

Reviewing intercultural videos:

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A review of...

Global Scenarios series

- "The multicultural meeting"
- "The virtual team"
- "Managing across cultures"
- "The Middle East"

Global One series

- "Cross-cultural understanding"
- "Intercultural communicating"
- "International negotiating"

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Despite the acceleration of global collaboration, monocultural training groups are becoming more and more common in many client systems due to financial constraints on travel for training. Unfortunately this provides trainers with seminar groups where no one is able to speak in person for other cultures that the participants need to interact with. In such groups it becomes difficult to challenge mainstream national or organizational assumptions. As a result, intercultural trainers, coaches and consultants are often in search of useful video programs and other tools and simulations that can make the training more authentic.

Videos can assist us here, but only partially. When well done they can bring us a step closer to bridging some gaps of understanding. Since video can now also be streamed, it can provide a quick overview of some of the potentially critical cultural challenges that are likely to appear when an organization suddenly faces an immediate need for cross border savvy. On the other hand, although videos help us see some of how others think and behave, we cannot really feel the difference of their presence nor interact with them to process the real situations and feelings we find ourselves in when working across cultures.

The Internet has made it possible to have intercultural videos on demand. It permits us to preview materials online so we can purchase the right stuff. The need is great. Lately I have had so many requests from fellow professionals asking what intercultural videos are available that I decided to have a more systematic look at what is currently being offered. My first stop, reported here, was Big World Media (<http://www.bigworldmedia.com>). I reviewed both their *Global Scenarios* and *Global One* series of training videos online. From their website you can request a preview, then Big World sends you a key code good for a limited period of time that lets you access and view their offerings.

The *Global One* series is described as "sophisticated documentaries for expert learning." Given the content and style of these videos, Big World's target market seems almost exclusively US businesspeople or educational programs in management. The focus and flavor is distinctly pitched to a US managerial culture. The *Global One* series features CEOs, high level business people and culture experts who walk us through the subject matter. Intercultural boilerplate is delivered by talking heads interspersed with short illustrative examples. It is familiar stuff to those of us in the field—the material, situations and advice that we commonly find in books, tip sheets, lectures, etc.

Saying this is not to fault the authors for what they are trying to do. These videos are professionally done and probably a good choice over less rich media if these basics are what one wants to present and if the task cannot be done live. Content is delivered at a level that a non-professional can understand. The videos provide a quick introduction to how cultural differences affect work, communication, and negotiation behavior and how they threaten disaster if not managed. Using these presentations in the classroom or training room would probably be most indicated where there is no professional at hand and there is an immediate need. Of the three videos, the "International Negotiation" seemed the most practical and useful, probably because negotiations tend to be a special playing field where the task of creating agreement is highly focused on certain objectives by both sides and there is an urgent and clear need to succeed.

The *Global One* videos can be paused and discussed at various points if one chooses to do so. There is an emphasis on perceiving and managing difference, but not much insight into the key values or background of diverse groups. USians need to be quickly and pragmatically schooled in the fact that their sense of time is a bit too quick and pragmatic for much of the world. If deeper learning and skill building is to occur, a talented and culturally competent trainer would be required to facilitate the use of these videos, particularly in a monocultural environment

The *Global Scenarios* series, described as "brief dramatizations for lively interaction and reflection" is far more interesting from a training perspective because the collection of dramatizations does just what the description says. The scenarios invite questioning, interaction and comparison of experiences. This is the stuff that trainers need, particularly when information cannot be produced by the participants through stories or role plays or the use of actors in the training room. The lead performers in this series (all USians with the one exception of a Brit behaving a great deal like a USian) come to grips with colleagues from other cultures in practical intercultural work situations, e.g., working virtually, communicating, and negotiating with people in other cultural contexts.

The problem formulation in both series of videos is largely done with US logic. This is at least in part inevitable, not just because US managers are the obvious target users, but also because of the need to use US English even when the script involves entering the mind of other kinds of people. This is not to say that others, particularly in overseas US businesses and client systems, might not profit from the viewing and discussing these videos. They can be very useful, particularly if the impact of the presentation as well as the content itself is also discussed as form of cultural expression. Streamed video is not e-learning per se, but could become part of it if carefully structured and pieced out, discussed and facilitated in cogent doses.

There are a few moments that strike one as heavily ethnocentric. For example, "Asian" communication is described as, "What they say is not exactly what they mean." This is at best inaccurate, since the division of context from words and meaning is not a problem of the "Asians" but a product of peculiar mental processes found commonly in the US and in other kindred cultures.

Fresh studies and new methodologies are desperately needed in the intercultural field. Future developments must take into account identity formation as well as clear articulation of the role of power and the distribution of resources in cross cultural relations. Perhaps it is the US sense of speed and "wanting it now" that prevents these issues from surfacing more clearly or at all. Both as professionals and collaborators we need to know how to get deeper into the workings of each others' minds. There is a strong cry for more media that help us take multiple perspectives on intercultural situations. We need alternative views of both ourselves and of "the other." The *Global Scenarios* series makes a start in this direction, showing at least a few relatively simple, though not simplistic insights into what might go on for the other and a few ways of bridging the differences.

I am grateful for these efforts the authors and producers of these videos have made, but also very impatient to find pursue the direction that leads to the next level of intercultural teaching tools, learning and competence.