Jessica Scannell Industry Theory and Practice

**Culture in the Work Place**

**Nigeria**

Nigeria is a diverse country in many ways. This diversity is reflected in its workplace culture. Nigeria is located in western Africa. It has one of the largest populations in Africa with over 135 million people. There are over 250 ethnic groups residing in the country. Over 500 languages are spoken. English is the official language; it is used for educational, governmental, and business purposes.

There are a number of religions practiced in the country. These include Islam, Christianity, and a number of indigenous beliefs that worship spirits and ancestors. 50% of the population are Muslim, 40% are Christian, while 10% practice indigenous beliefs. Christians live mainly in the south, and Muslims live primarily in the North. Many Christians and Muslims also intertwine their religion with indigenous beliefs. (“Nigeria – Language, Culture” n.d)

It is important to remember Nigeria is still a very poor country. While businesses are growing, a whopping 70% of the population lives below the poverty line and, 21% of the population is unemployed. (The World Factbook, 2012) These statistics have a huge impact on what everyday life is like on the ground in Nigeria. The first thing to note is that the average American business person traveling to Nigeria will be far wealthier and accustomed to a far more luxurious lifestyle than the average Nigerian.

The people may be poor in wealth, but they are rich in experience. When doing business with Nigerians, Americans should talk to them in a manner that does not show off their wealth or make them seem superior in anyway. If they offer something to eat, even if it does not look appealing, try it. Be humble, be adaptive, and be gracious. This will help to be accepted.

For the purpose of our presentation we analyzed Nigerian workplace culture in 6 categories these included; High Contact Vs. Low Contact Culture, Individualist vs. Collectivist Culture, Conversational Style, Use of Time, Social Customs, and Gender Roles.

Nigeria is a High Contact culture. Wealth is often closely correlated with levels of personal space. When people are used to living in poorer, closer conditions, they are often more comfortable being physically closer to each other as well. This is true in Nigeria. People, especially people of the same sex tend to stand closer to each other than in the United States. People who are not comfortable with this can come off as aloof or untrustworthy. (“Nigeria – Language, Culture” n.d)

Nigeria’s collectivist culture is very strong. Unlike in the US, extended families often live together and support each other. In rural areas, many native tribes also live a collectivist lifestyle. In some tribes, all of the women assume responsibility for taking care of all of the children together, not just their own. This emphasis on the group over the individual can also be seen in the workplace. Business teams should always put up a united front in meetings. Any indications of factions will cause the team to be viewed as untrustworthy.

Conversations in business can become heated more so than in the United States. People arguing their views in a passionate and loud manner, is not seen as a negative thing. With, that being said, people do not take personal criticism very well, it is best to avoid this if possible. (Katz, 2008)

Time in business is used differently in Nigeria than in the United States. For example, a large portion of the time spent at a meeting is often devoted to discussing personal issues and getting to know the people you are working with. This usually occurs at the beginning of a meeting, and can often take up to an hour or longer. People usually, enquire about the each other’s families’ health and wellbeing. This is seen as a very important part of the meeting. Any attempt to rush this process is seen in a very negative light. (Katz, 2008)

It is a social custom to respect the elderly. Both in meetings and in social settings, the eldest people in a room are always greeted first. They are seen as being wise and experienced, so their opinions are usually given priority. Greetings are also an important social custom. They usually consist of a firm handshake with a warm smile. Men may place their left hand on each other’s shoulder while shaking hands. When shaking hands with members of the opposite sex, men wait for women to extend their hand first. When greeting elderly people it is respectful to bow your head.

Given the fact Nigeria is such a diverse country; the degree to which gender roles are enforced is quite varied. Under Nigerian law, women are not afforded the same rights as men. It is not illegal to for husbands to beat their wives as long as no permanent harm is caused.

In rural areas where many people still live in indigenous tribes gender roles tend to be more defined. In some tribes woman do not hold any social status of their own. For instance in the Urhobo tribe, in southern Nigeria, a woman’s status is a reflection of either her father or her husband. Women in this tribe who are of the age to marry and choose not to may lose their social status, over time they can even be seen as a prostitute. In urban areas woman often have careers in business and politics. However, it is rare for woman to hold positions of high rank or salary. Women who do hold high ranking positions are usually married to very influential and successful men. (Omadjohwoefe, 2011)

In conclusion it is clear that while Nigeria is still quite a poor country dominated by patriarchal control, business and education are beginning to improve. These improvements are contributing to a rich and varied culture both in everyday life and in the workplace. One asset that Nigeria has always had, and will always have, is its warm, diverse, and welcoming people.

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