When in Rome: Intercultural learning and implications for training

Michael W. Morris\textsuperscript{a,∗}, Krishna Savani\textsuperscript{b}, Shira Mor\textsuperscript{c}, Jaee Cho\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a}Management Division, Columbia University, United States
\textsuperscript{b}Department of Management and Organization, National University of Singapore, Singapore
\textsuperscript{c}Department of Organization and Personnel Management, Rotterdam School of Management, The Netherlands

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A B S T R A C T

Learning requires acquiring and using knowledge. How do individuals acquire knowledge of another culture? How do they use this knowledge in order to operate proficiently in a new cultural setting? What kinds of training would foster intercultural learning? These questions have been addressed in many literatures of applied and basic research, featuring disparate concepts, methods and measures. In this paper, we review the insights from these different literatures. We note parallels among findings of survey research on immigrants, expatriate managers, and exchange students. We also draw on experiment-based research on learning to propose the cognitive processes involved in intercultural learning. In the first section, we focus on acquiring cultural knowledge, reviewing longstanding literatures on immigrant acculturation and expatriate adjustment investigating antecedents of intercultural adjustment and performance. In the second section, we focus on displaying proficiency, examining how newcomers to a cultural setting deploy their knowledge of it in order to adjust their behavior and judgments. We draw upon findings about individual differences and situational conditions that predict performance to suggest training for optimal use of cultural knowledge by adapting behaviors and judgments according to situational factors.

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\textsuperscript{*} Corresponding author at: Management Division, Columbia Business School, 3022 Broadway, New York, NY 10025, United States.

E-mail address: mwm82@columbia.edu (M.W. Morris).

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1. Introduction

Whereas scholars once thought that globalization would dilute cultural differences and reduce the challenges they pose to organizations, in practice it brings managers into contact with more cultures than ever before, heightening the need for intercultural competence and learning. Firms that once manufactured solely in their home country and exported to just a few familiar neighboring countries now manufacture and sell globally, requiring managers to deal with new and unfamiliar cultures. Consider for instance the classic British firm Land Rover: today it belongs to Tata Motors of India, sells more in China and Russia than any European country, and manufactures in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, managers in public sector organizations – whether military, medical, or environmental in their missions – increasingly find themselves working on global problems that bring them to remote countries with unfamiliar cultures (e.g. Yemen, the Congo, Siberia). Globalization has increased the world’s connectedness and pace of change, meaning that more and more managers have to gain proficiency in new cultures in order to succeed.

Globalization has also contributed to intercultural challenges at home. Workplaces are more culturally diverse as a result of increased immigration (Portes, 1995), multiculturalist policies and ideologies (Modood, 2013; Shweder, Minow, & Markus, 2004), and the post-Cold-War resurgence of ethnic identification (Barber, 2004; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). Whereas the US workforce once consisted predominantly of White males, this category no longer constitutes a majority (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Even managers of local enterprises need to learn about cultural differences in order to communicate and connect with diverse employees.

Finally globalization has also increased the cultural diversity within individuals. More and more people reside in multiple countries over the course of their lives and careers, becoming bicultural or multicultural (Chen, Benet-Martinez, & Harris Bond, 2008). Resultantly, people’s passport, birthplace, and residence are increasingly limited as guides to the person’s behaviors, preferences, or expectations. This makes it all the more challenging to rely on knowledge of people’s cultural background when interacting with them. Efforts to take into account another person’s culture risks making them feel stereotyped (Leung & Su, 2004).

1.1. Augustine’s advice

Intercultural interactions and careers are hardly new, but contemporary managers may face more complex intercultural challenges. The classic adage – “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” – originated with an executive’s intercultural dilemma. Augustine, a native of Carthage serving as Bishop of Milan, wrote to Januarius, Bishop of Naples, with advice about an upcoming trip to their organization’s headquarters in Rome. At the time, Christians in Rome fasted on Saturday whereas Christians in other cities did not. To avoid scandal or offense, Augustine’s approach was to fast when in Rome but not when at home in Milan, and he advised Januarius to adapt to local norms in the same way. History does not record whether the advice was followed, but we do know that Augustine had a long successful career after this correspondence, whereas Januarius was martyred not long thereafter.

Although Augustine found adaptation to be an easy solution to his intercultural dilemma, contemporary managers in many contexts find it fraught with challenges. Consider first the challenge of learning the foreign cultural
patterns. For Augustine it was easy to see what “the Romans do”. The norms of a religious community are followed by all of its members, in conspicuous public behaviors. They are also codified in teachings for children and converts. By contrast, the cultural biases that managers in today’s organizations need to learn are not so easily observed. While an expat can see that German bankers wear ties to work, the cultural patterns in their decision making are not directly visible – these can only be inferred from comments at a meeting or votes on a proposal. And this inference is challenging because not all German bankers make these decisions in the same way – it depends on personality and on situational factors (Bicchieri, 2006). Such cultural norms are rarely discussed by insiders or codified in documents; they are tacit, background rules and taken for granted (Gelfand et al., 2011; Triandis, 1996). People may only become conscious of the norms when someone violates them. For most managers in a new culture, simply learning what it is that “Romans do” is a subtle and complex process.

In this paper, we argue that managers learn foreign norms (what “Romans do”) through at least four qualitatively distinct cognitive processes: studying, attributional reasoning, social learning, and conditioning. Some of these learning processes operate in a controlled, explicit way, but others operate subconsciously, meaning that even as a manager gains familiarity with a new culture, he or she may not be aware of what he or she has learned. We draw on recent findings suggesting that these cognitive processes may depend in different ways on people’s motivations, personalities, and metacognitive proclivities. As we shall see, these learning findings shed light on the ways that individual difference dimensions predict immigrant acculturation and expatriate adjustment.

Consider next the challenge of deploying foreign knowledge proficiently, once it has been attained. For Augustine, knowledge of the Roman norm served as a script for his own conduct – he always fasted on Sabbath when in Rome. Also it served as a lens through which he could judge and interpret Romans. If he saw a Roman breakfasting on the Sabbath, he could determine that the person was non-Christian. Using his knowledge this way was straightforward because of early Christianity’s universalistic ethos – the same rules applied to everyone in the community. However, universalism is hardly universal; in most of the cultures that managers need to master, different behaviors are expected from different kinds of people. Newcomers who adopt practices that are reserved for the elite or for insiders are judged to be presumptuous or offensive. Nor can newcomers always use their cultural knowledge to draw conclusions about locals, as codes of behavior may be socially restricted or situationally contingent. Drawing inferences from cultural knowledge and people’s behavior is a delicate manner; while expatriates cannot succeed without using their knowledge of the local culture, they can only succeed if they use this knowledge very carefully. In this chapter, we argue that using cultural knowledge requires metacognitive activity such as checking the applicability of one’s assumptions and monitoring for errors. Managers who want to utilize knowledge of a foreign culture must do so judiciously – adapting in some ways so as to bridge communication gaps but not so much that it reduces trust or induces negative attributions (Enos, Kehrhahn, & Bell, 2003).

To make this case, in the sections below we review literatures relevant to the questions of how people internalize another culture and how they use this knowledge. Within each section, we integrate several different management and social science literatures to identify parallels and open questions. We bring in relevant research from experimental psychology to develop a picture of the cognitive processes involved. At the end of each section, we note applied implications for cultural learning and training.

2. Acquiring cultural knowledge

Several research literatures have amassed evidence relevant to the question of how people gain understanding of new cultures. Research on immigrant acculturation identifies antecedents of immigrants’ engagement and identification with their new culture. Studies of expatriate employees similarly look for predictors of emotional adjustment and job performance overseas. While these outcomes are thought to chiefly hinge on learning of the “host culture,” the actual processes of acquiring cultural knowledge are rarely theorized or measured in these literatures. Intercultural learning is a black box that exists between the antecedent conditions and traits and the outcome criteria such as identification or adjustment. However, several different kinds of learning processes that may play a role in second-culture learning have been theorized and studied in the experiment-based literatures on cultural training, intercultural competency, and cognitive psychology. Below, we integrate these suggestions into a four-fold taxonomy of intercultural learning processes. Then we draw implications for selection and training of intercultural competency.

2.1. Acculturation

How are people changed by exposure to a new culture? Two basic premises underlying theory and research about this can be termed the replacement and supplement models. The former is a zero-sum notion that when a new culture enters people’s minds and hearts it displaces their first culture. The latter notion is that gaining familiarity and proficiency in a second culture can leave one’s understanding and attachment to one’s first culture undiminished or perhaps even enhanced.

2.1.1. Replacement view

A longstanding concern about foreign exposure is that it is corrupting. A soldier’s loyalty could be diluted if he becomes too familiar with another land. A society’s stock of shared values and traditions could be contaminated by immigrants bringing different ways of life. Prohibitions against immigration and foreign travel have existed throughout human history – from the Hammurabi code of 1770 BC, to Japan’s 17th c. Sakoku Edict, to laws of North Korea today. Plato recommended that a state should restrict travel abroad to people over the age 40, who were believed to be less susceptible to learning anything new.
The replacement view of cultural learning underlies the assimilationist ideology that shaped US immigration policy and discourse until the late 20th century. Identifications with the country of origin must be dissolved in order to gain an American identity. Theodore Roosevelt (1915) decried those who maintain ethnic identities as lacking sufficient “heart-allegiance” to their country:

Americanism is a matter of the spirit and of the soul.
Our allegiance must be purely to the United States...
The men who do not become Americans and nothing else are hyphenated Americans; and there ought to be no room for them in this country.

Classical theory in sociology and anthropology supported this picture of a new culture replacing the pre-existing culture (Herskovits, 1938). Immigrant groups assimilate in a “straight line,” moving closer to the mainstream with each generation (Gans, 1973). Later theorists (Gordon, 1964) posited multiple dimensions of identification and assimilation (i.e., attitudinal, occupational, marital). Glazer and Moynihan (1963) delineated dimensions of acculturation among Jewish, Irish, Puerto Rican, African American and other communities in New York, and noted that ethnic habits get replaced by host culture habits on some dimensions more than others, as a function of language, religion, and race. Generally, immigrants are quicker to acculturate to political and economic practices (voting, savings accounts) than to religious or parenting practices (Navas et al., 2005). Professional aspirations push some people to embrace mainstream norms in public spheres more than in their private life (Arends-Tóth & van de Vijver, 2004). Challenging the generality of straight line assimilation, even if limited to certain dimensions, Portes and Zhou (1993) distinguished three qualitatively different trajectories of immigrant groups: upward mobility through assimilation, downward mobility to the underclass, and economic achievement coupled with maintenance of ethnic ties and values. Other critics challenge the taken for granted link between occupational success and assimilation. Comparing immigrant groups to and from many different countries, Sowell (1994) found that occupational and economic attainment is highest for groups who bring previously lacking skills to their adopted societies and work in niche fields; immigrants with skill sets highly similar to established locals have a harder time competing. By challenging the myths of the assimilationist ideology, this recent research has enabled more informed policies.

Acculturation also occurs in colonial and post-colonial societies. The influence of the colonizing culture also differs across domains. In Hong Kong, a society of Chinese ethnicity and Western institutions, role models in educational curriculum are drawn from both Eastern and Western history but not equally across all domains of life. Role models in instrumental domains include Westerners such as Thomas Edison, but role models in moral domains tend to be exclusively Chinese (Fu & Chiu, 2001).

The premise that knowledge of a new culture replaces the first culture persists in contemporary acculturation research. Gudykunst and Kim (2003) proposed that an immigrant becomes acculturated only to the extent that she “deculturizes” or “unlearns” her native culture. Learning a new culture requires that one act, think, and feel like a local – not just doing but also thinking and feeling as Romans do! Gudykunst and Kim (2003) spell out the implication that cultural learners should refrain from contact with their heritage culture, totally immersing themselves in the culture they are studying. “Unlearning” does not mean erasing knowledge from memory, but merely changing habitual patterns of association. An important distinction in social cognition research is between knowledge availability and accessibility (Higgins, 1996a). While a person possesses many schemas that are available in long term memory, only a small subset of these are highly accessible (“top of mind”) and hence frequently activated. Recent use of a schema heightens its accessibility, so accessibility perpetuates itself. Because a chronically accessible schema wins out in response competition, it crowds out other schemas from becoming chronically accessible. Habitually acting, thinking and feeling according to first-culture norms may make it harder for second-culture schemas to become chronically accessible.

