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AUTHOR Foeman, Anita Kathy; Pressley, Gary
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ABSTRACT

A review of the literature reveals obvious cultural differences between black and white members of American society. Further analysis indicates that the culture of black Americans has fostered the development of a number of characteristics that would help them to function in corporate cultures that are populated primarily by white Americans. Distinct cultural differences appear in the areas of values, language behaviors, nonverbal behaviors, and assumptions about relationships to the world. In examining each of those four categories, it becomes apparent that although ethnic differences provide group members with different ways of coping with the world, the general goals of survival and advancement are found in each cultural group. Further research is needed in order to explore the adaptability of black cultural skills to corporate settings.
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ETHNIC CULTURE AND CORPORATE CULTURE:
USING BLACK STYLES IN ORGANIZATIONS

by

Anita Kathy Foeman

and

Gary Pressley

Paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association

Providence, Rhode Island

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Gary Pressley

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Anita Foeman (Ph.D., Temple University) is an Assistant Professor of Communication
at West Chester University, West Chester, PA.

Gary Pressley (M.A., Temple University) is an Assistant Professor of Communication
at West Chester University, West Chester, PA.

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ABSTRACT

ETHNIC CULTURE AND CORPORATE CULTURE: USING BLACK STYLES IN ORGANIZATIONS

The purpose of this examination is three-fold. First, the authors review the literature addressing cultural differences between black and white organizational members as identified in the literature. They then attempt to make general and relevant statements about the participation of both groups, focusing on behaviors which have often been misinterpreted and misused within the context of the organization. Finally, the differences identified are examined and the authors attempt to point out behaviors which are consistent with organizational goals and which can add to the overall effectiveness of organizational functioning.

In order to achieve the last goal, the authors extrapolate from the literature and suggest ways in which 1) black workers may adjust appropriate behaviors to the specific setting of the workplace and, 2) white workers may redefine behaviors which they have experienced in interactions with blacks in a more positive light.

Pitfalls and problems in achieving research goals are outlined.

Ethnic Culture and Corporate Culture: Using Black Styles in Organizations

In the past, numerous researchers have considered the differences between black and white interpersonal styles (Kochman, 1981; Samovar, Porter, and Jain, 1981; Kochman 1972; Noel, 1969 etc.). Many have focused on the language differences between black and white communicators (Johnson and Buleny, 1982; Foster, 1974; Cohen, 1968; and others). Others have taken a broader look at interpersonal skills (Daniel and Smitherman, 1976; Baratz and Stephen, 1972; Johnson, 1971; and others).

In the most dismal cases, researchers came to the conclusion that society believes blacks' life styles make them unable to fit in (Fernandez, 1975). More optimistic researchers and scholars have gone on to argue for acceptance (rather than assimilation) of cultural differences (NCTE, 1974; Stewart, 1974).

Most recently, several researchers have begun to consider how cultural differences come into play when blacks and whites must work in unison. Fairhurst and Snavely (1983) consider how token members can accrue power in an unfamiliar context. Fant (1982), in probably one of the most systems-conscious perspectives on this issue, argues that

Change in the workplace... will involve a combination of increased awareness on the part of managers and peers about cultural differences and the difficulties experienced by the 'different' people, and change in the organizational system (p.68).

Dickens and Dickens (1981) and later King (1983) express almost identical views.

In all of the research examined, one position lies relatively neglected. Researchers may believe, but rarely articulate the position that within the context of the black culture are skills and attributes which are consistent and useful in the mainstream, particularly the organization. We take opposition to the conclusions of one third of Fernandez's (1982) respondent managers who believe that "the different cultural backgrounds of minority members are not conducive to success in management" (p.48). We intend to explore the positive aspects of black cultural style in American organizations.

This research will consider the ways in which black interpersonal skills can and do work for black organizational members. We will also consider potential pitfalls and misunderstandings which have in the past thwarted the effectiveness of approaches used by black workers.

Cultural Styles

In pursuing this line of argument, it will be important first to briefly discuss the concept of culture and then to discuss some of the relevant intracultural issues within the

larger American culture.

Culture

The idea that all cultural behavior is adaptive is accepted by most cultural anthropologists. Gregory Bateson discusses the "standardization of the affective aspects of the personalities of individuals which are so modified by their culture that their behavior to them is emotionally consistent" (p.66). People feel and behave consistent with their culture; ways which they believe will help them survive and thrive. In this sense a "melting pot" is inevitable to some extent simply because people share the same larger environment.

But because culture also provides us with a means of understanding what occurs around us, various standpoints will result in various cultures, even among those who share the same geographic region. Mirowsky II and Ross (1980) identify that "cultural differences are differences in the meaning of events and circumstances" (p. 483). These range from the ways we discuss and describe a personal experience to the value we attach to our very existence. So varied and complex are the aspects of culture that people can match at many points and not at many others, which complicates the process of comparing "different" cultures. This, however, is part of our assignment.

Intracultural Perceptions

In the case of most European cultures coming into contact in the United States, a melting of culture did occur. In the process of acculturation, newcomers initially made cultural "errors": the German immigrant said, "ziz," for, "this"; the Italian immigrant used too many gestures (see Ekman, 1976, for discussion of cultural "display rules"). Eventually some of these differences were eliminated, others integrated (see Royce, 1982.)

In the case of black immigration, cultural "errors" were rarely integrated, rarely understood. Not only was "dis" (for "this") not accepted, it came to be considered negative and inappropriate (Weber, 1985).

Cultural acceptance has been difficult for black Americans. In extreme cases, black people have been perceived as cultureless (Deutch, 1965). Some sociologists argued that black culture was all but destroyed by slavery (see Elkins, 1959 for an extensive review of the attitudes of the time). As recently as 1963 Glazer and Moynihan wrote, "The Negro is only American and nothing else. He has no values and culture to guard and protect." (p. 53). More to the point, the black culture was considered worthless and was therefore downplayed.

To a large extent, the degree of cultural acceptance or

rejection of any culture into the mainstream American culture was based on a hierarchy of cultural worth which developed in this country. Blacks were at the bottom. Newsweek (1984), in an article discussing interracial children, identified that in the case of black and white mixed children, "if there is any sign of blackness, society stamps the person as black... that is not true of any other biracial mixtures, but it is true of blacks because of the racial burden that black people have to bear in America..." And Hopper (1973) contends that black speech has probably become identified as low prestige simply "because blacks speak [it]" (p.347).

Interestingly, Mirowsky II and Ross (1980) find that the perception of difference may be incongruent with reality. In research addressing the relationship between ethnicity and distress, these researchers found broad values of blacks and whites to be quite similar. They found blacks and whites to be more similar than black-Mexican or white-Japanese comparisons, though Newsweek (1984) found these combinations to be more "acceptable" than black-white pairings.

A survey of the literature eventually reveals that it is color itself which is at the center of the cultural hierarchy (see Fernandez, 1981, p.38-39 for discussion). Certainly the stereotypical blue-eyed, blond-haired individual had been held up as the pinnacle of attractiveness in much of the mass media. And blacks represent the opposite. Without addressing the underlying question "why" Mirowsky II and Ross (1980) conclude that, "blacks are assigned to the most distressing positions" (p.493). Black people and black culture are perceived as undesirable.

Intracultural Reality

Still, in addition to the perceived chasm between white and black Americans, a real gap exists in the divergent perspectives that these two groups hold in regard to the nature of the world in which they live and the learned behaviors for addressing it. These are rarely discussed in day to day interactions between individuals. Kochman (1981) notices that it is often considered rude to identify another person as "different". Dickens and Dickens (1981) note, "In the past, blacks and whites have not spoken openly about racial relations" (p.29). In fact, in the past, the denial of racial difference has functioned as a survival mechanism for blacks who worked and came into contact with whites on a regular basis. These black people realized that any identification of difference would probably work to their detriment. But worse, these black individuals may actually have been victims of a "catch 22", for while any identification of difference would have been held against them, the denial of varying styles left them open to being misunderstood.

Black Culture in the Corporate Culture

Despite stress and misunderstandings resulting from culture clash, examination of consistencies in black behavior which are different from mainstream white behavior may offer encouraging insights for researchers and practitioners who earnestly wish to develop the black labor market. Many of the behaviors which distinguish blacks from their white coworkers may identify unique qualifications that black workers have in the areas of leadership and interpersonal effectiveness.

The cultural distinctions which will be addressed in this paper are: 1) Cultural Values, 2) Language Behaviors, 3) Nonverbal Behaviors, and 4) Assumptions about relationship to the world. These are the distinctions most evident in the literature.

Values

Most identifiable differences noted in the literature between black and white values as expressed in varying styles, center around attitudes regarding 1) self-assertiveness, 2) forthrightness, 3) spirituality, 4) responsiveness, and 5) group identification. These styles seem to remain fairly stable across socio-economic levels (with lower class individuals being most insulated against mainstream influence). According to Weber (1985), in her discussion of race and language, 80-90% of all black Americans engage in cultural behavioral forms of cultural identification at least some of the time. As we consider these behaviors, we shall diverge from the literature to speculate on how the values they represent play-out in organizational life.

Self-Assertiveness. Black interactants are likely to draw attention to their positive qualities or sense of individual power in a bold and unselfconscious manner. Kochman (1981) points to this manner in literature and entertainment. Maryland (1972) sees it in casual verbal interplay. The attitude of bravado plays out in a variety of situations ranging from the black pedestrian who walks slowly and boldly across the street (while the impatient motorists seethes), to the black student who boasts about making an insightful remark in class, to the football player who spikes the ball after a touchdown (a behavior outlawed by the NFL in 1983 as unsportsmanlike conduct).

Such behavior may be described as "extroverted" by members of the mainstream culture who demonstrate an outward selflessness and shy selfconsciousness (an attitude which blacks often view as coy or shifty). However, bravado has been a success tactic for many upwardly mobile blacks. Bravado on the

job may help an individual to be seen both as black and competent at the same time. By using this black cultural style, the individual who boasts also sets a standard for him/herself which must be met. Unlike a person who shys away from responsibility, this worker maintains high visibility and thus high accountability. In any community, the empty boast is meaningless. But the self-aggrandisement which leads to higher accountability is different. Kochman (1981) specifies, "if the person who is bragging is capable of demonstrating that he can do what he claims, blacks no longer consider it bragging" (p.66). He/She is in effect setting a performance standard.

Indeed, successful blacks are often self-assertive for good reason. Fant (1982) tells that some managers are "more careful in promoting blacks"(p.65). Many express an inability to judge job-related positive qualities of black employees. Thus an amount of extroversion assists white decision makers in identifying black employees who are effective. Ideally, this style attracts positive attention not only to the individual but to the organization as well. Thus, there is a double payoff for the organization.

