

**WHEN ONE SIZE "DOESN'T" FIT ALL: MATCHING
CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING TECHNIQUE AND LEARNING STYLE**

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The attribution approach suggests that it is not the behavior itself which is important but the attribution or cause that others place on it. It maintains that (1) all behavior is rational and logical from the perspective of the one acting out the behavior, and (2) people from different cultures perceive and organize their environment in unique and meaningful ways (Heider, 1958). These approaches are more concerned with identifying behavioral differences between cultures that manifest themselves in various situations.

In addition to theories about cultures in general, there are theories about the interaction of cultures. The similarity-attraction theory suggests that individuals tend to like people who share similar attitudes, behaviors, and opinion to themselves (Byrne, 1961, 1971). The self-identity theory notes that people tend to define themselves by the group to which they belong (Turner, 1987). Based on the first theory, a manager might be more effective in an global assignment by adapting his behavior to the host culture, however, the second theory says that such an approach might be difficult at best and harmful at worst since it could cause individual loss of identity. Thomas and Ravlin (1995) found that when managers attempted to adapt their managerial style to the host country's style, the response (positive or negative) of subordinates depended on the attributions these subordinates made for the behavior. In effect, subordinates passed judgments on managers based on whether they believed that the exhibited behavior represented an underlying similarity to their own culture or an attempt to be "something that they are not".

Cross-Cultural Training

There are numerous methods of cross-cultural training that can be roughly related back to the various approaches to cultural study. Landis and Brislin (1983) have proposed a six-type typology of cross-cultural training methods (Exhibit 1). The first type is information and fact-oriented training which is aimed at providing a general orientation to a new culture. Harris and Moran (1993) would include language and cross-cultural communications techniques in this category. In reviewing the exhibit, the second methodology is attribution training which focuses on behavioral differences. Cultural

awareness training seeks to increase the understanding of cultural values, attitudes, and behaviors. Cognitive-Behavior modification specifically examines the reward-punishment structure of different cultures. Experiential learning techniques seek to involve individuals directly in another culture through trips and simulations. The final type of CCT relies on actual interaction with host country individuals or expatriates with host country expertise.

 Insert Exhibit 1 Here

Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of research examining the effectiveness of CCT techniques and concluded that overall CCT had a major, positive impact on expatriate self-development, perception, adjustability, performance, and relational factors. However, they were not able to account for a majority of the variation between studies suggesting that the success of CCT is moderated by a number of factors. Black and Mendenhall (1990) have suggested that the nature of the occupations involved, job characteristics, cultural familiarity, and the nature of the interaction required in global assignments may account for some of the differences in CCT effectiveness. They attempt to integrate Social Learning Theory with work on CCT techniques and suggest that CCT techniques be classified by the level of training rigor and the type of modeling process involved (Exhibit 2). Social Learning Theory argues that learning takes place by a process of imitation/modeling and reinforcement of desired behaviors. It may involve actual behavior or vicarious experience, but more intensive learning is expected to take place when the process of modeling is gradual and participative. Black and Mendenhall (1990) argue that the greater the cultural novelty, required interaction, and job novelty, involved the greater the need for rigorous CCT techniques such as simulations, field trips, and actual interaction.

 Insert Exhibit 2 Here

An issue that the Deshpande and Viswesvaran (1992) study did not address, but one which could potentially account for much of the variation between studies, is the possibility that not all CCT techniques are equally effective in improving performance overall or within any of the given areas of performance they examined. They also were not able to consider whether individuals responded more favorably to different CCT techniques.

Learning Styles

The extent to which an individual or cultural group learns through different means is a function of learning style. Hergenhahn (1988) has suggested that there are three types of behaviors involved in learning style. The first type, cognitive behavior, centers on a preference for a given type of information process. The second type, affective behavior, is based on attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. The third type, physiological behavior, involves environmental and biological factors.

Kolb and Fry (1975) have identified two dimensions of cognitive learning: concreteness/abstractness and experimentation/reflection (Exhibit 3). Based on these dimensions, there are four types of learning - concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active participation - and four types of learners - accommodators, assimilators, divergers, and convergers. The accommodators learning style combines concrete experience with active participation. These individuals prefer an intuitive trial-and-error approach to problem solving and learning. Assimilators who combine abstract conceptualization and reflective observation use an inductive reasoning process and construct theoretical models to explain and understand encountered situations. Convergers who gravitate towards abstract conceptualization and active experimentation, on the other hand, favor an approach that focuses on solving specific problems through the practical application of ideas. Finally, the diverger who utilizes concrete experience and

reflective observation, likes to view a situation or problem from different perspectives and experiment with creative solutions.

