Multicultural and crosscultural supplementation program 1991 National Project

Training supervisors for a multicultural workforce

Prepared by:
Mr Aris Aresti and Mrs Ilonka Guse-Brennfleck of Melbourne College of Textiles, and
Ms Kate Dempsey of Kate Dempsey & Associates.
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The Melbourne College of Textiles would like to thank Ms Kate Dempsey for her assistance with re-drafting the final report.
1 Background

A number of research projects recently have focussed on the training needs of managers and supervisors. They attempt to define the role of the supervisor, identify the skills of the supervisor and show how such skills may be taught in a formal learning setting.

The Industry Supervision Articulation Project (ISAP) presented by Moorabbin College of TAFE in June 1991 includes an analysis of the current skills used by supervisors and the existing supervision training programs.

The report finds supervisors have 19 key tasks and 162 associated skills. Survey respondents indicated that the role of the supervisor is changing, from a technical expert to a manager of other people's time and work output.

The report identified three skill groupings, and managers and supervisors rated their relative importance. Forty five per cent of respondents (the largest group) believed human relations skills were most important in a supervisor's job, ahead of technical and analytical skills.

Human relations skills consist of staff selection, communication, team cohesion, conflict resolution, discipline and so on. The nationalities of supervisors and their workforce were not noted in the report and virtually no mention was made of language or cultural barriers. Indeed respondents failed even to mention English as important on the job (in relation to training needs).

However, in a college research and evaluation program regarding the Supervision Certificate, the Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE presented a report in December 1991 which identified that non-English-speaking background (NESB) participants in the Supervision Certificate program have problems with oral work and need more attention than other participants.

In both reports, findings relating directly to the needs of NESB supervisors were very limited.

The Melbourne College of Textiles in conjunction with the National Project in Multicultural and Crosscultural Supplementary Programs have therefore carried out investigations into the specific training needs of:

- current and future supervisors from NESBs
- supervisors of NESB workers
The purpose of this research is primarily to assist TAFE curriculum designers, trainers and teachers, by making known the obstacles to training NESB participants in TAFE supervision courses; and how best to overcome these obstacles.

Hence, this research does not attempt to analyse the validity of curriculum in existing supervision programs. This has already been carried out by Moorabbin College of TAFE (1991) and Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE (1991). Instead it tries to identify the gap in TAFE training provision for supervision of NESB participants or supervisors of NESB workers.

To do so successfully, a number of case studies of NESB supervisors and native-speaking supervisors of NESB employees, company directors and training officers was undertaken. Each of the case studies gives examples, not only of language barriers at the workplace, but also of problems relating to cultural misunderstandings and the lack of knowledge of different cultures which impacts on workplace harmony.

The case studies show some methods of operating which are successful and some which are not. This report concurs in general with the findings of the ISAP report, that the most important skills of a supervisor are in human relations.

In phase one of the project, 15 companies were visited and a range of people within each company were interviewed. Three key problem areas were identified in relation to working with a multicultural workforce:

1. Communication: language barrier
2. Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes
3. Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers:

It was evident to the researchers that the above-mentioned areas had a considerable effect on the industry, particularly on human resource management, whether on the shop floor or at management level.

The three key problem areas are relevant both to solutions at the workplace and to improvement to TAFE supervision courses. Therefore this research not only looks at how industry has been able to resolve these issues on the shop floor, but also how these resolutions can be used in overcoming the same problems in TAFE courses.

The project has used these key problem areas as a springboard for its research and does not endeavour to offer a detailed account of them. Instead it uses case studies to
illustrate how these problem areas may impact on work performance and to give an overall picture, so that TAFE curriculum designers, trainers and teachers of supervision courses can familiarise themselves with these problems.

The report concludes that an 'ideal' supervisor is one who takes the time to understand his or her workforce as individuals, sees workers as the main asset of the company, introduces team building, encourages participation in a systematic way, and is sensitive to cultural differences. The 'ideal' supervisor also provides incentives to develop team work, encourages workers to speak for themselves and looks for both on-the-job and formal training opportunities. He or she has a pro-active approach and a positive attitude to planning and co-ordinating the work of others.

None of the case studies in this report achieves perfect success, in fact two supervisors felt no effort was required on their part. However, the more successful supervisors seemed to aspire to a similar ideal model, and worked hard to achieve it in a complex multicultural environment.
## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The methodology chosen is basically a case study technique. This decision came from a desire to achieve maximum results within the resources allocated to the project and to still meet the extensive objectives of the project.

