

# Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20, 1993

## EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES FOR IMPARTING CROSS-CULTURAL APPRECIATION

William E. Stratton, Idaho State University

### ABSTRACT

This paper describes a workshop presenting several short exercises requiring minimal instructor preparation for imparting an appreciation of the issues and problems encountered in cross-cultural settings.

### INTRODUCTION

The increasingly global scope of business has resulted in the internationalization of the curriculum in business schools. Courses must not only deal with the essentials of business in the domestic setting, but must consider the implications of doing business in a worldwide arena.

One result of this trend is the need for courses in organizational behavior to foster appreciation for the impact of cross-cultural differences on the conduct of business in international settings. Another reason for emphasizing cross-cultural awareness is the increasing cultural diversity of the domestic environment, which also requires an appreciation for cultural differences to manage a diverse workforce effectively.

### STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

When teaching courses dealing with global issues in organizational behavior, I attempt to meet four major objectives:

#### 1. Increasing Cultural Self-Awareness

To deal effectively with another culture individuals must first appreciate their own culture, its implicit assumptions and distinctive practices, and its value biases.

#### 2. Developing Cross-Cultural Awareness

Students need to gain some understanding of the myriad ways that other cultures vary from their own, and gain some ability to appreciate these different perspectives.

#### 3. Understanding the Management Implications of Cultural Differences

Managers need to be able to perform a cultural analysis so that approaches to the achievement of organization goals elicit minimum disruptions due to cultural conflicts.

#### 4. Developing Trans-Cultural Skills and Approaches

Knowledge of cross-cultural differences is helpful, but students also need to develop an understanding of the situation faced by the individual actually bridging the culture gap. The processes of cultural adjustment and culture shock should also be understood.

Over the years, as I have taught cross-cultural issues as part

of my courses in organizational behavior, I have developed a number of short but effective exercises that attempt to achieve the objectives listed above.

### THE EXERCISES

These exercises help students appreciate some of the issues and problems encountered in cross-cultural settings. They are simple exercises requiring minimal instructor preparation and can be conducted in class using little time. Yet these exercises manage to move most students outside their comfort zone to actually experience the feelings of discomfort often encountered in cross-cultural settings.

The space afforded here does not permit me to go into detail concerning these exercises. Those who are interested may contact me for copies of the exercises and the teaching notes that accompany them.

Briefly, I will describe four of these exercises. One deals with the culturally-determined "natural" speaking distance and the problems created when one deals with another person who prefers to converse at a distinctly different distance, either much closer or farther away.

The second deals with how a group treats a co-worker who performs at a level, which is much lower than that of other group members. There are major cross-cultural differences in how such an individual is treated.

The third deals with the "manana" attitude and the distinctly different perceptions that an Anglo-American and a Latin American have of this concept.

Finally, the fourth exercise deals with differences in perception even with such amorphous stimuli as Rorschach inkblots, and the implications of this finding.

### CONCLUSION

I frequently use these and several similar exercises in my introductory course in individual and organizational behavior. They are short enough to be woven into my lecture material on international and cross-cultural management issues, and provide students some actual experiences with what the lectures and assigned readings typically discuss.

These materials can usefully supplement whatever text materials are used in dealing with cross-cultural/international issues. I think they would be of use to many instructors as they introduce global issues in their classes in response to trends in management education and the changes in business school accreditation requirements. Many textbooks have not yet responded very adequately to these new demands.