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ABSTRACT

Advocating the development of a new vision and strategies for lifelong learning in the multicultural workplace, this paper describes the influences of cultural issues on the human resource development (HRD) interface at a Japanese multinational firm operating in Canada. Following an introduction defining lifelong learning and related terms, background information is provided on the organization, indicating that it has a workforce of approximately 60 and an annual transaction volume of $60 billion (Canadian). The next section describes learning in the workplace, focusing on assessment during recruitment, the orientation program, a guided self-directed learning project required of all employees, and the company's professional development program. This section indicates that an emphasis is placed on workable and practical programs that can be implemented within the context of organizational constraints, such as limited human resource capacity and the very traditional Japanese heritage at the heart of the organization. The next section examines the Japanese and Canadian staff's cultural responses to the learning experiences, perceived gaps in the company between learning needs and learning capacity and initiative, and the interface between the two groups. Finally, recommendations and conclusions are presented, highlighting the need for individually-tailored learning programs that are integrated into as many facets of HRD as possible. Contains 14 references. (TGI)

HRD in a Multicultural Workplace: The Need For Lifelong Learning

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In: Lifelong Learning: Policies, Practices, and Programs

HRD in a Multicultural Workplace: The Need For Lifelong Learning

by Motoyo Ogisu-Kamiya

This paper describes and discusses issues pertinent to lifelong learning in a multicultural workplace, specifically, a subsidiary of a Japanese multinational firm operating in Canada. Several new initiatives for assessing learning potential as well as promoting general learning activities are described, as are issues related to the contrasting learning experiences and cultural issues of Japanese and Canadian staff. With the increasingly global nature of business, coupled with rapid technological change and escalating competition, the need for staff to engage in lifelong learning activities is unprecedented. Firms that incorporate activities which promote lifelong learning, as well as firms that understand and respond to learning issues brought about by the multicultural interface, will enhance their competitive position in the year 2000 and beyond. Given the free trade agenda of APEC member economies, the lessons and opportunities offered in this paper are particularly relevant.

INTRODUCTION

The investigation of and reflection on issues pertinent to learning and education are hardly new phenomena. Confucius, Buddha and Socrates explored learning issues long before the term lifelong learning came into vogue. Nonetheless, what is critical and important today is the realization that learning needs not only continue throughout the lifespan, but also that the rapid rate of change and the increasingly global nature of our lives predicates a need for successful lifelong learning as well as the successful management of this learning. In fact, our very survival may depend on this (see Thomas, 1991).

In an age characterized by fast-paced technological change and movement towards a global economy, an age where research, application and production can be transferred almost anywhere in the world, quickly and smoothly, there is an enormous competitive advantage associated with a workplace that incorporates a vision, strategy and structure to make human resource development (HRD) a continuous process. Of late, there has been unprecedented discussion on HRD in the workplace. Yet, in most of the private sector, the customary focus is on training - a one-way transfer of pre-defined skills and knowledge - rather than on broader, more complex, individualized, continuous, and self-directed lifelong learning.

This paper describes and scrutinises a private sector experience, specifically ref-

erencing cultural issues as they influence the HRD interface. The context is a Japanese multinational firm in the non-manufacturing sector, more precisely in the international trade business. (A more detailed picture of the company emerges later in the paper.)

In its most simplistic form, learning is a complex phenomenon with diverse dimensions. A multinational, multicultural workplace incorporates a host of supplementary factors, and it is not practical to attempt to extract and examine all that influence HRD and the learning context. However, two initiatives have been launched in the workplace under discussion, and these are examined in some detail. The first is an experimental learning program which was introduced in order to respond to emerging and pressing learning needs within the organization; the second is an examination of cultural issues as they relate to learning in the workplace.

This paper is a brief report drawn from observations and insights gleaned for the most part through first-hand experience. It is exploratory in nature, and has as its goal the development of a new vision for lifelong learning in a multicultural workplace as well as the development of practical strategies gleaned from what is very much a preliminary appraisal.

Following this introductory section, which continues by defining the way in which terminology is used, this paper describes the specific workplace under discussion. In turn, this is followed by two major sections: (1) learning in the workplace, which describes experimental assessment and learning programs; and (2) culture, which examines Japanese staff, Canadian staff, and the interface between the two. The paper concludes with recommendations and general observations specific to lifelong learning in the workplace.

