureau for the next 30 years. In 2030, the racial profile of the US is projected to be as follows: White—60.5%, Black—13.1%, Hispanic—18.9%, Asian/Pacific Islanders—6.6% and Native American—0.8%. Thus, in the next 30 years, Hispanic and Asian populations would increase 37% and 69%, respectively.

ANALYSIS OF CURRENT SITUATION AND DISCUSSION

History may not provide answers to present situations due to many variables that change between various eras. But history can help us define ques-

TABLE 3. Percent racial mix in census projections in the US

Race	YEAR				
	1990	2000	2010	2020	2030
White	75.6	71.8	68.0	64.3	60.5
Black	11.8	12.2	12.6	12.9	13.1
Hispanics	9.1	11.4	13.8	16.3	18.9
Asian/Pacific Islanders	2.8	3.9	4.8	5.7	6.6
American Indians	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.8

US population in millions—1900 (76), 1950 (152), 2000 (285), 2025 (338)

US department of Interior Force Diversity.⁴

tions. One such question is—what are the effects of mixing various cultures in a region or in a country? From the past, it is very clear that a gross statistical disparity in the “representation” of groups exists in different occupations, industries, and income levels. Individuality of different cultures is retained more with an increase in the percentage of minorities.

There is a downside to cultural diversity. Unchecked cultural diversity may lead to cultural conflicts or miscommunication and chaos. But, it is up to us to negate these cultural conflicts even before they emerge. The cultural diversity is like atomic energy. It is very useful when used carefully. Thus, it has become more important to study and understand cultures. The diversity in the American labor force can have a positive impact only if there is a good synergy between people. It would be appropriate here to cite two references to support this point.

Last year, Mr. Akio Morita, co-founder of Sony, passed away. In an article⁵ on him in *Fortune* magazine, the author made an important point—Mr. Akio Morita was a very successful Japanese CEO. Western leaders liked him because he seemed to understand them and they seemed to understand him. Mr. Morita was well versed in various foreign cultures and he constantly shifted cultural gears as he traveled around the globe. Pepi Sappal⁶ mentioned in his article on diversity in the *Wall Street Journal*, October 17th, 2000 that—“it is impossible to exploit all the markets, both at home and abroad, unless the organizations are in touch with their consumer’s needs. The best way to do that is by recruiting a diverse workforce that mirrors your customer base.” Probably, the author meant to say that the regional workforce should mirror the customer base in that particular region.

It is important to learn to respect cultural differences, and one should have openness toward cultural intricacies. We are aware of the fact that the culture at one company or organization could be very much different from that in another organization. So much so that culture in every department within a company could be different. This subject is very complex. In this article, we are discussing the issue of culture diversity on a ‘macro’ scale. The assumption here is that people with different cultural backgrounds bring diversity into the organization. We have to find ways to make use of this potential for the benefit of all.

Developing drugs is a complex process involving many activities in various departments. Overall, we can divide a pharmaceutical company into four major departments—Research and Development, Manufacturing, Business Development and Sales/Marketing. Let’s examine how the cultural diversity in various departments would affect them and what can be done about it. Table 4⁷ lists changes in the number of employees in various departments during the period 1980 to 1998. Overall, R & D and marketing departments experienced a significant growth in the last two decades.

Research and Development

The cost of R & D in the pharmaceutical industry is skyrocketing and there has been an unprecedented pressure on R & D divisions to succeed in the development of pharmaceutical products. Gone are the days of a single scientist buried in his/her own lab developing a new antibiotic. Pharmaceutical R & D has been turned into a huge, complex, and multidisciplinary process involving drug discovery, toxicology, pharmacology, pharmacokinetics, pharmaceuticals, analytical chemistry, etc. From Table 5,⁷ it is clear that the majority of the R & D staff members are scientists and professionals. Rules of project management have now been implemented widely in R & D and as a result, productivity initiatives are widely adopted. In general, scientists are known to have idiosyncrasies and the project team leaders have a tough task in front of them to achieve synergism among the team members.

Diana Stork⁸ from the University of Hartford (1998) discussed how drug R & D leaders may deal with cultural differences in ways that encourage the

TABLE 4. Domestic US employment in ethical pharmaceutical research-based companies December 1980 to June 1998

Employment function	12/80	12/85	12/90	12/95	12/97	6/98
Production, Quality Control	67,000	58,000	59,546	59,541	58,427	54,429
Medical R & D	25,500	35,800	43,952	49,409	50,486	51,002
Marketing	36,000	44,600	56,014	55,348	67,392	71,374
Administration	17,600	18,100	21,915	28,810	25,818	26,547
Distribution and others	10,900	7,300	7,384	5,611	4,667	4,934
Domestic US employment	157,600	164,400	188,811	198,718	206,790	208,286

Source⁷: Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, 1999.

