

# Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 22, 1995

## EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES AND PEDAGOGY TRACK WORKSHOP: SELECTING A MANAGER FOR MAQUILADORA, INC.

Virginia Arthur, College of Saint Benedict  
Wendy Klepetar, College of Saint Benedict

### ABSTRACT

Selection is a human resource function that is deeply embedded in the cultural values and attitudes that predominate in the organization. NAFTA will lead to an increased need for cooperation between U.S. and Mexican firms in the selection of employees. This workshop will explore how cultural differences between Anglo-American and Mexican managers impact upon selection decisions. Participants will be engaged in an experiential exercise that simulates an inter-cultural selection procedure. We will review research on the relevant cultural variables and discuss the impact these have on our experience in doing the exercise.

### INTRODUCTION

NAFTA will lead to ever-greater integration of businesses from the United States and from Mexico. A barrier to success in these enterprises is the great cultural differences between the two nations. Geert Hofstede's landmark study of work-related attitudes across cultures found that Anglo-Americans differed from Mexicans on three out of four dimensions he found to be significant: citizens of the United States scored low on power distance, high on individuality, and weak on uncertainty avoidance, while citizens of Mexico scored high on power distance, low on individuality, and strong on uncertainty avoidance. The commonality was relatively high scores on masculinity in both nations (Hofstede, 1980). The implications of these differences are far reaching. Normal patterns of behavior in work settings tend to differ widely between Anglo-American and Mexican employees.

Employee selection is a human resources function which is highly embedded in cultural norms. Decisions about what constitute appropriate criteria for selection are closely tied to basic concepts of what is valued in an employee (Mendenhall and Oddou, 1991). In the United States there has been extensive legal work done to define proper selection procedures.

As Dowling, Schuler and Welch state, "Equal employment opportunity laws are expressions of social values in regard to employment and reflect the values of a society or country." (Dowling, Schuler and Welch, 1994). Our laws insist, among other things, that each applicant be viewed and evaluated as an individual. It is explicitly illegal to make selection decisions based on the person's membership in certain groups, such as those defined by race, gender, or age. This legal prescription clearly emerges from our commitment to individualism. Mexicans, however, score very low on individualism and have no laws, for example, precluding gender discrimination in selection. It is quite a challenge to a firm from the U.S. to hire personnel in Mexico, particularly if it is trying to act cooperatively with Mexican human resource professionals.

The work of anthropologist Edward T. Hall is especially useful in understanding the differences between Anglo-American and Mexican culture and the impact that these differences are likely to have on meetings between members of these cultures. Three concepts he uses to analyze cultural differences are germane: proxemics; monochronic and polychronic time; high and low context. Proxemics deals with the cultural rules that underlie our use of space. Basically, cultures vary both in the amount of space people require around them and in the way that space is architecturally defined. When it comes to time, Hall states that people from different cultures exist in different time flows. Polychronic peoples, including Mexicans, experience time as nonlinear and fluid. Monochronic peoples, including Anglo-Americans, experience time as linear and uniform. Low context cultures, including that of Anglo-Americans, put all of the information conveyed in communication into the message. The assumption is that the interacting parties know nothing about each other or the issue. High context cultures, including that of Mexicans, proceed on the assumption that most of the information needed for the interaction is already present in the people communicating. Therefore, very little needs be conveyed in a particular interchange. As a result, high context peoples spend much time gathering background information and very little in explicit reporting. Low context peoples tend to do

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the opposite. A legal contract may be seen as an extreme example of low context communication. Ever -thing must be extensively and precisely stated in the document (Hall, 1981, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987).

This workshop will consist of an experiential exercise. Participants will be given roles to play as managers in a multinational corporation, headquartered in the United States, that is establishing a subsidiary in Mexico. Some will be Mexican, others Anglo-American. They will be given information about the candidates being considered for the position of general manager. They will also be given background information on the role they are expected to enact, including the criteria for selection that they are using and the expectations they have about the selection process. They will meet with counterparts from the other culture, and try to come to a decision about hiring. Rules for the meeting will be distributed that define the contrasting cultural views each party brings to the very act of conducting a meeting. The presenters will debrief the participants and discuss the theoretical framework provided by Hall to analyze the interaction.

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