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THE SPIRIT CATCHES YOU AND YOU FALL DOWN: A BOOK SUMMARY

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures by Anne Fadiman (1997).

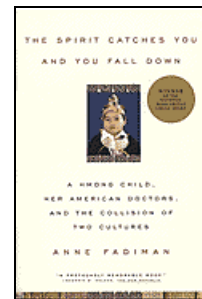
Do you operate in an industry where you interact with individuals who are culturally diverse from you? If your answer is “Yes,” then this book has some insights and lessons that may benefit you.

The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down is a true story about a young Hmong girl, Lia Lee, diagnosed as an epileptic at a county hospital in California. The book tells the story of this Hmong family’s experience with the American health care system and the impact of culture on this interaction. The culture of the Hmong collides with the culture of Western medicine to create this tragic story of cultural miscommunication.

Often, different cultures may share similar values. In Lia’s case, both her doctors and her parents wanted what was best for her. However, their ideas about what caused her illness and their beliefs in how to approach treatment of her illness were diametrically opposed. As the description of the book points out, “The Hmong see illness and healing as spiritual matters linked to virtually everything in the universe, while the medical community marks a division between body and soul and concerns itself almost exclusively with the former.” The doctors determine that anticonvulsants would be the best way to treat Lia’s illness. Her parents, however, believe that animal sacrifices will allow Lia’s soul to cease its wandering.

The book explores some of the messages the Lees had received regarding American doctors prior to coming to the United States. Similarly, the internalized beliefs held by the American doctors regarding the Hmong are also examined. The book looks at ways in which health care providers can improve their ability to care for patients whose background is different from their own. These lessons can provide great insight for any of us interested in bridging the cultural divide. Or, as one reviewer put it, this book is a must read “for anyone interested in how to negotiate cultural difference in a shrinking world.”

To learn more about how we can help you develop cultural awareness, visit us at www.adrgi.com.



With the return of merger mania, a focus on cultural awareness is critical. Typically, the acquirer, or larger company, sets the tone for the new culture and develops the plan to integrate the cultures of the two companies. The culture of an organization can be categorized by the primary or dominant function of a business (e.g. technology, marketing, etc.). What happens when there is a merger with different functional cultures such as a marketing company buying a technology company? This article, examines this culture confrontation in a case study.



Cultural awareness and integration is a critical determinant to the success of a merger. When an organization does not review culture and determine the new culture during a merger, the value of the merger (e.g. reduced costs, improved sales and profits, etc.) may not be achieved due to the resulting cultural conflict between the organizations. In this case study, the company names are omitted to protect the parties.

The Merger

Company A is a classic start-up marketing company that strives to be very customer focused and proactive. Company B is an established technology company that prides itself on its engineering accomplishments but is very reactive and does not handle customer interactions well. Company A and its technology consultant perform a survey to determine which company has the best technology in their field. Company B is determined to be the technology leader and Company A acquires Company B to accelerate their speed to market and to protect their competitive advantage by preventing a competitor from purchasing Company B.

Even though planning is a critical component for either a marketing or technology company, a merger integration plan (e.g. all the tasks required to successfully complete a merger) was not developed. Additionally, an analysis of the culture at these companies was not performed. In addition, the leadership team did not communicate the vision of the culture for the merged company.

The Results

To promote a single identity and culture, most successful mergers will change the name of the acquired company to represent the new corporate identity. Company B did not change their website name, email addresses or business cards. Since there was no schedule for these name changes, Company B was content to maintain its pre-merger name and identity; thus, the separate culture was being continued. This decision was made even in light of two organization studies that recommended a single company identity. Even after the merged company's name was changed, Company B's leaders and staff reacted like there were still two distinct company entities. This separation of cultures was enhanced by Company A's lack of daily face-to-face involvement in Company B's business. Company B felt the leadership team (CEO, CFO, Board of Directors) did not understand their needs as there was nobody from Company A spending more than one day a week at Company B's location. Also, the marketing culture of Company A did not take the time to even review Company B's engineering process that needed improvement. After a few years, the CTO spent several days a week at Company B but it was too late. The new integrated culture had never been formed.

Company A struggled to integrate the people of Company B and build a common culture. Company B's leaders did not communicate issues to the management of the merged team. Also, these leaders did not proactively notify senior management when milestones were going to be missed. Since this happened frequently, this behavior created a culture of distrust. Company B's staff saw what was happening and developed a distrust for Company A's leaders, too.

Further complicating the matter was the fact that both organizations had separate technology personnel and infrastructures. There was a battle as to how to best integrate the technology as well as which hardware platforms (Unix vs Microsoft) to standardize. This battle, that dragged on for 2 years, led to lower productivity as each group would try to sabotage the other. The existence of duplicative staff also resulted in higher costs. Furthermore, the goal of an integrated platform, which would have delivered business value, was delayed as the companies fought.

Based on customer feedback, there were quality and reliability issues. Company B claimed they were operating at a level that their pre-acquisition customer base had accepted. Company A, on the other hand, claimed they needed to be world class in terms of reliability and quality. Since there were not agreed upon measurements for reliability and quality, the leaders from Company A and B disputed what actions, if any, should be taken since company B believed that there really was not a problem.

Finally, the leadership team did not have an overall integration/merger plan with timelines, tasks, and owners. Without a plan and owners, nobody was accountable to ensure the organizations would actually merge, become one culture and deliver the benefits of the merger.

How can you develop cultural awareness and integrate cultures for successful mergers?

1. Before the merger, review functional cultures of both organizations and decide what the new organization's functional culture will be.
2. During a merger, the personnel of the acquired company need to see leadership commitment on the part of the acquiring company. Having leadership from the acquiring company spend a significant time in the acquired company's offices can demonstrate this commitment. This does not mean fly in for a day, shake hands, and then play golf in the afternoon. The acquirer needs to observe the people, processes, and systems firsthand in order to make intelligent and informed decisions quickly. Alternatively, leadership and culture can be disseminated by "cleaning house" and bringing in leadership from the acquirer's management team and removing acquired leaders. However, while this will infuse the acquirer's culture into the acquired's organization, morale may be hurt.
3. Before the merger, develop a merger integration plan with timelines, tasks, and owners. An executive should own the overall merger. If you delay implementing the merger integration plan, the acquired company becomes change resistant. Have leaders from both organizations working together (e.g. developing a new vision for the combined organization, developing solutions for strategic issues, promoting collaborative communication techniques with both companies using email discussion groups, etc.).
4. Change the acquired company's name after close of the merger. The

name should be changed as close to the merger as possible while balancing considerations of cost and customer confusion. Website names, email domains, and business cards should be changed along with all marketing materials and signage.

5. In order to integrate different cultures, focus efforts on handling people issues. The integration of finance, HR and other systems can be accomplished more quickly as the options are generally discernable. People and cultural issues are harder to see and to fix. By listening to the people and establishing teams staffed from both companies, cultural and people issues will be easier to handle.
6. Define common performance metrics and quality standards. This enables the new organization to have a common way to measure results and to assess performance.
7. Develop and implement a communications plan to reinforce the benefits of the merger and to discuss concerns with the merger.

If there are conflicting cultures in a merger, cultural awareness, assessment and integration planning are critical to delivering the benefits of the merger as well as having an integrated culture.

Russell Roman is president of Clifton Heights Associates, a consulting firm that focuses on project management to successfully deliver projects on-time and on-budget. In his career, he has managed projects that have generated over \$100 million in revenues and were used by over 7 million consumers and 25,000 customer end-users. Prior experience includes: S&H Greenpoints as Senior Director of Project Management, Sapient Corporation as a Project Manager, and Andersen Consulting (now Accenture) as a Change Management consultant. Mr. Roman holds a BS Degree in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University. Mr. Roman can be contacted at russellroman@comcast.net.

TOP 100 COMPANIES ADDRESS DIVERSITY

The March 2004 Training Magazine article “Daring to be Diverse” highlights what some of the Top 100 companies are doing to train employees and to promote understanding, awareness and acceptance of all cultural groups. Here’s what some of the Top 100 companies are doing to address diversity:

Avnet Technology Solutions – (ranked 44) - established a Diversity Council, a cross-functional team of six executives. The Council sponsors a Diversity Salute Award, “recognizing employees who further diversity processes and exemplify the principle of diversity as well as work-life balance.”

General Mills – (ranked 51) – formed The Diversity Cadre, a 28 member grassroots volunteer organization that conducts training on race, gender, sexual orientation and style awareness for all of GM’s technology employees. The group also sponsors diversity celebration and awareness events.

Hewlett-Packard – (ranked 81) – implemented a new course, “Diversity and Inclusion,” which “dispels myths and stereotypes and defines the link between diversity and success.”

IBM – (ranked 1) – created a program called Shades of Blue which focuses on developing cross-cultural competence.

AFLAC – (ranked 42) – implemented two courses, “Managing a Diverse Workplace” and “Becoming a Diversity Change Agent.” The company also



produces a quarterly publication for supervisors that runs a regular column addressing issues of diversity.

NCR – (ranked 73) – offers a number of online courses, including one entitled “Around the World in 80 Cultures.”

Pfizer - (ranked 2) – created a collaborative workspace known as the Japan Passport Program. The online workspace allows U.S. and Japanese colleagues to share knowledge and ideas.

John Wieland Homes & Neighborhoods - (ranked 53) - provides translators for all of its training sessions if necessary.

Ohio Savings Bank - (ranked 15) - has an Adult Sensitivity course that helps to provide its employees an understanding of some of the challenges the company's older customers face.