 Insert Exhibit 3 Here

Kolb (1985) suggests that individuals from different academic disciplines will show a preference for different learning styles. Kolb's study focused on the identification of the culture's predominant learning style in light of better preparing managers to interact more effectively in cross-cultural management arenas. Understanding a manager's learning style and approach to problem solving enables a greater sense of teamwork with host country's organization. Kolb proposed that students of business would be accommodators, showing a preference for concrete experience and active participation. A study by Yuen and Lee (1994) found that this was true for general management and marketing students but not for finance students who preferred the concrete experience and reflective observation of the diverger. This study also found that Singaporean students in general tended to learn by abstract conceptualization and reflective observation (assimilators). U.S students tend to learn best through concrete experience and active experimentation (accommodators). Based on this work, we suggest that the most effective type of CCT programs will seek to fit the training techniques with the learning style of the individuals involved. We propose the following four propositions:

P1: Interaction Training techniques should be utilized for accommodators who favor concrete experience and active participation.

P2: Attribution and Cognitive Behavior Training techniques should be utilized for divergers who favor concrete experience and reflective observation.

P3: Experiential Training techniques should be utilized for convergers who favor abstract conceptualization and active experimentation.

P4: Information and Fact-Oriented Training and Cultural Awareness training techniques should be utilized for assimilators who favor abstract conceptualization and reflective observation.

Discussion

According to a survey conducted by the National foreign trade Council, the number of American expatriates rose by 30% in 1995. Of the 74 companies surveyed, 71% stated that they expect this growth to continue (Hayes, 1996). Research suggests that overall CCT can be effective in improving the performance of expatriate managers. On the other hand, many firms believe investment in CCT programs to be a poor allocation of funds. This is in part proven by the number of expatriate managers who prematurely withdraw from the global assignment. The return rate is estimated at 20-50%. The early return costs have been estimated at 50,000 to 150,000 per manager (Black, Gregersen, and Mendenhall, 1992).

There are two possible explanations for the lack of support for CCT. CCT Programs cannot be viewed as serving as a substitute for an expatriate's technical and managerial skill set. The multinational's strategy to combine parent-company expatriates with local nationals to help market their products, transfer technology and implement on-site operational control cannot be solved by CCT Programs. Second, it is certainly possible that not all CCT programs are equally effective in content and delivery. As maintained by Black and Mendenhall (1990), cultural/job novelty and the amount of expatriate interaction with the host culture are the two elements to be considered when selecting the appropriate CCT Program. We would also suggest that companies consider the group (expatriate and family) to be trained and the differences in their learning style that might influence the effectiveness of training. Many studies have reported that the two primary reasons for the early return of expatriates are the family's inability to adjust and/or the expatriate's inability to adjust to the host culture.

Much of what we have learned in our own culture has been accomplished at an unconscious level. Our belief systems, judgements and behaviors have become so much apart of our inner fabric and framework that much of what we do is involuntary. It is difficult to develop a clear awareness of our own culture because much of what we know has been taken for granted. By teaching an expatriate manager about his own learning style and other existing learning styles, the manager focuses on their own individual framework and stands to retain and understand CCT material presented more effectively. The expatriate manager is also gaining insight with regards to how the host country may process information.

Implications For Further Research and Implementation

We propose that Cross-Cultural Training be delivered in a customized manner in order to fit the individual's learning style and cultural familiarity. To effectively accomplish this, CCT programs should include first a screening and identification of the expatriate manager's learning style. This identification can be accomplished through Kolb's (1985) "Learning Style Inventory" assessment. After the decision maker has defined the needs and parameters of the global assignment, the human resource department meanwhile has maintained a database on the characteristics of various potential candidates. The potential candidates are screened for their overriding learning style to discover whether the academic discipline or their governing nationality/ predominant country of origin is carrying more weight, thereby influencing their approach to processing information. We suggest the selection of those managers who possess a similar host country learning style for a customized CCT program. A match is then made between the learning styles of the potential candidates with the global assignment. Further evaluation then ensues on the more technical, managerial and cross culture familiarity skills that each of the candidates possess.

Given a full understanding of the learning styles, a training program will be designed to include instructional activities which fit the expatriate's learning style. See Exhibit below for our proposed learning style and CCT Methodology Model.

 Insert Exhibit 4 Here

By matching the expatriate's predominate learning style with a CCT training regime, learning is efficiently facilitated and stands to reduce training costs and thereby theoretically, reducing expatriate assignment failure costs. For each predominant learning style identified and emphasized in training, there will exist a second learning style as back-up with the remaining two styles being utilized to a lesser degree. By undergoing this kind of exercise, the expatriate grasps greater knowledge and understanding. In turn, it is hypothesized that this expatriate has also then been taught how to teach/train/coach more efficiently. This expatriate manager may employ the appropriate instructional method in order to successfully interact with the new organization's culture.

The hypothesis that all CCT programs are not equally effective in improving expatriate manager performance requires further analysis. Future research may challenge academicians to conduct additional study to include test and outcomes assessment of the propositions presented in this paper. An opportunity exists for business and human resource professionals to make *matching cross-cultural training techniques with learning style* both practical and meaningful. A cost benefit analysis is necessary to compare the cost of facilitating learning effectively with the cost of the expatriate's failure to complete the global assignment.

