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ABSTRACT
        This report provides culture-specific information about Cape
Breton Island in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada, and describes a
communication skills training model that complements its cultural foundation.
Data in the report are based on the researcher's experience, on interviews
with several trainers and directors of training, and on the literature. The
report notes that because Cape Breton is essentially a working class area
some of the training strategies might also be applied to other working class
venues with similar values. Divided into two sections, the report's first
part is an analysis of Cape Breton's cultural uniqueness, while the second
part contains a brief overview of an experiential learning model that has
been used successfully within the values and biases of the Cape Breton
culture. Next are specific examples of trainer characteristics and
facilitation strategies that foster successful communication workshops. The
report points out that the experiential learning lab model is based on a
model used in the Department of Communication at the University College of
Cape Breton. (Contains 17 references.) (NKA)

TRAINING CORPORATE OUTSIDERS: DOING IT THE CAPE BRETON WAY

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TRAINING CORPORATE OUTSIDERS: DOING IT THE CAPE BRETON WAY

> Moving to Cape Breton is like finding yourself in the middle of
> one big family gathering - you're welcomed with open arms,
> enthusiastically entertained, but as an outsider you're at a bit of a
> loss at first trying to penetrate the language, the customs, the long-
> shared history, and all the other things that bring Cape Bretoners
> even closer together than small town neighbours.
>
> (Rendall, 1996, p. 191)

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Baughman (1993) writes that, "The increased technology in communication, financial
transfers, and product transport has allowed industries to manage a multitude of functions in
distant locations" (p. 98). Companies which were once content to operate in a few foreign
countries are now viewing the marketplace from a global perspective. In the wake of this
movement toward globalization, organizations have learned to conform to the cultural values and
norms of their offshore subsidiaries. That is, what works in domestic headquarters may be
modified to fit the policies, environment, and culture of foreign sites.

This matter not only affects managerial and production practices, but is pertinent to training
and development as well. Communication training models, programs, and facilitation strategies
must also be adapted to local standards if they are to be effective because, as Trompennars
(1994) states, "In every culture in the world such phenomena as authority, bureaucracy,
creativity, good fellowship, verification, and accountability are experienced in different ways
(p.4). Therefore, it is useful for communication trainers and consultants to cultivate their
multicultural and intercultural awareness. In addition to attaining culture-general information,
a grounding in culture-specific knowledge can enhance communication specialists' ability to

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design relevant programs that will be embraced by trainees.

The goal of this work is to provide culture-specific information about Cape Breton Island in the province of Nova Scotia, Canada, and to describe a communication skills training model that complements its cultural foundation. Data for this report are based on the author's lived experience, on interviews with several trainers and directors of training, and on the literature. Because Cape Breton is essentially a working class area, some of the training strategies might also be applied to other working class venues with similar values.

This work is divided into two sections. In the first is an analysis of Cape Breton's cultural uniqueness. The second contains a brief overview of an experiential learning model that has been used successfully within the values and biases of the Cape Breton culture. This is followed by specific examples of trainer characteristics and facilitation strategies that foster successful communication workshops. First, though, is a snapshot of Cape Breton.

Cape Breton Island has a total population of 158,271 (Statistics Canada, 1998). The recent amalgamation in 1995 of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality makes Cape Breton county (one of 4 on the island) the third largest metropolitan area in Atlantic Canada with a population of 117,900. Although Cape Bretoners once supported themselves through natural resource-based industries like coal mining, steel making, and fishing, Cape Breton is now experiencing a period of economic diversity. Knowledge-based and high tech businesses are being formed and supported by various community and economic development agencies. "The information technology sector in Cape Breton is a $24 million industry providing employment for 800 people" (Cape Embraces," 1998). The Cape Breton cultural industry is also thriving, with Cape Breton talent being one of its biggest exports.

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CAPE BRETON'S CULTURAL UNIQUENESS

To portray Cape Breton's cultural uniqueness, eight themes, as marked by Brislin and Yoshida (1994) are examined. While Brislin and Yoshida use these topics to determine what trainees in intercultural communication programs need to learn, they also provide a guideline to characterize the idiosyncrasies of a culture. The themes consist of hierarchies (class and status), importance of the group and importance of the individual, language, roles, rituals and superstitions, time and space, values, and work.

