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## Working Paper

## Cultural Training Based on a Theory of Relational Ideology

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Abstract

A field experiment examined the effects of an intercultural training intervention based on the construct of Protestant Relational Ideology (PRI). The experiment, like drug trial research, compared the effectiveness of the novel PRI intervention with an intervention previously shown to be successful. People working on consulting projects with colleagues in China or Chile received either PRI-based training or the well-established and popular cultural assimilator training. Results show that compared to cultural assimilator training, relational ideology training is more effective in improving managers' success in completing project objectives and affective adjustment during cross-cultural ventures. The study shows that important practical and theoretical benefits can be gained from integrating theoretical advances in cultural psychology into cross-cultural training.

(Words: 115)

Cultural Training Based on a Theory of Relational Ideology

*Only people who have learned to work productively and creatively with individuals from a multitude of races and ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds can maintain America's competitiveness in the increasingly diverse and interconnected world economy...as global enterprises expand it is increasingly critical that employees at every level of its operations utilize these skills in their daily tasks.*

Amicus Brief filed with the U.S. Supreme Court by General Motors & Steelcase on behalf of 21 multinational companies, 2001 *Grutter et al. v. Bollinger et al.*

People working across different cultures face a common challenge of navigating through deep-seated cultural variations in cognition, values, and relational styles (for reviews see Adler, 1997; Farh, Earley, & Lin, 1997; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Prentice & Miller, 1999; Thomas, 2002). For example, one must adjust for differences in the way people interpret feedback, value social harmony versus task efficiency, and coordinate differences in opinion. For people working globally, cultural differences can derail otherwise promising work relations. 15% to 50% of managers assigned to work with colleagues abroad curtail their assignments because of an inability to manage cultural differences (Bird et al., 1993; Copeland & Griggs, 1985; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992; Eschbach, Parker & Stoeberl, 2001; Tung, 1987). Although problems associated with cross-cultural business collaborations can be economic or structural, many difficulties arise from interpersonal factors such as coordination, communication, and social-emotional adjustment between people from different cultures (Earley & Erez, 1993; Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996).

Recent theoretical and empirical advances in cross-cultural research can be leveraged to develop cross-cultural training (CCT) programs that address these interpersonal problems. Since cross-cultural research brings greater precision to our understanding of cultural differences and similarities, CCT programs that incorporate these theoretical frameworks and findings should better facilitate how people understand and anticipate cultural differences in work settings (Bhawuk, 2001; Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000). The present research follows this Lewinian tradition

of bringing a closer integration between basic theory and applied social intervention. This article describes the development of a theory-based, cross-cultural training intervention, referred to as *relational ideology* (RI) training, and examines evidence of its effectiveness on improving relational adjustment and task performance among people working across cultures.

The RI intervention is based on recent theoretical and empirical cultural psychology research on *Protestant Relational Ideology* (PRI), a framework for understanding similarities and differences in the relational schemas Americans, East Asians, and Latin Americans use to navigate social interactions (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). PRI refers to a deep-seated belief that, in work settings, affective and relational concerns are considered inappropriate and therefore should not be attended to. This characteristically American ideology guides perceptions, judgments, and behavior in both work versus non-work settings (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). The RI training was created from past research paradigms on PRI (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003; Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000). American trainees participated in exercises comparing their workplace relational styles to those of people from foreign countries, and learned about a conceptual framework offering ways to coordinate across these cultural differences.

<div align="center">Intercultural Training Models and Benchmarks</div>

The central aim of cross-cultural training programs and training interventions is to teach people to bridge cultural differences more effectively. Reviews of the studies that have evaluated cross-cultural training programs provide support for the general notion that training can be useful (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). For instance, cross-cultural training has been shown to reduce culture shock, miscommunication and return rates among expatriates (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000; Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Deshpande & Viswesvaran, 1992; Earley, 1987).

