

Developing Cultural Intelligence through Autonomous Learning from Cultural Exposure

MING LI
University of Liverpool Management School

Abstract

This chapter develops a model that depicts cultural exposure as an autonomous learning context that facilitates the development of cultural intelligence, which is an ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Drawing on experiential learning theory, the model delineates two elements of cultural exposure - the breadth and depth of international work and non-work experience, and cultural context - providing learning opportunities that autonomous learners can engage in experiential learning cycle. Individual characteristics that enable learners to seize autonomous learning opportunities and to engage in experiential learning are then examined with a focus on previous cultural exposure, personality, learning style, and foreign language proficiency. Implications for theory and management practice are also discussed.

Keywords: Cultural exposure, autonomous learning, experiential learning, autonomous learner

The shift of global economic growth from developed countries to developing countries will continue to create a growing number of expatriates, international assignees, and business travelers (Selmer, 2016). Companies today have an increasingly culturally diverse workforce and their employees need to engage with colleagues, customers and suppliers from different cultural backgrounds. Such cultural exposure provides ample opportunities for employees to learn about different cultures and develop skills for working effectively with people from other cultures, outside of formal cross-cultural training and development programs.

The knowledge that can be acquired from cultural exposure is not only the content knowledge about a specific cultural domain (Thomas et al., 2008), but also tacit knowledge which is not explicit and must be acquired in the absence of direct instruction and gained through practical experience and observation in various contexts (Grotenhuis & Weggeman, 2002). Simply providing cross-cultural training programs to individual employees on specific cultures or cross-cultural skills also does not ensure that they will actually use the skills on a regular basis (Adler & Bartholomew, 1992). To ensure employees develop and use cross-cultural skills, they must have inherent motivation to learn about other cultures and want to develop skills to work effectively with people from other cultures (Earley & Peterson, 2004). Therefore autonomous learning, which takes place when employees self-initiate learning activities, take an active and independent attitude to learning and independently undertake learning tasks (Dickinson, 1995 ; McCombs & Whisler, 1989), may be a more effective learning strategy that can facilitate employees to develop abilities to work effectively in a cross-cultural context.

The ability to work effectively with people from other cultures is termed cultural intelligence (CQ, Ang et al., 2007; Earley, 2002; Thomas et al., 2008). CQ enhances

employees' cultural adjustment (Lee & Sukoco, 2010), judgment and decision in different cultures (Ang et al., 2007), cross-cultural negotiation (Imai & Gelfand, 2010), and leadership when leading multicultural teams (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011) and organizational innovation (Elenkov & Manev, 2009). In today's global business environment, CQ is a key cross-cultural competence that is required by employees working internationally (Johnson, Lenartowicz & Apud, 2006), hence investment in developing CQ among employees is considered by many international organizations as strategically important to maintaining a competitive advantage (Ang & Inkpen, 2008).

It is widely recognized that international experience provides cultural exposure for learners to develop CQ and other cross-cultural skills (Crowne, 2008; Li, Mobley & Kelly, 2013; Thomas et al., 2008). However we are not yet clear about what specific elements of cultural exposure actually facilitate autonomous learning to develop CQ, nor do we have an adequate understanding of the type of individuals who seize the opportunity to learn from cultural exposure to develop CQ. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the elements of cultural exposure that provide autonomous learning opportunities and the individual factors that determine whether a learner will learn from cultural exposure. Drawing on experiential learning theory, the chapter presents a model (see Figure 1) that depicts how the breadth and depth of an international experience plus the cultural context to which one is exposed combine to produce the experiential elements needed for learning CQ autonomously. The model also depicts the individual characteristics that enable learners to engage in this experiential learning effectively including previous cultural exposure, personality, learning style, and foreign language proficiency. By considering these factors together, the model offers a comprehensive

framework for understanding autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context that can help build theory for learning and inform managerial practice.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Experiential Learning Theory as a Framework

Autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context means learners have an intrinsic need to learn about other cultures, would self-initiate learning activities within a new cultural environment, independently undertake learning tasks and assume their responsibility to develop skills to work effectively with other cultures, and do these things in an informal manner. Autonomous learning goes above and beyond formal cultural training provided by multinational companies (Noe, Tews & Marand, 2013). For this reason, it has great potential for the learning by international talents who must continuously update their knowledge and skill sets to adapt to different cultures, provide high quality service to customers from different cultures, and working effectively in multicultural teams. Autonomous learning is critical for realizing a successful global career.

