

Utilizing the U-Curve Model to Assess Cross-Cultural Training Programs for Low Context Expatriates Working in a High Context Culture

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This study investigated the adequacy of cross-cultural programs to prepare expatriates to work in high context culture. Lysgaard (1955) U-curve adjustment theory was used as a logical theoretical platform for discussing the cross-cultural adjustment process for the expatriates in the pre-departure and post arrival stages. Results from empirical studies highlighted that five elements that should be included in the cross-cultural training programs. The five elements of anticipatory adjustment, cultural distance, cultural congruency, modes and methods and cultural diversity training would make training programs more suitable and be instrumental in improving expatriate's performance and completion of foreign assignments.

INTRODUCTION

Several organizations use cross-cultural training to prepare employees for foreign deployment, but many organizations still fail to prepare expatriates with the cultural knowledge, skills, and behaviors needed to successfully adapt to their cultural environment leading to premature early return or expatriate failure (Black, 1988, 1990). The key is to use cross-cultural training to help them through the most difficult periods of Oberg's (1960) stage theory of culture shock in which expatriates can reach an effective stage of acculturation.

The purpose of this study is to assess the adequacy of cross-cultural training in the preparation of expatriates from low context culture to work in high context culture. The objective is to gain greater understanding about the training process during the U-curve transitional period of pre-departure and post-arrival stages. The results garnered can be added to the body of knowledge to address acculturation issues and how training can be delivered in the various stages to combat culture shock and equip expatriates to satisfactorily perform and complete their work assignment in a high context culture.

Background of the Problem

Cross-cultural training should provide an expatriate (expat) with the knowledge, social skills, and behaviors needed to adapt and to interact with the host culture (Ward & Kennedy, 1996; Cross, 1995; Searle & Ward, 1990; Grove & Torbiorn, 1985; Juffer, 1986). It is also used to provide them with psychological adjustment, and to ensure that they perform well and have comfortably adjusted to their

living and work environments (Oberg, 1960 as cited in Selmer, Chiu, & Shenkar, 2007). However, cross-cultural training methods that acculturate and assimilate expats from a low context culture into a high context culture are resulting in negative outcomes based on poor job performance and dissatisfaction because of differences in national culture (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Merritt, 2000). Research studies on expatriates who have undergone cross-cultural training posit that the modes of delivery and training content tend to be a one size fits all approach and do not create a training program that adapts to the cultural distance of the two different cultures (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005).

Cross-cultural training has been ineffective for the retention of expatriates in organizations for several reasons. Research has also shown that expats usually tend to have severe culture shock and that that culture shock predicts expatriate failure in measurable terms through an individual's job satisfaction and performance (Oberg, 1960; Wheeler, Gallagher, Brouer, & Sablynski, 2007). Training does not tend to include specific behaviors or skills needed to cope with culture shock or skills needed on the job which may correlate with an expatriate's inability to maintain a high level of job performance and satisfaction within the organization (Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman, 2011; Treven, 2003).

The problem with cross-cultural training is a lack of profundity and robustness in cultural awareness. The duration of the training tends to be too short and not given on-site. Pre-departure training is given in the expatriate's home country prior to their departure (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014). The brief period of training that is given prior to departure or included as part of an employee's first day of orientation training, does not focus on behavioral changes that will help to impact the employee's performance and satisfaction or address acculturation and culture shock which occurs over time (Selmer et al., 1998 as cited in Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007; Befus, 1998; Church, 1982). Pre-departure training was found to effectively make it easier for an expat to acculturate (Black, 1988, 1990; Black & Gregersen, 1991). However, many organizations simply do not include adequate preparation through pre-departure training (McFarlin & Sweeney, 2006; McEnery & DesHarnais, 1990 as cited in Shen & Lang, 2009). Similarly, organizations do not typically offer post arrival training either which has been found to address the specific issues and needs of an expatriate while they are living in the country (Shay & Baack, 2004).