Ernst & Young - (ranked 8) - has both an Office of Diversity Strategy and Development and an Ethnicity Diversity Task Force. All E&Y employees participate in Respect at Work training. In addition, a Minority Leadership Conference is held annually for minority leaders within Ernst & Young.

Marriott – (ranked 36) – has a Diversity Toolbox on its intranet which provides diversity activities and exercises as well as a calendar with 35 cultural and religious celebrations covering 85 countries. In an effort to promote supplier diversity, the company spent more than \$177 million on products and services from 10,000 businesses owned by minorities and women.

What is your organization doing to increase cultural competency, diversity awareness and cross-cultural communication?

To learn more about how your company can address diversity, visit us at www.adrgi.com.

A KEY TO SUCCESS - BENEFIT FROM DIVERSITY: A MESSAGE FROM BILL GALLATY – THE RAND GROUP

Have you ever noticed how very young children color in their first coloring book? Often they are quite content to use a "single" color on all objects in the picture. Although parents provide well-deserved praise at the completion of the young artist's work, it is doubtful that they really like the monochromatic green skies, green clouds, green cows and green water.

The same factors would hold true for diners at a buffet in which every dish consisted of corn. We prefer diversity in all areas of lives and the business environment is no different. A key for success in the commercial world is not only achieving diversity in the personal mix but also tapping into diversity to achieve maximum benefit.

Diversity goes well beyond skin color, hairstyles, eating habits and clothing choices. Cultural behaviors, preferences and thought patterns provide a rich opportunity for firms that learn to apply the diversity, not just achieve it.

Firms that truly understand the diversity of their market have no difficulty achieving great success from the diversity they create in their personnel.

[Learn how The Rand Group can help your company.](#)



QUOTE OF THE MONTH

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.”

- Author Unknown



A CHALLENGE TO YOU! MOVING BEYOND BUZZWORDS – CHARLES A. RANDALL, ESQ.

Before Donald Trump grabbed the spotlight with the catchphrase “You’re Fired!”, Frank Pacetta, a former district sales manager for Xerox, published a book entitled *Don’t Fire Them, Fire Them Up*. “You can have the most powerful vision and the greatest process, but without effective communication you’re dead,” Pacetta said in his book.



“The problem is that business communication is carried out on so many different channels or circuits that it’s easy to lose track of important information because you were literally listening in on the wrong line,” Pacetta opined. “You’ve got to ‘surf’ through all the channels constantly. Just tuning in on your managers or the home office isn’t enough.”

Many of these channels represent different cultures within an organization. In a broad sense, “culture” represents the shared attitudes and values of a particular social group. In the business environment, different divisions of the same company may breed very divergent cultures. It is critically important that these different cultural groups share a common understanding of the language of the organization.

To motivate his sales teams, Pacetta would present a statement of principles at a kick-off meeting each year. In fact, he would have each employee sign the code of ethics. But, after the fanfare of the signing ceremony, a statement of principles only works if everyone is truly on the same page with respect to the meaning behind the words. Every trade and profession has its own lingo and although workers speak the same language, many never take the time to make sure that all of the players have the same understanding of what certain buzz words mean.

For example, one of Pacetta’s principles stated: *We will satisfy our customer requirements*. That sounds great, but exactly who are the “customers”? Many companies use phrases like “customer service” to refer to dealings between co-workers and internal divisions as well as dealings with external parties. Does “customer” include third party vendors?

Another one of Pacetta’s principles declared: *We will implement and practice the quality process*. Well, what does “quality process” mean exactly and would it mean the same thing to your executives, managers, sales reps, and line workers or would your employees approach the quality mandate from the perspectives of different internal cultures?

To find out if your employees have a true meeting of the minds when it comes to the buzz words most frequently used in your business environment, try the following exercise. Start a meeting by making a list of buzz words and catchphrases on a board and designate someone to be in charge of sounding a bell or buzzer anytime one of the words is used. Explain that you want to discuss some important concepts *without* relying on the words that have been listed. When someone gets buzzed for using a prohibited word or phrase, that person must remain silent for two minutes.

This exercise will encourage your employees to fully explain their ideas and positions and it will require them to engage in active listening to really understand what is being said instead of just listening for buzz words and then giving a programmed response.

John C. Maxwell, founder of the INJOY Group and author of over 25 books on leadership, devoted an entire chapter to communication in his book *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork*. “Effective teams have teammates who are constantly talking to one another. Communication increases commitment and connection; they in turn fuel action,” Maxwell said. “If you want your team to *perform* at the highest level, the people on it need to be able to talk to and listen to one another.”

So go ahead. Define your buzzwords. We challenge you!

Mr. Randall maintains an Atlanta-based law practice, Charles A. Randall, P.C., focusing primarily on business and tax matters. He can be reached at cr@randalltaxlaw.com.

Share your success stories with us! If your company utilizes the buzzword exercise and it works for you, please e-mail us and share your story. We would welcome the opportunity to highlight your successes in our upcoming newsletters! E-mail us at info@adrgi.com.

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