

HOW MANY METHODS DO WE NEED TO EFFECTIVELY TRAIN MULTICULTURAL TEAMS?

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Abstract: *Multinational teams (MNTs) are a common occurrence within and across many national and international companies. They have the potential for superior performance compared to mono-cultural teams. However, even though cross-cultural training (CCT) for MNT performance enhancement has a critical role to play, evaluation studies about its usefulness are sparse. This evaluation research investigates the experiences of stakeholders of a specific CCT, named Model of Freedom (MoF). Furthermore, aiming to determine how many different training methods may be needed to deliver effective training, it evaluates the processes and training mechanisms of the MoF and its 'value' for MNTs in light of this objective. This research adopts an interpretive position, employing qualitative data collection methods. Interviews were conducted with the developer of the MoF, cross-cultural trainers familiar with it, former CCT participants, and external experts. In addition, CCT observations were made in Holland, Scotland, France, and Japan.*

Keywords: *Cultural diversity; multinational teams; cross-cultural training; model of freedom*

1. Introduction

The notion of 'cultural diversity', both in terms of differences in race and ethnicity and in terms of geographical origin, is now largely acknowledged by many international organizations. Nonetheless, it represents one of the biggest challenges they may face (Vallaster, 2005). More specifically, the existence of multinational teams (hereinafter 'MNTs') comprising individuals of differing gender, age, functions and professions, coupled with a wide range of cultural backgrounds, results in a complex amalgam of positive and negative benefits. On the positive side, such diversity may have a beneficial effect on creativity and the ability to solve complex problems, with potential for creating value within organizations (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000). A number of studies have highlighted the enormous potential of MNTs in comparison to mono-cultural (homogenous) teams (Adler, 2001; Bergh & Lehmann, 2006; Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Lehmann & van den Bergh, 2004). Conversely, the strong influence of culture on the behavior of individuals often leads to the failure of many MNTs (Canney-Davison & Ward, 1999; Cho & Greenlee, 1995; Hofielen & Broome, 2000). These are perhaps the contradictions of cultural diversity - on one level lies the potential for enormous success; on another, a high risk of underperformance.

Since multinational teams (MNTs) are

common occurrences within and across many national and international companies and have the potential for superior performance compared to mono-cultural teams, one way to capitalize on them and at the same minimize their potential negative effects is to put MNTs through cross-cultural training (hereinafter 'CCT'). Arguably, CCT has a critical role to play in enhancing MNT performance.

There exist several CCT models and methodologies, which raise the question of which model and methodology, if any, ensures strikingly superior MNT performance while minimizing negative risks. To say this, however, is to assume that one CCT model will be enough to do the job, which may or may be the case. Many different CCT models and methodologies may actually be needed to deliver effective training. This paper seeks to determine just that. To do so, it evaluates the processes and training mechanisms of various CCT models and methodologies against the background of the processes and practices of a specific cross-cultural training approach, entitled Model of Freedom (hereinafter 'MoF'). This model, developed and promoted globally by Dutch sociologist Mijnd Huijser (2006), is evaluated in an attempt to investigate the value of this new CCT tool when applied to MNTs and whether it can accommodate other CCTs. It then discusses how many and what type of training methods are useful and therefore should be employed in an effective CCT.

Key concepts are reviewed first, including CCT models. The methodology used in this research is introduced next. The findings are

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then reported and discussed. This paper ends with concluding remarks on the relevance of the MoF with regard to addressing cultural diversity in the workplace.

2. Literature Review

- *Multinational Teams*

A Multinational Team (MNT) can be defined as a team whose members "represent three or more ethnic backgrounds" (Adler, 2001: 140). It may be a face-to-face or a virtual team. Although different interchangeable names for MNTs exist such as global, international, transnational, cross-cultural or multicultural, no distinction is made between them in this paper, and each is subsumed under the banner of a MNT. Several studies indicate that although MNTs have the potential for high performance, it is more likely that they underperform or even fail in practice (Appelbaum, Shapiro, & Elbaz, 1998; Berger, 1996, 1998; Canney-Davison & Ward, 1999; Cho & Greenlee, 1995; Fink et al., 2004).

- *The Challenges of MNTs and CCTs*

A number of reasons have been cited for the challenges faced by MNTs and CCTs. They include: difficulties in building trust amongst MNT members and their leaders, especially if the team is virtual (Adler, 2001; Berger, 1996; Janssens, 1997; Oertig & Buerger, 2006; Zakaria, Amelinckx, & Wilemon, 2004); problems resulted from communication (Appelbaum, et al., 1998; Arnison & Miller, 2002; Berger, 1996; Gudykun et al., 1996; Marquardt & Horvath, 2001; Schneider & Barsoux, 2002); differing ways in which individuals from diverse cultures make decisions and the tensions ensuing amongst MNT members (Earley, 1999; Fisher et al., 2002; Marquardt & Horvath, 2001); differing expectations of leadership styles, preferences and hierarchies (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2001; Kippenberger, 2000; Miller et al., 2000; Moenaert et al., 2000); varying perceptions of how team members should be rewarded and motivated (Berry & Ward, 2006; Kippenberger, 2000; Rohn, 2006); and stress and frustration with MNTs resulting in distrust and lack of coherence amongst team members (Berry & Ward, 2006; Kippenberger, 2000; Rohn, 2006).

It is therefore not surprising that many commentators insist that developing cultural

understanding and raising awareness of cultural differences is critical in addressing the problems and challenges that MNTs face (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Earley & Gibson, 2002; Gibson & Cohen, 2003; Hofielen & Broome, 2000; Lehmann & van den Bergh, 2004). There is evidence to suggest that training in this area can reap real benefits as shown in Puck's (2006) research, although it must be noted that this particular research was conducted in a controlled environment. Thus, whilst research in this area is ongoing, proposed solutions have met with mixed success, suggesting that an alternative and innovative way of conducting such CCT is perhaps now needed.

- *The Contradicting Impact of Culture on Performance*

Understanding the dynamics of MNTs requires a fundamental shift from comparative studies of cultural differences to the study of intercultural interactions. Research shows that if a MNT, comprising individuals of differing gender, age, functions and professions, coupled with a range of cultural backgrounds are forced to work together, the outcome is quite often disappointing (Canney-Davison & Ward, 1999; Cho & Greenlee, 1995; Hofielen & Broome, 2000). Research also suggests that the strong influence of culture on the behaviour of individuals often leads to the failure of many MNTs (Brett et al., 2006). Conversely, if a MNT learns to overcome its cultural differences, this can have a beneficial effect on its creativity and ability to solve complex problems, with potential for creating value within the organisation. As Distefano and Maznevsky (2000) observed:

"Multicultural teams, then, have an enormous wealth of material with which to create innovative approaches to complex organizational challenges, and a broad range of operating modes with which to develop new ways of implementing solutions" (46-47).

Consistent with this statement, a number of studies have highlighted the enormous potential that MNTs can have in comparison to mono-cultural (homogenous) teams (Adler, 2001; Bergh & Lehmann, 2006; Lehmann & van den Bergh, 2004). Marquardt and Horvath (2001) have identified 10 sources of power of MNTs:

- 1) cost reduction and economy of scope;
- 2) getting talents from around the world;
- 3) ability to solve complex and difficult

- problems;
- 4) helping to transform the company into a global organisation;
 - 5) increasing the speed of operations;
 - 6) greater understanding of local customers and their need;
 - 7) helping to develop global leaders;
 - 8) creating better access to knowledge, resources and information;
 - 9) forming global alliances;
 - 10) helping the change into a global learning organisation (7-18).

It is widely reported that MNTs can create high levels of creativity enabling them to come up with new, competitive solutions and outperform mono-cultural teams (Bouncken, 2004; Gassmann, 2001; Janssens & Brett, 2006). Different worldviews and experiences and the wide variety of skills accumulated by their members can facilitate a MNT to think out of the box, quite often in a subtle but creative way. In theory, if properly managed, MNTs can benefit from the different cultural backgrounds of their team members, enabling them to create *cultural synergies* (Stumpf & Thomas, 2000). Here the word *synergy* as described by Stumpf & Thomas, 2000) refers to (i) “energy, used for maintaining the group and for fulfilling the group’s task” and (ii) as “the interaction of substances or factors which promote each other” (Stumpf & Thomas, 2000: 237). As to *intercultural synergy*, Thomas (1993) defines it as:

“[...] the combination of culturally diverse elements like orientation patterns, values, norm, behaviours etc. in such a way that a structure results which is of higher quality than the sum of its elements. The total result is then of higher quality than each single element, also than the sum of the elements” (408).

The basic issue of creating *cultural synergy* in MNTs often simply comes down to whether a MNT is able to overcome the destructive phase in its life cycle (storming) and whether its members learn to trust or at least respect each other and over time to develop cultural synergies (Köppel, 2007).

Despite the vast potential of MNTs, several studies point to their high risk of failure (Appelbaum, et al., 1998; Berger, 1996, 1998; Canney-Davison & Ward, 1999; Cho & Greenlee, 1995; Fink, et al., 2004). As Distefano and Maznevski (2000) argued, “[...] cultural differences proved the greatest

potential to hinder effective interaction within teams” (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000: 46). “Once cultural problems cause interpersonal clashes, teamwork can be seriously damaged” (212). According to Adler (2001), cultural differences need to be recognized as the source of why MNTs often underperform or even fail. Unsurprisingly, given the issues raised and the challenges and risks involved, there is much literature calling for the development of cultural understanding and awareness of cultural differences and arguing that some form of CCT could help MNTs turn these challenges to their advantage and benefit from the cultural differences within their ranks (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000; Earley & Gibson, 2002; Gibson & Cohen, 2003; Hofielen & Broome, 2000; Lehmann & van den Bergh, 2004).

- CCT Methods

As pointed out by Graf (2004), “the effective design of intercultural training programs is critical to their success” (199); hence the importance of choosing the right, customized training models and methodologies for delivering CCTs suitable for MNTs. This raises the question of which CCT models and methodologies are especially useful for MNTs. To answer this question, current CCT models and methodologies will now be discussed in terms of their potential usefulness for MNTs. The use of the term ‘potential’ used here in reference to the usefulness of these methodologies is no accident as it is meant to signal the lack of evaluations about the usefulness of those CCT methods, approaches and theories for MNTs.

According to Gudykunst, Guzley, and Hammer (1996), CCT models can be classified in terms of the approaches used (*didactical* versus *experiential*) or in terms of their contents (*culture-general* versus *culture-specific*).

(i) Didactical Training (DT)

The didactic training CCT approach assumes that, if someone wants to effectively interact with people in a specific culture, a cognitive understanding about this specific culture is required (Harrison & Hopkins, 1967). According to Graf (2004), lectures and discussions about the similarities and differences between the cultures formed the backbone of this kind of approach. To assess their ‘potential’ usefulness for MNTs, it is necessary to investigate every common

didactical training approach separately as each has its own peculiarities. These approaches include; DT lectures; DT e-training; DT-clips, films, and movies; and DT language training.

- *DT Lectures* - In a lecture or presentation, the trainer or expert delivers to the audience some sort of knowledge, usually in a one-way communication. Lectures are regularly used in CCT to introduce new contexts, give information, and to explain principles and theories. If lectures are interactive, they are

often referred to as a 'talk' (Fowler & Blohm, 2004). Cross-cultural models (culture-comparative studies) modeled on Hofstede and the likes (e.g. Tromenaars, Hall, or Lewis) are most likely applied in lectures. Table 1 lists the main strengths and weaknesses of the lecture method for MNTs.

- *DT E-Training* - E-training, also known as computer based-training, is a relatively new development in CCT as most of the

Table 1: Strength and Weaknesses of Lectures for MNTs

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainer feels in control (have confidence). • Information can be tailored for MNTs. • Large amount of information can be delivered in a relative short amount of time. • Can reach a MNT at once. • MNT member do not feel threatened by having to do something. • Preferred learning method in <i>some</i> cultures. • Can address complex theories with authority. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MNT members are usually passive. • Lecture/presentation can be boring, and/or not be understood by all MNT members. • Perhaps difficult for non native speaker to follow/understand. • Limited scope of learning (e.g. no experience involved). • Outcome limited to and dependent on the capabilities of the trainer.

Source: Fowler and Blohm (2004: 49; adapted by the author)

technology (e.g. the internet) developed mainly within the last two decades. E-training "refers to all types of learning available through CDs, DVDs and online programs" (Fowler & Blohm, 2004: 51). E-training can be designed to deliver contents similarly to one-way lectures and generally includes theory, introduction into new topics, etc. This can be combined with visual elements, such as video clips or animations to name a few. E-trainings can also be designed to be interactive, requiring the learner to do something (e.g. in a computer program to click on something). In E-training, communication with the trainer or other MNT member is

possible via live chats (texting or speaking and listening, which requires cameras and microphones) or via e-mail. The range of available online tools and approaches is manifold, which makes a realistic and objective judgment about the quality and possible usefulness of each difficult as it would require a very close look and understanding of each method. This could perhaps only be done in a separate research, as each individual approach would need to be looked at separately. That said, there are enough similarities among most e-training methods to warrant some generalizations of their possible strengths and weaknesses.

Table 2: Strengths and Weaknesses of E-Training in CCT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates words, sound, music, pictures, clips and other graphical elements appealing to the various learning styles of MNT members. • Can link people globally to attend a training and learn together without the need to be at the same place (particularly useful for a virtual MNT). • Trainee can decide when, how long and how much to learn. • Content can be repeated as much as necessary (different learning speeds of MNT members). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some MNT members may not be comfortable with technology and this kind of learning. • Some MNT member may not have the self motivation to start the training by themselves. • Access to hard/software is required. • Non native speakers might feel intimidated in online chats/discussions/game plays. • Trust is more difficult to develop between the learners and the trainer. • Lack of physical contacts with other MNT members and leaders might weaken the cross-cultural learning effect.

Source: Fowler and Blohm (2004: 52; adapted by the author)

- *DT Films, Clips and Movies* - Films, clips and movies in CCT can be used to show how people live in other cultures, often in a funny, entertaining and self-explaining way. Films in CCT are often produced to educate people about specific situations (e.g. conflicts in a MNT), with time in between the film sequences for the trainer to actively engage with the MNT members, perhaps to discuss a particular situation. Clips are normally shorter than a film and often not specifically produced

for CCT, but are meant to demonstrate certain cultural behaviors, situations, or any other incidences. Movies are sometimes shown in CCT to entertain and educate the viewers about people's life, social problems and cross-cultural interaction in general (e.g. the movie 'Lost in Translation' directed by Sofia Coppola in 2003). After showing a movie, a follow up in the form of a discussion led by the cross-cultural trainer will often ensue (Budd, 2002).

Table 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Films, Clips or Movies in CCT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can bring real live situations into a CCT. • No specific skilled trainer needed. • Can provide content that otherwise is impossible to demonstrate. • Entertain participants. • Substitute for case studies and critical incidents. • Film can appeal to all learning styles. • Able to raise issues about cultures, MNTs or other sensitive contents without intimidating MNT members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low quality productions, technologies (e.g. a YouTube clip) might distract viewers. • Objectives of the clip/movie/film are not clear for the participants. • Poor introduction/follow up/use of information of the content. • Boring for some viewers. • No substitute for role plays (where MNT members can experience situations). • Some language issues for non-native speakers.

Source: Fowler and Blohm (2004: 54; adapted by the author)

- *DT Language Training* - In the public view, CCT is sometimes associated with language training (Harrison, 1994). This view, of course, is not correct as the aim of language training (to teach participants to speak and understand a foreign language) differs from the aim of CCT as previously discussed. Therefore, language training by itself cannot replace or be seen as a CCT method for MNTs. However, it is the belief of this researcher that a good language training program can be used to support, or prepare non-native speakers of MNTs, to become more confident in their communication abilities, which, in the long run, can be beneficial to the MNT.

(ii) *Experience-Based Training (EBT)*

On the opposite side of didactical training, experiential approaches to CCT assume that people learn best when they can reflect on

their experiences. Role-plays and simulations are preferred methods to give CCT participants the possibility of experiencing by themselves different intercultural conditions. Role-plays are perhaps the most used CCT method for experienced based training.

- *EBT Role-Plays* - In role plays, CCT participants play themselves or others in fictive situations with a clear, purpose or goal defined beforehand (Fowler & Blohm, 2004). The basic idea behind the role playing method is to let the participants feel and experience by themselves various situations in order to let them reflect and therefore better understand certain behaviors, situations, or incidences in a MNT context. Various simulations such as, for example, BafaBafa (Bruschke et al., 1993), Barnga (Fowler, 1994) and a host of other games fall into this category.

Table 4: Strengths and Weaknesses of Role Plays in CCT

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chance to apply and practice new skills. • Let participants experience realistic situations. • Trainees learn by doing. • Role-plays can be done with two people, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be used for wrong purpose: to surprise, shock or embarrass trainees. • MNT members are perhaps too shy/not willing (fear of losing face) to participate. • May be culturally inappropriate for some

triads (one acting as observer giving feedback) or the whole MNT. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bring out different attitudes. • Ideal to step in others cultures (to see and experience the world differently for a moment). 	MNT members. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maybe poorly designed. • May be time consuming. • Trainees take it too seriously. • Unexpected outcome (like participants fighting).
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Source: Fowler and Blohm (2004: 61; adapted by the author)

(iii) Culture Specific (CS)

Culture-specific trainings refer to “information about a given culture and guidelines for interaction with members of that culture” (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976: 6). In culture-specific trainings, one culture is explained in detail with lots of examples and, perhaps, comparisons with another culture are made. A good example of culture-specific CCT is the culture assimilator.

- *CS Culture Assimilator* - Culture Assimilator, also known as intercultural sensitizer, is a widely used and researched method in CCT, mainly developed and used for pre-departure CCT. The basic idea of the culture assimilator is to create some sort of critical incidents between two cultures (normally described in a case study, but they can also be explained by the trainer). The trainee is then given several different possible answers which to choose from that best describes the critical incident (what has just happened and what caused it) and how he/she would act best in the next step (Fiedler et al., 1971). Problematic for MNTs, however, is the fact that in a cultural assimilator usually only two cultures are covered (the culture of the learner and the target culture for the work assignment) even though a MNT may be comprised of members from several other cultures. There are, however a few culture assimilators available (seen by the author at the SIETAR Global Conference 2008 in Spain) that claim to be specifically designed for MNTs but no study is available as to how such a specifically designed assimilator might

work in practice. The author of this study doubts that such culture assimilator would work well for MNTs as a tremendous amount of information needs to be known about all the cultural differences (that make up a MNT) before the assimilator can be used effectively by MNT members. Perhaps a culture assimilator for MNTs is used best after the main CCT in order to further enhance the newly acquired cross-cultural competences by actively applying those competences (e.g. how the team member would act in a certain situation).

(iv) Culture General (CG)

Culture General CCTs do not focus on one specific culture; they are rather general with the aim of delivering a broad focus on cultural dimensions and how cultures can be compared. Brislin and Pederson (1976), for example, refer to culture-general training as “such topics as cultural awareness and sensitivity training that allow [a person] to learn about himself as preparation for interaction in any culture” (Brislin & Pedersen, 1976: 6). One method that can be used in culture general that is particularly good for MNTs is case studies.

- *CG Case Studies* – CCT Case studies typically involve “a situation that includes enough detail to assess the problems involved and determine possible solutions” (Fowler & Blohm, 2004: 57). The case study method allows the creation of a 'possible' condition or situation that can be faced by any MNT. In a CCT, case studies can be done at the beginning (perhaps to introduce/raise

Table 5: Strengths and Weaknesses of Case Studies in CCT

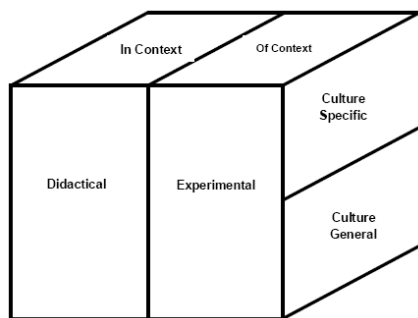
Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivates • Teaches terminology • Increases commitment • Relevant feedback for participants • Surfaces issues • Compares personal with group norms • Can assess change • Can promote sharing within the group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be seen as superficial • Teaches jargon • Produces stereotyping • Too much feedback; can be overwhelming • Potential for misuse • Produces fear of exposure • Not appropriate in all cultures

Source: Fowler and Blohm (2004: 56)

awareness about something), during the training (to test/check or apply new acquired knowledge), or at the end (to demonstrate the newly learned skills/prepare the team members for the next steps, etc.)

It has been argued that the relevant dimensions of in-context and off-context CCT, as shown in Figure 2, should be added (Puck, 2006).

Figure 2: Relevant CCT Dimensions for MNTs



Source: Puck (2006: 18)

'In context' and 'off context' can be understood as dimensions that can be applied to all didactical methods (e.g. in a lecture/presentations the trainer can give an example 'in context' directly related to MNTs, or give another example 'off context' not directly related to MNTs). The same applies for experimental methods, such as role play; it can be conducted 'in context' with a direct relation to the MNT work or 'off context' without a direct relation to the MNT but be equally useful for the CCT.

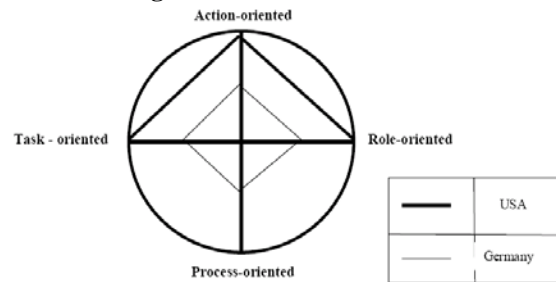
- *The CCT Model of Freedom*

One approach to CCT that has recently emerged and is specifically designed to enhance cross-cultural understanding for MNTs is the so-called Model of Freedom (MoF) developed and promoted globally by Dutch sociologist, Mijnd Huijsers (2006), as an analytical instrument designed to make sense of cultural differences.

Conceptually, the MoF can be visualized as a circle divided into four quadrants representing all possible human behaviors. The MoF measures individuals' appreciation of authority, systems, individuality, and role behavior and is applicable across all cultural dimensions (organizational, national and team). Within the model, four cultural orientations (action, process, task, and role) are represented, with each cultural orientation

scored on a scale of 0 to 100; any value nearer the latter indicating a high cultural orientation. When displayed and connected within the circle, a picture emerges of the preferences associated with different cultural groups. Figure 1, which shows a comparison of the culture orientation profiles of individuals from Germany and the USA, provides a good example of what 'visualization' actually looks like:

Figure 1: MoF Visualization



Source: Huijsers, 2006: 47

3. Methodology

This research is an evaluation of the potential value for and with focus on the training processes of the MoF as a mean of cross-cultural training for MNTs. Its purpose is to report on the results of in-depth and semi-structured interviews and participant observations.

According to Hall and Hall (2004), evaluation research is a specific type of research which focuses more on applied research, as opposed to developing or describing a new theory, and generally includes formative and summative evaluation research. Even though this research focuses on processes rather than simply on outcomes, it is often claimed that it is be beneficial to quantify the results of cross-cultural trainings (Patton, 2002:159). It is our belief, however, that quantitative methods are not always helpful. The time allocated to measure the impact of a CCT on individuals, teams, or even on the whole organisations is often not sufficient.

The research methods incorporated in this paper are purely qualitative with interpretivism as an underlying philosophy. The main evaluation framework used in this study is Kirkpatrick's four-stage evaluation model (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006).

Kirkpatrick's 'Four Levels of Evaluation', as outlined in Table 6 below, have been recommended for CCT evaluations in various

publications evaluator to conduct the (e.g. Kinast, 1998; Stellamanns, 2007; Wintterlin, 2008) as they allow the evaluation in a

systematic way, by focusing on the four most important aspects of any training: Reaction, Learning, Behavior, and Results.

Table 6: Kirkpatrick’s Four Levels of Evaluation

Level	Basic Questions	Assessment Method
Reaction	Were the participants pleased with the cross-cultural training?	Participant Observations, CCT, In-Depth Interviews.
Learning	What did the participants learn in the cross-cultural training?	In-depth Interviews (Former Participants, CCT Trainers).
Behavior	Did the participants change their behavior based on what they have learned?	In-depth Interviews (Former Participants CCT Trainers).
Results	Did the change in behavior positively affect the team?	In-depth Interviews (Former Participants CCT Trainers).

Source: Created by the author for this study based on Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006)

According to Denscombe (1998), the potential of interviews as a data collection method is “better exploited” when they are used for the exploration of complex issues. However, if the purpose of the interview was to collect data on simple or uncontroversial facts, questionnaires would be more suited. In-depth interviews are especially suitable to gain valuable insights and produce information which deals with the topic in detail and can be checked for validity and relevance. They are also likely to produce a very high response rate.

With semi-structured interviews, “the interviewer still has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered” (Denscombe, 1998: 175). However, semi-structured interviews provide more flexibility in terms of the order in which the topics are discussed. More importantly, they allow for open-ended questions and enable the interviewee to elaborate more on specific points of interest.

In total, 26 of in-depth and semi structured interviews were conducted with people, either ‘very’, ‘moderately’, or ‘not at all’ familiar with the MoF. Interviewees included 2 interviews with the author of the MoF, Mijnd Huijser (2006), 14 interviews with certified MoF associates (trainers), 5 in-depth interviews with cross-cultural training experts not connected with the MoF, and 6 in-depth interviews with former CCT participants coached under the MoF.

The data obtained was recorded, transcribed and analysed based on the Miles

and Huberman framework (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This research also relied on participant observations for data collection. The nature of participant observation allowed this researcher to place greater emphasis on depth rather than breadth of data. It also provided a solid platform for gaining insights into processes (Denscombe, 1998).

Four participant observations to which the MoF was applied as a CCT method have been conducted, recorded, and analyzed. Observations took place at two workshops in Amsterdam, Holland, and Glasgow, Scotland, one seminar in Tokyo, Japan, and one train-the-trainer Master Class in Paris, France.

4. Findings and Discussion

While many CCT are effective at the cognitive level, they weaken fundamentally in their ability to change the behaviors and mental attitudes of the trained. In this regard, the MoF stands apart.

Unlike many other CCT approaches, which only make people aware of cultural differences, the MoF goes a step further and acts as a change agent. This ability to modify the comportment and mindset of those trained is a significant development as the MoF theories and research combine with practical relevance to turn the MoF into a powerful, effective yet user-friendly training tool. As evidenced by the information collected in this research, this behaviour-altering capacity in particular, has made the MoF a favourite among both trainers and participants. Indeed,

its ability to transfer complex theories and research into practical application through user-friendly language and easy-to-grasp examples makes the MoF a very approachable CCT tool.

Besides, as a tool meant to strongly 'visualize' various aspects of cross-cultural interactions, it has been highly appreciated by both trainers and training participants. Since the 'visualization' stimulates user's imagination, it helps them better grasp its content and remember it even long after training is over.

As previously mentioned, it is critical that the widely culturally different individuals participating in a CCT not only be able to understand but, first and foremost, be eager to listen to the trainer if they are to benefit from it; hence the importance of choosing the right, customized training methodologies for successfully delivering CCTs suitable for any particular MNTs.

As observed during various MoF CCTs conducted by Huijser, which the researcher attended, a variety of CCT methods were incorporated as part the MoF CCT. One of the merits of the MoF is precisely that it allows itself to be applied in conjunction with or directly in various methods. The MoF can be used and explained in *didactical* form through lectures or it can be used *experimentally* and therefore applied in case studies and role-plays. Huijser also used the MoF *off-context* when he demonstrated situations (used examples) that helped to better understand culture-related concepts or ideas that influence others' behaviors but are not directly connected with MNTs. The MoF was also used *in-context* to show or explain directly related situations and issues with regard to the MNTs.

Moreover, the MoF can accommodate a *culture general* approach and explain and outline culture in general, not directly focusing on one but on all cultures. By the same token, the MoF is also suitable to explain one particular culture (or perhaps the business preferences from one particular country) in detail. In other words, it can be used as a *culture-specific* training method. As Puck (2006) has argued, it is when CCT methods are combined that possibly the best cross-cultural learning effects can be achieved. This is exactly where the MoF enables trainers to do; participants can be trained with a variety

of CCT methods that can be combined within the MoF.

Puck's method-combining argument is consistent with the researcher's participant observations during which it always seemed that the combination of methods made a significant difference. Everybody appeared to be able to grasp the MoF more easily and enjoy the CCT and make the most of it. In short, as can be inferred from the above, given its ability to combine CCT methodologies, a wide variety of people, regardless of their cultural origins or education, should be able to easily understand the MoF as a CCT tool.

5. Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, today more than ever before, MNTs are faced with many cross-cultural challenges, which they need to be prepared for. This is precisely where Huijser's (2006) MoF comes in handy as it offers various solutions to deal with such challenges. Since many elements of the MoF are derived from existing behavioural and management models, Huijser's CCT model merges the results of well-established behavioural and cross-cultural research in a way that simplifies complex concepts without encroaching on its usefulness. The MoF, displayed in different layers used for different purposes; for example, to demonstrate cultural orientations in companies or in teamwork, show how communication in different culture varies, or explain how conflicts occur and can be avoided. This is an important characteristic of the MoF, particularly for MNTs as it can be used for specific purposes. According to Huijser, the value of the model lies not in the categorization itself, but in how it allows others to visualize differences between cultures.

Participant observations conducted as part of this research also show that the 'visualization of cultural differences' has quite a positive effect on CCT participants. Their enthusiastic responses to this visualization process give much currency to the proverb 'a picture tells a thousand words.' That ability to 'visualize' is arguably one of the most valuable features of the MoF as compared to many other CCT approaches.

The benefits and relevance to MNTs of 'mapping cultural differences' have been documented by Distefano and Maznevsky (2000). According to them, the main objective

of mapping is “to understand the underlining characteristics affecting each member’s approach to the team,” which involves (1) “selecting which characteristics to map,” (2) “describing members’ characteristics,” and (3) “identifying their impact” (Distefano & Maznevski, 2000, 48).

Observations also indicate, especially in the case of Japan that participants found their own cultural professional profiles to be accurate and stressed that the MoF helped them unpack the “black box” of cultural differences.

That said much of the value of the MoF as a CCT for MNTs and the benefits to be derived from it are a function of the level of experience of the trainer. An inexperienced trainer or team leader can create problems when using the MoF as his/her main training tool. This may be due to the fact that reality is much more complex than can be explained with one cross-cultural training tool. This can easily lead to false expectations or to the wrong interpretation of some cultural behaviors. Take, for example, the term “Simple Systems,” used in reference to one of the dimensions considered in the MoF. It can easily be misinterpreted since it does not mean, contrary to what the term suggests, that the systems are simple but instead that no exceptions to the norms or regulations are allowed. Short of being made aware of such risk of misinterpretation, the MoF can be easily misused. Although Huijser has been hailed as an intercultural expert who knows how to explain his MoF in such a way others can easily understand it, this does not necessarily mean someone without experience may be able to teach or use the MoF effectively.

Recognizing this problem, Huijser has offered so-called “Master Classes” designed to train trainers. In these Master Classes, human resource managers interested in CCT, experienced team leaders, high-potential and cross-cultural trainers with an international record of accomplishment of at least five years are taught about all the facets of the MoF and certified as MoF associates.

To summarize, the demand for MNTs in companies around the world is likely to increase in the years to come as a result of globalization and the multiplicity of MNT operations around the world. The fact that many MNTs fail and team members suffer from stress, misinterpretations and distrust makes MNT work challenging and demands

more effective cross-cultural training provisions. From the observations and interviews conducted in this research, it can be surmised that the MoF can influence the performance of MNTs in positive ways, build a higher degree of cultural understanding of the trained team members and leaders, and help to reduce tensions in MNTs. The inordinate ability of the MoF to look at day-to-day cross-cultural situations and explain them, together with the ability to visualize cultural differences makes it the CCT of choice for MNTs.

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