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ORIENTATION TO ANOTHER SOCIETY

TRAINING FOR INTERCULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

In recent years we have witnessed a tremendous growth in programs of cultural exchange. A large number of scholars, scientists, and other professionals travel to other societies for periods extending from several months to several years. This phenomenon is no longer confined to a few countries but has become world-wide in scope. We are indeed living in a world where no country can exist in isolation. And with further growth in transportation, network, and communication technology, it is expected that interdependence among nations will become greater and greater. This would result in a further increase and proliferation of programs of cultural exchange involving a growing number of scholars and professionals in intercultural interactions. The purpose of this paper is to briefly review the nature of this intercultural interaction, discuss some of the problems involved in effectively adjusting to a new cultural environment, and to suggest ways of developing orientation as well as training programs for intercultural effectiveness.

INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION

First, it is necessary to discuss the nature of intercultural interaction.¹⁾ For the purpose of foreign cultural traits, habits, or norms. As illustration, let us assume two persons A and B belonging to cultures A' and B'.

¹⁾ "Culture" is defined in the anthropological sense. For the purpose of this paper, however, it is treated synonymously with the concept of a "society" or a "nation".



Figure 1: Persons in their own culture

As shown in figure 1, each person is operating in his own culture. Thus there is no intercultural interaction involved. If person B now moves to Culture A' (figure 2) or person A moves to Culture B' (figure 3), we have situations involving intercultural interaction. These situations can be further differentiated depending



Figure 2: Intercultural Interaction

Figure 3: Intercultural Interaction

upon whether the move is of a permanent or a temporary nature. If the move is permanent as in the case of immigration to a new country, the nature of intercultural interaction will be different than in the case where the move is temporary as in, for example, cultural exchange. The main difference involves the degree to which the old culture serves as a reference group. Also the criteria for effectiveness are different in the two cases. In the former case, the more the immigrant is *assimilated* into the new culture, the more effective the process. In the latter case, the same result would constitute an ineffective outcome. The purpose here is to increase intercultural sensitivity by developing genuine awareness and appreciation of the new culture, but preserve the status of one's own culture as the dominant reference group. In designing training and orientation programs for cultural exchange, it is essential to keep the above distinction clearly in mind.

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND EFFECTIVE INTERACTION

As mentioned in the earlier section, acquiring intercultural sensitivity is the key to effective interaction in the case of cultural exchange programs. There is no single key which will open the door to intercultural sensitivity. The keys that will unlock the door are human awareness, understanding of self, and knowledge of others.²⁾

²⁾ For more detailed discussion of these areas, see Clarence C. Chaffee, (1971).

Each of us abstracts from a given environment only a small portion of what is accessible to us. This abstracting process takes place through perceptual filters which are highly subjective in nature. As a matter of fact, much of this filtering takes place at an unconscious level, the individual often being unaware that abstracting is taking place at all.

One result of this filtering process is that we develop stereotypes about people from other cultures. Once developed, these stereotypes are difficult to change. And this reduces our capacity to perceive others as they are.

The ultimate purpose of effective intercultural interaction is to gain knowledge of others. But this can only be achieved if we gain self-understanding. And gaining this self-understanding requires that we be aware of our own filters and stereotypes. This process of becoming aware of one's limitations is not easy and is often painful. Ways should be sought, therefore, to both heighten awareness in the individual and, at the same time, reduce the pain that it can bring.

Effective interaction means giving of yourself — trying to see the world of others and to respect their life-ways. It means not forcing your ways on them. Yet at the same time, it means being true to yourself and your ways. To be really effective, interaction must be a two-way street, or of course, it is not interaction at all. That is, all interacting individuals should be attempting to do so from the basis of awareness, understanding and knowledge.

TRAINING FOR INTERCULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

Having outlined the nature of intercultural interaction and the processes involved in making it effective, we now turn to the "what and how" issues in designing an orientation and training program for participants of cultural exchange programs.

TO TRAIN OR NOT TO TRAIN

In recent years, many training programs were developed without asking why training is needed. There are some people who can effectively adjust to a new society without having the benefit of any type of training. In his intercultural research, the author has met some scholars all around the world who work very effectively in intercultural situations. These people are, however, relatively rare. A few years ago, the author interviewed international executives

about their experiences abroad. And only a few executives reported a successful experience. The others identified problem areas in which training prior to an overseas assignment would have been very useful.

