

TRAINING FOR CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

*implications for the
management of foreign
and minority workers*

As the barriers — social, economic, ethnic, religious, cultural and otherwise — which tended to separate men from one another continue to crumble, American workers need to learn the skill of dealing with differences, especially in people. Apart from the humanitarian consideration of providing such training, there are pragmatic reasons why American business should undertake cross-cultural* education of its management and sales personnel.

For the United States citizen going abroad on foreign assignment, such understanding can facilitate adjustment, foster customer relations and promote good will. A cross-cultural learning experience can cut costs of operating overseas and increase productivity. Similar arguments can be adapted to justify such training for managers and supervisors of minority groups from the micro-cultures within the country. As more and more blacks, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, Indians and other ethnic groups are brought into the mainstream of American labor, their supervisors need more insight and sophistication in understanding and motivating these peoples.

Since representatives of business and industry increasingly cross national borders to engage in the field of international commerce, cross-cultural preparation becomes an essential part of everyone's education. Hopefully, schools of business will incorporate such learning into the undergraduate and graduate curricula. However, this presentation is concerned about the development of a short, intensive cross-cultural learning experience for those out of school and now functioning on the job. It describes a "course" which could be incorporated

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* Cross-cultural education as described in this article refers to the study of factors and influences which give a people identity and make them distinctive; it analyzes what an individual outside that group must understand and do in order to facilitate his communication with that other culture.

into an organization's in-service training program, and outlines some research in the behavioral sciences. The premise is that cultural sensitivity can be profitable both to the individual practitioner and the corporation which he represents. The following assumptions form the basis for advocating that cross-cultural training become standard operating procedure.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. The world is fast becoming a global village; interchanges accelerate between and among peoples of different races and nationalities. This trend can be observed both within the continental United States and outside its borders. Therefore, it would seem that in the immediate decades ahead, the representative of American business would have to be more cosmopolitan and less provincial in his approach to people whose culture is different from his own. As greater numbers of American personnel are assigned overseas, the pressure of foreign competition for international markets demands representatives who are more culturally sophisticated.

2. The average American company or government agency is likely to provide adequate training for its employee on foreign assignment in international business practice and language; the missing ingredient seems to be cross-cultural preparation. Therefore, the latter should become an adjunct to what international training program is currently in force. However, because of its value in dealing with micro-cultures within the United States, cross-cultural understanding might also become a supplement to existing management development or sales instruction.

3. There is more value to cross-cultural education when it is more general, rather than oriented toward a specific culture. A more universal approach to human groups and cultures seems to be preferable because (a) the individual may be called upon to deal with peoples from a variety of cultures and have several intercultural experiences during

the course of his work history; (b) the individual can supplement an introduction to cultural understanding by his own study and reading concerning a particular culture in which he finds himself — he now would have the conceptual insights to acquire such information readily.

Hopefully, every organization has some type of orientation on-site for the new employee in a host country; at this time additional input could be offered concerning the particular cultural patterns and practices in the geographic area where he is now a "foreigner."

4. The American business representative abroad would seem to be more "professionally" qualified for service to indigenous peoples when he possesses knowledge of their cultural and psychological factors.

OBJECTIVES

Based upon such assumptions, the following purposes are suggested for any program of cross-cultural training.

- To assist the employee to understand people better who differ from him, so that he appreciates their unique culture and is aware of their psychological construct (the way in which they read meaning into the events and experiences of their private "world").
- To prepare American personnel for foreign assignment so that he can communicate more effectively with the people in whose country he is a guest.
- To provide general insight into those cultural factors which are different from the employee's reference points and groups, so as to lessen the impact of "culture shock" and speed up personal adjustment to a new culture.
- To improve customer and employee relations by creating awareness in personnel of the cultural differences likely to be encountered.

To encourage greater sensitivity and more astute observation of what is happening in the area which is culturally different for the individual, so that more informed decisions can be made relative to business and personal relations.

- To develop a more cosmopolitan business representative for service abroad who will be a more effective goodwill ambassador for both his company and his country.
- To foster greater sophistication upon the part of management who deal with representatives of micro-cultures within the United States during the course of their business relations.

PROGRAM CONTENT

The content of such an educational program is tentatively outlined with the possibilities for expansion or reduction of the coverage as the needs of the organization dictate.

The design for cross-cultural education presented here for consideration is drawn from the fields of cultural anthropology and psychology.*

- I. Concept of Culture: rational/irrational/non-rational influences on behavior; explicit/implicit elements of culture; cultural patterns and themes; cultural diversity and universals.
- II. Concept of Cultural Needs/Values: influences of family structure, religious philosophies, social organizations, group attitudes.
- III. Concept of Acculturation: culture/future shock; adaptive mechanisms; intercultural communication; silent language.

* The suggested curriculum was developed by the author with the assistance of Dr. Maneck Wadia, an anthropologist with the United States International University.

IV. Concept of Culture and the Individual: culture and personality; the influence of language; the development of psychological construct as related to perception, motivation and need satisfaction; work patterns, roles and relationships.

