Intercultural Training Requirements for Virtual Assignments: Results of an Explorative Empirical Study

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(November 2007)

LASER Discussion Papers - Paper No. 10

(edited by A. Abele-Brehm, R.T. Riphahn, K. Moser and C. Schnabel)

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Abstract

Virtual assignments are characterized by the spatial separation of private and business life. The virtual delegate lives and interacts in one culture, yet he or she works together mainly with people from another culture. Since face-to-face contacts with colleagues, customers or suppliers are reduced to a minimum, firsthand experience of foreign cultures does not take place. As a result, intercultural training becomes essential.

The study suggests that virtual delegates are faced with several intercultural management problems such as different time zones and communication styles as well as language barriers. These problems are increased by the lack of face-to-face communication, and common trust-building mechanisms. Intercultural training may be an instrument for overcoming these challenges. However, they have to be adapted to the specific requirements of virtual expatriates. Moreover, intercultural training should not only be offered to the virtual delegates themselves, but also to the individuals with whom they interact in the host country.

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