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Author

Woods, Peter, Barker, Michelle

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# **SUSTAINING AND DEVELOPING THE CROSS-CULTURAL MANAGEMENT EFFECTIVENESS OF AUSTRALIAN AND SINGAPOREAN EXPATRIATES**

*Peter Woods, Griffith University, Australia*

*Michelle C. Barker, Griffith University, Australia*

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to identify sustainable development practices for developing cross-cultural management effectiveness in Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers. Australian managers continue to be rated poorly in cross-cultural effectiveness by Asian business executives, and Singaporean expatriates have experienced cross-cultural ineffectiveness business interactions in China and elsewhere. Human resource development programs in cross-cultural management are infrequently utilised by Australian and Singaporean companies, being largely seen by these companies as a low business priority. Research examining the quality of relevant human resource development practices from the perspectives of 51 Australian expatriate managers in Singapore, Singaporean expatriate managers in Australia, and relevant HR professionals is described. Proposals for improved human resource development practices are critically examined, focussing on in-post training, the rise of coaching and mentoring, the development of socio-cultural competencies, and the development of culturally divergent management skills.

**Keywords:** Expatriation, Cross-Cultural, Training

The need for cross-cultural management development for expatriates has been long established in the research literature (Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; Tung, 1982). The reality, however, is that development programs have often been regarded as superficial (Stedham, 1997), and are usually not provided for either Australian or Singaporean expatriates (Anderson, 1998; Chew, 1997; Wang, Wee, & Koh, 1998). The reasons for not offering cross-cultural management development programs for expatriates include: doubts about the effectiveness of the training (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985); trainee dissatisfaction with the programs (Mendenhall, Dunbar, & Oddou, 1987; Mendenhall et al., 1985); the lack of time between selection and relocation (Anderson, 1998; Coyle, 1993) and management questioning the need for such programs for reasons including the anticipated short (1-3 years) length of expatriate assignments (Tung, 1981). The low utilisation of cross-cultural management development for expatriates needs further exploration, because expatriate failure or expatriate underperformance is a costly burden to multinational organisations.

This paper will explore the issues of training utilization, cross-cultural management development methods and 'on-assignment' management development for Australian and Singaporean expatriates through examining related research and theory and presenting and analysing the results of survey research with 51 participants. The paper discusses findings in relation to mentoring, the role of experience, neglect of expatriate management development and the need for further research in the area.

## **Definitions**

An expatriate manager, for the purposes of this study is defined as someone managing others (including host country nationals) on assignment in a foreign country for a period of at least six months. An assignment of at least six months will usually involve relocation and significant progress in cultural adjustment (Coyle, 1992; Selmer et al., 1998; Torbion, 1982). 'Australian' is defined as someone who is an Australian citizen or permanent resident, who has spent over five years in Australia. The same criteria applied to Singapore is used to define 'Singaporean'.

## **Cross-Cultural Management Effectiveness**

Cross-cultural management can be conceptualised using a variety of perspectives from a simple focus on the cultural adaptation of pre-existing management skills, to a discrete subset of management with unique skills, goals and processes (Torbion, 1985). Lane, DiStefano & Mazneveski (2000) define effective cross-cultural management as being able to "value and utilise ... cultural differences to achieve high performance" (p.26). Reaching this goal is proposed as a three step process in the 'MBI Model', which is to 'map' cultural differences, to 'bridge' communication across cultures, and to 'integrate' the differences through management. The model supports the 'unique skills' approach to

defining cross-cultural management. This paper will focus on the 'unique skills' approach, since comparatively little research has been undertaken in this area (Triandis, 2001) (Yiu & Saner, 2000). For this research, a 'cross-cultural manager' is defined as a manager who supervises and directs people who have a different cultural identity from their own. An 'expatriate' is a person working in a country they regard as 'foreign' (Cohen, 1977).

***Adaptation and Cross-Cultural Management Effectiveness.*** Adaptation or adjustment of managerial performance from the home country to the host country has often been seen as the framework for evaluating cross-cultural management effectiveness (Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; Welch, 2003). This focus, however, assumes that a manager's main focus is to transfer pre-existing expertise in task performance to the challenges of a new context (Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski, 2001). It could be argued that this is essentially an ethnocentric perspective, with a strong focus on the 'sender' rather than the 'receiver' (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). The 'cross' part of 'cross-cultural' is essentially one way, with the receiver playing the role of a modifier only. The manager needs only to adapt, rather than finding value in synergising differences and creating new strategies and new alternatives. In contrast, a focus on 'effectiveness' rather than 'adaptation' is the focus of this paper.

