

Cross culture communication | literature review



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The aim of this chapter is to discuss the theoretical basis on the success of expatriates in their international assignments. In this chapter, the author discuss two main factors on the success of expatriates in their international assignments, namely, cross-cultural communication and the effectiveness of cross-cultural training. Finally, the author will draw a conclusion on the reason for expatriate failure.

Expatriates

The definition of an expatriate would be a skillful employee who is sent to work in another unit of the same company located in a foreign country, usually on a temporary basis. According to Eric J. Romero, several researchers further define an expatriate as someone who is linked to a single foreign country, who is able to hold a leadership role in their assignment (Pucik and Saba, 1998), who has high technical skill levels relative to personnel in the host country (Howard, 1992) and has a limited role or time for his or her assignment in the overseas location (Adler and Bartholomew, 1992).

Cross-Cultural Communication

By definition, communication is the sharing of meaning and timely information using formal and informal means (Anderson & Weitz, 1989). Effective communication has the elements of relevance and reliability, and transpires in a timely manner (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Communication has been recognised as one of the most critical factors influencing learning and expatriates evaluations of teaching effectiveness (Grunewald & Ackerman, 1986; Kelley et al., 1991; Conant et al., 1988; Faranda & Clarke, 2004). An

effective communication is identified as the ability to convey information so that it is not too difficult and could be understood (Heffernan et al., 2009).

Approximately 6, 000 languages are used in the world today. Some of the barriers to effective communications come from the differences in spoken language, the extent to which information is exchanged, the use of nonverbal behaviour, and consideration of time (Chitakornkijsil, 2010).

Expatriates should be able to communicate in a second or third language that both individuals are able to understand. When business associates have a common culture, they have a common context for communication; their communication needs to be effective (Mcenery and Desharnais, 1990).

Miscommunications and cross-culture misunderstanding are still likely to happen regardless of one's fluency in the second or third language of the receiver's culture. To prevent this from happening, expatriates now need to be able to communicate in the language of their customers, no matter where he/she is located. Before one can conclude that English is sufficient to engage in most international business activities, expatriates are required to consider the number and languages of the nations they shall be working with and the degree of interaction with host-country nationals. According to Mcenery and Desharnais (1990), even if you do know the language, it may not be enough. If you do not understand the culture, you may not appreciate the messages behind the words.

Facial expression is an essential in an expatriate's daily interpersonal dealings with individuals from other cultures.

Although many people know that English is the language of world business and is sufficient for most common business transactions. But others argue that a global assignee should always speak the language of the customer. And, although many employees will not physically move to another country, they will have to work with others internationally via travel and electronic communication (Mcenery and Desharnais, 1990).

According to Chitakornkijasil (2010), every company will try to make global assignees learn the host-country language. This is very important for managers who will be working and living in a host country for extended periods. For others who visit multiple countries each year and spend only a few weeks in each, then learning various phrases are important, such as greetings, introducing oneself and thanking a person.

In order to minimize communication issues, a company may consider hiring host country personnel who are familiar with the home country culture, have a mixture of home country and host country nationals in the subsidiary, build specialists in certain regions and train personnel in the international division in intercultural communication.

According to a research on scholars done by Chitakornkijasil (2010), in the international organization, scholars agree that managers should adapt to the culture, technical expertise is not enough and language and cultural sensitivity are important. An effective global structure needs cross-cultural communication training and strong communication relations are vital to the wellbeing of a team.

H1: Cross-cultural communication plays an important role for the success of expatriates in their assignment.

Effectiveness of Cross – cultural Training

Cross-cultural training is useful in preparing employees for overseas assignment. However, there remain numerous questions about its effectiveness. Even though the basics are similar, there has been an increase in awareness that there is no single program that would be suitable for all types for international assignments. Similarly, where managers themselves come from, their personalities and their learning styles may also affect the nature of the cross-cultural training needed. Research has shown that training offered to the expatriate is often neglected, handled poorly or unstructured. According to Baliga and Baker (1985), they found that only 25 percent of the largest U. S. multinational corporations provide extensive pre-departure orientation programs. Also, Tung (1981) observed that only 32 percent of the U. S. companies surveyed, provided some international training. It is only among European and Japanese Multination Enterprise that cross-cultural training seemed to be more prevalent, with 69 percent of the European and 57 percent of the Japanese multinationals offering some form of training to their expatriates.

In light of the fact that the success of expatriates on an international assignment is influenced by the preparation, support and training they receive, (Fontaine, 1997; Anon, 2000; Black et al., 1991) it is evident that certain form of training is necessary to minimize expatriate failure (Guzley & Ha& Ivancevich, 1971).

