

Understanding the World of Work 1

I. The Corporate Culture in the Philippines

The Spanish, Americans, Japanese, Chinese, and Malay have greatly influenced the Filipino's culture and way of life. Filipinos are known to be casual, fun loving, sensitive, and hospitable people (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.). *Hiya*, translated as "shame" or "shyness" and commonly associated with "losing face," is an important concept that influences how Filipinos behave and interact with others. Filipinos also believe in *pakikisama*, which refers to the concept of smooth relationship and avoidance of confrontation (Santander Trade Portal, n.d.).

In addition, personal relationships are crucial in Filipino business culture. Finding a third-party introduction is a helpful strategy as Filipinos prefer to work with those that they know and trust. The Filipino hierarchy is vertical, and the most senior person approves all final decisions. However, group consensus is needed before it reaches the most senior person.

A. Introduction

The introduction is commonly done through smiling and shaking hands with each other. There will also be handing out of business cards, although how the cards are exchanged tend to be informal compared to other Asian cultures. During first meetings, it is recommended to address people directly by using their professional title or through using Mr., Mrs., or Miss, followed by the surname (Santander Trade Portal, n.d.).

B. Time Management

Filipinos have a more flexible sense of time. Asians are known to have this viewpoint with regards to time, but it does not mean that being punctual in unimportant; it is just that other relational factors may take priority (Adler & Elmhurst, 2012).

C. Gifts

Gifts are usually given at first meeting. It is appreciated but not expected and usually opened by the recipient in private after the meeting. Gifts should be of good quality, nicely wrapped, and inexpensive (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.).

D. Meetings Management

Mid-morning or afternoon meetings are preferred, and a follow-up call to confirm the meeting a day before is recommended. Usually, the initial meeting is viewed as a chance to get to know each other rather than going straight into negotiation. Filipinos find it difficult to say "NO" and would just offer a polite reply coupled with a smile rather than an outright negative feedback. Thus, one should recognize these subtleties and clarify things by asking questions to avoid misunderstanding (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, n.d.).

II. Adjusting to the Corporate Culture

According to Church and Conger (2018) of Harvard Business Review, there are five (5) aspects of company culture that one should pay attention to when starting a new job.

A. Relationships

Companies differ in how they cultivate relationships, in how much they value collaboration, and in how much face time is required to get work done and make important decisions. In some organizations, the only way to influence others is by spending time with them in person. In others, emailing, texting, and video conferencing are preferred over in-person meetings. When you arrive in your new organization, ask insiders how you should approach relationships. For example, do you need to spend time building a relationship with someone before asking them for help or input on a project? Or is it acceptable to gather a list of “go-to” individuals whom you can simply email for assistance when you need them?

Observe where and how your colleagues get work done and make decisions. Do they spend much of their time meeting with one another, or do they tend to be at their desks or work from home? Are people friendly and open to meeting with you? Or do they appear to be nice but repeatedly cancel “meet and greets?” You may need others to help you make the necessary connections.

B. Communications

When you start a new job, look at how people tend to communicate with one another. Is it through formal channels, like meetings that are always set in advance, and to which everyone comes well-prepared? Or do individuals more often communicate spontaneously with little or no documentation? (Maybe your manager frequently stops by and says, “Can you come join this meeting now?”) You should start by asking your boss what the expectations are. Personal assistants and your

teammates are other good sources of information.

Hierarchy often determines when and where it is acceptable to communicate with senior colleagues. For example, in more-hierarchical environments, you might have to “pre-clear” any communications upward in the hierarchy with your boss. In less hierarchical organizations, people may be encouraged to email senior leaders to chat with them. The best way to figure out these rules is to ask around. Your peers and direct reports may be well positioned to tell you how to proceed with your manager and those above. Ask about recent successful initiatives and how colleagues influenced senior leaders in their communications.

You should also note how information tends to be presented. For instance, do meetings revolve around formal presentations, or can individuals informally share issues, debate topics, and engage in real-time brainstorming without being judged? Some organizations and departments prefer 50-page presentations with reams of details and analyses, while others prefer to work from a simple emailed agenda with a bulleted list of topics. Pay attention to how information is typically packaged for meetings, the extent to which issues are debated versus “checked off,” and how deferential people are to those in positions of power. Observe how senior leaders in the room respond to formal decks and strong recommendations, versus informal discussions. Which style consistently results in a decision coming out of the meeting?

