

CULTURE SHOCK

The effectiveness of orientation training can be measured only after managers begin their assignments overseas. Once there, a unique phenomenon they face is culture shock, a pronounced reaction to the psychological disorientation people feel when they move for an extended time in a markedly different culture. Although they all experience it, individuals differ widely in how they allow themselves to be affected by culture shock.

While the severity of culture shock may be a function of the individual's lack of adaptability, it may equally be a result of the firm's lack of understanding of the situation into which the manager was sent. Often, goals set for a subsidiary or a project may be unrealistic, or the means by which they are to be reached may be inadequate. Situations like these can lead to the external manifestations of culture shock, such as bitterness and even physical illness. In extreme cases, they can lead to hostility toward anything in the host environment.

Managers typically go through four distinct stages when adapting to a new culture. The duration of each stage is highly individual.

1. Initial euphoria-enjoying the novelty of living in the host culture, largely from the perspective of a spectator.
2. Irritation and hostility-experiencing cultural differences as participation in the culture increases.
3. Adjustment-adapting to the situation, which in some cases leads to biculturalism and even accusations from corporate headquarters of "going native"
4. Reentry-returning home

Czinkota, Michael R., Ilkka A. Ronkainen and Michael H. Moffett. Fundamentals of International Business. Mason: South-Western, 2004.