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THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR TRAINING
IN INTER-CULTURAL INTERACTION

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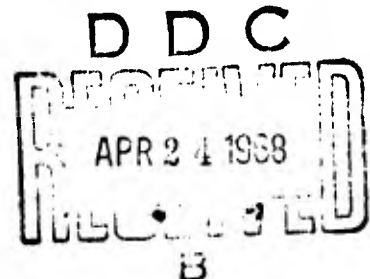
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The Need for Innovative Approaches for Training in Inter-Cultural Interaction

by

Arthur J. Hoehn

Symposium Presentation at the
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Prefatory Note

This is a modified version of a paper presented at the 1967 American Psychological Association Convention as part of a Symposium session titled, "Implementation Problems Related to Training for Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Planned Conversation," held in Washington, D.C., September 1967. Other participants in the Symposium were Dr. Gloria L. Grace and Mr. Neil A. Hofland, of the System Development Corporation; CPT Herbert T. Eachus, Aerospace Medical Research Laboratories; Dr. James K. Arima of Litton Scientific Support Laboratory; Dr. S. Stansfeld Sargent, Phoenix Veterans' Administration Hospital; and Dr. Frederic R. Wickert, Michigan State University.

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THE NEED FOR INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR TRAINING IN INTER-CULTURAL INTERACTION

Arthur J. Hoehn

The Traditional Approaches

Personnel sent on overseas assignments often go with no preparation for the culture-related aspects of their jobs except to read some handbooks or other printed materials and to talk with people who have served in similar assignments. However, since World War II, there has been a growing acceptance of the view that some *special* preparation for overseas assignment is needed. As a result, many training programs have come into existence. For the most part they are pre-departure "orientation" programs ranging in length from a few days to a few weeks. Their purpose tends to be that of giving a fund of information on such topics as:

The American organization sponsoring the work—its mission, structure, policies, and procedures

Matters of personal concern—housing, health information, educational and recreational facilities

American foreign policy and institutions

The host country—its history, economics, geography, social institutions, and customs

The "do's and don'ts" of behavior

The methods of presentation are typically those of lectures, with some reading and a few films. There is some tendency toward increased use of discussion and case study methods. Heavy use is made of guest lecturers—they are usually experts in their subject matter but often are unable to relate their knowledge to the performance situations the students will encounter overseas.

Only in language training—often a second component of these programs—are we likely to find significant use of demonstration and practice. Some programs include opportunities to *talk* about inter-cultural interaction, but usually there are no opportunities to try out or experiment with a realistic situation.

Limitations of the Traditional Approaches

The typical approaches to preparing people for overseas assignments have several advantages. Such programs can be set up without the elaborate and costly processes of designing job-oriented training. With limited numbers of trainees, they can be conducted and administered with relative ease and at acceptable cost. Also, despite the absence of supporting empirical data, most observers agree that such programs are worthwhile. It seems likely that they can reduce the anxiety about

venturing into a new culture, can develop interest in the host country and its people, and can teach something of the organizations with which the person will be working.

However, while these training programs have some advantages and no doubt have training value, they do not appear to provide an adequate preparation for overseas assignments, particularly those that require close working relationships with host-country people.

Specific criticisms of the typical short, pre-departure programs are of two general types. One kind of criticism points to continued failures, frustrations, and serious problems in overseas performance. The second general type of criticism refers to the glaring way in which traditional programs depart from the precepts of modern training technology.

Competent observers generally agree that failure in overseas performance due to lack of inter-cultural skills is quite frequent and that there is substantial room for improvement. Summing up such assessments, Loubert (1) states that "according to the best available estimates . . . one-quarter or more of those selected for overseas turn out to be obvious failures. As large a percentage perhaps will be hidden failures—marginal performers who retain their position but whose work does not fully meet its requirement."

If there are indeed frequent failures or deficiencies in overseas performance, what are the causes? Prominent among them are factors related to cultural differences: "culture shock"; faulty concepts of the roles to be played and the mission to be accomplished; unrealistic expectations; inability to adjust projects and proposals to the felt needs and social-cultural context of the host people; inability to understand the behavior and attitudes of the people; and difficulties in establishing rapport and in communicating effectively. Traditional approaches to overseas preparation are seldom focused directly on these difficulties. However, it appears that most of these culture-related problems can be attacked by techniques and approaches within the reach of available training technology, or by a combination of improved training and improved selection. Deficiencies which have been pointed out in traditional approaches include:

- Failure to teach the more critical skills, knowledges, attitudes, and understandings

- Failure to provide the kinds of training experiences which can bring about significant changes in behavior

- Failure to deal adequately with the problem of tailoring the training to the enormous variability in overseas assignments

- Failure to plan and implement training as part of a larger system of arrangements for ensuring effective overseas performance

First, the matter of training objectives. Objectives should be based on analysis of the roles and functions to be performed, and on carefully developed conceptions of what is critical to performance

of these roles and functions. Almost everyone who has attempted such analyses sees a need for more than simply acquiring information and knowledge of the kinds presented in the traditional area studies approach.

There is much less agreement as to what the cognitive and behavioral objectives of training should be. However, competent analysts tend to suggest greater emphasis on the following:

Understanding of *interaction* processes (as contrasted with knowledge about the foreign culture)

Empathic awareness and understanding of the values, assumptions, and attitudes of the host country people

Insight into the cultural basis on one's own values, assumptions, and attitudes

Understanding and acceptance of the roles called for in the assignment, *and*

Skills and techniques which will promote success in these roles

Achievement of these objectives calls for new departures in training. "Simply describing cultural differences, setting forth principles of good overseasmanship, or delineating good behaviors are unlikely alone to bring about the changes in attitude, perception, or behavior that are needed."¹ If we are to modify attitudes and perceptions, and teach interaction skills, we will have to use new techniques and new media. There is need for training that is experience-based, as contrasted with training that is information or content-oriented. That is, opportunities should be provided for learning through experiencing the consequences of behavior.

Difficulties in providing adequate training are compounded by the fact that overseas work assignments vary in many ways even for personnel of the same organization in the same foreign country. Perhaps the most common complaint overseas personnel make about their training is that it has no direct relevance to their particular problems and their specific job activities. Design of training that meets this deficiency is clearly needed.

The sheer numbers of people going on overseas assignments also present a growing problem for training. Live presentations by limited numbers of experts becomes impractical as the numbers of people to be trained skyrockets. Greater use will have to be made of closed circuit TV, programmed instruction, films, and other media that can be applied without continuous injections of creativity by highly trained instructors.

There appear to be serious weaknesses in traditional approaches with respect to what is taught, the kinds of training experiences provided,

¹From an informal, unpublished paper by Dr. Robert J. Foster of the HumRRO staff.

and the lack of personal and job relevance. No less serious is the lack of a system approach. Training for overseas work should, ideally, be viewed as only one component of a system of arrangements for ensuring effective overseas performance. The needed personnel system should generate adequate role and job definitions. It should also include a research-based approach to selection. It should apply proper methods of matching personnel to jobs. It should provide for adequate administrative and supervisory support in the field. It should incorporate ways to make adjustments in the light of feedback from the field.

These various arrangements should be founded on a carefully developed conception of the overseas mission and of the processes by which it is to be achieved. The Peace Corps is a good example of an organization that has attempted to make training function as one part of a well-designed and integrated system. The articulation of functions within the system is illustrated by its use of training, not only to provide overseas preparation but also for purposes of selection and assignment.

Current Efforts to Improve Training for Inter-Cultural Interaction

Although wide use of the traditional area study approach to overseas preparation persists, new approaches and techniques are coming on the scene. They are beginning to be used to augment (in a few instances, to supplant) the traditional approaches.

Some of the new approaches apply recent technological developments to achieve greater efficiency in the presentation of area and cultural information. Others represent attempts to achieve training objectives to which the area study approach is ill-suited.

One of the relatively recent innovations is the use of the T-Group or laboratory training method in training for effective inter-cultural interaction. This approach has been used in some Peace Corps programs and in programs presented by the University of Pittsburgh for Westinghouse business executives (See Foster and Danielian, 2).

Special role-playing techniques are being applied. A recent example is the "Contrast-American" approach developed by Stewart and Danielian (3, 4). This is a training technique that involves confrontation between a trainee and an actor, the latter trained to express values and assumptions that contrast sharply with those characteristic of American culture. The confrontations occur in the form of role-playing scenes that are sufficiently structured to elicit the culture contrasts but not so structured as to remove the appearance of spontaneity. A major objective of the training is to increase awareness of one's own American assumptions and values. Thus it can be utilized in preparing personnel for work in any of the developing countries.¹

¹Efforts are now being made to reduce the training to a programmed instruction format using filmed sequences.

Another form of role-playing, designed for quite different training objectives, has been developed by Haines, King, and Eachus (5, 6, 7, 8). This role-playing approach is highly structured and is used along with self-confrontation techniques to teach specific behaviors considered to be critical to advisor effectiveness. The specific behaviors include gestures, expressive movements, military manners, forms of address, patterns of speech, and personal bearing. Implementation of the approach is not difficult once the specific behaviors to be taught have been identified.

A third direction of innovation is in the applications of programmed instruction. An example is the Culture Assimilators developed by Stolurow and others at the University of Illinois (9). The Culture Assimilators are printed, self-instructional programs designed to teach generalizations concerning what is acceptable behavior of a member of the foreign culture as a function of his group membership and the kind of situation.

The PACKAGE program approach developed by Grace and Hofland (10) of the System Development Corporation involves the use of a variety of media for efficient presentation of area and cultural information. More specifically, maps, picture cards, film strips, audio tape, video tape, motion picture film, and discussion materials are used to present information on American policy and on the history, culture, and contemporary life of the country, and to teach a few key phrases of the language of the foreign country.

Mention should also be made of the approach developed by Robert Humphrey of the American Institutes for Research (11, 12). This is an in-country orientation program consisting of a series of small-group discussions. Issues dealt with include some that would be encountered in any developing country. However, there is, throughout, a strong focus on local and personal relevance and a major emphasis on trainee participation and involvement. The objective is to develop empathic understanding of the host country people. While now utilized primarily with overseas military personnel, the approach and supporting materials can be readily adapted for use with civilian groups.

An approach similar to that of Humphrey is found in the Personal Response program developed by Newman (13, 14) for use in the in-country training of American military personnel. The objective is to increase understanding of the Vietnamese peoples.

Potential Contributions of Innovative Approaches

Suppose new approaches such as those described were applied more widely and in greater depth. What would be the gains in terms of mission accomplishment? Would they outrun the costs?

Frankly, we can't be sure. There are almost no empirical data. But there is only one way to find out how much innovative approaches can help, and that is to apply and test them. Of course, this is not quite as easy as it sounds. Some of the new approaches have been developed little beyond the conceptual level—they cannot be empirically

assessed until they are translated into detailed procedures and fully developed materials. Even those that are ready to be applied cannot be tested until adequate criterion measures are available.

When we have fully developed programs embodying the new approaches, *and* appropriate criterion measures, we should be able to answer questions about costs and gains. We should also begin to be able to evaluate competing conceptions of the factor critical to overseas performance in general, and in different kinds of assignments and situations.

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13. ABSTRACT There is growing acceptance of the view that personnel being assigned overseas require some special preparation for the inter-cultural aspects of such assignments. At present such training generally takes the form of short pre-departure orientation programs designed to provide a fund of relevant information. This paper points to the limitations of such an approach, suggests some of the alternative objectives of inter-cultural training, describes some current efforts toward new techniques, and points to the need for empirical assessment of the training value of the new approaches and techniques.		

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