C. Decision-Making

How companies make decisions also varies in important ways. Some companies make real-time

decisions in formal meetings, while others tend to finalize decisions offline. Even if formal meetings are the norm, you may find that the real decisions happen by the coffee station, in the hallway, or over lunch. Watch for whether the decisions made in the meetings get implemented. If you see people agreeing to some set of actions in a meeting, and then notice that other things happen afterward, that suggests there are strong informal decision-making mechanisms at play that you'll need to uncover. For example, a decision to invest in a new product might ultimately rest in the hands of two pivotal individuals even when there is an entire senior leadership team reviewing the decision. You'd want to meet with these two (2) key leaders far in advance of any formal meetings, and convince them of your point of view. Or perhaps everyone in the room appears to agree to invest in that product collectively, but you notice that several individuals chose not to voice their disagreements in public for political reasons. You will need to circle back and influence each of them after the fact to ensure they don't derail your project.

Another aspect of decision-making to understand is whether your company culture has a bias for action or a bias for analysis and consensus. In organizations where the bias is for action, time and attention spans tend to be more limited, and decisions are made quickly. If you're pushing for an initiative, you need to present your position clearly and give key stakeholders the information they need to make a decision. Other company cultures prefer a more protracted discussion of options, models, and strategies. More patience is required on your part, especially because this bias for consensus often means sending more supporting

materials and analyses and redoing the same presentation several times, before reaching a final decision. The question you want to ask is, what is your own bias for action, and how does it fit your new culture?

D. Individual vs. Group Perspectives

Some companies approach work as being largely the product of individuals, while in others, it is the product of a collaborative orientation. If an organization is very individualistic in its approach, it will generally support a "hero mentality" that recognizes the ambitious individual. Rewards are often individually based, and performance management tends to be based on individual ratings where everyone's unique contribution is justified to their peers.

Group-focused organizations provide more of a safety net in that risks and rewards are shared, but it may be harder to stand out as an individual and differentiate yourself. These organizations tend to be flatter and more focused on shared goals and results. If you are a highly ambitious individual who enjoys individual recognition, you may not get what you need fast enough in terms of career progression. One cue is to listen to how people discuss their work in meetings. If people generally talk about group achievements, and you use "I" in your presentations, you will quickly be branded as someone who is not a team player. Once again, the key is in recognizing how individuals are recognized and rewarded.

E. Change Agents

Another cultural factor that can have a profound impact on your status and influence is the culture's

orientation toward change. Most places are resistant to outsiders bent on change. Typically, though, highly talented leaders brought in from the outside are told to “shake things up,” to challenge the status quo. Unfortunately, what happens to many of these folks is that they fail. Either they misread the cultural cues as to how disruptive they should really be (versus what they had been told), or they didn’t build the supportive relationships needed to back them up on key decisions — or both. Because they didn’t receive the proper onboarding advice, if any, they underestimated the cultural bounds they’d have to work within. So the challenge for any incoming leader is to determine what you can challenge in the culture, and when you should do so.

Pacing and buy-in are also critical factors. You need to ask: Can I be a highly assertive, fast-paced champion of change, or do I need to invest in engagement, dialogue, and consensus building first? Nobody will answer these questions for you—you need to figure it out by watching reactions to the initial recommendations you make. Start with a few trusted people to test your ideas. Ask them how others might respond before dropping your big idea in a formal setting with senior leaders. Know which leaders have your back before you propose major changes.

The main thing to keep in mind when you join a new company is that your previous achievements don’t allow you to act outside of the norms of the culture you’re in now. Most organizations will hire you for past experiences, but your future success there will be determined by your impact in your new environment — and depending on how well you understand and work

within your new culture, your impact can be amplified or derailed.

III. Communicating with Colleagues (upliftevents.com.au., n.d.)

A. Listen actively

Do not do anything while someone's talking to you because it is disrespectful and shows lack of interest to the person. Listen actively by orienting your body towards the speaker and looking directly as she/he speaks. You will only be able to understand what the speaker is trying to say if you listen to them closely and wait for them to finish before you reply. When the speaker is done, you may now reply or ask questions to clarify issues.