Research has studied the relationship between expatriate failure, poor job performance, and overall dissatisfaction which may be outcomes of a non-existent or poorly made cross-cultural training program (Tung, 1981, 1982; Mendenhall, Dunbar & Oddou, 1987 as cited in Shen & Lang, 2009; Black & Gregersen, 1990; Birdseye & Hill, 1995). Most training that happens during the pre-departure phase tends to focus on brief overviews of the host country but does not provide enough rigor in training about the differences between a high and low context culture, how to communicate or behave in a high context culture, and the appropriate behaviors that are needed (Shen & Lang, 2009; Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007). The training does not usually engage the expatriate in simulating problems or provide them with the coping mechanisms about how to overcome culture shock and psychological stress (Befus, 1988).

After the training most expats lack an understanding on how to recognize culture shock (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk, 2005; Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman, 2011), how to self-evaluate themselves in the acculturation process (Hussain & Deery, 2017; Varner & Palmer, 2005), and how to effectively respond with the right skills and behaviors that are culturally appropriate to the host country (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Peretz & Rosenblatt, 2011; Waxin, 2004). Most times the training does not indicate the degree of cultural distance or communicate about how those differences may affect the expatriate over time (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Selmer, Chiu, & Shenkar, 2007) and does not present them with the social aspects that distinguishes the expatriate's national culture of origin and the host country's cultural values and norms for effective work and living adjustment (Befus, 1988; Bennett, 1986; Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Peltokorpi, 2006).

Purpose Statement

This study examined cross cultural training and assessed the adequacy of the training in the preparation of expatriates from low context culture to work in high context culture. This conceptual research utilized qualitative approach by using the findings from empirical studies to develop a theoretical framework to elucidate how cross-cultural training can be structured to be more relevant in the

preparation of the expats. The U curve adjustment theory was used as the context to the transitional process for the expat adjustment experience from selection to deployment. The objective is to gain valuable knowledge to develop appropriate training for the pre-departure and the post-arrival stages of the foreign assignment. Empirical findings were examined, and pertinent training elements were identified that should be incorporated in cross cultural training programs.

This research is of profound significance to all organizations that employ a culturally diverse workforce that operate in both low and high context cultures and are faced with international human resource management issues. Companies now must compete in a global business landscape, but workers face unique challenges when having to assimilate personally and professionally in overseas work assignments. It is imperative that cross-cultural training methods emphasize the right types of training that will be necessary for an expatriate to succeed no matter where they choose to live or work around the world.

U-Curve Adjustment Theory

Lysgaard (1955) developed the U-curve of adjustment theory to describe the adjustment pattern of Norwegian students in the United States. The theory stated that adjustment tends to be general or specific and over time and contours to a U shape. Black & Mendenhall (1991) gave an outline of the four stages in the adjustment period. In the first six months, adjustment is easy and successful. This is termed the honeymoon period. In the next six to eighteen months, adjustment is difficult and unhappy and is termed the crisis or culture shock stage. After eighteen months the adjustment is good, and this period is called the adjustment stage. The last stage is the mastery level where the individuals are functioning effectively in the new culture

Black & Mendenhall (1991) stated the adjustment period for a new culture is a learning process and suggested that social learning theory is relevant framework that can be used to examine it. They further stated that social learning theory provides a theoretical explanation of how the general cross-cultural adjustment would exhibit a U-curve pattern. This research is built on Black & Mendenhall (1991) proposition that the U curve adjustment theory is a logical theoretical grounding for discussing the cross-cultural adjustment process, and proposed that for training to be effective and relevant, it must be delivered throughout the stages of the U curve adjustment period.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-cultural Training Methods

The three most common types of cross-cultural training methods that are currently being used for high context culture job deployment are interaction, didactic, and cultural awareness training (Black & Mendenhall, 1989; Earley, 1987; Tung, 1981; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Morris & Robie, 2001; Befus, 1988). These training methods are being delivered to low-context expatriates within organizations that are operating in high-context cultures, but do not take into consideration the degree of cultural distance (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005).

