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The Think Tank

Topic: Cultural impacts on values and lifestyles of the future. As cultures intermingle and occasionally clash – with some cultures becoming more dominant than others – what *values* and *lifestyles* will survive in the world in the year 2025? (For starters, see “points for consideration” below, but this list does not come close to being exhaustive.) Which *values* and *lifestyles* will be lost or marginalized, and what are the implications for mankind?

Also, which people will be most highly valued in 2025? The young or the elderly? Gifted people or others – and which gifts? Introverts or extroverts (and let's not forget the other Myers-Briggs or equivalent personality descriptors)? Which professions? Who will be the celebrities? And, what did I forget?

Points for consideration:

1. The primary values of people within the United States include liberty, opportunity, self-reliance, “taking a stand (position),” and the traditional work ethic, as evidenced by long workdays and the associated lifestyles. One might also add immediacy, as manifested by impatience with long lines and traffic jams and by the desire for immediate return on time or money invested. There are numerous avenues for entertainment, ranging from movies to spectator sports events. Yet, one of the most common complaints is “not enough hours in the day.”
2. Western Europe places more primacy on family and leisure time, as evidenced by their longer annual vacations, shorter workdays (in some parts), and even legal restrictions on store hours. In some countries, disposable income is somewhat less than in the United States, but even so, the standard of living is generally high. It has also been suggested that these cultures value introspection more so than North America does.
3. Various Asian countries also tend to value the work ethic, but they have traditionally been characterized by patience and by a time horizon far longer than that represented in the quarterly earnings statement. This cultural difference figured prominently in the outcome of the conflict that we know as the Vietnam War. In addition, some Asian cultures have historically valued age over youth and the group over the individual. In contrast with the reductionism that characterizes much of the West, Asian cultures are known for their more holistic views on matters ranging from wellness to warfare.

4. Speaking of time, the languages of some Native and Aboriginal peoples do not conjugate verbs by time. To them, past, present, and future are one. In addition, these peoples have traditionally valued co-existing with nature as opposed to dominating it.
5. While tribal warfare and authoritarian regimes have characterized parts of the Middle East for centuries, it was Arabia and Persia that advanced mathematics, medicine, and astronomy when much of Europe was in the Dark Ages. Traditionally, these parts of the world have valued learning, and it is unlikely that their “MVP's” would have been athletes and movie stars.
6. There are still other countries in which people have generally been fatalistic about life – perhaps understandably so.

So, what values and lifestyles can we expect to see in 2025 – and who will be the “MVP's”?

Bonus question: How would our everyday lives be different today if another culture had become dominant?

Have your views published and considered by your peers in the National Capital Region and in other WFS chapters worldwide. Send them to forum@futuretakes.org.

from the February 2004 topic, “Quality of Life in 2020”:

Quality of Life in the U.S. in 2020
by Jay Herson

Describing quality of life in 2020 would take considerable analysis. For our purposes here it is sufficient to consider the following drivers / metrics:

Employment – Continuity of employment will be a more important driver than income. The metric for continuity would be the percent of workforce gainfully employed for at least 75% of available hours.

Health – measured by the percent of the population having access to adequate care.

Education – the percent of children by age group having access to quality education.

Family – the percent of children reared in a functional family cluster.

Despite current problems the 2004 workforce will have more employment continuity and predictability than that of 2020. Sixteen years from now people will work longer hours when they can work. More people will be working as independent contractors rather than employees compared to today. These contractors will be matched with employers through the internet as it exists at that time. Many of contractors will work from home or offices of their own. More software development, research and professional services projects will be performed by teams brought together for a specific purpose and without any permanent administrative hierarchy. Team members can be based in foreign countries thus supporting even greater global competition for technical employment than today.

Despite the movement to independent contractors a larger percent of the population will be covered by some form of health insurance allowing access to adequate care. This will come about by formation of insurance pools formed by governments, employers, professional organizations, religious groups, etc. Those people who cannot afford to join these pools will receive traditional and rationed care

at public clinics and hospitals. Advances in medicine and disease prevention will at least allow for fewer clinic visits and shorter hospital stays than now although prevention programs will be more prevalent to those members of insurance pools.

In 2020 fewer children will be educated in public schools than in 2004. A system of vouchers will allow qualified children to attend private schools operated by religious groups, parent employers, universities, professional organizations, etc. Much of this education will be via internet with children participating from their own home, neighbor's home, churches, etc. The better private schools will require parent financial support to supplement the vouchers. Public schools as we know them will be attended by those children who do not achieve the qualifications to attend voucher-supported private schools. Public schools will be associated with an especially inferior education.

By 2020 the immediate family will be defined as a cluster of adults and children living together. The extended family will contain people living elsewhere but bonded together in some way. Not all members of the immediate or extended family will be relatives by blood or marriage. The success of this family cluster will depend on its ability to remain as an intact group for long periods of time. In 2020, 80% of middle and upper class children will live in functional family clusters compared to less than 50% for the lower class. Less than 40% of children overall will live in 1950's-style nuclear families.

In 2020 the quality of life of those educated, middle or upper class and residing in a functional family cluster will be as good as it is today but accelerating change will make even a five-year future less certain than it is today. More people will go through periods of breadwinner unemployment, family cluster change, etc. than today. The quality of life of those not well educated, lower social class will decline due to periods of unemployment, unsatisfactory health care, poor education and changing family cluster.

This bleak prediction will be somewhat mitigated by the excitement of technological advance in medicine, space exploration, transportation and home entertainment/automation. "Who knows? The Red Sox might win the 2020 World Series!"