The term 'effectiveness' in this paper is defined as 'the cumulative stakeholder perceptions of attainment level on specific behaviours and actions that capture the full spectrum of job activities' (Fraser, 2001, p.3). This definition includes the necessity for the expatriate to achieve the company objectives inherent in their posting, but also considers the host country perspective. The definition reflects the reality of managers having to deal with a variety of stakeholders successfully, in order to achieve company objectives incorporating a broad and long-term perspective. Thus, the effective manager does not simply fulfil the wishes of their immediate superior while alienating host country subordinates, destroying work relationships or offending local business regulators. The definition also leaves the determination of specific behaviours and actions open to being predetermined or mutually agreed, depending on the role and context of the manager. This is particularly suitable in the expatriate context, where contextual variables such as culture, economy and business environment will impinge on the task performance and role of the manager (Adler, 1992). The theoretical background that characterises this approach to cross-cultural management performance needs further examination.

There are two primary theoretical perspectives of cross-cultural management effectiveness: (1) adaptation theories (see Bhagat & Prien, 1996; Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991b; Zakaria, 2000) and (2) cross-cultural management theories (Choi, 1995; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002). Adaptation theories have been broadly categorised by Mendenhall, Kuhlmann, Stahl and Osland (Mendenhall, 2002) into learning models (Black et al., 1991b), stress-coping models (Coyle, 1993), developmental models (Bennett, 1993) and personality based models (van Oudenhoven, 2001). Generally, these models

focus on successfully adapting to changes associated with leaving a familiar environment and entering an unfamiliar environment. Anxiety reduction theory, for example, focuses on how these changes interfere with established routines and result in uncertainty, with expatriates attempting to reduce this uncertainty (Black et al., 1991b). It has been proposed that if information is provided about points of difference between the environments beforehand, then expatriates can make 'anticipatory adjustments' (Black et al., 1991b).

The adaptation perspective sees training as a mediating variable for adaptation to the host country environment. Training changes trainees' reactions to the cross-cultural situation in ways that reduce the stress of culture shock, decrease disorientation, and improve skills and knowledge (Zakaria, 2000). These changes, in turn, improve trainees' adaptation to the new environment (Zakaria, 2000). Eschbach and his colleagues (2001) found that training reduces the amount of time it takes to adjust to new cultures and begin functioning efficiently. The more the training concentrates on achieving realistic expectations of what to expect on assignment, the better the outcome (Caligiuri, 2001).

Cross-cultural management theories focus more on the competencies needed to utilise cultural diversity in management, beyond adapting previous management skills to a new cultural environment. (see Choi, 1995). The competencies that have been identified as important to cross-cultural management include effective cross-cultural communication (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988) (Harris, 2000), the ability to accurately identify and successfully negotiate cross-cultural conflicts (Sue, 1990) (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002), the ability to resolve cross-cultural value dilemmas (Fish & Wood, 1997) (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2002) and the ability to adapt management style to divergent situations (Fish et al., 1997) (Rosen, 2000). Another important competency is to be able to play the role of 'cultural and organisation interpreter', facilitating understanding between host country, organisation and home office (Fish et al., 1997) (Black, 1999) (Fenwick, 1999). These competencies are arguably useful in a culturally diverse environment, regardless of whether the manager is an expatriate adapting to a host country environment. Integrating the cross-cultural management theoretical focus with the developmental adaptation model, we suggest that developing the expatriate should be a more comprehensive process that equips expatriate managers to function in changing and culturally diverse environments. This environment could be domestic or international.

Related to these theoretical perspectives are two training perspectives: culture-specific training and culture-general training. Culture-specific training presents participants with specific skills that are appropriate for their destination country (Karpin, 1995). Culture-specific training is more appropriate when trainees from one homogenous culture will be interacting with people from another homogenous culture (Karpin, 1995). The Culture Assimilator approach is one of the oldest and most tested version of this type of training (Fielder, Mitchell, & Tiandis, 1971; Hofstede, 1980; Karpin, 1995). Initially, culture assimilators were developed specifically for a pair of cultures, meaning that trainees learned

behaviours that they should and should not use in the culture they were going to enter (Bhawuk, 2001). The 'do's and don'ts' approach to cross-cultural training may provide initial guidance in cultural survival, however it does little to equip an expatriate to understand the motivations, leadership models and values that are important in cross-cultural management.

Culture-general training, on the other hand, facilitates the development of generic skills that assist communication and interactions with people from different cultures (Karpin, 1995). These two types of training are not mutually exclusive, and culture-general training is often used to supplement culture-specific training (Karpin, 1995). Bhawuk (2001) proposed a theory-based system for developing non-specific cultural assimilators and claimed that assimilators developed in this way will help prepare people to interact successfully across many cultures rather than one specific target culture. Such systems allow for the development of generic skills that can be used to speed adaptation to new cultures generally rather than specific target cultures. Both culture-specific and culture-general training perspectives were recommended in an Australian government commissioned report on preparing Australian managers for cross-cultural management in the 'Asia-Pacific Century,' known as the 'Karpin Report' (1995).