Speaking a second language illustrates the tension between first- and second-culture accessibility. For bilinguals, schemas associated with the first- and second-language both become accessible when speaking or reading, creating response competition (Bialystok, Craik, Green, & Gollan, 2009; Kroll, Sumutka, & Schwartz, 2005). Part of the difficulty of operating in one’s second language is inhibiting the concepts from one’s first language that can interfere (Kroll et al., 2005; Miller & Kroll, 2002). Americans taking a Spanish class in Spain, compared to a group taking the same class in the U.S., showed better performance in a task requiring objects to be named in Spanish, and they also showed decreased accessibility (measured by reaction times) for the English names of the objects (Linck, Kroll, & Sunderman, 2009). Fluency in a second language comes more easily away from settings that constantly perpetuate the accessibility of one’s first-language associations.

Accessibility also depends on the visual environment. In an effect known as cultural priming, exposure to images associated with a culture sets off a chain reaction of excitation through the network of schemas associated with that culture, making them more likely to activate and thereby guide the person’s interpretations and actions (Fu, Chiu, Morris, & Young, 2007; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Zhang, Morris, Cheng, and Yap (2013) studied whether immigrants from mainland China (PRC) to the US speak English less fluently when they are primed with Chinese culture. In a simulated teleconference conversation in English, PRC immigrants spoke less fluently to an ethnically Chinese face than to a Caucasian face, despite the fact that they indicated greater social comfort with the Chinese face than the Caucasian face. A similar study found that PRC immigrants’ English fluency dropped after exposure to iconic Chinese images (The Great Wall) as opposed to iconic American images (Mount Rushmore). In other studies, PRC immigrants, after exposure to Chinese images, used literal translations from Chinese in an object naming task (e.g., they called pistachios ‘happy nuts’). In another study, they recognized these anomalous phrases with faster reaction time after
seeing Chinese images than American images (indicating that these Chinese linguistic structures had elevated cognitive accessibility). Chinese structures intruded into their English language processing.

Similarly studies of immigrant acculturation find that the cultural composition of the community matters. Birman, Trickett, and Buchanan (2005) compared adolescents’ acculturation in two communities of Russian immigrants in the same US state, one where Russians lived in a concentrated ethnic enclave and one where they lived dispersed through the area’s multicultural neighborhoods. American acculturation and Russian culture retention was measured in terms of linguistic fluency, consumption behavior (media, music, food, entertainment), and identification (“I consider myself American” versus “I consider myself Russian”). Time in the U.S. positively predicted measures of American acculturation, in terms of language, behavior, and identity. It negatively predicted Russian language and behavior, but not identity. First-culture identity may be less affected by the environment than language or consumption behavior. Interestingly, time in the U.S. also interacted with the community variable: the relationship between time in the U.S. and American linguistic, behavioral, and identity acculturation was stronger in the dispersed community, suggesting a faster process of acculturation. Less frequent social interactions with fellow Russians most likely meant less priming and less reinforcement of Russian habits.

While the immigrants’ social context matters for acculturation, it also depends on individual motivational needs. Need for cognitive closure (NFCC) refers to the desire for firm and final answers rather than ambiguity and further processing (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Individuals vary in their chronic levels of NFCC and some situational conditions induce NFCC, such as time pressure, distraction, or noise (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). This epistemic need draws people to conform to group norms. High NFCC is associated with liking homogeneous groups (Pierro, Mannetti, de Grada, Livi, & Kruglanski, 2003) and disliking deviant individuals (Kruglanski & Webster, 1991). Individuals higher in NFCC tend to adhere to culturally typical patterns of causal attribution and conflict management (Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Fu et al., 2007). Kosic, Kruglanski, Pierro, & Mannetti (2004) compared immigrants to Italy from Croatia who landed in different kinds of communities. For those in Croat ethnic communities, higher NFCC predicted slower adaptation to Italy and stronger maintenance of heritage-culture habits. For those in Italian communities, higher NFCC predicted faster adaptation to Italy. Closure comes from conforming to the salient ingroup.

Not all immigrant communities acculturate toward the mainstream host culture; some evolve toward greater differentiation. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) found that second generation Mexican immigrants in California, compared to first generation immigrants, expressed more negative attitudes about things American, perhaps because they are more privy to mainstream American discourse derogating their national origins. In some cases, reactive movements toward cultural conservatism may involve heightened levels of NFCC. Orehek et al. (2010) found that a slideshow about 9/11 raised Americans’ NFCC levels, and that Londoners’ NFCC levels were elevated in the weeks after the 2005 London transit bombing. Higher NFCC fosters cultural persistence, as it induces conformity from members of the culture and induces newcomers to look to old-timers’ behavior for guidance (Livi, Kruglanski, Pierro, Mannetti, & Kenny, 2014). Communities that feel threatened may go down the path of chronic closure needs and cultural traditionalism – cultural identity threat can heighten NFCC, which may ultimately play out in reactionary movements such as fascism or fundamentalism (see Morris, Mok, & Mor, 2011). NFCC may play a role in the ways communities respond to external threats by hardening or narrowing the boundaries of the cultural ingroup.

In sum, the replacement view of cultural learning is exemplified by research on acculturation. This research finds that immigrants assimilate compartmentally rather than categorically. The extent and speed of assimilation depends on the person’s linguistic, visual, and social context, because of the dynamics of schema activation. For example, it is harder to learn a second-culture when one’s first-culture schemas are chronically accessible. Acculturation also depends on the interaction of context with the motivational state of NFCC, because this epistemic motive induces conformity to the norms of whichever ingroup is most salient in the person’s social environment. High levels of NFCC at the community level may support culturally conservative and reactionary movements that resist the influence of other cultures.

2.1.2. Supplement view

While some acculturation phenomena can be understood within the framework of a second culture replacing the first culture, the limitations of this zero sum model of cultural knowledge have long been apparent. People can learn a new culture without losing their heritage culture proficiency and identity. Thomas and Znaniecki’s (1918) study of Polish immigrants in Chicago distinguished three trajectories of adjusting to the host culture of the US: “bohemians” who embraced the host culture and abandoned their heritage culture, “philistines” who rejected the host culture and stuck to their culture of origin, and “creatives” who strongly engage with the host culture identity while also keeping significant heritage-culture involvement. Even earlier Du Bois (1903) described African Americans as double-conscious, seeing life from the Black perspective and the White perspective, resulting in “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals.” Park (1928) and Stonequist (1937) described ethnic immigrants as “marginal,” as they lived in two cultural worlds but on the periphery of each. In this more ambivalent picture, dual allegiances could result in either creativity or conflict.

Drawing on these ideas, Berry (1974, 1990) developed a self-report scale to categorize immigrants into four acculturation strategies – Assimilation, Separation, Integration, and Marginalization. Assimilation means identification and engagement solely with the host culture; Separation, solely with the heritage culture; Integration, with both cultures; and Marginalization, with neither culture. Berry (1990) found evidence for his prediction that psychological adjustment would be highest with the
Integration strategy. Whereas Berry (1990) linked Marginalization to maladjustment, recent evidence supports Park and Stonequist’s Janus-faced image that dual weak identifications can indicate either alienation or independence (Boogie & Bourhis, 1996). In several recent studies of managers living between two cultures, the greatest career success was associated with the balanced configurations – Integration and Marginalization – as opposed to the unbalanced configurations – Assimilation and Separation (Gillespie, McBride, & Riddle, 2010; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng, 2009).

While acculturation paths are called “strategies,” they depend on the host society’s welcome as well as the immigrant’s aspirations. Immigrants from the same source country fare differently in different host countries (e.g., Vietnamese in France versus those in Finland). Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) distinguished three relevant types of host countries: settler societies founded on immigration (Australia, Israel), former colonial societies (Germany, the Netherlands), and societies new to immigration lacking explicit policies (Portugal, Sweden). In settler societies, which have higher rates of immigration, there is greater public support for cultural diversity and higher rates of immigrants on the Integration path. In sum, the question of whether immigrants’ cultural learning takes the form of assimilation (replacement) versus biculturalism (supplement) hinges on the host society’s welcome as much as the immigrants’ preferences.

In the last decades of the 20th century many Western nations, starting with Canada, began to conceptualize their societies as multicultural mosaics rather than assimilative melting pots (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). This coincided with the resurgence of ethnic identity and increased rates of immigration since the 1960s. In recent years, support for the multiculturalist ideology has dramatically receded in Western Europe, as unassimilated Islamic communities have become sites of discontent and violence (Brubaker, 2001). An emerging intercultural ideology called interculturalism places less emphasis of preserving authentic traditions and more emphasis on fostering interactions between ethnic communities (Meer & Modood, 2012).

At the same time, globalization has opened new forms of emigration, with more migrants aspiring to live transnationally. It has always been the case that more immigrants returned home than the assimilationist ideology acknowledged, and letters, money and gifts have always traveled back to families in the old country. What’s changed is that new communication and transportation technologies have made close relationships and frequent travel much easier, such that people can work abroad while maintaining an identity at home. People can maintain networks and involvements in both countries easily when they are just a short flight apart (e.g., Polish physicians in the U.K. who fly in for the workweek, NYers who vote in Dominican elections and even run for office). Transnationalism can enable compartmentalized acculturation and dual strong cultural identification.

In sum, research premised on the supplement view of second-culture learning finds that second-culture proficiency does not always crowd out first-culture proficiency and second-culture attachments can balance rather than displace first-culture attachments. When do two cultural identities conflict or compete? Proficiency in two cultures may interfere with each other in matters like attaining fluency, which depend on knowledge accessibility rather than knowledge availability. There may be more competition between cultures in the heart than in the mind. That is, learning how to bow does not interfere with ones memory of how to give a firm handshake. However, adopting Western gender roles may interfere with one’s commitment to Saudi traditions. (We will revisit such issues in our second section when we consider how newcomers make use of their knowledge of a second culture.)

2.2. Research on expatriate adjustment

Another applied research literature investigates people who sojourn in another country rather than immigrating, such as expatriate employees, foreign students, and military personnel. Whereas the immigrant literature typically studies engagement or identification with the host culture, the expatriate literature focuses on adjustment, “psychological comfort with various aspects of a new setting” (Black & Gregersen, 1991a, p. 498).

2.2.1. Emotional dynamics

Early case studies of expatriates spawned the influential theory of culture shock, which posits three phases in an expatriate’s emotional adjustment process. In the initial “honeymoon” period expatriates are enchanted with the novelty of their new foreign environment and buoyed by fresh memories of home, including its close, supportive relationships. After a month or two expatriates begin to experience culture shock, a debilitating “anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols” and causes many to isolate themselves or return home (Oberg, 1960, p. 177). Expatriates who survive the culture shock phase then transition to an emotionally positive phase of engagement with the local culture. On returning home, expatriates experience the same process: a honeymoon followed by reverse culture-shock and then eventual engagement (Adler, 1981; Austin, 1986). Culture shock theory assumes a new cultural attachment replaces the previous one and that this is a traumatic process. However, more systematic empirical tests reveal that not all expatriates experience this affective roller coaster, though many do struggle at various phases of their experience with feelings of insecurity and isolation (Triandis, 1994; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Recent theory and evidence suggests that the emotional dynamics of expatriates hinge on the feeling of security versus insecurity. Insecure feelings become self-confirming. Insecurity about one’s acceptance by others can lead to withdrawal, inducing further feelings of isolation, inadequacy and distress (Adler, 1975). This also happens through interpersonal dynamics; insecurities induce defensive social behaviors that often elicit the very rejection that the insecure person most fears (Stephan & Stephan, 1993). Some evidence linking expatriate adjustment to relational security comes from priming experiments. Fu, Morris and Hong (2014) found that exchange students’ adjustment to their host culture can be helped,
somewhat ironically, by reminders of their home culture. In a pilot study, American exchange students in Hong Kong felt more secure about their relationships with host nationals after a prior task in which they tasted American desserts (apple pie) as opposed to Chinese desserts (mango pudding). In Study 1, exposure to iconic American cultural images (versus Chinese images) induced greater adjustment to Hong Kong, and this effect was mediated by endorsement of relational security, not other values often related to studying abroad such as personal growth or international harmony. Study 2 surveyed Hong Kong students before, during, and after a term abroad. Students who expressed insecurity before the trip about interacting with host locals (but not those who had no insecurity) benefited from a home-culture prime intervention during their stay. Not only was their immediate cultural adjustment increased but the effect persisted, still evident months later in post-stay evaluations of the study abroad experience. In sum, home-culture primes soothe the relational insecurities that hinder some expatriates, impeding their development of relationships with host locals.