The potential difficulty with such a high profile is the chance that it may be experienced as intimidating by superiors and others. Coworkers may feel put-down as they perceive that their peer is stealing the spotlight. And since individuals who find the self-assertive style offensive are likely to be those who find direct confrontation difficult, the black worker is unlikely to get the feedback he/she needs in order to know how his/her behavior affects others. Therefore, the black employee may be subject to attacks that are never made face to face. Still, the value of a self-confident and assertive style should not be underestimated.

Forthrightness. Many black interactants feel comfortable using a straightforward approach to problem solving. Dickens and Dickens (1981) find that black managers, when faced with a conflict tend to, "confront the individual immediately, or if its more appropriate, later in private" (p.36). These researchers express concern that whites are more likely to deal with conflict indirectly, go to the individual's manager, or discuss the matter with the individual's colleagues. The operating premise of such behavior is to avoid unnecessary confrontation. "Often the white manager [when confronted with complaints about a subordinate] will decide to do nothing" (p.36); his/her assumption being that many problems do "just go away." A black manager is likely to bring the situation into the open asking direct and confronting questions like, "Why did you go over Jim's head?". The problem with bringing things out into the open is the possibility that under some circumstances whites may view

blacks as overreactive (while blacks may perceive whites as passive and impotent). Thus, it is important for the black manager to know that the straightforward verbal style should be carefully mediated by supportive and open nonverbal signals.

Further, the tacit assumptions regarding desired outcomes of open debate may be different depending upon cultural background. Consider a black manager who is approached by a white subordinate about concerns with a coworker. He/She, as manager, is likely to feel that the approach is a desire for a specific and immediate response. While the subordinate may desire some action, it is just as likely that the subordinate simply wants an opportunity to ventilate. Kochman (1981) notes that black interactants are more likely than their white counterparts to see verbal debate as "a means to an end" (p.38). Whites may see the verbal debate as an end in itself. The black manager may feel that action is needed when it is not. When one considers all the possible racial permutations of a situation in which one coworker goes to a manager to discuss concerns about another coworker, the potential for misunderstanding is tremendous. In any case, whatever the racial makeup of a group, all parties involved should clearly articulate outcomes they expect. The willingness on the part of the black manager to take an assertive role may be a plus.

Spirituality. Black people, to a large extent, have maintained an acceptance of old wisdom and a belief in an overall balance of right and wrong in the world. This may reach back to the strong connection of black people to the church and to their belief in justice in life-after-death if not in life itself. Whatever the reason, Dickens and Dickens (1981) note that

“a surprisingly high number of blacks believe in the Protestant work ethic. That is, if they work hard and stay out of trouble, they will be successful and properly rewarded” (p.36).

Whites accept that the system is unfair and that the guy who works hard and stays out of trouble may not finish first. Yet, the acceptance of nepotism and favoritism as a premise for hiring and promotion may slowly be breaking down. Internal and external changes impact the organization's ability to continue with old policy. A new premise of fairness and accountability may in fact replace old ones. Blacks (probably because of attitudes inculcated from mainstream corporate culture) may be more on target with this goal.

Many of the established values familiar to blacks are maintained in the form of proverbial sayings. While these sayings can be construed to be overly simplistic, even superstitious, when used effectively, they are able to expose the truth in an artful manner. An expression like, "what goes around comes around," for example, has all the insight of, "I told you

so," without the sting (see Weber, 1985, for additional examples). Such sayings, because of their proverbial nature have an air of impartiality and wit to them that can be used to the advantage of the black manager in expressing his/her values.

Organizational survival may be inherently linked to such humanistic values. Peters and Waterman (1983), in their study of America's best run companies, found that companies whose only articulated goals are financial did not do nearly as well financially as companies who had broader sets of values. They found, "the excellent companies are unashamed collectors and tellers of stories, of legends and myths in support of their basic beliefs" (p.282). Among the beliefs they cite as important are a sense of fairness and ongoing identity. Robson (1984) too, argues that organizations have cultures and that the values of these cultures are similar to the values of an individual. The sense of fairness, connectedness and personal respect were among these. Perhaps it is because of similar, if somewhat idealistic beliefs, that blacks (like women) are often judged to be the most sympathetic managers. (Weber, 1985; Dickens and Dickens, 1981; Kochman, 1981; Fant, 1982). Peters and Waterman summarize the power of the value system a manager brings to his/her work sphere saying, "Clarifying a value system and breathing life into it are the greatest contributions a leader can make" (p. 291). The black manager may be particularly able to provide this.

Responsiveness. Black listeners are known to actively respond to a speaker both verbally and physically. Such behavior is evident in settings like black churches, movie theatres, and sometimes college classrooms. While it may be the case that most Americans nod along or sit passively, black listeners often go beyond this. Connolly (1975) found black interactants moving around and altering proxemic distances more than white interactants. In addition interjections like "tell it" or "you're right," characterize a speaker-response pattern used by blacks (Weber, 1985).

In organizations, listeners generally verbalize only when they disagree. Even then, they may be reluctant. What is often referred to as "active listening" is often suggested to alleviate the problems of weak and incomplete feedback. The ongoing dialogue between presenter and audience which is typical of black interaction allows the presenter to know where he/she stands and when the mood of the audience changes.