The term "lifelong learning", though perhaps relatively new, has managed to attract considerable conceptual and theoretical attention, and at least a modicum of confusion. Related terms, such as "lifelong education", "adult education", and "recurrent education" are often used interchangeably. However, an in-depth discussion on conceptual and definitional issues is beyond the scope of this paper (for discussion and clarification see, for example, Candy and Crebert, 1991; Thomas, 1991). In this paper, lifelong learning" is "the process by which an adult continues to acquire, in a conscious manner, formal or informal education throughout his or her life span, either to maintain and improve vocational viability or for personal development" (Shafritz, Koeppe & Soper, 1988, p.273).

"Lifelong" implies a framework encompassing the entire lifespan including childhood, though discussion of lifelong learning tends to focus on activities taking place in adulthood. Often, "learning" and "education", in broad contexts, are used interchangeably, and may be defined as "the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills through both formal and informal exposure to information, ideas and experiences. "Education", in a narrower context, may be defined as "systematic planned instruction that takes place in school" (Shafritz, Koeppe & Soper, 1988, p. 164).

Lifelong learning may focus on two areas which in industrialized societies have tended to become increasingly distinct and separate. The first of these is career and vocational learning, at the upper-end sometimes described as professional development. The second relates to life-enrichment or personal growth. The distinction is

somewhat artificial and likely misguided given that the two are so closely related. Further, as some writers predict the imminent arrival of a "jobless" society, this distinction will need to be reconsidered (see Bridges, 1994; Rifkin, 1995). Regardless, within the context of this paper, the focus will be on work-related learning.

Training is "a planned and systematic sequence of instruction under competent supervision, designed to impact predetermined skills, knowledge or abilities ... " (Shafritz, Koeppe & Soper, 1988, p.478). The central characteristics of training are based on the dual assumptions of a predictable environment and expected outcomes. In the private sector, training issues still predominate. However, at a time when the business environment is experiencing striking change and an unpredictable future, the relevance of training based on traditional and narrow assumptions requires reconsideration.

THE ORGANIZATION

As one of the largest international trade companies in the world, the organization discussed in this paper spans the globe with more than 150 offices and an annual trading volume of more than US$150 billion. Its activities include import, export, offshore trade as well as finance and investment. The diversified business activities reflect the fast-changing and complex business environment, characterised in recent years by a global economy which has intensified the speed and complexity of all transactions. The organization must be prepared to cope on a daily basis with operating in different time zones, a variety of languages, and different cultural contexts.

The Canadian operation, a fully owned subsidiary of the parent company, has been in Canada for more than thirty-five years. Compared with the parent company, the Canadian operation is relatively small, with an annual transaction volume of around CD$2 billion and a workforce of about 60. Recently, it has been reorganizing in order to respond to changes in the business environment.

There are three key factors affecting the employee training environment. These include the complex nature of international trade, the distinctive characteristics associated with a multinational company, and the need for reorganizing and restructuring within the Canadian operation. Taken together, these factors, especially the need for reorganizing and restructuring, have necessitated a new organizational vision and a new generation of internationally oriented staff. At the operational level, this has prompted the company to specifically examine learning initiatives and learning capacities as they relate to current and potential staff members.

The company is strongly influenced and characterized by traditional Japanese corporate culture and organizational structure. In fact, the North American concept of human resource development is very new to the company. Previously, the Canadian operation was viewed vaguely as a simple extension of the Tokyo Head Office. There were few specific, prescribed frameworks for structuring human resource development initiatives, and Canadian staff were seen to be and treated as "helpers." The notion of managing the Canadian operation as a distinct entity was limited. This approach is common with many Japanese overseas operations in the non-manufacturing sector.

As noted earlier, dramatic environmental change including the increasingly com-

e environment has brought with it the need for a new generation of staff, and as and continues to be a major force driving the reorganization of the Canadian operation. In response to this pressing need, the company identified three distinct learning focuses as having special potential for positive influence. The first involved assessing the capacity of and initiative for learning of all job applicants during the recruitment process, the second focused on learning issues specific to newly hired staff, and the third dealt with learning issues related to the existing staff.

LEARNING IN THE WORKPLACE

Following is a summary description of three experimental programs. The emphasis in these programs has been on initiating workable and practical programs that can be implemented within the context of organizational constraints that include limited human resource capacity and the very heavy, traditional Japanese heritage at the heart of the organization. Each of the programs was formulated by experimentally adapting a proactive learning approach and each was gradually implemented over the course of a few years. (Knowles describes proactive learning as including required conditions and skills. Required conditions include institutional support for learning from mistakes, high value for self-direction, commitment to learning as a developmental process, and collaborative relationships with colleagues. Required skills include the abilities to accept responsibility for learning, experiment with new behaviour, and use data for self-diagnosis for self-improvement - see Knowles, 1973, pp. 178-179).

Learning Assessment During Recruitment

During the recruitment process, several learning issues have been addressed. Included are assessment of the applicants' learning attributes and learning styles, their track record for participation in continuous learning activities, and their learning initiative as displayed during the application process. Recently, a small-scale survey on these issues as they linked to job applicants was conducted. The overall survey findings noted that very few job applicants are clearly and sufficiently communicating their learning issues during the job application process. For example, learning style and learning track record were for the most part poorly communicated by the applicants, and learning initiative during the application process was observed among just a small fraction of them (See Ogisu-Kamiya, 1996).

These findings indicate that most job seekers are not receiving guidance on learning issues as these relate to the job application process specifically or overall career development in a more general sense. Aside from fragmented suggestions received from various sources, job applicants are in large part left to "figure things out for themselves." Even common learning-related suggestions, such as "research the company and industry prior to applying for a job", were demonstrated by a very small percentage of the applicants. The urgency of addressing this gap between the needs of job seekers and the availability of services and resources seems to be greater than ever given the sweeping changes affecting the workplace:

- an increasing number of employers have started to focus on "learning" in order to ensure their workforce is able to remain current with the fast changing business environment (one recent survey found that "willingness to learn" was ranked by the employers as the second most important attribute of job applicants - see Mossop Cornelissen & Associates, 1995);
- dramatically changing workplaces in North America are characterized by re-organization, restructuring, and down-sizing, which necessitates that all workers, regardless of their current employment status, take charge of their professional lives more than ever, including responsibility for learning within the context of their career development.

Orientation Program and Guided Self-directed Learning Project

For all newly hired staff, an individually tailored orientation program is prepared. The program has two components. First are generic sessions which, for example, include an overall introduction to the company, its computer system, and the office procedures. Second are department-specific session which are directly related to the new staff members' responsibilities. In addition, guidance with regard to the self-directed learning project described below is included. The involvement of managerial and non-managerial staff in the planning and implementation of these sessions is intended to be part of the learning program for that group.

As well as the orientation program, new staff are required to complete a guided, self-directed learning project. Each must define and research a specific topic pertaining to either the industry broadly, the company's operation and activities more specifically, or products in which the individual has a special interest. The staff member is required to produce a written report within a three-month probation period. The main thrust of this learning project is to facilitate new staff to develop a learning focus from the very beginning of the employment period. It is also expected that this experience will act as a catalyst for each employee to continue with broader and more substantive learning experiences after the probation period ends. Aside from one-page guidelines provided at the orientation session, the framework of the project has been kept open-ended in order to suit each new staff member's ability and comfort level.

These reports show widely differing levels of quality and quantity, with final drafts ranging from vaguely structured 3-4 page essays to an in-depth research paper of about 100 pages. The differences derive mostly from two inter-related factors: the open-ended framework of the learning initiative assumed by each staff member creates the potential for considerable variety; and new staff have a broad spectrum of skills and abilities that far exceeded tentative assessment and assumptions made during the hiring process.

It has become evident that the project is a useful tool to assess skills, abilities and calibre (level of initiative) of new staff. That information can be used subsequently as a benchmark for facilitation of individualized learning activities throughout their career paths. So far, the development of newly hired staff after completing the research project has been encouraging. For the most part they have shown a tendency to continue to take the initiative for learning throughout the ensuing professional

development program.

Professional Development Program

The third element in the HRD initiative focuses on learning programs for existing staff. Included are two elements: first are full company-sponsored programs, and second are company-supported self-directed development initiatives. With regard to the company-sponsored programs, computer training as well as some training initiatives of general interest are offered. In terms of the self-directed scheme, the process of learning is emphasized as well as the content of learning. At the outset, a staff member who intends to undertake a learning project is required to produce a written learning proposal. With the involvement of the supervisor, identification of learning needs and the reconciliation of these with corporate objectives are completed. Upon completion of the proposed project, the staff member produces a report. Given the small scale of the Canadian operation and its limited internal resources, emphasis has been placed on external rather than internal learning opportunities. Courses in international trade and business communications are strongly supported as are other job-related courses.

It took considerable time for this professional development program to be initiated. One of management's key concerns was the clear identification of the benefits which the company could reasonably be expected to secure. As well, Japanese management was influenced by the Japanese-style tenured employment, or lack thereof in Canada. In Japan, up until recently, employment practices emphasized hiring new graduates and keeping them for life. In this context, a company is able to invest heavily in on-the-job training and education without fear that employees will leave (Johnson, 1988). In the Canadian context, this is not so clear. In fact, staff turnover within a fluid labour market is often mentioned as one of the major contributing factors for relatively modest in-house training in North America. Nonetheless, the recognition of pressing training needs has superseded the above concerns.

Since its inception in late 1993, the program has grown considerably. Under the full-company sponsorship scheme, a series of extensive computer training activities have been implemented. With regard to the self-directed scheme, an increasing number of staff utilize it for their learning projects. A wide variety of courses have been offered, with the most popular being international trade, Japanese language training, and accounting and finance coursework. As a spin-off, informal learning partnerships are emerging in the workplace. Examples include staff members who take the same course or subject and study together, and staff with advanced knowledge in a certain subject area helping others who are taking courses at basic or intermediate levels.

An in-depth examination of the outcome of these initiatives has yet to be completed. Nonetheless, preliminary reflection indicates that by consciously addressing learning issues through the implementation of relevant and focused programs, the personal learning initiatives of the staff have been stimulated to new levels. Also, directing the learning activities of newly hired staff from the outset has proved to be effective for seeding the first notions of an ongoing learning ethic. In effect, a desire for learning has been sparked in the workplace. Most importantly, however, for the full development of these programs in the years to come, a strong and ongoing organizational commitment is needed.

CULTURE

As well as the assessment and professional development initiatives described earlier, there has been a pressing need within the organization for an exploratory inquiry to examine how learning issues are influenced by the cultural context. In part this results from the fact that the firm is a complex, multinational, multicultural workplace, an environment which poses learning challenges in a different and highly complex context. This inquiry was exploratory in nature.

The human resource composition within the Canadian operation is a combination of two distinct groups: Japanese expatriates and Canadian staff. The expatriates from Japan are mostly key management personnel, each of whom serves for an average term of five years. This group is strongly influenced by Tokyo Head Office rules and hierarchy. They are in Canada for a relatively short period of time, and will almost certainly return to Tokyo upon completion of their assignments. Canadian staff members are hired locally and their appointments and functions are bound solely by the framework of the Canadian operation, though their work extends beyond Canadian boundaries.

For both of these groups, this paper addresses cultural responses to learning experiences, as well as perceived gaps between learning needs and learning capacity and initiative. The interface between the two groups is also addressed. Because the expatriates are dominant within the organization, greater emphasis is placed on this group. While acknowledging a range of individual differences, the paper assumes that it is possible to make general observations about the characteristics of each group and contrast their differing cultural contexts and learning potential.

Japanese Staff

Hall's (1986) conceptual framework is helpful in addressing cultural experiences as these relate to learning as well as some of the interface issues. Hall differentiates between "high context culture" and "low context culture", noting that in a high context environment, such as the Japanese culture, the norms, values and traditions strongly interrelate in order to create an environment where subtle meanings and messages are clear. Most information is stored in the memory of individuals, and as a result very little of it needs to be transferred on an ongoing basis. In effect, the rules and roles are known, the game is well delineated, and everyone who grew up learning the game knows how to play without a great deal of explanation or discussion. Conversely, in a low context environment, such as Canadian culture, far less can be taken for granted and therefore a great deal of day-to-day information must be transmitted. In the definitive low context environment, everybody is told everything in detail.

As a group, the Japanese expatriates are highly homogeneous. All are males ranging from their mid-thirties to more than fifty years of age, all are university graduates, and the company has been their only employer throughout their working lives. For the younger ones, Canada is the first overseas post, while for older expatriates this may be the second or third overseas posting.

ng the course of the posting, most expatriates have demonstrated few and ly weak learning initiatives. For the most part expatriates display a strong tendency to cling to a reactive learning approach, characterized by Knowles (1973) as the ability to retain information, to listen uncritically, to record information, and to predict evaluation criteria. The required conditions for reactive learning include a willingness to be dependent, a strong respect for authority, a solid commitment to learning as a means to an end (for example, credentials), and a competitive relationship with peers.

The Japanese school system is well known for reactive learning, where the focus is on teaching students how to be taught rather than teaching them how to learn. This tendency is exacerbated by highly competitive university entrance exams, for which reactive learning skills are extremely effective. Even at the university level, except for some optional senior level seminar courses, the primary emphasis on reactive learning remains. Learning is typically perceived as the means to an end, namely, earning a degree. The Japanese expatriates have evidenced reactive learning skills by successfully earning credentials from respected universities which almost automatically are the basis for securing a positions in a major established company.

During the period when the expatriate group was hired, lifelong employment was the norm. They were, and still are, expected to be "company men," unwaveringly loyal and responsive to the firm's needs. As a result, most of their core, work-related value orientation comes from the company. Interestingly enough, corporate culture requires and organizationally reinforces the reactive learning characteristics noted earlier: being dependent, respecting authority, committing to learning for succession, and competing with peers. The expatriates' approach to reactive learning has been further reinforced through internal training programs. Ueda (1990) noted that these programs or systems are organized to serve the requirements of corporations rather than the interests of individual employees/learners. By the time the expatriates were assigned to overseas posts, reactive learning had become a deeply entrenched and largely unconscious behavioral pattern. Now, in a fast paced, changing environment, this pattern appears to be a major obstacle.

Hedberg (1981) describes a process of learning, unlearning (discarding previously learned responses) and relearning (obtaining new responses and mental maps), a model which might help break the patterns associated with reactive learning. However, the experience expatriates have with reactive learning, including the positive rewards they have enjoyed and the investments they have made, make change difficult. In this setting, the acquisition of a proactive learning approach based on Hedberg's model or others is improbable.

Additional attributes of the Japanese educational system are worth noting (see Thomas's framework for management of learning in different cultures, 1991). First, the Japanese educational system emphasizes the needs of young learners, and second, learning needs associated with achieving entry into the educational system, and university in particular, are stressed. In both these cases, the learning needs of adults are in large part neglected, though some recent initiatives to mitigate this situation have been reported (Maehira, 1994). Further, Japanese society quite clearly distinguishes between the traditionally recognized stages of life: the learning stage

(prior to early adulthood), and the working stage (after graduation from post-secondary institutions). For the most part, it is assumed that all learning takes place in the first stage. Conventionally, learning during adulthood, over and above in-house training, is viewed as an exception rather than the norm.

For the expatriate group, attained social status is another factor that mitigates against broader participation in lifelong learning activities. As male graduates from elite universities, they are for the most part automatically accorded high status as "elite company men" in a major corporation. Social recognition is guaranteed for life, and it is logical for them to support the system that has contributed to their success rather than assume the risks inherent in a new approach.

Regardless of the cultural constraints, overseas assignments require considerably more learning and adaptation on the part of expatriates. Far from the Tokyo Head Office, expatriates must assume a wider range of responsibilities with far less support and supervision. Expatriates must develop effective work relations with the host country staff, all of whom bring different cultural experiences to the workplace. Also, they must adapt to a range of new circumstances including the host country's socio-economic environment, language, and customs. Given the reactive nature of their approach to learning, the capacity and initiative displayed by expatriates is unlikely to respond as effectively to this daunting list of learning needs as might be wished. Overseas assignments require venturing beyond the traditional structure and learning to adapt to new conditions. It is a major obstacle for the expatriates to expand their own learning context, and for the most part they appear to be mentally confined by a reactive learning style and, as a result, lifelong learning potential remains for the most part untapped.

Internationally-oriented management skills is an area where the development of expertise is particularly lacking among the expatriate staff, and there appear to be at least two critical factors associated with this. First, there is the Japanese tendency to assume "management" is a matter of "common sense." This perspective gives rise to the view that "management" can be done just using "common sense," and therefore it can be left mostly to the discretion of the individual. This response may work in an environment comprised of Japanese management and Japanese workers, where both groups share the same assumptions and high cultural context. However, it is not nearly as effective in a cross-cultural environment where members of two cultures operate within radically different sets of assumptions.

The second factor relates to the Head Office environment back in Japan where feudalistic "class" distinctions and strong hierarchical qualities are tightly maintained. In this environment, the need for a variety of strong management skills is marginal. However, outside this environment internationally-oriented management expertise is demanded as the company struggles to operate in a multicultural context and compete around the globe. It has yet to be fully appreciated that the management skills of expatriate staff carry profound cultural constraints. So far, in the non-manufacturing sector, the universality of their skills has proven to be limited.

Canadian Staff

The Canadian staff are characterized first and foremost by their diversity. They

include both males and females, ranging in age from twenty to over sixty. Included are a variety of ethnic groups, the majority being of Japanese and Asian background. Some have served the company for more than thirty years, while others are newly hired. Those who work at the management level are predominantly male, Japanese in origin, older, and have a record of long service.

Canadian staff are products of a variety of educational systems, both in Canada and abroad, with terminal education ranging from high school attainment through graduate school. For the most part their work experience includes more than one employer, often spanning several sectors of the economy in Canada and abroad.

By contrast with the expatriate group, the capacity for and approach to learning of the Canadian staff is more flexible and demonstrates greater individual variation. In many instances, younger and newer Canadian staff members have demonstrated the most initiative for new learning. This observation became more noticeable after the professional development programs described earlier in this paper were implemented. Conversely, limited receptiveness and initiative in learning among older, long service staff members has been noted. One of the major contributing factors to this tendency is thought to be the Canadian operation's long practice of providing a job for life and pay based on seniority, or more succinctly described by Johnson (1988) as living wages graduated by age.

Canadian staff who had earlier emigrated to Canada appear to adjust more readily to new learning experiences and the high context environment than those born in Canada. Survival following arrival in this new country had likely necessitated the acquisition of fresh skills and knowledge, and the replication of this learning behaviour is apparently not difficult. In particular, those who have fluency in a second language (not necessarily Japanese) demonstrate more understanding of the somewhat mixed cultural context than do unilingual staff. From a strategic planning perspective, this has been an important discovery. International trade is cross-cultural and cross-border by definition, and the company's workplace is and will continue to be multicultural. Hiring staff who fit and work more easily in this context has strong and immediate benefits.

In Canada, the educational system is primarily a reactive one, though to a lesser extent than is the case in Japan. As suggested earlier in this paper, the reactive approach is poor preparation for lifelong learning (see also Knowles, 1973; Shuttleworth, 1993).

Observation of the Canadian experience suggests that the distinction between learning as a youth and learning as an adult is becoming progressively less marked. More adults are learning in ways that are similar to the learning they experienced as youths. In fact, learning at both these stages has begun to extend in a variety of directions that more directly reflect labour market needs. There is an escalating demand for adult education and training due to such factors as high unemployment, a fluid labour market, and limitations on in-house training. Nowadays, for many adults, participation in lifelong learning directly and significantly influences their economic well-being. As a result, within Canada the cycle of learning, unlearning and relearning is increasingly common and may well occur several times during a person's lifetime.

Within the environment of the company under discussion, considerable learning needs are imposed directly and indirectly on Canadian staff. As described, the firm is a large, complex corporation with diverse global operations dominated every where and in every fashion by the Japanese management style. The requirements are particularly demanding for newer and younger Canadian staff members. Even if these workers generally exhibit a higher level of initiative, flexibility and receptiveness in their approaches to learning, fulfilling these requirements is a substantial challenge. Those who are unfamiliar with the high-context Japanese culture are at a disadvantage, and language continues to be a key barrier as most written documentation is in Japanese. As a result, employees who lack proficiency in the Japanese language are effectively locked out of what is arguably the most consequential communications channel. For older Canadian workers, saturated learning capacity and levels of initiative are not in keeping with the learning demands imposed by the fast changing business environment and technological revolution.

The area of management skills and the development of such skills is another example where corporate needs are not being fully met. In the past, locally hired staff, viewed primarily as "helpers," were not expected to have management skills per se. As a result, the hiring process de-emphasized these. Additionally, a watered down version of the "management is common sense" notion described earlier appears to be conveyed by the Japanese administration to the Canadian staff. As a result, even in cases where managerial titles have been given to local staff, usually based on gender and length of service, the skills are not well developed and the expectation for management proficiency remains unarticulated.

