

## **Take a bow: culturally preparing expatriates for doing business in Japan**

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### **Abstract**

There are many cultural dimensions that firms should always consider and implement in their expatriate training programs. Insufficient cultural training can lead to business disasters for the multinational and the expatriate. Appropriate cultural training for expatriates can bring limitless possibilities. In this paper, expatriate cultural awareness training for foreign assignments in Japan will be examined before embarking on the international assignment, and therefore having a better chance at success.

Key words: Japan, expatriate training, cultural training, doing business in Japan.

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## **Cultural Conditioning**

As part of the socialization process, our cultures are programmed into all of us. Culture is shaped by many factors. These factors do not just appear over night and cannot be chosen. They took time to install themselves in each of us. Hence, culture is often described as a shaping process occurring over time that creates relative stability, reflecting a collective knowledge structure that shares values, behavioral norms, and patterns of behavior (Dowling, Festing, & Engle, Sr., 2009). Culture has a system for dividing right from wrong, or good from evil (Morrison, & Conaway, 2007). This process can be almost non-existent, as it is something so instituted and founded so deeply within our being that it is hard to pinpoint and trace. Its' extent and effectiveness is not seen or confirmed until one encounters others from a different culture; the greater the difference between both cultures, the greater the values, attitudes, and behaviors from ones' culture that will be noticed.

This is precisely why culture is so very tightly connected to business. More importantly, international business has a more crucial relationship with culture, given that a multinational is functioning in different countries, each with their own culture. International business involves the interaction and movement of people across boundaries; therefore, an appreciation of cultural differences is essential" (Dowling et al. 2009).

However, recognition for these differences has been neglected. Nonetheless, it is generally recognized that culturally insensitive attitudes and behaviors are inappropriate and often stem from ignorance or from misguided beliefs ('my way is best', or 'what works at home will work here).

## **International HRM**

In general, human resource management involves the use of certain activities that can effectively apply human resources, including planning, staffing, performance management, training and development, compensation and benefits, and industrial relations (Mujtaba, 2007). When a firm goes international, this general perception of HRM is expanded and affected, becoming more complex and intricate. In international human resources management (IHRM), business activities, type of employees, and countries of operation are all varied and scattered, with limitless possibilities of interplay.

IHRM is HRM, except that there is no limit to just one place where human resource activities take place; these same activities are multiplied by the number of countries where the multinational is conducting business. Along with this multiplication, the general HRM activities have to be modified so that they can apply to each foreign country where the firm is situated. Therefore, a multinational firm has host-country nationals, parent-country nationals, and third-country nationals, or HCNs, PCNs, and TCNs, respectively. But, along with the initial ideas that can be often one of the first signs of a possible birth of a subsidiary, is the expatriate.

## **Culture & the Expatriate**

Globalization is not a brand-new, modern idea. Globalization set foot in the business world since the beginning of trade. More specifically, when early settlers roamed the world and countries traded spices for oxen, and vice versa. However, globalization was not quite the unstoppable fire that it is now. Its growth was unavoidable, but it seems as though international

business keeps adding wood to the fire on a daily basis, causing globalization to become stronger by the minute. Cultural differences in integration were always given attention. When relocating into a culture that is extremely different than the expatriates' home country, the level of stress is heightened. In fact, stress is a central element of international relocation that is defined as a psychological state that develops when an individual faces a situation that surpasses internal or external resources available to deal with that situation (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010). By the nature of expatriate assignments, they are characterized by the three components of stress: outcome uncertainty, lack of situation control, and expectation ambiguity (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010).

More importantly, the negative and harmful experience of culture shock and other displacements are areas that have been extensively researched generally, and from a business perspective as well. Especially for business purposes, culture shock and the like can extremely hurt a company's profits and waste its costs. In IHRM, staff is sometimes transferred to another country to work for a subsidiary. Thus, an expatriate is an employee who is sent to work at one of the firm's foreign operations. It is of utmost importance that the expatriate learns and understands about the targeted country's culture. Communication always takes place between individuals, not cultures (Morrison & Conaway, 2007).

