Adjusting to Workplace/IA

presented by

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Study

Work

People
Environment
Culture
Expectations
Administrative procedure
Possible Challenges

- Demands of work/expectations of supervisor
- Working with colleagues: diversified workforce - different cultures, languages, beliefs, values, styles (difficult people?)
- Your expectation vs reality:
  - Nature of work unrelated to study/major
  - Mundane, boring
  - Low pay (stipend/allowance)
Transition Phase

• May be undergoing a variety of intense, new experiences
• Missing familiar patterns of life, study, people, etc.
Transition Phase

• Emotional:
  – frustration, anxiety or sadness.

• Physical:
  – sleeping disturbances, appetite changes, fatigue.

• Thinking:
  – loss of concentration, difficulty making decision

• Behaviour:
  – avoid people, lose interest in people or hobbies, etc.
Adaptation Phase

• Coping with your work / IA
• More confident and relaxed in new situations.
• New friends and activities.
• Managing the demands of IA
Suggestions to Help You to Adjust to IA/Workplace
Points To Note

• Open to learning

New environment

Current skills & knowledge

Comfort Zone
Points To Note

• **Attitude:**
  - Expectation vs reality
    ➢ pay vs stipend/allowance, mundane work, etc.

• **Change perspective:**
  - E.g. Opportunity to learn to be patient, acquire skills to work with difficult people, establish network for future prospect (supervisor may be your referee, etc.)
Points To Note

• Professional conduct:
  – Punctuality
  – Dress code
  – Speech (words, titles used)
  – Actions/behaviour (appropriateness): office politics and gossips
Points To Note

• Relationships at Workplace:
  – Differences in how men and women behave at work environment
    • “Reducing Venus and Mars conflicts”
    • The Straits Times, 10 Jan 2011, Pg B16
Reducing Venus and Mars conflicts

Understand and respect one another, and stay away from office gossip

WHEN I was in business school, two study groups stood out because both five-person groups had two women each compared with other similarly sized groups with at most one female.

Our group thrived, possibly because we had a clear division of labour. The engineer took care of the spreadsheets, the project manager kept us on schedule, the CEO kept a bird’s-eye view on things, the other girl would pipe up when it had anything to do with marketing or public relations, and I was the scribe.

The other group, however, was a shambles after a few weeks, even though initially touted as the dream team. In the end, many of them were too stubborn and hard-headed to be able to keep any semblance of peace. Tantrums were had, tears were shed. It was a pity.

We wondered why it was so, and I thought it was because the women in the team acted a little too aggressively and were a little too “manly” for the group to gel properly. Everyone was fighting to be the leader.

As much as I don’t want to come across as an anti-feminist, I do think men and women behave very differently – especially in a work-type environment.

According to career coaches like Ms Keatman Jar from the Prowise Consultancy, men like to talk and give reports while women like to collect information and gain rapport. Men focus on facts, reason and logic, women focus on feelings, senses and meaning. Men are more assertive, women are more cooperative. Men thrive on competing and achieving, women thrive on harmony and relating.

It was this last comparison that affected my poor colleagues in the study group fisse in business school. The women were too high achieving – which isn’t wrong per se. It’s just that the men didn’t know how to react to high-achieving women. And that problem extends into offices and boardrooms everywhere.

The thing is, it is women who are slowly creeping into work areas that were dominated by men in the past, so the focus is on them to adjust to any alpha male behaviour that is thrown their way. According to the Department of Statistics, 51 per cent of the population is female and 43 per cent of these women are in the workforce. However, only 10 per cent of positions in the board and top management are filled by women.

The first solution, not just for women but for men as well, is to understand others. Once you relax the automatic fight mode a lot of people unconsciously adopt at work, it will be easier to understand where the other person is coming from and minimise conflicts. Rather than immediately jump on people when an error is made, take time out to clarify what led to the mishap and understand the situation better.

Another great solution promoted by career coaches like Ms Keatman Jar is to respect everyone. How you treat your peers and underlings as compared with how you treat your boss shows a lot about you. A well-do-to private equity investor once said to me, “The measure of a man is how he treats the waiting staff.” It has stuck to me ever since. Everyone

expects you to be nice to your boss, but do you hold the lid for the cleaning woman or say thank you when she cleans your rubbish?

One other important way to stay out of the male-female divide is to stay away from any gossip or arguments. When you become known as a gossiper and for untrustworthiness, you’ll immediately develop a reputation that will be very hard to shake off. Stay neutral in any fight and save yourself the aggravation.

Having said that, staying neutral doesn’t mean being totally aloof. The consultants propose showing genuine interest in people. Go to networking events and be open to people outside your team. Says Ms Jar: “Likability and trust will lead to a positive relationship.”