### **Australian Expatriate Cross-Cultural Effectiveness**

As part of the Karpin report, a telephone survey was conducted (supplemented by focus group discussions and personal interviews) with 502 Asian business executives (Dawkins, Savery, & Mazzarol, 1995). In Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Taiwan the participants were asked to rank Australian managers against five key trade and investment competitors active in the region (Japan, Germany, USA, UK and Taiwan) using a framework of managerial qualities. Australian managers were rated poorly against the key competitors on all qualities (Dawkins et al., 1995). Singaporean and Indonesian focus groups reported Australian managers as 'friendly but simple, lacking in understanding of Asians or Asian business practice' (Dawkins et al., 1995, p. 38). The data was confined to impressions of Australian managers, as only 19 per cent of respondents had contact with Australian business managers more than once a month, and there was no differentiation between visiting managers and expatriate managers (Dawkins et al., 1995). The research also highlighted that Australian managers were seen as 'unwilling to adapt to cultural differences and appeared to be unaware of cultural differences between countries' (Dawkins et al., 1995, p. 37).

### **Singaporean Expatriate Cross-Cultural Effectiveness**

The development of effective Singaporean expatriates has been a focus of the Singapore government along with the drive to establish international Singaporean companies. The focus of research to date has been mainly on Singaporean expatriates in China (Wang et al., 1998) with findings reflecting the view of Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew that cross-cultural challenges exist for the Singaporean expatriate in China; despite ethnic links between Singaporean Chinese and Mainland China. There has been relatively little research focus on

expatriates elsewhere, however Chew's (1997) research into the performance management of Singaporean expatriates through surveys and interviews with expatriates from 29 Singaporean companies is relevant. Chew found that contact with the head office appeared to be a major focus of expatriate management. Whereas the Australian expatriates often experience the 'out of sight, out of mind' treatment by their head office (Grosseholz, 1999), overall, Singaporean expatriates experienced close contact and support from their head office. Chew (1997) also affirms the lack of specific cross-cultural development programs for Singaporean expatriates.

### **Australian Expatriate Development**

Anderson (1998), in research that examined the preparation of seventy-two Australian expatriates and their families for relocation to South East Asia, found that only a minority (36%) of respondents reported attending formal cultural training courses. Respondents' comments in this research indicated that cultural training courses would have been helpful. A 1995 survey of 31 Australian expatriate employees (with the assignment countries not disclosed) found a higher percentage of companies offered cultural training (Davidson & Kinzel, 1995). Amongst the managers in this sample, 69% were offered language training, 63% were offered general culture transition training, and 57% were offered training for local culture's customs and social behaviour (Davidson et al., 1995). The percentages were found to be lower than what was offered to US managers, with a similar survey with US expatriate managers reporting 10% to 13% higher access to such training. Less than 50% of Australian companies responding to the survey assessed their current training practices as sufficient (Davidson et al., 1995).

Against the background of the apparent need for improved cross-cultural competencies, the percentage of Australian expatriates offered cross-cultural training appears low according to Anderson (1998) and Davidson and Kinzel's (1995) surveys. Research by Hutchings and McEllister (1999) on 22 Australian organisations and expatriates working in China, found that no expatriate had received cross-cultural training. Ten respondents had received some language training with six of those having some content covering training in multicultural communication included in the language course. The lack of cross-cultural training may be particularly disadvantageous for expatriates from countries like Australia who are often posted to countries with very different cultures from the expatriates' own culture (Clegg & Gray, 2002).

In an examination of cross-cultural management competence in Australian business enterprises in East Asia (with the largest group of respondents being expatriates in SE Asian assignments), Fish and Wood (1997) defined the competency areas needing attention. These were: 'developing skills in changing organisational mind-sets from ethnocentric to geocentric'; 'developing skills in managing and dealing with staff in cross-cultural business settings'; 'developing skills relevant to conveying the business image as well as the operational and strategic intent of the business enterprise in and across foreign business environments'; and 'foreign language skills' (Fish et al., 1997, p. 47, 48). The

researchers highlight that cross-cultural training and development programs focussing on these skills are needed. The majority of respondents had experienced at least two overseas assignments, and this raises the question whether overseas experience alone develops these competencies. Black et al., found that, overall, with regard to expatriates on overseas assignments, 'previous experience does not seem to facilitate the adjustment process' (1991b).

### **Singaporean Expatriate Development**

Singaporean expatriate managers that have received cross-cultural training for their expatriate assignments are also a minority (Chew, 1997; Wang et al., 1998). Training for cross-cultural situations has received some emphasis in the Singapore hotel industry (Cheng & Brown, 1998), and this industry is continuing to expand to Australia. This training is largely didactic, but is offered both pre-departure and in-country (Cheng et al., 1998), however Khatri (1998; 1999) found that Singaporean companies tend to under-utilise training and development practices. Khatri (1999) also found that evaluation of training programs and related needs analyses were limited in Singaporean training programs. Even so (and contrary to research cited previously), Osman-Gani (2000), in a study of training of expatriates from Singapore, Japan, Korea, Germany, and the United States, found that the managers of Singaporean multinationals acknowledged the importance of both language training and cross-cultural training. Curiously, the levels of rated importance of cross-cultural training did not vary significantly between Singapore and most of the other countries in the study, except that Singaporean managers rated cross-cultural training as more important than their Japanese counterparts. Singaporean multinationals placed more emphasis on the detailed knowledge of what was required in the new location than many other, particularly Western, countries (Osman-Gani, 2000; Prud'homme van Reine & Trompenaars, 2000). The paradox that Singaporean multinational organisations acknowledge the importance of cross-cultural training yet under-utilise it, is an area that requires additional research.