The experience of Foreign Student Advisors in universities, Peace Corps volunteers, other "exchange promoting" programs, as well as of multinational corporations all point to the need and desirability of proper selection and training programs.

ROLE OF SELECTION

It is not the purpose of this paper to discuss the role of selection. It is, however, necessary to indicate that selection plays a very important role in determining the effectiveness of any assignment abroad. Generally the selection is based on the technical qualifications of the individual involved. Though this is a necessary requirement, it is not sufficient for selecting a person to be sent abroad. One must also consider his motives as well as other personality characteristics. People want to go overseas for a variety of reasons. Some of these motives involve a desire to travel and learn, sense of mission, professional development, and desire to help. The other set of motives involve the desire to escape a work situation, escape a personal situation, etc. Also some people are selected for overseas assignments by their superiors because they may not be performing well at home. Probably no one should be rejected for overseas work solely on the basis of why they want to go — with the exception of those who want to go because they feel it will be easier to work abroad than at home. (An overseas assignment is likely to be more difficult.) It is also desirable that the people who are to be sent abroad have a genuine desire to learn.

TRAINING

Assuming that the selection process has been appropriately handled, we now turn to the question of designing the training program. In this section, we will discuss what areas should be covered in training.

AREAS TO BE COVERED BY TRAINING

Effective orientation and training programs must be designed to focus on the essential environmental differences which the exchange scholar will face. The environmental factors can be broadly categorized into two groups: physical

factors and socio-cultural factors. Socio-cultural factors can be further subdivided into three main groups: language, customs, and cultural attitudes. The problems of each group of environmental factors will be summarized briefly to provide a basis for discussion of training requirements.

PHYSICAL FACTORS

The problem of adjustment to different climatic conditions is probably the most obvious. A person from a cold climate may find it hard to adjust to conditions of heat and high humidity and vice versa. A person going from a relatively developed country to a much less developed place may also encounter such things as unsanitary conditions, inadequate housing, etc.

An orientation program should include full and complete briefing regarding these factors and how these may be handled. These briefings should be preferably carried out by someone who has had first-hand experience of the situation being discussed. It is also essential that wives be included in such an orientation session.

LANGUAGE

The problem of language is probably the most obvious of the sociocultural environmental differences to be encountered by the exchange scholar. There is no doubt that fluency in the local language can greatly aid the task of attempting to understand the other cultural differences. When the exchange scholar must rely solely on interpreters he is at an obvious disadvantage.

Even a partial knowledge of the language can be helpful. This is true not only because the exchange scholar who knows the language to some extent can understand more of what happens around him, but perhaps more importantly, he hereby demonstrates to the local nationals that he is interested in their country and themselves.

Finally, the very process of learning a language gives a further insight into the modes of thinking and the culture of the country. The use of particular words and the way in which they are spoken derive from and express the customs and cultural attitudes of the people.

CUSTOMS

Included under the heading of customs are those habitual actions which are typical of the members of a culture. The nature of the customs

and the degree to which they differ from those of one's own culture will vary widely from country to country. Some will impress the scholar favorably, others may seem somewhat strange, and some may strike him as unacceptable or distasteful.

The task for the exchange scholar is to view these customs with an open mind. He must avoid the temptation to evaluate them on the basis of his own set of standards which derive from a varyingly differing environment. He will not be expected to embrace all the customs and practice them as his own but he will be wise to understand the customs and respect them. The man with the ability to look at things from the other person's viewpoint soon realizes that his own set of customs include many which appear strange to others.

Understanding of the customs of the country enables the exchange scholar to create an environment in his dealings with his local national associates in which the local national feels at ease, thereby removing one obstacle to free the effective communication.

CULTURAL ATTITUDES

Every culture evidences attitudes which are held by its members with sufficient frequency to make understanding of these attitudes useful in understanding the behavior of the group and its members. Obviously, not every member of a society thinks or acts in the same manner but there are certain prevalent attitudes which are characteristic of one culture, but not of another.

One way to categorize cultural attitudes is as follows:³⁾

1. Attitudes toward other people.
2. Moral standards — codes of conduct
3. Social status attitudes
4. Attitudes toward individual work

Attitudes toward others involve the difference between group-oriented and individualistic personalities. For example, in Japan, the group-oriented personality is more valued. In other countries, there is much greater stress on individual action.

Moral standards vary widely. What may be an acceptable code of conduct in one culture may

³⁾ This categorization is based on the work of Fayerweather (1960).

be considered immoral in another culture. Bribery, for example, may be an accepted business procedure in some countries.