Since autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context does not occur in a formal classroom but occurs when a learner engages in concrete experiences with different cultures, it is also experiential in nature. It involves reflection upon different cultural experiences and observed cultural phenomena, planned actions and experiments on what works and doesn't in a different cultural setting. This is representative of the learning cycle as defined by experiential

learning theory, and hence experiential learning theory can help us better understand how autonomous learning facilitates the development of CQ from cultural exposure.

Drawn from the foundational “theory of experience” of Dewey (1938) and Lewin (1951), Kolb’s (1984) defines experiential learning theory (ELT) as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984: p41). Kolb describes experiential learning as a cycle of four learning modes where immediate concrete experience (CE) serves as the basis for observation and reflection (RO), in which the experience is subsequently assimilated into abstract conceptualization (AC), and then formed into active experimentation (AE) of learned knowledge, which both completes the cycle of learning and begins the creation of a new experiential learning cycle (Kolb & Kolb, 2005a; Kolb, 1984). The four learning modes require the learning activities of feeling, reflecting, thinking and doing respectively (Kolb, 1984); learners need to engage in all these activities to learn effectively.

Applying ELT to autonomous learning in a cultural context, learners start the learning cycle with CE which allows learners to grasp cultural knowledge by relying on tangible and immediately felt qualities of the experience with different cultures (Kolb, 1984). Knowledge from concrete cultural experience is then processed by RO which enables learners to examine cultures from different perspectives (Kolb, 1984) and critically reflect and challenge personal assumptions built on prior cultural experience and knowledge (Taylor, 1994), and uncover how and why things in other cultures happen in different ways. The meaning is then assimilated into new cultural knowledge by AC which allows learners to think through what works and doesn’t work facing different cultural situations and make systematic plans of what to do if similar cultural situations take place in the future (Kolb, 1984). These plans are executed by AE,

which is focused on doing what works in different cultures and taking risks to enact different behaviors to test these ideas and change situations (Kolb, 1984). AE completes the cycle of cultural learning and also begins it anew by assisting the creation of new cultural learning experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 2005a; Kolb, 1984).

Based on ELT, the two conditions for autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context are necessary: (1) learners must have cultural exposure that provides them with concrete cultural experiences from which they can learn autonomously and, (2) learners must seize learning opportunities from cultural exposure and engage in the experiential learning cycle effectively. The remainder of this chapter will examine cultural exposure as an autonomous learning context with a focus on what elements of cultural exposure provide autonomous learning opportunities and which individual characteristics determine whether an autonomous learner will develop CQ from their cultural exposure via the four experiential learning modes.

Cultural Exposure as an Autonomous Learning Context

International Experience

Many types of international experience can provide employees with unique and crucial cultural exposures. It can occur in forms such as encounters with individuals from different cultures, short visits to foreign countries, and long-term immersion in a new culture. Broadly speaking, international experiences that provides cultural exposure occur in both work and non-work domains.

In the work domain, global work experience includes corporate expatriates, self-initiated expatriates, and more novel forms of corporate global employees such as short-term assignees, flexpatriates and international business travelers (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen & Bolino,

2012). Multiyear expatriate experience, no matter if it is assigned from corporate or self-initiated, is regarded as the most intense form of cultural exposure (Crowne, 2008; Li et al., 2013). Work experiences in multinational companies also provide cultural exposures. For example, opportunities to work and communicate with colleagues and customers from different cultures, and participate in cultural diversified virtual teams (Miriam, Alon, Raveh, Ella, Rikki & Efrat, 2013), task forces or learning groups with people from diverse backgrounds (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011), global service learning projects conducted in cross-cultural teams (Mosakowski, Calic & Earley, 2013; Pless, Maak & Stahl, 2011) and corporate sponsored volunteer programs in international nongovernment organizations (Caligiuri, Mencia & Jiang, 2013).

In the non-work domain, having friends from foreign countries could be the most powerful source of autonomous learning about culture because the time learners spend with foreign friends serves as concrete cultural experience for them to observe behaviors of their friends. Learners are also likely to communicate carefully to understand their friends and will adapt their behaviors to accommodate a foreign friend's different needs (Canary & Dainton, 2003). Overseas education experience (Crowne, 2008) requires students to spend an extensive period of time living abroad, often receiving education in a foreign language and studying and socializing with people from other cultures, thus providing significant cultural exposure. In addition, experience travelling abroad, whether work and non-work related, also provides important exposure to different cultures (Oddou, Mendenhall & Ritchie, 2000). Travelers experience cultural phenomena, social norms, exotic food, architecture, cultural heritages, and cultural events. Since cultural knowledge learned in one domain (work or non-work) can transfer to the other (Takeuchi et al., 2005), all of these offer a wealth of intrinsically

interesting autonomous learning opportunities that produce concrete cultural experiences for autonomous learners.

