



A Tale of two Cities: A Case Study on the Regional Communication Differences in Texas

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ABSTRACT: *In a society fixated on the global business scene, this case study steps back to consider cultural differences between regions within a single state. Business communicators across the globe must adapt styles in order to reach differing client bases. However, according to this study, the same is true when business persons seek to effectively communicate across regional differences within a single state. This case study provides an insightful look into the business cultures of two Texas towns and discusses how we manage identity in both.*

Keywords: *Communication, Identity Management, Authority, Intercultural Communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

There is an evident difference in how business is conducted around the world. However, we rarely consider the differences in how business is conducted across a single nation, and even less rare are the studies of a single state's regions. This case study seeks to better understand the experience of two financial advisors who found a distinct difference in the business cultures of Dallas, Texas, and Tyler, Texas. This paper will first look at the regional differences between these two locations, recognize the different aspects of business culture, understand the experience these two financial advisors had when moving from Dallas to Tyler, and explain the difference in these two subcultures.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To better understand why there is a difference in the business communication cultures of Dallas and Tyler, we must first better understand the history of those who settled there. "The original North American colonies were settled by people from distinct regions of the British Islands, and from France, the Netherlands, and Spain, each with their own religious, political, and ethnographic characteristics". Even though it has been centuries since these cultures first came, their ways of life still influence us today. Woodard has found there to be eleven distinct regional cultures within North America. Texas is composed of three of these regions: The Deep South, Greater Appalachia, and El Norte(1, p 2-3).

For this Case Study, we will be focusing on the Deep South and the Greater Appalachia. According to Woodard's map, Dallas falls in the Greater Appalachia region and Tyler falls in what is considered the Deep South. These two cities that are a mere 100 miles apart fall on the regional line that divides the Greater Appalachia and Deep South regions of Texas. The Greater Appalachia contains north and middle Texas while the Deep South contains southeastern Texas.

"[The Greater Appalachia] culture had... a warrior ethic and a deep commitment to individual liberty and personal sovereignty. Intensely suspicious of aristocrats and social reformers alike, these American Borderlanders despised... Deep Southern aristocrats... For most of American history, [the Deep South] has been the bastion of white supremacy, aristocratic privilege, and a version of classical Republicanism modeled on the slave states of the ancient world, where democracy was a privilege of the few and enslavement the natural lot of the many. It remains the least democratic of the nations, a one-party entity where race remains the primary determinant of one's political affiliations."
(1, p 8-9)

These brief descriptions of the initial regional culture tells us a lot about those who live there now. The Deep South was full of aristocrats who believed in white supremacy. The Greater Appalachia despised the actions of their neighbors to the south and believed that everyone was entitled to individual liberties and personal sovereignty (1, p 8-9).

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When taking Woodard's research into consideration, this could be the historical reason for why these two regional cultures behave so differently. The ideals and values of those who initially settled in these regions influence those living there today. Regional culture differences are not the only factor however, for this case study we must also take the business culture into consideration.

Business Culture is what makes a business unique. Just as one can see a distinct difference when traveling between different countries, every business has a distinct culture that has been influenced by the company's location, ideologies, and profession.

As discussed previously, the regional influences can have just as great of an impact on the business culture as the physical location. Two similar companies in the same state can have entirely different cultures depending on what region they are located in. After which you must also take the company's physical location into consideration. In the big city, life and business move at a faster pace than in a small town in the country. If you work in a small town, you're more likely to take a car to work. If you work in a big city, you are more likely to take public transportation. So what type of car you drive may not matter in a city where few people drive to work as compared to a small town.

Ideology is "the mental framework different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of the way society works... Most of us are unaware of our ideologies and the tremendous impact they can have on our lives" (2, p 339). The founders of a company will typically have the biggest influence over the ideologies of the company since they are the ones growing and shaping the company. However much like a tree, the more a company grows the farther it moves away from its roots. As it grows a company will begin to branch off to new ideas, further straying from the original philosophies on which it was founded.

When a company's ideology changes, the culture changes. This not only affects the working environment, but also the hiring process. Men and women going into new companies must meet the cultural expectations as well as the professional expectations. So even if a person meets all of the professional expectations, they may not get the job simply because of the cultural difference. As a result, professionals must converge to the culture of their career through what they say, wear, and drive.

Convergence is a form of accommodation, "a strategy of adapting your communication behavior in such a way as to become more similar to another person" (2, p 393). If professionals don't converge then they isolate themselves and put their future at the company at a risk. Either they will get tired of feeling alone and outcast or when cutbacks come their superiors will pick out the outliers.

Convergence to a company's culture may be as simple as wearing business attire when you prefer casual attire or it could mean compromising your ethics when representing a guilty client in court. This could also mean changing what type of vehicle you drive.