With the recognition that expatriates’ experiences in gaining familiarity and comfort with host cultures vary widely (just as do immigrants’ experiences of acculturation), research has turned to identifying the antecedent factors that determine whether an expatriate adjusts quickly, slowly or not at all. Adjustment is typically measured as the degree of comfort with the general practical environment (i.e., food, climate, weather, and housing and living conditions), interpersonal interactions with host nationals, and with work/school tasks (Black & Stephens, 1989; Black, 1988, 1990; Gregersen & Black, 1990). We review research on predictors of adjustment in terms of two major categories: situational factors, dimensions of the expatriate’s environment, and personal factors, dimensions of individual difference.

2.2.2. Situational factors

Not surprisingly, studies have found that expatriate adjustment decreases with greater objective challenges to be overcome and increases with greater social and organizational supports. Adjustment decreases with greater cultural distance between home and host countries (Searle & Ward, 1990; Van Vianen, De Pater, Kristof-Brown, & Johnson, 2004). It increases with spousal adjustment, cross-cultural training, and support from host nationals (Black & Gregersen, 1991b; Black & Stephens, 1989; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Adjustment increases with the job characteristic of decision autonomy (Takeuchi, Shay, & Jiatao, 2008) and support from one’s home organization and superior (Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001). Mixed findings have emerged about organizational rank and functional area (Shaffer, Harrison, & Gilley, 1999).

2.2.3. Personal factors

2.2.3.1. Personality. Much evidence links expatriate adjustment to personality dimensions (Abbe, Gullick, & Herman, 2008). In terms of the five factor model of personality, extraversion, people’s proclivity to be outgoing and expressive, positively predicts expatriate work adjustment and job performance (Caligiuri, 2000; Mol, Born, Willemsen, & Van der Molen, 2005; Searle & Ward, 1990; Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, & Ferzandi, 2006), perhaps because they are more able to interact with locals and find social support. Openness to experience, people’s taste for novelty as opposed to routine, also positively predicts work adjustment and job performance (Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003; Lievens, Harris, Van Keer, & Bis QRER, 2003; Shaffer et al., 2006). This may reflect the fact that curiosity drives cultural learning or that comfort with ambiguity as opposed to familiar routine makes confusion a less frightening experience. Expatriates higher on agreeableness, people’s degree of interpersonal flexibility, have better interpersonal adjustment, better job satisfaction, and lower desire to terminate their foreign assignment (Caligiuri, 2000; Dalton & Wilson, 2000; Mol et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006), consistent with the notion that developing close interactions and relationships with locals is critical to an expatriate’s overall adjustment. Expatriates higher on conscientiousness have better general adjustment to the host culture and better job performance, both self-rated and supervisor-rated (Caligiuri, 2000; Dalton & Wilson, 2000; Mol et al., 2005; Ones & Viswesvaran, 1999; Shaffer et al., 2006). While there is no direct evidence for the mechanism, it may reflect a tendency to focus on their jobs despite distractions and to receive positive feedback for their performance. Finally, people with greater emotional stability are higher in interpersonal and work adjustment (Ali et al., 2003; Mol et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006). Most likely, this is because more emotionally stable individuals can endure frustrating interactions and feelings of incompetence without the downward spiral of insecurity, defensiveness and anxiety that characterizes culture shock.

While plausible mechanisms explaining the influence of personality dimensions on adjustment have been posited, these mediating processes have not been well tested, as the survey designs of expatriate research are not very amenable to testing psychological processes. For the applied goal of selecting individuals for expatriate or exchange student roles, it is useful to know that scores on brief scales predict positive adjustment. However, for our present interest in knowing how people learn cultures so that we can better train them, correlations with personality traits provide limited insight. In the case of dimensions such as Openness, it seems likely that the association with adjustment comes from greater learning, but in the case of dimensions such as Agreeableness or Emotional Stability it may come as much from advantages in emotional coping as from learning. Also the finding that adjustment is linked to all five very different personality dimensions suggests that there may be different kinds of learning processes that contribute to adjustment. Extraversion likely brings about more frequent interaction with locals, and hence more feedback. Openness, by contrast, may have its effects through inducing people to read novels or wander through museums. So whereas the extraversion effect may involve experiential learning from reinforcements, the openness effect may involve the explicit process of studying factual information. These are qualitatively different kinds of learning processes that may play roles at different stages of
cultural learning, but these processes have not been probed in the expatriate literature.

2.2.3.2. Intelligence. Another literature examines general mental ability and expatriate adjustment. General intelligence, or IQ, is one of the most important predictors of human performance outcomes. The traditional view of intelligence, stemming from Binet and Simon (1916) and Spearman (1927), defines intelligence as basic mental abilities that predict academic performance. General mental ability predicts learning performance in many domains (e.g., Hunter & Hunter, 1984), so research and policy has presumed that IQ would provide an advantage in puzzling through the rules, norms, and conventions governing behaviors in the new cultural environment. However, perhaps because it has been taken for granted, this role of IQ has been seldom tested.

Surprisingly, though, the extant evidence does not indicate that IQ drives intercultural adjustment. A study of 35 international students in California (Matsumoto, LeRoux, Robles, & Campos, 2007) administered the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Third Edition (Wechsler, 1997), a widely used measure of IQ that includes 13 sub-scales, along with two measures of cultural adjustment (culture shock and homesickness scales) and three measures of general psychological well-being (anxiety, hopelessness, and satisfaction with life). Result showed that the total Wechsler IQ score did not correlate with any of the cultural adjustment and general well-being outcomes. Of the 65 correlations between the 13 sub-scales of the Wechsler IQ scale and the five dependent measures, eight were significant. However, when these correlations are evaluated in light of the number of tests – with the Bonferroni correction, Holm’s step-down procedure (Holm, 1979) or Hochberg’s step-up procedure (Hochberg, 1988) – none are strong enough to count as significant. Therefore, Matsumoto et al. (2007) does not provide conclusive evidence that IQ predicts intercultural adjustment.

Another study with a sample of 102 international students in New Zealand (Ward, Fischer, Lam, & Hall, 2009, Study 3) administered a commonly used measure of IQ, the Raven’s Progressive Matrices test, along with two measures of intercultural adjustment (the Sociocultural Adaptation Scale and the Academic Adaptation Scale) and two measures of general well-being (satisfaction with life and depression). Ward et al. found no significant correlation between IQ and the adaptation measures, range r (102) = −.07 to −.01. With a different indicator of IQ and different measures of cultural adaptation, this study again provides no evidence for a relationship. Although one must be careful drawing conclusions from null effects in studies with small samples, the evidence to date suggests that general intelligence is not a strong predictor of intercultural adjustment. Given the traditional presumption that second-culture learning is largely a matter of studying facts and puzzling through unfamiliar experiences, the finding that IQ does not help adjustment is surprising.

2.2.3.3. Emotional intelligence. The aptitude of emotional intelligence was proposed as a set of “mental processes involving emotional information,” including “(a) appraising and expressing emotions in the self and others, (b) regulating emotions in the self and others, and (c) using emotions in adaptive ways” (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, pp. 190–191). It emerged from a long tradition of efforts to measure social aptitudes or social intelligence (Thurstone, 1938). Unlike IQ, which refers to people’s ability to process information cognitively through reason and logic, emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to people’s ability to process affect and emotion in a socially appropriate manner. Salovey and colleagues (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitarenios 2003) developed a reliable and valid competence test (the MSCEIT) that assesses accuracy of recognizing facial expressions of basic emotions and of reasoning about their typical antecedents and consequences. EQ is typically uncorrelated or weakly correlated with IQ (e.g., r’s = −.04 to .15; Ang et al., 2007, pp. 349–350).

As the concept of EI was popularized by Goleman (1995) and others, its definition expanded to encompass individual differences that foster well-being and success, even if these strengths do not have their effects through processing information about emotions. These broad trait constructs of EI were operationalized with self-report inventories such as the TEIQu (Petrides & Furnham, 2003). Although the evidence falls short of the hype in the popular press, some evidence shows that trait EI measures work above and beyond IQ for predicting performance outcomes, such as academic performance (e.g., Petrides, Frederickson, & Furnham, 2004), job performance (e.g., Lam & Kirby, 2002), and leadership effectiveness (e.g., Wong & Law, 2002). While these broader scales seemingly have predictive validity, their shortcomings is discriminant validity; the TEIQu correlates −.7 with neuroticism and +.7 with extraversion, indicating that it largely overlaps with personality characteristics, as this is the same level at which different personality inventories for these dimensions (the NEO and the BFI) correlate with each other (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2008). Trait EI measures appear to be merely new labels for familiar dimensions of personality.

Competence tests of emotional intelligence are preferred to self-report assessments as people might often not have insight into how they process emotional information. However, other problems arise with competence tests. The MSCEIT involves answering abstract questions about emotions, so it correlates with IQ. An alternative approach to competence testing is based on the situational judgment paradigm (MacCann & Roberts, 2008). In situational judgment tests, participants are presented with concrete situations and asked how to handle each situation effectively (McDaniel, Hartman, Whetzel, & Grubb, 2007). Situational judgment measures of EQ predict medical students’ performance above and beyond IQ and admissions aptitude tests in courses on interpersonal communication and sensitivity (targeting bedside manner) but not in the remainder of their classes on medicine per se (Libbrecht, Lievens, Carette, & Côté, 2014). These findings are important scientifically and practically, even if they fall short of exaggerated popular claims that EQ is the key to work and school success.

As with IQ, only a few studies have examined the influence of emotional intelligence on expatriate adjustment. A study of Taiwanese managers working in China
found that managers’ emotional intelligence predicted their intercultural adjustment and organizational commitment (Lii & Wong, 2008). A survey of international students in New Zealand (Ward et al., 2009, Study 2) found that EQ (measured using Schutte et al.’s, 1998, scale) predicted general cultural adjustment but not academic adjustment. It also predicted subjective life satisfaction. While initial evidence suggests that EQ correlates with expatriate adjustment, satisfaction and performance, it is not clear whether these associations reflect general influences of EQ or something specific about EQ and intercultural adaptation. It is certainly not clear that these findings reflect an effect of EQ on intercultural learning.

2.2.3.4. Cultural intelligence. Another social aptitude proposed in recent management research is cultural intelligence (Earley & Ang, 2003). Cultural intelligence (CQ) is conceptualized as four dimensions of ability relevant to intercultural effectiveness: cognitive (e.g., “I know the legal and economic systems of other cultures”), metacognitive (e.g., “I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people of different cultural backgrounds”), motivational (e.g., “I am confident that I can socialize with locals in a culture that is unfamiliar to me”), and behavioral (e.g., “I change my verbal behavior (e.g., accent, tone) when a cross-cultural interaction requires it”). Individuals higher on overall CQ are more likely to make culturally appropriate behavioral attributions, perform better in multi-cultural work settings, show better adjustment in a foreign country, and negotiate better in multi-cultural teams, among other outcomes (e.g., Ang & van Dyne, 2008; Ang et al., 2007; Earley & Ang, 2003; Imai & Gelfand, 2010; Janssens & Brett, 2006; Templer, Tay, & Chandrasekar, 2006).

The various dimensions of CQ have found to be correlated with different dimensions of EQ (r’s = .14-.41, p’s < .01; Ang et al., 2007, p. 349) but CQ predicted intercultural adjustment outcomes above and beyond EQ. CQ and IQ were found to be uncorrelated in both an American sample and a Singaporean sample (r’s = -.01-.07, ns; Ang et al., 2007, pp. 349–350).

Do these correlations with intercultural effectiveness reflect that these dimensions foster intercultural learning? Let us consider each dimension, in turn. The cognitive dimension, knowledge of other cultures such as languages, would likely foster greater learning from experiences abroad (e.g., Black et al., 1991). Expatriates who have developed complex cognitive structures regarding the home and host cultures prior to interactions should be able to learn effectively from host nationals and to integrate such new information (Osland & Bird, 2000; Sanchez, Spector, & Cooper, 2000).

The motivational dimension (which taps self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation) associates with overall adjustment (Templer et al., 2006) and expatriate work performance (Chen, Kirkman, Kim, Farh, & Tangirala, 2010). Such associations may reflect third variables, as self-efficacy often is based on the past experience of competence at a task. From a theoretical perspective, a dimension that taps confidence and drive to engage the host culture should be most directly associated with outcomes that involve confidence and motivation, such as culture shock early in an overseas stay and burnout later on. While these emotional challenges may dampen cultural learning, the effects of motivational traits on the outcome variables do not necessarily run through intercultural learning.