Scholars and practitioners have developed a wide variety of training programs designed to improve effectiveness in cross-cultural work conditions (for excellent reviews see Black & Mendenhall, 1990; Triandis, Kurowski & Gelfand, 1994). These training methods vary in the

content and format. Some training programs only include brief lectures that provide basic information about the history and socio-economic situation of a target culture with or without discussion of cultural differences in beliefs and behaviors. Although these forms of informational instruction may be better than no training (Tung, 1981; Bird, 1993), they are more effective when combined with experiential exercises that make salient the cognitive and affective states encountered during intercultural contact (Bhawuk, 2001; Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983). The benefits of an experiential component in cultural training was demonstrated by Earley (1987) who compared one trainee group that received information about the target culture in lecture format and a second trainee group that participated in a series of role-play exercises and simulations in addition to the lectures. Subsequently assessed measures of effectiveness on project-related goals and psychological adjustment showed that the effect of the lecture format was significantly improved by the experiential exercises. Other scholars have shown that training components that increase participant's awareness about culture and its influence on thought and behavior can also add value (e.g., Landis, Brislin, & Hulgus, 1985).

A cross-cultural training program that meets these various criteria for effective intervention is the "cultural assimilator" (CA), the most widely studied training method (Bhawuk, 2001.) In CA, participants are presented with a collection of cross-cultural "critical incidents" that occur between a sojourner and a host national (or person from a specific foreign culture). Each vignette is followed by a relevant question and a number of alternative interpretations of the host national's behavior. Trainees choose one interpretation and then receive feedback. If the "correct answer" is chosen (correct as defined by the modal response of people in the host's culture), trainees are instructed to go to the next critical incident (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971; Cushner, 1989). If an incorrect answer is chosen, a brief explanation is provided and the trainee is instructed to choose another answer. Critical incidents have been developed to highlight unique cultural concepts as well as key dimensions along which cultures

vary. In short, the purpose of the CA program is to train participants to make similar responses and interpretations as people from the host culture.

The CA is the most rigorously tested and validated training program (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990). It has been shown to be effective in providing information about a host or foreign country (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000), increasing overseas work performance (Worchel & Mitchell, 1972), improving psychological adjustment (Cusnher, 1989), and reducing anxiety during intercultural contact (Landis, Brislin, & Hulgus, 1985). There are two types of CA training: One focuses on the characteristics of one target culture (culture-specific assimilator) and the other focuses on broad dimensions along which cultures vary (culture-general assimilator). For example, a culture-specific assimilator would focus on aligning American's attributions to those of the Japanese, whereas a culture-general assimilator would focus on how cultures can differ in saving face, preserving harmony, individual versus collective goals, and so on. These two forms of CA show similar rates of success (Bonner, 1987; Brislin & Cushner, 1996; Cushner, 1989; Triandis, 1984).

Given its extensive research record and documented success, the CA is an appropriate benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of new cross-cultural training interventions. In the next sections, we describe one such intervention—relational ideology training. We first describe the theoretical basis and empirical evidence underlying relational ideology and then outline the key dimensions of the training program.

<center>Protestant Relational Ideology in American Workplaces</center>

*Protestant Relational Ideology* (PRI) refers to deep-seated beliefs that attention to affective and relational concerns should be restricted in work settings (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). People influenced by this ideology encode fewer social-emotional and relational cues at work and show poorer memory for interpersonal information in workgroups**.** PRI is prevalent in American culture, stemming from the beliefs and practices of ascetic Calvinist Protestants

(Lenski, 1963; Weber, 1904). Based on their interpretation of Calvinist theology, America's founding communities developed a particular cognitive and behavioral pattern that restricted relational concerns when performing work and other activities considered part of one's calling. Outside of work, however, these restrictions were relaxed such that paying attention to others' socio-emotional cues were considered appropriate, even encouraged. These beliefs were later secularized and diffused in American culture as an ideology that shapes how people think about and respond to the social-emotional dimension of work and non-work interactions.