The company should also have the responsibility to teach all employees about the importance of culture. This way, the company as a whole can gain knowledge about foreign countries and culture, and also have an essential appreciation for their fellow coworkers and their general work practices. Cultural expatriate training is also critical in cases where the expatriate is relocating with his/her family, because research has revealed that there is a positive relationship between spouse and expatriate adjustment (Wilkinson & Singh, 2010).

No matter what country in the world a multinational wants to expand to, adapting to that culture is key in possibly engaging a good business relationship. Often, the business pioneer who makes that first management step on foreign soil is an expatriate. Through an international assignment, they are sent abroad to test the waters and create a stable foundation, ultimately and hopefully leading to the firm's expansion through a successful subsidiary. In fact, the strategic use of expatriates is critical in the development of global leaders, as it has been scientifically discovered that international assignments were found to be the single most powerful development experience (Mendenhall, Kühlmann, & Stahl, 2001).

The expatriate is the first management impression or the initial image that the multinational is sending abroad. Therefore, it is critical for the expatriate to be the one to make these cultural adaptations that are appropriate for that country. The need for cultural adaptation from the expatriate is vital for the long-term and stable future of the company's subsidiary, or foundation, in that country. Being culturally literate is of utmost importance, not only for long-term views, but to effectively communicate and more efficiently perform tasks. There are many reasons why an expatriate has to be prepared about another country's culture. One of them is that their company might wish to sell to the general public in the future. The average consumer in the foreign country is not going to have the same habits as that of the multinational's home country (Morrison & Conaway, 2007). Also, although someone may speak like those from the expatriates' home country, they are still thinking in a different way.

Culture shapes how people think. For example, just because someone may be speaking English, they probably aren't even thinking in English, and may be thinking in Spanish, German, Persian, or other languages. Therefore, learning more about the culture can give more insight into how people think, offering a business advantage. To prepare an expatriate to be culturally adaptable, and to perform their tasks, sufficient pre-departure training is needed with substantial

concentration on culture. Expatriate training consists of several processes. As a brief overview, they can include cultural awareness programs, preliminary visits, language training, and practical assistance, as presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 – Pre-Departure Training**

1. Cultural Awareness
2. Preliminary Visit
3. Language Training
4. Practical Assistance
5. Mentoring
6. Repatriation Procedures

(Dowling, Festing, & Engle, Sr., 2009)

Here, the paper focuses on cultural awareness programs and stress their importance in the success of the international assignment and international business.

### **The Cultural Norms in Japan**

To better examine the importance of culture in an expatriate training program for successful business abroad, the business culture of Japan is examined. Japan is used as an example of the country of destination for an expatriate training for an international assignment. To properly prepare the expatriate for Japan's culture, a program should be devised that contains step by step cultural information. The program should be administered in person, through a one-on-one workshop, and in print-out form. This way, the expatriate can refer to it whenever he/she needs to and take it overseas. There should be a section that details each characteristic, going more in-depth to refresh the expatriate of the cultural training program he/she received, and a table that sums it all up.

With a population of 126,804,433 people, Japan is a modern country with excellent business practices (East & Southeast Asia: Japan, 2010). Still, they have a very strong culture that is worth learning about for a multinational prior to initializing business with the Japanese. Japan's national language is Japanese, but most Japanese businesspeople speak English. The Western style, or left to right, is used to process text, but it is also common to see the Japanese style of vertical columns starting at the right side of the page and moving towards the left (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

Japan has a parliamentary government with a constitutional monarchy. It also has a GDP of \$5.108 trillion and a labor force of 65.93 million people (East & Southeast Asia: Japan, 2010). Agricultural products include rice, sugar beets, vegetables, fruit, pork, poultry, dairy products, eggs, and fish. Japan is among the world's largest and technologically advanced producers of motor vehicles, electronic equipment, machine tools, steel and nonferrous metals, ships, chemicals, textiles, and processed foods. It is important to note that Japan has two ethnic groups; Koreans and Japanese, but Koreans make up less than one percent of the population.

Its' three main religions are Shintoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. Some American expatriates and their managers might assume that Christianity is one of the biggest religions in

Japan, but it is not. Japan has a high-context culture and is a group-oriented society (Martin & Chaney, 2009). In fact, according to results from the GLOBE project, in which countries were benchmarked on various dimensions and clustered those with high within-culture agreement and high between-culture differentiation, Japan was amongst the highest on the dimension of Institutional Collectivism (Wankel, 2008). Due to its high-context nature, Japan has certain societal and cultural norms that are commonly prohibited and understood by businesspeople working in Japan.

