



# Achieved vs Ascribed

*Resolving Dilemmas from Conflicting Values in Cultural Diversity*

*Based on: Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars*



# Achieved

◆ American  
Idol 2013





# Ascribed

◆ William, Kate,  
and baby  
George (and  
Lupo too)





# Measuring Achievement

- ◆ How much do you agree with the following statement?
- ◆ “The most important thing in life is to think and act in a way that shows who you really are, even if you are not able to accomplish all of the goals that you have.”
  - ◆ This statement describes how much your perception of individual worth is independent from what society believes that you should achieve.



# How Americans view Achievement

- ◆ The most important thing is that nobody has an unfair advantage. Achievement implies that all is gained from one's own efforts. Given this, ascribed comes across as a privilege of those who gain and unjust and undeserved special treatment.
- ◆ There is, however, a tremendous irony to achievement, and that is that society decides which characteristics are deemed important: E.g., beauty contests, sports competitions, SAT scores, 'the biggest loser' competitions, etc.



# Why Americans value Achievement

- ◆ “Justification by works” (Protestantism)
- ◆ An immigrant nation, where the most important thing is not where you came from but what you have done lately
- ◆ High value given to pragmatism, which also applies to the business world.
- ◆ In a global economy, business goes to those who have the goods and services
- ◆ Puts into practice the new ideas that come up



# The Best of Achievement

- ◆ Awards excellence
- ◆ Celebrates great heroes
- ◆ Anyone can change, the poor can become rich
- ◆ There is an obligation to keep your promise
  - ◆ “The woods are lovely dark and deep and I have promises to keep (Robert Frost)
- ◆ Those that have success can receive even greater opportunities



# Exaggeration of Achievement

- ◆ If there are winners, then everyone else is a loser (Second place is nothing more than the first person to lose)
- ◆ If only one is a winner, it is difficult to recognize the accomplishments of those who lose (e.g., Seinfeld-Olympics)
- ◆ Value given to trivial accomplishments (e.g., world record number of t-shirts: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r6tlw-oPDBM> )
- ◆ Excessive effort exerted to achieve (especially among young people, e.g., child performers)



# The Best of Ascribed

- ◆ Those that are born with privilege, feel an obligation to return something to society.
- ◆ There is more to lose than just money. There is more at stake when one may lose their good name, integrity, reputation, or the confidence from others
- ◆ Self-fulfilling prophecy. One achieves the lofty goals that others expect from them



# Exaggeration of Ascribed

- ◆ One begins to believe in their false superiority
- ◆ The incompetent are elevated, despite any lack of real abilities
- ◆ There is a tendency to defend the ascribed state with violence
- ◆ It becomes easy to make fun of the stupid privileged



# The Hawthorne Effect

- ◆ Elton Mayo & Fritz Roethlisberger of Harvard Business School, Western Electric in Chicago
- ◆ Better Work Conditions -> Higher Production
- ◆ 39% increase in production
- ◆ Independent Variables: Personal attention, they liked the scientists, individual value
- ◆ The transformation of status led to the increase in results





# Achieved and Ascribed in Business

- ◆ “Up and Out” vs. Long-term nurturing
- ◆ “Management by objectives” and the bonus received for recognition of quality
- ◆ The dichotomy between production (achieved) and consumption (ascribed)
- ◆ With limited resources, society decides which values are most important: E.g., biotechnology or engineering, fast food or salmon
- ◆ Interviews with plant workers from Anheuser-Busch in Fairfield
- ◆ Studies that “identified” students who were going to progress at school. Indeed they progressed the most, but the truth is that no study had ever been performed



# Examples from Movies

- ◆ Achievement

- ◆ My Fair Lady

- ◆ Titanic

- ◆ Ascribed

- ◆ Tengoku to Jigoku

- ◆ Knight's Tale



Reference:

Hampden-Turner, Charles and Fons Trompenaars. 2002.  
*Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth  
from Conflicting Values*. New Haven & London: Yale  
University Press.