The notion that PRI shapes the relational schemas Americans use at work has received wide empirical support from field and laboratory studies conducted across and within cultures using behavioral, self-report and implicit cognitive measures (for a review see Sanchez-Burks, 2004). In one experiment (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, Study 1), two groups with highly similar demographic profiles (education, ethnicity, parents' socio-economic status) who differed in whether they were raised with PRI were primed either for a work context or for a social context before performing an 'emotional Stroop test.' Participants heard words having either positive or negative valence read either in an affect-appropriate tone (e.g., a sad voice for *funeral*) or an affect-inappropriate tone (e.g., a sad voice for *wedding),* with instructions to quickly identify the semantic valence (good-bad) of each word and ignore the emotional tone of the spoken word. When primed for the social context, emotional tone of voice equally confused both groups. However, when primed for a work context, emotional tone of voice had virtually no effect on the group raised with PRI. These participants were able to focus exclusively on identifying the semantic meaning of the words and block out emotional content. A similar behavioral pattern was found in a follow up study (Sanchez-Burks, 2002; study 2) in which participants exposed to PRI showed less relational attunement and non-verbal coordination in a work setting compared to a social, non-work setting. Participants less influenced by PRI showed equal levels of coordination across these settings.

Another study showed that Americans are less likely to notice relational cues embedded in a supervisor's attempt to save face for an employee while conveying a bad performance evaluation. However, these cues are noticed and used for making sense of social, non-work communications such as one between friends. In contrast, Chinese, Koreans, and Thais attend to relational cues equally across work and non-work contexts (Sanchez-Burks, et al., 2003).

PRI also suggests that cross-cultural variations in relational attunement are context-dependent with differences most pronounced in the context of work. For example, Sanchez-Burks, Lee, et al (2003) measured American and East Asian managers' preference for using indirectness cues in communication with a specific coworker or with a non-work-related acquaintance (Holtgraves, 1997). Their findings showed virtually no cultural differences in communication style outside work: Americans reported being as indirect as East Asians. However, there was a substantial cultural difference when participants were considering a specific coworker. Here, Americans were significantly less indirect than Asians. In short, East-West differences in relational sensitivity are magnified in the workplace.

PRI further shapes people's memories of what transpires in team meetings and their preferences for which teams they would like to join. This was demonstrated in a series of cross-cultural field experiments in which Anglo-Americans, Mexicans, and Latino-Americans listened to audio and video clips of work teams and later asked to recall details from the meetings (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000). These details were then coded as task-related or interpersonal-related. Results showed that Mexicans and Latinos showed similar levels of recall for task-related and interpersonal-related information from team meetings. In contrast, Americans primarily recalled more task-related information than interpersonal-related information (e.g., memories about interpersonal discord or rapport building). Moreover, in deciding between two work teams to join, Americans preferred teams that focused exclusively on the task and avoided any discussion related to establishing interpersonal rapport.

In a similar vein, a survey of American, Mexican, and Asian managers finds that Americans were less likely than the other groups to think about a subordinate's personal motivations. Instead, Americans focused almost exclusively on work-specific incentives such as salary (DeVoe & Iyengar, 2004). Americans are also less likely than other cultural groups to believe that relationship conflict can have a detrimental influence on task performance (Neuman et al., 2004), and less likely to believe that improving interpersonal dynamics is an effective strategy for achieving success on a team project (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2000).

Overall, these studies show that cultural differences in relational sensitivity are more pronounced in work than non-work settings. This has been shown in multiple domains, including work team preferences, memory for interpersonal team dynamics, communication styles, motivation and conflict-resolution strategies. The main contribution of PRI is to provide a theoretical framework that explains why Americans' interpersonal style differs from other cultural groups not rooted in Calvinist Protestantism (such as East Asians or Latin Americans), and outlines the conditions under which to expect cultural differences and cultural similarities in relational focus. The theory and research on PRI provided the framework in the development and assessment of a cross-cultural training intervention described in the next section.