The behavioral dimension, which taps the individual’s plasticity in performing adaptive behaviors, has been found to help in intercultural negotiations. Behavioral CQ (as well as motivational CQ) has been associated with a greater use of integrative tactics (communicating one’s priorities between two issues) and cooperative moves (expressing enthusiasm for working together; Imai & Gelfand, 2010). People who are behaviorally flexible likely have an advantage in nonverbal signals used to build relationships, setting others at ease, showing appreciation to a host, showing respect to superordinates and demonstrating authority to subordinates. Past research has not probed how people learn these subtleties, but if the process involves trial and error variation, more behaviorally flexible people would have an advantage.

The metacognitive dimension, which taps the individual’s awareness, monitoring and control of culture-based assumptions and inferences, predicts intercultural collaboration and trust development. Among MBA students working in culturally diverse teams, metacognitive CQ (and cognitive and behavioral CQ but not motivational CQ) associated with higher levels of trust toward and from peers (Rockstuhl & V. Ng, 2008). Evidence from network surveys, peer-rated surveys and lab experiments converge to show that metacognitive CQ predicted higher levels of creative collaboration in intercultural relationships and this relationship is mediated by greater development of affective trust in these relationships (Chua et al., 2012). Intracultural creative collaboration was not associated with metacognitive CQ, suggesting that the mechanism is distinct to challenges of intercultural interactions rather than reflecting the general benefits of self-awareness. An experimental manipulation found that the effect on creative collaboration depends on personal interaction; when people from different cultures were given no chance to speak personally before collaborating, high metacognition did not help. This suggests that its effects come from more sensitive interactions that yield trust and ultimately better collaboration.

Overall, CQ research has widened the set of strengths that are studied as antecedents to expatriate effectiveness. However, as with EQ and personality research, the evidence consists largely of correlations from cross-sectional surveys, without all the controls and mediating variables that would be needed to fully isolate the causal mechanisms involved. A major limitation of this research is its reliance on self-report assessments, vulnerable to false reporting, rather than competence tests. Also, research teams using different sets of items observe different factor structures (e.g., Ang et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2008; Van Dyne et al., 2012). CQ research has not tested theories of how the dimensions combine and interact to produce cultural competence, so at this point it is more of a list of strengths than a model of intercultural functioning. While dimensions such as metacognition seem to have their
effects through helping people learn from interactions, the precise learning processes involved have not been thoroughly probed.

2.2.4. Summary

The literature on expatriate adjustment provides interesting clues about how people learn new cultures that complements insights from the more longstanding literature on immigrants. Since the classic theories of cultural shock, this literature has emphasized the emotional challenge of adjusting to a new culture. Whereas research on immigrants indicates that exposure to heritage-culture cues can undermine one's efforts to gain fluency in a second language, research on expatriates counters that reminders of home can soothe feelings of insecurity. While there is a point to immersive learning environments, occasional tastes of home can embolden expatriates who are struggling with insecurity to reach out and engage with the host culture.

The survey literature on antecedents of adjustment has discovered situational factors (cultural distance, family adjustment, organizational support) and personal factors (personality traits and emotional and cultural intelligence) that predict dimensions of intercultural adjustment such as social, work/school, and general satisfaction. While it is presumed that intercultural learning is critical to these adjustment outcomes, few studies have measured learning per se. Adjustment depends on gaining knowledge of the host culture, of course, but also upon the expatriate's emotional strengths and on the objective challenges of their job and supports from their organization and their significant others. While these findings help in selecting people for expat positions, they are relatively weak in overall predictiveness, suggesting omission of important factors, moderating conditions, and mediating variables (cf. Harrison, Shaffer, & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, 2004; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). These findings are less helpful for designing expatriate training programs, because it is hard to know which antecedents have their effects through learning as opposed to other mechanisms. Hence, this survey research provides little insight into the underlying processes of cultural learning that can be harnessed to better promote learning before and during assignments (cf. Mezias & Scandura, 2005). As with findings about immigrant identification, the outcome variables of self-reported adjustment and job/school performance are somewhat removed from learning itself.

In our next section, we review research from research programs using primarily laboratory methods to probe learning processes, and we build a four-fold taxonomy of learning processes that are relevant to acquiring a second culture.

2.3. Learning processes

The journey of learning another culture can extend over many years, so it should not be surprising that learning occurs through different processes at different points along the voyage. While every intercultural journey is different, and there is no fixed order in which types of learning must necessarily take place, it is likely that some processes typically figure more prominently early in the journey and others later on. We posit the following four kinds of learning process:

- **Studying**, internalizing facts as declarative knowledge from books or classes;
- **Attributional Reasoning**, tracing observed behaviors to intentions and causes;
- **Social Learning**, imitating the ways role models behave in situations; and
- **Conditioning**, trying different behaviors and repeating the ones that get rewarded.

In this section, we draw on recent findings to propose how each of these learning processes functions in the internalization and fine-tuning of cultural knowledge, noting their possible relevance to antecedents of cultural learning such as cultural intelligence.

2.3.1. Studying

The first stage of learning another culture for most people is studying, internalizing knowledge from books or schooling. Studying is well suited to acquiring the basic facts of language, history, society and etiquette that are needed as a base for navigating as learners, and is the mainstay of cultural training sessions, touristic guidebooks, and exchange student orientations (Yamazaki & Kayes, 2004). Training for businesspeople and students also often involves the presenting of findings from cross-cultural research, such as country differences in values, communication styles, and ethical judgments (Osland & Bird, 2000). Related to studying is learning by asking locals or seasoned expats to explain the culture. While such conversations over dinner are less tedious than studying guidebooks, it is still a matter of internalizing abstract propositions about the culture. Of course, many situational nuances and subcultural variations are missed by the generalizations of the classroom, guidebook or dinner table. The generalizations with which a culture is represented can be a useful starting point for learning the complexity of lived culture or they can be unfortunate stopping points.

2.3.2. Attributional reasoning

In addition to studying, learning a culture involves reading people and situations in order to interpret behaviors and interactions. In everyday life, we constantly make sense of other people's behavior through attributional reasoning, comparing different episodes to diagnose beliefs, motives and intentions and ultimately personality traits and situational constraints and provocations (Jones & Harris, 1967). Much research has revealed the important role of attributional reasoning for managers in the workplace who must diagnose problems and evaluate performance by tracing an employee's behavior to properties of the person, the situation, or the relationship between people (Eberly, Holley, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2011).

Attributional reasoning is an important means of inferring cultural norms. Cultural norms are situational
causes of behavior. To impute cultural norms from observed behaviors, the expatriate first has to get beyond the bias of attributing actions to dispositions of the actor (Ross, 1977; Storti, 1990), the worst offenders being attributors from Western individualistic cultures little accustomed to thinking about social constraints on behavior (Morris & Peng, 1994). An important cue to expatriates in diagnosing norms is the consensus with which locals, or a particular category of locals, act in a given situation. When many locals respond in the same way, then attributing to personality becomes less compelling. The longer the newcomer’s experience in the host culture, the greater the likelihood of noticing such patterns of consensus that reflect a cultural norm.

Another important cue to expats may be surprise. First, surprising behavior in an unfamiliar setting elicits negative affective reactions (Brislin, 1981), which trigger deliberate, analytic reasoning. Second, when an expat feels surprised but notices that locals are not surprised this likely indicates that locals have a different cultural norm. Notice that this process of cultural learning involves making comparisons between cultures. For this reason, it is likely an important learning process for newly arrived expatriates who can compare their observations in the new environment with their fresh memories of home.

2.3.3. Social learning

Becoming competent in another culture involves not only memorizing facts about its institutions and customs, and inferring the goals and constraints guiding people’s behaviors in routine events, but also involves learning how to perform those actions, mastering the moves of its social dances. Social learning theory (e.g., Bandura, 1977) holds that people learn most things from childhood onwards through imitating the behavior of others, role models. Recent social psychology research highlights that this is largely an unconscious process. People unconsciously mirror or mimic the behaviors of the people they interact with (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Heyes, 2005). When expatriates unintentionally pick up mannerism of host locals (e.g., an Australian accent, a Gallic shrug), this may reflect a subconscious process through which mirroring begets new habits. We “catch” behaviors from others around us through implicit social learning.

Recent cultural psychology research provides some indirect evidence for social learning of a second culture. First studies found that exposing people to interpersonal situations from other cultures induces some of the psychological tendencies characteristic of the culture. Self-esteem and self-enhancing behaviors are much more subdued in Japan than in the West (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). These self-styles are afforded in part by the everyday situations of the two societies–Japanese situations induce people to feel self-critical, American situations induce people to feel self-enhancing (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Likewise, studies of expatriates suggest that they may pick up the tendencies characteristic of the society they are visiting. Japanese expats after several months in Canada show an increase in self-esteem, whereas Canadians expats in Japan show a decrease in self-esteem (Heine & Lehman, 2004).

While this study cannot discern why expats changed, it seems likely that people notice the behaviors of people around them (American boasting, Japanese self-deprecation) and adjust their habits toward these norms.

Cultural psychologists have recently studied intercultural social learning in the laboratory. Savani, Morris, Naidu, Kumar, and Berli (2011) sampled experiences of everyday events involving an influence attempt from college students in India and the US. Content analyses of these influence situations revealed that in India, people typically attempted to influence friends and family with the other person’s interest in mind, whereas in the US, people typically attempted to influence others with self-interested motives. Another study confirmed an obvious implication of this – in the influence situations sampled from India, the best decision is usually to accommodate to influence attempts, whereas in the influence situations sampled from the US, the best decision is usually to resist the influence attempt. Both Indian and American participants exposed to the situations (with their origins obscured) showed this pattern of judgments. In a final study, new participants were exposed to a series of 100 influence situations in a long session (50 India-sourced, 50 US-sourced), and they were asked to take the role of the influence target in each decision and decide whether to accommodate or resist. Not surprisingly, participants (from both countries) accommodated more in India-sourced situations than US-sourced situations. Also, Indian participants were generally more likely to accommodate than Americans, likely reflecting their cultural default response. However, strikingly, these biases converged across trials: As US participants encountered more and more India-sourced situations featuring altruistic influencers, their predisposition to resist relaxed; as Indian participants encountered more and more American-sourced situations featuring selfish influencers, their predisposition to accommodate broke down.

Social learning is likely particularly important for learning the complex sequences of behavior called for in social institutions and routine events. “Scripts” are procedural knowledge of the sequences of actions expected in a setting (e.g., dining at a restaurant, withdrawing money from a bank, running a meeting, delegating to administrative staff; Morris & Murphy, 1990; Schank & Abelson, 1977). People learn these sequences by imitating the actions of another person who they observe succeeding in the situation. For a relatively new expatriate, much cultural learning likely occurs through imitating the behavior of locals or more seasoned expats. Some cultural newcomers bluff their way through social interactions by imitating the actions of those around them, even if they do not fully understand the meanings of those actions (Black & Mendenhall, 1990) – an approach corresponding to low cognitive CQ but high behavioral CQ.

While intercultural social learning calls for more theory and evidence, there has been extensive theorizing and research about the role of culture and social learning in human evolution. Whereas other species learn primarily through first-hand trial-and-error learning, *homo sapiens* learn primarily through imitating others (Tomasello, 1994). Our abilities to impute intentions, beliefs and
desires to others help us imitate others’ intended actions rather than their literal behaviors. Our abilities to model others’ minds also enable us to teach. This capacity for knowledge sharing meant that human innovations tended to become widely shared within a tribe and to be transmitted across generations. By contrast, in other primates, innovations are not shared widely, and they get lost within a few generations. Given the central role of social learning in the origins of human culture, it would be odd if social learning did not also play a large role in learning a second culture.

Social learning processes are also central to the leading account of cultural evolution, dual inheritance theory (Boyd, 1985; Boyd & Richerson, 1996). It posits that people adopt practices through two basic forms of social learning: imitating the most frequent behavior in their population and emulating the behavior of the prestigious/successful exemplars. While a parsimonious account of how people inherit practices from their primary culture, these heuristics may be too simple to suffice for second-culture learning, as imitation depends on the right reference group and emulation depends on the right role model.1

1 The first social learning heuristic posited in dual inheritance theory rule is that individuals tend to “preferentially adopt the cultural traits that are most frequent in the population” which works because “the frequency of a trait among the individuals within the population provides information about the trait’s adaptiveness” (Henrich & Boyd, 1998, p. 219). Of course, much social psychology evidence documents a reflexive mental bias in the direction of acting and thinking in line with the majority (Sherif, 1936) and this aspect of psychology perpetuates group norms, including cultural patterns. That said, the evidence indicates people attend to reference groups, not the entire population; they conform to a salient, immediate group even when its majority behavior contradicts what most people in the broader community would be assumed to do (Asch, 1951).

