

## Cross Cultural Solutions for International Business

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Cross cultural solutions to international business demands are increasingly being viewed as a valid and necessary method in enhancing communication and interaction in and between companies, between companies and customers and between colleagues.

Cross cultural consultancies are involved in aiding companies to find solutions to the challenges cross cultural differences carry.

International and national businesses are ultimately the result of people. As with incompatible software, if people are running on different cultural coding, problems can occur. Cross cultural consultancies therefore concentrate their efforts on interpersonal communication.

Different cultures and cultural backgrounds between a highly diverse staff base brings with it obstacles, challenges and difficulties. Cross cultural differences manifest in general areas such as in behaviour, etiquette, norms, values, expressions, group mechanics and non-verbal communication. These cross cultural differences then follow on through to high level areas such as management styles, corporate culture, marketing, HR and PR.

In order to overcome potential pitfalls, specialist attention is required in the form of a cross cultural consultant. As one would approach a doctor for a medical diagnosis or an accountant to examine finances, cross cultural consultants offer the expertise, experience and know-how to diagnose problems and provide solutions to interpersonal cultural differences.

Within companies there are many facets in which cultural differences manifest. Some key areas which cross cultural consultants deal with include, but are not exclusive to, the following:

### Cross Cultural HR

HR covers a wide range of business critical areas that need cross cultural analysis. Consultants may offer advice on a number of areas including recruitment, relocation, international assignments, staff retention and training programmes.

### Cross Cultural Team-Building

In order to have a well functioning business unit within a company, communication is critical. Cross cultural consultants will provide tools and methods to promote staff integration, reduce cross cultural conflicts and build team spirit. This is essentially done through highlighting differences and building on strengths to ensure they are used positively.

### Cross Cultural Synergy

International mergers, acquisitions and joint-ventures require people from different cultural backgrounds to harmonise in order to succeed. Cross cultural consultants counsel on group mechanics, communication styles, norms, values and integration processes.

## **Cross Cultural Awareness Training**

Working with colleagues, customers or clients from different cultural backgrounds, with different religions, values and etiquettes can occasionally lead to problems. Cross cultural awareness training is usually a generic introduction into a culture, country, region or religion. The aim is to equip the trainee with the adequate knowledge to deal comfortably with people from different cultures, avoiding misunderstandings and mistakes.

## **Cross Cultural Training for Expatriate Relocation**

Staff that travel overseas need to understand the cultural basics of the host country or region. Knowledge of the country's history, culture, laws, traditions, business practices and social etiquettes all help to minimise the impact of culture shock and hence smooth their transition overseas.

## **Cross Cultural Negotiations**

Equipped with their knowledge of the two or more cultures that can be meeting around the negotiation table, a cross cultural consultant advises on areas such as negotiation strategies, styles, planning, closure and etiquette in order to increase the chance of a successful outcome, free from misunderstandings, suspicions and general cross cultural communication breakdown.

## **Cross Cultural PR Consultancy**

Brand image, public relations and advertising are all areas companies must be careful of when moving out of the national context. Tastes and values change dramatically from continent to continent. It is crucial to understand whether the brand name, image or advertising campaign is culturally applicable in the target country. Cross cultural consultants examine words, images, pictures, colours and symbols to ensure they fit well with the target culture.

## **Cross Cultural Language Training**

Language training is an area where little investment is made by companies, but where the business advantages are great. Linguistic knowledge goes a long way in bridging cultural gaps and smoothing lines of communication. Cross cultural consultancies provide language training to business staff, moulding their learning to the business environment in which they work.

In conclusion, clearly the role and expertise of cross cultural communication consultants is important for today's international business. The potential pitfalls cross cultural differences present to companies are extensive. In essence a cross cultural consultant's primary objective is integration. This integration, between colleagues, clients and customers is crucial for business success. Equipped with experience, knowledge and above all objectivity, a cross cultural consultant creates bridges of understanding and opens lines of communication.

### **Short note about the author**

*Neil Payne is Director of London based cross cultural communications consultancy, Kwintessential.*

*For more information on cross cultural training please visit <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk>*

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