Interface - Japanese and Canadian Staff

While the two previous sub-sections of the paper highlighted the capacity, initiative and orientation towards lifelong learning for the Japanese expatriates and the Canadian staff, this section examines the interface by means of two salient examples.

One of the intersections where fundamental multicultural interface issues surface on a day-to-day basis within the company is in the giving and receiving of instructions between Japanese expatriates and the Canadian staff. High-context Japanese managers automatically expect Japanese speaking Canadian staff to share the same cultural perspective. In other words, the Japanese expect them to understand direction without going into detail or allowing them to pose questions. This is not a reasonable assumption. Even if Japanese speaking Canadian staff are Japanese by origin and do in fact speak the language, the extent to which they can be effective within a high-context environment differs considerably. depending in part on the level of their immersion in the low context culture.

At the same time, high-context Japanese managers often appear reluctant or uncomfortable giving instruction in any great detail to non-Japanese Canadian staff. To provide instructive detail is, quite simply, not a cultural norm to begin with, and doing so in English poses an additional challenge. It is generally held that high-context people constantly experience discomfort in a low-context environment. In fact, Hall (1986, p. 162) suggests that "high context individuals operating in low conte

ires constantly feel put down as shifts in the level of context are metacommunications which indicate shifts in relationship." On the other side, Canadian staff are often puzzled and frustrated by the lack of clear and detailed direction. As a result, Canadian staff tend to develop their own terms of reference or, in some cases, a sense of mistrust.

The second example of the interface issue relates to the regular changes that take place at the senior levels in the company. As Japanese managers are cycled in and cycled out of Canada, consistency and continuity get lost. As a result, there is limited organizational accumulation of knowledge and skills, especially as these relate to management styles and expectations. This is exacerbated by the fact that, without a uniform and articulated management approach that is understood by Canadian staff, there is a range of individual differences among Japanese managers, and hence a lack of predictability with regard to management expectations. For Canadian staff, it takes time and effort to adjust to the regular changes in management personnel. Canadian staff who have stayed with the company for an extended period of time have learned a variety of coping styles, typically coupled with varying degrees of resignation.

RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Lifelong learning in general and cultural interface issues in particular have yet to achieve preferential status within workplace agendas. As a result, few studies have been completed and little has been written about this area. Following are several recommendations based on this preliminary investigation.

In order to fully incorporate a lifelong learning approach within a corporate human resources development plan, several dimensions need to be addressed. To begin with, learning issues need to be expressly and consciously addressed rather than relegated to a subordinate role. Second, within a multicultural workplace it is critical to acknowledge cultural differences in terms of learning styles and educational experiences, and the cultural interface needs to be examined and evaluated. Third, promotion of a lifelong learning culture, including a proactive learning approach within the organization, needs to be explicitly endorsed at the corporate level.

Within the typical workplace setting, two specific strategies are suggested. These include the development of learning programs and, more broadly, addressing the human resources infrastructure. With regard to learning programs, organizations need to explore and evaluate systematic and organized methods for addressing lifelong learning issues. All the dimensions described in this paper need to be considered in order to come up with individually-tailored learning-related programs for the workplace. In addition, learning opportunities need to be integrated into as many facets of human resource practice as possible. This should begin with assessing potential staff in terms of their learning styles, ability to learn, and willingness to learn. The experience described in this paper suggests that learning assessment programs are easily adaptable for small- to medium-sized companies, even those firms whose capacities and resources may be quite limited. In fact, these are the firms which may have the most to lose by not having effective learning assessment programs.

The development of and support for a learning infrastructure, including the creation of a positive corporate culture and adequate resource allocation, are crucial if workplace lifelong learning is to take place. In this vein, competency within the organization is required in order to facilitate lifelong learning. Strong leadership and an organizational vision, coupled with learning capacity and managerial initiative, must be fostered.

Today's workplace is undergoing drastic change, and multinational and multicultural workplaces present unique challenges and opportunities for human resources development in general and for learning issues in particular. The process of cultivating a lifelong learning ethic can be a fascinating and rewarding learning experience in and of itself for human resource specialists. Beyond that, however, there is no doubt that many corporations, Japanese and others, are at the crossroads. Fresh learning paradigms are required, and this paper has detailed implications for the entire corporate structure. New methods, new models and new commitments are required, and nowhere is this more apparent that in the host of multicultural workplaces located within the Asia-Pacific region.

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