

# Cultural Training Based on a Theory of Relational Ideology

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This article describes the development of a theory-based cross-cultural training intervention, named relational ideology training, and reports a field experiment testing its effectiveness in facilitating intercultural collaborations. The intervention was based on our *Protestant relational ideology* (PRI) theory and cross-cultural research derived from this theory. An experiment compared the effectiveness of this novel intervention with the well established cultural assimilator training. Results show that compared to cultural assimilator training, relational ideology training is more effective in improving managers' task performance and affective adjustment in cross-cultural ventures. Important practical and theoretical benefits can be gained from integrating theoretical advances in cultural psychology into cross-cultural training. We discuss the implications of RI training as an empirically validated intervention for Americans living locally yet working globally.

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 Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Prentice & Miller, 1999; Thomas, 2002; Sanchez-Burks & Lee, 2007). 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; indeed, 15–50% 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, & Stoerber, 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; Gelfand & Brett, 2004; 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 advances in social psychological 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*, a framework for understanding cross-cultural similarities and differences in the relational schemas people use to navigate social interactions (Sanchez-Burks, 2002). Protestant relational ideology refers to a deep-seated belief that affective and relational concerns are inappropriate in some contexts and should be given less attention in work than in non-work settings. This characteristically American ideology has been shown to influence perceptions, memory, judgments, and behavior in work-focused social interactions (for a review see Sanchez-Burks, 2005). The content and design of RI training was created from past research

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paradigms on Protestant relational ideology (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003; Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000). In RI training, American trainees participate in a series of research exercises comparing their workplace relational styles to those of people from foreign countries. Specifically, trainees complete a series of exercises that reveal participants' relational beliefs at work and how those beliefs compare to those of people abroad. These exercises help trainees learn about Protestant relational ideology as a conceptual framework useful for understanding, managing, and coordinating these cultural differences in relational work styles.

### INTERCULTURAL TRAINING MODELS AND BENCHMARKS

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). The central aim of cross-cultural training programs and training interventions is to teach people to bridge cultural differences more effectively. Research suggests 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). However, effectiveness of the training depends largely on its content and format (Kirkpatrick, 1994).

Some training programs only include brief lectures that provide basic information about the history and socio-economic situation of a target or foreign 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 were 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. Earley (1987) found that project-related goals and psychological adjustment were significantly improved when lectures were combined with experiential exercises. Other scholars have shown that training components that increase participants' awareness about culture and its influence on thought and behavior also can add value (e.g., Landis, Brislin, & Hulgus, 1985).

The "cultural assimilator" (CA) is a cross-cultural training program that has been extensively researched and widely considered a benchmark for effectiveness (for an excellent review see Bhawuk, 2001). Although there are many varieties of CA varying in design and quality, most CA programs present participants with a collection of cross-cultural "critical incidents" that occur between a sojourner (e.g., an American in a specific foreign country) and a host national (a person from the specific foreign culture). Each vignette is followed by a relevant question and several 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 responses and interpretations similar to those of people from the host culture.

The CA is the most rigorously tested and validated cross-cultural training program (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Black & Mendenhall, 1990). It has been shown to be effective in conveying information about a host or foreign country (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000), increasing overseas work performance (Worchel & Mitchell, 1972), improving psychological adjustment (Cushner, 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 Americans' attributions to those of the Japanese, whereas a culture-general assimilator would focus on how cultures generally 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—when designed and implemented based on established theory and research—provides a conservative 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 training and then outline the key dimensions of the training program.