In many societies, people are more concerned with their title than the pay they receive. Also, societies differ significantly in terms of the social status ascribed to various professions.

Attitude toward work varies widely. In some countries, the individual may tend to adhere rigorously to the established methods of doing things. In other countries, there may be more emphasis on independent action.

Understanding of cultural attitudes is difficult but extremely necessary. If the exchange scholar is selecting his course of action and evaluating the behavior of others on the basis of his own set of attitudes, he is very likely to misinterpret and choose less than optimum alternatives.

Again, it is not suggested that the exchange scholar adopt completely the attitudes of the new culture at the expense of his old attitudes. However, if he is to function efficiently, he must seek to understand the cultural attitudes and take account of them so that he can base his decisions upon them when necessary.

CULTURE SHOCK

The immediate effect of being faced with many environmental changes at once is termed culture shock. The first few months in the new environment can be difficult as the newcomer attempts to adjust to many new ways of doing things. Some never overcome this initial shock and are not successful in their overseas assignments. Others, who had prepared themselves to accept the differences and were eager to learn and enjoy the discoveries which such a situation provides in abundance, pass easily through the initial period of adjustment and go on to many rewarding experiences. One goal of any training program should be to assist the individual in making the culture shock as mild and brief as possible.

TRAINING TECHNIQUES

Available training techniques can be classified into two categories: »traditional« and »experiential.« The traditional method emphasizes *cognitive* learning using such information-giving techniques as lectures, films, case studies, books and journal articles. The purpose here is to develop intellectual and analytical skills. The

experiential method, on the other hand, emphasizes *affective* learning and is aimed at the development of behavioral and action skills. It employs such techniques as simulation, role playing, field tests, discussion groups, T-groups (sensitivity training), and self-confrontation techniques.

In the experiential method, the learning takes place when trainees generate data through their interaction and are helped by the staff to analyze the data and the interaction process. Thus the emphasis in this type of training is on process rather than content. The schedule is flexible and trainees are allowed to develop in their unique way. The role of the staff is that of a guide rather than an authority figure.

TRAINING PROGRAMS

Most of the existing intercultural training programs tend to emphasize primarily cognitive learning using traditional methods, while some programs, for example, those of the Peace Corps have experimented with experiential methods. The author has been involved in several intercultural training programs in the United States, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia.⁴) These programs have involved foreign students, exchange scholars, executives and administrators with overseas assignments. Based on these experiences, the author believes that a »systems approach« combining cognitive as well as affective learning is essential for developing training programs for intercultural effectiveness. An outline of such a program is offered below.

AN ILLUSTRATIVE PROGRAM

Most of the existing programs of intercultural training focus on imparting information to the trainee about the difference in the physical environment, provide language training, and sometimes supply information about customs. The emphasis in these training programs is on cognitive learning using traditional methods. Many of these tend to ignore problems of attitude and of cultural awareness. Some programs that touch upon these problems do not seem to have them as their central focus nor do they seem to emphasize methods of training which are best designed to cope with problems of attitudes. The proposed program considers problems of attitudes to be both important and highly interrelated with other environmental factors.

⁴) For further details, see R. Nath (1968).

In developing a training program on the subjects of language, customs, and cultural attitudes, it becomes apparent that different teaching methods seem to have better application to one area than another. At the same time, it is apparent that the three subject areas overlap. It is impossible to talk for very long about one without bringing up some aspect of another. For that reason, the training program can be thought of as a system made up of three interrelated subsystems.

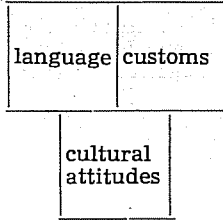


Figure 4: The Environmental System

These three subsystems should be considered individually in detail, but the interrelations between them makes it essential that the training program be structured so as to emphasize the total environmental system. The key to the understanding of the total system is the subsystem of cultural attitudes. Fluency in the language and knowledge of the customs provide tools which can make understanding of the cultural attitudes easier. It is important, however, not to assume that just because a person has gained fluency in the language and appears at ease with the customs, that he thereby can "understand" automatically the cultural attitudes of the country. The trainee has spent many years building up his own set of attitudes. The training program must have as its major goal the creation of a situation which will stimulate self-analysis of the trainee's own attitudes and provide him with a framework within which to evaluate the cultural attitudes of his overseas environment.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Language can best be taught by an intensive program which requires constant practice on the part of the learner. The availability of a language laboratory can further facilitate the process of learning a new language.