*Hypothesis 1. That most Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers do not receive training by the company to enable them to perform their expatriate manager assignment.*

### **Pre-Departure Training**

Sequential cross-cultural training, as proposed by Selmer et al. (1998), suggests that pre-departure training alone is inadequate as it does not take into account the variations in learning receptivity that occur over the expatriate period. Pre-departure training is suggested as being more suited to essential information on local conditions, didactic exposure to the cross-cultural adjustment process, issues of initial adjustment, and as a type of selection process that may filter out some candidates prior to departure. The salience of generic 'foreignness' of the overseas situation seems to inhibit effective engagement of the trainee with the training provided (Selmer et al., 1998). Interestingly, Mamman (1995) suggests



that pre-departure training is mostly relevant to expatriate's *early* adjustment in a culture.

The time between the decision to accept an overseas posting and departure from the home country is relatively short, with only 64% of respondents in Anderson's (1998) Australian expatriate research indicating they felt there was sufficient time between the posting decision and departure. The impact of relocation stress on the expatriate and the family also limits receptivity to training, with three months after arrival being nominated as the most acute phase of such stress (Coyle, 1993). The expatriate's frame of reference usually shifts from home to host culture from four to seven months post-arrival (Torbiorn, 1982), hence the expatriate is more receptive to learning new behaviours at least four months *after* arrival.

One option for implementing cross-cultural training is within university commerce or business courses. Since working within cross-cultural contexts is increasingly becoming the norm for university graduates, particularly within management, cross-cultural training in universities would enhance what might now be considered core skills training for students (see Harris & Kumra, 2000). This issue was mentioned by Karpin (1995), who called for more university-based cross-cultural management training.

### **'In-Country' Training**

Selmer and his colleagues (1998) suggests that sequential training 'in-country' should be conducted in a group setting for expatriates from different organisations operating in the same host culture. The group environment would also provide an opportunity to develop interpersonal networks amongst expatriate managers. The social benefits of such networks to career expatriates have been highlighted by Tung (1998), who notes the trend towards expatriates spending more time abroad compared with her previous study in 1981 (Tung, 1981). The most commonly nominated time period to feel comfortable in the foreign environment nominated by the 409 expatriates surveyed in her 1998 study was 6-12 months. On-the-job training over this period of time could provide both support as well as cross-cultural skill refinement (Tung, 1998). Suutari and Burch's (2001) survey of 38 Finland based expatriates found that cross-cultural and language training was more common if delivered in-post, rather than prior to departure. Their research participants also emphasised the need for more local language and culture training than they had received. Difficulties in interacting with locals was identified as the most crucial problem they faced in adjustment.

Hutchings and McEllister (1999), have identified "in-post support" with "work-related skill development, mentoring and consultative groups" (p.157) as a major need experienced by Australian expatriate managers. 'In-post support' is defined as the range of training and other support services available for expatriates while they are stationed in the host country. Hutchings and McEllister (1999) found that none of the 22 Australian expatriates in China whom they surveyed, received such support. As stated earlier, Chew's (1997) research

indicated that Singaporean managers reported having close communication with head office, with regular visits from executives to the overseas subsidiary (Chew, 1997). The Singaporean expatriates in Chew's (1997) study saw this contact in both a developmental and control context, thus being regarded as coaching by some participants. The extent of expatriate's 'in-country' training, requires further research.

*Hypothesis 2. That most Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers do not receive training 'on assignment' (in-country).*

## **Development Methods**

There have been a number of categorisations of cross-cultural training (Blake, Heslin, & Curtis, 1996; Gudykunst, 1977; Landis, 1983). Choosing the most effective cross-cultural management development methods for a particular assignment has been aided by well-established frameworks (Black et al., 1992; Black & Mendenhall, 1989) which have been modified over time (Gudykunst, Hammer, & Wiseman, 1996) to incorporate new training design and delivery techniques. These frameworks suggest that training methods should be chosen depending on the length and type of assignment, dissimilarity between host and expatriate culture and the degree of 'culture toughness' (resistance to outside influences). Selmer's (2000) quantitative training needs assessment has also been used as a guide when designing suitable cross-cultural training programs.

