

INTRODUCTION

- b) Some of the recent research on intercultural competence (i.e. during the past decade) indicates more interest in studying the contextual and organizational factors than in identifying traits associated with intercultural competence. There has always been debate among experts and managers of international projects (particularly in the field of development) as to the relative importance of the individual versus the environment and organizational factors in determining the success of assignments. In the early years, individual traits were emphasized. More recently the focus has shifted to situational factors, partly as a result of the limited success researchers have had in trying to predict intercultural outcomes based on assessment of individual traits.

This intercultural effectiveness profile is a beginning, a work in progress, that will benefit from future improvement.

We do not attempt to resolve this debate here, but we believe that the success of international projects depends on all three of the following key factors:

- the organizational aspect (i.e. how well the international assignment is defined, organized, supplied and managed);
- the environment (i.e. how congenial the economic, social and political environment is to achieving the goals of the assignment); and
- the personal qualities and intercultural skills of the individuals involved.

While all three of these components are important, the aim of this intercultural effectiveness profile has been to focus on the third element – the personal qualities of individuals. Focusing on this component can lead to better selection, training, and performance evaluation.

In sum, although the skills of the individuals do not guarantee success, without these skills overall success of international and intercultural projects or assignments will rarely, if ever, be achieved. They are a necessary condition of success.