### **Social Etiquette Considerations in Japan**

**Appearance.** Not surprisingly, Japanese clothing is more on the conservative end. Usual business wear is dark suits for men, and conservative dresses and suits for women. The excessive use of jewelry, perfume, clothing, and other accessories are usually more “censored” in Japan (Goldman, 1994). Due to cultural customs, shoes are removed frequently, and wearing slip-ons can come in handy. On a more peculiar note, women can wear high heels as long as they are not taller than their Japanese counterparts (Martin & Chaney, 2009). Due to their group-oriented nature, dressing alike is important because it shows harmony. It is important to note that all white is worn only for mourning.

**Greeting.** The typical Japanese greeting is a bow with palms down on the sides of one’s thighs. The depth and length of the bow has intricate meanings. For example, people of equal standing bow for the same depth and amount of time. However, if one person is senior, then the other person bows deeper and longer. These gestures and movements to remember may seem minimal to many, but can give a bad impression if not done by showing a lack of preparation. In fact, at times it can even be confused with a lack of care to learn about the culture, or even disrespectful. If an expatriate is not aware of this and only shakes hands, it does not necessarily mean that business will fail but it is a start on the wrong foot. On the other hand, if the expatriate does do this well, it can be a pleasant surprise that gives more credibility. Like in the U.S., the lower-ranking person is introduced to the higher one first, and the last name is used with the word san (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

Exchanging business cards is of high importance in Japan, and thus a good supply of bilingual ones are needed. The card should be presented with both hands and a slight bow. Upon receiving, thoroughly examining the card at once and immediately placing it in a briefcase or cardholder is of utmost importance, as doing that is a sign that the card is treated with respect.

**Verbal Communication.** First and foremost, if the expatriate does not speak Japanese, it is vital for them to understand that the people they are speaking with do not speak English as their first language. The expatriate therefore must consider that the person he or she is speaking with has to listen to the message, process it, and translate it into their language. The expatriate should keep this in mind constantly, for it is a task that might require repetition. Japanese is a highly status-oriented language, in which lower status people speak politely to higher status ones (Goldman, 1994). In the presence of a high ranking Japanese businessperson, the initiation of speech is up to that senior person. It is normal to speak quietly unless under certain circumstances like at a social gathering or during sporting events (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

Japanese business people are likely to say “Hai, wakarimashita,” or “Yes,” often (Goldman, 1994). This might not mean that they understand, agree, or approve, and can simply just indicate “I hear what you are saying.” Japanese people also apologize often and hardly ever say no. Instead, they tend to speak other phrases which is a ‘no’ in disguise. For example, “I’ll

consider it,” or “That is difficult” are phrases that often indicate a “no” response. Silence in the Japanese culture is seen as many things. It does not, however, indicate disagreement. It is used to show respect, to carefully consider what to say next, to convey truthfulness, to show defiance, or to convey embarrassment (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

**Nonverbal Communication - Facial Expressions.** Not using eye contact is encouraged and seen as showing respect to the person you are speaking with, and vice versa. Japan is a high-context culture in which the signals that are sent between Japanese people are often missed by people from Western cultures (Asada, 2007). Laughter can mean many things, from amusement to embarrassment. For the purposes of conducting business there, it is very important to know that the Japanese keep facial expressions at a minimum, not showing anger or irritation. Also, smiling can mean many things from pleasure, displeasure, or embarrassment (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

**Space & Time.** The Japanese are a no-touch culture and prefer more room for personal spaces. They hold punctuality very important, and the opposite, impolite. In fact, the attitude towards time is influenced by rank, with those employees of a lower rank not going home for the day before their bosses do (Martin & Chaney, 2009). Japan has been having slight changes, with shaking hands and more touching during business deals. But, their culture is not likely to be changing any time soon.