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Exhibit 1

Fundamental Cross-Cultural Training Methodologies

Information and Fact-Oriented Training: Trainees are presented with various facts about the country in which they are about to live via lectures, videotapes, and reading materials.

Attribution Training: The attribution approach focuses on explanations of behavior from the point of view of the native. The goal is to learn the cognitive standards by which the host-nationals process behavioral input so that the trainee can understand why the host-nationals behave as they do and adapt his or her own behavior to match the standards of behavior in the host country.

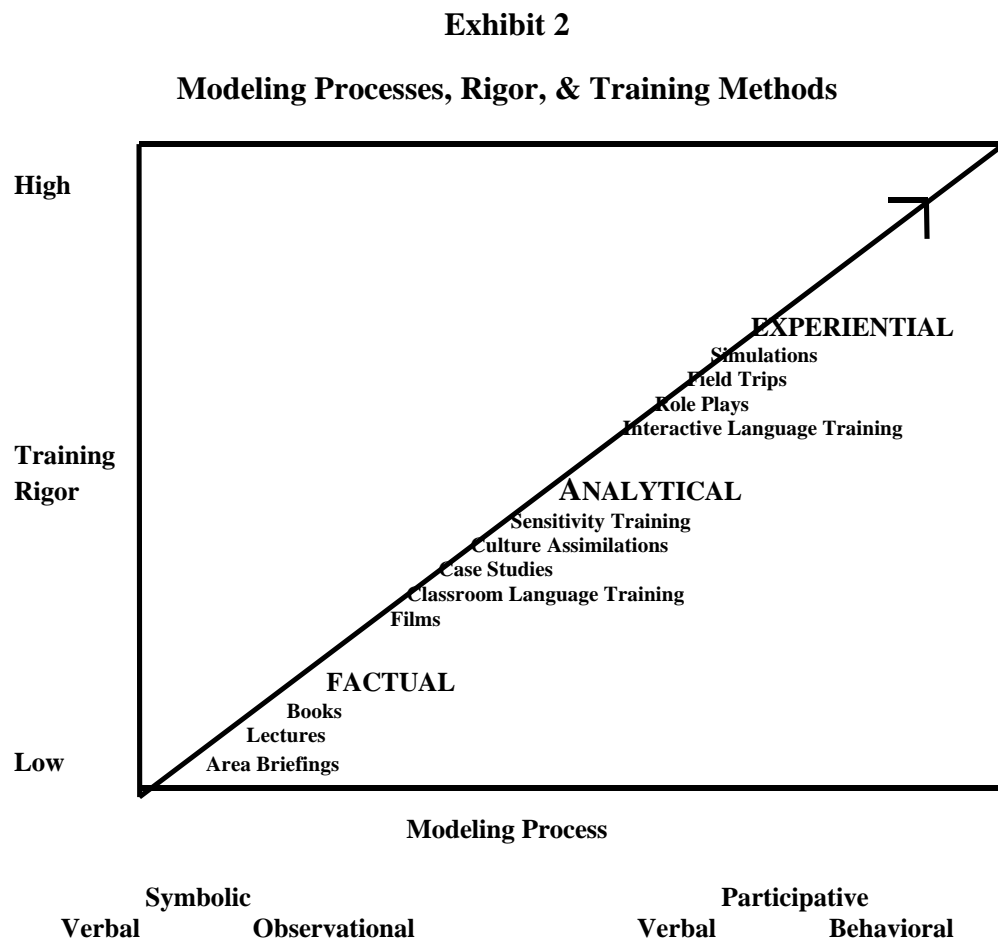
Cultural Awareness Training: The aim is to study the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are common in one's own culture so that the trainee better understands how culture impacts his or her own behavior. Once this is understood, it is assumed he or she can better understand how culture affects human behavior in other countries.

Cognitive-Behavior Modification: The focus here is to assist trainees in linking what they find to be rewarding and punishing in their own subcultures (work, family, religion, etc.) and then to examine the reward and punishment structure in the host culture. Through an examination of the differences and similarities, strategies are developed to assist the trainee to obtain rewards-avoid punishments-in the host country.

Experiential Learning: The goal of this approach is to involve the trainees as active participants, to introduce the nature of life in another culture by actively experiencing that culture via field trips, complex role-plays, and cultural simulations.

Interaction Training: Here trainees interact with natives or returned expatriates in order to become more comfortable with host-nationals and to learn from first-hand experience of the returned expatriates. The methods utilized can range from in-depth role plays to casual, informal discussions.

Source: Black and Mendenhall (1990) adapted from Landis and Brislin (1983)



Source: Black & Mendenhall (1990)

Exhibit 3
Learning Style Grid

Concrete	ACCOMMODATOR Interaction Training	DIVERGER Cognitive Behavior & Attribution Training
	CONVERGER Experiential Training	ASSIMILATOR Information, Fact -Oriented & Cultural Awareness Training
Abstract	Active	Reflective

Source: Adapted from Kolb (1985)

Exhibit 4
Learning Style and CCT Methodology Model