The potential for misunderstanding the response pattern of black interactants is significant because the pattern is somewhat complicated. For one thing, black respondents tend to use a lower level of eye contact (see complete discussion in Nonverbal section). Yet, it is possible that the lower level of eye contact is compensated for by a combination of closer proximity and higher verbal responsiveness (see Weber, 1985 and

Connolly, 1975). Fant (1982) also suggests that black speakers may use more eye contact than white speakers. When all of these factors are not intuitively understood by a white interactant, black listeners' behavior may appear incongruent; responses may seem passive-aggressive or as a sign of incomprehension. A white speaker may continue to repeat or rephrase his/her statements waiting for the eye contact which to him/her would indicate acceptance and/or understanding. The black speaker may feel defensive of such a condescending manner. In each case, interactants bypass intended meaning.

In fact, both minority and majority interactants should consider the possibility of integrating the most engaging aspects of interaction from both cultures. This would include both high eye contact and high verbal responsiveness. Perhaps black workers can add a higher level of verbal responsiveness to the work setting.

Group Identification. Analysts who broadly address the cultural differences between black and white Americans address the sense of community that blacks demonstrate (Business Week, 1984; Kochman, 1981; McCraws, 1981). Sitaram and Cogdell (1976) identify that blacks place a significantly higher priority on "collective responsibility" than do whites. And both Kochman (1981) and Weber (1985) describe blacks on the whole as being very group identified. In day to day life, this may take the form of cheering for a sport team because it has the most black players or a feeling of embarrassment because another black person behaves inappropriately in a public place.

The potential organizational hazard of overidentifying with a racial group is the obvious inability to work with nonmembers or to work within the organizational context. Yet, consider McCraw's (1981) examination of successful black baccalaureate nursing graduates in which she found in more than 80% of the cases, that success in the nursing program was associated with a high level of "black awareness" (the opposite of what had been hypothesized); and Business week's (1980) report that the successful black manager indicated a high level of awareness of his/her position as a "black" manager. Seemingly, higher racial identification leads to a higher sense of responsibility and higher personal standards. Extensions of this esprit de corps can be seen as well. Perhaps, for example, the black worker may use his/her sense of community as an anchor which he/she can extend to support others in the organization.

The communal strength of the black culture is often seen as it functions to mediate the negative impact of many inevitable outside influences for black individuals. Many researchers discuss the impact of the black community in offsetting the negative impacts of age on its elders. These writers (Ward, 1983; Davis, 1976; Sitiran and Cogdell, 1976; Moore, 1971; and

others) are impressed that aging is offset to a greater extent in the black community relative to the white community despite economic and social inequities. In the organizational context, the sense of group responsibility can assist in teaching organizational members to mediate the impact of certain inevitable economic and social factors on them. This could ultimately mean survival for a struggling organization. (These effects, of course, are relative to the level of black worker identification with the organization as a whole.)

The five abovementioned values of black Americans (Self-Assertiveness, Forthrightness, Spirituality, Responsiveness, and Group Identification) have been effective in helping blacks survive in an isolated but turbulent environment. It is reasonable to think that these same values could add to the quality and texture of the American corporate culture.

Language

Writers have been theorizing for decades about the structural and functional differences between the vernacular used by blacks in the United States and that nebulous standard brand of spoken English used by the majority of whites. Sociolinguists and dialectologists have been in disagreement as to whether black language is a consequence of social, cultural, economic, or heredity deprivation (Anastasi and D'Angelo, 1952; Bull, 1955; Newton, 1962; Taba, 1964; Dreger, 1967; Labov, 1969; also see Johnson and Buttny, 1982 for discussion of deficiency versus difference positions). Rarely do theorists take the position that blacks, through their language, can make positive contributions to the mainstream society. Riessman (1964) argues that some features of the black lexicon have made their way into the dominant culture via the musician. Brown (1968) claims that terms like, "okee doke," and "shot" have also been accepted by a limited number of whites. However, these contributions have not been widely accepted throughout the dominant culture-- certainly not the corporate world. It is our feeling based on our personal observations and our review of the literature that blacks can in fact make positive linguistic contributions to the work place which may facilitate the achievement of corporate goals.

While it is true that the structure of black idiom (the dialect) may not be appealing to whites in the workplace, we believe that there are characteristics of black language function which should be considered. Language function deals with the way language is used to achieve goals. One may possess the language structure of the black community which may be inconsistent with organizational needs, and yet the functions of that language may be consistent with the goals of the organization. Consider Mayor Harold Washington, mayor of Chicago. Although he has some of the feature of black dialect, he nevertheless uses language successfully to cope with the complex demands of a large metropolis. Obviously, some of the skills of black organizational members are working. It is the purpose of this section to propose some characteristics of language function which we feel will be consistent with organizational goals. They shall be divided into the following general verbal skills noted throughout the literature: 1) Verbal Inventive Skills, and 2) Call and Response.

Verbal Inventive Skills. One has only to observe the skilled black language user in his/her everyday interpersonal interactions to witness his/her linguistic adroitness. The inventiveness of black individuals begins in childhood and continues to develop throughout life. Houston (1973) in a study comparing black and white first graders, found that while white

children retold stories verbatim, black children retold the same stories with their own styles, often adding where they thought it would enhance. Davis and Watson (1982), after interviewing over 160 black and white corporate managers and executives arrived at the conclusion that blacks are one of the most verbally inventive groups in the United States (p.95).

