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Developing Global Workforce: An Integrative Intercultural Effectiveness Model for International Human Resource Development

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Keywords: Intercultural Effectiveness (ICE) Competencies, Human Resource Development (HRD), International HRD (IHRD), Cross-cultural Learning, Transformative Learning

Abstract: Globalization has a significant impact on the field of human resource development (HRD), especially on international HRD (IHRD). The challenge of developing global workforce with intercultural competencies has received extensive attention. It is necessary to reexamine the structure and content of IHRD programs that facilitate individual to be interculturally competent. This paper attempts to propose an integrative intercultural effectiveness (ICE) model, modified from Han's (2011) study, as the guidelines for IHRD to identify the process and content in developing intercultural competencies.

Introduction

Globalization has a significant impact on the field of human resource development (HRD), especially on international HRD (IHRD). In the Conference Board report (Kramer, 2005), a majority of companies want to accelerate the development of their global talent. Literature reveals that finding talented global managers is getting harder, due to the lack of global talent (Bhasin & Cheng, 2001). When the shortage of international managers becomes a significant constraint for international organizations to achieve success in the global arena (Scullion, 1995; Shen, 2005), the challenge of developing and managing global workforce receives extensive attention (Briscoe et al., 2009; Tarique & Schuler, 2009). The request for IHRD professionals to develop the world class workforce and managers with intercultural competencies has been made clear (Chang, 2007).

Intercultural Effectiveness (ICE) Competencies

Scholars, in the different disciplines, throughout the past thirty years have defined intercultural competence in a variety of ways. In the literature, the definitions of competence are theoretically and empirically inconsistent (Baxter Magolda, 2000; Lusting & Koester, 2003). Intercultural competence as a concept has been explored and studied under different terms, such as intercultural effectiveness (Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Han, 1997, 2008), cross-cultural adjustment (Benson, 1978), cross-cultural competence (Ruben 1989), intercultural effectiveness (Cui & Van Den Berg, 1991; Hanningan, 1990), intercultural competence (Dinges, 1983), and intercultural communication competence (Spitzberg, 2000). The process of achieving intercultural competence involves awareness, understanding, acceptance, respect, appreciation, and developing new attitudes, skills and behaviors in reaction across cultural boundaries (Deardorff, 2004). This paper highlights ICE from the studies of Cui and Van Den Berg (1991) and Han (1997, 2008, 2012) to explore and conceptualize intercultural competencies.

Purpose of study

This paper explores the theoretical inquiries for IHRD. The purposes of the study are: (a) to propose an integrative intercultural effectiveness (ICE) model, modified from Han's (2012) study, as the guidelines for reexamining the structure and content of IHRD programs for developing global management and international workforce, (b) to conceptualize intercultural competence, (c) to identify the cross-cultural learning processes for acquiring initial and optimal learning outcomes, and (d) to advance IHRD professionalism in the theoretical understanding of developing ICE for the global workforce and management.

IHRD

IHRD occurs at an international level, multinational level, and regional level. It has a cross-cultural, transnational, and global nature (Wang & McLean, 2007). The differences of IHRD and domestic HRD include issues regarding global manager's/expatriate's relocation, cultural reorientation and language translations (Marquardt & Berger, 2003). The role of IHRD has traditionally been focused on selecting, training and supporting expatriates for their international assignments (Barlett, Bae, Chen & Wan, 2002; Tung & Punnett, 1993). When expatriate managers are constantly challenged to balance globalization and local responsiveness, they are requested to have cross-cultural learning as the means to enhance their intercultural competence to work together, to manage diversity, complexity, ambiguity, and even personal stress.

Cross-cultural Learning and Transformative Learning

Cross-cultural learning is the process of adaptation to a new environment and its requirements through obtaining necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Hannigan, 1990). The intercultural learning process has to include how the individual has been modified or changed in their knowledge, attitude, and skill in the intercultural situation. Effective cross-cultural learning does not always come from a positive experience but from effective reflection. The reflection is a cognitive process and it is based on the learner's personal maturity level of cognitive development. Mezirow (1996) stated that learning is a process of making meaning and how adult learners make sense of their own lives. He asserted that the change or modification from a cross-cultural learning is viewed as an integrative and transformative process (Mezirow, 1991).

Many researchers (Chang, 2007; Chin, Gu, & Tubbs, 2001; Taylor, 1994) asserted that acquiring intercultural competence is a personal transformational process or viewed it as an integrative and transformative process (Kim & Ruben, 1988; Mezirow, 1991). Kim and Ruben (1988) confirmed that the process of acquiring intercultural competence is transformational and it is a learning and growth process that allows individuals to function effectively across cultural and national boundaries.

Based on the conceptualization exploration of the relationship between transformative learning and cross-cultural learning, Han (2012) proposed an integrative ICE model (See below) for IHRD to develop global workforce with ICE competencies. The model is presented of an integrative approach to ICE competencies development that illustrates the processes and the outcomes of cross-cultural learning, and also identifies the cross-cultural learning processes from modification and acquisition to effective reflections affecting cross-cultural initial outcome--transformative learning and optimal outcomes-- ICE competencies. The integrative ICE model will help IHRD professionals recognize best practices for individuals and organizations to

develop ICE competencies and identify guidelines for IHRD professionals to plan international training activities, interventions, and programs.

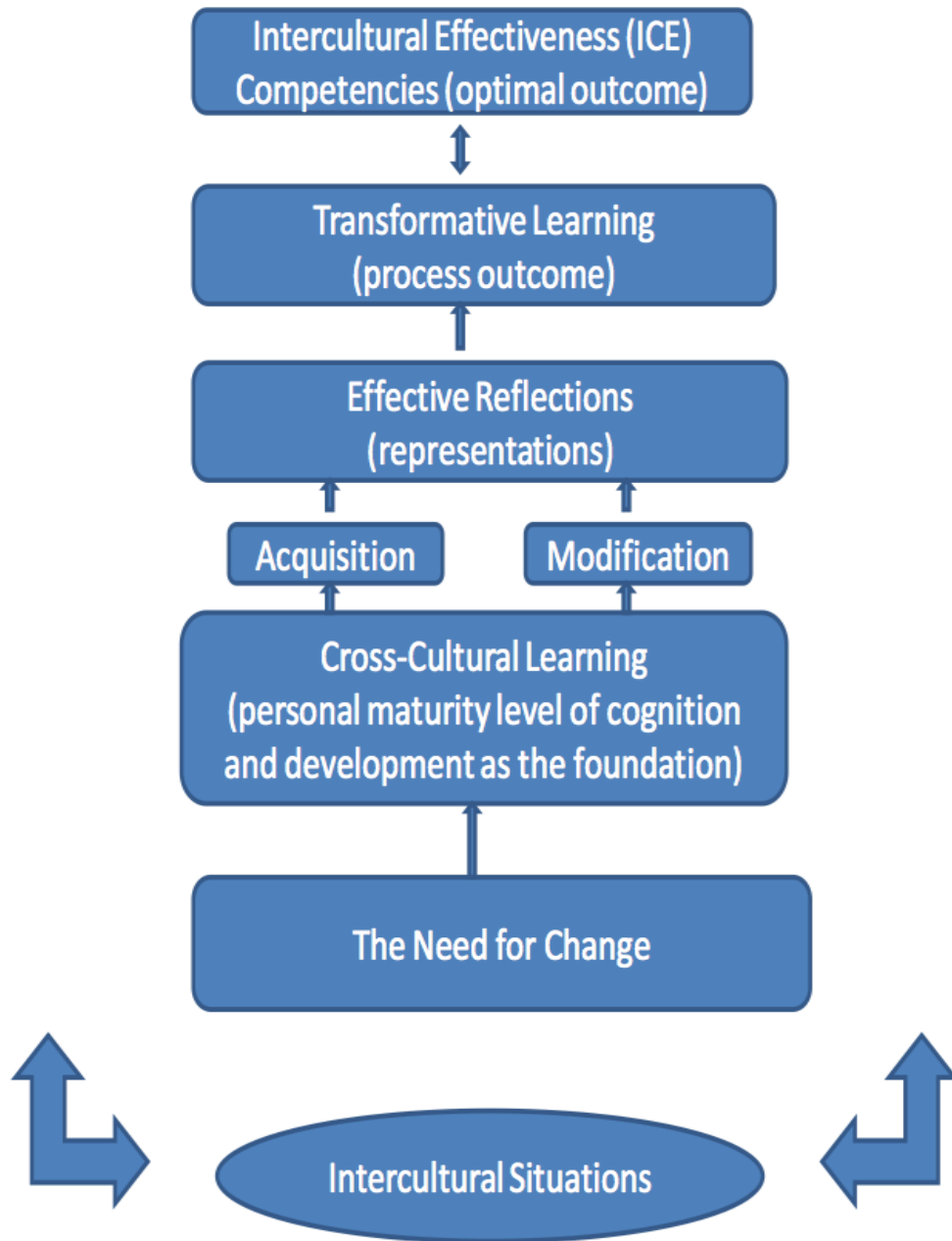


Figure 1 Integrative Model of ICE (modified from Han, 2012)