TABLE 5. Domestic US R & D personnel. Percent values by position level in research-based pharmaceutical companies, 1995-97

Category	YEAR		
	1995	1996	1997
Scientific and Professional	70.4	71.8	72.0
Technical	10.0	10.2	10.5
Supporting Staff	19.6	18.0	17.4
Total	100	100	100

Source⁷: Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, 1999.

creativity needed for drug discovery and the discipline and unity of purpose so important for R & D success. Three main factors were discussed—personality and predisposition, culture and demography, and discipline and training. R & D culture is very different than manufacturing culture. There is a component of creativity and innovation. Thus, it is important to pay attention to what people (scientists) are good at and enjoy. In problem solving, scientists may focus on unwanted aspects of the problem and get carried away in irrelevant areas. Management must come up with policies and it is a function of the project leader to make sure that his/her team members perceive the company policies in the right way. With this background on R & D culture, the question is—how important is cultural diversity in R & D? Citing one example, C.O. Rutledge⁹ noted that by working with people from diverse backgrounds, more than one solution to the problem was possible and by having more than one possible solution, the probability of having a better solution increased. Beyond higher education what one needs in R & D is—an analytical skill set for logical thinking, philosophical ideologies, stable mind-set and good interpersonal communications. Facts are important in R & D, but faith and feelings play a vital role in important decision-making. Results in R & D are not always crystal-clear. People from different cultural backgrounds are known to be experts in different areas of human behavior. Thus, a project team consisting of members with diverse cultural backgrounds would complement each other, making a strong team and hopefully helping it to make correct decisions.

Farai Chideya¹⁰ in her book focussed on the young adults in the US who are living and creating the racial profile. They are the true identity of the cultural variations in the US. These young adults in the age range between 15-20 have been called the 'Millennium Generation.' Considering the current composition of the US population, the Millennium Generation is going to experience more cultural diversity than ever before. Many pharmacy schools in the US have created a new organization, GPEN (Globalization of Pharmaceutics Education Network). The main goal is to prepare students for the new globalized pharmaceutical industry. GPEN held three international conferences so far—in Kansas (1996), Zurich (1998) and Uppsala (2000). Such educational programs would certainly prepare students for the new cultural environment in the pharmaceutical industry.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing in the pharmaceutical industry involves manufacture of drug substances and drug products. Many pharmaceutical companies in the US have global operations, i.e., they have manufacturing sites abroad and in the US. More cultural diversity has been observed in the manufacturing arena in recent times. A production manager should always be prepared to understand

aspects of various cultures. More than that he/she has to accept differences in cultures. One needs different skill sets in manufacturing as opposed to R & D. One has to strictly adhere to manufacturing protocols and make sure that the same quality product is produced in every batch. However, standardized procedures rarely go smoothly every time, as expected. Many known and unknown factors affect the manufacturing process and at those instances, skilled decision-making becomes crucial. In this case, Hofstede's value dimensions—power distance and uncertainty avoidance become important. Especially, when dealing with a foreign manufacturing environment, the Production Manager must adjust to local culture. When a production manager from the US was sent to Peru, he tried to introduce a democratic decision-making style.¹ To his surprise, soon workers started quitting their jobs. It was later learned that the Latin American culture considers the manager as an authoritarian figure and workers were not used to participative US culture. If managers in the US are exposed to varied cultures, they automatically get trained (knowingly and unknowingly) for day-to-day problem solving in abroad and in the US.

Business

In his article, R. M. Bostrock¹¹ has rightfully stated that with recent globalization, political borders have faded, but cultural differences have re-emerged. When Ernie Drew joined Hoechst Celanese in 1988, he found a typical US corporation—run by white, middle-aged men.¹² Immediately after joining, he opened doors to minorities and women who would climb the executive ladder. The goal was very simple—to improve profitability. As discussed before, one of the reasons behind the success of Mr. Akio Morita of Sony, could be his knowledge of various cultures.⁵