Verbal inventiveness is apparently a quality typical of black language use and relevant to a variety of contexts. The inventiveness specifically relevant to the organizational setting seems to be most obvious in regard to 1) the Duel Function of black language and 2) Signifying.

Duel Function. One way in which verbal inventiveness is displayed is in the "duel function". Rich (1973) and Kochman (1971) note that whites use language as a method of exchanging information. Rich believes that members of the mainstream culture, "attach maximum credibility to what is expressed in language" (p. 151). He argues that blacks use language in a duel manner.

[The black speaker] ...uses language in a traditional sense in which what is said is interpreted literally and also employs language in a manipulative manner, in which language is viewed opportunistically as a means of obtaining what one wants (p. 151).

An example of the duel function strategy is shucking (also known as "shucking and jiving" or just "jiving"). In shucking, blacks attempt to accommodate whites in authority to generate the appearance that may be acceptable to those empowered whites, but shift the behavior for interaction with other blacks (Stanbeck and Pearce, 1981). A black man may accommodate the boss, but be a task master when he interacts at his own level. Kochman (1971) contends that "a history of survival forces [blacks] to look for expedience, take advantage of opportunities, and focus on what will and will not work" (p. 43). According to Kochman the latter function (the manipulative function) occurs when one is addressing another of equal or higher status but never when addressing another of lower status. A higher status person addressing a lower status person doesn't have to rely on this form of manipulation to control another's behavior. He/She can usually do so because of his/her position of power. However, the lower status or equal status speaker must rely on finesse.

The danger of the duel literal/manipulative function is that a distrustful climate can develop which is not conducive to openness in the work place. Whites may feel that blacks are constantly playing "verbal games" and that black attempts at communication often cannot be taken seriously. Nevertheless, with a premium on persuasion in the organization for achieving cooperation, a variation of skills implicit in this mode of language might be a valuable tool (even in higher black to

lower white communication transactions). With emphasis placed on "playing the game," blacks may be particularly adept at identifying the game context and acting appropriately.

It is important to note that the duel function of black language does not inherently suggest insincerity. In many cases the duel nature of black language expands the interpersonal function of language while maintaining its informational components completely. It is suggested in studies by Likert (1961) and Goldhaber (1983) that organizational productivity may be ameliorated by improved superior/subordinate interpersonal relationships. Likert (1961) found that successful superiors were perceived by their workers as caring about their well-being and as attempting to treat others with sensitivity and consideration as they fulfill the task function. We feel that blacks, because of their ability to use language in a duel manner, may find a variety of ways for approaching superiors and subordinates in attempting to create a positive communication climate and yet to gain a measure of control over the communicative situation. The challenge of the black manager is to make sure that his/her coworkers understand the duel framework from which he/she is functioning.

This duel skill is already an integral part of most black manager's repertoire because blacks in general have had to make adjustments to white interactants to offset potentially incendiary encroachments and thus, to survive. Dickens and Dickens (1981) explain that blacks know that they "must confront whites in a way that leaves whites their dignity. If not, racism will dominate the white person's behavior and will cause him or her to become illogical" (p. 34). Even outside of the "do or die" context, verbal dualism suggests a verbal facility relevant to the organization.

Signifying. Another way that blacks display verbal inventiveness (also for the purpose of gaining interpersonal control) is signifying. Signifying describes language which implies, goads, begs, or boasts, all by indirect means (Abrahams, 1964). However, we shall limit our discussion of signifying to mean "implying" which we feel is advantageous in organizational encounters.

Kochman (1981) describes signifying as hinting or implying what one wants to know personal information about another. If a black woman wants to know whether a man she is interested in is married or not without really asking him directly, she might ask a question about a possible wife ("What does your wife think of this or that") and hope that he will reply that he isn't married. The root of signifying is entrenched in the cultural value that the disclosure of personal information is strictly voluntary. Thus, blacks will reject direct questioning (although it is on occasion used with close friends and relatives) and use

signifying as a means of gaining information of a personal nature. Kochman (1981) concluded in his findings that blacks tend to be sensitive about probing into the personal affairs of others and having others probe into their personal affairs. He further explains that a possible reason for minorities resisting direct questioning is that they often feel vulnerable to the way that information may be interpreted and used against them (p. 104).

It is reasonable to assume that black managers may be quite empathetic to the apprehension of a worker to reveal personal information and thus will often reject direct questioning as a strategy. Dickens and Dickens (1981) have found in their study of black managers that "blacks tend to have a great deal of sensitivity in dealing with people" (p. 36). Many white managers and supervisors obversely attempt to gain personal information via direct questioning (ex. "Is something going on at home?") which may result in a failure to elicit disclosure. The potentially troubled worker may close him/herself because he/she feels pressured into disclosing.

Negative corporate ramifications of signifying (indirect questions) may be an exacerbation of misunderstanding in an interpersonal situation between black and white interactants possibly already replete with misunderstanding because of the differences in customs. A white subordinate may be unaware of a black managers concern and willingness to listen. Interactants may never get at the root of the problem. However, positive ramifications may be that the manager who skillfully employs signifying may find that he/she still has subtly controlled the situation. Disclosure is often done when one is not pressured to do so.

