



Culture typically can enable organisations to be successful or hinder them. However, because every organisation is unique and has unique restrictions to deal with (e.g. laws, regulations, etc.) the type of organisational culture that best supports an organisation has to be considered separately. For the tax office to be a bit more focused on the process and structure is good, we do after all want the tax office to treat everybody equally. However, for a commercial company, this makes less sense, as not every client is worth the same amount.

How does improved cultural knowledge help Finnish companies succeed?

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THE FIRST question is: is there something like a Finnish working culture? And with increasing numbers of foreigners employed in Finland, what are the effects on the so-called Finnish working culture?

With the help of Helsinki Times, itim International has conducted a study of Finnish organisational cultures and to which extent these assist Finnish organisations to work with foreigners (in Finland) and/or to compete globally. A total of 21 organisations participated in the research, spread out over six business areas:

1. Public Service
2. Higher Education Institutions
3. ICT Sector
4. Consulting
5. Professional Associations
6. Logistics

A PARTICULAR challenge throughout all organisations which have participated in this research remains the degree to which leadership styles are accepted. Compared to other countries, this seems to be a particular issue in most of the Nordic cultures.

From a global perspective, typical Finnish managers are promoted based on

(technical) seniority, and the usual (Nordic) expectation of a manager is that a manager should be a colleague who is supportive and consultative. The reality is that most employees coming from cultures such as Spain, Russia, etc. expect a father/mother figure who has authority, who does not act like a colleague, but provides clear instructions and checks the work done (people respect what you inspect), and does this with respect.

Promoting experts to leadership roles normally results in two things:

1. You lose an expert
2. You gain a poor manager/leader

THE SECOND part is especially relevant in today's globalising world. More people from abroad come to Finland and more Finnish companies go international: the role of the expert leader is becoming less relevant and the role of the "father/mother" figure (Latin cultures, Russia) / people manager (US, UK) becomes more important.

Organisational cultures that are not focusing on what needs to get done and are not open enough (and the precise level needed depends on the type of organisation) and on top of that have poor acceptance of leadership will not be able to compete globally and will not be able to profit from the value that diver-

sity can bring.

itim International was founded in 1985 by Geert Hofstede, a pioneer in the field of culture and man-

Accepting differences requires an open and goal-oriented organisational culture

agement and the founder of comparative intercultural research who is listed in the Wall Street Journal as one of the Top 20 most influential management thinkers in the world, and Bob Waisfisz, a highly experienced and successful management trainer and consultant.

Since itim's inception, more than 5000 organisations have been assisted in, first of all, becoming aware of national cultural differences and measuring to which extent their organisational (sub)cultures support their strategy. Secondly, we have enabled companies to change their organisational cultures to better accommodate people from different cultures, to use cultural differences as an advantage and, therefore, to become more successful globally. With this knowledge we have learned that for organisations to really excel globally they need to build internal space for people to become aware and ac-

cept differences. To learn to ask the question "you think differently, how can we use that?" instead of being afraid of the differences.

In the consultancy lingo we talk about two dimensions which play a role, based on Hofstede's organisational cultural model (which differs from the national cultural model).

Level of effectiveness

FOCUSING on how you do your work (means-oriented) vs. focusing on what is being done (goal-oriented): If you can agree on what you are doing, instead of how it gets done, you already have established something that you share (the goal).

Approachability

HAVING an open environment, where it is easy to talk to people (e.g.) give feedback to your boss and you don't need to be afraid to make mistakes vs. a closed environment where people prefer to stay silent when in trouble, where there is a lot of gossiping, but also a high need for secrecy.

With this knowledge we can say that based on this research, the Finnish ICT sector is doing a good job, as are the higher education institutions. The organisational cultures of the public service organisations and the logistic companies, which in Finland include the hospitals and postal services respectively, which are currently recruiting a lot of foreign staff, do not have organisational cultures which very easily support the integration of those who think differently.