An Integrative ICE Model

In the model, the process of acquiring ICE competencies starts from the need for change. As an individual encounters different intercultural interactions, the need for change initiates the journey of cross-cultural learning and the process of acquiring intercultural competence. Based on personal maturity level of cognition and development, cross-cultural learning evolves to different outcomes.

Mezirow (1996) stated that learning is a process of making meaning and how adult learners make sense of their own life. The transformative learning process begins with an experience of a disorientating dilemma for learners. In Mezirow's (1991) work, there are four components in transformative learning: (a) experience, (b) critical reflection, (c) reflective discourse, and (d) action. Learning begins with the learner's experiences. An individual starts to interpret the issues of intercultural interactions with self-examination and critical reflection. When an individual is unable to successfully solve intercultural issues or after he or she tests the new meanings acquiring from intercultural situations, the individual get involved in the discoursing dialogue with trusted others in order to obtain a new understanding that allows the individual to assess of the interpretation. Finally, the individual takes —immediate action, delayed action or reasoned reaffirmation of an existing pattern of action (Mezirow, 2000, p. 24).

In essence, the change process echoes the theory of transformative learning. Effective reflection, derived from acquiring and modifying the representations of intercultural situations, guides individual's action and behavior. The meaningful and effective reflection is not only crucial to the process of transformative learning-- the initial outcome of cross-cultural learning but also to the development of ICE competencies-- the optimal outcomes of cross-cultural learning. In turn, ICE competencies facilitate transformative learning and vice versa. The model illustrates the processes and the outcomes of cross-cultural learning, and identifies the cross-cultural learning with the processes of modification, acquisition, and effective reflections. Cross-cultural learning evolves transformative learning as the initial outcome and ICE competencies as the optimal outcome. The integrative ICE model helps IHRD conceptualize ICE as the best practice as the guidelines to plan, design, develop, and conduct cross-cultural training interventions and programs. In addition, developing ICE competencies needs to pay attention to individual's experience. Kolb (1984) asserted that —Learning is a continuous process grounded in experience. Knowledge is continuously derived and tested out in the experience of the learner (p. 27). While learning begins with the learner's experiences, the integrative ICE model provides IHRD professionals to take learner's experiences as the means to help the individual's acquisition, modification, and critical reflection. It contributes to conceptualize and explain how ICE competencies and knowledge transfer by experiences.

Conclusion

Globalization increases the need to understand the work-related programs across national and cultural boundaries (Chang, 2004). It is crucial to understand how individual learner functions and learns across cultural boundaries. In addition, there is a great demand for workforce development practitioners to work effectively with the cultural diverse learners in the workplaces and to facilitate the cross-cultural learning (Chang, 2004).

As many international organizations require their workers to equip themselves with intercultural competence, global human resources and capitals will determine the success of the organization (Bhasin & Cheng, 2001). IHRD becomes a means for organization to develop

intercultural competencies for managers from different national and cultural backgrounds (Osman-Gani, 2000). This paper recommends IHRD needs to take a progressive approach for the organizations. They must move from reactive to proactive role and facilitate continuous learning in the cross-cultural arena. Most importantly, a call to manage change, to facilitate intercultural competencies, and to develop global talent for IHRD becomes crucial for organizations to be globally competitive. Lynham (2000) has launched a theory-building inquiry to advance HRD's professionalism and maturity. The integrative ICE model (modified from Han, 2012), deriving from the theory of transformative learning and the process of cross-cultural learning, provides a theoretical conceptualized foundation for IHRD professional to tackle this inquiry by identifying the process and content in developing intercultural competencies and to advance their professionalism and practices in the attempt of building the world class workforce and managers with ICE competencies.

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