## PROTESTANT RELATIONAL IDEOLOGY IN AMERICAN WORKPLACES

*Protestant Relational Ideology* refers to deep-seated beliefs that affective and relational concerns are inappropriate in work settings and, therefore, are to be given less attention in professional, work settings than in social, non-work settings (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, 2005). People living in cultures influenced by this ideology have been shown to be less “relationally attuned” at work than at play; they encode fewer social-emotional and relational cues, show poorer memory for interpersonal information, and tend to be less aware of others’ non-verbal behavioral cues while in work settings than in non-work social settings. Protestant relational ideology is prevalent in American culture, stemming from the beliefs and practices of the early Calvinist Protestants (Lenski, 1963). Based on their interpretation of Calvinist theology, some of 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” (Weber, 1904). Outside of work, however, these restrictions were relaxed such that paying attention to others’ socio-emotional cues was considered appropriate, even encouraged (Daniels, 1995; Fischer, 1989). 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 Protestant relational ideology shapes the relational schemas of Americans has received wide empirical support from both field and laboratory studies; studies conducted across and within cultures; and studies using behavioral, self-report, and implicit cognitive measures of relational schemas (for a review see Sanchez-Burks, 2005). In one experiment (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, Study 1), two groups with highly similar demographic profiles (education, ethnicity, parents’ socio-economic status), but that differed only in their exposure to Protestant relational ideology, were primed either for a work context or a social context. Participants then performed an “emotional Stroop test” (Kitayama & Howard, 1994), where they 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*). Participants had to 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 Protestant and non-Protestant groups (that is, when the tone was affect-inappropriate, participants took longer to identify the semantic valence of the word). However, when primed for a work context,

emotional tone of voice had virtually no effect on the group raised with Protestant relational ideology. In short, participants in the work condition were able to identify the semantic meaning of the words and block out emotional content in the work context. A similar behavioral pattern was found in a follow-up study (Sanchez-Burks, 2002, study 2), where participants exposed to Protestant relational ideology showed decreased relational attunement and non-verbal sensitivity in a work setting compared to a social, non-work setting. Participants less exposed to Protestant relational ideology showed equal levels of sensitivity and behavioral entrainment to other’s non-verbal cues across work and social settings.

Similar evidence supporting Protestant relational ideology theory was found in interpersonal communication processes, showing that Americans, a cultural group influenced by Protestant relational ideology, are less relationally attuned and sensitive in work than non-work settings, while such tendencies are less apparent in cultures that have not been influenced by Protestant relational ideology. For example, Sanchez-Burks, Lee and their colleagues (2003) examined the use of relational cues in communication, such as using indirect and subtle forms of speech, or engaging in face-saving communication. They found that Americans were less likely to notice relational cues in an interaction when it was framed as a discussion between co-workers than when it was framed as a discussion between friends. In contrast, Chinese, Koreans, and Thais (cultures not influenced by Protestant relational ideology) attended to relational cues equally well across work and non-work interactions. When comparing American and East Asian managers’ preferences for using relational cues in their communication (Holtgraves, 1997), no differences were observed between work and non-work settings for East Asians. In contrast, Americans reported significantly lower preferences for using relational cues when communicating with a co-worker than with a social acquaintance.

Similarly, in a series of cross-cultural field experiments, Anglo-Americans, Mexicans, and Latin Americans listened to audio/video clips of work teams and were later tested for their recall of task-related or interpersonally related details from the clips (Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra, 2000). Results showed that while Mexicans and Latinos recalled similar levels of task and interpersonally related details, Americans recalled more task than interpersonally related details. Moreover, Americans preferred work teams that focused exclusively on the task and avoided any discussion related to interpersonal rapport or discord.

In the same vein, American managers have been shown to be less likely than Mexican and Asian managers to think about a subordinate’s personal

motivations, focusing more exclusively on work-related 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 (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2007), 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). Further, Americans are more likely than people from other cultures to perceive “professionalism” as necessarily restricting relational and socioemotional issues in the workplace, thus maintaining a clear divide between work and non-work life (Heaphy et al., 2007).

Overall, these studies show how PRI-influenced cultures such as the U.S. exhibit a relational work style characterized by being less attuned to the social-emotional and relational dimension of work interactions than non-work interactions. In contrast, other cultures (e.g., those in East Asia or Latin America) show an equal or even heightened level of relational attunement at work. 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 and how Americans’ interpersonal style differs from other cultural groups not rooted in Calvinist Protestantism. The theory and research on Protestant relational ideology provided the framework for the development and assessment of a cross-cultural training intervention described in the next section.

## RELATIONAL IDEOLOGY TRAINING

We developed a *relational ideology* (RI) training intervention based on recent research on Protestant relational ideology. This study examines whether training interventions that highlight how Protestant relational ideology differs from the relational ideologies of other cultures would 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 in East Asia and Latin America.