V. Concept of Emerging World Culture: man in transition and the homogenization of society; the challenge of adaptation and personal change; the intercultural experience as an opportunity for personal and professional development; the improvement of international business relations.

The subject matter should be covered through an action learning experience which involves the trainee and relates the theory to his work situation abroad. This might be accomplished in a small group setting made up of employees scheduled for foreign assignment (or for a group of supervisors of minority employees). To provide variety of presentation, educational technology, simulation, case studies, inventories and group techniques would be utilized. A field experience could be offered by arranging for an intercultural experience with some local micro-culture; around most large cities a half dozen distinct cultural communities may often be located.

On the other hand, training experiences in cross-cultural subjects might be arranged for home study. Experience demonstrates that personnel overseas may have their work performance aided or undermined by family's adjustment or lack of it. Many personnel directors feel that wives and children should be included in any company program which promotes acculturation. Therefore, this investigator is exploring the development of a "packaged program" for sight and sound presentation.

By combining the filmstrip with an audio track in a cassette approach, the program can be housed in light-weight equipment which the employee can take to his home. There his family can review with him the concepts described above.

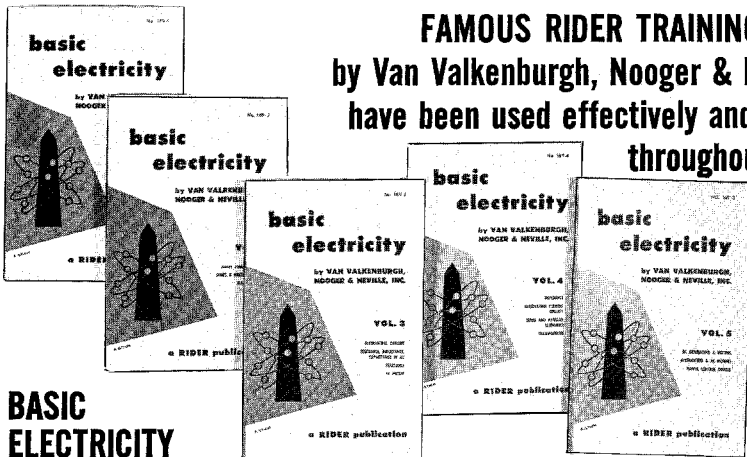
The company training department can maintain some type of control by use of instruments which are returned for analysis by the corporation's educational

specialist. With this approach, other variations are possible once the basic input has been provided to the employee. For example, those who have

completed the "course" and are scheduled to go abroad might gather for a group discussion with their immediate supervisors as to what the employee has learned and its implication for his new assignment.

No doubt about it—these texts TRAIN!

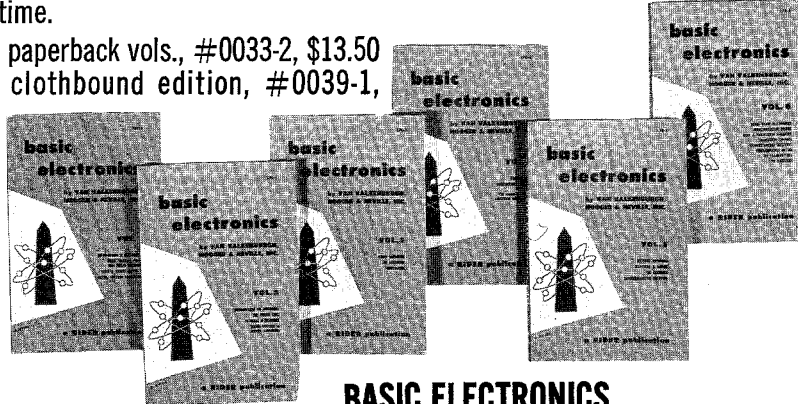
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The project can be further extended by suggesting outside readings which employees awaiting foreign transfers could then discuss over lunch with one another. Personnel who have already successfully served a tour of duty abroad might also act as resource persons in such dialogues. Employees who have come from different cultural groupings might be asked to share their perspectives.

It is suggested that such cross-cultural training be about 40-50 hours in length. The individual sessions should preferably be no less than two hours. Naturally, it is possible to provide an intensive weekend format utilizing the laboratory method of education.

CONCLUSION

Cross-cultural training should increase employee effectiveness when serving outside one's own country or when working with minority groups within the United States. It should contribute to improved customer relations, sales and good will. Hopefully, it will reduce waste, misunderstanding and confusion in international business negotiations. At the very least, it will help American business to meet their foreign competition with more sophistication. Such learning will also enable the employee to understand himself and his organization better. It may not only contribute to the process of acculturation abroad, but reduce the impact of "future shock" as the emerging cyberculture replaces traditional society and its reference points. Certainly, cross-cultural education for today's personnel will prepare employees more realistically for the pluralistic one-world of tomorrow!*

*A useful reference is the seminar report of May 1969, *Cross-Cultural Training*, published by the Center for Research and Education, Box 1768, Estes Park, Col. 80517.