Interaction training which is also referred to as "the personal experience", uses interactions and pre-observational methods in order to successfully acculturate and to gain skills for adjustment in tight cultures (Osland & Bird, 2000). It can take the form of informally watching locals in the host country and remarking on the differences which can be good preparation for actually interacting with members of the host country (Lee & Larwood, 1983). Pazy & Zeira (1983) stated that interaction training can be integrated with an expat's work in daily life. When expats are not on the job, interaction training for tight cultures also incorporates expats outside of work in order to learn how to get along with the locals of their host country. Waxin & Panaccio (2005) posited that the benefits of this type of training is the greatest due to the fact that many expatriates are able to learn from other expatriates through on and off the job activities.

Cultural awareness training strives to teach the expatriates about their own culture so that they will appreciate cultural differences between the host and home countries (Befus, 1988). This training strategy

assumes that individuals with a more developed understanding of their own culture will be more effective in overseas assignments (Bennett, 1986). Waxin & Panaccio (2005) stated that cultural awareness training tends to require a level of self-awareness through an examination of a self-assessment of the expatriate before and then after arrival. They further stated that it can be a challenging area of a cross-cultural training program because the training is typically given during the pre-departure stage of training and do not lead to an understanding of the culture by expatriates who have no concept or experience with a host culture, especially if there is greater cultural distance between the culture of origin and the host culture.

Didactic training has been a widely practiced and is used by more than two thirds of the multinational corporations offering cross-cultural training. It is a generalized approach using a conventional type of learning which is composed of reading literature that provides information about the new country's culture, receiving pamphlets or other documents. (Waxin & Pannacio, 2005; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). Informal briefings can be conducted in a wide variety of ways, including casual conversations with recently returned expatriates, structured information sessions with experts, host country nationals, and former expatriates, or the provision of information booklets on the host country (Brewster, 1995; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). The expatriates are given factual information on working conditions, living conditions of the host country, and cultural differences (Bennett, 1986). Information-giving activities are used to enhance the cognitive skills that enable the expatriate to understand the host culture. In addition, they provide the expatriate with a framework for evaluating new situations that will be encountered (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Morris & Robie, 2001).

Modes of Delivery

The modes of delivery discussed in the literature mainly include in-house lectures, cultural assimilation, mentoring, field experience, work overlap and interviews with repatriates, current expatriates and host country nationals (Black and Mendenhall, 1990; Harris, Brewster and Sparrow 2003; Edwards and Rees 2006; Littrell et al. 2006 as cited in Shen & Lang, 2009). Field experience exposes trainees to the emotional stress of living and working with people from different cultures through orientation visits in the country of assignment. Work overlap requires the trainee to work overseas for a short period (Dowling, Festing and Engle 2008). The training modes of delivery, such as classroom lectures, films, demonstrations, case studies, simulation exercises, and programmed instructions are typically considered off the job training (preparing the employee for adaptation to the host country culture) as opposed to on the job training (preparing the employee for work related roles and responsibilities) (Treven, 2003).

Black & Mendenhall cited Bandura (1977) social learning theory and which stated that in-house training mode and lectures is not the best to prepare people for deployment and, behavior is learned from the environment through interaction. It is thus inferred that the best training when people learn from being deployed into the new culture. Expatriates need to immerse themselves for a week or two to experience the cultural elements and observe human interaction.

The Stages of Delivery for Cross-cultural Training

Research has shown that cross-cultural training is delivered primarily during the pre-departure stage but rarely includes post-arrival training (Selmer et al., 1998; Shay & Baack, 2004 as cited in Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007). The pre-departure stage is when organizations train individuals for their international assignment utilizing some basic cultural awareness training about the host country, and didactic form, distributing official documents to help the expatriate prepare for living and working once they arrive, and a brief overview about what to expect as well as some of the customary societal rules and behaviors that expatriates should be made aware of in order to ensure they are following the rules in the host country (Selmer et al., 1998 as cited in Shin, Morgeson, & Campion, 2007). Most organizations will include at least some pre-departure training, or the expatriate will often need to be proactive in learning as much about the culture as possible prior to arrival.