Relational Ideology Training

A *relational ideology* (RI) training intervention was developed from theoretical advances in cultural psychology (Bhawuk, 2001), particularly the recent work on PRI. This study examines whether training interventions based on PRI could increase the success of cross-cultural workplace interactions. The training intervention described below was targeted for American managers and was designed to improve Americans' cross-cultural working relationships with East Asians or Latin managers in other countries. The format of the training involves people, individually or in groups, completing a series of exercises that reveal participants' relational beliefs at work and how that compares to people abroad.

Abbreviated versions of research paradigms in prior PRI research served as a foundation for creating the training intervention. First, using a modified version of Holtgraves' (1997) indirectness scale, trainees fill out a self-report assessment of their sensitivity to relational cues at work and outside work (Sanchez-Burks, Lee, et al., 2003, Studies 2-5). Second, following procedures used in an experiment by Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, and Ybarra (2000, Study 2), trainees are asked to recall details after listening to audio recordings of work team meetings. Their memory for task and interpersonal details are then compared to research findings from Latino and Latin-American managers. Third, trainees engage in a role play exercise enacting a performance feedback session. One participant reads a note describing an employee's overall annual performance (the note was taken from Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003, Study 1 and said "This is your interim evaluation summary: Overall the evaluation indicates your strengths are in communication skills, anticipating events and creativity. The other areas are not as strong as these—some are poor, but it's difficult to evaluate those areas. Good job!"). Other participants estimated the actual numerical scores reflected by the note along 14 performance dimensions, such as "organizational skills" and "communication skills."

These self assessments and role play exercises provide the basis for discussions about cultural differences in attention to relational concerns in the workplace. Specifically, directed discussion with a facilitator focuses on two key points: (a) <u>where</u> to anticipate the greatest differences, namely in work rather than non-work settings; and (b) <u>what</u> types of perceptual, value, and behavioral differences to expect, namely those related to the importance of attentiveness to social relations. These various training components—indirectness scale, memory of task versus interpersonal events, role play, and directed discussion—are tools to heighten awareness about one's own and others' preferred relational style in and outside work, and to introduce trainees to the PRI construct as a conceptual framework for understanding how to coordinate across cultural divides at work.

The Study

The present study demonstrates the value of the theory-based RI intervention for Americans working with colleagues in East Asia and Latin America. To provide a conservative test of the effectiveness of the RI intervention, we used an experimental design analogous to drug testing trials in which a new treatment is compared to the best alternate treatment known to be effective, rather than to no treatment at all (Gudykunst, Guzley, & Hammer, 1996; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). Given the documented effectiveness of the CA, it served as an appropriate comparison group for assessing the RI intervention.

The RI training was designed for people who remain based in their home culture—that is, not those relocated overseas for long-term assignments—yet work with contacts abroad through phone calls, electronic mail, and short-term visits to the host country. The sample used in the present study reflects this target population: Americans preparing for a short-term (six-week) international work project in China or Chile. An experimental design was used to assess training effectiveness with participants randomly assigned to participate in either the RI training program or the CA training program. The projects required participants to work closely with a foreign business contact in the host country to obtain and verify information from company databases. Interviews with coordinators of these international projects suggested that one of the most common barriers to project success was establishing effective communication with host contacts for obtaining information needed for the project; thus a key task objective was to receive complete and timely replies to requests for information.

After completing the training and the project, objective and subjective measures of the project's effectiveness were administered to trainees. Objective measures focused on participant's actual effectiveness in obtaining replies to information requests from host colleagues. Compared to the CA condition, we hypothesized that participants in the RI condition would have greater success obtaining responses to requests for information from their foreign

partners, and receiving information that was helpful to project goals (H1). Further, compared to the CA condition, we hypothesized that participants in the RI condition would experience less awkwardness, be more comfortable, and enjoy their interactions with their foreign partners more (H2).

