An American Human Resource Manager Working in China

Student’s Name

Professor’s Name

Course Title

Date

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**Introduction**

The wave of globalization, coupled with economic advancement has brought the world closer into what is commonly dubbed as a global village. As a result, businesses have expanded internationally, and human resources have been compelled to work in foreign countries. Working in a foreign country exposes the worker into a new way of living, and the experiences related to cross-cultural environment. In the same manner, additional formal requirements such as work permit may be required. Being away from home, and living in a new culture could result in cultural shock. The situation is even worse when the element of language barrier is implicated in working abroad. Indeed, working in a foreign country could be made easier if the worker is physically and psychologically prepared. Being armed with the right information is vital while moving to work into a new country. This paper will present essential information for a human resource manager, moving from the US to work in China.

**Introduction Chinese Culture**

Even though the Chinese customs have evolved over time, China still has a rich culture mostly borrowed from the traditional practices. The Hofstede’s cultural dimension model is useful in comparing the Chinese culture with the US culture, in order to arm the employee on how to go about business in china. According to Xiumei, and Jinying (2011), the Hofstede’s model addresses various cultural dimensions. To start with, the power distance index measures how much the people in the society accept and appreciate inequality. China has a power distance index of 80 (Hofstede Insights, 2018). This indicates that in china, inequality is embraced, and thus the subordinate –superior relationships are upheld in the workplaces. Also, individuals are influenced by the formal authority, and sanction. As such, hierarchy is appreciated in the workplaces, and workers should not depict aspirations that do not match to their ranks. an American working in china will have to adopt to this cultural element, given that the power distance index of the US is quite low (40), pointing out that equality is more accepted in the American workplace, as opposed to inequality (Hofsted, 2018).

The second index is individualism versus collectivism. This index measures the level of interdependence that exists within the society. China scores 91 in this index, against US’ 20. The Chinese society is a collective society. This indicates that group effort and team loyalty are appreciated more as compared to individual achievements and aspirations. Therefore, in the workplace, the employees’ personal aspirations should not go against the interest of the team. This is contrary to the American culture where individualism is promoted, and personal achievements come before the interest of the team (Xiumei, and Jinying, 2011).

According to Hofstede’s Insights (2018) the third index is masculinity versus femininity. This index measures the motivation behind people’s aspirations for achievement. China scores 66 in this index, meaning that it is masculine society; driven by competition and achievement. This means that the Chinese are likely to sacrifice their leisure time, and forego vacations in order to work and be successful. The US scores 62 in this index, meaning that the US society is also significantly driven by success and achievements

The next cultural dimension index is uncertainty avoidance; which measures the extent to which people of a particular culture feel threatened by unknown situations, and how they try to avoid these situations. Chinese culture scores 30 in this index, meaning that Chinese are comfortable with ambiguity. As such, their adherence to rules and laws is flexible depending on the situation at hand, and expediency is mostly applicable. On the contrary, the American culture score for uncertainty avoidance is 46. This indicates that rules and laws are followed strictly in the US and that the Americans are uncomfortable with ambiguity (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

The next index is the long term orientation, which measures how a particular culture maintains some connections with its past, while addressing present and the future challenges. China scores 87 in this index. This means that Chinese people uphold time-honored customs and perceive social changes with misgiving. On the contrary, the US scores 26 in this index, meaning that Americans are flexible to changes (Hofstede Insights, 2018). The last index is indulgence, which measures the extent to which people identifying them with a certain culture endevour to control their desires and impulses. China scores 24 in this index, meaning that Chinese tend to be cynical and pessimist. It is a restrained society which does not put emphasize on leisure time. The Chinese control the gratification of their desires. This is contrary to the US culture which scores 68 in this index, an indication of a more indulgent society, whose people do not try to restrict their desires and aspirations (Xiumei, and Jinying, 2011).