In designing development programs, the well known 'training needs analysis' has traditionally focussed on the three levels of (1) organisation, (2) operations and (3) individual, in order to analyse needs and integrate them together in development design (McGehee & Thayer, 1961). Australian training and development has been guided by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), which has favoured a competency based training agenda (Smith, 1998). Competency based training is 'training geared towards specific outcomes which reflect the required competencies in the workplace' (Tovey, 1997). Competency standards have not yet been formally established for cross-cultural management, and such a process would assist in designing effective training programs. Competency based training is also emphasised in Singapore, with a clear link between training and high-performance work systems (Barnard & Rodgers, 2000). In addition, training has received a high priority in Human Resource Management practice in Singapore (Lee, 2000).

Despite the variety of cross-cultural management training available, it is suggested that didactic training is the most frequently utilized form of training due to the familiarity with such methods of training and the perceived low cost of time and money for this type of training.

*Hypothesis 3. That didactic training is the most common form of human resource development received by Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers.*

## **Didactic Instruction Innovations**

Documentary and interpersonal methods both have been shown to have beneficial effects on managerial performance overseas (Earley, 1987). Interactive web based training programs such as 'Learning Space', 'Symposium', and many others (Steed, 1999) offer further opportunities for didactic, collaborative, and interactive learning between geographically dispersed expatriates, human resource development professionals and management, particularly at the organisational level. Such interactive multimedia programs, including videoconferencing, combined with the program's integrated curriculum management system, allow a flexible and curriculum rich ongoing training program for expatriates. This is particularly suited to time pressured managers. One of the major drawbacks of such training is the limitation on interaction between trainers and students, with immediacy still being limited by technology and different time zones for expatriates (Noe, 1999). Francis (2001) has proposed that didactic training may be more appropriate for use with participants from high power distance and uncertainty avoidant cultures such as Singapore. Francis (2001) found that both Australians and Singaporeans displayed the opposite tendencies of low power distance and low uncertainty avoidance; hence, Australians may be more suited to experiential-type training using simulations and structured exercises. The use of such learning tools to enhance effective cross-cultural management skills amongst Australian and Singaporean expatriates is an area that requires further exploration.

### **Simulation Activities**

The type of training suggested by Selmer et al. (1998) has been used successfully with overseas students adjusting to academic and social life in U.K., Canada and Australia. The ExcelL Intercultural Skills Program focuses on developing socio-cultural competencies that participants identify (such as making social contact, seeking help, participating in a group) and then apply in their own environment (Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, & Barker, 1999). The format of role-based training in groups provides the opportunity for feedback, provides a method of diagnoses and shared problem solving, and the supportive environment enables mutual validation (Mak et al., 1999). For empirical evidence on the ExcelL (Excellence in Experiential Learning and Leadership) see Mak et al. (1998; 1998).

Interactive training involving action learning principles has been found to be effective in management training (Smith, 1998). Such programs based on Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), have been recommended in cross-cultural training in the business environment for some time (Black, & Mendenhall, 1989). The programs are, however, relatively untested with expatriate managers in the post arrival environment. The key need of managers for intercultural effectiveness and the proven efficacy of such programs in other intercultural training environments, suggests that programs such as ExcelL may be beneficial for training expatriate managers. Whether expatriate managers and HR professionals regard interactive cross-cultural training is the most effective form of cross-cultural management development requires further research.

*Hypothesis 4. That experienced Australian and Singaporean expatriates and HR professionals regard interactive cross-cultural training as the most Effective Form Of Cross-Cultural Management Development.*

## **Research Design**

**Aim.** To examine the perceived effectiveness of relevant human resource development practices from the perspectives of Australian expatriate managers in Singapore, Singaporean expatriate managers in Australia, and Human Resource professionals involved in managing and training expatriate managers.

**Primary Research Question.** What are the most effective ways of developing expatriate managers in their cross-cultural management role, according to Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers and HR professionals?

**Secondary Research Question.** What is the type and timing of training that Australians and Singaporeans receive to enable them to perform their expatriate manager assignments?

## **Method**

This study was conducted as part of a larger study that also asked participants about their impressions of expatriate performance management.

## **Sample**

A contact list of potential participants was derived from the following sources: the web-site of the Australian-Singapore Chamber of Commerce; contacts provided by the President of the Singapore Business Association of Queensland; foreign companies in Brisbane via the Yellow Pages; relevant HRM professionals identified on the Australian Human Resources Institute web-site; responses to advertisements made on Singapore expatriate bulletin boards; searches on the web for Australian expatriates and Australian companies in Singapore; and primary and secondary responses to public announcements made by the researcher via email and through Griffith University contacts. Contact was made initially either by phone, email, fax or face-to-face interview, and the questionnaire and cover letter was sent to the participant after they agreed to participate. In most cases, the questionnaire was sent by email, with a few by either fax or through personal contact. A difference was noted in the preferred method of completing the survey, with Australian expatriates preferring email responses (74%), Singaporean expatriates preferring telephone interview (80%), and HR professionals preferring to respond by fax (64%).