The study was split into three phases to focus the research and allow for modifications to the methodology during data collection. Phase one was a preliminary investigation, phase two was a review of results and design for phase three. Phase three was the detailed case studies within several targeted firms.

### 2.2 Phase One

In phase one of the project it was decided to visit a range of companies to gain an idea of the variables involved and to help design the more detailed case studies. Ten companies were chosen for this preliminary investigation. The selection was based on the researchers' attempt to provide a cross-section of textiles, clothing and footwear (TCF) firms. Initial variables considered were: examples for each of the three industry sectors of textiles, clothing and footwear, companies of different size, companies with different product range, e.g. men's clothing/women's clothing, footwear components/footwear manufacture, and, of course, companies with NESB supervisors. Two non-TCF firms were also visited to give comparative information on NESB supervisors in other types of workplaces.

In the ten companies visited two production managers, five NESB supervisors, three English-speaking supervisors, three TAFE trainers and three past NESB students of the TAFE supervision course were all interviewed (see appendix for questionnaires).

After the preliminary investigation the collected data was analysed. The analysis aimed to identify key issues for focussing the detailed case studies.

It became evident that there were similar issues on the shop floor in all companies. All companies visited noted problems with involving workers in activities at the workplace, with trying to get instructions clearly understood and with disagreements between workers and supervisors, where a lack of understanding of another culture was apparent. The three TAFE trainers also expressed concern that the language barrier hindered the progress of NESB supervision students.

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In this instance the key issues identified were:

- Language barriers (to effective work relationships)
- Cultural barriers i.e. customs and attitudes (to effective work relationships)
- Language and cultural characteristics (that affect an individual's work involvement).

Once the key issues were identified an interview schedule was drawn up for phase three.

Six companies were selected for the case studies. Those interviewed for case study were additional to the group interviewed in phase one. Five of the case studies were from TCF industries and one from another manufacturing firm.

The interviews were conducted on site in the particular work areas of the personnel responding. This approach had the advantage of providing an extra sense of security for respondents, in that they feel more comfortable in familiar surrounds. This also allowed the interviewer to observe the work environment and other personnel whilst talking to each respondent. It provided the opportunity for the interviewer to observe the dynamics of relationships amongst workers, and between workers and supervisors.
3 Case studies*

3.1 Barbara's story – ‘Sometimes it's so frustrating’

The company

'Westgear' is a clothing factory in the inner city suburb of Collingwood. It employs 175 people (only four of whom are men). The factory makes T-shirts and knitwear.

The workforce

Six different nationalities are represented in Westgear's workforce. More than 70% of the workers are Vietnamese. There are also workers from China (10%), Italy (9%), Greece (5%), Turkey (3%) and Lebanon (1.5%).

The supervisor

Barbara is an Australian-born woman, 30 years old. She has nine years experience in the clothing industry. She has completed a TAFE clothing course and a 'train-the-trainer' course. She supervises all workers, with five leading hands each controlling a team of more than 30 people of various ethnic backgrounds.

Problem definition

Barbara believes that she tries hard to involve workers in decision making and makes every effort to have instructions clearly understood. But she admits that with so many workers of different nationalities the task is often frustrating.

1 Communication: language barrier

Barbara says that communication between supervisors and employees at her factory has proved a problem. She feels this is mainly due to differing levels of fluency in English. She says that whilst leading hands from non-English-speaking backgrounds have a 'relatively efficient' grasp of English, most NESB machine operators have what she calls 'survival standard' English.

* Please note that the company and personal names in the case studies have all been changed.

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Barbara asked one of the operators to carry a pile of garments from A to B. The Vietnamese operator smiled and nodded. When Barbara returned she found that the operator had not moved all the garments. Barbara asked, "Why have you only moved half those garments?" The operator said nothing, but simply looked baffled. Apart from lost production time, the operator felt confused and Barbara said, "It's so frustrating!"

2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

Barbara finds that building a two-way relationship with her trainees is difficult due to the large multicultural workforce.

Barbara's knowledge of the various attitudes, values and customs of her workers is limited and this can create barriers because of misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

Barbara explained and demonstrated a task to be done to one Asian operator. When she asked the operator whether she had understood the process she received a nod and a smile.

After this had occurred a number of times she thought that some of the Asian migrants in particular would not ask questions or criticise an authority. She concluded that nodding often could in fact mean 'No, I don't understand'.

3. Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

Barbara believed that her workers did not seem to want to be involved in discussions and meetings to resolve work-related problems.

She said that she found it hard to get them to talk about general work problems. To her, they also appear to be 'almost mechanical' when operating their machines, 'preferring to stick together' in their cultural group.