Interestingly, although black managers may reject direct questioning as a strategy specifically for gaining personal information, Dickens and Dickens (1981) found that black managers will engage in direct questioning to diffuse conflict. They argue that a black manager faced with a conflict will confront it immediately with straightforwardness using questions like, "Do you have a problem with me?" (see "Forthrightness"). However, when the confidence of personal information is at a premium, the black manager will likely opt for a less direct style.

Review of the literature suggests that many black managers are quite sensitive to the needs of the worker and thus can discern the appropriate time and place to resolve personal problems and interpersonal conflicts.

Call/Response. In most white churches (as in most areas of the white culture) language is linear in nature. The minister preaches a sermon during which he/she receives no verbal response from the congregation. Most feedback takes the form of head nodding, smiles, and sometimes laughter. In the typical black

church, obversely, language is transactional. There is an ongoing dialogue between speaker and congregation. The preacher says something and he/she immediately gets a vocal response like, "preach," "amen," or "go ahead." Weber (1985) proports that the interplay between speaker and listener has its actual genesis in "the African world view which holds that all elements and forces are interrelated and indistinguishable because they work together to accomplish a common goal and a sense of commitment between the speaker and the listener" (p.246). Kochman (1981) describes the ritual as a process in which each interactant exchanges energy. Each may continue to participate as either caller or respondent. Smitherman (1977) explains that a speaker initially responds to the audience and it then responds to her/him in an ongoing exchange.

The call/response ritual when examined in the larger black community takes the form of responses in conversation like "that's right," "uh huh," "right," etc. Such responses make the role of the listener much more active than is typical in mainstream dialogue. The function of the call/response activity is two-fold. First, it increases understanding of the speaker's message (Kochman, 1981; Smitherman, 1977; Abrahams, 1970). Second, it helps to build a bond between speaker and listener.

Kochman explains that Call and Response

underlies doing your own thing, which in black culture does not mean, as it has come to be translated in white culture, acting independently of the group. Rather...doing your thing means asserting yourself 'within' the group, such as entering into a performance by adding your voice to the ensemble... an invitation to bring your own thing into a complementary relationship with the mode, so that ... all might benefit from its power" (p.109-110).

Because whites generally don't use the call/response pattern, blacks may find conflicts in interracial interactions. Blacks, used to verbal response, may feel that white interactants are not listening. Whites may feel that black interactants continually interrupt them. Still, an emphasis on accuracy in conversation, in both giving and receiving verbal messages (related to task, maintainance, and innovation) means that call/response may be quite pertinent to organizational life.

In fact, one might argue that the hybrid public speaking situation (where the speaker is often interrupted by the listener) is actually a variation of the call/response pattern. Hybrid speaking is becoming a more central theme in quality controlled and Theory Z type organizations. American managers have found that some of these systems tend to be a bit tricky in their implementation. The USA has tended to lag behind other countries in integrating participatory systems because of their unfamiliar format. Black businesspeople may be in the forefront

in developing the hybrid public speaking situation in American organizations.

Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication often generates much of the meaning in face to face encounters. Harrison (1965) estimates that in the interpersonal situation approximately 65% of social meaning is carried over the nonverbal channel. Many writers agree that the nonverbal component carries the "true" or "real" meaning in communication because it is less subject to conscious control. Barlund (1968) and later Rich (1973) state that the "self" seems to be revealed more readily in nonverbal than in verbal ways.

These findings may suggest that a black who attempts to assimilate nonverbal aspects from behavior into the mainstream white culture might have more difficulty making such adjustments than that same individual would have simply adjusting verbal behaviors. Thus, while "assimilated" blacks may use standard English, their body language and supersegmentals may remain "black" (Dubner, 1972). It is probably wisest that black interactants attempt to develop positive aspects of their own nonverbal code rather than to grossly assimilate subtle nonverbal aspects of middleclass white behavior. Yet, the difficulties in identifying and developing efficient black nonverbal skills are considerable given the nature of the American organization. Still, the development of such strengths may have large payoffs in the long range for all organizational participants.

We have found that there are significant difficulties among whites in understanding black nonverbal communication, and among blacks in effectively implementing their particular styles in white contexts. This conclusion is supported by research conducted as long ago as 1947 (Labarre) and as recently as 1981 and beyond (Kochman). It is the purpose of this section to examine three areas of nonverbal communication particular to blacks which may be cultivated for organizational success. These include 1) Proxemic Style, 2) Kinesic Style, and 3) Chronemic Style.

In our examination of black nonverbal communication, we will include first a discussion of the divergent patterns of black and white interactants and the problems that have resulted from these differences. At the end of the section on nonverbal behaviors we shall consider the positive applications of black styles in organizational settings.

Proxemics. Many studies have attempted to examine how blacks use space in various interracial situations. Baxter (1970) observed intracultural proxemics among whites, blacks, and Mexicans in interpersonal settings and found that Mexican-Americans stood the

closest (about 21.6 inches apart), whites were next (at about 27.5 inches), and blacks maintained the most space (about 32 inches). Willis in an earlier study (1966) came to similar conclusions. Interestingly, other studies have found blacks to stand closer to each other in same race dyads (Connolly, 1975). Topic and context may be influencing factors. Findings remain inconclusive. White to black interracial pairings have found more consistent outcomes. Research on mixed sex, mixed race dyads found that blacks tend to move closer to whites than whites to blacks. Rich (1974) suggests

A 'touch-don't touch' phenomenon has developed, which is strongly tied to the stereotype by whites that blacks and other nonwhites are unclean and have unpleasant odors and textures. Such a physical stereotype explains the strong physical avoidance patterns demonstrated in interracial settings. One black member of an interracial encounter group described his perception of the physical reaction of white women when he sits next to them on buses. The black man reacted to the subtle but observable physical withdrawal of a white women as she moved ever so close to the window and fixed her eyes in a stare outward so she would not have to face the black male face to face (p.170).