Out of 70 potential respondents, 60 usable questionnaires were returned. This represents a response rate of 86%. The sample was then narrowed to attempt to decrease the number of contextual variables, with expatriates in Australia who were not Singaporeans excluded, and Australian expatriates who were not posted to Singapore also excluded. This left 51 usable responses, with a final response rate of 73%. The respondents were from a variety of industries including

banking, professional services, retail, construction, media and academic. Details of the final sample are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent Sample Details

Variable	Category	Respondent Category			Total	Percentage
		Australian Expatriate in Singapore n = 20	Singaporean Expatriate in Australia n = 15	HR Professional n = 16	N = 51	N = 51
<b>Gender</b>	Male	16	8	11	35	69%
	Female	4	7	5	16	31%
<b>Birthplace</b>	Australia	14	0	7	21	41%
	Overseas	6	15	9	30	59%
<b>Fluent in Language Other Than English?</b>	Yes	5	14	6	25	49%
	No	15	1	10	26	51%
<b>Time of Posting</b>	Less Than Six Months	1	0	1	2	4%
	6 To 12 Months	2	6	1	9	18%
	1 to 2 years	3	6	6	15	29%
	2 to 5 years	6	2	8	16	31%
	Over five years	8	1	0	9	18%

Although this stratified sample is small, all of the respondents were from different firms, and so the HR development practices represent at least 51 different firms operating in either Singapore or Australia. This response compares favourably with similar published research on representative expatriate samples of human resource practices such as Gregersen, Hite and Black (1996, n = 58), Anderson (1998, n = 72) and Davidson and Kintzel (1995, n = 31).

### ***Instrument***

A questionnaire was developed to assess the respondents' perceived experience of the timing and type of training, in line with Woods (2000) and Blake et al. (1996), the effectiveness of training, and their suggestions for expatriate training. A panel of training, expatriate and questionnaire experts reviewed the questionnaire and it was modified according to their suggestions. After pilot testing of the instrument, the number of questions was reduced in order to facilitate completion and return of the questionnaires.

The questionnaire that was administered assessed the type and timing of training, and respondents were invited to respond in an open-ended manner to questions asking them to identify the aspects of training that enabled them to be more effective in their role as cross-cultural managers. They were also asked what type of training they thought would have helped them to be more effective in their role as expatriate managers. A slightly modified version of the questionnaire with questions framed in the third person was sent to Human Resource professionals. The latter group were asked their impressions of the type and timing of training received by expatriate managers. They were also asked their impressions of the most effective form of training to enhance the performance of expatriates as cross-cultural managers, and their observations of the main deficiencies of training expatriate managers.

### ***Results***

The collated results from survey responses are listed in Tables 2 and 3. The responses to open-ended questions were grouped and analysed using thematic content analysis. The groups and frequency of suggestion is listed in Table 4.

As Table 2 indicates, the most common method of human resource development for expatriates is mentoring with 72.5% of the sample receiving this training, and 37.7% of the total receiving this training while 'in-country'. The other common forms of HR development were self-awareness, team building and stress reduction exercises (68.6% of respondents), didactic training (62.7%) alongside with orientation visits to the country (62.7%). The most common form of training provided by companies *prior to departure* were orientation visits, with 37.3% of the sample benefiting from this development activity. Simulation activities, case studies, and language learning were cross-cultural management development methods that were used infrequently.

Table 2: Method and Timing of Training for Expatriate Manager Assignments

HR Development Method	% Never	% University	% Training received prior to joining the company	% Pre-departure, company sponsored training	% On-assignment, company sponsored training
Books, films, lectures, web-based instruction on cross-cultural management and/ or the assignment country (didactic)	37.3	17.6	7.8	21.6	15.7
Language learning (specific to the assignment country)	60.8	2	21.6	9.8	5.9
Case studies (scenarios dealing with cross-cultural management issues)	72.5	3.9	0	11.8	11.8
Orientation visits to the country prior to departure	37.3	11.8	9.8	37.3	3.9
Group discussion on experiences and strategies in cross-cultural adjustment and management	51	5.9	3.9	19.6	19.6
Simulation activities which require the exercise of skills associated with intercultural performance	80.4	3.9	0	9.8	5.9
Self awareness exercises, reflection, stress reduction exercises, team building	31.4	2	25.5	27.5	13.7
Coaching and/ or mentoring	27.5	0	11.8	23.5	37.3
Total Sample n = 51					

Table 3: Perceptions on Aspects of Training that has Enabled Expatriates to be More Effective in the Role of Cross-Cultural Managers

Aspects of Training Seen as Effective	Australian Expatriate	Singaporean Expatriate	HR Professional	Total
Personal experience	25%	47%	0	23.5%
Understanding culture	5%	0	44%	16%
Knowledge transfer/ coaching from experienced expatriates	20%	0	19%	14%
Group discussion of experience	10%	20%	12.5%	14%
No training/ very brief training	20%	7%	6%	12%
Case studies	5%	13%	12.5%	10%
Context specific work / business issues	0	0	31%	10%
Cross-cultural effectiveness	0	0	25%	8%
Cultural self-awareness	0	0	19%	6%
Total Sample, n =	51			

Table 3 identifies that personal experience was nominated most commonly as the most beneficial form of training to enable expatriates to be more effective in the role of cross-cultural manager. Singaporean expatriates in particular felt this form of training to be the most effective, with almost half of the sample nominating personal experience. Through the interview process, Singaporean expatriates mentioned their prior experience as overseas students and their experience working with Australian expatriates in Singapore as helping them to



work cross-culturally in the Australian context. This was also the most commonly nominated aspect of training enabling expatriates to be effective in the role of cross-cultural manager by Australian expatriates in Singapore. In contrast, HR professionals did not nominate personal experience as an effective development process.

Understanding culture was the most commonly nominated effective development process mentioned by HR professionals. In contrast, however, expatriates nominated this category only once. Group discussion of experience was also nominated frequently, with no noticeable inter-group variation. Seven participants noted coaching and knowledge transfer from experienced expatriates as effective aspects of their cross-cultural management development.

Table 4: Suggested Type of Training to help Expatriate Managers be More Effective in the Role of Cross-Cultural Managers

Suggested Type of Training	Australian Expatriate	Singaporean Expatriate	HR Professional	Total
Cross-cultural awareness/ communication/ management	5	7	7	19
Country specific market/ business issues (didactic methods)	4	1	2	7
Offer more training than is current practice	1	1	5	7
Language training	4	0	2	6
Cultural adjustment/ stress management	1	1	1	3
Other	7	3	7	17
Total Sample, n = 51				

Cross-cultural awareness/ communication/ management was mentioned by 19 respondents (37%) as being the type of training managers need to be more effective in their role as cross-cultural managers. As Table 4 details, there is no noticeable inter-group variation in this category. One Australian expatriate commented: “Cultural awareness training would have been good, as I was immediately shocked by the cultural differences in things such as meetings and interactions with customers (both internal and external).” A Singaporean HR manager stated: “Expatriate managers lack orientation to their host country before they assume their position. In most of my experience they suffer a cultural shock and have a long adjustment period.”

The second most frequently nominated category was the need for more country specific market and business issues training through didactic methods. An Australian expatriate explained: “Books, films, lectures, web-based instruction on cross-cultural management and/or the assignment country would have been helpful.” Seven respondents took the opportunity to express their opinion that more training should be offered to assist expatriate managers.

## **Discussion**

Overall, the study found support for Hypothesis 1 that most Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers do not receive training by the company to enable them to perform their expatriate manager assignment. This was supported for all forms of training except for coaching/ mentoring. A total of 60.8% of respondents indicated that the company provided mentoring or some form of coaching either before or after departure. These findings are in line with Anderson (1998; 2001), Davidson and Kinzel (1995), Hutchings and McEllister (1999) and Chew’s (1997) research regarding the low rate of human resource development activities to equip expatriates in managing across cultures. It could be said that this is an ongoing issue for Australian and Singaporean expatriates, and that the track record of Australian and Singaporean companies indicates that no real change has occurred in the last decade. HR professionals in particular seem to advocate that more training is needed. During interviews a number of HR professionals indicated their frustration at companies giving cross-cultural management training a low priority, despite their recommendations based on experience that expatriate performance could be enhanced by interventions to further cross-cultural management development. The relationship between cross-cultural management training utilization and company international orientation (ethnocentric, geocentric, regiocentric), type of managerial work and company industry, are all relationships that could be explored in further research.

Hypothesis 2 (that most Australian and Singaporean managers do not receive specific training 'in country') was supported for all forms of training except for coaching/ mentoring with 37.3% of respondents receiving this training on assignment. Respondents indicated in interviews that coaching/ mentoring was often informal, and a common impression reflected by respondents was that development plans relating to cross-cultural management were not actively pursued whilst on assignment. Many respondents indicated in interviews that the focus of HR assistance while on assignment was mainly related to compensation, living and family adjustment issues. A further factor mentioned was that the HR managers responsible for handling their individual development plans were usually back in the home country, and that the unique challenges of cross-cultural management were not considered priority issues by the company.