As human beings, we illustrate meaning through discourse (2, p 342). Through discourse we may assess that money correlates with success. When people see a man or woman driving an expensive car, such as a BMW or Porsche, they associate that with success. Regardless of whether or not they can afford the car, we still associate expensive cars with monetary success. The opposite may be true as well. An interviewer may assume that a person may not be a good candidate for the job based on what type of car they drive. Much like how pharmaceutical commercials seem more credible when they're supported by an authoritative figure in a lab coat, the type of car a person drives can give him automotive authority.

This could be considered a form of economic determinism. Economic determinism is the "belief that human behavior and relationships are ultimately caused by differences in financial resources and the disparity in power that those gaps create", or the separation from the *haves* from the *havenots* (2, p 341). By buying expensive suits and cars, a businessman can distinguish himself or herself as a *haver* rather than a *havenot* and will be considered a better candidate for success. A great example of this is the movie "How to Succeed Business without Really Trying" (4, 1967). In this thematic interpretation of the satirical novel, a window washer changes his appearance and adapts his personality to climb to the top of the corporate world with no professional experience whatsoever (4, 1967). By giving the appearance of success, more opportunities for success are given to him.

Not all companies expect their employees to drive expensive luxury cars or wear designer suits. Depending on the profession, the expectations may change. Lawyers and most businessmen will always be expected to wear suits where as nurses and doctors will wear scrubs. Blue collared workers such as mechanics and police officers may be expected to wear a uniform where as engineers and teachers may wear business casual attire. The income brackets of each profession also change the expectations. A corporate lawyer will make significantly more than a teacher, and what vehicle he drives will reflect this. Similarly, the type of car one drives may not matter in some professions, but may be vitally important in others. "According to the findings of a study done in the San Francisco Bay area, owners of prestige autos receive a special kind of deference from others" (3, p 190). So the type of car one drive influences the way that others see him or her. A person may receive more or less initial respect based solely on the type of car he or she drives.

III. RATIONALE AND METHODS

Based on the literature it is therefore reasonable to assume that there is a distinct business cultural difference between Dallas and Tyler. This study seeks a better understanding of these cultural differences. For purposes of this study, we interviewed two business professionals who moved from Dallas to Tyler in the past two years, yet stayed with the same company. Interview data was transcribed and analyzed for thematic outcomes.

The business culture may vary based on the company's location, ideologies, and profession. The possibilities are endless, and being able to identify the business culture using these characteristics can be vital when job hunting. Two businessmen found this to be true when moving from Dallas to Tyler. According to their respective census data, Dallas is a large city of 1.258 million people whereas Tyler is a small city of 100,223 people. Even though these cities are less than 100 miles apart, the cultural differences in business are greatly different.

IV. RESULTS

The two businessmen who were interviewed for this case study are financial advisors at a financial service company in Tyler, Texas. The advisors are contracted to the company, but they each manage their own individual business within the company. Advisors may represent multiple offerings, firms, groups, companies, families, etc. The advisors are responsible for meeting with clients to discuss their personal finances and to help them achieve their financial goals. The goal is for each advisor to effectively grow their individual business within the larger organization.

Both advisors noticed a distinct cultural difference in how business is run in Tyler as compared to Dallas. There was a higher level of accountability within Tyler than in Dallas.

"I think [culture and image] matters here [in Tyler] a little bit more because [it's a] smaller town...[with] more connected and interwoven circles. I think it can be more dangerous here [in Tyler] to not handle your affairs with a level of integrity and honesty. Honestly we're going to aspire to the highest level of integrity and honesty in everything that we do. But I think that it matters here more because the damage that can be done is a lot more significant. Whereas in Dallas I may see my client once or twice a year in client meetings and then I'm not going to see them again through the remainder of the year because Dallas is just so large. You can kind of blend in [and] disappear..."

Subject B

They claimed that face-to-face business was run the same in Dallas as it was in Tyler. In Dallas, business was conducted solely in the office place, while in Tyler business is continued outside the office place. In Dallas, clients were prompted by monetary success, while in Tyler clients were prompted by the existence of both monetary and domestic success. In Dallas, your success is reflected in the types of clothes you wear and how you present yourself in person and on social media. In Tyler, your success is reflected in the type of car you and your spouse drive, the expensive house you live in, the private school your children go to, the neighborhood you live in, your church involvement, your children's extracurricular activities, and more.

"Image in Dallas is all what you want to project on a private level, like what you choose to show people, so you can talk a big game in Dallas. You can meet someone at a restaurant in Dallas and have an hour to two conversation and be projecting [a certain] image the whole time. But in Tyler it takes more than that: the car, the house, the country club membership to actually convince people of image. Versus in Dallas you can do it all on Facebook with a bunch of pictures. In Tyler the society image is much more important... You're graded on a different scale."