Method

The present study was conducted in conjunction with an MBA experiential program on international business. As part of the course, students worked on international consulting projects for firms in Shanghai, China, and Santiago, Chile. The projects covered several industries, including manufacturing, financial services, retail, marketing, and telecommunications. Students were assigned to projects based on a bidding system where each student ranked their project preferences. All students were assigned to a project in their top five project bids. The projects lasted six weeks. Students traveled to China and Chile for a 10-day visit at the foreign firm and worked on the project in the U.S. the remainder of the time. During this time, students needed to maintain close communication with contacts in the foreign firm via telephone, facsimile, and electronic mail to request information from company databases. Participants were randomly assigned to either the relational ideology (RI) training or cultural assimilator (CA) training. In sum, the present experiment consisted of a 2 (Form of training: RI vs CA) X 2 (Host culture: China vs. Chile) design.

*Participants.* Seventy-nine MBA students participated in the study (Age $\underline{M}$ = 28; 64 Men, 15 Women). Participants had a minimum of six years' prior full-time working experience and none had prior experience in the culture where their project would be based.

*Content of training*. The cross-cultural training occurred in a one-week pre-project orientation. The training consisted of two phases. In the first phase all participants received documents providing socio-political, economic, and historical information about the host country in which they would work. This information was based on government and industry published

reports, books, and materials. During the second day of training, participants were randomly assigned to an RI or CA training session. These sessions lasted three hours and were conducted with one facilitator, blind to the hypotheses, and either 39 or 40 participants in each session.

*Relational Ideology training.* As mentioned earlier, RI training had four components: self-report measures of indirectness in and out of work, recall of audio recordings of teams, role play exercise enacting a performance evaluation, and discussion of applicability of PRI in cross cultural work interactions. The goal of RI training is to introduce trainees to the notions that the cultural differences at work (a) often operate outside one's awareness, (b) in part, derive from one's attention to the social-emotional and relational dimensions of work and non-work interactions, (c) reveal a common way in which Americans differ from colleagues in East Asia and Latin America, and (d) can alleviate problematic cross-cultural misunderstandings if one remains cognizant of the underlying dynamics.

Together, the RI training components incorporated several features advocated in the training literature increasing self- and other-awareness, providing a theoretical framework for making sense of culture variation, and including experiential exercises with feedback in which participants can practice anticipating cultural differences (Bhawuk, 2001; Earley, 1987; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983).

*Cultural assimilator training.* The CA training contained a collection of real-life workplace scenarios describing incidents between Americans and East Asian or Latin American workers, and different explanations for avoiding misunderstandings (Cushner & Brislin, 1996; Landis & Bhagat, 1996; Wang, et al., 2000). The topics covered in the critical incidents included communication, status, motivation, and different preferences for individual versus group work. To mirror the RI training, the critical incidents included scenarios between East Asians and Americans and between Latin Americans and Americans (critical incidents were obtained from Cushner & Brislin, 1996 and Wang et al., 2000). This training followed the standard protocol in

CA training (e.g., Bhawuk, 1998; Harrison, 1992; Weldon, et al., 1975): participants read the scenarios, chose which of several options best explains the misunderstanding, and then referred to an index in which they were provided with an explanation for their choice. If their choice was incorrect, they were then asked to choose another option. Participants advanced to the next incident only after they had learned the correct explanation.

*Dependent Measures*

At the end of the six-week project, the course coordinators administered to participants a comprehensive feedback survey regarding their experience with the international projects. Items measuring task and interpersonal outcomes were inserted into this longer feedback survey (see below). There were no explicit connections made between the cultural training programs completed seven weeks earlier and the feedback survey.