The post-arrival stage is the most significant stage for expatriates because it is when they begin to interact with the host country nationals and are starting to learn how to adjust their behaviors to the host country's cultural norms and values for adaptation to life and for better performance (Shay & Baack, 2004). Most expatriates have this type of immersive training after they have arrived in the host culture, but this method can also be problematic as it is mixed with high levels of culture shock often present at this phase of acculturation. However, the benefits of this type of training is the greatest due to the fact that many expatriates are able to learn from other expatriates through on and off the job activities (Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). One of the gaps in research and in practice is a lack of post-arrival training. Cross-cultural training needs to be delivered in strategic modes that have been carefully selected so that expatriates learn to adjust their behavior, to overcome culture shock, and to help them to perform better at their jobs. Current post-arrival is limited to a focus on the expatriate's first month or two on the job and on living accommodations (Shay & Baack, 2004).

The Failure to Acculturate

Expatriate failure is typically measured by an employee's job performance and job satisfaction as an outcome of the success or failure to acculturate to a host country's culture which leads them to leave their assignment early or leave the organization to join a new one. Expatriate failure is usually attributed to culture shock and poor mental health in individuals and the inability to effectively resolve complex cultural problems that arise out of particular situations in the host country (Muecke, Lenthall, & Lindeman, 2011).

Black (1988) did a case study of American expatriates in Japan in order to examine adjustment through work roles, interaction with Japanese nationals, and the general culture and everyday life. The study links expatriate failure to a lack of knowledge about the appropriate behaviors needed to adjust to the culture shock stages found between stage 2 and 3 of culture shock theory. It also links expatriate failure to a lack of pre-departure knowledge and found that some pre-departure training does facilitate adjustment.

Black and Gregersen (1991) examined previous international work experience, cultural training, time spent in the country, interaction with home and host nationals, personal and other general factors that significantly affect cross-cultural. The results of the study showed that the failure to adjust in overseas assignments are associated with a lack of anticipatory adjustment that pre-departure training provides for the individual about information regarding the overseas position and the culture in which the job is located. What emerged from the Black and Gregersen (1991) study was pre-departure training will be less significant if the home and host cultures are culturally distant from one another and thus company-wide pre-departure training requires more time and training rigor for training to be effective.

Cotton and Tuttle (1986) conducted a meta-analysis and employee perceptions of work-related factors included pay, job performance, role clarity, task receptiveness, satisfaction with pay, with the work itself, with supervision, with co-workers, with promotional opportunities, the employee's organizational commitment, interaction and participation, intrinsic value of work, job autonomy, job involvement, job stress, career variables, and overall job satisfaction. Cotton and Tuttle (1986) results similarly agree with Black and Gregersen (1990) in that a combination of work-related factors and personal characteristics contributes to employee turnover. Black and Gregersen (1990) suggested that work role clarity and over met expectations about the general environment indicated a positive association with expatriate overall satisfaction to living and work satisfaction. The results indicated that general satisfaction was the strongest predictor of intent to leave the assignment early.

Birdseye and Hill (1995) examined the relationship between expatriate turnover and job satisfaction. The results projected that organizations are directly impacted with an expatriate's intent to leave when they do not develop and implement a successful cross-cultural training method that enables an expatriate to have a level of job autonomy and to live independently. Treven (2003) paper emphasized that cross-cultural training should include learning the appropriate behaviors, interpersonal styles, and how to communicate in business meetings and social gatherings as part of working and living in a new cultural environment. Treven's (2003) is based on theories of Hofstede's dimensions of cultural values as well as

Hall's approach to high- and low-context cultures. It specifically addresses the impact of Hall's high and low context framework to cross-cultural training to increase understanding about culture and motivation of employees, communication, conflict resolution and organizational changes.