Work

Structural unemployment results from a major shift in industry. This has occurred in Cape Breton in the last thirty years. Its three primary resource industries (coal mining, fishing, and steel production) each suffered a major decline. A dwindling market for coal and steel, and depletion of the fish stocks has resulted in an official unemployment rate of 25% - one in four people have no work. Employment insurance (an employer/employee paid, government run, insurance plan) has become of way of life for many. Seasonal workers focus their energies on obtaining enough work to guarantee employment insurance claims, otherwise they face having to apply for welfare or "social assistance". To have fishers give up a share of a sale to someone who requires additional work hours in order to qualify for employment benefits is not uncommon. As a result of the employment shift, attitudes toward unemployment have changed. For instance, I think that people are less likely to define themselves through their work. They are forced to look to other aspects of their lives for fulfilment - their families, hobbies,

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affiliations, and so forth. Many displaced workers have furthered their education or tried their hand as entrepreneurs. To address the unemployment problems in Cape Breton, federal and provincial governments have invested heavily in make-work projects that have done little to create economic stability or long term employment opportunities. Instead, people have come to rely on and expect intervention, which has dampened the entrepreneurial spirit. In recent years there has been a move to create island-based businesses and children learn entrepreneurial skills in school. The island is presently promoted as a high tech information centre, a tourist attraction, and a crime-free home for retirees.

The lack of work has resulted in a population decline as young, skilled, university-educated people seek employment elsewhere. This has a devastating effect on a culture which values families and the easy going lifestyle of the island. Many people hate to leave and this fact is lamented in local song and theatre.

It is impossible to talk about Cape Breton and work without mentioning the labour unrest that occurred during the 1920's. "The decade saw numerous strikes in the coal industry and sharp class conflict; a culture of resistance amongst coal miners resulted from the workers' struggle with industrial capitalists. ...there were at least 58 strikes in the Sydney coal fields between 1920 and 1925" (MacKinnon, 1996, p. 146). Note that miners were not striking for wage increases, but to prevent a cut in wages. At one point the government of Nova Scotia formed a mounted police brigade. William Davis, a young miner, was shot dead and women, children, as well as the strikers were harassed by little more than a band of thugs hired off the wharves of Halifax. The legacy of this and other incidents still permeates the culture as Cape Bretoners distrust management (and outsiders), and mainlanders see Cape Breton as a bad labour

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risk area. In fact, statistics show that "the average number of strikes and lockouts in Cape Breton is significantly lower than in other (areas of the) Atlantic Canadian provinces" (Setting The Record," 1998).

Values

Above all, Cape Bretoners value family, and newcomers to the area immediately sense this familial commitment. For example, a colleague of mine, who also taught in Ohio, routinely uses an ice-breaker requiring his students to explain what they would do if they won a million dollars. He related that while students at Ohio University typically list their proposed purchases, Cape Breton students first describe how they will provide for their families.

Although Cape Bretoners are friendly and open, their social interactions can centre exclusively around their large, extended families and long-time friends. Newcomers tend to befriend one another. Families not only meet social needs, they, like in any small town, are expected to help out when necessary. For example, if someone's "hot water heater goes" (malfunctions), it is not the plumber who is called, but rather the father, uncle, nephew, daughter, or whoever has the know-how to fix it. People pitch in.

Cape Bretoners also enjoy, appreciate, and make music. They are an inordinately musically-talented people and most families have several members who play, by ear (without needing to read musical notes), a variety of musical instruments. Visitors to the island are amazed at the calibre of local talent and you are likely to find live musical interaction, as opposed to performances, at most social events. Everyone joins in to take their turns with the available instruments or to sing their rendition of a favourite song, often supported by spontaneous

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harmony lines from the many different voices around the room.

And while Cape Bretoners play and enjoy all musical genres, it is the recent resurgence of Celtic music that has put Cape Breton performers (particularly from rural Cape Breton) on the map. Singers such as Rita MacNeil and The Rankin Family, or fiddlers like Ashley MacIsaac and Natalie MacMaster have all performed around the world. Rita MacNeil hosted a national television variety show. Rural Cape Breton is a haven for traditional round-and-square dances where both local and internationally known fiddlers play in hot, crowded, Saturday-night church halls.

Cape Bretoners also value the beauty and serenity of the land. Sulliman MacPherson and Corbin (1996) examined oral and written narratives to learn how Cape Bretoners think of themselves. Included was a love for the land and an appreciation for a free and peaceful country (p. 236). It is little wonder that Cape Bretoners have a fine regard for nature, Cape Breton was ranked in *Traveller Magazine* (November, 1994) as the fourth most beautiful island in the world! The love of nature is played out by the fact that camping, hiking, or heading for summer cottages have been and continue to be popular pursuits. People like to commune with nature and engage in seasonal outdoor activities that bring them in touch with the island's beautiful land and seascapes.

Finally, Cape Bretoners value humour and the laid-back, often informal interactional style of the island. These are discussed in an upcoming section.

Time And Space

Given the interrelationship between time and values, Cape Bretoners are presumed to spend periods with their families, and are expected to drop in on, or at least call, a variety of relatives when visiting Cape Breton. Cape Bretoners also value social and down time.

Because of the relatively small population, there is plenty of space in Cape Breton. Therefore, many Cape Bretoners hope to own a small piece of the island. Many have summer cottages, camp sites, or trailers which serve as retreats and holiday destinations.

Language

Language creates reality as it develops and maintains cultural values. Cape Bretoners "play" with the language, make puns, and create good natured humour. Quick wit is appreciated, even at the listener's expense, for it can also serve as a form of verbal affection. For example, many years ago my sister and I visited an uncle and announced our arrival by saying that the two cutest girls in Cape Breton were there to see him. As if on cue, he retorted, "Well move out of the way and show them in." Or, after getting my long hair curled, I asked my husband and friend what they thought. Without skipping a beat, Ellison, the friend, quipped, "Well, you could take them to small claims court." Waiting in any line in Cape Breton can be very entertaining as people spit out humorous, situational one-liners, each building on the previous ones to create intricate, fascinatingly funny, fantasy chains. They also use colourful langauge. This was depicted in *The Rise and Follies of Cape Breton Island*, a theatre production which promoted and exaggerated stereotypical versions of the cultural nuances. In one scene, a husband asks his wife to pass him something and she replies in a sharp, sarcastic tone, "Is the

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piano tied to your arse dear?" You'll find too that Cape Bretoners a good story tellers and weave intricate tales, exaggerating the facts for the story's sake.

Everyday language is informal and it is not uncommon to be addressed as *dear* or *sweetheart*. Westhaver (1996) suggests that, "Terms of endearment act to narrow social distances between people and break down class barriers, thus helping to initiate and strengthen friendships" (p. 94-95). Of late, customer service workers are being discouraged by their employers from using such nonprofessional colloquialisms.

Another feature of language in Cape Breton is the habitual use of nicknames. "... because of the oral nature of nicknames, one cannot claim that nicknames are more numerous in Cape Breton than in other areas or cultures. At the same time, however, evidence indicates that the practice of nicknaming is a lively and important oral tradition in Cape Breton that reflects the cultural values and local history of the various communities" (Davey & MacKinnon, 1996, p. 197-198). Nicknames are built around family ties (Derrick Big Angus, the grandson of Big Angus), alliterations (Beer Bottle), physical characteristics (Spotty Steward who had a growth on his eye) and so forth (Davey & MacKinnon, 1996).

As a whole, Cape Bretoners keep up with world events, are politically astute, and take an interest in local, provincial, and federal politics. As a result, they can be opinionated. At the same time, however, the language somehow conveys to Cape Bretoners that they should not brag, should not think too highly of themselves, or be too boastful. This can result in negative self-concepts and low self-esteem, particularly as they are subjected to mainland stereotypes of the lazy, drinking, unemployed Cape Bretoner, looking for handouts from the government. The latest adage bandied about by Cape Bretoners themselves is that the best and the brightest leave.

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Finally, the presence of the Gaelic language, brought by the Scottish immigrants in the early eighteen hundreds also influences Cape Breton speech. As recently as two generations ago, Gaelic was the first language of many rural Cape Bretoners and a concerted effort has been made in the last twenty years to preserve and revive the language. Cape Breton expressions such as, "I'll be after seeing you" or "I'll be after going now" evolved from the structure of the Gaelic language.

Importance Of The Group And Importance Of The Individual

Cape Bretoners see the importance of the group as beneficial to the individual. Allegiance to a group can garner personal gain for the individual. For example, there is an active cooperative movement which has helped provide islanders with affordable housing, food, and fuel. In recent years various workers' coops have been organized. When a major food chain wanted to close a medium-sized grocery story in the village of Saint Peters, the workers took over the ownership. The strength of union support in Cape Breton offers another example of individuals working together to attain personal gain for everyone.

Rituals and Superstitions

There are several Cape Breton rituals or traditions that ought to be mentioned. For one, passers-by nonverbally, and even verbally, greet one another. In many instances general comments or jokes are made. On quiet county roads, drivers extend a wave to one another or to hikers along the way. Cape Bretoners still drop in, unannounced, for visits and when they do, someone will "put on the tea pot." Strong, steeped tea, a snack, or an alcoholic beverage

are offered.

Death is also ritualized and "even young people read the obituaries as the old people weave together entire family histories from just one name" (Rolls, 1996, p. 142). Although three-day wakes have been reduced to two, and "no visitation" is becoming more common, wakes are still well attended. Bereaved families are showered with food, money, and condolences. The after funeral gatherings often progress into the night, fuelled by music, song, liquor and food as family and friends recount anecdotes about the deceased. In the Mi'Kmaq communities the remains are still laid out at home and the funeral is followed by an auction to help defray funeral costs.

Another *institution* in Cape Breton is playing the card game *Tarabish*, which is thought to to have originated in Italy. Passed on through oral tradition, the game is integral to Cape Breton's popular culture. There is even an annual World Tarabish Tournament. Akin to Bridge, it is considered *the* game, one of wit, skill, "shrewdness, finesse, and perhaps even a sense of folly" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 57). Some Cape Bretoners take the rules so seriously that longstanding friendships have been know to dissolve over differences.

Roles

Because so many fishers, miners, and steel workers are without employment, the changing sex roles may have been somewhat accelerated. Many women are the major breadwinners, as exemplified in the line of one small child, Jessie, who said to her working mother: "Why don't you stay home today and be the daddy?" However, women are still responsible for household chores.

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The church has also played a major role in the Cape Breton culture. Predominately a Catholic area, priests have had a powerful influence in social, political, and family arenas.

Hierarchies (Class And Status)

Brislin and Yoshida (1994) write that, "Hierarchies exist in every culture. What differs when examining societies cross-culturally is that the level of hierarchy, the manner in which it is shown, and its desirability vary" (p. 53). They go on to explain that while there are hierarchial differences among people in the United States, it is appropriate not to accentuate the fact. I think this stance is even further exaggerated in Cape Breton. Because of strong family ties, Cape Bretoners socialize across hierarchial levels. At parties you might find lawyers, professors, social activists, labourers, writers, artists, teachers, electricians, or unemployed individuals all interacting and enjoying one another. "Clearly, great material wealth is not evident in Cape breton and those blessed with affluence mingle easily with the less fortunate. These conventions promote a blending of social classes in Cape Breton that resonates with the value that is placed on family and relationships" (Rolls, 1996, p. 143).

AN EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING MODEL FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS TRAINING

The Model

Cohen and Sovet (1989) refer to experiential learning as changes in judgment, attitude, or skills acquired through direct participation in a series of events. Such a training format serves the cultural dimensions of Cape Bretoners. Given their oral enrichment and an interactional

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style that includes stories, myths, and tales, a participatory model grants trainees collaboration in content and application, and thus learning. While experiential learning is broadly applied in adult education and its benefits widely documented, this particular model features the development of the cognitive, affective, and behaviourial dimensions of trainees. Based on the experiential learning lab model used in the Department of Communication at the University College of Cape Breton, the UCCB model is considered by students to be an enjoyable one. They report that they gain insight into their communication strengths and weaknesses, and became more sensitive communicators (Rolls, 1993). The model also appeals to the training needs of both females and males (Rolls, 1997).

While some experiential learning training models emphasize the behaviourial dimension and allow learners to process information cognitively and affectively at their own rate, this model integrates the three components into each workshop. To help trainees understand new theoretical positions, or to introduce skill building techniques (the cognitive dimension), material is presented in a lecture/discussion format which requires involvement. To meet the affective ingredient, trainers elicit from participants their emotional reactions to the topic of discussion. The behaviourial element calls for actual practice in a particular communication skill, or it provides discussion/games that bring more abstract concepts to life. For example, if I want to increase participants' awareness of organizational causes of conflict and possible ways to deal with it, then the cognitive, affective, and behaviourial aspects of the situation might be examined in the following manner: Participants could be asked to work in small groups to list the kinds of things that cause them conflict, and to provide examples of how they might address the problems. After an allotted discussion time, learners share their responses with the entire group.

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The discussion reinforces the cognitive development (they generate strategies) and the affective responses (they express how they feel in such situations). After this discussion, I can refer to a list of typical causes of organizational conflict and ask the workshop participants to identify where their conflicts fit in the list (the cognitive aspect). We can then move on to how one might handle the conflict, and engage in role playing exercises (the behaviourial segment) to reinforce the cognitive and affective mastery.

This model has been adapted for use with clerical staffs, managers, nurses, personal care workers, service industry workers, kitchen staffs, receptionists, technicians, linespeople, team leaders, information processors, finance managers, project developers, et cetera in organizations such as homes for continuous care, community resource centres, unions, and provincial and federal government agencies. The model can be used for training in professional speaking, interview techniques, or problem solving. It works for interpersonal communication skill building which focuses on topics such as self-concept, listening, nonverbal communication, language (saying what you mean), dealing with conflict, increasing interpersonal sensitivities, creating supportive climates, and so forth. It has worked with institutional cross sections of learners who possess varied experiences and educational backgrounds. Because of its interactive nature, it works best with groups of 25 or less.

