Module 1: Critical Thinking

Cultural Relativism

“Cultural relativism suggests that all ethics, morals, norms, beliefs ,and behaviors must be understood within the context of the culture from which they arise” [2]. Therefore, all cultures contain their own belief systems and there is no universal standard to gauge cultures. Additionally, since this essentially means everything is relative to a specific culture, rules are created by that culture, for that culture. Thus allowing the greater good of a culture to prevail by creating and implementing the rules the majority agree upon.

Each workplace ends up creating their own culture. Therefore, one could argue that every workplace is their own culture, separate from all the others. Since every workplace has their own culture they each will have to have their own cultural rules and norms. These rules and norms are determined by the members of the culture. With any sort of diversity in the workplace, it will force the workplace culture to adapt according to all the members' individual home culture. Thus, the members of the workplace culture, or atleast the majority, will work together to have their homeplace cultural rules and norms mesh together into a new workplace culture environment.

Cultural relativism can force the workplace to challenge its own customs and norms. According to an article on LinkedIn “Cultural relativism challenges organizations to reevaluate their policies and practices to ensure they are inclusive and respectful of diverse cultural perspectives” [1]. This in turn leads to HR departments working towards creating policies that are more considerate and flexible towards cultural differences. For example, this could mean accommodating religious observances and recognizing cultural holidays. By implementing these changes, brought on by cultural relativism, a software developer’s workplace can be an inclusive environment where employees feel valued. This may seem beneficial, however, not everyone believes cultural relativism will improve the workplace.

According to an article written by Tunga, “Cultural relativism can be the death of your company.” [3]. The argument is, there may be value in every culture but not every custom works for your business. For example, within the culture of a software project, a client may have cultural differences they want implemented. Unfortunately, the desired implementations may be a disaster for the software. Therefore, the software developers would have to avoid giving into cultural relativism in order to keep the business alive and going. Thus leading to the question of is cultural relativism ultimately good or bad for a company.

In summary, it appears there are some companies that benefit from cultural relativism and some companies that are hurt from cultural relativism. For the most part, companies seem to benefit from cultural relativism, however, there are the anomalies that cannot be ignored. Therefore, I feel compelled to believe cultural relativism is beneficial to most companies. The simple fact that cultural relativism makes a company adaptable to others means the company is already light on its feet. Additionally, the company is ready to be adaptable towards other, perhaps, more business oriented situations.

References

[1] Larry Whitaker, M. (2023, July 3). *Embracing cultural relativism in the workplace: Fostering Understanding and Inclusion*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/embracing-cultural-relativism-workplace-fostering-larry/

[2] Kendra Cherry, Mse. (2023, July 8). Understanding cultural relativism and its importance. Verywell Mind. https://www.verywellmind.com/understanding-cultural-relativism-7549709

[3] Scherpenzeel, R. V. (2023, February 14). *Example of cultural relativism in business: 3 approaches that work*. Tunga. https://tunga.io/example-of-cultural-relativism/