While the heuristic of imitating the frequent behavior in one’s group explains how people relate to their primary society and culture, does it explain how they learn a second culture? Can expats find adaptive ways to conduct themselves by imitating the most frequent behaviors in the population? Many common behaviors in a society (entering Mosques to pray) might be considered inappropriate for expats, so expats would be ill-served by imitating them. The issue of focusing on a relevant reference group, important in any kind of cultural learning, seems even more crucial for expats learning a second culture. Simply imitating what is frequent in the population or the immediate environment does not work.

The second social learning heuristic in dual inheritance theory is emulation of the prestigious or successful (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). “Natural selection favored social learners who could evaluate potential models and copy the most successful among them. . . . This generated a preference for models who seem generally ‘popular’” (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001, p. 165). There is experimental evidence that people automatically track prestige. Even 3- and 4-year old children were twice as likely to attend to a target person that others had previously attended to versus previously ignored (Chudek, Heller, Birch, & Henrich, 2012). People gaze more at individuals who have high informal social status in a group than people who have low informal status (Foulsham, Cheng, Tracy, Henrich, & Kingstone, 2010). By tracking who gets attention we know who has status and who to emulate.

Copying the individuals who get the most attention is a heuristic that could be applied when trying to learn a second culture. However, if the person who gets the most attention is the village elder or the managing director of national division, the behaviors exhibited by the prestigious person may not be ones considered appropriate for a visitor or newcomer to enact. Like the conformity heuristic, the prestige heuristic is simple to define but not so simple to implement in second culture learning.

2.3.4. Conditioning

While another person’s behavior can provide a rough guide to handling a situation in a foreign context, finding the optimal approach requires trial and error learning from feedback. In everyday interactions, one’s actions get rewarded or not depending on whether one’s goal is achieved. Another layer of reinforcement comes from interpersonal sanctioning for appropriateness or inappropriateness, which can come in explicit verbal feedback or in the form of subtle differences. Did they smile or frown? Did they withdraw or draw closer? Explicit or implicit feedback in interactions enables learning through conditioning—the association between an action and a situation increases with positive reinforcement and decreases with negative reinforcement.

Some preliminary evidence from conditioning experiments suggests that people learn cultural norms through conditioning. Some indirect evidence comes from studies of cognitive changes in expatriates that go beyond what could happen through social learning. Cultural attention patterns affect performance in tasks requiring judgments of line length. Americans are better at decontextualized judgments and Japanese are better at contextualized judgments; for example Americans are better at estimating the absolute length and Japanese are better at estimating its length relative to a frame. However, the accuracy patterns were different for expatriates: Japanese studying in America for a year show the characteristic American pattern, greater accuracy in absolute judgements; Americans studying in Japan show the characteristic Japanese pattern, greater accuracy in contextualized judgments (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003). While the study cannot tell how these differences come about, it is plausible that extended exposure to interpersonal situations demanding attention to context conditioned the American expats in Japan to think more like Japanese people, and vice versa for Japanese expats in the US.

In recent preliminary work (Savani et al., 2014), we simulated the expat experience by presenting participants with a series of influence episodes from another culture, asking them to make decisions about whether to accommodate or resist, and then providing feedback about whether they made the right decision (“Correct” or “Wrong” according to a consensus of locals). The modal correct response in the other-culture situations differed from that in participants’ own culture (accommodation was advisable in 92% of Indian situations but only 48% of American situations, as judged by respective locals). Therefore, when exposed to situations from the other culture, Indians would have to learn about situations in which one does better by resisting, whereas Americans would have to learn about situations in which one does better by accommodating. We found that people can learn from noisy feedback to make decisions more like those of locals. This could be through nonconscious conditioning or through conscious testing of hypotheses about the other culture.

One strategy for teasing apart these mechanisms involves varying the task by delaying feedback. As anyone who has trained an animal knows, conditioning requires that the feedback immediately follow the behavior. But
delay does not disrupt explicit learning processes, such as hypothesis testing. Preliminary evidence suggests that participants failed to learn from the expat situation simulation when the feedback was briefly delayed (Savani et al., 2014), pointing to a role of implicit conditioning rather than hypothesis testing.

Another strategy for revealing the mechanism makes use of individual difference measures. If the mechanism is implicit conditioning, then learning should be predicted by implicit processing aptitudes rather than by explicit processing aptitudes. In ongoing research (Savani et al., 2014), we assess implicit aptitudes using the artificial grammar learning task (Reber, 1967, measures the ability to notice ordering of sub-strings within larger strings) and the probabilistic classification task (Knowlton, Squire, & Gluck, 1994, measures picking up probabilistic associations between stimuli and outcomes). We assess explicit reasoning aptitude or IQ using the Raven’s progressive matrices test. Preliminary results indicate that implicit aptitudes predict Americans’ learning to accommodate when exposed to Indian situations, and Indians’ learning not to accommodate when exposed to American situations. Notably, explicit aptitudes or IQ did not predict learning in this behavioral choice task. (Note that this last finding is consistent with the previously reviewed findings of no association between IQ and expatriate adaptation.)

The emerging evidence for implicit conditioning as a mechanism of intercultural learning raises the question of whether effects of other individual differences related to intercultural success run through conditioning. Recall that research on CQ has found that people’s tendency toward cultural metacognition predicts success in intercultural trust and collaboration (Chua et al., 2012). Could this be because cultural metacognition enables implicit learning from social interactions? Morris and Savani (2014) found preliminary evidence that individuals higher in metacognitive CQ learn more quickly in the expat simulation task.

2.3.5. Conclusion

We have delineated four types of learning process involved in the acquisition of a second-culture, which may figure differentially across time and across domains of knowledge. We have related these to antecedent individual differences noted in past correlational research with immigrants and expatriates in order to speculate about learning processes that may intervene between these antecedents and the criterion measures.

A key thesis in our argument is that second-culture learning involves not only conscious, effortful, explicit learning processes such as studying and attributional reasoning but also nonconscious, automatic, implicit learning processes such as social learning and conditioning. Intercultural research and applied practices of selection and training can benefit from recent research programs in cognitive and social psychology revealing the ubiquitous role of implicit processes. Intriguing evidence suggests that implicit training may be able to bring people closer to native-like fluency. Recent evidence from studies of language training have contrasted explicit training (grammar-focused classroom lessons) and implicit training (immersive exposure) and found that they differentially affect neural (ERP) measures. Implicit training results in responses to syntactic violations that are more like those of native speakers (Morgan-Short, Steinhauer, Sanz, & Ullman, 2012). By recognizing the differences between various explicit and implicit processes rather than lumping them together, it may be possible to develop more realistic and effective training tools. We pursue this in the section below, which suggests implications of research on each learning process for training.

2.4. Implications for training

2.4.1. Studying

How can organizations best foster learning through studying? Declarative knowledge provides an all-important base for further learning. Although books and classes are the most widely used tools for learning through studying, increasingly used web-based tools provide another medium that lends itself to structured tutorials and quizzes that enrich declarative knowledge (e.g., www.culturenavigator.com). These tutorials have many efficiency advantages over classes, and allow for a more sustained learning process.

Also internet searches of foreign documents, when combined with machine translators, enables bypassing books written for tourists in order to learn from primary sources such as newspapers and blogs. This approach enables more contextualized learning. The cultural difference between a rural village and a capital city can be as large as the difference between countries. Prospective expatriates and sojourners can use the Internet to gain local knowledge about their particular foreign destination instead of relying on generalized portraits. Internet research also is more likely to provide up to date information. To stay up to date with societal, business, and organizational changes, expats can study daily news reports and blogs to know the issues and topics of current importance in the local community. In sum, new media offer new ways of learning from studying, reducing the chances that outdated books and classes leave learners with distorted impressions that are counterproductive to intercultural effectiveness.

2.4.2. Attributional learning

Tools for training people to make culturally appropriate attributions have a long history in applied psychology (Flanagan, 1954). Much of the effort has focused on reducing problematic attributions rather than on encouraging attributions that produce cultural insights. The most studied tools are called cultural assimilators; they are designed to nudge the novice’s attributions toward those

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2 High metacognitive CQ may be akin to a learning goal rather than performance goals with regard to cultural patterns (Porter, Webb, & Gogus, 2010). In achievement contexts, people with a learning goal are more likely to vary their approach and adapt (Guily & Phillips, 2005) and persist in the face of negative feedback and uncertainty (Dweck, 1986; Porter et al., 2010). Thus, people high in cultural metacognition may vary their behavior to get more feedback and may notice more of the feedback they receive in social interactions to learn the appropriate situation-action-outcome contingencies.
that would be made by a cultural expert (Bhawuk, 1998; Fielder et al., 1971; for a recent review, see Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson, & Maglio, 2005). The essence of this training method is to expose soon-to-be expatriates to puzzling situations that they are likely to encounter in new cultures, and to help them interpret the host nationals’ behavior through the host-culture lens rather than through their own culture’s lens.

In the first step, so called “critical incidents” are sampled by asking expatriates to describe incidents with host nationals “that made a major difference in their attitudes or behavior toward the members of the other culture” (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971, p. 97). Critical incidents thus generated are grouped into categories, often by inductive, qualitative procedures rather than quantitative methods such as cluster analyses. Thereafter, researchers develop scenarios about intercultural interactions, each followed by a multiple-choice question asking the trainee to select his or her best explanation for the host nationals’ behaviors. Of the explanations provided, most rely on cultural stereotypes or misplaced assumptions, whereas one option is the culturally appropriate explanation. Expats take the quiz and receive feedback about which questions they answered incorrectly. The reason for the correct answer in each situation is then explained. This classroom quiz format trains reasoning better than mere studying, because trainees become motivated to learn after seeing they have made mistakes. Like classroom quizzes, cultural assimilators are teaching methods that enable active learning.

An interesting finding from research with cultural assimilators developed for different countries is that identifying the correct answer often requires no culture-specific knowledge but merely a non-judgmental outlook or a suspension of one’s own cultural norms as a standard of judgment. As Brislin (1986, p. 216) stated, “there are extensive commonalities in the experiences of people who interact with culturally different others. These commonalities occur despite differences in the exact jobs people have, or despite differences in the exact place where the extensive intercultural interaction takes place.” Brislin (1986) compiled incidents from several countries to form a culture-general attributional training tool. This finding suggests that attributional assimilators do not impart schemas for understanding behavior patterns in other cultures but instead caution trainees to avoid using American culture as a lens for interpreting the actions of people from other cultures. These findings and our analysis imply a number of ways to improve the attributional assimilator procedure (Fiedler et al., 1971).

Sample a broader pool of incidents. The current method presents trainees with a narrow range of selected incidents that teach them one basic lesson: to not interpret people from other cultures as though they are American. First, while “critical incidents” are important, they are not representative of the cross-cultural interactions that an expat will have with locals. As each “critical incident” is selected because it reveals some confusing cultural difference, the overall experience may create the impression of the other culture as antipodean in its norms. This would probably contribute to stereotypes. Work on human universals suggests that any two cultures are alike in as many ways as they differ. Also learning a culture requires understanding local–local interactions as well as expat–local interactions. Training tools might work better with more representative samples of situations within given types of interactions (e.g., instances of conflict at work; negotiation incidents; interactions across hierarchical levels). Training with a broader, more representative pool of incidents might help to convey schemas for causally explaining the everyday patterns of behavior in another culture.

Use immediate feedback to train through implicit learning. While a classroom training session keyed to explicit learning would fail if it tried to encompass too much diversity of incidents, it may also be possible to train attributions through implicit learning, which can pick up signals from more complex and noisier data. Trainees would indicate their attribution and receive feedback based on whether their selected action matches the natives’ decision or not. This training procedure would simulate the process of learning by trial and error in the real world. By giving prospective expats practice in learning implicitly from immediate feedback, the above procedure would help them be more prepared for the difficult everyday interactions that they are likely to encounter in the new setting. Notably, this type of trial-and-error learning is close to impossible to impart in a lecture- or book-type format that relies on verbalized rules while glossing over the heterogeneity and complexity of everyday social interactions.

Training in use of cues. In addition to training tools that provide feedback, cultural trainers should promote use of the cues of consensus and surprise that our analysis identified. Films that show a series of locals responding to similar situations might be a good tool for training people to use consensus information. When most locals respond the same way, a cultural norm imputation is justified. Written vignettes about surprising experiences in an early expat’s experience might be an effective way to teach people to attend to the information in their own surprise and others’ surprise. When the expat is the only one surprised by a behavior, this implies a difference in norms. Teaching students how to engage in attributional reasoning as an investigative process would be far more valuable than merely warning them about a finite set of critical incidents.