Peltokorpi and Froese (2014) study of 191 Western continent expatriates in metropolitan areas in Brazil and Japan examined the interactive effects of host country context (Brazil and Japan) and expatriate personality traits on job satisfaction. The theoretical framework was drawn from the cultural fit hypothesis. Expatriates with high Cultural Empathy had higher job satisfaction in Japan than in Brazil; Social Initiative had a stronger influence on expatriate job satisfaction in Brazil than Japan. The cultural fit hypothesis between a host country's cultural values, norms and personality traits and the personality traits that predict expatriate adjustment in the host country (Searle & Ward, 1990 as cited in Peltokorpi and Froese, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate cross-cultural trainings that are used to prepare expatriates to work in high context culture and to assess their adequacy for expats to successfully complete the duties of their job. Findings from the empirical studies revealed that cross-cultural training is not a one-off process but a continuous process. For the training to be effective it must be performed throughout the stages of the expats transition to match with the U-curve of cross-cultural adjustment. Training is most effective when done in both stages of transition, pre-departure and post-arrival. Pre-departure training should be done before and during the honeymoon period. While post-arrival training should be performed in the honeymoon, culture shock and adjustment periods. The empirical studies highlighted five elements that should be included in cross-cultural training. The elements are Anticipatory Adjustment, Cultural Distance, Cultural Congruency, Diversity Training and Mode of Delivery.

Anticipatory Adjustment

For the training to be effective it must provide the relevant information for anticipatory adjustment. According to Black & Mendenhall (1991) anticipatory adjustment is how individuals choose to respond in various future situations. Pre-departure training must contain information on living and working conditions and overseas position and the culture in which the job is located. Strubler, Park, & Agarwal (2011) purported to increase anticipatory adjustment, training should incorporate a more detailed model that includes language and culture-specific training, general cross-cultural training, diversity training, and interpersonal communication and skill training. Previous experience such as assignments to work on international training teams and making short-term visits to the host country prior to a long-term assignment is also instrumental in increasing anticipatory adjustment.

Black & Mendenhall (1991) proposed that if training increases the individual's attention to and retention of the information, this will have a positive effect on the actual reproduction of the anticipatorily determined behaviors in the new culture. Black (1988), Black and Gregersen (1991) stated that post arrival experience is also crucial to proper adjustment. The results also indicated that interaction outside of work with home and host country nationals were important to adjustment.

Cultural Distance

Several empirical findings revealed that the more culture distant that exists between the host and home country the more pre-departure training is needed. Waxin and Panaccio (2005) results found that prior international experience and cultural distance did have an effect on the expatriate work adjustment. They stated that cross-cultural training accelerates expatriate adjustment and that the type of cross-cultural training mattered. Their research also indicated that pre-move training and cross-cultural briefings increase interaction adjustment through conventional and experimental training methods.

Black and Gregersen (1991) stated that pre-departure training will be less significant if the home and host cultures are culturally distant from one another and thus company-wide pre-departure training requires more time and training rigor for training to be effective. Varner and Palmer (2005) studies

suggested that expatriates operate more effectively in cultures that are similar to their own in either a low or high context culture. Peltokorpi (2006) results indicated that language differences, status hierarchies, collectivism, and logical differences can create barriers to knowledge sharing between employees of different cultures, age, and hierarchies primarily due to the cultural context of Hall's (1960) high and low contextual framework. National culture differences should be a significant consideration in cross-cultural knowledge training since it shapes an individual's habits, styles, communication styles, language, logic, and informs others about how to behave in a given situation.

Cultural Congruent

Candidates with personality characteristics that are highly congruent with the host countries benefitted more from cross-cultural training. Black (1990) concluded that selecting individuals for foreign assignments who have high levels of cultural flexibility, social orientation, collaborative conflict resolution orientations, and who have a low degree of ethnocentricity and will have better results in retaining the training and completing their assignment.

Varner and Palmer (2005) stated that in order for the training to be considered effective, the expatriate has to be able to have both self-knowledge and self-awareness in order to adjust their own behaviors that are appropriate to the host country. Cultural awareness training is only as relevant and effective as the expatriate's awareness of their own cultural values and understands how they differ from the host country's cultural values in addition to company actions that can support their development.