Contextualizing the Model

To apply the model to training programs in Cape Breton, facilitators must adopt a transactional, collaborative approach and share power with participants. From this perspective, communication theories and strategies can more fittingly be applied to the groups' individual work settings. Generating a warm, safe communication climate in which participants feel

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comfortable to disclose information about themselves, or their work setting, is integral to the model's success. My experience is that when participants disclose their feelings, they demonstrate to themselves and others the need for the new communication behaviour. Whether it be learning listening skills, or becoming aware of language limitations, discussion of individual responses can heighten the motivation to learn more about the topic (the cognitive aspect) and how specifically to respond (the behaviourial dimension). Time spent in initial, ice-breaking activities helps to create such a learning climate. Because the culture is unpretentious, the training works best when the setting is informal. Once the primary tension between and among the trainer and trainees has been reduced, the work can begin. Clients begin to accept the trainer as "one of them" but one with the expertise to help them improve their work and home lives.

To develop trust in Cape Breton, trainers must be aware of the inherent distrust that is held for management. Because communication consultants are generally hired by management, they too become suspect. To remedy this, trainers can convey their nonpartisan posture to attendants. I am generally asked, "Who do you report to?" or "What will happen as a result of this training?" Further, given the network of family and friends in the area, at least one relative, colleague, or acquaintance may be in attendance. Trainers must balance confidence in their role with the appropriate recognition for the relationship.

On a more positive note, Cape Breton trainers are afforded a "we verses them" position; that is, we are able to direct behaviour in a way that would not be acceptable from an outsider. For example, in training people how to take an assertive approach to conflict, I generally examine the other common tactics - nonassertive behaviour, aggressive behaviour, and passive

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aggressive behaviour. Passive aggressive behaviours are transmitted through sarcasm, jokes, nonverbal displays such as rolling the eyes, or hints. Cape Bretoners are very passive aggressive, and often use the joke as a form of confrontation. But while it may be funny, it may also do little to solve the problem or to contribute to the interpersonal development of the relationship. Because of my Cape Breton roots, and appreciation for humour, I am able to simultaneously appreciate and correct this behaviour during workshops.

Family can also be used to further create trust and connections within the group. At a recent workshop two participants from the other side of the island arrived late for the session. Having started about fifteen to twenty minutes earlier, groups had to be rearranged to accommodate the newcomers. Entering a session where you do not know the facilitator or the other group members is difficult and their awkwardness was evident in their nonverbal communication. I too was a little ill at ease as I had no rapport with them, and their body language seemed less than open. To reduce the tension, I joined the group, talked about their trip, and finally asked if they knew a cousin of mine who lived in the area, and they did. That was it; the tension was reduced and they quickly integrated into the group.

To conform to language norms, trainers should be comfortable with humour and encouraging its inclusion in the sessions can build an enjoyable learning experience for all. Trainees' ability to tell stories also adds greatly to sessions and helps the trainer to demonstrate how seemingly dry theoretical perspectives are actually rich, poignant, daily interactions.

So as not to offend trainees, consultants in Cape Breton should refrain from using stereotypical Cape Breton images as examples. This is insulting and turns trainees off. They might also be aware of the job insecurity that exists and to refrain from asking, "What does your

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husband do?" Given the interrelation between a person's family life and work life, to insert family-centred as well as work-centred interpersonal communication examples can be effective. Also, organizations must be sensitive to the major role that families play. One director of training informed me that she left a lucrative position because she was expected (on short notice), to do training at other sites throughout the province. This was impossible with small children at home.

Because modesty is encouraged within the Cape Breton culture, trainers must too assume an unpretentious stance. Down-to-earth Cape Bretoners expect the same in return and are quick to put people in their place. At the same time, sessions on the interrelationship among communication, self-esteem, and self-concept are well accepted, especially in an area where even well educated, professionals seem reluctant to accept a compliment. Women in particular respond well to esteem-building exercises.

CONCLUSION

While a number of strategies outlined in this paper are similar to the tenets of good adult education, they are even more pertinent to the Cape Breton culture. Once the trainer sets the scene, Cape Breton participants expect to and are willing to participate, offer humour, and provide honest, often soul-searching self disclosure. They are wonderful to work with because they do work. In some ways, it's a facilitators' heaven, if the facilitator displays the right balance of confidence, humility, amusement, collaboration, and knowledge. Gaining an understanding of the cultural nuances and taking an experiential learning approach that incorporates a cognitive, affective, behaviourial learning approach can help facilitators create appealing, interactive sessions where the learning dynamics are keen.

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