Culturally mixed rather than immersive settings. Also recall that our analysis suggests that expats can learn about cultural norms through making comparisons across cultures. Research on intercultural learning in several different paradigms has found similarly that learning from cultural exposure depends on recognizing differences, drawing contrasts between cultural traditions (Cheng, Mor, Morris, & Wallen, 2011; Leung & Chiu, 2008). This aspect of cultural learning through attributions may point to a difference between the optimal conditions for learning norms through attributional reasoning and those for other forms of cultural learning such as gaining linguistic fluency. A central premise in language training programs is total immersion, hearing only the foreign language throughout the day. This helps in making the second-language associations more accessible and habitual.
However, an immersive experience of this sort does not lend itself to observing cultural differences through contrasts, so an expatriate aiming to understand the tacit rules of local behavior may find it easier to learn in a social environment that is mixed between locals and expats.

2.4.3. Social learning

Given that social learning plays a fundamental role in mastering how to handle situations and solve problems, training tools that exploit this form of learning should also be emphasized. The first step of social learning is observing patterns in another culture. Pre-departure training could assign trainees to conduct routine interactions in ethnic neighborhoods and make note of characteristic behavioral patterns. Films of expats and locals in the target culture could be shown, asking students to identify behavioral moves that they would need in their repertoire.

Whereas our suggested procedures for training attributional reasoning push trainees to analyze their observations in order to diagnose a behavior, the goal of social learning should be procedural knowledge, not declarative knowledge. Classes should involve observing a behavior and then performing that behavior. These sessions should be more like language classes or dance classes than seminars involving analysis and explanation. An instructor from the target culture could interact with students to guide them through the steps of a cultural script for routine events such as a business meeting or celebratory meal. Students could rehearse further by role playing with each other.

What expats need to learn through social learning is a basic repertoire of moves for getting through routine interactions. Students should be encouraged to imitate even if they do not understand all the nuances – to “fake it till you make it.” As many prospective expats are highly controlled and cerebral people, imitating little understood actions may feel uncomfortable, so sessions might begin with the exercises typically used at the start of acting classes to expand students’ comfort zones. Training programs targeting the behavioral dimensions of CQ have adopted some acting class pedagogy (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004). However, behavioral CQ training could be improved by emphasizing the process of social learning rather than the notion of behavioral plasticity as a general strength. Not all kinds of variation in behavior are adaptive. The goal should be selection of appropriate reference groups and role models, identification of critical behavioral moves and sequences, and then practice and rehearsal so as to internalize these behaviors as automatic habits.

2.4.4. Conditioning

Given that people can learn cultural norms from verbal descriptions of everyday situations that have occurred in another culture (Savani et al., 2014), game-like simulators of everyday interactions may work to train people through conditioning. Simulators would enable people to experience the reinforcements that their habitual behaviors or default decisions would evoke in a different cultural setting and to learn by trial and error variation of their behavior and conditioning. Research on conditioning implies the following insights about how to design intercultural conditioning training tools.

Providing immediate feedback. Research has found that for people to be able to learn through conditioning, they need to receive feedback very soon after they have selected a response; introducing even a brief delay of five seconds between participants’ response and their feedback disrupts implicit learning (Maddox, Ashby, & Bohil, 2003; Maddox, Ashby, Ing, & Pickering, 2004). Feedback delay similarly disrupted learning from our simulation of experiential intercultural learning (Savani et al., 2014). As is the case in most first-person animated simulations, training tools to teach cultural norms through conditioning should provide the feedback immediately after the trainee makes each behavioral choice.

Give brief, unambiguous feedback. Some cross-cultural training tools, such as the critical incidents method (Fiedler et al., 1971) provide participants with detailed feedback. This is useful in the context of training attributional reasoning, which is an explicit process. However, when training implicit processes, detailed feedback is not optimal. In a learning study, Maddox, Love, Glass, and Filoteo (2008) manipulated whether participants were provided with detailed feedback after each trial (e.g., “Correct, that was an X” or “No, that was a Y”) or brief feedback (e.g., “Correct” or “No”). They found that when the task required implicit processing, participants performed better when they received brief feedback than when they received lengthier feedback. Their argument is that detailed feedback triggers attempts to identify verbalizable rules that determine the optimal response. However, if the learning task does not lend itself to be solved by such rules, then detailed feedback can hinder learning. Designers of such training tools are advised to give unambiguous but brief feedback rather than detailed or nuanced feedback.

Label incidents after they are presented. In many expatriate training modules, participants are presented with lists of do’s and don’ts, actions that are appropriate in the other cultures and actions that are not. Typically in these cases, the descriptions precede the actions; participants first see the label (e.g., “Do’s”) followed by a list of actions (e.g., “Bow to an older person”). However, research has found that when learning occurs through the implicit learning system, presenting the label after participants have processed the stimuli leads to faster learning (Ashby, Maddox, & Bohil, 2002). Therefore, even very basic training tools like these would benefit by the introduction of minor changes that are informed by research.

Selecting for and developing relevant aptitudes. Evidence from the studies of expatriates on the job and students in our lab simulations of intercultural learning converge in finding that IQ does not drive success. Instead the literature indicates expatriate adjustment follows from personality traits such as extraversion, agreeableness and openness to experience and from dimensions of CQ such as cultural metacognition. It is hard to tell from these associations precisely why such attributes matter, but our lab studies begin to elucidate this: intercultural learning from feedback is fostered by higher cultural
metacognition (Morris & Savani, 2014) and by higher implicit processing ability, assessed by the artificial grammar learning task and the probabilistic classification (Savani et al., 2014). These same measures of implicit processing ability have been found to predict performance in foreign language classes, over above measures general cognitive aptitude (Kaufman et al., 2010). These dimensions of implicit aptitude and metacognition, rather than IQ, might be useful as selection criteria for deciding which of many similarly qualified candidates might be more suitable for expatriate assignments or for cultural training programs.

It also may be possible to develop implicit processing aptitudes. Although advertisements about brain training games are greatly overstated, recent evidence suggests that fluid intelligence increases through practice on difficult working memory tasks (Jaeggi, Buschkuehl, Jonides, & Perrig, 2008) and cognitive flexibility may be increased as function of playing intensive point-of-view video games (Colzato, Van Leeuwen, Van Den Wildenberg, & Hommel, 2010). Ritter et al. (2012) found that experiencing unusual events in a virtual reality simulation led to greater cognitive flexibility afterwards. Other research finds that music training improves executive functioning (Moreno et al., 2011) and that musicians have greater implicit learning performance even outside of the musical domain (Francois & Schön, 2011). Hence, it may be that many of the personal attributes that foster cultural learning can be developed, and so the training of employees should begin by fostering these upstream aptitudes.

Another task in developing implicit learning may be helping people feel comfortable muddling through decisions without explicit understanding. One possibility for increasing people’s openness to learning implicitly would be to expose them to simulated environments (e.g., complex video games) where explicit learning would be very difficult. The easier way to learn and progress in such simulated environments would be through suppressing one’s tendency to identify rules by conscious reasoning, and instead making decisions based on intuition and gut feelings. The games can be designed such that attempts to identify conscious rules are doomed to fail. To the extent that there is a similarity between such simulated environments and the actual new cultural environments that trainees are subsequently exposed to, people might generalize the notion that “trying to explicitly identify rules does not help, but keeping one’s eyes and ears open and going with one’s gut does.”

3. Using cultural knowledge

Having considered how people acquire cultural knowledge, we now turn to the question of how people utilize this knowledge. As before, we review disparate literatures relevant to this question, both basic social science and applied management research. We draw parallels, note unanswered questions, and then draw on recent work to propose some of the underlying cognitive processes. Two sections consider different uses of cultural knowledge: using knowledge as a script for acting like locals, and using it as a lens for making sense of their behavior.

3.1. Scripts for acting like locals

A person who has learned the scripts of a second culture is like a musician who expands her repertoire by learning a new style of music. Having acquired this knowledge, there are different ways to use it. For example, imagine that Susan grew up playing bluegrass music in Tennessee. Ever since childhood, she played with her family and never thought much about the choice of songs. At a wedding or a funeral, she would play the tunes that intuitively occurred to her. These automatic associations enabled her to coordinate with other bluegrass musicians, even ones she had never met before. In recent years, she studied flamenco music in Spain, and learned its songs for seasonal holidays, weddings, and the like. Now Susan lives in London and plays at events with different cultural audiences, Spanish and American among others. What determines which musical tradition Susan draws upon on a given night? Does she play what the audience knows best – flamenco for a Spanish crowd and bluegrass for Americans? Or does she do the opposite, confronting audiences with her other side? Does she mix the two traditions for a hybrid sound?

This process of drawing on two cultural repertoires to negotiate social situations and pursue goals is studied in several literatures that are rarely integrated. Sociolinguists study bicultural communities in which speakers switch codes – changing languages within the same conversation. Management researchers study expats who accommodate their workplace behaviors to local norms, examining how this affects the managers as well as locals who observe it. Both literatures suggest that switching between cultural repertoires has complex motivational antecedents and consequences. In the last decade, priming experiments on bicultural individuals has documented switching in implicit thought processes – switching between differing cultural modes of perception, decision making, and behavior. Documenting that different patterns of switching tendencies are predicted by different patterns of bicultural identity structure, this work elucidates the psychological processes that may underlie phenomena in all three literatures.

3.1.1. Bilingual code switching

Sociolinguists use the term “code switching” to refer to alternating between different languages or dialects within a given conversation (Heller, 1988). Linguistics traditionally viewed the mixing of languages as substandard speech, but as sociolinguists studied bilingual communities, they came to see code switches as purposeful responses to places and people. Places or settings sometimes require a given language, or they have features, such as the people present, that imply the appropriateness of a given language. For example, in many U.S. Latino communities, children speak Spanish at home and English at school, except at recess, when they speak Spanish or Spanglish (Reyes, 2004). This break from English language use occurs because recess is an informal time without the English-enforcing teacher.
Latino children speaking Spanish with their parents and English with their teachers can be described as convergent switching – shifting toward the language of the other people present in a situation. Convergent shifts may reflect the goal of clearer communication or may reflect social goals such as putting others at ease or ingratiating oneself. A police officer in Miami may question witnesses in Spanish so they understand the question better, or so that they feel less nervous, or to convey that he is from the Latino community, not an outsider. Giles and Byrne (1982) posited that when speakers seek greater closeness to their listener they converge toward the other in language, accent, dialect, and gesture.

The opposite case is divergent switching, which involves shifting away from other people. Just as spies switch codes when discussing highly secret information (to prevent eavesdropping), parents switch languages when discussing topics they want to keep secret from their children, such as surprise parties or Christmas presents. Aside from the pragmatic goal of keeping secrets, divergent switching can serve social goals such as distancing oneself from a person or place. If the crime witness addressed by the cop in Spanish answered back in highly formal English – “I beg your pardon, officer, is there a question you’d like me to consider?” – this would be a way of rebuffing the officer’s attempt at rapport. More generally, when a speaker adopts language, accent, dialect or gesture that contrasts with their present place or audience, they can come across as showing contempt or rejection (Gasiorek & Giles, 2012; Giles & Gasiorek, 2012).

Another reason speakers may switch between languages is to convey closeness or distance to the topic of conversation. Nelson Mandela advised that negotiators should switch to the other side’s native tongue for a more emotional influence: “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” Indeed, evidence shows that people respond more to emotional content, both behaviorally and physiologically, when they hear or read it in their mother tongue as opposed to a second language (Harris, Gleason, & Aycicegi, 2006). Speakers switch to the audience’s native language to convey a heartfelt sentiment. Conversely, when speakers want to distance themselves from a topic, they may switch to the audience’s second language in order to strike a more detached, intellectual tone. Even moral decisions are made differently as a function of native versus second language. Costa et al. (2014) found that people solving moral dilemmas in their second language exhibit less emotional processing and more utilitarian reasoning.

Emotions also influence language switching through processes that are less purposive and more reflexive. People who feel threat or stress revert to early, well-learned behaviors (Staw, Sandelands, & Dutton, 1981). The emotion overrides social motives related to people, places, and conversational subjects. In the aftermath of an accident or costly mistake, employees are likely to swear in their native language regardless of other factors.

Finally, switches occur when a given subject is easier to describe in one language than the other. In Chinese research labs, scientific discussions often switch into English because they involve concepts that everyone has a better lexicon for in the second language. Technical topics may be easier to discuss in the language of schooling (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). More briefly, bilinguals switch to a language for a particular concept if it has words or fixed expressions dedicated to the concept that the other language lacks. Sometimes, people also switch for the sake of upholding traditions, such as to recite a toast or company slogan in the original language, so that the gesture resonates with tradition.

