

When Culture Stifles Innovation

Girish Malhotra, President & Founder, Epcot International

Who are the technical innovators in the US? The image we often have is that of the young Silicon Valley geek or the surfing California biopharma scientist -- sometimes brash and unafraid to challenge authority and champion new and better ideas.

Their peers in other countries behave quite differently. This is especially true in Asia, particularly in the Far and South East. In India, China, and other parts of East Asia, cultural norms may impede innovation, even when the game-changing ideas come from extremely smart, highly-trained and educated people, and proven problem solvers.

Generally, one of the following will stand in the way:

Fear of offending superiors/bosses

Fear of challenging the status quo

Fear of failure

Fear of acceptance of ideas

There's one fundamental difference here. In Western culture, suggested innovation and improvements are not viewed as upsetting the apple cart, but improving it. They are expected and encouraged to improve business practices.

However, in the Eastern cultures, suggestions may be interpreted as insubordination. Any question that could be interpreted as challenging the prevailing practice, especially when it is raised by a junior professional who does not have the authority, is viewed as unacceptable. A recent article in Time magazine offers some examples.

If the practice has been in place and is profitable, and was put in place by higher ups in an organization, suggesting an alternative will be viewed as challenging the intellect of the superiors. It will be seen as attacking the ingrained culture.

Thus, a junior person working for an Indian or Chinese pharmaceutical company will not propose an idea that will improve current practices or profitability as there is fear of failure or fear of less than expected success.

In addition, some people in the organization will also make a point of blocking success and making sure that any new good ideas fail. (This can be true in Western nations as well).

When Culture Stifles Innovation

Published on Chem.Info (<http://www.chem.info>)

[Keep reading here...](#) [1]

Source URL (retrieved on 10/08/2015 - 9:35pm):

<http://www.chem.info/blogs/2013/12/when-culture-stifles-innovation>

Links:

[1] http://www.pharmpro.com/blogs/2013/12/nail-sticks-out-could-change-world-when-culture-stifles-innovation?et_cid=3639883&et_rid=552443301&type=headline