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CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING

Business leaders of today are under pressure to achieve higher targets at an ever-increasing pace dictated by a rapidly changing business environment. Success lies in the strength of the business relationships formed with all stakeholders. For anyone involved in international business, the added dimension of dealing with partners of a different cultural background increases the complexity. It is insufficient to speak a common language, and indeed, even when both partners speak English, for example, it is often assumed (incorrectly) that communication is easy, discounting the important impact of different cultural values and beliefs on the communication process itself.

Awareness of your own behavioural and communication style preferences, and the ability to adapt them to differing cultural contexts, is vital to developing cross-cultural competence. This can be acquired over time with contact to different nationalities (through work or in your personal life). The longer you know someone who does not share your language, culture and beliefs, the more able you are to understand them, to communicate successfully and to develop relationships with them. An accelerated way of doing this is through cross-cultural training.

In short, cross-cultural training contributes to improved bottom-line performance by enabling people to be more effective performers throughout multicultural organisations, no matter what their level or role is within that organisation. We need to be ready to adapt our habitual attitudes and behaviour and learn the skills needed to build and enjoy better and mutually rewarding professional relationships with people of different cultures.

International human resource managers generally recognize that employees functioning in different cultural settings require new knowledge, skills and attitudes in order to maximize their potential and succeed at work. Traditionally, cross-cultural training has been aimed at expatriates of large corporations in preparation for a long-term delegation to a foreign country. More recently, two simultaneous trends have led to cross-cultural training being developed along different lines. As companies strive to be more competitive in an increasingly international marketplace, organisations have been streamlined to cut costs. The decline of head office functions in large organisations and the reduction in numbers of middle managers performing traditional co-ordinating roles has led to a big decrease in international assignments. Global operations employ more local management. At the same time, increasing globalisation has created cross-border organisations with multi-cultural teams operating out of different centres to resolve business issues. Managers travel to many countries for shorter trips on a frequent basis. Typical challenges currently being faced by international and global organisations include:

- How can we maximise the potential performance of our global teams when our team members are increasingly remote from each other and rarely meet?
- How can we develop the new skills that global team managers need?
- How can we build good working relationships across many different cultures?
- How can we improve communication when most of it is by email or phone?
- How can we develop a greater sense of cultural awareness and improved cross-border working relationships throughout the organisation?

In order to be effective, cross-cultural training must address these needs, among others, through a clear understanding of the client context and an engaging and interactive approach. It needs to distil the vast body of cross-cultural research into understandable and memorable messages. It needs to target the specific challenges faced by the organization and provide people with the tools and techniques which they can use to become more effective at building and maintaining excellent relationships with people from other cultures. Because, ultimately, working across cultures is all the really “hard” stuff - working with other people and building relationships.



Anne Stenbom / Stockholm, Schweden
stenbom@wup.info, anne@stenbom.eu