Breadth vs Depth. Being exposed to a broader range of international experiences provides more opportunities to develop CQ. Based on Browne (2013), the breadth of cultural exposure refers to the number of locations visited abroad and the number of times abroad (Crowne (2013). For example, breadth would be represented by the number of countries a learner has worked in, the number of multinational companies a learner has worked with, the number of foreign friends a learner has, the number of years studied abroad, and the number of times traveled abroad. Learners with larger breadth of cultural exposures have more cultural learning opportunities, and they are more “cosmopolitan”. Since they are more familiar with many cultures, they are likely to develop more comprehensive cognitive frameworks that facilitate individual learning from their concrete cultural experience, making reflections, and comparing and contrasting cultural differences. They are also more at ease with different cultures, and thus are more likely to adapt their behaviors.

Yet, the accuracy of one's cultural understanding is not always linked to how many times or how long a time one has spent in another culture; it depends on the degree of involvement with the other culture (Osland, Bird, Delano, & Jacob, 2000, p. 75). One might visit many places but still fail to learn if s/he is not involved in the local culture, such as when an American eats McDonalds, visits American shops and hangs out with American friends when in China. Hence both breadth and depth of exposure influence learning and relate to the development of CQ (Crowne, 2013; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun & Lepak, 2005).

Based on Browne (2013), the depth of culture exposure refers to the degree one participates in cultural experiences and interacts with local culture. More depth of cultural

exposure leads to more cultural cues and experiencing more challenges that trigger deeper reflection about cultural values and norms, hence these experiences are more concrete. Learners can then assimilate deeper understanding about a given culture. This deeper knowledge enables planning and experimenting with appropriate behaviors, which in turn leads to a higher level of CQ.

Cultural Context

Cultural exposures differ in their ability to stimulate or impair cultural learning based on the unique cultural context (Mosakowski et al., 2013). A number of scholars have presented frameworks for characterizing the type of cultural context (Hall & Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 1984; Trompenaars, 1993). Drawing from these frameworks, it is possible to identify which cultural contexts autonomous learners should learn from. A cultural context that facilitates the four learning modes of the experiential learning cycle should offer a more favorable learning condition for autonomous learners. This requires a cultural context to have a clear set of cultural norms for learners to experience, observe, reflect on and adopt/experiment behaviors in accordance with developing an understanding of what is accepted by people in that culture.

Tight vs. Loose Culture. A tight cultural context has been identified as important for cross-cultural learning (Mosakowski et al., 2013). Tight cultures have strong social and cultural norms and a low tolerance of deviant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011). A tight culture provides a learner with a clear set of behavioral rules that they need to understand and an opportunity for the learner to reproduce behaviors to see whether they are consistent with expectations of the tight culture community. In comparison, a loose culture has weak social and cultural norms and a high tolerance of deviant behavior (Gelfand et al., 2011), and hence

does not offer this structure and feedback, leaving learners to decide whether their behavior is accepted or not.

High vs. Low Culture. Another cultural context identified by Mosakowski et al. (2013) as important for cross-cultural learning is a low context culture, where people say what they mean, communication is explicit and requires little interpretation (Hall & Hall, 1989). A low-context culture provides learners with more clear rules and explicit information in communication to understand cultural meaning (Mosakowski et al., 2013). In comparison, in a high context culture, information can have different meanings depending on the situation and context (Hall & Hall, 1989). Hence a high context culture requires that a learner has additional information about the context to decode meanings and gain understanding. This complexity and subtlety makes cultural understanding in this environment more problematic and challenging (Mosakowski et al., 2013).

Cultural Distance. Cultural distance is the degree of (dis)similarity between two or more cultures (Skule, 2004). A culture's cultural distance from the culture a learner is from will likely influence autonomous learning. Too little cultural distance does not create a novel enough cultural experience to stimulate reflection, assimilation and experimentation. Too much cultural distance creates too much challenge to engage in the experiential learning cycle. For example, when a learner is in a culture that is highly different from their own, it is more likely for them to experience cultural shock (Bennett, 1977). Although cultural shock experience is also a learning opportunity for learners to reflect on what had happened and how culture played a role, and then adapt their behaviors to different cultures, it also means learners will have an intense emotional experience, which could reduce their sense of self-efficacy, and lead to withdrawal from the cultural experience instead of learning from it. A moderate level of

cultural distance may produce the optimal level of cultural challenge for learners to engage in the experiential learning cycle. In other words, the relationship between cultural distance and cultural learning is likely a curvilinear, inverted “U” function (Mosakowski et al., 2013).