Subject A

Business moves faster in Dallas as compared to Tyler. The advisors noted that in Dallas it could take them two weeks to get started on a new project whereas in Tyler the same project could take them three to six months depending on the client. The city is more face-paced where as Tyler is more laid back when it comes to business.

The pace that business ran was also reflected in the promoted lifestyle one led in Dallas as compared to Tyler. In Dallas, Subject B noted that he was more career driven because he primarily hung out with work friends outside of work and because of the lifestyle that is promoted in a big city like Dallas. Subject B believed this competitive, fast paced environment led individuals to pursuing their careers while leaving their personal lives on hold. As a result, individuals living in the city begin to build their identity around their career. In Tyler, Subject B noticed that the atmosphere promotes a more family driven lifestyle where you rarely see your coworkers outside the office place. Because of this slow pace environment, individuals tend to focus more on their personal success while their careers make a steadily climb up over the years. As a result, individuals living in small towns build their identity around their family and personal success more than their career.

When talking to clients or even potential clients, they found that the values differed between clients in Dallas and those in Tyler. Clients in Dallas were more focused on how the financial advisors could help their professional and individual objectives. These clients were more focused on how the proposed financial plan would help their plans for the future, their net worth, and their retirement plan. However clients in Tyler were more focused on how the financial advisors could help their professional and family objectives. These clients were more focused on how the proposed financial planning would help their wife, kids, grandkids, and other future generations.

In Tyler “people are more others focused” while in Dallas “people are more [self] focused”. Subject B believed that America is becoming more and more individualistic and self focused. However he believed Tyler to be one of the few remaining “little pockets” where the community is “very benevolent” and “very charitable”. “There is some fundraising event opportunities going on literally every weekend of the year. People like to get involved here in those causes. There just tends to be more of a [focus on] overall community health. How do we better this area for the future generations coming after us? People here are more legacy driven.” Subject B

Aside from the cultural differences, both associates also found there were different expectations for the type of car they were expected to drive. Subject A drove a Toyota Camry when he moved from Dallas to Tyler two years ago, now he drives a Lexus. Subject B drove an Infinity M37 when he moved from Dallas to Tyler two years ago, now he drives a Lexus ES300H.

Before when they lived in Dallas, the type of car one drove didn’t matter. Everyone parked in a parking garage, and Dallas is so big it was very unlikely that you would be driving next to someone you knew during rush hour traffic. Whereas in Tyler, everyone parks in a lot in front of the building where everyone can see they type of car you drive. Additionally, Tyler is so small that you are highly likely to see someone you know driving beside you at any given time.

Neither of them noticed a distinct difference in how they were treated after purchasing a luxury car. However they both felt there was an underlying expectation to drive such a car in order to be perceived as successful. Subject A noticed that a business colleague held him at a higher regard as a result of his purchase. While attending Leadership Tyler, a nonprofit organization that provides leadership training for local businessmen and women, Subject A had an interesting interaction with his fellow peers.

“... I was meeting [a group of] them at Andy’s and I pulled up in the Lexus, and they made a comment about it and I’ve actually gotten a few clients out of [that moment]. And this one guy publically said, ‘Hey we’ve got three financial advisors in our Leadership Tyler class and you know what I’m just going to be honest here. If I’m going to work with anyone in the finance world, I’m gonna work with [Subject A]. Because he’s got a nice car and a nice suit, obviously very successful. It is what it is.’ He just said out loud that, you just look like you’re successful and I would want to work with someone like that. That’s been the most overt comment anyone’s ever made.”

Subject A

Even though neither associates recognized the change in behavior, there was still a recognizable difference in how they were treated. How Subject A’s colleagues responded to his vehicle reveals their perception of his monetary success. Leadership Tyler enrolls those who are already on the path of success that wish to further that success by learning crucial leadership skills. Even though the class knew this, there was an evident draw to Subject A as a consultant after seeing the type of car he drove. Even though there were three financial advisors in the class, Subject A was perceived as the most successful because of his attire and vehicle. After one of his classmates verbally distinguished Subject A as successful, Subject A gained a new clients.

V. CONCLUSION

The experience of these two financial advisors depicts the regional and business culture differences between Dallas and Tyler. As a result of the regional variances, community atmosphere, and difference in business cultures, Tyler and Dallas do not communicate on the same level. Surprisingly, in the smaller town of Tyler, greater emphasis is placed on personal and career achievements as they relate to an individual’s perceived level of success. Such findings are important for business people who reach across state subcultures to communicate with varying client bases. One person who is successful in one environment should not expect immediate success upon entering a new market without first considering the cultural differences and taking steps to adapt accordingly. Unexpectedly, but importantly, one must strive to develop strong intercultural and interpersonal communication competence when stepping across subcultural borders, borders that are after not marked clearly on a map.

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