The evaluation of the Chinese versus US cultural dimension indices is important because the cultural facts depicted by the scores in the indices play a major role in the workplace. As such, identifying how the Chinese culture affects their behavior and sentiments is important for a human resource manager in understanding how to deal with Chinese workers as well as how to behave at a personal level. This understanding is also important in establishing culture sensitivity and appreciation towards the Chinese culture.

**Local Customs**

It is important for the human resource manager to understand the local customs of the Chinese people, and especially those that are likely to be depicted in the workplace. Understanding the values and attitudes of the Chinese workers saves the costs associated with misleading expectations and outlook. To start with, the American Management Association ( AMA, 2008) noted that as opposed to the existing stereotypes, Chinese workers are not only motivated by money. On the contrary, current studies indicate that Chinese workers expect to be in team that they can take pride in at the workplace. In the same manner, it is very demoralizing for a Chinese employee to lose face. an American can ignorantly make a Chinese workers to lose face by simple actions such as getting angry at, and blaming an employee in front of the other employees. When an employee lose face because of a foreign manager, they harbor hatred towards such a manager (Zhang, Huai, and Xie, 2015).

Another thing to consider is that it takes time for the Chinese to develop trust with foreigners. For instance, AMA (2018) noted that business negotiations do not materialize in a first time meeting with the Chinese partners. First of all, the Chinese are not straight forward people, and therefore, they take time to drive a point home (Von, 2007). In the same manner, they will take the first meeting as an opportunity to assess whether the partner is trustworthy. This notwithstanding, after establishing a strong relationship the Chinese workers or business partners, will always be loyal, and feel obliged to take up their responsibility in the established relationship. Another custom is related to the influence of religious values on the Chinese. For instance, most foreigners associate the Chinese culture with Buddhism. However, it is important to note that the Confucian values have the strongest impact on the culture and work values of the Chinese. Confucian values in this case endorse prudence, perseverance, restraint, and respect for authority as sought-after individual goals. As such, in the workplace, employees may tend to avoid extravagance, or avoid telling the manager it is impossible to perform a certain task, among other conducts related to the Confucian values and principles (AMA, 2018).

In the same manner, the Chinese culture is heavily influenced by traditional beliefs and practices. As such, elements such as symbols and omens may have significant meanings in the Chinese culture. For instance, it would seem awkward and unprofessional for an American manager to make decisions based on elements such as the position of celestial bodies or related omens. However, such practices and beliefs are strongly embedded into the individual and professional life of the Chinese. In the same manner, foreigner business people may be viewed with suspicion and sometimes hostility by the Chinese locals. In addition, a human resource manager working in China should understand that it may be difficult to find highly qualified workers in particular sectors. As a matter of fact, the AMA (2018) noted that around 37 percent of the U.S owned businesses operating in China reported hiring the desirable skilled human resource as the biggest operational challenge facing them.

The above described customs are among the major customs that influence the Chinese cultural norms and most particularly, those that are likely to manifest in the workplace. Having a thorough understanding of these values and attitudes, and how they manifest in the workplace, will not only reduce the cultural shock of the managers, but it will also enforce their abilities in hiring and retaining employees, and going about other operational tasks. Therefore, the awareness of these customs is important for a foreign manager working in China.

**Visa**

According to the InterNations (2018), there are various types of visas for foreigners entering into China, depending on the nature of stay. In this case, the American human resource manager working in China will need a long-term work visa. In China this type of visa is referred to as the Z-visa. This visa is required for foreign employees and their families. Besides the usual application form, the manager will require a passport, a photograph, an official letter of invitation, a recent health certificate, and an official employment license obtained from the Chinese authorities. It is worthwhile to note that in order to obtain the employment license; an individual must have the status of a foreign expatriate with specialized qualifications. Alternatively one must present a contract from an organization that is certified to employ foreigners. The visa can be applied at the nearest Chinese embassy suitably around two months before the intended date of entry.

**Residence and Work Permit**

Upon entry, the manager will have to get a temporary residence permit which expires after thirty days. Before the temporary residence permit expires, the manager will have to apply for a residence permit. This permit expires after one year, or depending on the term of the contract; after which it can be renewed. In this case, the company should help the employee to acquire the temporary residence permit. Alternatively, the Z-Visa acts as a temporary (30 days) work permit, after which the employee should have applied and gotten the official work permit (InterNations, 2018b).