Methods and Modes of Delivery

Methods and modes of delivery are important for the expats to acquire the requisite skills. Experimental training methods were the most effective in relationship to overcoming cultural barriers due to cultural distance between host and parent countries. (Forster, 2000; Brewster, 1995; Waxin et al., 1997; Selmer, 2000 & Waxin & Panaccio, 2005). The results further provided evidence that experimental methods of training can be the most effective for hard cultures or for cultures that are vastly different from one's own. Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014 purported that the ability to deliver the training in the right modes is needed in order to ensure that the information is communicated to the expatriate so that it has an impact on them to be able to adjust by giving them coping strategies, such as appropriate behavioral responses, to ensure a high level of expatriate satisfaction at work and in daily life.

Luna (1998) results showed that the mode of delivery is a vital component in teaching cultural value differences about the host country and transferring this knowledge to the expatriate. Discussing cultural values too early in a program and using experiential and participatory activities to engage the emotions of people to think about cultural values too early may precipitate division of the group and create an additional barrier to achieving culturally congruent knowledge and practices.

Post-arrival Diversity Training

Cross-cultural training should not only be given to expatriates but also to host country nationals. Host country nationals should also be given the chance to become informed about the cultural characteristics of the expatriate home country through cultural-diversity training. The organization should increase awareness of cultural differences in work-interactions and leadership styles can diminish culture-based misunderstandings and negative stereotypes (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2014).

Interaction training endeavors are based on the assumption that incoming expatriates learn best from expatriates already occupying their position with the overseas organization (Befus, 1988). For example, work overlaps, otherwise known as on-the-job training, are the most common form of interactional training used in expatriate preparation. During the overlap period, the experienced expatriate can facilitate hands-on training regarding business practices and life in general (Brewster, 1995 as cited in Littrell, 2006).

Waxin and Panaccio (2005) revealed that cross-cultural training must be in accordance with the hardness of the culture of the host country. The cultural distance is negatively related to adjustment, so the more different that culture is from the country of origin, the more cross-cultural training is necessary.

Pre-departure training should also be given in the host country in real-time after expatriate's have arrived and be required rather than voluntary (Briody & Chrisman, 1991, Selmer, 2001, Mendenhall & Stahl, 2000 as cited in Waxin & Panaccio, 2005).

Waxin (2004) results establish that culture of origin has a direct effect on interaction adjustment and a moderator effect on its antecedents. Research conducted has provided evidence that intercultural training is positively related to expatriate adjustment and increases interaction behaviors and helps them to develop the skills needed to adjust to the host culture environment (Black et al., 1991; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992, Eschbach, Parker, & Stoeberl, 2001 as cited in Waxin, 2004).

CONCLUSION

In assessing the adequacy of cross-cultural training programs, empirical findings highlighted that five elements should be included in the framework. The five elements of anticipatory adjustment, cultural distance, cultural congruency, modes and methods and cultural diversity training framework would make a training program more adequate and could be instrumental in improving expatriate's performance and completion of foreign assignments.

Cross cultural training programs content must incorporate both culture-specific and general cross-cultural training information. Content must also include detailed information on cultural and job conditions, so the expats can develop and increase their anticipatory adjustment. The greater the cultural distance between host and the home countries, the training programs should have more rigor and length. Selection criteria of candidates for foreign deployment are paramount to seek candidates who possess characteristics that are cultural congruent with the host country. If this is not plausible, the training period should be extended and increased in rigor and content.

The types of cross-cultural training methods and modes are crucial to the how quickly the expats will adjust in the new cultural environment. It is important that three most common training methods are utilized with the appropriate modes. During the pre-departure stage it is recommended that didactic and cultural awareness training be done. Training should be for reasonable length of time and incorporate the appropriate rigor and modes. For the post-arrival stage, the training method should be interaction and cultural awareness. Cross-cultural training should not only be limited to the expatriates but should be extended to the host country nationals also. Post-arrival diversity training can increase awareness of cultural similarities and differences of both the host and home countries and by so doing encourage greater interaction. Greater interaction can increase cultural intelligent that can lead to faster adjustment of the expats.

The important assertions from this study are that cross-cultural training should be continuous from pre-departure to post-arrival and not one-off phenomenon. If the training is match with the U curve pattern of adjustment, there is increased probability that expats would be more likely to adjust well in their new cultural environment and be better able to perform and complete their assignments.

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