** It must be pointed out that this statement only reflects Barbara's opinion and not that of the research team. The smiles and nods may have been intended to convey willingness to be helpful, despite language problems.
It could be that the workers, whose English is limited, don’t speak up because they don’t wish to appear foolish in front of others. It could also be that workers from some countries are not used to the idea of participating at the workplace. These workers may well have come from a culture where it is frowned upon for workers on the shop floor to offer any suggestions.

1 Communication: language barrier

One solution to the language problem could be to divide the large number of trainees into smaller work teams so that Barbara could concentrate more on one team at a time.

If the team is of the same cultural background, the level of language proficiency of each worker is not so important because the instructions can be translated.

However, if there is a diverse range of cultural groups within a workforce another possibility could be to have small teams formed according to the level of language proficiency. This division would allow the supervisor to give instructions in a way that would be appropriate to the level of understanding of each team.

2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

It was through the process of trial and error that Barbara found what she believed to be the most effective way she could address her workers. This strategy could prove costly, both in terms of time lost and mistakes made through misunderstandings.

To avoid this type of ad hoc approach, supervisors should be made aware of cultural differences through in-house seminars or TAFE induction workshops. These would help them to select a more effective strategy. Such a seminar would use the expertise of teachers from various nationalities, who can draw out the implications of workplace misunderstandings and show the impact of cultural traits on the event.

3 Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

Barbara could use an interpreter to involve her workers in meetings or discussions on work-related issues. This would allow a person with little confidence in his or her English to be put at ease and to identify more clearly any barriers which the workers themselves may feel towards participation.
An in-house seminar or TAFE induction workshop could be held to discuss with management and supervisors the different attitudes in various cultures that may lead to non-participation. It would also be ideal to send workers to seminars that deal with issues such as team building and sharing of responsibility. Current factory work practices have changed from emphasising the individual to encouraging a team effort. Important concepts such as just-in-time and total quality management have also been introduced. If more workplace changes are to be implemented successfully, a team approach has to be taught not only to the workers, who may come from a culture where individual competition is encouraged, but also to management.

Evaluation of workplace-based solutions

1 Communication: language barrier

- Small training groups to better understand the needs and difficulties of trainees

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<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara would be able to know her trainees much better if trainee numbers were smaller.</td>
<td>A smaller training group could mean a decrease in production. The trainees, therefore, might have to work harder to maintain the same level of production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building confidence would need less time.</td>
<td>Management may object to these changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara would be able to give more time to her trainees if they were divided into smaller work teams.</td>
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- Engaging interpreters or co-workers speaking the same language

The idea of Barbara using interpreters to help with the different language levels would be ideal, for in most multicultural workforces there are usually interpreters.

A company may not have suitable interpreters in its workforce.
2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

In-house seminars or TAFE induction workshops on cultural traits affecting workplace communication would be good for supervisors and managers.

These seminars would address issues such as: workers having a say in workplace decisions, working in a team environment, and becoming more aware of each fellow worker's behaviour.

It would cost money and time. Management must fully support the seminars or any changes occurring at the workplace may be short lived.

3 Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

Barbara's interpreters would ease tensions and allow NESB employees to have their say.

In-house seminars for supervisors would increase their awareness of the different customs of their workers. A supervisor would be better able to handle these differences.

These seminars would not only point out cultural differences, but also give hints on instructing people who have language problems.

Barbara would be able to give more time to her trainees if they were divided into smaller work teams.

A company may not have suitable interpreters in its workforce.

It is costly for the company to educate its supervisors.
Summary of Barbara's approach

Barbara saw a connection between teamwork and improved production, so she had her workforce divided into production teams. She met regularly with team leaders and thought carefully about the structuring of teams.

She was able to identify problems in the teams associated with levels of language proficiency and cultural barriers to participation. She saw these affected the output of her workforce, but was unable to use any systematic approach to solving these problems. She simply tried to be consistent in her approach to all workers and found praise (rather than criticism) a good motivator.

3.2 Andros – 'Everything is understood'

The company

'Merino' textile company is a small firm making blankets in the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

The workforce

The company has ten workers on the shop floor. Four of these workers are women. Eight of the ten workers are from countries where English is not the primary language.

The supervisor

Andros is from Poland. He is 35 years old and has worked for Merino for nine years. He has had 'train-the-trainer' experience and his English has been assessed at about level 2+.

