



Chapter XIII

The Role of Information and Communication Technology in Managing Cultural Diversity in the Modern Workforce: Challenges and Issues

Indrawati Nataatmadja

University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Laurel Evelyn Dyson

University of Technology, Sydney, Australia

Abstract

This chapter demonstrates how managers can use information and communication technology (ICT) more effectively in culturally diverse workforces. Basing our analysis on the cultural dimensions of Hofstede and Hall, we compare a range of ICTs and provide a chart summarizing their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, a framework for developing ICT is proposed, and an example of its application to

a global organization is presented. The study shows that none of the existing ICT tools is perfect in all situations and all cultural contexts. Therefore, managers need to provide a variety of ICTs to their employees, and developers should build flexibility into their ICT designs.

Introduction

With cultural diversity in the modern workforce a reality today, there is a challenge for managers to capitalize effectively on this diversity in order to harness the benefits while avoiding potential problems. To optimize the positive outcomes, information and communication technology (ICT) is an essential tool. Using appropriate technologies is shown to break down cultural barriers and to promote understanding and knowledge sharing among employees of different language backgrounds and, hence, lead to successful collaboration.

First, we will discuss culture and its dimensions according to some of the principal cultural theorists of today: Hofstede, the GLOBE group, Trompenaars, and Hall. We also will highlight the importance of language in modern-day management practices. The second section will analyze the relationship among management, cultural diversity, and ICT, and how managers can improve employee effectiveness, employee empowerment, and decision making, and also facilitate knowledge management within the organization. Third, a range of information and communication technologies will be compared and contrasted, including e-mail, discussion forums, chat rooms, intranet, groupware, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, and mobile technologies. These technologies will be evaluated in the context of the cultural dimensions outlined in the first section to provide a guideline for managers to choose the best-fit ICT for their needs. Finally, we will provide a framework to develop new ICT systems for a multicultural workplace.

In summary, this chapter's objective is to raise the awareness of managers, administrators, information systems developers, and other knowledge workers about the role of ICT in managing cultural diversity in the workforce. Valuing diversity by welcoming, recognizing, and cultivating differences among people so that they can develop their unique talents ultimately will assist in the creation of effective and competitive organizations.

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