Cultural Diversity. Another widely studied cultural context is cultural diversity (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Groves & Feyerherm, 2011). The more diversified a culture is, the more specific cultures there are to be learned, hence offering more cultural learning opportunities for learners to engage in the experiential learning cycle, despite creating more communication challenges since different cultures might adopt different languages and have different communication patterns (Hall & Hall, 1989).

Learning Support. Learning support offered by an organization (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison & Sowa, 1986) and host country nationals (Sonesh & DeNisi, 2016), such as providing mentors is also found to influence expatriate adjustment and thus learning in a cross-cultural context. The more support a learner receives, the more information the learner is likely to perceive about cultural and social norms, this information aids the learner to engage in experiential learning cycle. In addition, support creates a sense of psychological safety that should help the learner embrace the experiential learning cycle by opening up their feelings to cultural experience, deeper reflection about cultural norms, better planning for future actions and more willingness to experiment with different cultural behaviors.

Individual Characteristics for Autonomous Learning

Whether cultural exposure generates CQ depends in part on specific individual differences. Some key characteristics of autonomous learners that have been identified are a need to learn, taking initiatives, resourcefulness, persistence and self-efficacy (Derrick, 2003;

Derrick, Ponton & Carr, 2005). Learners with these characteristics learn more effectively in general. These characteristics also enhance autonomous learning from cultural exposures in a cross-cultural context. In addition, there are a number of other individual characteristics that uniquely influence autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context based on previous research.

Previous Cultural Exposure. Bicultural life experiences, such as having parents from different cultures (Bell & Harrison, 1996), provide cultural exposure on a daily basis. They are said to be “history is destiny” factors which determine an executive’s interest in international work (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002). Bennett (2004) calls people born into multicultural families the *cultural margin* who are comfortable switching between relative perspectives of different cultures and have a sufficiently complex self-concept producing the flexibility needed for CQ (Earley & Ang, 2003). Third-culture children, those who have lived in a foreign country for a period of time as adolescents, have cultural exposure during their highly impressionable adolescence (Selmer & Lam, 2004). People who have partners from different cultural backgrounds need to contend with the sometimes difficult additional adjustments that result from their differences in cultural backgrounds compared with mono-cultural couples, and they negotiate the accommodation of two different cultural ways of life (Telser-Gadow, 1992) and hence have most intimate cultural exposure to learn autonomously and develop CQ. Overall, learners with these previous cultural exposures tend to have more intrinsic motivation and take initiatives to learn about other cultures, they also tend to have more comprehensive cognitive frameworks that facilitate their learning and reflection of new cultural exposure. Their previous cultural exposure also enables them to plan and experiment their actions more effectively to adapt to different cultures.

Personality. Personality is “an individual’s characteristic pattern of thought, emotion, and behavior” (Funder, 1997). As the study of personality has evolved over time, the five-factor model of personality is recognized to be the best representation of personality trait structure (McCrae & Costa, 1997; McCrae & John, 1992). The five factors are openness, extraversion, neuroticism (the opposite of emotional stability), conscientiousness, and agreeableness. Openness is related to deep learning (as opposed to surface learning) which is driven by an intrinsic interest in what is being learned (Chamorro-Premuzic & Furnham, 2009), and it is also an important trait for the experiential learning mode of CE which starts the experiential learning cycle. Hence it is an important personality trait that influences autonomous learning from cultural exposure. Openness is deemed to be the most influential personality trait for the development of CQ (Ang, Van Dyne & Koh, 2006). Interpersonal dimensions of personality including extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability (King, George & Hebl, 2005) are important for learning from other individuals including people from other cultures. For example, extraverted individuals are more likely to reach out to strangers and socialize with people from other cultures making it important for CE and AE. Agreeableness is highly correlated with cultural empathy (Leone, Van der Zee, van Oudenhoven, Perugini & Ercolani, 2005), which is the individual’s ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts and behaviors of members from different cultural groups, making these traits important for RO and AC. Negative emotions such as fear and anxiety can block learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2005b), therefore emotional stability can positively influence autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context which often involves emotional events such as cultural shock. Conscientiousness is highly correlated to motivation to learn (Colquitt & Simmering, 1998), hence learners of higher level of conscientiousness are likely to be more motivated to

learn about other cultures. They tend to question cultural assumptions and compare cultural norms (Ang et al., 2006), hence engage in RO experiential learning mode during cross-cultural interactions. They also tend to take initiatives, plan for actions that are appropriate for other cultures and apply AE experiential learning mode.

