ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion
An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue- 2 [April 2016]

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

The Criterion

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/about/

Archive: http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/

Contact Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/

Editorial Board: http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/

Submission: http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/

FAQ: http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/

Ethnocentrism: Its Implications on Social, Cultural and Workplace Diversity

Dr. Arpita Palchoudhury
Asst. Professor,
Engineering Sciences,
Ramrao Adik Institute of Technology,
University of Mumbai, India.

Cultural diversity enriches our lives in many ways , but it can also lead to conflicts . Problems arise when people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds feel that their values and beliefs should be acceptable to all . Culture refers to a shared system of knowledge , beliefs , values , and attitudes . The tendency to see and appreciate only our own individual point of view is Ethnocentrism . But it has been observed that ethnocentric attitude can fan social , cultural and workplace conflicts . Nevertheless , such conflicts can be avoided if one is aware , open-minded and respectful towards cultural values , attitudes and beliefs different from his own . In this research paper , I have tried to correlate ethnocentrism with social, cultural *and* workplace diversity . Its' implications on people's attitude and social interaction.

"People are pretty much alike . It's only that our differences are more susceptible to definite than our similarities ." This quote by Linda Ellerbee aptly defines cultural diversity subtly merging into Ethnocentrism . Culture refers to a learned and shared system of knowledge , belief , values , and attitudes . Conflicts can occur between people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds . Cultural diversity enriches our lives in many ways , but it can also lead to misconstrued perception of other people's attitude and behavior .Misunderstanding people's intentions on the basis of one's own beliefs and values is Ethnocentrism. The universal tendency to appreciate and accept only one's belief system can lead to social , cultural and workplace conflicts . Cultural conflict is a major issue which can mar public relations .It can also cause hindrance in corporate working as people from diverse backgrounds function together in a multicultural setting .

Ethnocentrism essentially means judging another culture solely by the values and standards of one's own culture. Ethnocentric individuals judge other groups relative to their own ethnic group or culture ; especially with concern for language , behavior , customs and religion . These ethnic distinctions and subdivisions serve to define each ethnicity's unique cultural identity . Ethnocentrism is a natural proclivity of human psychology . It can be overt or subtle , but negative , in a way that creates cultural conflicts . People born in a particular culture , grow up absorbing the values and behavior of their culture and develop a world view that Consider , their culture to be the norm . When people experience other cultures that have different values and normal

behavior , they find that the thought patterns appropriate to their birth culture and the meanings their birth culture attaches to behavior are not appropriate for the new culture. However , people get accustomed to their birth culture , so it becomes difficult for them to accept the behavior of people from different cultural background as they judge their behavior from their own viewpoint.

In Precarious Life , Judith Butler discuses recognizing the other in order to sustain the self and the problems of not being able to identify the other. Butler writes : Identification always relies upon a difference that it seeks to overcome , and that its aim is accomplished only by reintroducing the difference it claims to have vanquished . The one with whom I identify is not me , and that " not being me " is the condition of identification . Ethnocentrism can lead to collective narcissism . In Sigmund Freud's 1922 study " Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego " he noted how " every little canton looks down upon the other with contempt ". This was Later termed as " Freud's theory of collective narcissism ". A very natural tendency of human beings is to consider their own culture and community as better than the other cultures and social groups . This can also lead to intergroup bias .Collective narcissism and ethnocentrism are closely related . They can also be positively correlated and is   often seen   to be coexistent. But they can also be independent in that either can exit without the presence of the other . Ethnocentricity is strongly manifested in groups that are   " self –relevant", like religion , nationality or ethnicity. This is likely to get exacerbated during conflicts and aggression .

India harbors a multicultural and multilingual society but ethnocentrism still exists in a subtle way . It gets strongly manifested during cultural conflicts or inter-religion conflicts. These conflicts occur simply because people do not know or try to understand what matters in another culture . People often perceive others' actions as being peculiar without understanding the reason for reacting differently than the other person would have . We can take the example of an Indian employee working in the UK . He may bow slightly to greet his manager who may pass a mocking   comment ' these Indians always behave like this ', to his fellow colleague . We often say , British drivers drive on the ' left hand side '. An Arab is likely to perceive an American who wants to set a deadline for completion of some work as aggressive . But the same Arab is likely to prefer a handshake over a written contract , which can be perceived as naïve and untrustworthy by the American . Ethnocentrism can lead to such kinds of attitudinal differences .