Various departments come under the category "Business," such as finance, strategic management, purchasing, etc. Employees from these departments interact with outside customers with varied cultural backgrounds. The issue is more prominent when one has to deal at a global scale. Cultivating culturally diverse environments in-house would allow employees to get trained in this subject. As a result, in a real marketplace, they will make more correct decisions over incorrect ones. It is clear from Table 2 that the negotiation strategy and value system for different cultures could vary greatly. Bowing is common in the Japanese culture. But, one should not imitate it unless he/she knows who bows to whom, how many times and when.¹³ Knowledge of factors such as food habits, dress codes, religious beliefs, and values would make a major difference in negotiations. One will be exposed to various cultural values only if there is cultural diversity in the internal business environment. Some skills can not developed by reading books or attending seminars. They are acquired only by experiences. This is the very same reason why many companies require in-

ternational experience (working several years in a foreign country) for many of their senior executives. Cultural background prepares individuals to deal with economic, social, and moral necessities. A human resources spokesperson must have a thorough understanding of the cultural cross-section of members when negotiating with union leaders. Money is not the only criterion to satisfy the needs of all people. Union negotiations can also be won by committing to non-monetary propositions. The cultural trait "social trust" is observed to different degrees in different cultures. M. J. Mazarr¹³ placed people with Chinese, French or Italian cultural heritage in the "low trust" category. In these cultures, sociability does not extend beyond the family or clan.

Internationally, it may be prudent not to divide the world into different nations, but rather to divide it into different civilizations. There are mainly seven to eight civilizations¹⁴—Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African. One can subdivide these cultures at micro levels and one could easily also identify intra-cultural variation. But, in a business environment, dividing people in different cultural groups at the macro level helps predict their thinking and rationale ahead of time.

Sales/Marketing

Pharmaceutical sales and marketing are evolving processes. New ideologies and philosophies have been introduced in recent times. Economics is playing a major role in prescribing medicines. Patients, doctors, hospital administrators, health insurance companies, and pharmacies are still the key players. Sales and marketing are the areas where cultural diversity is having the most impact. As discussed before, the US population profile has changed and is expected to change further in coming years. However, assimilation of immigrants in the American "melting pot" has changed too. People with different ethnic backgrounds are retaining more cultural beliefs. As quoted by M.A. Caso¹⁵ in his article, "The 'melting pot' has been replaced by a stew or salad where each ingredient contributes to the overall flavor but still keeps its own distinct characteristics and identities." If this statement has some truth in it, it means that physicians have to be more aware of the cultural differences among their patients. It has been well established that genetic composition among different races, food habits, customs, and cultural values affects drug treatments. The mental health of people varies in different cultures and they would respond differently to treatments, especially when it comes to psychoactive drugs. The number of physicians from minorities is continuously growing and it is likely that they could be involved in treating patients of their own ethnic background. California, New Jersey, Florida, New York, and Illinois have been identified as states with the most cultural diversity. The composition of the sales force of any pharmaceutical company should reflect this diversity.

This way, the company would establish close ties with physicians and, at the same time, openness to different cultures would become prevalent in the entire sales force. If one observes occurrence of certain diseases in a particular cultural population, marketing executives should not have any difficulty in carving a niche market. However, it would be possible only through awareness of such cultural variations. Such awareness would come either by education or by working side-by-side with people with different cultural backgrounds.

When it comes to marketing drugs abroad, the US is certainly at an advantage. Marketing executives are exposed to different cultures in their home territory and are well prepared in the international arena. An alliance between marketing and R & D would help generate drugs for people with different ethnic backgrounds. It is agreed that at this time, the majority of pharmaceutical markets exist in the US, Japan and Europe. However, the economic development of countries such as China and India, considering their large human population, could be very attractive markets. A component of culture in future clinical studies would certainly be beneficial to pharmaceutical companies in the long run.

As the ethnic and racial diversity of the population grows, consumers (patients) often look for "one of their own," a practitioner with a shared value set and similar experiences. Often, people feel comfortable in describing symptoms and reactions with someone who they feel confident will understand their meaning and feelings, their reactions to pain or what might be stigmatized or shameful in some cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that the US population profile will experience major changes in the coming years. As a result, the "Millennium Generation" has to be prepared for the cultural diversity expected in the work force. As long as one openly accepts the existence of cultural differences, it is easy to see how work forces with different cultural heritages would complement each other in the business environment. A work force with intercultural diversity should bring 'profit' to business and professional entities in the long run. However, one has to make serious efforts to prevent cultural conflicts by generating openness to different cultures. This is a time to channel this large potential to our benefit and this is plausible in every aspect of the pharmaceutical domain—R&D, manufacturing, business sales/marketing, and practice. A word of caution in this evolving circumstance is a subtlety that one should be open to differences in cultures when it comes to positive traits, but must make efforts to avoid branding and stereotyping in considering negative traits.

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