

Cultural preparation & training

When assignees and family members move to another country and have interactions with people from a different culture, cross-cultural training is required to understand behaviours and styles of communication. This improves adjustment and aids assignment success.

WHEN TRAINING IS NEEDED

It is generally thought that cross-cultural training should be given when assignees are moving to a societal culture that is significantly different to that of their home country and when they are likely to have to work closely with local people. It is also frequently assumed that such training is only necessary if individuals are going to remain in the host country for relatively lengthy periods. This, however, is not the case.

Research has shown that subtle cultural differences can prove equally difficult, if not more so, to adapt to as they are less visible. Cross-cultural

training should be offered to assignees moving between what appear to be relatively similar cultures.

Assignees will need to adapt to local cultural norms. This is the case for all assignees, even those on short-term or frequent flyer style assignments.

TRAINING RIGOUR

The type of training given can vary from information-giving briefing to in-depth approaches that include cross-cultural role plays, simulations and immersion/field experience. If individuals are to change their behaviours and adapt successfully, a rigorous approach is required.

The length of training courses should be realistic to enable participants to engage in the new culture and practise different scenarios such as negotiations, team interactions and management exercises.

Cross-cultural training should ideally be mandatory as intercultural competence is a crucial predictor of assignment success. It can be delivered in the home country ahead of the assignment taking place and continue in the host location on arrival.

WHO RECEIVES TRAINING

Training should be offered to accompanying spouses/partners and other family members as appropriate as they must also adapt successfully to their new cultural environment.

It is important to consider providing some training to host country employees as they will receive and work with incoming assignees. This can aid communications and work relationships.

It is important that all individuals understand the relevance of learning about the home and host countries' cultural differences and engage in the training. If people are resistant to participating then learning is unlikely to be effective.

SPECIFIC AND GENERAL CULTURAL TRAINING

A further consideration is whether training should relate just to the specific countries involved or whether a more general approach to learning about cultural differences might be required. If an assignee is relocating to a country with very little cultural diversity, then training in that country's specific culture is clearly needed. If the receiving location is multi-cultural, an understanding of a wider range of cultures is useful.

Training that embraces understanding cultural dimensions and differences at a wider level can be helpful when assignees will be making multiple moves during their careers. Leadership training should include cultural awareness to provide a broad level of cross-cultural understanding.

LANGUAGE TRAINING

Language training can assist assignees with workplace communications and all family members with their societal adjustment. Language training can be offered ahead of the move and during the assignment.



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