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)
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: