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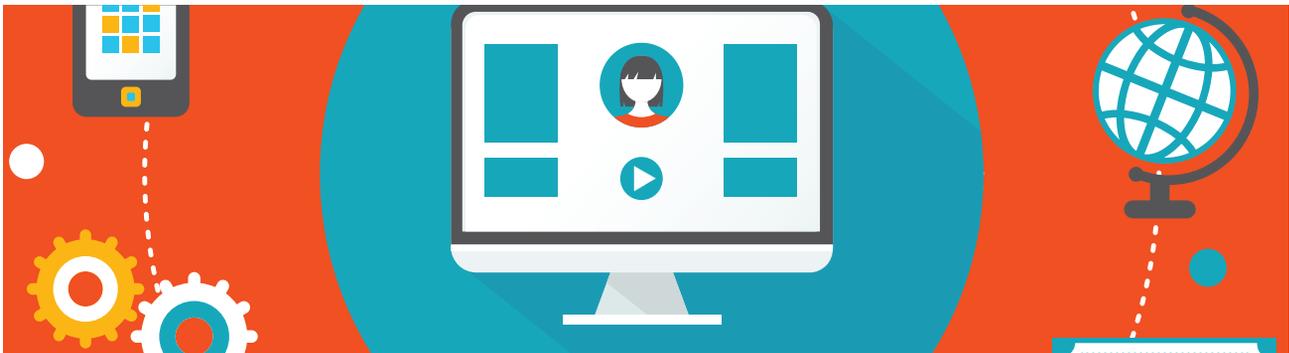
TIPS, TOOLS & INTELLIGENCE  
FOR DEVELOPING TALENT



# SUCCESSFUL GLOBAL TRAINING

Michael Marquardt

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**T**alent development (TD) professionals often assume that what has successfully worked in their culture or country will also work effectively in other parts of the world, and that good training, consulting, marketing, and managing are the same whether they are done in Bangkok, Buenos Aires, or in Boston. Nothing could be further from the truth. Designing and delivering TD activities globally across many cultures requires important knowledge and significant skills.

Global trainers fail for a variety of culturally insensitive and globally uninformed reasons, including:

- Inadequate flexibility in understanding the social, political, and cultural contexts in which global and local organizations and people operate
- Inadequate flexibility in adjusting to management styles, learning types, and preferences of learners from different cultures
- Over-reliance on models, concepts, and materials derived from one's national cultural perspective that may be inappropriate in other cultures and other parts of the world
- Lack of long-term commitment to developing solid initial relationships, and lack of adequate follow through and reinforcement for lasting success.

It is a fact that people and organizations around the world think, act, work, learn, and lead in different ways. Culture consciously and subconsciously shapes values, assumptions, perceptions, and behaviors. Culture provides systematic guidelines for how people conduct themselves both personally and in business. Understanding how talent is developed in different cultures is essential for global TD professionals.

In this *TD at Work*, you will

- learn about challenges to training globally, including how these challenges relate to leadership and communication
- begin to more fully understand the core competencies of global trainers

- get tips on training design, development, implementation, and evaluation
- receive advice about global scheduling and resources challenges.

## GLOBAL TD CHALLENGES

There are a number of key ways by which cultural differences influence the work of TD professionals in a global environment. Practitioners must take into account how people in different countries work and learn. What applies to one workforce in one country may have little bearing on the rest of the world. The following is an examination of how cultural differences affect TD, training, and performance professionals who work in a global environment—and how professionals can best meet these challenges.

### Leadership Roles and Expectations

American managers are encouraged to use a participative, democratic style of leadership. To achieve the business goal, the opinion and work effort of each team member is often solicited; Americans tend to prefer the impersonal authority of mutually agreed upon goals and objectives rather than the arbitrary power of a superior. Disagreeing with a manager is not uncommon, and employees are encouraged to take the initiative. American organizations tend to be flatter, and power is more decentralized. Managers and trainers must earn respect; it is not automatically granted. Attempts to minimize inequality are accomplished through legal and political means.

These roles and expectations are not as commonly found outside the United States. A variety of leadership styles fit comfortably into the cultures of other countries. Several different leadership styles are listed below.

- Leadership may be more autocratic and paternalistic.
- Managers are expected to make decisions rather than work out problems with subordinates.
- Work often does not bypass a chain of command.

# COMPETITIVE VERSUS COOPERATIVE MOTIVATION AND WORK STYLES

What motivates workers and learners differs significantly from culture to culture. How we work and learn with each other varies from being very competitive to being cooperative.

Competitive cultures place an emphasis on being assertive and focus on results, success, and achievements—especially as they relate to tasks and rewards. Work is highly valued, and determines one's importance.

Cooperative cultures, on the other hand, place a high value and emphasis on consensual decision making. Employees are hired not only for their skills, but also for their ability to fit into the group, to promote its shared values, to facilitate communication, to demonstrate loyalty, and to contribute to the overall work environment.

Below are some tips on navigating various work styles:

- Identify the motivating factors of the culture in which you are working
  - Develop appropriate workplace and learning activities that build on the work styles of the participants, and not necessarily on what motivates you
  - Realize that competition between groups is much more comfortable than competition within groups
  - Be careful about praising or singling out individual accomplishments. This may cause embarrassment and be counterproductive
  - Realize that individuals in many cultures may be reluctant to raise questions in group settings.
- 
- A clear hierarchy exists, based on status—age, sex, family, or title; this may discourage lower-level workers from airing views freely lest they be construed as disrespectful or nonconformist.
  - Power and authority are centralized and organizational structure—in terms of highly demarcated levels—is under tight control.
  - A leader may be expected to act in a certain, formal manner or may lose credibility.

As you begin facilitating training in a global setting, recognize that leadership roles and ways of being effective vary from culture to culture. This affects the manner in which you work with and train leaders. Remember, it may be more difficult to work in a hierarchical culture if you lack a high level title, education, or status. At the start, explain your expectations as a trainer or consultant. Try to be specific about behavior rules—how you wish to be addressed, how you will address the participants in your session, and your expectations.

## Cooperation and Competition

Generally speaking, the American culture is individualistic and tends to place a high value on independence. Conversely, many world cultures are more group oriented or collectivist (this is especially true in Eastern cultures). People in these cultures tend to subordinate individual interests for the good of the group, and groups protect their members in exchange for loyalty and obedience. Personal identity is based in the social network to which one belongs. Thus, harmony, rather than speaking one's mind, is valued.

## Groupings and Training Methodologies

When conducting training and consulting activities, you may need to form groups and teams. Randomly selecting groups could lead to failure—groupings that do not take gender, status, age, or ethnic background into account may offend all participants, especially in cultures in which the entire social and work structure is based on these elements. For example, in some Middle Eastern cultures, learning would be next to impossible with groups of mixed gender, because women and men tend to stay segregated in daily life. Similarly, in some Asian cultures, learning would be difficult with groups with members of various ages or higher status, because young people may hesitate to participate in deference to older or more senior members of the group.

## Cultures and Communication Styles

Training professionals must also consider the communication styles of various cultural groups when facilitating a training program. Communication styles can range from low context to high context and from expressive to instrumental.

### Low-Context Communication Cultures

The primary function of communication in low-context cultures such as the United States, Germany, and Australia is to exchange information, facts, and opinions. Information is communicated, for the most part, in words, and meaning is expressed explicitly. American task-centered businesses, for example, stress the exchange of facts and information through language and tend to be impersonal. The status of an individual is not as important as what she is communicating. In the United States, the business end of the transaction, rather than the personal side, is often emphasized. Thus Americans tend to focus on going immediately into business discussions rather than taking time to first get to know the potential business partner.

### High-Context Communication Cultures

The business cultures of Japan and China tend to use high-context communication by sharing experiences and making certain rules and requirements are understood without explicitly stating them. Meaning is communicated not just in words, but by tone, body language, facial expressions, eye contact, speech patterns, use of silence, past interactions, status, and common friends.

Contextual information is required before business transactions occur. For example, in various Asian cultures, a “yes” may mean “yes,” “maybe,” “I don’t know,” “if you say so,” or even “no” (determined by level of enthusiasm). The precise interpretation depends on the context, not just the words. Silence designates thought, not disengagement. Rushing to fill a silent void may be considered pushy or impulsive, or even emotional. Background, family, political and social connections, philosophical beliefs, affiliations,

## SELECTING GROUPS FOR EXERCISES

During learning and consulting activities, there will be a number of occasions that may require the forming of groups or teams. In the United States, trainers often accomplish this at random (for example, counting off into groups of three, drawing numbers, and so forth).

In other countries, this random approach could result in some very uncomfortable, ineffective, and even offensive situations. In creating groups, global trainers must be aware of the cultural significance, if any, of mixing by gender, status, age, or ethnic group. In many cultures, for example, learning would be next to impossible with groups of mixed gender. In Asia, young people in a group will hesitate to speak out if older people are in the group.

When facilitating group activities, it is important to remember the following tips.

- Be culturally and politically sensitive as you divide participants into groups. If in doubt, check with a local trainer or a senior member of the organization.
- In many cultures, a person’s status in the group continues to determine the degree to which she can state her opinion. Mixing such people may severely limit their participation.
- In a similar vein, some cultures encourage verbal comments by only the leader or manager of the group and not the individual participants.

and experience are also important. For example, one’s rank or family name may determine how and when one is addressed, what can or cannot be stated, and so forth.

MEANING IS COMMUNICATED NOT JUST IN WORDS, BUT BY TONE, BODY LANGUAGE, FACIAL EXPRESSIONS, EYE CONTACT, SPEECH PATTERNS, USE OF SILENCE, PAST INTERACTIONS, STATUS, AND COMMON FRIENDS.

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