Building Global Competence: 
A New Pedagogy for a New Millennium

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines common methods used to teach and develop global competencies in managers and assesses their relative strengths and weaknesses. It then describes a field-tested teaching pedagogy aimed at developing global competencies that confronts the weaknesses of previous methods. The new pedagogy derives from a variety of social science models, such as anthropology, sociology, and economics. Graduate level managers move in and out of increasingly sophisticated field exercises that result in an individualized framework for future cultural entry, and incorporates the newly developed competencies. Participants extrapolate their experience from the current culture to different country-based and organization-based cultures.

INTRODUCTION

The globalization of commerce has increased the number and complexity of transactions among markets and cultures that were once isolated from each other (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994; Francesco and Gold, 1997; Korten, 1996). In addition, it has required managers and organizational workers to develop new cross-cultural competencies to facilitate these transactions and to help organizations develop on a global basis (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 2000; Tvorik, 1996; Qualman, 1995). Increased interest in alliances, global network structures, and other transorganizational interventions, as well as growing workforce diversity, demands that managers and other workers become well versed and experienced in cross cultural competence. Educational curriculums seek to address this need by training people to conduct affairs in various countries. But where do these competencies come from and how are they acquired?

Traditional methods of education, such as case studies, simulations, and company visits, have attempted to address this challenge but fall short and lack efficacy. The purpose of this paper was to critique these methods and propose a unique educational design that builds on the advantages of multiple theoretical approaches in a live field setting.

For the purposes of this paper, global competence is defined as the ability to transverse country-based cultures. That is, to be able to identify one’s own cultural values and business practices, to suspend judgment of other’s cultural values while conducting business transactions, and to possess the behavioral flexibility to adopt situationally appropriate behaviors for task accomplishment. Put differently, it means to be able to operate successfully within another country’s cultural assumptions.

Traditional Approaches

Table 1 describes three traditional approaches and a new method, including the pros and cons of each method.
Three traditional methods are most frequently used to help students of organization behavior and intercultural studies extend their international and cross-cultural skills: the case method, simulations, and foreign visits—often within the context of a class or company going on a study mission. The case method is a well-understood pedagogy, and a number of international cases now exist to introduce student managers to the world of cross-cultural differences (Vielba and Edelshain, 1995; Pemberton, 1995). Typically, a case describes a business situation and asks the reader to analyze the cause of success or difficulty and/or recommend actions. Well-known cultural frameworks, such as Hofstede (1999, 1998), Hall (1977), and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) are used to understand the alternatives available to a manager in a particular case situation. Thus, the case method is inexpensive and can explore a broad range of concepts and situations. For example, constraints and opportunities can be explored, the manager’s own biases and values can be raised, and a number of different cultures can be discussed and compared. The method is especially effective when the analyses or recommendations can be shown to be in error because of their reliance on an inaccurate cultural assumption. The case method also has two important weaknesses. Since it is an abstraction of a real or past event, it lacks a “reality” component. The professional trying to learn a cross-cultural competence is unable to associate the learnings with the emotional or visceral reality that accompanies the situation. The learning is primarily cognitive. In addition, the only information available is what the case writer deems important. Cases are often criticized for supplying either too much or too little information. When it supplies too much, the professional manager faces less uncertainty than a real world application; when there is too little information, the professional has to “make assumptions” about the case. While making up information is a reality of cross-cultural work, it is, again, devoid of the emotional activation that accompanies reality.

A second and increasingly popular method is the simulation (McBride, 1992; Keys, 1995; Murrell and Blanchard, 1992). Here, a situation is defined and rules governing relationships among simulation participants are prescribed. As participants work their way through the simulation, they develop beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
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<tr>
<td>International Cases</td>
<td>Inexpensive</td>
<td>Little emotional activation</td>
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<td>Good exposure to broad range of concepts/ cultures</td>
<td>Case provides clues (or not) and therefore controls the information flow</td>
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<td>Simulations</td>
<td>Raise issues but are not real</td>
<td>Misses the foreign milieu</td>
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<td>Activate emotions and frustrations</td>
<td>Easy to measure that which is trivial but hard to measure things more important</td>
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<td>Only as strong as the concepts it is designed to meet</td>
<td>Unclear line of sight</td>
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<td>Foreign Visits</td>
<td>Exposure to the “real” culture</td>
<td>Participants remain spectators</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transfers operational ideas to “back home” situation</td>
<td>Host institution controls the content/ format</td>
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<td>Benchmarks systems &amp; processes</td>
<td>Emotionally shallow</td>
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<td>Graduated Immersion</td>
<td>Customized</td>
<td>Time consuming</td>
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<td>Field Model</td>
<td>Depth work</td>
<td>Expensive</td>
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<td>Internalizes cultural awareness</td>
<td>Emotionally demanding</td>
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<td>Generalizable model</td>
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that are then challenged by beliefs that have been developed by other groups. The friction between the beliefs is then identified and debriefed.

Simulations are inexpensive, excellent at raising specific issues, and do a good job of activating emotional responses. They can be conducted anywhere and at anytime. They can identify, explore, and illuminate important cross-cultural concepts, such as individualism vs. collectivism, high vs. low context cultures, or achievement vs. affiliation orientation. Finally, a well-done simulation can create some very real emotional reactions. Affective experiences are important because they generate an array of imbedded participant biases that can be examined in the simulation and are part and parcel of the process of conducting international business. Simulations allow the individual to integrate both task-oriented and emotional experiences.

Simulations also have several important weaknesses that limit their effectiveness as a management development tool. First, even though some real emotional issues can be raised, a simulation misses the full foreign milieu…smells, dress codes, atmosphere, and language for example. Like case studies, the situation is contrived. Second, the simulation is only as strong as the concepts it was designed to highlight and third, it is dependent on the skills of the facilitator to surface them. It is unfortunately true that issues which are easy to measure or demonstrate are trivial compared to the issues that are important. It is difficult for example to fully demonstrate in a simulation the difficulties of working through a translator, the proper protocols at a meeting with senior level officials from a Communist government, or the awareness that any response other than “yes” means “no” in some cultures. Third, there is an unclear line of sight in a simulation, meaning some learnings may be readily transferable to a new culture, while others may elude the best-intentioned learner. This too primarily hinges on the expertise of the facilitator to surface the more imbedded cultural assumptions.

A third common method, increasingly popular in executive education, is the foreign visit. Here, professors accompany a class to a foreign country and visit organizations that have agreed to host a group of students. The class is given a tour of the facility, a senior manager often makes a presentation about the organization’s operations, strategy, or current challenges and the students are allowed to ask questions. In addition, the foreign sessions often include arranged sightseeing tours to expose students to cultural artifacts.

The foreign visit has some important strengths. The most obvious strength is the reality of the situation. The massive amounts of sensory information about a new and different world can be a truly eye-opening experience, and participants often return with a new perspective on their worldview and life. Unlike cases and simulations, the foreign visit is live and exposes the professional to a number of pre-selected as well as random aspects of the culture. Second, there are at least two good opportunities to learn from modeling and imitation (Bandura, 1977). Participants can view real life professionals operating in a culture and often pick up subtle clues, mannerisms, and other behaviors operating in a company that can be imitated. They can also benchmark systems, processes, and procedures that can be transferred to their own organizations in their home country. This benchmarking potential is, in fact, the real benefit of a foreign visit.

However, a critical analysis of the benefits suggests they tend to be more operationally focused, as opposed to cross-cultural. Foreign business visit outcomes may be surprisingly more shallow than expected. If the goal of the visit is improved global competence, the outcomes hardly warrant the additional expense. First, despite the real life nature of the foreign visit, the visitor remains a spectator and is typically insulated from interacting with local nationals. They observe, listen, and interact in controlled situations. Moreover, the host organization easily controls the content, exposure, and intensity
of the visit. As a result, the learnings are limited to the operational and systems issues agreed to by the
host institution.

However, if the goal of the visit is to increase global competence, the controlled and pre-selected
nature of the “forced march” through the country prevents any opportunity for structured learning about
how to interact with, gain behavioral flexibility in, or develop an appreciation of a different culture. The
best opportunities for this learning come only during unstructured free time such as shopping and dining,
but there is little or no opportunity to explore the meaning of the interactions experienced. The “life
changing” experience reported by foreign visitors upon return to their native culture, when debriefed,
reveal little more than a great experience, cemented biases, and a chance to do some traveling in style.
Such trips provide a false sense of sense of quality in output and student satisfaction, at best providing an
inoculation against surprise and novelty in a foreign land. There is little explicit knowledge about the true
nature of the culture; and they lack the depth and breadth necessary for character and skill development
required to conduct aggressive business across cultures.

Overall, while these traditional methods can contribute to the development of professional skills
and abilities with respect to cross-cultural competence, each method has important weaknesses. In
response, we have been developing, over the past three years, a methodology that draws on strengths of
these methods as well concepts from the social sciences to build global competence in executive students.
The method is described below.

THE GRADUATED FIELD IMMERSION MODEL

The graduated field immersion model (GFIM) is a five-day workshop that draws from frameworks
and theories in the social sciences. Anthropological concepts, such as participant-observer methods and
definitions of culture, and economic concepts, such as industrial-organization models, are used to develop
cross-cultural skills and learn about a foreign country’s business environment. In preparation,
participants come to the workshop having completed a pre-work assignment.

The GFIM requires participants to conduct four increasingly complex and sophisticated activities to
build cross-cultural skills and knowledge and to develop a global competence. With the exception of the
final activity, each event is conducted in the field among local nationals and businesses. Participants are
asked to complete assignments, each one building on the learnings and competencies developed in the
prior assignment.

Pre-Workshop Assignment

Prior to the workshop, participants are asked to complete an Individual Interpersonal Competence Profile. The profile describes the elements of human relations that the participants have
determined are important to their business practices, including an assessment of interpersonal strengths
and weaknesses. The profile is driven by data from self-awareness and feedback from others and is
triangulated with the addition of the characteristics for successful transpatriates as identified by Meyers
and Kelly in their Cross Cultural Adaptability Index (CCAI).

The four activities in the GFIM are listed below and described in Table 2:
1. Cultural Orientation
2. Hypothesis Testing

1 The term “foreign” is used to describe a cultural, economic, political, and organizational values and features set of any country that is different from the individual’s own home country. No implications of better or worse, higher or lower status are intended.
Table 2: Elements and Concepts in the Graduated Field Immersion Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cultural Orientation</th>
<th>Hypothesis Testing</th>
<th>Economic Orientation</th>
<th>Cultural Entry</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timing</td>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Day 2</td>
<td>Day 3 and 4</td>
<td>Day 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>Small groups do fieldwork to identify and collect unfamiliar cultural attributes.</td>
<td>Small groups empirically test propositions about the host culture</td>
<td>Small groups do field research on local economy and management practices</td>
<td>Participants collaborate to develop processes and models of cultural entry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectives</td>
<td>To develop participant-observer skills</td>
<td>To develop research and diagnostic skills</td>
<td>To apply research skills to excise sociological &amp; economic patterns</td>
<td>To integrate learnings from prior experiences</td>
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<td>To learn about the concept of culture</td>
<td>To understand the sociotype and stereotype concepts</td>
<td>To heighten interaction with the host culture to develop confidence and resourcefulness in finding local resources</td>
<td>To articulate one’s personal assumptions and cultural filters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>To explore everyday aspects of the host culture</td>
<td>To consider values, ethics, and personal choices when in a different culture</td>
<td></td>
<td>To develop a process for continually examining systems through multiple perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>A list of propositions that show insights on a number of aspects of the new culture</td>
<td>Applied research methods &amp; concepts</td>
<td>Formal presentations to local professionals/executives regarding feasible host country business opportunities</td>
<td>Individualized and practical frameworks to smooth entry into various cultures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A number of artifacts that represent the culture</td>
<td>Greater personal comfort interacting within the host culture</td>
<td>A personal view of group dynamics and behaviors that helped or hindered the team’s performance</td>
<td>Raised awareness of the similarities and differences between country and organizational culture</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-assessment and team feedback of stretch goal achievement</td>
<td>Enhanced awareness of personal projections and defenses for increased autonomy</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory Base</td>
<td>Anthropological methods and concepts</td>
<td>Sociological research methods Ethics and values</td>
<td>Economics &amp; Sociology Group dynamics Organizational communications</td>
<td>Organization theory Model building Learning theory</td>
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<td>Humanistic psychology</td>
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Cultural Orientation

The objectives of the first assignment are to develop anthropological skills of participant-observation (Spradley, 1997), explore everyday aspects of the host culture, and identify gaps between the pre-work assessment of strengths and weaknesses (developed in isolation of the culture) and the actual emotional experience of those skills in application. After the participants review their pre-workshop
assessment papers and set individual stretch goals for the exercise, they are formed into small groups (the smaller the better after accounting for safety concerns). Trios and quartets work well. The first assignment asks the teams to spend the day collecting objects and experiencing the local culture. They are also given a restaurant name and address and asked to show up to the restaurant for dinner at a specified time with their collected artifacts for the retelling of their experiences. No maps or directions are supplied.

During the dinner, the experience is debriefed by asking the participants to present to the group the top three experiences and/or objects acquired. They are also asked to reflect on their skill set needs and to infer the meaning of the exchanges they had. That is, given the experience, how accurate were their initial assessments of their strengths and weaknesses, and how should they be revised and clarified for the remainder of the workshop. In addition, they describe their assessments or propositions (hypotheses) about why local inhabitants acted the way they did.

Several concepts from the social and behavioral sciences inform the design of this activity. For example, one of anthropology’s primary research methods is participant observation (Reference). In this method, researchers immerse themselves into the culture by becoming part of it. In Street Corner Society (1993), Whyte learned about the street gangs by taking an apartment and “hanging out” with the local boys and then keeping extensive observational notes about the interactions among the group members as well as their relationships with other groups. In the same way, the first field assignment asks participants to become part of the culture by doing normal, everyday activities. As they interact with the culture, they are encouraged to note difference in mannerisms, behaviors, exchanges, and so on. Another attribute of the assignment draws from humanistic psychology and becomes an important source of information (Rogers, 1961). Each participant is encouraged to be aware of their intra-psychic experience: to notice when they become frustrated, annoyed, happy, satisfied, when they talk louder or walk faster, and other behavioral or emotional clues that identify potential differences in cultural assumptions.

This initial activity eases participants into the new culture, helping them gain a foothold upon which to balance the succeeding fieldwork activities. It establishes the baseline for a pattern of increasingly complex and demanding activities that require participant confidence and resourcefulness.

**Hypothesis Testing**

The second assignment, conducted on the second day of the workshop, builds on the Cultural Orientation assignment. The objectives of the second session are to develop research, diagnostic, and intervention skills, understand the difference between a sociotype and a stereotype, and to challenge participants to consider the role of values and ethics in cross-cultural work.

In this activity, participants develop a set of propositions about the host culture that are derived from readings, experiences from the prior day’s activities, or cases. For example, Americans often hold the view that “the French are rude,” or “Asians are industrious,” propositions that can be empirically tested. Small groups are asked to pick one or more propositions and to develop a research plan to collect data in the field to support/refute the proposition’s assertion. Clustered into new small groups, they are asked to return to the workshop and make afternoon presentations about the efficacy of the proposition and research design.

The second activity obviously brings research into a central place in the workshop. It is here that participants learn the skills they need to responsibly test their own assumptions and conclusions about a different culture. Questions of reliability and validity as well as the generalizability of the testing process are discussed. The group also assesses the caliber of the research methodology used and the conclusions
drawn. Finally, there are rich opportunities to explore issues of values, ethics, interventions, personal choice and responsibility, as well as the nature of their risk-taking.

**Economic Orientation**

In the third assignment on Days 3 and 4, the participants are reformed into larger groups to conduct research on the host country’s business practices, prevalent industries and economic climate. The objectives of the third assignment are to learn about the host country’s business environment and its relationship to culture; extend basic research skills and leverage resourcefulness in a foreign environment; and develop confidence and interpersonal skills in finding local resources and talking to local nationals. The activity culminates in participant-driven recommendations regarding the feasibility of different business decisions.

Each group is assigned a particular subject to research and asked to develop recommendations for presentation to a panel of local national executives. For example, a group could be assigned to investigate the country’s health care system and present the pros and cons of hiring local nationals or sending expatriots. Participants are given a clear set of criteria or standards against which the presentations will be judged.

Following a day and a half of research, presentations are made to a panel of host culture executives who can provide important insights and audit for participant misunderstandings. Their suggestions are identified and discussed during the presentation and debrief of the activity. In turn we have found our guest local national executives appreciate and benefit from the thinking and insights resultant of the student presentations.

Perhaps the most important concept explored and applied in this activity is economic and cultural. By exploring and researching a particular aspect of the host economy, the participants gain important insights into the economic structure of the country. In addition, the opportunity to explore relationships among organizations, economics, and culture is created. For example, in Mexico, the health care system clearly reflects the economic strata. There is a private health care system for the wealthy, a social security system for the working class, and a subsidized system for the masses of unemployed. In China, the cultural importance of relationships is reflected in their insistence on a local joint venture partner. Different countries have chosen different economic models and those models often reflect the culture, thereby providing important clues to the student managers wanting to gain international experience.

The economic orientation activity also has important psychological applications. Participants often face important roadblocks in acquiring information about a particular aspect of the economy, and in many cases, the biggest roadblock is not the availability of information, organizations, or managers to talk to. The biggest roadblock is the individual’s own sense of confidence (or lack of it). Modern managers and consultants as global workers need to be able to enter into many cultures, perform duties and tasks, and create relationships with local nationals whether they be customers, partners, or employees. One’s resourcefulness is fully tested and evaluated. Success in the activity builds personal confidence in transversing countries.

Finally, this activity draws on important social psychological and sociological concepts, in particular group dynamics. The effectiveness of the team in gathering important data about some aspect of the economy is often a function of how well the group designs data collection activities, how well it assigns tasks to individuals, and how it chooses to meet its goals. As a result, the participants also get insights into the relationship between strategy and group dynamics.
Cultural Entry Model

The final activity, building a cultural entry model, is conducted on the fifth day and is intended to bring the experience together in an integrated fashion. The assignment is for individuals and small groups to apply the individual and collective learnings over the past several days to describe the process one should use to successfully enter and understand the host country. The objectives of the exercise are to heighten self-awareness regarding interpersonal strengths and weaknesses as surfaced inside or outside the group; apply data gleaned from readings, papers, assignments, and from participant-observer roles; and create a framework to ease personal entry into a foreign culture as well as different organizations.

This activity is debriefed by identifying the common processes and concepts developed by the group. In addition, unique techniques are also identified and discussed. The efficacy and generalizability of these model elements to other cultures begins the process of seeing global competence as a life-long learning process. A number of subjects typically arise, including the fit between their own existing skill sets and the task requirements, areas for continued improvement and development, ethical and value implications of their behavior and business practices in cross-cultural situations, and observations on the way the groups function. Participants are encouraged to formalize their models, use them in future cross-cultural situations, and adapt them as part of an ongoing personal and professional development agenda.

CONCLUSION

This paper critiqued common methods for developing global competencies. Each of them possessed strengths and weaknesses. A new model and method, the graduated field immersion model, was described that built on the strengths of prior methods and adopted concepts from the social sciences. The new model consists of increasingly challenging field assignments that develops cross-cultural skills and culminates in a model of cultural entry that has wide transferability to other countries and organizations.

REFERENCES