Despite talk about Japan becoming more Westernized, it appears as though Japanese hosts are initially entwined in many Japanese rules and codes of business (Goldman, 1994). The Japanese still prefer their distance. This is understandable, considering that every culture has deeply instituted roots and meanings behind customs. In any culture, changing something so simple as a greeting would require a change in the culture as a whole. A change in culture would require a change in perceptions, values, beliefs, and more, which, if done, can take more than decades, but rarely ever happens.

**Workplace Behavior.** Reflecting their group-oriented culture, there are often group offices with no partitions, walls, or doors, in which everyone can be seen, signifying the rejection of secrets (Nishiyama, 2000). Expatriates should also be aware of how to express their business plans. By most Japanese standards, U.S. business leaders can be a bit too obvious or flamboyant regarding the outer trappings of business success (Goldman, 1994). In collectivistic cultures people tend to exhibit more self disclosure and use interdependent communication strategies, since group members tend to share their feelings and thoughts with each other. Collectivistic cultures may target both tangible and intrinsic goals for business-relationship building (Zhu, Nel, & Bhat, 2006).

**Meetings.** Meetings in Japan are punctual and usually take place in an office, restaurant, or bar. Office meetings will only be business related and decisions will not happen quickly because the Japanese usually want to discuss proposals amongst themselves before responding. Meetings can be planned or set spontaneously, can take place in a bar or restaurant, and serve the purpose of building a relationship and discussing business issues (Martin & Chaney, 2009). As a plus to some, and a burden to others, alcohol consumption is part of meetings, and it is considered rude if one does not participate. Note taking, as in many cultures, is a sign of appreciation. In Japan, making and maintaining business connections is vital and assists in getting appointments and negotiating business deals.

The vertical nature of Japanese society places a high value on saving face and avoiding interpersonal confrontations, which also discourages the adoption of the American style of aggressive bargaining and confrontation (Nishiyama, 2000). Losing face is detrimental and more

discouraging and embarrassing than it is in the U.S. Due to their group-oriented culture, individual performance compliments are not common, and the group as a whole is complimented instead. It is even considered rude to single out an individual for recognition or reward (Martin & Chaney, 2009). Generally, the Japanese respond to positive persuasion instead of hard-sell techniques (Goldman, 1994).

**Women.** Non-Japanese businesswomen are more respected than Japanese businesswomen because they take the perspective that foreign businesswomen hold higher positions in their companies than Japanese women hold in theirs (Martin & Chaney, 2009). A woman is expected to be professional, and show credibility and authority immediately. The Japanese society is male-dominated and women who attain positions as those of men are few. Women are also expected to use more polite forms of speech than men (Goldman, 1994).

**Food.** For starters, it is considered rude to reject a food invitation, and is always encouraged to accept them, whether it be breakfast, lunch, or dinner. If invited to someone's house, the proper position to assume is the kneeling on a tatami mat, with men keeping their knees a few inches apart, and women keeping their knees together (Martin & Chaney, 2009). The host always pays. The expatriate should be prepared, as Japanese dinners can reach into late hours. Using chopsticks are critical. Not knowing how to use chopsticks can really show a complete lack of consideration for the culture. If the expatriate does not know how to use these, they must learn before they leave. The host usually begins the toast, and says Kampai, the equivalent of "cheers" (Martin & Chaney, 2009). Tipping is not accepted and can cause the person to lose face and be embarrassed. If the person does something extra, one may tip by placing Yen in an envelope rather than handing it directly, but the Japanese consider helping a gesture of hospitality, not for tip (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

**Gifts.** Ochugen are mid-summer gifts that are exchanged around the mid-summer Buddhist festival of Obon in July, and Oseibo are year-end gifts that are given at the end of December (Nishiyama, 2000). These are gift-giving times in which nearly everyone partakes in gift-giving, including businesses, relatives, friends, and so on. Gift wrapping and presentation is just as important as the gift itself. The wrapping should be neat with proper wrapping paper and presented with both hands. Gifts are usually not opened in front of the giver, but if they are, it should be done carefully to show politeness.

Okaeshi are return gifts that are given when a visitor is leaving a place where they were temporarily staying or spent a long time (Nishiyama, 2000). The gifts are usually given in person or sent via takkyubin, or "home delivery service." Good gift ideas are music, liquor, books, handbags, and art. Gifts are also given for other occasions, including birthdays, weddings, and more. Condolence gifts are money and/or flowers. When visiting someone, a temiyage is given, which can be a basket of fruit, a box of cookies, a can of green tea, or a bottle of his or her favorite beverage (Nishiyama, 2000).