In addition, personality traits do not exist in a vacuum, but co-exist within individuals along with other traits (Merz & Roesch, 2011; Penney, David & Witt, 2011) producing interactive effects among them. For example, openness is positively related to CQ when agreeableness is high, but not when agreeableness is low (Li, Mobley & Kelly, 2016). In other words, the interpersonal dimension of personality is very important for autonomous learning to develop CQ, despite the fact that openness to experience has long been recognized as the most important trait for cross-cultural learning.

Learning Style. Due to different social and learning experiences, learners rarely execute the four experiential learning modes – CE, RO, AC and AE - equally well because they often need to resolve tensions between the two dialectic learning modes of grasping experience (CE-AC) and transforming experience (RO-AE). Over time, they develop preferences for one mode over the other on these two dialectic dimensions, and in doing so they form one of the following four learning styles: *Divergent*, emphasizing on CE (feeling) and RO (reflecting); *Assimilative*, emphasizing on AC (thinking) and RO (reflecting); *Convergent*, emphasizing on AC (thinking) and AE (doing); *Accommodative*, emphasizing on CE (feeling) and AE (acting) (Kolb, 1984). A learner should achieve better learning performance when his or her learning style matches the learning context (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

In a cross-cultural context, AC is not an experiential learning skill for cultural adaption as critical as CE, RO and AE (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Learners who prefer AC over CE

appear to learn less effectively from concrete cultural experience because AC grasps knowledge from abstract symbols such as ideas and concepts, from books for example, as opposed to the immediate quality of experience (Kolb, 1984). Li et al. (2013) found the positive relationship between the length of overseas experience and CQ is strengthened when global executives have a divergent learning style, not when they have an assimilative, convergent or accommodative learning style. The greatest strength for divergent learning style lies in imaginative ability and the awareness of meaning and values (Kolb, 1984). Learners with a divergent learning style can experience a new culture more concretely by engaging their feelings during the experience, can view cultural situations from many different perspectives, reflect upon cultural differences, and then form an understanding of what behaviors are appropriate in the new culture context. Hence, they should be more effective and resourceful when they conduct independent autonomous learning from cultural exposures.

Foreign Language Proficiency. Language is at the center of individual interaction, and it plays a particularly prominent role in the way culture is transmitted and learned. Because people encode things in memory in terms of a particular language, language defines the way they view the world. So, from their very origins, culture and language have been interwoven as part of the human experience; one can only truly understand a foreign culture if one knows the language. Therefore language is important for autonomous learning from cultural exposure.

Those who speak a foreign language fluently are more likely to experience self-efficacy and feel comfortable engaging in interactions with people from different cultures (Takeuchi, Yun & Russell, 2002). The more proficient one is in a foreign language, the easier it should be to obtain necessary information about a given culture and observe cultural cues to engage in the experiential learning cycle. In addition, the more languages one commands, the more

flexible one is likely to be in shifting one's thinking and learning, leading them to learn from the same cultural exposures more effectively.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications for Future Research

This chapter presents a theoretical model of cultural exposure as a way to engage in autonomous learning to develop CQ. The model highlights a number of future research questions that need to be addressed. Firstly, the model recognizes that experience matters for learning in an international context in distinct and complex ways (Takeuchi et al., 2005). The breadth and the depth of international work and non-work experience, each and in combination, offers different learning opportunities for autonomous learners. Future research could further explore what factors contribute to the breadth of international experience, and what factors contribute to the depth of international experience, as well as evaluating how breadth and depth interact to influence autonomous learning.

Secondly, the model makes clear that learning will occur across different types of cross-cultural contexts, however the amount and challenge of learning is likely to vary. More specifically, the model provides a framework for examining specific cultural learning contexts to identify the level of challenge required to develop CQ within a given culture. Autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context is clearly not linear. Factors such as cultural distance, cultural diversity and social support will likely combine in complex ways and impact the level of learning challenge. Thus, future research should explore which experiential learning strategies would be more effective under different combinations. Moreover, future research

could empirically confirm that the relationship between cultural distance and cultural learning is indeed an inverted “U” curvilinear function.

