Challenges of a Management Training Program in Indonesia: A Case Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present “lessons-learned” in the development, delivery, and evaluation of a Management and Leadership Training Workshop delivered in Bali, Indonesia. These lessons may be useful for understanding Indonesian culture and the relational dynamics of working with Indonesian groups, but also are relevant to the development and execution of workshops in any cross-cultural environment. Based upon the lessons learned, the team shares recommendations. A more intensive orientation was needed in this particular case, especially in regards to cultural norms, business practices, and interest/needs of participants. Time to work and rehearse with a translator to ensure that concepts and words can be communicated is critical. The training team should have asked the local planners for Indonesian case studies and situations that would have been relevant in the training activities. Our experience demonstrated the importance of adequate knowledge of the culture and context and that flexibility is critical when working in international training environments.
Introduction

A 1998 review of the Indonesia agricultural industry conducted by the Education for Community Food Enterprise Development (ECFED) revealed a lack of well-trained mid and upper level managers in the food industry. The same report identified weak linkages between university agricultural research and the Indonesian food industry. In response, a cooperative program with the USDA/FAS/ATO Jakarta and the Office of International Agricultural Programs at Texas A&M University were formed to prepare and deliver workshops in Denpasar, Bali. The specific charge of the “Bali Project” was to strengthen Indonesian universities’ capacity for training agribusiness managers and to increase research in food science and technology. These workshops were part of a much larger project. Through work with the identified audience, the team gained insight into working in a cross-cultural setting.

The primary goal of the “Bali Project” was to improve the capacity of Indonesian institutions of higher education in agriculture to produce graduates in agribusiness and food science whose abilities, interest, and attitudes would lead to increased supply and affordability of healthful foods. Two important aspects of the “Bali Project” were to build teams made up of Indonesian educators and local entrepreneurs and to train these teams in skill areas necessary for successful joint projects. A critical element was to encourage the incubation of programs that combine food research programs with hands-on food enterprise development.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present “lessons-learned” in the development, delivery, and evaluation of a Management and Leadership Training Workshop delivered in February 2002. These lessons may be useful for understanding Indonesian culture and the relational dynamics of working with Indonesian groups, but also are relevant to the development and execution of workshops in any cross-cultural environment. As a case study, the “Bali Project” brings to light five specific concerns: 1) use of time and space, 2) use of “real-time” translations, 3) process (philosophical) differences regarding managers and subordinates, 4) process differences regarding group activities and group reports; and 5) process differences in group decision making and consensus. Lessons regarding each of these concerns will be described in terms of what was anticipated, what was experienced, what could be handled differently with future Indonesian groups, and what the lessons reflect about cross-cultural training in general.

Context for the Case Study: “The Bali Project”

This weeklong training program focused on improving the cooperative and leadership skills of the participants. The first day was devoted to leadership and team-building activities. Days two and three, the participants were divided into university faculty and business owners for specialized training, although the group began and ended the day together with additional team building activities and sharing of results. During the breakout session, the university faculty members were instructed in program planning/instructional design, learning styles, writing objectives, evaluation, instructional strategies/techniques, and developing and delivering a mini-lesson. For the breakout session with business owners, groups learned
about management and business planning/implementation. The separate programs followed parallel lines -- as the faculty learned instructional planning, the entrepreneurs learned strategic business planning. For example, a needs assessment is the first step to instructional design and a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats) was the first step in business planning. The final day was devoted to bringing the two groups back together to work as interdisciplinary teams to implement the business plans. At this point, university faculty could interject curriculum needs in order to train students for the skills necessary for the business plans. This was a very novel idea, because typically small food industry businesses in Indonesia use family members rather than college graduates.

Various techniques were used throughout the workshop, but each activity or exercise was linked to at least one of the following training goals. First, training was designed to stimulate communication, trust and cooperative team development among all of the participants. Second, training was designed to encourage and facilitate curriculum development among university faculty. Third, training was designed to encourage and facilitate strategic business planning among the entrepreneurs.

The audience consisted of 40 business people and 15 professors. The business people were involved in management with about 50% holding degrees from Indonesian universities. Their command of spoken English was nominal. The professors were from Agribusiness, Agricultural Economics, and Management backgrounds and were fairly proficient in English. “Real time” translation was used during the presentation and activities in an effort to equalize differences in English proficiencies.

A local team living in Dempasar supported delivery of the training program. This team was comprised of United States and Indonesian nationals. The Dempasar team was charged with recruiting program participants and providing logistical support. Background information regarding the “Bali Project” was provided prior to the workshop. Included in this information were rather explicit “warnings” that Indonesian managers were not accustomed to thinking of their subordinates as valuable assets and that historically, university professors were not trusted because they were too closely associated with exploitative governments. The Dempasar team’s recruitment efforts continued up until the start of the workshop. Thus, the exact number of participants and complete information regarding the participants’ background was not known until the morning of the workshop.