In sum, code switching can reflect situational norms, social motives such as creating distance or closeness to an audience, emotional reflexes, convenience or tradition.

3.1.2. Behavioral accommodation

Whereas linguistic code switching occurs in interactions between members of the same bicultural community, another kind of switching occurs when newcomers or visitors to a country interact with locals – namely, accommodation of one’s behaviors to local norms. The everyday social etiquette of any given culture involves some behaviors that may be impolite or unacceptable in another culture (Gudykunst, 1983; O’Connell, Lord, & O’Connell, 1990). So adapting one’s habitual behaviors can be a way to avoid creating offense or discomfort. Expatriates do not have to know the host culture well in order to adapt some of their behaviors; even a first time traveler to Japan can learn to bow instead of hugging, kissing, or shaking hands.

The literature on accommodation has a different emphasis than that on code switching. While researchers presume it ensues when people want to get closer to their audience, little research has investigated this antecedent. Another antecedent of expat accommodation (or its opposite) that parallels the literature on code switching is stress (Oberg, 1960). Stress or anxiety is thought to interfere with the performance of accommodating one’s behavior to local norms (Weldon, Carlton, Rissman, Slobodin, & Triandis, 1975). The literature has not studied reverse accommodation, although some qualitative accounts of culture-shock describe withdrawal and polarization of behavior away from the host culture. The antecedent conditions and forms of behavioral accommodation remain under-researched.

The question that has received abundant research is the consequences of accommodation. Consistent with the idea that convergent switching serves the goal of closeness, accommodation researchers build on similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1971; Heider, 1958) to argue that expatriates get closer to locals through accommodating (Black et al., 1991). By avoiding faux pas that violate local norms, accommodators escape the negative repercussions (Earley & Ang, 2003; Osland, Bird, Delano, & Jacob, 2000; Pompitakpan, 1999). More generally, accommodation by bringing one’s behavior closer to that of one’s interactant fosters positive relationship characteristics, such as rapport, respect and trust (Leary, 1995; Montagliani & Giacalone, 1998; Schlenker & Weigold, 1992). Studies show that trust is critical to the success of intercultural negotiations (Kramer, 2010) and collaborations (Chua et al., 2012).
Nonetheless, accommodation can also evoke some negative reactions, especially when it comes across as extreme or blatant. Expats in Singapore who accommodate to the colloquialism of Singaporean English (e.g., ending sentences with ‘‘...la’’) are judged negatively by locals (Platt & Weber, 1984). Accommodation inspires distrust when it comes across as ingratiating (Jones & Wortman, 1973). Recall that the code-switching literature finds that speaking in one’s native tongue connotes more sincerity. Conversely then, adhering to another culture’s norms can appear insincere. Given that integrity is a standard for judging trustworthiness, acts of accommodation may reduce intercultural trust (see Morris, 2011).

Another concern is that accommodation may threaten locals’ social identity. Social identity theory suggests that people expect different behaviors from outgroup members than ingroup members (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Positive identifications with the ingroup are sustained through looking for valued ways in which the ingroup differs; dimensions of positive distinctiveness that support one’s positive evaluation of the ingroup. Intergroup similarity can threaten group distinctiveness (Brown, 1984). Based on the social identity argument, Francis (1991) investigated Americans’ responses to accommodation by a Japanese sales team. Japanese business norms (e.g., conservative business suits, indirect gestures, bowing) differ from American (e.g., less formal attire, direct gestures, hand shaking) in many ways. In the role of a U.S. purchasing agent, participants read about a sales presentation by Japanese visitors with different degrees of accommodation. In one of three conditions: no accommodation to American norms, moderate accommodation (e.g., less formal suits, shaking hands lightly while bowing), and extreme accommodation (e.g., informal attire, firm handshakes), American observers evaluated the Japanese visitors most positively in the moderate not the extreme condition. Pornpitakpan (1999) explored the robustness of this curvilinear effect by exposing Thais and Japanese to four levels of adaptation by visiting American managers. For Thais, attraction monotonically increased with each degree of adaptation. For Japanese, it plateaued at moderate rather than extreme adaptation. Perceived threat to social identity was measured by asking whether the visitor’s behavior infringed on the local social identity, but perceived threat was low across conditions, suggesting that it is the not the mechanism through which extreme adaptation induces disliking.

Given that extreme accommodation does not always reduce attraction and the audience’s social identity is not threatened by it, what is it that underlies negative reactions to accommodation? Thomas and Toye (1995) replicated Francis’s (1991) curvilinear effect and found that extreme accommodation was judged as uncomplimentary to the locals, perhaps because seeing foreigners mimicking one’s customs makes people feel stereotyped. Thomas and Ravlin (1995) presented video clips of the interactions between a Japanese manager and American subordinates, varying whether the manager exhibited stereotypical behaviors of the manager’s culture (Japan) or the subordinates’ culture (US). When the manager accommodated, he was perceived as more effective managerially. Nonetheless, the manager’s behavior was attributed to an attempt to fit in rather than as expressing the manager’s internal preferences, and this attribution reduced trust in the manager. The threshold for judging accommodative behaviors to be sincere efforts at connection rather than manipulative ploys likely depends on prior impressions and suspicions, which in turn may depend on past and present political conflicts between the two cultural groups. Recent work finds that it also depends on the ideology or mindset of the perceiver. Cho, Morris, and Dow (2014) found that multiculturalists (who believe cultures are categorical and independent) dislike accommodators, seeing them as betraying their heritage cultures, whereas polyculturalists (who believe cultures are overlapping and interacting) like accommodators, judging them as culturally able or adroit.

Other research on expatriate accommodation examines negative consequences for the accommodator (Molinsky, 2007). Managers may feel a threat to their identity when their personal values conflict with the behaviors demanded by the local culture (Baumeister, Shapiro, & Tice, 1985). Further, they may experience negative emotions such as embarrassment, anxiety, and guilt when acting in ways that differ from their usual habits. Extensions of this line of theorizing (Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009) applied cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) to elucidate the psychological toll of accommodation, also positing tactics through which accommodators may reduce the dissonance. Molinsky (2013a,b) recommends that accommodators perform hybrid behaviors that incorporate some local mannerisms while also maintaining some consistency with their typical behaviors. Overall, a moderate level of accommodation seems the best tack for gaining its benefits while minimizing its downsides.

Another line of research looks at the longer term effects of accommodating when abroad on creativity. One way of resolving dissonance between conflicting values is developing more complex beliefs and thought patterns; that is, greater integrative complexity (Tadmor & Tetlock, 2006). Tadmor et al. (2009) found that expatriates identified with both their home culture and their host culture (who thus face conflicts between the two value sets) are most likely to develop elevated integrative complexity. Similarly studies find that people who report having accommodated to local norms in past stays abroad do better in creative problem solving upon return (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Maddux, Adam, & Galinsky, 2010). Other studies suggest that creativity gains are more likely for individuals high in Openness and for foreign stays that were chosen rather than imposed (Cho & Morris, 2014) and under conditions that do not induce need for cognitive closure (NFCC) or existential threat (Leung & Chiu, 2010). All told, these findings suggest that creativity gains from foreign stays depends on dispositions and states that affect the expatriate’s willingness to accommodate and how much of the local culture they learn. Other research finds that drawing on this foreign knowledge for creative solutions once home depends on home country factors (Wang, 2013). Drawing on foreign knowledge is less likely if there is xenophobic sentiment, not surprisingly. It also depends
on more proximal factors such the strength of the individuals’ ties to the local professional community, their degree of workplace autonomy, and whether their colleagues have greater international experience than they do. Creative suggestions that draw from foreign ideas always involve some social risks, and returnees’ propensity to propose them depends on factors relevant to these perceived costs.

3.1.3. Bicultural frame switching

A third literature about how individuals draw on dual cultural legacies to adjust their behavior to the cultural context focuses on judgment and decision making. Bicultural individuals, who are fluent and practiced in two cultures, automatically switch between two sets of culturally associated biases in response to situational cues. Bicultural Hong Kong students exposed to images of Chinese culture, compared to those exposed to neutral images, subsequently attributed behavior to more situational social pressures, whereas those exposed to images of Western culture attributed more to internal personality dispositions (Hong et al., 2000; for replications see Hong, Benet-Martinez, Chiu, & Morris, 2003; Morris & Mok, 2011). This cultural priming effect has also been documented with other kinds of biculturals, such as the children of Greek immigrants to Holland (Verkuyten & Pouliai, 2002).

The cultural priming process affects not only social judgments but also economic decisions involving preferences associated with cultural norms. Singaporean participants exposed to Western images (Singaporean images) become more likely to choose to pay for one-day delivery instead of slower delivery, consistent with adherence to Western versus Chinese preference norms (Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005). Benjamin, Choi, and Strickland (2010) varied whether Asian-American participants were asked demographic questions about languages spoken in their family; this prime of Asian identity affected their subsequent intertemporal choices, inducing more patient preferences for larger, later payoffs rather than smaller, sooner payoffs.

Finally, just as expatriate accommodation has been linked to creativity, so too has bicultural frame switching. Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, and Lee (2008) found that biculturals higher in identity integration, who do more assimilative switching, are better at tasks that require both sets of cultural knowledge, such as designing fusion cuisine menus. Although the measures from their study cannot definitively prove the underlying process, they argued that identity integration carries an advantage in gaining simultaneous access to both pools of cultural knowledge so that they can be employed in a fusion design task.

In sum, comparing the three “switching” literatures reveals parallels and open questions. Evidence about self-defense motives in the bicultural frame switching literature suggests that it is worth testing the presumption in the two literatures that the direction of switching depends on impression management motives. Convergent and divergent switching may reflect the actors’ identity-related motives and not just their efforts to manipulate impressions. Conversely, new research questions about bicultural frame switching are suggested by research on consequences of expat accommodation. When biculturals shift in their mental frames and overt behaviors, how does this come across to the people around them? While it may increase perceived competence, would it decrease perceived integrity and thereby lower trust? Does it depend on whether the observers encode biculturals as ingroup members? Is extreme switching received better than moderate switching? Is there an emotional toll for biculturals who hold two sets of cultural values, and must often act in a way that contradicts one set of values? Is this primarily a problem for conflicted as opposed to integrated biculturals?

3.1.4. Implications for training

What insights do literatures on cultural switching provide about how to train or coach managers working in intercultural settings? In other words, when and how should managers enact the scripts or norms of a second culture? This question relates most closely to the accommodation literature, yet the findings about bilingual code switching and bicultural frame switching provide useful context.

**Aim for partial not total accommodation.** The expatriate literature clearly suggests that newcomers or visitors to a culture fare better with moderate rather than extreme accommodation, as partial accommodation accrues the benefits of avoiding *faux pas* and appearing more similar without the risks that come with total accommodation, such as appearing manipulative, inconsistent, or unfaithful to one’s cultural roots. Partial accommodation is also easier to enact and may take less of a toll. When US President Obama recently greeted the Emperor of Japan, he simultaneously shook hands and bowed, a partial but not total accommodation to Japanese etiquette.

**Practice in low-stress interactions.** We have seen that even after cultural norms are learned at a cognitive level, there are still emotional challenges of performing them in real social interactions, ranging from embarrassment at one’s imperfect performance to concerns about one’s audience’s judgments. This stress can evoke the cultural divergence response, reverting to one’s first-culture habits. As an early review of training research noted, “if the interaction is anxiety producing, then the trained subject may fall back upon old responses with a new tenacity” (Weldon et al., 1975, p. 309). Many training programs that aim to increase behavioral cultural intelligence follow a “small wins” method to maintain the trainee’s confidence. Assignments requiring linguistic, behavioral, and cognitive accommodation are structured in a series of escalating challenges, starting with the trivially easy encounters (speak, act, and think like a local in your interaction with a taxi driver), and moving on to more complex events (interacting with local waiters or shopkeepers) to real challenges at the workplace (making a presentation or running a meeting). Another virtue of this approach may be reducing anxiety.