*Task-related measures.* We measured participant's success in obtaining helpful responses to information requests. Performance in this area was measured using two items rated along Likert-type scales: (1) How frequently did individuals from the company respond to requests for information? (Frequency: 0 – Never, 2 – Sometimes, 4 – Always); (2) How helpful were company contacts in providing you information requested for the project? (Helpfulness: 0 – Not at all helpful, 2 – Somewhat helpful, 4 – Extremely helpful).[2] These two items were highly correlated ($r$ = .89, $p$ < .001) and thus were combined to create an objective task measure.

*Affective reaction measures.* Affective reactions to working within the foreign firm were assessed using two 5-point Likert items: How would you characterize the overall nature of your interactions with company representatives? (Interactions: 0 - Very awkward, 4 Very comfortable); (2) How much did you enjoy interacting with the company representatives? (Enjoy: 0- Not at all, 2 – Somewhat, 4 – Very much). These two items were highly correlated ($r$ = .78, $p$ < .001) and thus were combined to create an overall affective reaction measure.

In addition, a separate 5-point Likert question measured affective reactions to social interactions with non-company locals in the host culture (Enjoy: 0- Not at all, 2 – Somewhat, 4 – Very much). This item was not significantly correlated with the company contact affective reaction measure ($r$ = .23, $p$ > .05).

*Control measures.* Two additional questions were assessed. First, immediately following the training sessions participants responded to the following item: The concepts introduced in this training session were useful in helping me better understand the problems that can arise when working across cultures (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – neither disagree nor agree, 10 – strongly agree). Second, participants were asked in the post-project survey: How much direct contact did you have with individuals in your host company during your on-site visit? (1 – not much, 4 – extensive).

<center>Results</center>

*Preliminary Considerations*

A one-way (RI training vs. CA training) analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the usefulness of the RI and the CA training programs were not perceived to be significantly different ($M$ = 7.46, $M$ = 7.23 respectively), $F$ < 1. Although, these subjective evaluations are commonly used as an indicator of training success, they can be unrelated to changes in trainees' actual cognitions and behaviors necessary for success abroad (Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983). As an additional preliminary check, we examined the relative amount of face-to-face contact participants in each condition had with host colleagues. The analysis showed no differences between participants in the RI and CA training sessions ($M$ = 3.58, $M$ = 3.57 respectively), $F$ < 1, establishing that the level of intercultural contact was consistent across conditions.

*Training Effects on Task and Affective Measures*

To examine the overall effect of the RI training relative to CA training, a multi-analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the task objectives and affective reaction measures.

The MANOVA showed a main effect of training $F(2,74) = 7.29$, p < .01 and a main effect of country, $F(2,74) = 9.37$, p < .001. The training by country interaction was not significant ($F < 1$). To more closely examine the hypothesized pattern of effects, we subsequently conducted ANOVAs separately for the task and affective measures.

*Task-related Objectives*

A 2 (Training: RI vs. CA) X 2 (Host Country: China vs. Chile) ANOVA was conducted on participants' success on task-related objectives. As predicted, a significant main effect of training showed that participants who had received RI training were more successful than participants in CA training in eliciting responses to requests for needed project information from company representatives in the host country (M's = 2.14 versus 1.48), $F(1,75) = 10.54$, p =.002. The interaction was not significant, ($F< 1$) suggesting that the effectiveness of RI training did not vary across the Latin American and East Asian host countries. The means, shown in Figure 1, shows more task-related interactions for RI than CA training in Chile (Ms = 2.67 versus 1.87), $t(75) = 2.28$, p = .026, and in China (Ms = 1.75 versus .95), $t(75) = 2.31$, p = .023.

That most of the means are only near or below the midpoint suggests that success in these task objectives was indeed a challenge. Not a single participant reported receiving replies to all project information requests. Finally, a main effect for country showed that Chilean company contacts were more responsive to requests (M = 1.87) compared to Chinese contacts (M = .95), $F(1,75) = 13.94$, p < .001).