Similarly, the individual characteristics are also likely to combine in complex ways to influence how successful a learner is at developing CQ autonomously. For example, personality traits are related to experiential learning styles (Furnham, 1992; Li & Armstrong, 2015). Personality and learning style may relate to previous cultural exposure and foreign language abilities. Therefore, future research could also examine the interactive effect of these factors in autonomous learning to develop CQ.

Having experiential, contextual and individual characteristics in the same model aids further study about cross-cultural learning from a person-culture congruence perspective. Matching the learning context with one’s learning ability and style leads to enhanced learning performance (Kolb & Kolb, 2005b). Even though individuals with a divergent learning style learn better from overseas work experience in general (Li et al., 2013), it is possible each learning style would enable learners to develop CQ from cultural exposure if a cultural context fits their learning style. For example, employees of a convergent learning style may learn well in tight and low context cultures. In the same vein, although a tight culture offers a better autonomous learning context in general, a learner who tends to adopt the AE learning mode might learn effectively in a loose culture. Future research could further explore such unique and complex interactions between cultural learning contexts and individual learner characteristics.

Managerial Implications

The model put forth in this chapter also has important implications for employees who seek to develop a global career and for companies looking to select and develop their international talents.

For employees, CQ is a key competency for building a global career. The model points out that employees do not need to rely solely on formal cultural trainings to develop this competency. They can actively seek out a variety of international work and non-work experiences and when doing so, should aim to increase the depth of these experiences. Meanwhile, they need to examine carefully the cultural context of these experiences. If the cultural exposure is in a tight or low context culture, then there will be relatively more explicitly communicated cultural cues to aid learners. If the cultural context is the opposite, then they will need to ‘read between the lines’, seek cultural cues, and search for references about the culture if they want to learn about it. In addition, since some cultural contexts are more challenging for autonomous learners to engage in experiential learning (i.e., cultural exposures with a higher level of cultural distance or cultural diversity), a gradual approach starting from cultural learning contexts that are easier to ones that are more challenging may be more effective when autonomous learners use cultural exposures to develop CQ.

Autonomous learners can also self-evaluate their personality and learning style to understand their innate potential to develop CQ, and establish developmental plans that are sensitive to these characteristics when identifying individual development needs. For example, low openness individuals will need to cultivate their curiosity for different perspectives, motivations and behaviors of people from different cultures. They can do so through reaching out to people with different cultural backgrounds and developing work relationships or friendships with them. When their learning style does not fit with the learning context of a

cultural exposure, then they will need to establish learning strategies by engaging in learning modes that are not their preference to overcome the challenges. For example, if an employee has a convergent learning style and is working in a high context culture, this employee must cultivate his or her feeling and reflecting learning abilities.

With regard to selection of international talent, the individual factors identified in this model are useful for companies to identify autonomous learners who can learn well from cultural exposures. These factors also demonstrate the importance of matching certain individuals with certain assignments to certain cultures based on their learning style, language expertise, and previous cultural exposure. Overall, individuals who have a divergent learning style can learn most effectively in an international context (Li et al., 2013). However depending on specific contexts of cultural exposure, employees who have any of the other three learning styles may learn effectively as well. The inclusion of both personality and learning style data will undoubtedly improve the accuracy of selection assessments for international talents.

For the development of international talents, organizations could create cultural exposures that employees could apply for or participate in that stimulate employees' interested to learn other cultures. These include overseas work assignments, overseas business travels, cultural training events that are not prescriptive but fluid and flexible, team projects with people from different cultures, volunteer programs in other countries, and so on. Organizations also need to create a positive learning environment for autonomous learners and provide support for learning because "people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of challenge and support" (Kegan, 1994: p42). This can be done through

providing mentors during overseas work assignment, providing cultural learning events, and creating a learning culture that fosters international collaboration and collegiality.

Conclusion

The model put forward in this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of autonomous learning in a cross-cultural context. Autonomous learning constitutes a critical source of learning above and beyond formal cultural training to develop employees' CQ and enhance the competitiveness of an organization in an increasingly globalized business environment. Simply having cultural exposure does not mean an employee will learn autonomously from it, but these experiences set the stage for learning. In the end, the nature of the cultural exposure and the unique characteristics of the employee as a learner determine how much he/she learns from cultural exposure to develop CQ and how effective the employee is within an international work environment.

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