Lessons Learned

Case studies can be used to provide meaningful, experiential data about complex situations, events, and phenomena. The use of thick description provides enough detail so that others may be able to transfer results to other settings. The training team chose to discuss the results of this case study under three sub-headings: development, delivery, and evaluation.

Development

Although the training team had a few documents to help prepare us for the development of the training program, we basically were selected as individuals to join the team based upon our expertise. We did have the advice of a student who had lived in Bali a few months and a project manager working on location. The local project manager had lived in Indonesia for 16 years and was well versed in the language and customs. It was difficult at times for him
to meet the expectation of the western project administrators (USDA/FAS/ATO) and maintain cultural morays. For example, a professor from the local university was not compensated for his hotel room in order to save project funds because he lived in Denpasar. This offended him greatly and as a result, not only did he not attend the training sessions, it was reported that he actively discouraged others from participating as well. Deferential treatment of professionals is customary in Indonesia, but not in the US.

In a perfect world, a training team would have a little bit of information about the participants prior to designing a training program. In this case, the team only had very sparse information; that the participants were academics and business owners and very little in terms of detailed information. Participants were recruited up until the last minute. Only limited information about their business practices, specializations or interests was available as the training was developed in the U.S. Therefore, it was difficult to tailor the content to the specific needs or interests of the participants.

The team was recruited about a month before the delivery of the training program. Each individual had content expertise but as a team we did not have time to progress through the normal stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Dufrene & Lehman, 2002). It was more like storming and performing! Most of the team members had experience working in international settings and knew that the formation of training teams on short notice is common practice, but it is still stressful nevertheless.

The team planned what they thought would be an interactive session to promote collaboration, team building, and communications within the framework of business and curriculum planning.

Delivery

Probably most lessons were learned in the area of delivery. To say the least, each trainer adapted the training on a daily basis, if not hourly. The Denpasar project team indicated to the training team that they wanted the participants exposed to a Western training and management workshop. Workshops in Indonesia are traditionally very formal. Lecture is the normative teaching style. Based upon our brief orientation by the Office of International Agricultural Programs, the team envisioned breakout rooms, use of props, markers, access to technology, etc. (a very Western mentally). In reality, interactive techniques were uncommon and materials scarce. The training team purchased and transported most of the training materials in our suitcases. Even the logistics and cost of copying and paper were an issue at the training headquarters. We did have a laptop with a dial-up connection after two days. We were able to project PowerPoint slides in the training room, but the room was extremely large (a ballroom) and set-up in a U-shape with participants on the outer walls and instructors up on a stage. The initial room configuration was set-up in a formal United Nations horseshoe format, which we reconfigured to a more interactive configuration to encourage greater group dynamics between and among participants and instructors. The initial formal arrangement was very hierarchical in nature and typical for Indonesian meetings. Needless to say, the new more interactive environment was culturally foreign to them and created quite a bit of chatter among them.
There were also some problems with miscommunication because the training team did not speak Bahasa, the native Indonesian language. The trainers would speak in short snipits and then a translator would communicate to the audience. An additional issue is the fact that Bahasa, the national language of Indonesia, is relatively new and varies greatly in different regions of Indonesia and workshop participants came from many different islands, all with various dialects. So the combination of Western concepts with some dialectic concerns made translation a challenge. It was obvious from the beginning that the task of teaching Western leadership concepts was not going to be easy, as the translators had no idea how to convey the message. And in many instances, the participants were being asked to respond to ideas that were very foreign to them; for example, many of the participants were successful business people in a monopolistic environment, but few had been trained to think in terms of competitive markets or in terms of teams’ approaches to business functions. Often assuming that translations were going smoothly, trainers would at times proceed for 20 or 30 minutes before realizing that key conceptual information had never been adequately conveyed to the participants.

We also experienced great differences between our expectations regarding group dynamics and the observed interactions of the participants. The concept of working in teams (especially with the women participants) seemed to cause the most confusion. Also, groups seemed to have a great deal of difficulty beginning an assigned task, which left the training team to wonder whether or not the translations of instructions had failed. At times, participants complained that the program translators were not providing adequate translations. Also, the trainers noticed that leaders in small groups emerged as opinion leaders who helped get the group actively engaged. These individuals also acted as facilitators and communicators because they were themselves fluent in English. No doubt, they served as a cultural bridge due to the previously mentioned problems with translation. Once engaged in small group activities, the participants appeared to function well as teams. One process difference noticed by the trainers was that even groups that appeared to make little progress toward the activity goal could, when pressed, produce evidence of task completion. It seemed that our team was not particularly capable of “reading” group interactions, especially in terms of how close groups were to task completion. At first, the participants were hesitant to undermine the program translators, but eventually the group complained that the translation was not accurate. At that point, one translator was “re-assigned” and then others in the group assumed the role.