Rich further suggests that blacks don't appear to share these same apprehensions in regard to moving close to whites unless there is a fear of observable rejection by the white individual (170).

The past confusions in organizations created by the distinction between black and white proxemic behaviors has been significant. While blacks felt put-off and put-down, white decision makers felt intimidated by blacks who seemed to be "closing in" on them in interpersonal situations. When coupled with the black employees straightforward style (mentioned above) the impact of the black employees on white employees was strong, and, unfortunately, negative. (See Kirch, 1973 and Jensen, 1985 for further discussion.)

Kinesics. Birdwhistle (1963) defines Kinesics as "systematic study of those patterned and learned aspects of body motion which can be demonstrated to have communicational value" (p.125). Birdwhistle further argues that emotional states are expressed through body motion which can often be accurately interpreted within a culture. They are often misunderstood across culture however.

In this section, we will consider two aspects of kinesic behavior which are relevant to the development of black workers in the organizational context. These include 1) Eye Contact, and 2) Body movement.

Eye Contact. One aspect of kinesic behavior which has often been misunderstood in mixed race dyads has been eye contact. Abrahams (1969) and others have found that in many black communities children have been taught that maintaining direct eye contact with an adult is a sign of hostility and defiance (p.11, 29). Therefore, these individuals would not look directly at the teacher, or the doctor, or any other person in a position of authority (a person who in many cases is a white individual). Johnson (1972) and Hall (1974), in separate studies, examined eye contact of black subordinates interfacing with white supervisors in the workplace and came to similar conclusions. Unfortunately, when eye contact was low, white interactants interpreted this behavior to mean that the black interactant had something to hide. Jensen (1985) found that blacks' eye contact will increase when they are expressing anger. In this instance, Fant (1973) takes the position that the black interactant will use more eye contact than the white interactant. This behavior can bring about additional confusion and conflict in the organizational context because black eye contact seems extreme and erratic. Confusion and hostility is often the outcome.

Body Movement. Much of black kinesic behavior is rooted in the need to sell oneself. Although this need is not restricted to the black culture, Abrahams finds that it is most prevalent there. Horton (1967) believes that the roots of such behavior is found in the need of low income blacks, in the absence of other status markers, to develop a "rep" (reputation) through "style." Horton describes,

[Style] means to carry one's self well, to show class. Style may refer to the use of gestures in conversation... It may be expressed in the loose walk, the jiving or dancing walk, the cool walk... [the] hand rap or hand slap.

All of these behaviors express an individual's mood and individuality.

The problem that is faced in the context of the integrated workplace is that this behavior is experienced as a sign of arrogance or "cliquishness" or nonprofessionalism. It may also be associated with an overidentification with blacks as a group rather than the organization as a whole.

Chronemics. Different cultures have different perceptions of time and consequently use time differently. Mainstream white culture has a "present" and "future" orientation toward time, and adheres strictly to the clock. Blacks, particularly lower class blacks, share a perception of time familiar to Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. Henry (1965) postulates that in "C.P." (colored people's) time, an event which is scheduled may occur at any moment within a wide range of time, or may not occur at all.

Henry claims that poor blacks tend to have difficulty assimilating a linear perception of time because poor blacks lack an attitude of self determination and hope, for "hope is a boundary; it separates the free from the slave, the determined from the drifting... time [and] space exist for us only when we have hope" (p.33). Such hope pulls one into the realm of the objective effects of behavior and a concern for rationality. Horton (1965), concluded that the white concept of time is rational, impersonal, and futuristic. The black (particularly lower class) perception is personal and oriented toward the present only (p. 10).

The organizational difficulties of making appointments, fulfilling obligations, and being accountable, are impacted greatly when temporal styles conflict. White organizational members express frustration with the nebulous manner in which some black organizational members use time. This has often frustrated the attempts of these black individuals to be taken seriously and to function effectively in the organization. It has led to termination of employment for some employees. The distinction in cultural style has perhaps been one of the most immediately damaging factor to the upward mobility of the black worker. Thus, while it may be psychologically difficult for a black individual to expand his/her perception of time, it may be the watershed to inclusion in the mainstream work process.

Positive Implications of Black Nonverbal Style

The devastating effects which have been brought about in the past because of differing nonverbal styles between whites and blacks in the workplace may begin to turn around and become positives in future organizational interactions. John Naisbitt (1984), in his timely book Megatrends, identifies new directions in which America and the world is heading. These will invariably change the American corporate world forever. One direction Nesbit discusses is a change from a national to a world economy. America will no longer be the center of industry. Japan, as well as many developing third world economies like Singapore, South Korea, Brazil and others are competing for a place in industry that America alone held for many decades.

Naisbitt further contends that the consequence of the shift in economic and political power is a new global interdependence. In international intercultural interactions, American businessmen must adapt to Arab, South American, and French businessmen who wish to stand closer than mainstream proxemic rules will allow. (See Jensen, 1985 for further discussion.) American businessmen must adjust to the eye avoidance of Latin workers and the subtle messages being transmitted in various uses of time in Latin, Arab, and oriental cultures.

The rules which will apply in doing international business

may be familiar to black employees who share values with various international cultures. The integration of black nonverbal styles into the American corporate structure can act as a transitional move toward integrating international styles relevant to conducting international business.

In addition to preparing the American corporation for more exotic, unfamiliar modes of nonverbal communication, the black employee can help American businesspeople to develop a stronger nonverbal code. The "flare and expression" used by black interactants tends to be less equivocal and thus more effective in assisting in the development of a stronger message and a stronger sense of connectedness.

In many instances, the mainstream community has accepted specific stylized behaviors from the black community (like the "high five") and has integrated the positive and bonding impacts of these. More extensive qualities of black style and attitude could be borrowed to the benefit of the organization. These could positively impact the image of trust, connectedness, and concern so badly needed in internal and international relations involving American organizations. The leadership potential of black individuals who have learned to function effectively in white organizations using their "hybrid" interpersonal nonverbal styles is invaluable at every level of corporate life.

Assumptions about the World

Because of the significance of race, black individuals almost inherently view themselves differently than white individuals view themselves. King (1983) notes, for one thing, that for blacks race is always an issue. Outside of a limited community, a black person is always considered different. Almost inherently, in a democratic society, his/her minority concern is seen as less pressing, less important. But while the issue is less important to America as a whole, it is no less important to any particular black person. In fact, because the issue of race is relegated to the back burner by society at large, it becomes more distressing for a black individual.

Szaley and Deese (1978) examine cultural perception and report that blacks are far more aware of themselves as blacks than whites are of their "whiteness." Blacks are also more aware of whites as "whites." And surely, blacks think about "whites" more than whites think about "blacks". Royce (1982) examines a variety of American cultures and summarizes mainstream, white society saying, "very simply, if you control society long enough, you begin to assume that your power is a natural state of affairs" (p. 4). Whites in organizations tend to see the old way as the way and not in a relative sense.

As the majority members in the organization, white individuals find generally neutral assumptions made about their capabilities, intentions, and attitudes. Though the dialect or last name of a white person may be perceived negatively in a given situation, these attitudes are generally ephemeral and change and they are generally not because of his/her race per se. A black person, however, no matter who he/she is, must fairly consistently deal with stereotypes of blacks. Whites, though they tend to talk in terms of individuals when they refer to themselves, view blacks as a group (Royce 1982). And unfortunately, to the majority of Americans, the problem of race is a personal one. For most people the issue of race is "an irritant" (Kochman, 1981, p.160). Fant (1982) says that frequently whites are less willing than blacks to discuss racial issues at work in a serious manner.

However, despite a position which in some senses is precarious, blacks can and do use their perspective to their advantage. Because of the assumption of difference, blacks are in a unique position to view an organization from within and without simultaneously. Royce (1982) notes that people in power do not need to be aware of the complexities of a situation under [their] dominance because [they] control it by fiat and superior power. The view from below is quite different- to survive at all, to get ahead, requires knowledge of the subtleties of institutional structure as well as knowledge of

the thoughts and values of the dominant group.

Black workers may be able to identify to organizational "sharks" that they live in a fluid environment. For example, it was pointed out to a professor of Business Management (a quite successful consultant) at a large Eastern University by a black MBA student, that the new competitiveness of the job market does not in fact "make it harder for all of us to find a job." The student clarified that it is not harder if you happen to be black and/or a woman, because any chance is better than no chance. In such a statement, the student identified for his professor an entirely different way of viewing reality.

Black organizational members can point out to others in the organization that ethnocentricity and ethnostereotyping is not the most effective means of marketing products or creating helpful community relations. Modern organizations face a range of challenges unknown to their earlier counterparts. Governmental, political, social, and economic changes occurring today would be baffling to the homogenous organization of yesteryear. Legal and moral imperatives aside, the modern organization must seek complex solutions to complex problems. The most sophisticated organizations struggle to answer their questions. Part of the success of a successful organization is in its ability to tap the insights and strengths of a wide range of bright contributors. If American organizations cannot solve problems from within, it is difficult to imagine that they will be effective in a volatile international market. On a purely pragmatic level, blacks and whites must exchange cultural insights. Subjugation of any individual or group of individuals may squelch productivity as well as spirit.

Based on our consideration of black values, language behaviors, nonverbal behaviors, and assumptions about the world, one can see that while ethnic differences provide group members with different ways of dealing with reality, the general goals of survival and advancement are constant within each cultural group. The integration of a variety of approaches in order to meet identical organizational goals seems realistic and good.

Future Considerations

The arguments made in this report are formative. Further examination is needed to confirm our suspicions about the adaptability of black cultural skills to corporate settings.

In our research we have been able to identify two distinct needs relative to the examination of corporate-ethnic culture integration.

One, is the need for systematic research which evaluates interpersonal attributes of both black and white organizational members, judging the effectiveness of a range of strategies, then

considering their potential for bringing about certain outcomes.

Two, is the need to develop new attitudes among those preparing black students for work. Social and academic leaders must be among the first to attempt to identify skills which black students may nurture and adjust in order to thrive in a new organizational world.

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