CUSTOMS

Several training methods can be integrated to provide a helpful coverage of the customs of a particular culture. Reading lists, films, discussion groups, and role playing would allow sufficient opportunity for the trainee to participate

actively in the learning process. If language study is a part of the program, many of the customs can be dealt with in that segment of training.

Reading lists will allow the trainee to gain a knowledge of the customs through the eyes of more than one observer. Films will permit the trainee to observe the practice of certain customs and point out instances of their misuse. Discussion of the readings and films should be led by an individual with personal knowledge of the country being discussed. Through role playing, the trainee will actually gain experience with the customs and learn the proper behavior suggested by each.

Throughout the training sessions on customs, the interrelation between the exchange scholar and the foreign society as defined by customs should be stressed. There may be some customs which it would be unwise for the scholar to adopt because to do so might be viewed as condescension. The adoption of others might be looked upon favorably and the scholar could improve his communication with his local national associates by practicing these customs. Still others would depend on the particular individual and situation involved. A thorough understanding of the customs and the reasons for them will aid the scholar in his attempt to respect the customs and will increase his chance of gaining similar respect from the nationals of the country he is visiting.

CULTURAL ATTITUDES

A comprehensive study of the language and customs of a country puts the trainee in a good position to learn and understand the cultural attitudes underlying much of the behavior of the citizens of that country. If any benefit is to be derived from studying cultural attitudes, it must be presented with the goal of challenging the presently held attitudes of the trainee. It is not an attempt to exchange all of the trainees' old attitudes for a new set corresponding to those of the culture of the country to which he is assigned. The trainee should, however, come away with the attitude that the cultural attitudes are not "strange", simply because they differ from his own. The measure of success of the training program is the degree to which the trainee understands these cultural attitudes and sees them not as a threat to his own integrity but as a valuable *additional* frame of reference within which to make decisions in his new environment.

A valuable tool for examining problems of cultural attitudes involves dealing with the "self-re-

ference criterion" — the unconscious reference to one's own cultural values (Lee, 1966). Lee proposed a four-step analysis system to isolate and eliminate the self-reference problem:

1. Define the problem or goal in terms of one's own cultural traits, habits, or norms.
2. Define the problem or goal in terms of the no value judgments.
3. Isolate the influence of the self-reference criterion in the problem and examine it to see how it complicates the problem.
4. Redefine the problem without the influence of the self-reference criterion and solve for the optimum goal situation.

Any useful study of foreign cultural attitudes should be matched with an equally intensive study of one's own cultural attitudes. The exchange scholar must accept the fact that his set of rules may have worked at home but they won't necessarily work in a new environment. In order to be able to correct this, he must achieve an understanding of the cultural attitudes of both countries.

The training in the subject area of cultural attitudes should rely heavily on experiential methods such as role playing and group discussion. Through participation in situations in which the trainee can see the results of his own attitudes and those of the foreign culture, he will gain an understanding of the problem that is not easily achieved in a lecture. Case studies presented in films for realism can also assist in pointing out the differences in behavior resulting from different attitudes.

By requiring active participation, the trainee can learn not simply to identify the different attitudes, but to incorporate them into a new set of standards which will enable him to modify his behavior in the light of the cultural attitudes prevailing in the host society.

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF A PROPOSED 10-DAY TRAINING PROGRAM

Table I provides a summary of important characteristics of a proposed program for intercultural effectiveness. As discussed earlier, the orientation about physical environmental differences involves cognitive learning and hence traditional methods of training. On the other hand, learning about cultural attitudes requires an affective type of learning and this can best be accomplished through the use of experiential methods. Language training and learning about

customs involve both cognitive and affective processes. This, therefore, requires the use of experiential training methods in addition to traditional methods.

A very important feature of the proposed program is that there is a gradual progression from cognitive to affective learning. In this design, the trainee is first encouraged to gain awareness of the new culture before engaging in more difficult processes of self-understanding and understanding of others. In our experience, such a design works better in intercultural training than a design which starts with exploration of self.

DURATION AND TIMING OF THE PROGRAM

Language training usually requires about 4—8 weeks of constant practice. It is desirable that some language training be completed prior to the departure time. This, of course, would be continued upon arrival in the new culture.

Most of the information about physical environmental differences can be written down and passed on to the trainee. In addition, a two-day orientation session may be organized. This session should be held well in advance of the departure date.

The training about customs may involve about three days. Some information about assignment-related customs should be provided prior to the departure date while most of the training in this area should be combined with cultural attitudes training.