The goal of RI training is to introduce trainees to the notions that cultural differences in relational attunement and social-emotional sensitivity (a) often operate outside one’s awareness, (b) derive in part from cultural variation in attention to the social-emotional and relational issues in work and non-work interactions, and (c) reveal a common way in which Americans differ from East Asians and Latin Americans. This last component is consistent with many CCT modules, including CA training, in that it goes beyond cultural stereotypes by highlighting only

empirically validated cultural differences and similarities. RI training also emphasizes that problematic cross-cultural misunderstandings can be alleviated if one remains cognizant of these underlying dynamics. These key notions are represented in the training sessions by experiential exercises (training design) that highlight and describe relevant cultural patterns uncovered in past research (training content). A novel feature of RI training is that the exercises are drawn from experimental tasks adapted from empirical studies conducted on Protestant relational ideology. These exercises provide an in-depth experience with the implicit influence of culturally shaped relational schemas on perception and behavior. The exercises and descriptions were chosen to represent the breadth and depth of published empirical demonstrations of Protestant relational ideology.

The RI training has several components that have been shown to be important in the training literature: increasing awareness of one’s own cultural style, increasing awareness of other cultural styles, providing a theoretical framework for making sense of cultural variations, and including experiential exercises with feedback in which participants can practice their understanding and handling of cultural differences (Bhawuk, 2001; Earley, 1987; Kealey & Protheroe, 1996; Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983). The effectiveness of RI training results from implementing all these components. Implementing a single component, such as simply increasing awareness of one’s own cultural style, is not likely to provide a substantive or useful conceptual model for participants to manage cross-cultural differences in work relations.

In the first part of this training, participants complete a series of self-assessments that consist of modified versions of surveys and exercises used in prior cross-cultural experiments on PRI. The second part of the training involves a facilitator-directed discussion about these exercises, focusing on differences between the participants’ responses and those collected from American, East Asian, and Latin American respondents in prior studies. Thus, participants are provided the opportunity to examine their cultural styles and are exposed to the differences in the central tendencies between their culture and other cultures. The directed discussion about these exercises focuses on two key points: (a) where to anticipate the greatest differences, namely in work rather than non-work settings; and (b) what types of perceptual, value, and behavioral differences to expect, namely those related to relational attunement or sensitivity. By focusing on these cross-cultural differences, the directed discussions heighten trainees’ awareness about their own and others’ preferred relational styles in and outside work, and introduce them to the Protestant relational ideology construct as a conceptual framework for understanding how to coordinate across cultural divides at work.

## THE STUDY

The present study investigates the effectiveness of relational ideology (RI) training for Americans working with colleagues in East Asia and Latin America. To provide a conservative test of this new training, we designed an experiment in which RI training is compared to a control group that received the most rigorously tested cultural training program known to be effective, the cultural assimilator or CA (Gudykunst, Guzley, & Hammer, 1996; Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991). As mentioned, cultural assimilators can vary greatly in quality and effectiveness; to ensure the RI intervention was compared to the best current alternative in cross cultural training, the control group only received CA training protocols that have been tested and shown to be effective in the literature. The outcomes of the RI and CA interventions were modeled after suggestions provided by Bhawuk and Brislin (2000), Brislin, Landis, and Brandt (1983), and other cross-cultural training research (e.g., Earley, 1987; Weldon et al., 1975).

Briefly, the trainees were Americans who remained based in their home culture; that is, they were not relocated overseas for long-term assignments, but worked with contacts abroad through phone calls, electronic mail, and short-term visits to the host country. Specifically, the sample used in the present study consisted of Americans preparing for a short-term (six-week) international work project that included two weeks working onsite in China or Chile. The projects required participants to work closely with a foreign business contact in the host country to obtain and verify information from company databases.

We used an experimental design where we randomly assigned trainees to participate in either the RI training program or the CA training program prior to their work project.<sup>1</sup> After completing the training and the project, we measured trainees' task performance and affective adjustment to their foreign co-workers. Objective task performance measures focused on participants' ability to obtain replies to information requests from their foreign co-workers (Interviews with coordinators of similar international projects revealed that the most common predictor of project success was the ability to obtain information needed from foreign coworkers.).