*Affective Reactions with Company Contacts*

A 2 (Training: RI vs. CA) by 2 (Host Country: China vs. Chile) ANOVA was conducted on participants' affective reactions to working with host company contacts. As shown in Figure 2, a main effect of training reveals that participants who received the RI training experienced less awkward, more comfortable and more enjoyable cross-cultural interactions relative to those who received the CA training (Ms = 2.22 vs. 1.64), $F(1,75) = 9.49$, p < .005. The training by country

interaction was not significant ($F < 1$), showing that RI was more effective than CA in Chile ($Ms$ = 2.58 vs. 2.02), $t(75) = 1.82$, $p = .08$, and in China ($Ms = 1.95$ vs. 1.09), $t(75) = 2.89$, $p = .007$. However, regardless of training received, more positive affective reactions were reported for Chilean hosts ($M = 2.21$) compared to Chinese hosts ($M = 1.52$), $t(75) = 3.59$, $p = .001$.

*Affective Reactions with non-Company Locals*

To examine whether the relative benefits of the RI training outside of work, a 2 (Training: RI vs. CA) by 2 (Host Country: China vs. Chile) ANOVA was conducted on participants' affective reactions to working with non-company locals. This analysis showed no significant main effect of training ($t < 1$) or training by country interaction ($t < 1$), thus showing no advantage of RI training ($M = 3.48$) over CA training ($M = 3.38$) with respect to facilitating non-work-related social interactions abroad.

## Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of a cross-cultural training intervention based on PRI theory. Analogous to drug trial experiments, relational ideology (RI) training was assessed relative to an existing training method, the cultural assimilator (CA), which has been shown to be effective in facilitating affective experiences and task-related interactions (for a review see Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000). The success found with CA training establishes it as a useful benchmark for evaluating novel theory-based training such as RI training. The purpose was not to examine whether RI training should replace CA training, but rather to provide a conservative test for RI training's effectiveness, and to show how advances in cultural psychology theory can be applied to facilitate cross-cultural interactions. Our results indicate that participants randomly assigned to RI training were more effective in eliciting responses from host company contacts and obtaining information necessary for success on their consulting projects. Moreover, RI training enabled participants to experience less awkwardness and to have more positive affective experiences working with company contacts in the host country.

These results suggest that at least for this population, set of tasks, and countries examined, RI training is more effective than CA training. Clearly, important boundary conditions should be noted. First, our results did not show any effect of RI training in improving affective experiences outside of work. Like CA training, the effectiveness of RI training may be restricted to cross-cultural work-focused interactions. This may not represent a significant limitation for those workers who remain based in the U.S. and rely on email, phone exchanges, and frequent but brief trips in their foreign collaborations. However, for sojourners required to remain in the host country for extended time periods, there remains a need for more comprehensive training.

Second, the participants in our study were MBA students in a cross cultural consulting project, and as such the success of their collaboration was not connected to an actual job on which their livelihood depended. This may have decreased the perceived importance of project success for our participants. Despite this limitation, success on this project and in their MBA program more generally is likely to be very important for our participants.

Third, it is important to note that the RI training is designed for interactions between Americans working with East Asians or Latin Americans, and focused only on training Americans. Though one must be careful not to draw inferences about RI training's effectiveness beyond this limited scope, RI training may be useful in other contexts, such as increasing self-awareness for American workers, or explaining to non-Americans the underlying reasons for misunderstandings that arise when working with Americans.

Besides showing that RI training effectively increases task and affective outcomes in cross cultural business ventures, there are several important contributions to this study. RI training components are directly taken from research paradigms used to study PRI. This approach makes an explicit link between cultural theory and application, and also demonstrates the applied value of experimental paradigms. Indeed, paradigms from cultural experiments can and should be incorporated into cultural training. Aside from the current extension from PRI

research to RI training, paradigms such as those used to demonstrate variation in social loafing and collectivistic orientations (Earley, 1987) could provide participants with information about how to structure individual versus group tasks in multicultural collaborations. Research that has detailed the influence of cultures of honor on interpretations of insults (Cohen & Nisbett, 1996) might help people anticipate and avoid angry or even potentially violent reactions when conveying negative feedback to a colleague.