B. Speak with discretion and talk face to face

You should know when to speak or when to restrain yourself to avoid conflict, unwanted attention, and misunderstanding. In addition, face to face communication is best in building trust and openness, getting immediate response regarding someone's viewpoint and feelings, and resolving complex problems.

C. Offer constructive criticism

Do not include your personal feelings when giving feedback or tips for improvement. Use an appropriate tone and words to avoid sounding mean or bossy.

D. Build and earn trust

Act consistently and with integrity to build the trust of your colleagues. You will also earn their trust by

communicating clearly and concisely.

E. Get personal but don't be too casual

You may get to know your colleagues better by talking about your personal lives during breaks or after work. However, do not get too casual as it might make the other person uncomfortable. Make sure that all your office communications, including emails, phone calls, and meetings, are professional.

F. Consider communication preference and technology etiquette

Respect other's preference regarding the channel of communication to use. Others prefer exchanging emails rather than talking on the phone. However, it is difficult to determine the tone of an email and text message. To avoid misunderstanding, it is sometimes better to speak face to face.

G. Tell them the relevance of what you are communicating

Communication is only relevant if it is related to what the other person wants or needs. Figure out how your message will be relevant to your colleague and then tell them about it. If they are successful in imparting this information to them, they will keep on listening and responding.

H. Keep written and spoken communications short, simple, and direct

Remember that employees have multiple tasks at hand every day. Keep your emails to one (1) or two (2) paragraphs only to prevent people from becoming bored and skipping over the most important part of the

message. If you do have a lot of information to cover, use bullet points or subheadings to make the email easy to scan for recipients.

IV. Strategies for Building Professional Relationships (Rochow, n.d.)

A. Improve your communication skills

Poor communication is at the bottom of many workplace issues, including low morale, increased stress, and failure to meet deadlines. Communicating is not just about talking to someone or hearing them when they speak. You both have to understand what the other person is saying.

B. Respect others

When trying to build better relationships, always remember to follow the golden rule and treat others as you would want to be treated. This means being courteous, using non-offensive language, and respecting people's time.

C. Respond to feedback positively

You can talk about growth and improvement as much as you want, but if you can't take feedback with a grain of salt and you don't know how to give others constructive feedback, you won't be able to progress past where you currently are. Giving feedback to others opens the door to establishing a deeper rapport.

Receiving feedback from others is an opportunity for you to address specific issues that may be hindering your professional development. Feedback is ultimately about perspective and will help you learn how to see things from different angles.

D. Be empathetic

Contrary to what it sometimes feels like, developing better professional relationships isn't about always proving you're better than others. Being empathetic to others, especially those who may be in a position that's subordinate to yours, will go a long way in solidifying relationships.

Instead of feeling smug because you did something better or knew something someone didn't, use the experience as a teaching opportunity and a chance to support someone else.

E. Celebrate others

It can be easy to feel envious of someone else's achievements, especially if you've been working hard on something of your own. But instead of feeling annoyed or jealous, congratulate the person.

F. Seek opinions

People love doling out advice. One of the main reasons we network with people is to take advantage of their experience, skills, or knowledge at some point in time, even if it's just reading articles they post.

You shouldn't email blast everyone on your contact list regularly (or you'll find yourself losing contacts left and right). However, don't hesitate to reach out if you have a real need for their opinion or advice. Be sure to inquire about them, too, and always be courteous and close with a thank you.

G. Get coffee

If you're trying to build more of a rapport with a professional contact, try to take it off the page. Suggest meeting for a coffee and set a specific time, so they know you aren't planning on chatting their ear off for two (2) hours on a Sunday morning. If you travel a lot for work, do your best to grab a cup of coffee with connections in other cities while you're there.

H. Check-in

You might not always have something specific in mind to talk or ask about. That's fine. You can always drop a note to check-in. This works well with people you've briefly met or talked to once or twice but don't have an established relationship yet. Keep it short and direct. Afterward, thank them for their time.

I. Do some housekeeping

Don't worry, if you don't recognize a connection, you're not alone. Set aside some time maybe once a month to perform connection housekeeping. You don't have to go through your entire list, especially if you've got hundreds of connections, but go through a section and re-introduce yourself to those you don't know or don't remember. Just remember it's also important to give your contacts a break. If you reach out with a question and they don't respond, don't follow up by suggesting coffee.

Conversely, if you meet up for coffee, send them a "thank you" note, but resist the urge to suggest turning it into a regular thing.

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