The training about cultural attitudes should involve about five days. And this training should be conducted immediately upon arrival of the trainee in the new culture to minimize the effect of cultural shock. The staff conducting this training should have intercultural experience in addition to their expertise in experiential training techniques. It is also desirable to include several persons from the new culture as participants in the training program.

OTHER ISSUES

We have outlined above some important characteristics of an illustrative program of intercultural training. Let us now look at other issues related to this training.

First, we have treated language training as a separate module. Though language training is intimately related to the other two areas of

Table I: Some Characteristics of a Proposed 10-day Training Program for Intercultural Effectiveness

Characteristic	Physical Environment	Socio-Cultural Environment		Language
		Customs	Cultural Attitudes	
Type of Learning	Cognitive	Affective and Cognitive	Affective	Cognitive and Affective
Training Method	Traditional	Experiential and Traditional	Experiential	Traditional and Experiential
Duration	2 days	3 days	5 days	4-8 weeks
Timing	Prior to departure	Prior to departure and upon arrival in new culture	Upon arrival in new culture	Prior to departure and upon arrival in new culture

customs and cultural attitudes, it needs to be separately handled due to several practical considerations. In many countries, people speak fluently two or three languages. For these persons, language training may not be as much of a problem or need as for persons who know only one language. Also, intensive language training requires a rather long period (4—8 weeks). Though it is highly desirable, such a timespan may on occasion not be available. Finally, a scholar can acquire a working knowledge of a language upon arrival in the new country provided he is strongly motivated to do so.

Second, the proposed program is only one model for intercultural training. Ten days may be about the minimum time that should be allotted to such a training. During such a short period, one can only create an awareness of major issues involved in intercultural interaction. Thus the training program is just an introduction to a process of learning that should go on during the whole sojourn. If time and resources are available, it may be useful to include additional skill training in the training program. It may be also desirable to plan a one to two days' session in the middle of the stay and another one at the end of the sojourn.

Third, one must raise the issue of the role of family in the process of adjustment to a new society. When a person moves to a new country, he is going into two cultures. First is the professional culture where the differences are ones of degree. Second is the broader societal culture which he, and particularly his family, has to cope with in their private life. It is essential that problems of adjustment to both of these cultures be explored in any intercultural training program. Also, participation by wives in the training program is highly desirable.

Fourth, most programs of intercultural training were developed for persons going from a developed country to a less developed country or vice versa. What would be the problems if one were going from a developed to another developed country? In the latter case, there may not be major differences in such physical factors as living or working conditions. Also, customs may not differ as much as in the former case. Thus the greatest source of environmental differences would be cultural attitudes and, to some extent, factors of status. And both of these differences may be rather subtle. This would mean that the training program for scholars going from a developed to another developed country would need to emphasize the area of cultural attitudes. And such training should be conducted primarily through the use of experiential techniques.

The fifth issue is: who should do the training. In the case of international managers, the multinational corporation assumes the responsibility. In the case of students, this responsibility has been, sometimes, assumed by the Foreign Student Advisory Office in the host university. In the case of scholars, circumstances have varied widely. Sometimes, agencies in the host country have assumed the responsibility. In most cases, the scholar has been left to fend for himself. There is a need to develop more systematic procedures in this area. As indicated earlier, it is necessary to provide some orientation prior to departure. This should be arranged by the appropriate ministry, agency or institution which is responsible for handling the cultural exchange program. The training to be provided upon arrival in the new culture should be handled by the sponsoring agency or institution in the host country. And there should be a close coordination between these two agencies or institutions.

Another and more desirable alternative would be to create an Intercultural Training Institute. Such an institute could be located in every major receiving country. The Institute could engage both in intercultural training and applied research related to it. Its faculty could comprise scholars with intercultural experience. Such an institute could provide a genuine intercultural environment in which scholars could develop intercultural sensitivity — and the knowledge needed to make their assignment not only a professionally, but also humanly rewarding experience.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the world of today, there is a growing need for persons who have the sensitivity and the skill for effective intercultural interaction. Programs of cultural exchange have the opportunity to serve this need.

An exchange scholar may have all the required technical qualifications and yet may fail in his mission abroad if he lacks intercultural sensitivity.

An intercultural orientation and training program such as the one outlined in this paper should, therefore, be an integral part of any program of cultural exchange. This would not only enhance the effectiveness of the exchange program but might also help in the development of scholars with greater international perspective and understanding.

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