Also, this study employed a standard experimental design, randomly assigning participants to each type of training. Unfortunately, such designs are difficult to implement and rare in applied assessments of intercultural training (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996). The few that exist have provided important insights into the additive nature of training components (e.g., Bird et al., 1993; Earley, 1987) and the effectiveness of the CA (e.g., Landis, Brislin, & Hulgus, 1985; Worchel & Mitchell, 1972). More studies that use such designs are necessary for drawing direct causal links between training interventions and relevant outcomes.

Further, basic cross cultural research that provides a theoretical framework for understanding cultural dynamics, and applied research on training programs designed to improve cross-cultural interactions, have proceeded along parallel yet uncoordinated trajectories. This study shows the promise of bridging these efforts. The present study builds on the work of Triandis, Bhawuk, and their colleagues (Bhauwk, 2001; Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988) who have empirically shown the benefits of incorporating theory, such as PRI, into cross-cultural training that helps Americans work better overseas. Our hope is that the present research stimulates further investigation into the application of recent theoretical advances in the emerging cultural theory (Fiske et al., 1998; Kitayama & Cohen, in press). As an example of this integration, this article offers RI training as an empirically validated intervention for Americans living locally yet working globally.

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Footnotes

[1]Due to constraints placed on the researcher by the university program and sponsor organizations, it was not possible to include a third, no-training group.

[2] Company contacts were asked by program coordinators to complete a survey about their evaluation of participants. Items included in this survey provided host's perspectives on the participants' success in building relationships and communicating with company contacts. Due to the low response rate for this survey, we were unable to conduct analyses on these ratings. These host evaluations of participants' performance were designed to provide a valuable complement to participant's self-ratings. Interestingly, prior research has found a close correspondence between such host and self-report ratings (e.g., Earley, 1987). Whether such correspondence would be replicated in the present experiment unfortunately could not be examined.

Figure Captions

<u>Figure 1.</u> Success eliciting responses and obtaining needed project information requests from foreign contacts as a function of intercultural training type and foreign country. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.

<u>Figure 2.</u> Affective reactions while working with company contacts as a function of intercultural training type and foreign country. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.

*Figure 1.* Success eliciting responses and obtaining needed project information from foreign contacts as a function of intercultural training type and country of host company. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.
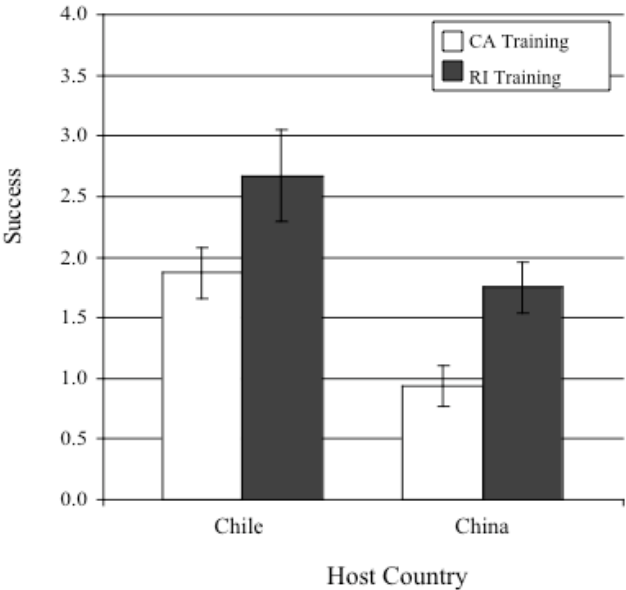


*Figure 2.* Affective reactions while working with company contacts as a function of intercultural training type and country of host company. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.