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Intercultural Competence Report

Executive Summary

This report explores the challenges and opportunities of integrating staff from Switzerland into the Multicultural Hotel & Spa (MH&S) in London, England. By analyzing cultural differences between England and Switzerland (Germanic Europe Cluster, GLOBE Project), the report identifies potential areas of conflict in leadership styles, decision-making, and guest service expectations.

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Introduction

The globalized hospitality industry thrives on cultural exchange. However, integrating staff from diverse backgrounds presents significant leadership challenges due to potential cultural dissonance (Hofstede, 1980). This report examines the critical role of intercultural competence in navigating these challenges within the MH&S. Focusing on staff integration from Switzerland, belonging to the Germanic Europe Cluster (House et al., 2004), this report analyzes cultural differences and their impact on leadership dynamics. It identifies potential areas of conflict and proposes strategies to foster a cohesive and high-performing multicultural team.

Cultural Dissonance: A Tale of Two Worlds

England (Anglo Cluster):

Individualism: England fosters an individualistic culture, prioritizing personal achievement, direct communication, and assertiveness (Lewis, 1999). Decisions tend to be made by individuals based on efficiency and a focus on results (Jackson, 2004).

Power Distance: Power structures are relatively flat, with a more informal and egalitarian approach to leadership (Hofstede, 1991).

Communication: Communication is typically direct and to the point, with open and honest feedback expected (Barnett, 2002).

Switzerland (Germanic Europe Cluster):

Assertiveness: Similar to England, Switzerland emphasizes assertiveness in communication, but with a stronger emphasis on politeness and diplomacy (Morris et al., 1998). Decisions are often made collaboratively with clear hierarchies respected (Ringov & House, 2007).

Performance Orientation: Both cultures value performance and results, but Switzerland might have a more structured and detail-oriented approach (Rademacher & Chung, 2010).

Power Distance: Power structures are more hierarchical than in England, with respect for authority figures being a prominent cultural value (Hofstede, 1991).

This cultural dissonance presents potential challenges for MH&S leadership:

Leadership Style: A direct, results-oriented leadership style common in England might be well-received by Swiss staff who value assertiveness, but could feel overly demanding compared to the more consultative approach they might be accustomed to.

Decision-Making: While both cultures value efficiency, the English preference for individual decision-making could appear dismissive to Swiss staff who favor a more collaborative process (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Guest Service: Both cultures value professionalism, but the English style might be perceived as slightly more casual compared to the Swiss emphasis on precision and formality (Chen, 2013).

Leadership Challenges in Hospitality: A Balancing Act

The hospitality industry requires a unique blend of leadership skills to navigate diverse guest expectations while fostering a cohesive team environment. Here are

some specific challenges in managing a multicultural team with staff from Switzerland:

Balancing Directness and Respect: Leaders need to strike a balance between the directness valued in both cultures while ensuring communication remains respectful and avoids confrontation, which might be more sensitive for Swiss staff.

Fostering Collaboration: Encouraging a collaborative decision-making process that values individual input while respecting established hierarchies will be crucial to motivating Swiss staff.

Understanding Formality: Leaders need to be sensitive to the Swiss emphasis on professionalism and ensure guest service standards meet their expectations for precision and formality.

Guest Service Expectations: Bridging the gap between the potentially more casual English service style and the Swiss emphasis on formality will be crucial for a seamless guest experience. **The Friction Points: Scenarios from the MH&S**
(Continued)

Guest Service Complaints: A Swiss staff member, while trying to be polite in addressing a guest complaint, might take a slightly more formal approach than an English colleague. This could be misinterpreted by the guest as a lack of empathy. Leaders can address this by providing training on cultural communication styles and guest service expectations. Role-playing exercises can help staff from both cultures understand and adapt their communication to better serve guests with diverse preferences.

Team Meetings: The English style of open brainstorming might lead to interruptions by English staff, potentially frustrating Swiss staff accustomed to a more structured and turn-taking approach in meetings. Leaders can establish clear ground rules for meetings, promoting active listening and respecting individual contributions.

Encouraging a round-robin style of participation can ensure all voices are heard and the Swiss preference for structure is maintained.

Scheduling: The Swiss emphasis on punctuality and planning might clash with the more flexible approach of some English staff, requiring clear communication and expectations around deadlines. Leaders can implement clear scheduling systems and deadlines, while also promoting open communication about potential delays or unforeseen circumstances. Fostering a culture of mutual respect and understanding can help bridge this gap.

Building Bridges: Strategies for Intercultural Competence

Bridging these cultural divides requires a multi-pronged approach:

Intercultural Training: Investing in training sessions on cultural differences, communication styles, and effective teamwork strategies in a multicultural environment is crucial (Chen, 2013). This training should explore the GLOBE Project framework and its application to understanding cultural values.

Leadership Development: Leaders must be equipped with cultural sensitivity and adaptability. This includes training in active listening, utilizing indirect communication where appropriate, and fostering a collaborative decision-making process that values diverse perspectives (Barnett, 2002). Leaders should also be mindful of their own cultural biases and how they might impact their communication and decision-making.

Team-Building Activities: Organizing team-building activities that encourage interaction and trust-building across cultures fosters a sense of belonging and breaks down cultural barriers (Ely & Thomas, 2001). These activities can be informal

gatherings, team outings, or cultural exchange events that celebrate the diverse backgrounds of the team.

Celebrating Diversity: Recognizing and celebrating the cultural diversity within the team showcases the value of different perspectives and strengthens team spirit (McKay et al., 2003). This could involve celebrating cultural holidays, showcasing traditional cuisine, or encouraging staff to share aspects of their heritage with their colleagues.

Conclusion

Leading a multicultural team requires more than just technical expertise. Intercultural competence is paramount for navigating cultural dissonance and fostering a cohesive work environment. By acknowledging these underlying cultural differences and implementing the recommendations outlined above, the MH&S can leverage the strengths of its diverse workforce to create a dynamic and successful hospitality experience. However, it is crucial to recognize that cultural competence is an ongoing journey, requiring continuous learning, adaptation, and a genuine commitment to fostering an inclusive work environment (Chen, 2013).

Recommendations

Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to identify specific areas where cultural differences might pose challenges within the MH&S.

Develop a tailored intercultural training program focusing on the identified needs and incorporating the GLOBE Project framework for cultural understanding.

Establish clear communication protocols that encourage active listening, open communication, and respect for diverse perspectives.

Implement a mentorship program where experienced staff from both cultures can guide and support new team members.

Regularly celebrate cultural events and traditions to foster a sense of belonging and appreciation for diversity within the team.

By implementing these recommendations, the MH&S can create a welcoming and inclusive environment for staff from Switzerland and ensure a seamless guest experience that caters to diverse cultural preferences.

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