Chapter 70

The Influence of Cultural Factors on Corporate Training in East Asia:
Perspectives From Systems Theory, Human Resource Development, and Instructional Systems Design

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ABSTRACT

In the context of the increasing economic importance of the Pacific Rim, the unique historical and cultural factors that impact organizational and corporate culture in the East Asian business world have been the subject of much discussion. East Asian culture and its attendant philosophical influences will first be discussed. Improving corporate training in East Asian business can be aided by the application of a whole-system approach that is able to encompass the cultural and philosophical background of East Asian business. Drawing from systems theory, human resource management, and instructional systems design, this chapter will propose suggestions for East Asian corporate training. In addition, suggestions for online learning design using this theoretical background will be established.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Pacific Rim nations in Asia in the global economy has brought Asian corporations forward in the world marketplace. In describing the Pacific Rim nations in terms of economic strength, one can discuss the rise of China in the Asian economic landscape. This landscape is commonly taken to include China, Japan, the "tiger economies" of Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, as

well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) economies including Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam (Dent, 1995; Napoli, 2014). Although these countries continually change with economic fluctuations, the role of Asia in the world economy has grown. For example, in 1990 Asia accounted for 23.3 percent of world gross domestic product (GDP); Asia in 2014 accounted for 38.8 percent of world GDP, an increase of over 15 percent. Asian nations in general are becoming more intertwined with global markets. Asian businesses have expanded in America and Europe; they have developed multi-national relationships such as the Renault-Nissan alliance, and have increasingly focused on gaining cultural brand recognition abroad (Pomfret & Sourdin, 2014).

The reasons behind the economic rise of the Pacific Rim nations center around factors such as lower labor and manufacture costs, laxer regulations, and untapped consumer and labor markets. Specifically, these factors have helped many East Asian companies to grow. For instance, in 2016, Chinese companies took the top three spots in the Forbes 2000 ranking of companies (Agarwal, 2016). Moreover, many East Asian companies are engaging in increased levels of foreign investment in manufacturing facilities, culturally-specific marketing of products, and existing intellectual property such as brand names. Examples of this trend include the bids for the British Rover marque of cars by the Chinese car manufacturer SAIC in 2005, the purchase of the Smithfield foods brand by the Chinese meat processing company Shuanghui International in 2013, and the recent bid for the $14.3 billion acquisition of the Starwood Hotels brand by the Chinese insurance company Anbang (Tran, 2005; Gandel, 2016).

Despite these significant changes, the nations and companies of East Asia continue to be influenced by traditional cultural values. Cultural commentators and businesspeople have sought to reveal the cultural factors that underlie the perceived successes and weaknesses of Asian economic growth (Denison, Haaland, & Goelzer, 2004). The historical and cultural influences on the East Asian business world have been the subject of much current discussion. Discussions regarding working conditions as well as reports of employee suicides in East Asian companies such as Foxconn (Dou, 2016) have been causes for especial concern. From these incidents, the significance of how East Asian culture impacts workplace training becomes clear.

This chapter will begin by discussing the influence of East Asian culture on businesses and organizational operations. It can be argued that long-standing traditions of hierarchical management, insularity, and patriarchal leadership have a negative impact on East Asian business outcomes. However, it is also instructive to engage with strengths of the East Asian cultural landscape in business such as loyalty, group cohesion, and efficiency. Considering a balanced view of the East Asian business landscape can result in business synergy for training that combines the best of Western and Eastern thinking. Certain cultural traits of the Asian business world offer useful ideas which could serve as the basis for further improvement. Understanding the improvements to be made, however, requires a whole-system approach that necessarily considers both the theoretical and practical background of corporate training in East Asia. This whole-system approach can draw from systems theory as well as pertinent ideas from human resource management and training design. Based on these ideas, this chapter will offer suggestions directed towards the improvement of East Asian business culture and training. Pertinent suggestions for online learning design that apply the theories discussed will then be offered. In this way, this chapter is intended to aid instructors who wish to use online learning to bridge cultural as well as geographic borders in East Asia.

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