**Retooling.** If the repertoire of behaviors learned from a culture is a toolkit that can be drawn upon, forging identity-consistent versions of these behaviors can be thought of as a process of “retooling” (Molinsky, 2013b; Swidler, 1986). When retooling, newcomers acknowledge that some aspects of local practices challenge their
personal values, grounded in their heritage culture. After appreciating this fact, the remaining question is how to deal with this conflict when adapting to local practices. Based on observation of foreign students in the U.S., Molinsky (2013b) theorized two ways people cope with internal conflicts, the instrumental approach and the integrative approach (adapted from Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In the instrumental approach, people tell themselves it is necessary for them to achieve their goals (Grandey, 2003). This often results in negative emotions, such as guilt (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999) or discomfort (Elliot & Devine, 1994). It can also harm their relationships with local people who can sense their inauthenticity (Molinsky, 2007; Molinsky, 2013a,b). On the other hand, the integrative approach seeks to understand the positive meanings behind the other culture’s practices and results in greater feelings and appearance of authenticity (Molinsky, 2013a). For example, by asking local people, managers can come to an understanding of the local cultural perspective embedded in the local behaviors. Through this learning process, people become able to enact the practice in a more considered, authentic way. After this process, managers can customize their new behaviors to their personal styles (Molinsky, 2013a,b). In the end, expatriates who feel that they selectively enact the local practices that are identity-consistent do better than their peers who feel that they are pretending to be someone else.

3.2. Lenses for understanding locals

Second-culture learners use their knowledge not only as a guide to their own behavior, but also as a guide to understanding locals. To navigate social situations, one has to use one’s cultural knowledge to anticipate how other people will behave in particular situations, interpret their behavior while it is happening, and learn from it after the fact. However, the application of cultural generalizations to individuals is not without risks. Social psychology research has long studied how stereotypes can cloud perceivers’ judgments and offend the target person. Findings from stereotype research and cultural intelligence research provide different insights about the use of generalizations in social judgment. As in the previous sections, we draw on these literatures and recent research to propose some key cognitive processes involved in effective use of cultural generalizations. We conclude by spelling out some implications for training people to use cultural generalizations that follow from our proposed processes.

3.2.1. Social psychological studies of stereotypes

Social psychologists have long focused on the negative effects of ethnic stereotypes on intergroup relations and deemed them harmful (Katz & Braly, 1933). Others contend that some stereotypes based on social categories can be accurate and lead to more accurate predictions, such as gender-based generalizations about students’ aptitude in different subjects at different ages (Jussim, Cain, Crawford, Harber, & Cohen, 2009). While social psychology research typically examines stereotypes in the context of race and gender generalizations (Devine, 1989), international management scholars argue that national culture generalizations can assist managers in coordinating with others and avoiding offense, given differences in business etiquette and styles of communication and decision making (Osland & Bird, 2006). Adler (2008) encourages the use of “helpful stereotypes” – accurate descriptions of a behavioral norm of a specific culture that can be modified based on further observations and experience. In fact, accurate generalizations about cultural differences have been associated with higher quality and more effective intercultural interactions (Li & Hong, 2001). However, people vary greatly in the extent to which they have formed helpful stereotypes. For example, individuals vary greatly in their ability to accurately predict norms across cultures, such as the typical helping behaviors in China, the U.S., and the Netherlands (Bohns et al., 2011).

An important question is what cues do individuals follow in applying a cultural generalization/stereotype to a target person? Or in using the evidence from an encounter with a target person to update the stereotype? One factor that can influence the application of stereotypes is their applicability; the extent to which the target’s appearance or initial behavior is congruent with the stereotype (Higgins & Brendl, 1995). Scholars examining expectancies further contend that individuals who behave atypically are more surprising and more memorable (Roese & Sherman, 2007), suggesting that perceivers should be less likely to make stereotype-consistent inferences when encountering incongruent targets.

Past research indicates that there are dramatic individual differences in the extent to which perceivers apply stereotypes to a target person who has incongruent attributes. Whereas prejudiced individuals discount incongruent behavioral evidence as a byproduct of situational factors and stick to stereotypes to guide their judgments (Dijksterhuis, Van Knippenberg, Kruglanski, & Schaper, 1996; Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis, & Van Knippenberg, 2003), low prejudice individuals actively search for counter-stereotypic information that can instead inform their judgments (Sherman, Stroessner, Conrey, & Azam, 2005). However, little research has identified individual differences relevant to the flexible use of stereotypes that the international business literature recommends.

3.2.2. Cultural metacognition and stereotype application

An individual difference found to be relevant to sensitive use of cultural knowledge is cultural metacognition. Individuals higher in cultural metacognition develop affective trust in their cross-cultural interactions and relationships, which pays off in the form of better creative collaboration (Chua et al., 2012). Theorists of metacognition (Klafehn, Banerjee, & Chiu, 2008) propose that it promotes (a) contextualized thinking (i.e., heightened sensitivity to how a target person is affected by his or her situation) and (b) cognitive flexibility (i.e., discriminative application of schemas and scripts). Metacognition is epistemic self-evaluation, which in this context means monitoring of the applicability of one’s preconceptions rather than blindly imposing them (Van Dyne et al., 2012). Studies find that individuals high in cultural metacognition are more likely to apply valid generalizations about
cultural norms to make judgments and decisions in intercultural negotiations with counterparts described as culturally traditional (Mor, Morris, & Joh, 2013).

In recent research, we proposed that higher cultural metacognition would be associated with contingent application of generalizations/stereotypes (i.e., application when a target’s initial behavior is stereotype-congruent but not otherwise). That is, a target person from a group assumed to communicate very directly would be categorized and treated that way if the target’s initial behavior was direct but not if it were indirect. And, higher cultural metacognition would be associated with more imposition of cultural generalizations onto congruent targets and less onto noncongruent targets. Consistent with this congruence contingency hypothesis, Mor and Morris (2013) found that participants who had been exposed to a cultural generalization about an unfamiliar cultural group were more likely to judge a target in line with the generalization if the target’s initial behavior was consistent, and less likely if the behavior was inconsistent. The same congruence contingency was seen in the pattern of how those higher in cultural metacognition updated their belief about the generalization after the interaction and in how they formed expectations about a novel target person from the group.

3.2.3. Implications for training

Training managers to flexibly use their knowledge to interpret people from other cultures is important, because many of the locals involved in international business are not typical locals with stereotype-congruent habits (Earley & Peterson, 2004). Given that cultural metacognition is associated with adaptive, flexible use of generalizations in social perception (and with effective trust development and collaboration), organizations would do well to try to develop this proclivity in their managers who take on international assignments, by giving them relevant trainings and experiences. Just because there are reliable individual differences on this dimension does not mean that it is not malleable. Even personality traits are somewhat malleable as a function of experience, for example studying abroad is associated with increases in Openness and Agreeableness and decreased Neuroticism (Zimmermann & Neyer, 2013). Challenging study abroad experiences may have curvilinear effects on self-ratings of cognitive and metacognitive cultural strength — at first reducing their self-estimates and eventually increasing them.

Cultural intelligence theorists have speculated that cultural metacognition may be fostered by some training strategies that are already used; for example attributional assimilators may have their benefits in part by making trainees aware that some of their confident judgments are wrong (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Thomas, 2009). Erez et al. (2013) found that a program requiring long-term collaborative work on culturally diverse virtual teams increased cultural intelligence as well as global identity, so long as the team had a positive dynamic. Past research found that a dyad’s success was driven by the member with the higher level of cultural metacognition (Chua et al., 2012), which suggests that it may be helpful to compose teams with at least one person high on cultural metacognition who can bring about a positive interaction and teach others by example.

Increasingly, cultural researchers of metacognition distinguish its subcomponents, just as do researchers of metacognition in social and educational psychology. One framework distinguishes awareness, planning, and checking (Van Dyne et al., 2012). A standard method of training for increased awareness is to give trainee’s assessment feedback. The current self-report instruments for cultural metacognition are unlikely to work for this purpose, as people don’t know what they don’t know — a high self-estimate can be a sign of low metacognitive awareness. Peer ratings are useful for personality feedback but it is hard for peers to gauge one’s metacognitive habits. Developing objective performance measures may be more useful. Training people to be less overconfident is a standard part of decision making classes, and it can be done by showing people that their confidence ratings are not calibrated to their objective accuracy levels.

As for planning, teaching a person how to learn what they need to know about new cultural settings may be the most valuable lesson that cultural training can provide. While a firm cannot teach managers about all the world’s cultures, they can inform managers about better and worse ways to learn about a new culture. Managers should be directed away from hackneyed tourist guides and dusty ethnographies to continually updated websites. They can learn not to always ask locals about the local culture, but instead to ask seasoned expatriates who are more likely to have noticed and analyzed its patterns. Asking a more seasoned colleague to provide feedback about one’s intercultural effectiveness is another good tip for effective learning.

As for checking, managers may do well to have checklist of background information that they collect about a counterpart before an upcoming meeting. While the person may carry a Japanese passport and even work for a Japanese company, if he went to high school in Amsterdam and university in the UK, and if he’s worked mostly in LA ever since, he most likely does not operate according to traditional Japanese social norms, at least not when interacting with a Westerner. The checking process should continue upon meeting the person: What setting does he choose for the meeting? How is he dressed? What topics does he bring up to break the ice? All of these are cues to cultural habits and cultural identity, hence to how he should be interpreted and how he should be treated. If he is a traditional Japanese businessperson, then it will be helpful to interpret his actions through the lens of what you know about Japanese business etiquette. If his actions are incongruent with traditional Japanese norms, then it would be a mistake — it would lead to erroneous conclusions and possibly would give offense. These are the kinds of clues that a good salesperson, spy or journalist would attend to, and managers can be trained to do the same.

All this said, we must remember that much of metacognitive error monitoring and control happens nonconsciously. While a checklist won’t help with implicit metacognition, it may be that habits of implicit error
monitoring and control could be trained through games. Variations of the Savani et al. (2014) epart learning simulator could be constructed with characters from different cultural backgrounds and interactions that are complex enough to defy simple rule-like solutions and that change over time, in the way that real cultural norms change at the start of a holiday such as Ramadan or with a life transition such as marriage. This sort of game would train people to develop hypotheses or generalizations, but at the same time to check and update these assumptions.

4. Conclusion

This paper reviews recent research relevant to learning and gaining proficiency in a new culture, a challenge that more and more managers face everyday. This involves acquiring knowledge of the norms of the other culture and then knowing how best to use this knowledge as a guide to one's own behavior and as a lens for interpreting locals' behavior.

With regard to acquiring knowledge of cultural norms, a tension running through the literatures is the difference between replacement models of cultural learning (Gans' model of "straight line" assimilation or Gudykunst and Kim's call for deculturation) versus supplement models (Berry's notion of integration or Hong et al.'s model of bicultural frame switching). By analyzing underlying cognitive processes, we have delineated some kinds of cultural learning that may operate in a replacement manner (changing which implicit associations are most accessible) and some kinds that operate in a supplemental manner (learning the gestures of a greeting ritual).

In the next section on learning processes, we proposed a four-fold taxonomy of major learning processes involved in learning another culture: studying, attributional reasoning, social learning, and conditioning. Whereas the first two are explicit, conscious learning processes, the latter two are largely implicit and non-conscious. In the recent research on cultural learning from conditioning, striking parallels have emerged to the findings from the longstanding literature on expatriate adjustment, namely that IQ is not a key driver whereas other aptitudes more relevant to procedural knowledge and social information processing do predict who learns in the laboratory or adjusts in the field. As a result, the widespread presumption that IQ should be a key basis for selecting personnel for the state department, intelligence agencies and international business assignments (Harvey & Novicevic, 2001) may be based on a misconception of the primary learning processes involved in acquiring knowledge of another culture's norms.

The final sections reviewed evidence relevant to the question of how can expatriates best use their knowledge of another culture, once they have acquired it. A key issue is whether they should use their knowledge as scripts to guide their own behavior, so that they are acting like locals. Unlike Augustine, who could simply do as Romans do when in Rome, the evidence from studies of reactions to managers who accommodate their behavior to local norms is decidedly more mixed. The extreme accommodation that worked for Augustine can give rise to unwanted outcomes when managers use it in a national culture appreciably different from their own, including being judged as untrustworthy, manipulative, and disloyal to one's roots, as well as personally feeling dissonance and inauthenticity. We therefore developed recommendations for training managers in moderate forms of accommodation that feel identity-consistent and at the same time contribute to a more successful adaptation to life abroad. Likewise, research on using cultural knowledge as a lens for interpreting locals similarly calls for a moderate, flexible approach. Drawing inferences about a target person from cultural group generalizations can help interactions to the extent that the target's habits are shaped by cultural traditions, but it can lead to error and frayed relationships otherwise. We suggest ways that expatriates can develop habits of metacognitively monitoring the applicability of their cultural assumptions to the persons they interact with. Metacognitive awareness of one's cultural assumptions and inferences is a key not only to learning the norms of another culture but also to effectively deploying this knowledge in social interactions.

References