We often tend to judge other cultural groups in terms of our life experience , not their context . We fail to understand that their ways have their respective meanings and functions in life , just as our ways have for us . Sometimes we create invalid assumptions about other' ways based on our narrow experience . This often leads to negative judgements . We tend to misinterpret what may be meaningful and purposeful to other people due to our ethnocentric   attitude .Ethnocentrism may lead to adverse situations at

the workplace and day to day interactions with people . The culturally diverse workplace of modern times differs significantly from that of the earlier generations in two ways . Workplace is constituted of people from different national and cultural backgrounds . Workforce diversity representing different groups is growing prominent by the day . Ethnic balance is changing . Diversity , can in fact lead to a much richer workplace environment , with people contributing greater variety of viewpoints . But while operating in a multicultural set up , one should take into consideration the diversity in the human related aspects , otherwise it may lead to personnel – related issues . Managers who do not possess the skills to manage workforce diversity may prove to be incompetent . Multicultural skills are not only of paramount importance to people who work within their respective religion and domain but will prove to be of utmost value in the near future as global talent is likely to become a priority .

Cultural factors considerably influence the typical ways in which individuals interact with others , present their ideas and viewpoints or even negotiate . The norms as well as values we assimilate in terms of our socio – cultural conditioning shape our views about the world apart from the way we interact with each other . Most people believe that the world culture refers to people from a specific nationality . National cultures do exist and have a significant role to play in shaping the way people interact . But there are other dimensions as well . In a country like India regional differences may have a powerful influence on the way people interact . Attitudes , ethnicity , values , customs , race etc. can influence behavior even at the workplace . It has been observed that socio – economic backgrounds , physical disabilities , gender , sexual orientation , religion are also important determinants in this regard . Normally speaking our perception is solely based on the external or visible attributes of culture that is food , clothing , rituals , language etc. But we tend to slip into stereotypical labelling holding prejudices and subsequently resorting to discriminatory action and narcissism . For promoting intercultural communication , a proper understanding of the differences between individualistic (ego-centric) cultures and collectivist (socio-centric) cultures should be undertaken . It is important to understand the value system and traditions that govern and shape people's behavior .

In a business scenario , people working together are influenced by external and internal stimuli . While interacting with people for business purposes in a foreign nation , one should realize that the overall national as well as individual cultural differences within cultures further influence those stimuli . One can face various constraints and variables while working with foreign nationals . One should be able to understand them and acknowledge their existence . Various nations around the world have the concept of single religion or multi religion . There are many nations that are tolerant towards regional diversity . Besides being tolerant towards several religions ,these nations allow the practice of other personal beliefs as well . Tolerance can reduce cross – cultural conflicts to a great extent . But there are other parameters too like politics , law &

regulations , education , economics etc . that can influence a country's social norms . The family structure and how its members relate to one another - decisions , buying patterns , pooling of resources , special interests - influence behavior as well as business communication . Beyond the immediate family , a bond may exist between people , based on caste and creed , age , class or even special interests . Perception regarding materialism , roles and status , culture and manners , punctuality etc . may affect relationship and communication . Thus to overcome ethnocentrism , it is necessary to be aware of and accept the social norms , cultural differences and ethnicity .

Discrimination , prejudice and stereotyping can become a part of one's life if not consciously taken care of . Unfair judgements often feel right simply because they become a habit . Efforts can be taken to rethink about the preconceived ideas about a particular group , class , religion and culture to overcome the tendency to stereotype and prejudge people . Its ' not just a question of being politically correct . Its' a question of being fair .

Works Cited:

1. Masters Wallace ,Personal Development for Life & Work, Cengage Learning, 10th edition,New Delhi,2012
2. Raman Meenakshi, Singh Prakash, Business Communication, Oxford Higher Education, 2nd Edition, New Delhi,2012

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnocentrism