Intercultural Training for Expatriates

Reconsidering Power and Politics

HUI-CHING CHANG • *University of Illinois at Chicago*
G. RICHARD HOLT • *University of Illinois at Chicago*

Among the many significant issues to be dealt with in intercultural business conduct is the problem of overseas assignment of personnel by multinational companies. As the world increasingly shrinks into a "global village," company personnel are required not only to conduct business beyond their own cultural boundaries but to develop business institutions in unfamiliar locations.

Being assigned to a foreign country means that the businessperson (often referred to as an "expatriate" or "sojourner") cannot avoid encountering unknown cultural Others. To prepare employees for future encounters, training programs have been devised to acquaint expatriates with communication processes they are likely to encounter in foreign business environments. Because many training programs aim at ensuring eventual success in expatriates' overseas assignments through engineering smooth cultural transitions, much of the training literature has concentrated on the contents of training programs, such as what material should be included and whether certain approaches are more effective than others.

However, training also serves as a socialization device to transform the sojourner from primarily monocultural to intercultural contexts. Not only do these programs tell trainees what they should know to interact successfully with those in the visited culture, but by providing specific contents they also stipulate how trainees should think about intercultural communication. The ways in which the intercultural encounter is conceived in the design and contents of these training programs impose frames of reference that govern sojourners' future activity.

One influential frame of reference, shared by many training programs, is the view that "intercultural communication" is equivalent to "recognizing cultural differences." Although informative, this framework stops short of a full account of the intercultural training process. We argue that, beyond their overt concern for "cultural differences,"

training programs must also recognize the importance of power and politics in forming the substructure of meaning for any intercultural encounter.

The subject of power has received significant attention throughout the social sciences (Mumby, 1988). Here, we adopt a critical perspective in analyzing how power is both product and process in interaction. Although mundane political elements such as decision making and election to public office are comparatively easy to understand, the "politics of everyday life" is often obscure and difficult to conceive. Power exists in social formations through which consensus is achieved despite conflicting interests. Although implicit and indirect, the "politics of everyday life," actualized through often lengthy historical involvement among interactants, is even more powerful than "ordinary" political elements (Deetz, 1990, 1992).[1]

Differences in power literally infuse every act of intercultural communication or even of communication about intercultural communication (as in training programs). Power differences are social outcomes of inherently inequitable interests, particularly when such differences are subtle and difficult for the stakeholders to analyze:

> The presence of ideology in the external social world or at the workplace, perpetuated through legitimation and socialization processes, can indicate the inability of certain or even all groups to carefully understand or assess the implicit values carried in their everyday practices, linguistic forms, and perceptual experiences. (Deetz, 1992, p. 56)

Power is not simply an omnipresent feature of intercultural encounters but plays a pivotal role in shaping interactions of people such as expatriates. As Murray and Sondhi (1987) argue,

> It is the knowledge of the possession of power on one's side, and of powerlessness on the other side, which makes communication difficult. In such a context, the possibility of an "equal exchange," or "establishing co-membership," of "empathy and rapport"—all of which are seen as essential to a good communication's environment . . . —are remote, for reasons which have little to do with language or accent, little to do with culture or with culturally derived speech conventions, but a great deal to do with *structure*. (p. 30)

Without recognizing the importance of power, the expatriate's understanding of intercultural communication may be severely limited and even distorted. To emphasize the importance of power in helping expatriates understand the dynamism of their future intercultural encounters, we describe an intercultural communication model that depicts an alternative framework in which the communication of business sojourners is not limited to a static conception of cultural differences but also reflects the struggle between interactants over the power to define the meaning of interaction.

TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESS SOJOURNERS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a review of the diverse literature on training programs for business sojourners, identifying various conceptions of intercultural communication as well as their general lack of focus on issues of power. First, we analyze why training programs are necessary for business sojourners, outlining the broader contexts in which such programs are developed. Second, we discuss expatriate adjustment and the criteria used to measure the effectiveness of training programs. Third, contents, approaches, and methods in the design of various training programs are summarized. Finally, we conclude this section with some observations about the coexistence of academic and practice-based research in intercultural communication training. A consistent theme running throughout the literature is its emphasis on cultural differences at the expense of a dynamic, contextually sensitive view of intercultural communication.

The Need for Training Programs for Business Sojourners

Increasing contact between different cultural groups, particularly following World War II, has stimulated the development of intercultural training programs (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Brislin & Pedersen, 1976; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983). As Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) notes, intercultural communication training originated with the demand for the Foreign Services Institute to train American diplomats to better understand and more effectively interact with people in other countries. Over time, these training programs have been extended to other Americans involved in foreign countries, including the Peace Corps, technical assistance advisors, missionaries, diplomats, military personnel, business professionals, and so on. Another force influencing the development of training programs has been the presence of diverse cultural and ethnic constituencies within the United States, including multiethnic clients in counseling, international students who need to be oriented to American culture, refugees and immigrants in training programs, and so on (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976; Brislin & Yoshida, 1994).

In perhaps no other intercultural activity has the need for training been more critical than in multinational business. Once its employees cross their own cultural boundaries, the multinational corporation is faced with many potential problems. It must concern itself with various laws, tariffs, taxes, enforcement practices, legal systems, and governments; different markets with different cultures, histories, values, social systems, and languages; and differences in size, resource endowment, economic development, political structure, national development, and industrial policies (Black & Mendenhall, 1989). At the same time, a multitude of other adjustments—often referred to collectively as "culture shock"—await the expatriate on arrival in the host country. Not only is the expatriate expected to have requisite professional qualifications to handle the job, performance is made more difficult by the need to function in consistently unfamiliar cultural contexts.

In the face of such complexity, it becomes increasingly difficult to see successful interaction with the cultural Other as merely an outcome ensured by having a humanistic attitude toward one's fellows; rather, successful interaction must be viewed as a matter of the sojourner's very survival. From the company's viewpoint, it is also a matter of economics, of whether the high costs paid for overseas assignment have been well spent. To a certain extent at least, training programs have proved effective in reducing the negative outcomes of overseas assignment for American expatriates (such as low performance, early return from overseas, and so on), which in the past had cost companies between $50,000 and $150,000 per expatriate for a yearly cost of about $2 billion (Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Harris & Moran, 1987; McEnery & DesHarnais, 1990; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Tung, 1981). Nevertheless, although scholars in general support the view that training programs positively affect cross-cultural skill development, adjustability, and job performance, many corporate leaders doubt their effectiveness (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992; but compare Dotlich, 1982).[2]

Expatriate Adjustment and Effectiveness of Training Programs

If a training program is to be effective and appropriate, its developers must understand the factors that influence intercultural adjustment, including technical competence, personality traits, environmental variables, family situation, and so on (Tung, 1981). This adjustment concerns not only the extent to which the individual feels comfortable, together with the degree of cultural shock upon encountering the new culture, but also the individual's ability to interact effectively with host nationals (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Kim, 1988).

Various conceptual schemes have been devised to explain intercultural adjustment. For example, Black, Mendenhall, and Oddou (1991) suggest at least three key adjustments: to work, to interacting with host nationals, and to the general environment. Parker and McEnvoy (1993) have developed a conceptual model that has three categories of variables: individual (e.g., personality characteristics, predeparture knowledge of the host nation, motivation, and prior international experience), organizational (e.g., length of overseas assignment and career development policies), and contextual (e.g., family adjustment and cultural novelty of the host nation). Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) summarize four dimensions relating to successful expatriate acculturation: self-oriented, other-oriented, perceptual, and cultural toughness (or cultural novelty). Beyond these factors, Fontaine (1986) points out the importance of social support systems in facilitating adjustment. Business expatriates must go through processes of socialization (Lee & Larwood, 1983) or acculturation (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) to become adjusted to or integrated with the host country.

To aid in intercultural adaptation, scholars and practitioners aim at the ideal of developing cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally prepared individuals who can enter into the heart of the foreign culture. According to this view, successful intercultural adjustment requires that the business sojourner not only understand cultural differences cognitively but also empathize with the cultural Other and be able to put understanding and empathy into practice. The emphasis on cultivating multiple dimensions of development in the individual to facilitate intercultural adaptation seems consistent across the majority of training programs.

The skills needed for intercultural adjustment are in turn used as criteria according to which training programs can be assessed. For example, Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, and Yong (1986) emphasize good personal adjustment, good interpersonal relations with hosts, and task effectiveness as criteria against which to measure the outcomes of training programs. Black and Mendenhall (1990) focus on cross-cultural skill development, adjustment, and performance as key criteria in evaluation.

From these findings, it is clear that, apart from the few programs that address issues such as cultural toughness or novelty and those that emphasize the role of family and other social support systems, most training curricula concentrate on individual-level variables thought to facilitate the business sojourner's adaptation and hence performance.

This focus on the individual-level variable is in line with the idea of intercultural communication as the process of mediating between cultural differences. According to this view, if expatriates are cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally prepared to accept cultural differences, their future interactions should be successful. This perspective must now be seen as limited and idealistic, particularly in view of the importance of power in shaping the dynamism of intercultural encounters.

Methods Used in Training Programs

Although training programs may differ in their target audience and degree of specificity, most share the idea that intercultural communication essentially presents a number of "problems" that must be "overcome" through sensitizing trainees to cultural differences. Sensitizing methods include area studies, cultural assimilators, sensitivity training, simulation, human relations training, intercultural communication workshops, field experiences, behavior modification, attribution training, and so on (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976; Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983; Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Tung, 1981). Particular programs may combine and integrate these separate approaches in various ways.

To systematically analyze the design of training programs, Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) classify the various approaches into four divisions following two axes: by content (cultural-specific vs. cultural-general) and by method of instruction (didactic vs. experiential). In cultural-specific approaches, training materials are specific to the host nation the expatriate will visit, whereas in the cultural-general approach, training materials pertain not to a particular nation but, rather, to generalized awareness of cultural differences to be applied in any cultural environment (Dunbar & Katcher, 1990). On the other dimension, the didactic approach emphasizes cognitive learning about the cultural Other through broadening trainee understanding either of given cultures or cultures in general, whereas experiential learning focuses on situated interactions with host nationals and trainee self-reflection.

Training programs taking a cultural-specific approach typically begin with specific information regarding a given culture, supplementing this basic information with role-plays or other structured experiences. One prevailing training method taking a cultural-specific approach is the cultural assimilator (also called the "intercultural sensitizer"), designed for various combinations of target-audience/target-culture (Albert, 1983). Developed primarily by cross-cultural psychologists, assimilators focus on critical incidents as points of analysis from which alternative explanations tied to different cultures can be identified and discussed (Albert, 1983; Leong & Kim, 1991).[3] The contents of these methods of training must necessarily focus on cultural differences.

Cultural-specific approaches can be contrasted with cultural-general approaches, the latter using training methods such as structured experiences, simulations, and cultural-general assimilators (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983) said to achieve the goal of a generalized awareness of cultural differences. An example is the assimilator designed by Brislin et al. (1986): 100 critical incidents delineating various kinds of intercultural encounters among people of different nationalities and in different situations that are used as examples to which alternative explanations are chosen by trainees. The effectiveness of cultural-general assimilators has been well documented (Cushner, 1989).

Issues of cultural difference may be approached either through cognitive learning (also called "documentary" or "didactic") or through interpersonal or experiential learning. Didactic approaches typically rely on lectures, whereas approaches such as sensitivity training emphasize experiential learning.

Intercultural training literature is inconclusive regarding which approaches and what kinds of contents are most effective. For example, Earley (1987) compares documentary (cognitive) to interpersonal (experiential) training, concluding that, although additive effects could be identified, interpersonal training was not necessarily superior to documentary training. Several analysts suggest that best results are achieved by combining and integrating various approaches and methods (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983).

Although there are a great many intercultural training methods, the specific contents of training programs are seldom made available to the public (for an exception, see Casse, 1982), nor is there significant sharing of materials among practitioners or researchers: "Despite years of experience, however, there are very few sets of materials in widespread use. There has long been a tradition of homemade and do it yourself materials that have little distribution outside a given trainer's social network" (Brislin et al., 1986, p. 23). As a result, the precise contents of many training programs remain to be assessed (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983).

Nevertheless, what materials have been made available for analysis suggest the following conclusions. The various approaches seem to be geared toward sensitization to cultural differences, not the dynamics of sociohistorically situated intercultural encounters. Even those training methods that may provide *in situ* training (such as experiential learning) largely ignore the role of factors such as power shaped by sociohistori-

cal context and negotiated by participants in their moment-to-moment interaction.

The Coexistence of Academic and Practical Approaches

Intercultural training of business sojourners fuses scholarly and applied research, embracing not only multiple lines of academic investigation (Kim, 1988) but practical findings discovered by the trainers and expatriates/sojourners. The conflation of academic research and practitioner suggestions can be clearly observed in publication outlets; not only are there discussions in scholarly journals (Black & Mendenhall, 1989) and books (Landis & Brislin, 1983) but also short, practically focused articles published in less academically oriented journals (Caudron, 1991; Dotlich, 1982; Dunbar & Katcher, 1990). Articles of the latter variety are frequently written by trainers specializing in some specific aspect or aspects of intercultural training and can be seen as extensions of trainers' experiences. Additionally, many lists of "do's and don'ts" concerning intercultural behavior have been offered in the popular media.

However, despite scholarly interest in intercultural training, most training programs are organized and substantiated not by theoretical models but, rather, by practitioners' experiences[4] (Black & Mendenhall, 1989, 1990; Caudron, 1991; Dunbar & Katcher, 1990; Shizuru, Landis, & Brislin, 1983). Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) identify "the lack of articulated theory underlying the various programs that are currently in use" (p. 121) as a major drawback in the development of training programs. Not only are there few theories to guide the design of training programs (an exception is Black & Mendenhall, 1990), but most research in international adjustment tends to be anecdotal or atheoretical (Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Black et al., 1991).

There are historical reasons for this lack of emphasis on theory. As noted earlier, Leeds-Hurwitz (1990) argues that intercultural training originated with the need for foreign service personnel who tended to be more interested in practical application than in theory. Scholars, particularly anthropologists, were asked to translate scholarly knowledge of cultural practices into knowledge readily accessible and applicable to those who had to interact with people in foreign countries. This historical grounding explains in part both why training programs have flourished and why they have focused on application. Nevertheless, this one-sided development leaves out many factors important to the training of business sojourners, such as why cross-cultural training is effective or which situations are best served by specific training methods (Black & Mendenhall, 1989).

A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR BUSINESS SOJOURNERS

Although scholars and practitioners have devoted significant attention to the contents of training programs—such as their degree of effectiveness, goals, functions, and so on—seldom have the questions been asked why certain contents (and not others) are selected, what viewpoints are promoted in training programs, and how program contents shape the trainee's conception of intercultural encounters. What is the role of the trainer, for example, in structuring client experiences? They "manipulate the emotions of their clientele, play simulation games with their thinking, and then reassemble the pieces of their trainees' psyches" (Starosta, 1990, p. 2). In the process of "reassembly" to influence the trainee to become a more sensitive intercultural communicator, trainers socialize business sojourners in ways both subtle and overt to structure their future intercultural encounters.

Depending on how the unfamiliar cultural Other is characterized, training programs inscribe frames of reference for their audiences through which the cultural Other must eventually be approached. Hence, instead of taking the contents of training programs at face value, we need to turn our attention to the question of *how* the intercultural communication process is conceived and inscribed through administering the contents of training programs.

Intercultural Communication as Equivalent to Cross-Cultural Difference

As currently conceived, most training programs present the intercultural encounter as involving two people of more or less equal status who attempt to surmount differences that their cultures have imposed between them. This focus on cultural differences has its roots in various theories of intercultural communication (e.g., Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 1988). The emphasis on cultural differences as the overarching theme can be observed in the design, goals, and definitions of various training programs. As Gudykunst and Hammer (1983) note,

> Yet pressures resulting from differing cultural values, communication styles, norms, and behaviors are acutely felt in the international arena of human interaction. These difficulties and interpersonal conflicts that arise from the

> interaction of people with cultural differences occupy the central concern of intercultural training efforts. (p. 120)

This perspective is shared by Brislin and Yoshida (1994), who explain that commonalities among various intercultural training programs include "the necessity of establishing good interpersonal relations with people, and . . . communicating effectively in the presence of cultural differences that can interfere with good relations" (p. 5). The training needs identified by corporations also focus upon cultural differences as the main concern in assessing and engineering effectiveness in overseas assignments (Dotlich, 1982). In programs emphasizing cultural difference, divergences between interactants are heightened: The culture from which the trainee comes, together with the culture of the target nation he or she will encounter in the near future, are deliberately conceived as two distinctive, different ways of life.

Because of cultural differences, the contents of most training programs suggest that the expatriate needs to know what constitutes "appropriate" behavior in the host country, as behavior from one's home culture is likely not to be judged appropriate in another cultural context:

> Cross-cultural training can provide models of appropriate and inappropriate behavior in general or specific, hypothetical or simulated situations; it can provide information from which trainees can imagine appropriate and inappropriate behavior and associated consequences. (Black & Mendenhall, 1990, p. 124)

This approach toward cultural differences is also illustrated in Triandis et al. (1988) in their application of Hofstede's individualism-collectivism dimension to describe cultural differences. In the training of people from collectivist cultures to interact with members of individualist cultures, Triandis et al. suggest, the trainee should "pay less attention to the groups to which the Other belongs . . . than when the Other comes from your own culture" (p. 279). Indeed, dichotomous contrasts between individualism and collectivism, together with other constructs—such as low-/high-context communication (Hall, 1976), and elaborated and restricted codes (Bernstein, 1971)—have been used by many scholars as mechanisms to explain intercultural communication (see, e.g., Cushman & Kincaid, 1987; Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Ting-Toomey, 1988; Yum, 1988). Although these analyses have provided insight into the understanding of other cultures, unfortunately, they have also become "cognitive shorthand," leading scholars to sustain unwarranted stereotypes.[5] These schemes to label and classify

cultural differences tell very little about the dynamism of intercultural encounters.

In some respects, this conception of cultural differences may appear to echo the approach taken by the lists of "do's and don'ts" proffered by a great many practitioners (Caudron, 1991).[6] In training programs, the process of intercultural interaction is more often than not viewed as static and rigid. According to the majority view, as long as one knows and is willing to appreciate "how others behave differently" from oneself, one should be more successful in intercultural interaction. With their focus on cultural differences, very seldom do existing training programs explore either the situational dynamism enacted by interactants in contexts or the sociohistorical factors that define the power struggles inherent in all intercultural encounters. To begin with, lists of cultural "do's and don'ts" and "appropriate and inappropriate behaviors" seldom consider the context within which behavioral rules must be negotiated. Information regarding a specific cultural group tends to be stereotypical, inaccurate, and romanticizing (Foeman, 1991). The static representation of reified "cultural differences" prevents the expatriate from becoming attuned to the dynamism of context. As Irwin (1993) comments on the "anthropology of manners" (that is, cultural differences),

> It is superficial because cultural difference is complex and cultures change (sometimes very rapidly) so that data sets are incomplete; because it is "other culture" oriented and fixated ethnocentrically rather than being concerned with interactions; because it implies that behaviour change is necessary if communication is to occur (and sometimes "trains" for it via quick-fix approaches); and because it stops short in its capacity to assist people in understanding structures and establishing "frame of reference" in an increasingly complex world. Moreover, the anthropology of manners approach to intercultural communication, through its focus on overt behaviours, is often devoid of understanding of context, and is ahistorical. (pp. 74-75)

A good example of the importance of context in framing the meaning of intercultural encounters can be observed in Brislin et al.'s (1986) description of a general cultural assimilator. In their attempt to identify central issues in cross-cultural interactions that transcend specific roles or places in which incidents take place, Brislin and his colleagues noted difficulties they encountered in designing the assimilator: When the critical incidents employed by cultural assimilators did not provide sufficient contextual information—such as background of interactants—trainees found it difficult to make appropriate attributions. For the

cultural assimilator to work in expatriate training, description of critical incidents must remain specific rather than general. Even when they talk about cultural differences, trainees still need contextual information before they can make judgments.

Some scholars have urged moving beyond a focus on cultural differences to a more contextually sensitive approach in the design and application of training programs. Armstrong and Bauman (1993), for example, draw on sociolinguistic theories to advocate contextually sensitive interactional process analysis for training programs. They discuss problems that arise because training programs emphasize normative differences only, without considering socially situated interactional encounters imbued with complex linguistic features, communicator's sociolinguistic knowledge structure, and the negotiation of meaning: "Sociolinguistic theory suggests that it is more productive to look at communication as a process in which social identities are negotiated rather than seeing communication as following a fixed set of norms and rules" (p. 82). This approach toward understanding, which should lead eventually to appropriate social skills, is also well stated by Fontaine (1986):

> A social skills approach to intercultural training would be "culture general" in nature, providing knowledge about *process* skills that can be useful for finding out about the key dynamics in *any* setting quickly and effectively. . . . While the process approach may require more innovativeness, in the long run it may be both more efficient and effective. In essence, it gives every sojourner the skill to be his or her own trainer, and culture specific knowledge and skills are acquired while actually immersed in the host culture. Additionally, and critically, the process approach allows the sojourner to learn cultural specific knowledge and skills which are appropriate to his or her own personal or subcultural characteristics rather than just to "Americans" or "Westerners" or what worked for the trainer. (p. 367)

Clearly, it is necessary for intercultural training to move toward a more sophisticated understanding of the complexity of context that orchestrates the intercultural communication process. Toward this goal, many forms of contextual information, such as social linguistic knowledge, social identity of participants, procedural knowledge, interactional negotiation, situational parameters, and so on, must be taken into account. These elementary sociolinguistic processes, however, are transformed by power and politics. By centralizing power imbalance as an issue, one finds international business encounters inextricably tied to issues of economics, international politics, and the sometimes

lengthy sociopolitical histories of the cultures whose representatives are involved in local interaction.

The Need to Reconsider Power and Politics in Expatriate Encounters

Despite the apparent tendency of some trainers to depict the intercultural encounter as an idealistic transaction, contact between representatives of different cultures always involves inequality between interactants and hence makes more important issues of power and struggle. When they argue that "all cross-cultural encounters have a dimension of power," Murray and Sondhi (1987, p. 30) assert that the central focus for intercultural encounters should be on forces other than culture difference. "Culture" can be a central focus only if one assumes that interactants are of approximately equal status. Merely using the term "cross-cultural communication" is highly problematic because it implies that interactants "are in neutral territory in which equal exchanges are possible" (p. 31).

The centrality of power to expatriate encounters with hosts can scarcely be denied. Power struggle achieves expression as an outgrowth of the superior (or inferior) position of the expatriate, as against the inferiority (or superiority) of the host national. The status differential between interactants is expressed simultaneously at many different levels, including role differentiation (e.g., manager vs. subordinate), the status which accompanies being associated with a given part of the organization ("headquarters" vs. the "branch office"), the differential economic and political power each interactant's home country represents ("the developed country" vs. "the underdeveloped [or developing, or Third World] country"), all combined with the past sociohistorical backgrounds of the two cultural representatives. Particularly in corporate contexts, as Deetz (1990) notes, the production of personal identity and joint decisions is often based on forces of power and complicity through consent and ideology. Power is played out at the level of practice, at which organizational reality is produced and reproduced (Mumby, 1988, p. 61).

Even at the micro level, factors such as social position, gender, ethnic group membership, language choice, and so on coincide with broader structural factors to accentuate the inherent disparity involved in intercultural encounters: "This can happen because a cultural system comprises an ordered system of codes which determine both the distribution of meanings in society as well as ownership and access to the means of production of social meanings. Hence the ever-present possibility of misunderstanding" (Anchor, 1985, p. 249).

Problems with negotiation of differences in power become particularly thorny when the encounter involves people of different cultural backgrpunds, different nationalities, and/or different races. To illustrate how strongly sociopolitical power operates in defining expatriate experience, consider the following problematic encounter between the executive of a multinational firm based in the United States and subordinates in one of its European subsidiaries (Harris & Moran, 1987). The views of the European employees were based largely on the events of World War II, in which the British, formerly a world superpower, were forced to rely on the assistance of America, once a British colony. America in turn was elevated to the status of premier international leader. Although the war had occurred more than 50 years prior to the encounter, many hard feelings had to be dealt with before a meaningful solution could be fashioned.

In fact, the "grudge" held against a cultural outsider is seldom a form of personal hostility. Even while employees from two different cultural backgrounds may "get along" with each other, aspects of the political-historical context may not allow them to interact freely. Driven by lengthy and complex historical-political backgrounds, conflict may result not from problems between individuals but from problems between nations. These and other elements of sociohistorieal context perpetually redefine the quality and tone of so-called "local" interactions between expatriates and hosts.

Even in those training contexts where participants might be of different races, power relations among participants can be problematic. Regardless of whether such training uses a didactic or experiential approach, Foeman (1991) argues, the delicacy and subtle negotiation of relations between members of two races must be handled with great caution:

> It appears that the shortcomings of both the didactic and experiential training approaches bring about a paradox between a focus on creating a sense of sociopolitical context and the need for interpersonally satisfying communication. If we attempt an information-giving model to impart knowledge and provide context, we may ignore and subjugate people of color while miseducating white participants and limiting their potential for change. If we move toward a more relational model, we may achieve limited or irrelevant change in white participants and further damage people of color by exploiting their pain. (p. 259)

As might be expected, many opportunities exist for making mismatches—what one party pereeives as "friendliness" may, given the inevitable power struggle between interactants, be construed as "hostility." The differences between Israelis and Arabs, for example, with the long history of animosity between their cultures, go far beyond the fact that two individuals with two sets of values may be involved in an intercultural encounter. The sentiment aroused by sociopolitical context powerfully defines the meaning of cultural "differences." As Foeman (1991) explains, " 'talking things through' will not address the deepest 'interpersonal' goal sought through training interventions, i.e., to change the interpersonal power structure" (p. 259).

Apitzsch and Dittmar (1987) observed a seminar conducted to assist communication between German and Turkish adolescents. Because Germany at the time provided better working and living conditions, many Turkish adolescents had come to Germany to work. Although there were some cultural differences leading to misunderstanding between Germans and Turks, as the seminar unfolded, the researchers were surprised to learn that what prevented effective communication between the groups was that the German youths had assumed all along a superior position from which they saw it as their duty to help their "Turkish friends" be "assimilated into" German society. In terms of power, all the elements of social, economic, and political context seemed (to both groups) to favor the Germans. This imbalance in power between the two groups manifested itself at all levels of interaction, from the contents of stereotypes to microbehaviors such as kinesics and paralinguistic cues. To state the findings in terms of the "voice" metaphor (Voloshinov, 1973), the German "voice" (that is, the shared belief of Germans in their superiority over the Turks) effectively silenced the "voice" of the Turkish adolescents. Under such circumstances, Apitzsch and Dittmar (1987) argue, it would have been impossible for the Turks to have engaged in equal exchange with the Germans.

That which is true of intercultural communication in general is even more evident in the intercultural training program. Because power defines which voice will be heard, the typical training program can be seen as a kind of preemptive silencer of alternative cultural representations (other "voices," if you will). Consider the position of the trainee entering the typical intercultural training program. The trainee is presented with what is presumed to be authoritative information about the culture this individual is going to visit, by trainers who are presented as "authorities" (that is, as experts who are said to know better than others how one should behave in the host culture), and in circumstances precisely controlled by the company for whom the trainee works (frequently for the stated purpose of ensuring that trainees are equipped with knowledge of the host culture simply so that they can perform their

professional tasks more efficiently). All these elements of training context—as expressions of power—work to promote an "official," sanctioned view of the host culture, compounded in its effects by the prescriptive nature of the training program—put bluntly, the job of the trainer, through the program, is to tell the trainee *what to do*. However, as should be clear from the preceding discussion, the ideal of "what to do" in a given intercultural interaction is extraordinarily problematic.[7] As Deetz (1990) contends, "If such criteria [effectiveness and efficiency] are to be used, questions such as 'whose and what goals are being advanced' need to accompany them" (p. 57).

Conclusion

The intercultural encounter is fraught with contradictions, inconsistencies, and problems to be negotiated by interactants. Power and politics influence specific cognitive and affective mental contents, including attributions, stereotypes one is allowed to have toward specific cultural members, and so forth.[8] Indeed, intercultural interaction is more often than not impeded by factors that *cannot* be directly tied to elements traditionally considered cultural. As Murray and Sondhi (1987) point out, although most sociolinguistic analyses concentrate on the technical aspects of cultural difference as factors leading to cross-cultural misunderstanding (elements such as intonation or nonverbal communication), they generally fail to deal with the more difficult aspects of cross-cultural encounters, such as "prejudice, racism, discriminatory practices, or . . . problems concerned with the power relations between participants" (p. 18).

If training programs concentrate solely or primarily on issues relating to cultural differences, they run the risk of overlooking the broader structural factors that accent the inherent inequality among interactants. Although discussions of cultural difference are important elements in cross-cultural training, we have now reached the point where an understanding of the dynamic interplay of power within specific sociohistorical contexts should receive comparatively equal or perhaps greater emphasis.

Hence, it is imperative to formulate an alternative framework to guide the design of training for expatriate adjustment. To go beyond the static picture of cultural differences currently in vogue and to satisfy the previously noted need for theoretical models, in the following section we present a two-level model of intercultural communication to guide the design of training programs.

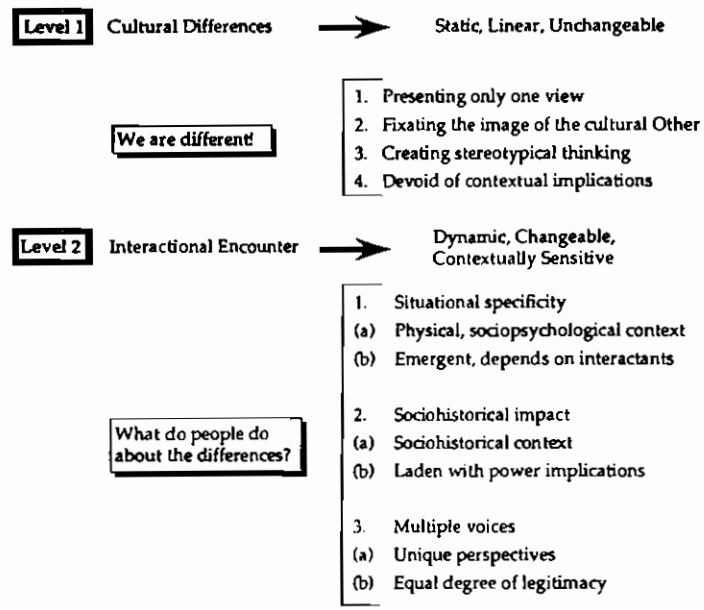

Figure F1.1. Model of Intercultural Training Process

A NEW MODEL FOR TRAINING IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION FOR BUSINESS EXPATRIATES

The proposed model offers a more sophisticated understanding of intercultural communication, showing it as taking place within a broader sociohistorical context in which power struggles among interactants serve to redefine the meaning of "cultural differences."

The Model

The model incorporates two levels of analysis needed to guide the design of a training program (depicted in Figure F1.1). Although cultural differences certainly exist (Level 1), the discussion of training should now be moved to a different level of questioning. Instead of asking questions such as "What are some possible cultural differences between people from the host and guest nations?" (Level 1 question), one should advance to another level of analysis which asks questions such as "What do people do about these cultural differences and why?" (Level 2 question). The decisions that expatriates and their hosts make

regarding cultural differences are conditioned by factors, such as power and politics, that have not traditionally been considered a part of culture.

Simply put, intercultural communication takes place in specific contexts that are simultaneously defined by interactants and by sociohistorical environments. As interactants negotiate power they redefine the meaning of cultural differences. Because context is so complex, no uniform viewpoint can be identified; rather, multiple voices each advance unique viewpoints from past experience to actuate interaction in the here and now. Hence, intercultural encounters may be harmonious and successful or may be conflictual and stressful, regardless of the extent to which cultural differences may be present.

An Explication of Level 2 Analysis

As noted, Level 2 analysis is distinguished by a greater sensitivity to the complexity of power in actual intercultural interaction. Level 2 complexity implies that intercultural context is characterized by at least three distinct qualities: implies situational specificity, derives meaning from sociohistorical background, and embraces multiple voices.

Intercultural context implies situational specificity. Interaction always takes place within particular contexts. Principles of interaction cannot be predetermined but must be refined through attuning the self to the demands of the situation. The meanings of interaction are best viewed as emergent, depending on who the interactants are and how they respond to and negotiate with other interactants in a given context.

According to this view, the expatriate's intercultural encounters require dealing not with two separate, abstract cultural systems but with ongoing adjustment to the specific parameters of a given situation. Such parameters operate at many different levels. On the one hand, one can differentiate three levels of context: general, organizational, and specific interactional (local). On the other hand, situation includes physical context (location and physical environment in which interaction takes place), sociopsychological context (the role relationship between interactants and the social dimensions of the encounter), and moment-to-moment interactional context actualized by the interactants.

However, given the omnipresent imbalance of power, equal exchange among interactants is highly unlikely. The negotiation is thus a politics of identity construction constrained by unequal power distribution (Deetz, 1990):

> The rights and responsibilities of people are not given in advance by nature or by a privileged, universal value structure, but are negotiated through interaction. Acceptance of views because of an individual's privilege or authority or because of the nature of the medium represents a possible illegitimate relation. Authority itself is legitimate only if redeemable by appeal to an open interactional formation of relations freed from the appeal to authority. (p. 59)

To offer a more complete understanding of context, discussion now turns to the role of sociohistorical background in the shaping of interactions.

Intercultural context derives meaning from sociohistorical background. Cultural differences are more easily misunderstood when they are governed by strong emotions (such as hatred or resentment) that may have arisen out of the historical backgrounds of the interactants. Even while learning to "appreciate" cultural distinctions, one may yet fail to learn to tolerate differences because of "noncultural reasons," such as deep-rooted negative stereotypes or other emotional predispositions arising from historical circumstance.

Complicating factors such as power, attributions, stereotypes, and ingroup/outgroup distinction are less matters of cultural difference (such elements are generally acknowledged to be universal) than outgrowths of historical conflict and struggle that are worked out in the contexts in which interaction takes place (Apitzsch & Dittmar, 1987; Lalljee, 1987; Murray & Sondhi, 1987). For example, Fisher (1985) notes that international behavior is often specific to historical relations between nations. Through the focus provided by immediate contact between members of two cultures, power and politics originating in sociohistorical context are brought into the present situation. Therefore, a satisfactory explanation of intercultural interaction must push further into the realms of power and political reality. As Murray and Sondhi (1987) put it,

> In encounters in which there is considerable social and cultural distance between participants, it is only a full understanding of context which enables the observer to discover the meaning of individual utterances for each of the participants, to assess when and why miscommunication occurs, and to decide when significant exchanges have taken place and what is the significance to each of the participants. Just as such exchanges do not, in real life, take place in a socio-historical vacuum, neither can empirical observation take place in such a vacuum. (p. 18)

As the trainee moves from less to more familiarity with "differences," one must remember that intercultural learning is more than merely a matter of the trainee's private and personal beliefs, unique to oneself;

frequently, the trainee's attitude is specific to the target nation, advised and conditioned by the sociohistorical background of both trainee and representative of the host nation.

Intercultural context embraces multiple voices. That cultures present divergent, often contradictory appearances has long been recognized (Bakhtin, 1986; Bruner & Gorfain, 1984; Opler, 1945). Rather than operating from a shared, more or less unified, coherent picture of "the" culture, people's customary ways of interacting manifest themselves in divergent, often inconsistent representations. These different representations (metaphorically expressed as "voices") compete against each other, struggling over which "version" of culture will prevail in a given interaction. That some versions predominate over others is frequently due to the differential amounts of power held by some parties to the interaction over others. Thus, the process of negotiation is constrained by imposition of the views of one or a few participants on other interactants.

In their analysis of the multiple voices involved in the telling of stories about Masada, Bruner and Gorfain (1984) contend,

> As we focus upon the play of voices in the Masada tradition, our concept of dialogic narration recognizes that no story is "a" story or "the" story but rather a dialogic process of many historically situated particular tellings. In our theoretical perspective, narration refers to a process rather than to an entity; to discourse rather than to a text; to interpretation and feeling rather than to the abstract sequence of events. Narration includes voice, point of view, and the positioning of a narrative within a discourse. (pp. 57-58)

Regardless of the contents of a given culture, the process of describing one's observations is an incomplete activity, more construction than description.[9] What is true of "ethnographic description" can also be applied to the novice expatriate. Because any culture can be described in an indefinite number of ways, how a given culture is perceived will vary from one trainee to the next. In approaching the cultural Other, one unavoidably engages in a process of cultural description, unique to the context, one's sociohistorical background, and one's immediate needs in that context. When they perform such activities, trainees are subject to the same constraints; just as ethnographers are strongly influenced by interactions with the people they study (Briggs, 1986), so the business expatriate's engagement with the cultural host is influenced by the unique interaction process between their respective cultures. All such interactions embrace a variety of discourses ("voices"), both overt and hidden, the interaction among which animates social activity but at the same time ensures that conflict among viewpoints is inevitable (Bakhtin, 1986).

The reified "culture" referred to in training programs serves only as an illusory stage on which interanimation among conflicting voices can take place. Although trainers cannot avoid making decisions about what needs to be included in a training program, it is extremely important that both trainers and trainees be apprised of two postulates: first, that there exist alternative explanations (available to the expatriate) of behaviors encountered in intercultural interaction and, second, that expatriates are best served by cultivating in them the ability to choose flexibly from among these alternatives in approaching their interactions with the cultural Other.

It should be clear that the more elaborated view of the purpose of training programs that results from these two postulates is some considerable distance from the rigid, fixed, uniform image of the cultural Other that has been propounded in most training programs and still more so in the "all-purpose" lists of "do's and don'ts" offered in the popular literature. What will be deemed "the best" or the "most appropriate" items in the behavioral repertoire for business sojourners must be evaluated by the sojourners themselves, informed by sufficiently flexible training (yet sensitive to the constraints imposed by power imbalance), as they engage in moment-to-moment interaction in specific contexts.

SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Although many have addressed various substantive aspects of training programs to facilitate cross-cultural understanding for business professionals, the issue of how training programs function as forms of socialization has seldom been discussed. The training literature contains virtually no discussion of the primary characteristic shared by all intercultural training: that programs accomplish not merely the "facilitation" of intercultural communication but also the placing of frames of reference for business professionals in their future encounters with members of the host culture.

As is evident in the design and contents of various training programs, much attention has been paid to issues of cultural difference, emphasizing the notion that intercultural interaction is a matter of two interactants of more or less equal status, each embracing distinctive cultural values, communicating their differences across relatively uncluttered communicational territory. We have argued that this constitutes only

the first level of analysis, at which the role of power imbalance is seldom considered.

Intercultural training programs must go beyond static conceptions of cultural difference toward dynamic views of intercultural encounters sensitive to the forces of power and politics. This second, or interactional, level must also be addressed so that trainees will acquire a fuller understanding of their future interactions, whether for business or for some other purpose. The proposed model opens at least the possibility of assuming different frames of reference for business sojourners.

For the designers of programs, we offer four principles that we feel should be instituted immediately. First, trainers must include considerations of power in their program designs; it can no longer be pretended that intercultural training is a form of "polite" discourse that ignores more difficult, murkier aspects of human interaction. Second, trainers must rigorously remind trainees of the existence and viability of alternative explanations of intercultural phenomena. Incorporating this principle demands that trainers engage in exacting self-examination and analysis of their training programs to find and deal with flawed "totalizing" statements about what the other culture "is." Third, trainers must motivate their trainees to go beyond observable cultural differences in here-and-now interactions. Trainees must be compelled to consistently relate what occurs in the present to the powerful forces of history. Fourth, it must be emphasized that cultural differences are the product of negotiation of power. Expatriates need to be aware that cultural differences are not static—their impacts vary dynamically from one situation to another.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the limitations of the analyses we have advanced. First, because no extant training programs could be analyzed (except in the most general and speculative sense), we have based our observations and conclusions primarily on literature that has identified the major approaches and dimensions involved in intercultural training. For all we know, there may yet await pitfalls that will make the application of our proposed principles more difficult than they already seem to be. However, we should not let these unforeseen difficulties dissuade us from the goal of engineering more appropriately complex training designs. It must be recognized that, despite *any* difficulties trainers may encounter in formulating power-inclusive models of training, it is imperative that some means be found to move away from the static models of cultural difference currently offered.

Second, the analysis advanced here remains an initial stage from which it is hoped that more specific principles of training design can be offered, refined, contested, and ultimately integrated into actual training programs. In pursuit of this goal, we have offered four preliminary principles. However, even absent full incorporation of these principles —a goal that must await future research and application by training specialists and scholars—we believe that simply realizing the need for a theoretical model that recognizes the importance of power in the socialization of professional expatriates through training is itself an important first step for program designers to take.

NOTES

1. It should be noted that although Deetz's discussion centers around communication within corporate contexts, rather than on intercultural communication, his analysis of power in communication provides a sound theoretical framework for our analysis.

2. Perhaps for this reason, comparatively few companies offer training programs dealing with cultural issues prior to the expatriate's visit to the foreign country (Inman, 1985). During the six-year period covered by Inman's (1985) research, the number of cross-cultural training programs decreased. At the same time, more attention has been paid to the technical aspects of international assignment, such as whether the expatriate understands the language or whether he or she has the requisite technical and professional qualifications to perform effectively in the foreign country (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976). McEnery and DesHarnais (1990) also note that about 50 to 60 percent of American companies provide no preparation for their employees to do business abroad.

3. While the utility of the cultural assimilator in intercultural training has been well-documented, scholars have also cautioned that trainers should avoid applying assimilator precepts in simplistic and stereotypical ways, leading trainees to believe that there is only one "right" way to understand a given culture (Gudykunst & Hammer, 1983; Leong & Kim, 1991).

4. The paucity of theoretical models has also been noted by Kim (1988) in her review of studies of overseas adaptation: "For the most part, selection of overseas effectiveness factors in these studies tend to be based on specific practical interests pertaining to specific situations of cross-cultural adaptation, not on rigorous theoretical reasoning" (p. 25).

5. One classification system, the collectivism/individualism distinction, is often said to parallel Hall's (1976) distinction between high- and low-context cultures. The parallels between measures of collectivism/individualism and high-/low-context communication also becomes conflated with Bernstein's (1971) distinction between restricted and elaborated codes. High-context communication is seen as relying on restricted code, whereas low-context communication is tied to elaborated codes (Hall, 1976). Combining Hall's distinction between high- and low-context communication with Bernstein's distinction between restricted and elaborated codes, Gudykunst and Kim (1992) conclude that high-context communication is closely related to collectivist cultures in that both emphasize the importance of the ingroup and have social harmony as their primary concern. This dichotomous thinking, from collectivism and individualism, then to high-context and low-context cultures, then on to restricted and elaborated codes, leads to severe constraints in the understanding of intercultural communication process.

6. This static view of cultural differences can also be observed in many instances in which various cultural classification schemes, such as Hofstede's (1984) four dimensions

of culture, have been utilized to facilitate intercultural understanding. While these classification schemes certainly provide basic and generalized pictures of the cultural Other, we contend that more attention should be paid to *in situ* dynamic intercultural interaction; culture does not exist in abstract terms, but is realized through the engagement of the interactant.

7. To compound the difficulty, critical scholars working in the tradition of dialogic criticism of discourse (see, for example, Voloshinov, 1973) have noted that it is precisely those discourses that are promoted as "official" that engender the most resistant interpretation from the disenfranchised.

8. Even more broadly, the notion of "training" and "knowing how others do things" is a cultural tradition typically more associated with Americans, a reflection, it is said, of a superior attitude which impels Americans to "understand" and "appreciate" the lower-positioned cultural Other. According to this view, "training" itself may be seen as the result of assuming a superior position with respect to the other culture. The findings of Tung (1988) illustrate this well: among Japanese, European, Australian, and American executives, it is only the American executives who do not consider international experience as important to organizational promotion. For the returned U.S. expatriates and their personnel managers, overseas assignment is not seen as a step up on the career ladder. This attitude may partially explain the higher failure rate and the less thorough adjustment of American expatriates as compared to expatriates from other nations, although Parker and McEnvoy's (1993) study does not show that U.S. expatriates were less well adjusted than other expatriates.

9. The idea that culture embraces more than one viewpoint has been addressed by post-modernist anthropologists in their composition and critique of ethnographies (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Traditionally, cultural description in ethnography has been judged according to its fidelity, that is, whether it "accurately" describes the cultural Other. Recent developments in ethnography, however, have called into question whether objective descriptions are possible (Ellen, 1984) and some now insist that the goal of attaining the status of objective observer is largely illusory (but for a particularly cogent argument against this view, see P. S. Sangren, 1988).

Introducing Power, Context, and Theory to Intercultural Training

A Response to Chang and Holt

WENDY LEEDS-HURWITZ • *University of Wisconsin–Parkside*

Intercultural training has been available in the United States in one form or another for about 50 years. That is a noticeable length of time, so it is appropriate now to take stock of what has occurred in the past, to survey what is available in the present, and to give serious consideration to improving training available in the future. Chang and Holt take a step in this direction, emphasizing the last of these three possibilities. Their goal is to suggest ways to improve intercultural training intended for one specific audience, business managers. They essentially cover three topics: power, context, and theory. The following pages expand on some of their ideas and point out a few limitations of their argument.

POWER

I would agree with Chang and Holt that "power is both product and process in interaction," and they make good use of writings about power by organizational communication analysts such as Deetz (1992) and Mumby (1988) to expand what should be taken into account by those in intercultural communication. It makes particularly good sense to adapt this literature when their concern is specifically the training of business managers: If any group would be sensitive to the conclusions of organizational analysts, this group should be. Chang and Holt conclude as a result of their reading of the organizational communication literature that "broader structural factors" and "sociohistorical context" need to be taken into account for intercultural training. Obviously these can be important influences, but I would caution against stepping too far back from the specifics of intercultural interactions in the search for an understanding of power.