Hypothesis 3 (that didactic training is the most common form of human resource development received by Australian and Singaporean expatriate managers) was *not* supported, with coaching/ mentoring being the most common form of training received (72.5% of respondents). This supports recent research that identifies a trend in the utilisation of coaching and mentoring in Australian

expatriate human resource development (Anderson, 2001), and indicates that it is commonly used with Singaporean expatriates. Mentoring has been recognised as beneficial in developing the protégé beyond programmed knowledge to broader psychosocial and career support (Delahaye, 2000), both of which are important in the adjustment and expatriation process (Dowling, Welch, & Schuler, 1999). Mentoring has been demonstrated to have positive correlations with expatriate socialisation, job attitudes, general understanding of the issues involved in business within multicultural contexts, and intention to complete the assignment (Feldman & Bolino, 1999). The negative side of mentoring, however, includes that possibility that cross-cultural management mistakes can also be passed on to the protégé when standards and performance measures of cross-cultural management are scarce (Woods, 2002). The lessons of expatriates in colonial history serve as reminders of how negative attitudes towards the host culture can be communicated through informal mentoring (Stening, 1994). Further research is needed to determine if mentoring that is linked to company-wide cross-cultural performance standards (explained through other training methods) would give greater assurance in improving cross-cultural management performance

Hypothesis 4 (that experienced Australian and Singaporean expatriates and HR professionals regard interactive cross-cultural training as the most effective form of cross-cultural management development) was not supported directly. Interestingly, personal experience was nominated most frequently, with almost one quarter of the total sample referring to this category. Singaporean expatriates in particular were strong advocates of the impact of previous experience on their ability to become more effective cross-cultural managers. This reflected the experience of many Singaporean participants who had studied in Australia and who had interacted with Australian expatriates in Singapore. The higher percentage of Singaporeans studying abroad as compared to Australians may provide Singapore companies with more people who have directly experienced living, adjusting and even working in foreign cultures. The extent to which this experience results in more effective cross-cultural management performance requires further research. Research by Selmer (2002) appears to indicate that the relationship between experience and socio-cultural and psychological adjustment may be counter intuitive: Selmer (2002) found that previous expatriate experience appeared to have no positive long-term impact upon the adjustment of expatriates. Nevertheless, it is important that HR development professionals do not underestimate the importance of experience as a teacher (Kolb, 1984). The research respondents have affirmed the role of personal experience, and the associated andragogical implications for HR development professionals including the necessity to engage with and reframe experience in development processes (Knowles, 1990). A 'one size fits all' approach to training or a 'participant as blank slate' approach appears especially redundant with cross-cultural management learning, in light of the high value that experienced cross-cultural managers place on personal experience.

Amongst HR professionals, understanding culture was nominated most frequently as the form of HR development enables the expatriate to be more

effective in the role of cross-cultural manager. In contrast, the top ranking response to deficiencies in training by all respondent categories was cross-cultural awareness/ communication/ management. Hypothesis 4, therefore, is partially supported in that cross-cultural training that develops a cultural understanding of the host culture and develops cross-cultural awareness/ communication/ management is supported by the sample as being effective. Respondents, however, did not link this to an interactive human resource development methodology.

In answering the primary research question, therefore, it is suggested that the perceived most effective methods of developing expatriate managers for their cross-cultural management role are personal experience, coaching from experienced expatriates and group discussion of experience. Personal experience has the possibility for reinforcing attitudes and practices that are functional, but not always effective when adverse cultural impact is considered (Black & Mendenhall, 1991a). In terms of the content of training, respondents suggest cross-cultural awareness/ communication/ management most often.

In answering the secondary research question, the most common forms of training have been discussed, however the most common timing of training occurs prior to departure, with a grand total of 71 responses over five questions in that category. It cannot be ignored, however that many respondents did not receive any training at all.

## **Conclusion**

While the exploratory nature of the research and small sample size nevertheless are limitations, the research study contributes to understanding why Singaporean and Australian expatriates are perceived to experience cross-cultural management problems. Cross-cultural management development overall seems to continue to receive a low priority from Australian and Singaporean companies sending expatriates overseas. Even though the importance of sustainable cross-cultural management development has been acknowledged for some time, and managers in multinational organisations at times also recognise the need for such training, the present study has again found that Australian and Singaporean expatriates do not appear to be receiving the cross-cultural development interventions they perceive that they need and desire. It is possible that trends are emerging in HR development through coaching and mentoring, however further research is needed to establish whether this is a trend that applies to cross-cultural management.

As has been the case for many years, innovations in training such as group simulations building socio-cultural competencies and in-country training are poorly utilised in human resource development practice. The reasons for this are unclear, and this question is worthy of further research.

The research study reported here supports previous findings that Australian and Singaporean organisations under-utilise cross-cultural management development of their expatriates, indicates that Australian and Singaporean expatriates value

experience as their most valuable teacher in cross-cultural management, and suggests a trend towards the increasing use of mentoring in developing cross-cultural managers. These findings demonstrate a need for more research into the following important topics: why Australian and Singaporean organisations continue to avoid the use of cross-cultural management development even though experienced expatriates and HR professionals believe it is needed; how personal experience can effectively be integrated into the development of cross-cultural managers; and how mentoring facilitates the development of effective cross-cultural managers. The answers to these questions will provide further help in developing effective cross-cultural managers in general, and high calibre Australian and Singaporean cross-cultural managers in particular.

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