**Entertainment.** In Japan, business entertainment is important for getting to know each other, which is important for business deals. It is more of an informal meeting, where subjects like politics, family, and other subjects are tackled. This form of entertainment meeting will most likely involve drinking and dining. It is common that business will be discussed minimally and only towards the end of the meal or drinking period (Martin & Chaney, 2009).

**Holidays.** Holidays are a very important aspect of any international assignment, since most of the employees managed in a foreign subsidiary will be from that country. Japan has three main holiday seasons: the New Year, Golden Week, and Bon Festival (see Table 2).

Table 2 – Japanese Holidays (Martin &amp; Chaney, 2009)

January 1 <sup>st</sup>	New Year's Day (Shogatsu) - Businesses are usually closed through January 3 <sup>rd</sup>
January 15 <sup>th</sup>	Coming of Age Day
February 11 <sup>th</sup>	National Foundation Day
March 21 <sup>st</sup>	Vernal Equinox Day. Graves are visited during this week.
April 29 <sup>th</sup>	Greenery Day
May 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Constitution Day
May 5 <sup>th</sup>	Children's Day
August 15 <sup>th</sup>	Bon Festival
Third Monday in September	Respect for the Angel Day
September 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Autumnal Equinox
October 10 <sup>th</sup>	Sports Day
November 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Culture Day
November 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Labor Thanksgiving Day
December 23 <sup>rd</sup>	Emperor's Birthday
New Year's holidays, December 28 <sup>th</sup> - January 3 <sup>rd</sup> ; Golden Week, April 29 <sup>th</sup> - May 5 <sup>th</sup> ; and Obon, mid-August.	Visits to ancestral graves

**Humor.** The Japanese do not like jokes that include sex, religion, or minorities. If they still laugh, it is out of politeness. Humor should not be used in business situations, although elsewhere would be appropriate. In fact, attempting to use humor is discouraged if the expatriate is not too familiar with the culture. For example, American humor is almost impossible for Japanese people to understand unless they have worked amongst Americans a long time (Nishiyama, 2000).

**Social Behavior.** Public touching between people of opposite sexes is considered inappropriate. Surprisingly, gum chewing in public is also inappropriate in Japan. It is also important to cover the mouth when using a toothpick. The American 'ok' sign means money in Japan, and no one wants to get those signs confused. It is important to know that good posture is significant and only men cross their legs at the knees or ankles when sitting. The following are a few additional pointers provided by Nishiyama (2000):

- Do not call loudly or wave to someone from a distance.
- Do not act too friendly, and refrain from slapping or touching others on the back. Do not talk loudly in a crowd.
- Do not put your feet up on a desk or other surface, and do not show the sole of your shoes.

- Do not blow your nose and put your handkerchief back into your pocket; use tissue paper instead.
- Do not point fingers.
- Do not kiss babies or touch young children to show affection.
- Do not eat when walking.
- Do not smile or greet strangers with “Hello.”

## **Transportation**

Due to their large population, Japan has developed transportation systems that can withhold and keep up with this capacity. It has one of the most sophisticated passenger train systems of bullet-train networks that connect major cities. The trains are called shinkansen and are operated by Japan Railways, or JR. The Tokaido/Sanyo Shinkansen trains connect Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka (Shinkansen, 2010). The southern half of the Kyushu Shinkansen connects Yatsushiro with Kagoshima, while the northern half connects Yatsushiro to Hakata. The Tohoku Shinkansen runs from Tokyo to Morioka and the Joetsu Shinkansen runs to Nigata.

In addition to buses, minibuses, and taxis, the metropolitan areas also contain convenient subway and monorails (Nishiyama, 2000). It is important for the expatriate to learn and get accustomed to these means, as driving a car might present obstacles in traffic. Most importantly, the expatriate should learn the bullet-train system, as it proves to be the most convenient form of rapid transportation.

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**Table 3A - Social Etiquette Hints**

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1. Appearance
    - a. Conservative clothing: dark suits for men and conservative dresses and suits for women.
    - b. Slip-on shoes are advised.
    - c. Dressing alike is important because it shows harmony.
  2. Greeting
    - a. Bow with palms down on the sides of one's thighs.
    - b. Lower-ranking person is introduced to the higher one first, and the last name is used with the word san.
    - c. Exchanging business cards is of high importance, so have plenty bilingual ones prepared.
  3. Verbal Communication
    - a. In presence of a high ranking Japanese businessperson, the initiation of speech is up to that senior person.
    - b. Speak quietly, unless at a place where it is louder than normal.
    - c. Silence does not necessarily indicate disagreement and is used to show respect, to carefully consider what to say next, to convey truthfulness, to show defiance, or to convey embarrassment.
  4. Nonverbal Communication
    - a. Facial Expressions
      - i. Not using eye contact is encouraged and shows respect.
      - ii. Laughter and smiling can mean anything from amusement to embarrassment.
    - b. Space & Time
      - i. No-touch culture that prefers room for personal spaces.
      - ii. Punctuality is very important.
      - iii. Attitude towards time is influenced by rank; employees of a lower rank not going home for the day before their bosses do.
  5. Workplace Behavior
    - a. Group offices with no partitions, walls, or doors, in which everyone can be seen, signifying the rejection of secrets.
    - b. Avoid flamboyance in plan expressions.
    - c. Meetings
      - i. Are punctual and take place in an office, restaurant, or bar.
      - ii. Office meetings only business related; decisions won't happen quickly because Japanese want to discuss proposals amongst themselves before responding.
      - iii. Alcohol consumption is part of meetings and is considered rude if one doesn't participate.
      - iv. Group-oriented nature prohibits individual performance compliments.
  6. Women
    - a. Woman expected to be professional and show credibility and authority immediately.
    - b. Male-dominated society; women who attain positions as those of men are few.
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**Table 3B - Social Etiquette Hints**

7. Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Considered rude to reject any form of food invitation</li> <li>b. Host always pays.</li> <li>c. Learning how to use chopsticks is imperative.</li> <li>d. Kampai is the equivalent of “cheers.”</li> <li>e. Tips are discouraged; if person does something extra, tip by placing Yen in an envelope rather than handing it directly.</li> </ul>
8. Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Ochugen are mid-summer gifts that are exchanged around the mid-summer Buddhist festival of Obon in July; Oseibo are year-end gifts that are given at the end of December.</li> <li>b. Gift presentation is as important as gift.</li> <li>c. Good gift ideas are music, liquor, books, handbags and American art.</li> </ul>
9. Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Business entertainment is important for getting to know each other; important for business deals.</li> <li>b. Informal meet; politics, family, and other subjects tackled, and most likely involve drinking and dining.</li> </ul>
10. Holidays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Very important for expatriate, since employees celebrate them.</li> <li>b. Three main holiday seasons: the New Year, Golden Week, and Bon Festival.</li> <li>c. Refer to content for the full list of dates.</li> </ul>
11. Humor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Avoid jokes that include sex, religion, or minorities.</li> <li>b. American humor very different than that of Japanese.</li> </ul>
12. Social Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Public gum chewing and touching between people opposite sexes inappropriate.</li> <li>b. Important to cover mouth when using a toothpick.</li> <li>c. The ‘ok’ sign in U.S. means money in Japan.</li> <li>d. Always have good posture.</li> <li>e. Refer to content for additional pointers.</li> </ul>
13. Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Sophisticated passenger train system of bullet-train networks that connect major cities; expatriates encouraged to use these.</li> <li>b. Trains are called shinkansen and are operated by Japan Railways, or JR.</li> <li>c. For example, Tokaido/Sanyo Shinkansen trains connect Tokyo, Nagoya, Kyoto, and Osaka.</li> <li>d. Refer to content for more information.</li> </ul>

### **Culture: What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You**

To efficiently measure the success that proper expatriate culture training can bring, it is important to measure the failure that improper pre-departure culture training can cause. The expatriate is the messenger; the one to carry and instill information and processes. But, without sufficient cultural training, the message will be lost in translation. Lack of information and cultural research in training programs can lead to disastrous results that are even harder to fix. For example, using the Japanese business culture research, assume an expatriate walks into an office to meet his future team of workers for the first time. If his pre-departure training excluded simple cultural information such as a greeting, the excited and smiling expatriate will shake

hands and hug the people that they will be working with everyday, not knowing the cultural damage that he has just caused.

Failure of effective cultural awareness programs in pre-departure expatriate training is due to many reasons. One is that firms often select expatriates primarily based on technical ability (Dowling, et al. 2009). No matter what technical or professional expertise, much of the success or struggle of a U.S. venture with the Japanese is ultimately contingent upon bridging the gaps of cultural differences and communicating in a manner most effective with Japanese hosts (Goldman, 1994). If expatriates are on an assignment in which they are technically prepared for, not much would be accomplished if they are culturally illiterate.

Surprisingly, many firms fail to realize the importance of cultural training. They assume that the role of good business is standard, and works everywhere. They do not believe they need to engage in special efforts for their expatriates (Mendenhall, Oddou, & Stahl, 2007). It has been recognized that culturally insensitive attitudes and behaviors stemming from ignorance or misguided beliefs not only are inappropriate but cause international business failure. Further, some executives believe that expatriates should not receive so much preparation if their pay is more than reasonable. If the expatriate faces a problem, chances are the executives back home won't be willing to help. When employers are issued first class tickets on a luxury liner, they are not supposed to complain about being at sea (Mendenhall, Oddou, & Stahl, 2007).

People at the home office also find it difficult that the expatriates need training programs. There might also be too much concentration on finances and profit, instead of gripping the cultural perspective that an effective, enforced, and thorough cultural program can positively affect profits. On the other hand, a firm might create a cultural program for expatriates with the right intentions, but not with enough invasive and valid research, ending up with a program that is too narrow-minded and general. Other firms also attempt to make the effort, but fail to do so successfully because of limited dedication time.

There might also be too much pressure to cut costs and therefore not enough financial resources for cultural training. This might be because of increased competition, poor business profits, and more. All in all, businesses often do not place enough concentration and effort into the cultural training of expatriates. This can result in increased costs, stressed expatriates, misinformed managers and employees, and the un-instituted idea that expatriates not only have to get accustomed to a culture that might be extremely different to their own, but have the responsibility to successfully transfer and install company information, with the overall effort to introduce a good name for the firm to the international business world.

### **Damaging the Expatriate**

In the face of the low priority companies typically attach to cross cultural training of expatriates, it may significantly strengthen the argument for thorough cultural preparation before expatriate transfers (Selmer, 2007). Poor attention for expatriate cultural programs can be extremely harmful for expatriates and their family, and ultimately, for business. Additionally, when an expatriate is going overseas to a country in which he or she is aware that the culture is extremely different than his/her own, as in this case of an American expatriate going to Japan, the expatriate is more aware of these differences, and makes the needed changes faster in his/her mind, greatly affecting adjustment.

Many expatriates may experience culture shock. Culture shock occurs when someone is involved with a new environment. The new environment may require many adjustments in a

short period of time, challenging people's frames of reference to such an extent that their sense of self, especially in terms of nationality, comes into question. Then, the person experiences a shock reaction to new cultural experiences that cause psychological disorientation (Mujtaba, 2007) because they misunderstand or do not recognize important cues.

This effect can spillover and negatively affect business, and what the expatriate was essentially sent there to do. Culture shock, and even less serious, but similar problems, can cause the expatriate to become depressed and long for home. This feeling of sadness mixed with disorientation can build up and cause the expatriate to lose concentration at work. Even if they still perform, it will be at a standard, 'do what I have to do' level.

### **Culture: What You Know Can't Hurt You**

For an expatriate assigned to an entirely different host culture, the advantage is that the consciousness of dissimilarity is always there (Selmer, 2007). With proper preparation, there would be fewer chances of culture shock, and the like. This can spillover for the better, and positively affect business. The expatriate would perform above standard level and be an overachiever. In turn, effective cultural awareness programs can be extremely beneficial for the international assignment as well. Effective cultural training assists individuals to adjust rapidly to the new culture (Dowling, et al, 2009).

Thorough cultural knowledge can help to adapt much easier and know what is to be expected. Thus, there would be a greater chance at achieving production efficiency and business synergy. The expatriate has a greater chance at succeeding in the assignment, and also going beyond and connecting with the foreign employees in a way that wouldn't be possible if they were all from the same culture. Different cultures working together the right way can create a team with an open mind, bringing new ideas to the table that wouldn't be thought of if everyone was from the same culture. Productivity, synergy, and new ideas make a multinational corporation more competitive.

### **Recommendation for Expatriates**

Traveling abroad is one thing, but re-locating for work is another. When traveling, the possibility of culture shock is minimized and the whole experience is more exciting because one is visiting there to fulfill entertainment purposes. On the other hand, re-locating as an expatriate combines different aspirations and goals together, and one is moving to achieve multiple purposes. Some of these purposes include gaining experience, knowledge, transferring work messages from the parent company, establishing new processes, and completing the assignment successfully. Additional to trying to achieve these goals in an attempt to create a better future, expatriates often do this along with their family, while trying to adjust to a new culture.

Culture is something installed deep within an individual that affects one's perspective on everything around that person. Being culturally literate in more than one country requires an open mind. The way of handling business relationships varies across the world. For example, some countries depend more on personal friendship-relationships, while others keep it strictly business-related. Culture plays a role in all of them, but more of a critical role in some than in others, and Japan is no exception. In Japan, the amount of knowledge an expatriate has about the country's culture shows Japanese employees the expatriates' appreciation and care for their culture and for the business assignment.

Globalization is making all companies, including domestic, have some connection to a foreign business. Hence, international human resource managers must first gather information on the cultures of the countries in which their multinational is doing business, and then establish human resource processes that are appropriate in that country and culture. Pre-departure expatriate training should extensively cover culture, as it is a necessity that can have a surprisingly positive influence on business and an extensively negative one if the focus on cultural knowledge is ignored, especially in Japan. Furthermore, thorough cultural pre-departure expatriate training can help the employee just the same. Culture shock can hurt both the expatriate and the company. The expatriate becomes extremely uncomfortable and culturally disoriented. Business is damaged, and the money and effort the firm spent on sending the expatriate overseas is wasted. So, cultural training can be beneficial for both the expatriate and the firm.

Adapting to a foreign country is vital for the success of an expatriate. Thus, as a summary, it is important to remember the following:

- The expatriate should enter the country with an open mind and with an ever-present notion that the people encountered are not fluent enough with the expatriate's culture to be able to communicate as those in the expatriate's home country.
- Follow proper greeting procedures. First impressions count, especially in a foreign country as an expatriate.
- Focus on the assignment throughout the entirety of the term. This can help avoid possible feelings of sadness or separation and longing from the home country.
- Think about the future and the experience you will have. This can also help avoid culture shock.

### **Summary**

Being able to culturally speak and adapt can create positivity, and positivity in business creates connections. These connections can be very beneficial for the future, whether it be a connection that the expatriate can use alone, or one that can bring more opportunities for the multinational as a whole. The benefits from an expatriate who is thoroughly prepared and knows enough about a culture before embarking on an expatriate assignment can create limitless possibilities. For the expatriate, it can turn the nerves into excitement, the fright into opportunity, and the remoteness into adventure. For the firm, it can increase the possibility of more subsidiaries and expansion. Not to mention, the firm's team will have one more international business leader added to the list. Hence, research and development will also be enhanced; maybe even spark the next "post-it!"

### **Discussion Questions for Reflection**

1. What are some common cultural mistakes people can make when dealing with their Japanese counterparts? List three and explain how one can avoid such mistakes.
2. What are the purposes of bowing and explain its various forms related to rank?
3. Regarding the success of the foreign assignments, to what extent do you believe an expatriate's influence reaches? Give specific examples and hypothetical situations of possible, realistic opportunities that a successful expatriate can create for the firm as a whole.

4. Why is gift-giving so important in Japan?
5. What influences from the Japanese culture spill over and affect women's role versus that of men's in the Japanese workplace?
6. Out of all the Asian countries, how is Japan's emphasis to be more open with business compared to the rest? Are they less or more inclined to be more open to international business? Why or why not?

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