**Housing**

Looking for accommodation while working in China would be determined by various Factors. The standard of the housing/residential area, its vicinity to the public transport and other facilities including schools if the manager is moving with his family are the major factors to consider. The common mode of public transport in China is public buses. Alternatively, trains are available in the major cities such Guangzhou, Beijing and Shaghai. Driving in the Chinese cities is hectic due to traffic jam and impolite drivers (Fowler, 2018). Based on these factors, most expatriates have a tendency of living in a common middle –class and upper-class neighborhoods. Alternatively, some expatriates may opt to live in lavish townhouses or gated residential neighborhoods that accommodate foreign nationals.

For this particular human resource manager who will be working in the Guangzhou city, it is worthwhile to note that most foreign employees working in this city tend to congregate in housing complexes outside the city centre preferably in Ersha island , Castle Hill, and Golden Lake Garden among others. The cost of renting accommodation in these areas ranges between 10,000 and 15,000 Chinese Yuan this is around 1500 and 2250 US dollars. The lease is basically a rental contract that expires after one or two years, but it can be renewed anyway. After moving into a neighborhood, one must register with the local police within 24 hours of the change of address. The registration documents in this case include passport, visa, residence permit, the rental contract, as well as the landlord’s proof of ownership (InterNations, 2018).

**Healthcare**

Notably, the healthcare standards in China are inferior as compared to the US healthcare standards. However, InterNations (2018) noted that there are still some good medical care facilities especially in big cities such as Guangzhou. Nonetheless, it is advisable for the human resource manager in this case to take a flight to Hong Kong where healthcare standards are comparable to those in the US. Notably, foreign employees working in China are compelled to enroll in the official health insurance system in China, and therefore, they are covered under this system. However, this coverage would not offer sufficient coverage. As a result, it is advisable for the human resource manager in this case to enroll in a private health insurance policy from the local or the international providers. It is also advisable to take the necessary precautions by getting the recommended and the necessary vaccinations. Foreign employees who have serious respiratory conditions may find it extremely hard to work in china, due to the extreme conditions of air pollution in china.

**Childcare and Education**

Children who are three years and above can be enrolled in preschool and kindergarten facilities. Such facilities which cater for international communities are available to bigger cities such as Guangzhou. Children above the age of three can be enrolled to the Chinese state schools, but only if they are able to learn the local language easily. Alternatively, they can be enrolled to the international schools also available in the major cities. It is worthwhile to note that the teaching approach in China employ rigid teaching methods and stricter attitudes than those that would be expected in the US. The international school may also be too expensive. It is not a wonder that sometimes Americans working in China prefer to home school their children.

**Union Influence**

The economic transition in the Chinese economy, as well as globalization has raised the importance of unionization in the protection of the Chinese labor force. Nonetheless, Yao and Zhong (2013) noted that the Chinese unions are not entirely established by the workers. In the same manner the unions operate in a constrained institutional relationship. While some firms are better unionized than others, the major elements covered by the unions are hourly wage, working hours as well as pension coverage. In short, the Chinese union operates as a functional wing of the government, as opposed to an independent institution looking for the wellbeing of the workers.

In conclusion, working in a foreign country exposes the employee to a foreign culture. It is therefore important for the employee to understand the way of life that typify the culture they would be working in. This is particularly important for a human resource manager working in a foreign company. This is because; human resource managers have to manage people. As a result, they must be conversant with the way of life, conduct, as well as beliefs of the people they would be managing. An American human resource manager working in China faces many challenges due to the numerous cultural differences between China and America, as indicated by the Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. However, understanding the Chinese culture would be important in mitigating culture shock, as well as developing cultural sensitivity and appreciation. Also, being conversant with the legal and social procedures necessary when settling in China will make the manager’s transition easier. Consequently, this paper has presented useful information for an American human resource manager moving to work in China.

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