Cultural differences between Western and Eastern views of punctuality were another delivery concern. For example, the first meeting began later than planned because many of the participants arrived after the scheduled 8:00 opening. At 8:19, there were only 11 participants. By 8:32, there were 28 participants. It was not until 8:39 that all of the participants had arrived. In planning the workshops, we envisioned presenting “door prizes” at the end of each day as rewards for work well done. Instead, we realized that a better use of the prizes was present them at the beginning of sessions as rewards for Western punctuality. Most of the participants responded to these rewards, by arriving on time; however, a few continued to be late each day! On the last day, we allowed participants to choose from the “prizes” we had left and their favorites were small trophies/ribbons, and items from the university, such as T-shirts and postcards.

For the conclusion of the training program, it was customary to have a rather formal dinner/celebration. This included round tables with tablecloths, fresh flowers, and numerous
tables of beautifully prepared foods. The project director in Dempasar passed out certificates and each member of the training team congratulated the participants. We also received gifts from the local businesspeople, mainly food products. There was live music, dancing, and Karaoke afterwards. It was quite an event and something that the trainers felt should be a part of Western training programs, because it provides a nice closure.

**Evaluation**

For evaluation of the program, we used a standard “affective” evaluation form that was developed by the program planners in Dempasar. It asked the typical questions about program effectiveness. The Dempasar group compiled the results and the training team was sent an email with a summary. Overall, the results were positive. They wanted more workshops and to accept more participants from different companies or universities to broaden the programs outreach. They wanted content on consulting and wanted the training team to follow up on the business plans to help them to be implemented. Some indication of displeasure with the translation (both oral and written materials) was mentioned. They also wanted more case studies from companies in Indonesia, something that this particular training team could not offer with such short preparation time and lack of prior experience in Indonesia.

The training team was also interested in determining if there was a change in participants’ ideas about leadership as a result of the training. Therefore, a simple pre/post test measure was given. The participants were asked:

1) In what ways can you benefit from others in reaching your professional goals?
2) In what ways can you benefit from working with others who are similar to you?
3) In what ways can you benefit from working with others who are different from you?
4) What does leadership mean to you?

Once again, translation became an issue. After looking at the results, it appeared that participants “told” us what they thought we wanted to hear. Early on, participants’ idea of leadership was about being in charge and being in control. At the end, it was what we had told them—it’s about cooperation.

It is difficult to know if any true change occurred as a result of this short training program. We would like to know the long-term vs. short-term impact. We are in contact with the program planners and hope to know if any new business practices or curriculum changes have been implemented a year later.

**Conclusions**

With any case study it is important to share “lessons learned.” The training team would like to conclude with a discussion of what we anticipated, what we actually experienced, what we would handle differently in the future, and what the lessons reflect about cross-cultural training in general.

**Anticipated**

- More information about the participants and their backgrounds
• An interactive, participatory workshop environment
• Access to resources and supplies that we needed
• A rigid time schedule
• Use of movable tables for group work and break-out sessions
• Use of activities with small groups reporting back to the larger group
• That “the boss” would be the leaders (based upon the orientation materials)
• Consensus building among educators and entrepreneurs
• Good translation to bridge language and cultural differences.

Experienced
• Little to no background information about our participants
• An expectation of a more formal, lecture-based training program
• Limited access to resources and supplies
• Difficulty getting participants to begin on time
• A large ballroom with tables along the edge
• Opinion leaders emerged, regardless of their positions, primarily due to their English skills
• Vocal individuals promoted their views and others appeared to be silenced; the entrepreneurs and educators behaved very differently in the sessions.
• Numerous problems with translation of Western concepts and vocabulary.

What we would handle differently
• Even though the time to put together a training team is usually short, a more intensive orientation was needed in this particular case, especially in regards to cultural norms, business practices and interest/needs of participants.
• Time to work and rehearse with a translator to ensure that concepts and words can be translated.
• The training team should have asked the local planners for Indonesian case studies and situations that would have been relevant in the activities.

What the lessons reflect about cross-cultural training in general
• To be successful, adequate knowledge of the culture and context is very important.
• Although practitioners know that flexibility is critical, it still is worth noting for working in international training environments.

Educational Importance, Implications, and Application

In today’s global marketplace, professionals working in Extension, university, and business settings must be able to work in cross-cultural settings. By sharing experiences, practical knowledge, and applications, insight can be gained into the processes that are most effective in diverse environments.
References