Do realise, though, that not everyone embraces the building of bonds. Some people are just toxic and want to fight their way through everything. In these cases, the professionals advise keeping clear and trying to extricate yourself from any middlemen status.

It wasn’t in my place to advise my classmates in the past, but I do wish they had spoken to the career coaches and relieved themselves of all the angst then.

I hope the experience has made them more aware though. After all, who wants to come up against angst-ridden colleagues day in and day out?

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Points To Note

• Relationships at Workplace:
  – Cultural quotient
  – “The new competitive edge”
  – The Straits Times, 10 Jan 2011, Pg C18
  – “Cultural Intelligence” by Brooks Peterson, NLB
The new competitive edge

Cultural intelligence is the most important trait required by modern executives.

Imagine operating in China and not knowing that in Chinese culture, it is considered disrespectful if you accept someone's business card and immediately put it in your pocket without looking at it.

Imagine working with Indians and not knowing that a handshake between a man and an Indian woman is uncommon and may result in hesitation and awkwardness.

And, imagine doing business with Japanese and not knowing that looking at them directly in the eye is considered disrespectful.

Not a big deal, you may say, but these very issues can be the seeds of misunderstanding between you and your Chinese, Indian and Japanese counterparts.

To survive in today's globalised world, young executives not only need intelligence and emotional quotients (commonly referred to as IQ and EQ), but also a new kind of quotient: CQ.

What is CQ?

Mr David Livermore, author of the book Leading With Cultural Intelligence, defines cultural intelligence (CQ) as the capability to function effectively across national, ethnic and organisational cultures.

Having CQ enables a person to connect, communicate and work effectively with people from different cultures and in unfamiliar cultural settings, which is not an easy feat to achieve.

According to an April 2010 article in The Economist magazine, 16 to 40 per cent of executives and their overseas assignments earlier than the stipulated period.

If you want to do business successfully with the Japanese, be savvy in not just their business behaviour but their values and philosophies as well. PHOTO: AP

3 Practise CQ

International conferences, exhibitions and routine overseas visits are great opportunities to interact with people of different cultures and sharpen your CQ.

Similarly, consciously network with foreign colleagues in your organisation, meet them more often over lunch and recreational events — and turn every interaction into an opportunity to boost your CQ.

On survival in nature, Charles Darwin said: "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change."

The change that executives are facing today is an increasingly globalised world and a rapidly diversifying workforce. And the only way to survive career-wise is to adapt and become culturally intelligent.

3. Accept differences 

The foundational step towards CQ is to expect and accept the cultural diversity around you — and not resist it. Cultures have deep historic roots that condition people from their childhood and evolve over generations.

When the cultural traditions of other countries do not make sense to you, remember that is precisely the point.

By nature, we tend to resist what is unfamiliar and different, but the intelligence lies in adapting to it.

2. Acquire CQ knowledge

Knowing that "bonjour" means "good morning" in French can help you to cross communication barriers between you and your French counterparts.

CQ demands cultural knowledge, which can be acquired by all traditional means like books, Internet, training and so forth.

Being curious about people’s religious practices, watching movies of different origins and having holidays in other countries are also useful exposures to foreign cultures.
Points To Note

- **Self regulation (Emotions, motivation):**
  - Clarity of focus
  - Self-reminder: “I have the ability to learn.”
  - Task value
“None of this had even a hope of any practical application in my life. But ten years later, when we were designing the first Macintosh computer, it all came back to me. And we designed it all into the Mac. It was the first computer with beautiful typography.”
Points To Note

• Steve Jobs: Commencement speech at Stanford, 2005
  – Connecting the dots
  “…It was impossible to connect the dots looking forward when I was in college. But it was very, very clear looking backwards ten years later…You have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. ”
• Workplace sexual harassment

“Sexual harassment means unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, or other conduct based on sex, affecting the dignity of women and men at work. This can include unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct”.

(European Commission’s Council Resolution, 1990)

• Approach CAO
Communication Skills

- Passive, Aggressive, Passive Aggressive
- Assertive
  - Describe the situation
  - State your feeling
  - Specify the change you want
  - How you say it: your TONE

E.g. “When you say ..., I feel ... Please stop doing that.”
Use Your Resources

- Supervisor/colleagues at your workplace
- NTU: NTU tutor, CAO staff, School, Doctor, Counsellor
HOW TO REACH US

- ♦ Telephone: 6790 4462
- ☀ Email: scc@ntu.edu.sg
- ≡ Location: #05-07 Student Services Centre
- ℹ Website: http://www.ntu.edu.sg/scc/
“Academic ability must be matched by people skills, the capacity to adapt and change with changing circumstances, and to keep on learning.”

MM Lee (RI Gryphon Award Gala Dinner)
My Paper, 14 Jan 2011
Best Wishes
To Your IA!