We reasoned that RI training would be more effective than CA training for a number of reasons. First, while CA training educates trainees about the content of cultural differences, RI training additionally provides trainees with a conceptual framework to understand

why such differences exist. As such, rather than trying to cover all possible scenarios where cultural differences may occur, trainees are better able to apply the main conceptual precepts of PRI to new and unique situations.

Second, while CA training focuses on cultural differences that are generalized within a cultural group, RI training focuses on trainees' own beliefs about PRI (or how relational cues should be used in work and non-work settings), how such beliefs implicitly influence their attention, memory, interpretations, and behaviors, and how their own beliefs differ from others within and outside their own culture. As such, RI training provides a more direct and personalized way of understanding where, how and why cultural differences would most likely emerge.

Third, the design of RI training is well suited for the outcomes that are most relevant to the specific international work projects being examined in this study. By showing trainees that Americans, unlike their East Asian and Latin Americans, are less attuned to relational and social-emotional cues at work, we anticipated that RI training would heighten trainees' attunement to these cues when interacting with their foreign colleagues. As a result, we expected trainees would more effectively use relational cues (such as establishing rapport, or attending to indirect cues) to obtain the information they need. In addition, by giving trainees a conceptual framework to understand why cultural differences exist and how to anticipate them, we expected that RI training would also improve trainees' affective experiences around the cross cultural collaboration.

In summary, 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 (Hypothesis 1). Further, compared to the CA condition, we hypothesized that participants in the RI condition would have more positive affective experiences working with their foreign co-workers, that is, experience less awkwardness, be more comfortable, and enjoy their working interactions more (Hypothesis 2).

## METHOD

The present study was conducted in conjunction with an MBA experiential program on international business. As part of the course, students were divided into international consulting teams working for firms in Shanghai, China, or in Santiago, Chile. The projects covered several industries, including manufacturing, financial services, retail, marketing, and telecommunications. Students were assigned to projects based on a

<sup>1</sup>Due to constraints placed on the researchers by the university program and sponsor organizations, it was not possible to include a third, no-training group.

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 or 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 receive either the relational ideology (RI) training or the cultural assimilator (CA) training prior to the project start date. In sum, the present experiment consisted of a 2 (Form of training: RI vs. CA)  $\times$  2 (Host culture: China vs. Chile) design.

### Participants

Seventy-nine MBA students participated in the study (Age  $M = 28$ ; 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 was based. Based on preliminary analyses that showed no main effects or interactions associated with gender (all  $F_s < 1$ ), this factor was combined in the analyses reported below.

### 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 the CA training session; each session lasted three hours.

*Relational ideology training.* The RI training consisted of two parts; a self assessment component followed by a directed discussion focusing on differences between participants' responses to those found in East Asia and Latin America. The self-assessment part included three components: self-report measures of reliance on indirect cues to convey and infer information in and out of work, recall of audio recordings of teams, interactive role play exercises enacting a performance evaluation, and discussion of these exercises focusing on the ideas and implications behind Protestant relational ideology. First, using a modified version of Holtgraves' (1997) indirectness scale, trainees filled out a self assessment of their sensitivity to relational cues

at work and outside work (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2003, Studies 2–5). Second, following procedures used in an experiment by Sanchez-Burks, Nisbett, & Ybarra (2000, Study 2), trainees were asked to recall details after listening to audio recordings of work team meetings. Their memory for task and interpersonal details were then compared to research findings from Latino and Latin-American managers. Third, trainees completed a performance feedback session in which they read a transcription of a conversation by an employer describing an employee's overall annual performance and then estimated the actual numerical scores given privately by the employer along 14 performance dimensions, such as "organizational skills" and "communication skills." The transcribed 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!"

Immediately following the self-assessment part of the training was a directed discussion about these exercises with a facilitator who focused on two key points: (a) where to anticipate the greatest differences, namely in work rather than non-work settings; and (b) what types of perceptual, value, and behavioral differences to expect, namely those related to relational attunement or sensitivity. The directed discussion focused on how the exercises—indirectness scale, memory of task versus interpersonal events, and role play—could be used to heighten awareness about one's own and others' preferred relational styles in and outside work, and introduced trainees to the Protestant relational ideology construct as a conceptual framework for understanding how to coordinate across cultural divides at work.

*Cultural assimilator training.* The self-directed CA training contained a collection of real-life workplace scenarios describing critical incidents between American and East Asian workers and American and 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. The critical incidents included scenarios between East Asians and Americans, and between Latin Americans and Americans (critical incidents were obtained from Cushner & Brislin, 1996 & Wang et al., 2000). This self-directed 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 explained the misunderstandings, and then referred to an index that provided them with an explanation for their choice. If their choice was incorrect, they were then instructed to choose another option. The booklet instructed participants to advance to the next incident only after they had learned the correct explanation.

### Dependent Measures

Outcome measures focused on indicators of successful intercultural relationships within the workplace. At the end of the six-week project, the coordinators of the international projects administered a comprehensive feedback survey to measure participants' experiences. The dependent measure items measuring task success 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; the coordinators who collected these dependent measures did not administer the training interventions.

*Task-related measures.* We measured participants' success in obtaining helpful responses to their requests for information. 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).<sup>2</sup> These two items were highly correlated ( $r = .89, p < .001$ ) and thus were combined to create an index of success with task-objectives.

*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).

## RESULTS

### Preliminary Considerations

A one-way (RI training vs. CA training) analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the subjective ratings of usefulness between the RI and the CA training programs (post training session but before project began) were not significantly different ( $M = 7.46, M = 7.23$ , respectively),  $F < 1$ . It should be noted that such subjective ratings of a training program may reflect participants' enjoyment of the training or interest in the topic, rather than any meaningful and sustainable changes in trainees' cognitions and behaviors (Brislin, Landis, & Brandt, 1983; Harackiewicz, Barron, Carter, Lehto, & Elliot, 1997). We also examined the relative amount of face-to-face contact participants in each condition had with their foreign 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. Finally, we examined whether participants' affective reactions to non-work foreigners in the host countries differed across the training conditions. A 2 (Training: RI vs. CA) by 2 (Host Country: China vs. Chile) ANOVA conducted on participants' affective reactions to non-work foreigners showed no significant main effects of training ( $t < 1$ ; RI mean = 3.48, CA mean = 3.38) or training by host country interaction ( $t < 1$ ).

<sup>2</sup>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.

**Training Effects on Task and Affective Outcomes**

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 host country,  $F(2,74) = 9.37, p < .001$ . The training by host 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)  $\times$  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 ( $M_s = 2.14$  vs. 1.48),  $F(1,75) = 10.54, p = .002$ .

A main effect for country showed that Chilean company contacts were more responsive to requests ( $M = 1.87$ ) compared to Chinese contacts ( $M = .95$ ),  $F(1,75) = 13.94, p < .001$ . The interaction of training and host country was not significant ( $F < 1$ ), suggesting that RI training was equally effective in Latin America and East Asia. The means are shown in Figure 1. Trainees in RI training were more effective in obtaining responses to their requests for information than trainees in CA training in Chile ( $M_s = 2.67$  versus 1.87),  $t(75) = 2.28, p = .026$ , and in China ( $M_s = 1.75$  versus .95),  $t(75) = 2.31, p = .023$ . It is interesting to note that most of the means are only near or below the midpoint, suggesting that success in these task objectives was indeed a challenge. Not a single participant reported receiving replies to all project information requests. Overall, these results support Hypothesis 1.

**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 ( $M_s = 2.22$  vs. 1.64),  $F(1,75) = 9.49, p < .005$ .

A host country main effect showed more positive affective reactions toward Chilean hosts ( $M = 2.21$ ) than Chinese hosts ( $M = 1.52$ ),  $t(75) = 3.59, p = .001$ .

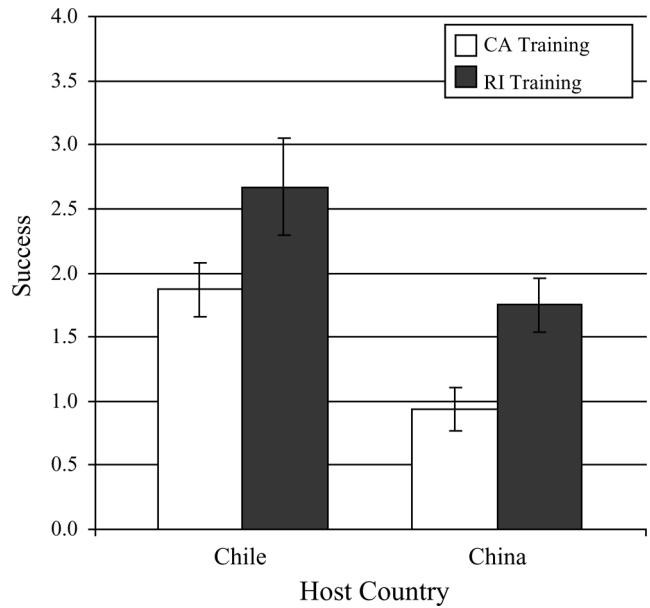


FIGURE 1 Success eliciting responses and obtaining needed project information requests from foreign contacts as a function of intercultural training type and foreign country. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.

The training by country interaction was not significant ( $F < 1$ ). The means, shown in Figure 2, show that RI was more effective than CA in Chile ( $M_s = 2.58$  vs. 2.02),  $t(75) = 1.82, p > .05$ , and in China ( $M_s = 1.95$  vs. 1.09),  $t(75) = 2.89, p = .007$ . Overall, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

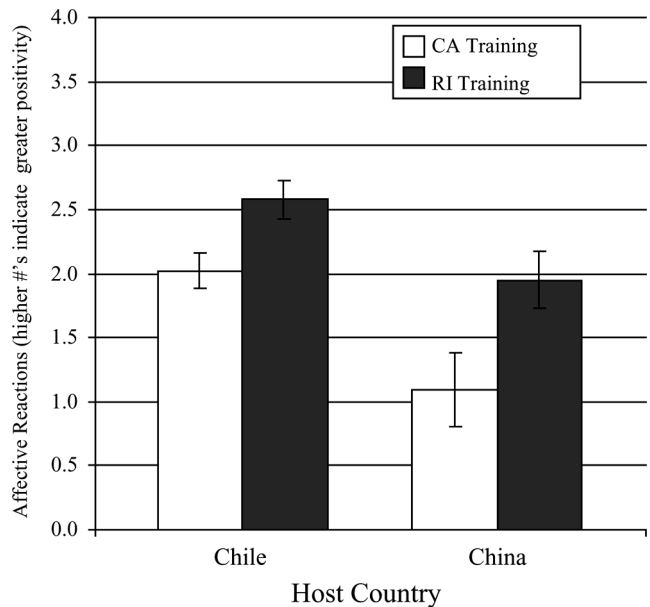


FIGURE 2 Affective reactions while working with company contacts as a function of intercultural training type and foreign country. Error bars represent one between-subjects standard error.



## DISCUSSION

This study described the translation of a cultural psychology theory, Protestant relational ideology, into a cross-cultural training intervention, and investigated the effectiveness of this theory-based training intervention. We argued that Relational ideology (RI) training increases trainees' vigilance to cues that would signal the presence of cultural differences in relational styles, understanding of a conceptual model to make sense of these differences and awareness of alternative relational approaches during intercultural business exchanges. RI training was assessed relative to the cultural assimilator (CA), one of the best training methods shown to be effective in facilitating affective experiences and task-related interactions in cross cultural work (Bhawuk & Brislin, 2000). The documented success of 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 and rigorous test for evaluating RI training's effectiveness, and to show how recent advances in cultural psychology theory can be applied to facilitate cross-cultural interactions. In this sense, this study follows the theory-in-action approach to social psychological research.

Our results indicate that, compared to CA training, participants randomly assigned to RI training reported being more effective in eliciting responses from host company contacts and obtaining information necessary for success on their consulting projects. Moreover, it appears that RI-trainees achieved this task-related success while improving the quality of the relationship with their foreign colleagues. RI-trained participants reported experiencing less awkwardness and had more positive affective experiences working with their foreign colleagues than CA-trained participants. We found these effects even though participants' subjective ratings of the RI and CA training programs did not differ; in other words, RI training produced improved task and affective outcomes during intercultural work relations even though participants rated both programs (assessed weeks earlier immediately following the training) as similarly useful.

The results of this study suggest that, at least for this sample, 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 interactions. This may not represent a significant limitation for those workers who remain based in the U.S. and rely on e-mail, 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 that includes both work and non-work interactions and outcome measures.

Second, the participants in our study were MBA students in a relatively short-term, cross-cultural consulting project, and as such the success of their collaboration was not connected to an actual job on which their livelihood depended. Although success on this project and in their MBA program more generally is likely to be very important for our participants, this may have nevertheless decreased the perceived importance of project success for our participants. RI training should also be tested with non-student populations engaged in longer term cross-cultural work projects.

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, future research could examine if 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.

Fourth, the RI training protocol developed in this manuscript includes multiple components, e.g. increasing self-and other-awareness, conceptualizing cross-cultural differences through the conceptual lens of PRI, and practicing skills through experiential exercises. Clearly, the effectiveness of RI training was only assessed for all these components holistically, and we cannot make any inferences as to the effectiveness of any single component of RI training. While we argued that all these components are integral and necessary for effective RI training, future research can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of each component.

Fifth, the current study relied on participants' self-reports of task effectiveness and affective reactions. To guard against problems associated with common-method variance, we allowed for a seven-week lag between the training interventions (both experimental and control) and collection of the outcome measures. We also used different researchers to conduct training sessions and collect post-project measures. In that sense, while the outcomes were measured by self-reports, they were collected at different times and contexts. However, future research also should examine outcome measures other than self-report measures.

Last, this study does not have a no-training condition. Our applied field setting precluded such a condition – this was a critical project for our trainees, and the failure to provide them with any type of effective cross-cultural training would adversely affect their

performance on a meaningful and important work project. Because we could only compare RI training with CA training, our data cannot rule out the possibility that our findings reflect that CA training decreased trainees' intercultural effectiveness rather than the RI training increasing their effectiveness. In light of prior research showing the robust efficacy of CA training, however, this may not altogether be a plausible account of the present findings.

Moreover, in applied field settings where novel training programs can be compared to either an established benchmark or a no-training condition, but not both, comparing RI training to the "gold standard" in the cross-cultural training literature provides a more conservative test of RI training. Ideally of course, all three conditions would be incorporated into the design. However, for other applied researchers seeking causal inferences facing similar constraints, the present design strategy maintains full experimental control in field settings.

Besides showing that RI training effectively increases task and affective outcomes in cross-cultural working relationships, there are several important contributions of this study. This study employed a standard experimental design, randomly assigning participants to each type of training. Unfortunately, such designs are difficult to implement and are 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; 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. Future cross-cultural training research also would benefit from integrating techniques and perspectives that exist in the training development and evaluation literature more broadly (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1994). Benefits of such mutual exchange would likely facilitate the goals of both fields of research.

Additionally, RI training components are directly taken from research paradigms used to study Protestant relational ideology. This approach makes an explicit link between cross-cultural research and application, demonstrating the applied value of experimental paradigms. Indeed, paradigms from cultural experiments can and should be incorporated into cultural training. For example, aside from the current extension from Protestant relational ideology research to RI training, the research protocols used to demonstrate variation in social loafing and collectivistic orientations (Earley, 1987) could be used as training tools to structure individual versus group tasks in multicultural collaborations. Or, research paradigms that examined the influence of cultures of honor on interpretations of insults (Cohen & Nisbett, 1996) could help people anticipate and avoid angry or

even potentially violent reactions when conveying negative feedback to a colleague. This approach of intertwining training design and content directly with research paradigms offers a useful complement to existing training formats such as CA (Earley & Ang, 2003; Thomas & Inkson, 2004).

Basic and applied cross-cultural studies have proceeded along parallel yet uncoordinated trajectories (see Earley & Ang, 2003, for an excellent exception). This study shows the promise of bridging these efforts. The present study builds on previous work that empirically showed the benefits of incorporating theory, such as Protestant relational ideology, into cross-cultural training that helps Americans work better overseas (Bhauwk, 2001; Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988). Our hope is that the present research stimulates further applications of recent theoretical advances in 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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