

Cultural Communications of Mainland United States– Based Organizations and Their Hawaiian Workforces: A Case Study of Their Unique Nature

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hawaiian Islands are a diverse melting pot of people, cultures, and languages that make doing business in the state a unique challenge for organizations based on the mainland United States. While Hawaii is indeed the 50th state in the union, culturally they are more closely aligned with Asia and other Polynesian cultures than the United States as a whole. Doing business in Hawaii can often feel as though one is doing business in a foreign country, a place where one only partially speaks the language. Understanding these cultural differences and shaping communication styles to align with the cultural values of the Hawaiian sub-culture is essential to success for any organization planning to start operations in Hawaii. Through a process of cultural analysis, organizations can more effectively manage change within their operations and engage their Hawaiian workforces with great success.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND: ORGANIZATIONS AND CULTURE

Hawaii, the 50th state in the United States, is geographically located in the Pacific Ocean about 2,000 miles from the union's nearest continental state, California, in North America. Made up of more than 100 islands, there are eight main islands of Hawaii: Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, Kahoolawe, Lanai, Molokai, Kauai and Niihau (Rubin, n.d.). The people of Hawaii have ancestral roots from many different geographic origins and have arrived at different times throughout Hawaii's existence. As such, the cultural foundations of Hawaii are based in long-standing traditions and have created a Hawaiian subculture. Communication with and within this subculture pose unique challenges to mainland United States based organizations and to the Hawaiian workforces with whom the organizations interact.

Organizations face a multitude of challenges in the modern global environment. From mergers and acquisitions to new flash markets being developed, the landscape for most organizations change on a semi-routine basis. In an increasingly global marketplace, organizations are faced with new and pressing challenges that they may not have had to confront in the past. With the invention of the internet and the increased ability for people to venture out from their native lands, organizations have had to learn to deal with new challenges from the convergence of different cultures. Understanding these differences is key to the success of organizations who have more than a regional footprint. Multi-National corporations have often been the testing grounds of cultural diversity programs in organizations and many have managed to navigate the cultural differences that exist. For many United States based organizations, that do not have an international footprint, this concept is indeed foreign to them as they primarily have dealt with western culture and ideals.

This case study is designed to take an in-depth look into the cultural differences that organizations need to understand when doing business with locations that have substantially different cultures than their own. Whereas this case study will focus primarily on regional or national culture, the concepts presented are applicable to the organizational culture, as well, as each organization is heavily influenced by regional and national cultures. Organizations that have satellite facilities in geographically and culturally different areas, even within the same country, need to understand the basic principles of culture. The case study begins by reviewing the Cultural Dimensions that have been developed by renowned Social Scientist Geert Hofstede. These dimensions will be key to our understanding of the cultures we will discuss. These dimensions will be used to evaluate the unique relationships between mainland United States organizations and their Hawaiian workforces. Finally, solutions and recommendations for organizational communication strategies based on the cultural analysis are offered.

SETTING THE STAGE: WHAT IS CULTURE

Culture is a topic that has fascinated researchers for centuries. Cultural research can be found dating back to Montesquieu and Herder in the 18th century to Tocqueville in the 19th century, to Webber in the early 20th century (Bailey & Clegg, 2007). Modern researchers such as Dr. Geert Hofstede and Michael Minkov have revolutionized the cultural research field. In his book, *Culture's Consequences*, published in 1980, Hofstede defines culture as "collective programming of the mind" (p. 13). This suggests that the root of culture is much more than one person or family, but holds true to a much larger population. Cultures are perceived to be different when their ways of life are significantly different (Adler & Gunderson, 2008). Hofstede held that each culture could be defined by their views on certain cultural

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