The content of training can also be significant in the effectiveness of training program as matching the content to the nature of international assignment and for the right expatriate, can greatly aid in the success of their assignment. To determine the right content for training program, the trainer has to consider the type of market it is in, the type of needs that exist overseas and the type of expatriate the organization is sending so as to fully utilize the training content that have been chosen to be effective for the expatriate.

As there is no single program that would be suitable for all types of international assignment, cross-cultural training is one that is needed and suitable for every international assignment which many authors talk about.

Cross-cultural training has been under extensive study for over a decade (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou 1991), and it is believed that the competence and skills of expatriates may not be applied in various cultural environments without adjustment. It is suggested that acculturation and adaptation (Bird et al, 1999), the need to make sense of, and understand the other cultures (DeFranco, 1999; Osland & Bird, 2000), and to adapt managerial styles (Hammer et al, 1998) is essential in ensuring intercultural effectiveness, and avoiding interpersonal blunders (Zakaria, 2000). The need to develop cross-cultural skills in expatriates is even greater where the gap between cultures is very wide (Kaye & Taylor, 1997; Forster, 2000). Previous studies contended that the greater the differences in culture between the parent country and the host country, the higher the levels of effort required for training (Hodgetts & Luthans, 2000).

Cross-cultural training programmes should be offered to the needs of the expatriates. This enables them to increase social and interpersonal skills, environmental adaptability, management styles and work adjustment to fit the characteristic with the host culture workforce and to deal with the high degrees of stress (Tung, 1982). Thus, Webb (1996) and Kabst (2004) believe that expatriates who are unfamiliar with the host culture may experience many problems in their assignments.

Black and Mendenhall (1990) and Shim and Paprock (2002) also concluded that cross-cultural training is effective in developing important cross-cultural skills. It facilitates cross-cultural adjustment, which may lead to higher adjustment which may result in higher involvement. This enhances the expatriate's motivation to learn and then transfers his/her learning to the employees of the host company, which eventually enhances the overall performance of both the expatriate and the host company.

According to the contingency theory of human resource training, the fit between training style and learning styles may significantly influence the effectiveness of cross-cultural training. This includes satisfaction, commitment and involvement of expatriates in work places (Kolb, et al, 1995; Vance & Paik, 2002).

Learning styles consist of how information is processed and perceived, as well as how expatriates take in experience and how they react to that information (MacCarthy, 1996). Learners with a convergent learning style tend to learn through abstracting both the problem and the context setting of the problem. In addition, different cultures have different outcomes in

their learning styles. Hayes & Allinson, (1988) investigated the middle career managers of three different cultures from Britain, India and East Africa, using two dimensions of learning style: analysis and action. The results were significantly different. Indian managers were much higher on analysis than on action. British managers were much higher on action than on analysis. East African managers were lower in both analysis as well as action scores. They further concluded that the kind of learning environments and activities which promote effective learning in some cultures may not promote the same outcomes in other cultures where a different learning style predominated (Hayes & Allinson, 1988).

For a trainer, an understanding of the learning process is one of the most important issues in management and training (Harvey & Novicevic 2001). The instructor can bring learning to a new height by helping the learner to integrate the new material into his/her life. According to Croker (2002), the instructor changes roles in a learning process. Beginning as a motivator, the instructor turns into the authority and presents expert information, followed by a facilitator/coach and finally, takes on the evaluator/remediator role. Croker (2002) also suggested that to adopt a 'whole brain learning lesson design' and to deliver training courses, instructor should consider being with a concrete training course by creating an experience in which the learners engage and it moves from concrete to abstract by developing the connection between the concept and its relationship to the learner's lives and by providing information related to the concept. Once the concept is well established, it will then move away from abstract to application by practising new knowledge in such a way that learners can extend their learning to more

complex experiences. Finally, the course moves to concrete again by encouraging learners to apply new knowledge for its relevance and usefulness.

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that the learning style of expatriates could be very important in the delivery of training (Kolb 1978; Lam 1998; Jensen & Kolb 2000). Learning styles could also influence thinking, feeling, reflecting as well as implementation of expatriates in a training environment. The analysis of learning style of expatriates is also useful in identifying what kinds of training modes should be offered to expatriates. To enhance the effectiveness of training, instructors should deliver learning materials in teaching modes that best fit the various learning styles of expatriate. Thus, the compatibility between the teaching style and expatriate's learning style may serve as a moderating effect for the influence of cross-cultural training on training performance.