Problem definition

Andros confidently told the research team that no problems existed. He felt the tasks of the workers were straightforward and simple and so there was very little need for communication: he just demonstrated the task. It is interesting to note that Andros supervised two Australian-born workers and eight other workers, each from eight different countries (although three were Spanish-speaking). The level of English of those born overseas was, according to Andros, "Not good, but enough to understand instruction".

1 Communication: language barrier

For most of the time work-related communication between Andros and his workers, we were told, is clear as most of the instructions are repetitive.

According to Andros this is the case because over a period of time his workers have become familiar with the way he expects them to work and therefore his demands are 'understood'.

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2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

It was Andros' experience that when working with and instructing migrant workers they would always pretend to understand him because they did not want to offend him. They may also have been too embarrassed or even too scared to ask for a further explanation.

According to Andros' experience Asians tend not to criticise or interrupt someone in authority. We would like to point out here that this statement should not be generalised, as the reason for Andros' interpretation could be very specific to his workplace only.

3 Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

Andros did not consider this area to be a problem. "Sure, they go to (worker participation) meetings", he said. Since the researchers did not speak to the workers themselves, this statement is difficult to verify. However, some of Andros' comments tend to challenge his confident notion that workers feel involved in the workplace. He said, "We have meetings sometimes, but they are not important and anyway they would rather not give up their coffee time to go to a meeting".

1 Communication: language barrier

It is difficult to comment on strategies to overcome a language barrier when the supervisor feels that none exist. However the researchers were not as confident that no change was needed. For example, although there were signs (in English) above every machine, explaining how to feed material through to avoid wastage, the researchers saw larger amounts of material wastage at Merino's than at other similar factories. It is likely that further investigation would show that, despite Andros' view, improvements could be made at Merino's.

2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

Andros believed that communicating solely by demonstration was the most effective way to convey explanations and instructions to his employees. This was also less time consuming, in his view, than using verbal communication.

However, communicating by demonstration does present difficulties because of possible misinterpretation of supervisors' gestures which are not actually part of the
Evaluation of workplace-based solutions

1 Communication: language barrier

Engaging interpreters and co-workers speaking the same language.

Advantages

This would be ideal and would help the supervisor cope with differing language levels.

Disadvantages

A company may not have suitable interpreters in its workforce.

The supervisor is distanced from the employee if a third party is engaged as a translator.

2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

Instructing employees through demonstration.

The act of demonstrating would be seen as the 'common' language needed for differing language levels.

Disadvantages

The supervisor would be deprived of positive feedback where problems could be raised.

There would be too much loss of:

- supervisor's time
- worker's time
- company's production time.

It is often difficult to separate simple instruction gestures from those which are meant to show 'well done' or 'dangerous'. These gestures can be misunderstood by people from other cultures.

Summary of Andros' approach

Andros did not show the researchers that he had a sophisticated understanding of his workers. Although he conceded that some of his workers may be afraid to ask questions, he did not see any relationship between this and his own attitudes and behaviour. Nor did he seem to understand that the workers' lack of involvement had a negative impact on productivity in the workplace.
He felt things ran smoothly enough and saw no requirement for change.

### 3.3 Nicos – ‘A good supervisor must get to know his workers’

#### The company

‘Automach’ is a car assembly plant in the outer northern suburbs of Melbourne. It has a large workforce engaged in all aspects of automobile assembly.

#### The workforce

The whole company employs more than 2000 workers. Nicos is responsible for a team of 34 workers. There are five women (15%) in Nicos’ team. Thirteen different nationalities are represented in the team, 11 of which do not have English as their first language. Twenty per cent of the workers are Lebanese, 20% are Turkish and 15% are Vietnamese.

#### The supervisor

Nicos is a 45 year old Greek male. He has no formal training as a supervisor and has come up through the ranks from the shop floor. His English level is assessed as level 2.

#### Problem definition

With regard to the three problem areas studied Nicos felt that taking the time to understand his workers was most important. He believed that being himself a migrant from a non-English-speaking background, and being promoted from the shop floor, helped him to understand the needs of his team.

He admitted, however, that his method of trial and error with different cultural groups had sometimes led to confusion.

1. **Communication: language barrier**

   One day the Polish leading hand complained to Nicos that one of the workers, a Turkish man, was constantly leaving his machine to go to the toilet.

   The leading hand complained that the Turkish worker was disrespectful. When he asked for an explanation, the Turk replied, "I don't know". Nicos, who could speak some Turkish, approached the worker for an explanation.

   The Turkish worker told Nicos that he had mild food poisoning, but that he didn't have the English words to explain his frequent absences, and he was embarrassed by the reason.
In this case having the capacity to speak another language was clearly valuable. But Nicos also took the time to speak quietly with the Turkish worker and appreciate his embarrassment. Whereas the leading hand had assumed disrespect when probably none was intended.

2. Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes.

It was an occupational health and safety requirement that workers should always wear eye and ear protection. Management had complained that workers were neglecting this responsibility.

Nicos noticed in his section that it was the Greek, Italian and Turkish male workers who were not wearing the protection.

Bearing in mind his own experiences, he felt the reason was not laziness or neglect, but had more to do with notions of 'manliness' and the importance, especially in those cultures, of being seen not to shy away from danger.

Nicos explained his ideas to management and a different approach was taken when instructing workers to wear safety equipment.

In this instance, management was annoyed by workers neglecting their duty. When a more sensitive understanding of the cultural dimension was used, management agreed that simply ordering workers to wear protection was unlikely to succeed and a more educative approach was taken.

3 Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

In Nicos' view, co-operation between him and his workers, and his understanding of them, increased worker involvement. He believed he had been able to encourage his workers to take an active part in workplace meetings.

He assured workers that it is 'safe' to make suggestions; that their jobs are secure and ideas are welcome. He especially encouraged the quieter workers (usually the Vietnamese in Nicos' experience) to speak up.

When workers wanted an extra door put in at one end of the workshop, so they could come and go quickly for their smoke break, Nicos said, "Good idea, you raise it and I will support
you". He thereby gave them the opportunity to have their voices heard.

1 Communication: language barriers

One solution in combating the language barrier would be to engage in the practice of non-verbal communication. This particular practice would be most effective if the supervisor concerned was sensitive to the language problems of his or her workers.

2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

Nicos' experience had taught him that the use of diagrams was the most effective way to communicate explanations and instructions. The diagrams could then be related to the employees' workplace environment and a practical demonstration given.

3 Language and customs: hindering the involvement of workers

Once again, Nicos is not only sensitive to the language problem his workers face, but also to cultural issues. This has consequently helped him in dealing with his workers' attitudes. He is, therefore, able to encourage them to realise the benefits of attending workplace meetings and to not regard them as merely 'rest from work periods'.

Evaluation of workplace-based solutions

1 Communication: language barrier

Engaging in the practice of non-verbal communication.

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<tr>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
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<tr>
<td>This would be ideal and would unite a workforce of differing language levels.</td>
<td>Certain ethnic groups may take offence if body language is engaged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2 Multicultural problem: barriers created by lack of knowledge of customs and attitudes

Instructing employees through demonstration. This strategy may cause more problems when behaviour inappropriate to that culture is demonstrated. (See conclusion for an example.)

Trialling different instruction approaches and recording workers' responses.

3 Language and customs: hindering involvement of workers

The supervisor who is sensitive to cultural differences within a multicultural workforce, may find that this sensitivity brings him or her closer to the workers.

The supervisor who is sensitive to these differences earns the respect of his or her workers. This fosters confidence in the workers and may therefore lead to more effective work. Not all supervisors are sensitive to cultural differences. Taking time to understand cultural differences may be viewed by management as non-productive time.

Summary of Nicos' approach

Nicos believes the role of the supervisor is to encourage his or her workers. To do this successfully Nicos felt that the supervisor must make the effort to get to know, respect and understand them. He felt that coming up from the shop floor and being a migrant himself helped him to do this.

Nicos employed many tactics to gain the confidence of his workers and to encourage them. For example, and he regularly walked around the shop floor and talked to workers, he made the effort to learn a few words of other languages, he took the time to listen to and observe the interactions of his workers. When language presented a barrier he used diagrams to assist explanation.

He met his leading hands for 20 minutes every morning to go over problems. He encouraged workers to attend union and occupational health, safety and welfare meetings and he encouraged them to speak for themselves.
4 Further perspectives on culture at the workplace

4.1 Giggles on the shop floor - Who cracked a joke?

The company

This company, called 'Outback' makes camping equipment. It moved to new premises in the western suburbs of Melbourne two years ago. It is a young company, struggling to stay afloat in tough economic times.

The workforce

The company has 31 shopfloor workers. Twenty of these workers (64%) are women. There are 11 Australian workers (35%) and the remaining 20 workers come from 12 different countries, and all of them speak languages other than English.

The production manager

Brian is Australian, 27 years old and a friend of the company owner. He used to be a teacher.

Brian was very intrigued to observe how his employees reacted when under stress, and that the customs and attitudes of the various cultures of his workforce were very easily misinterpreted. He noted a number of times when his Philippino, Chinese and Turkish employees started to giggle when under stress.

The manager was informed of a delicate situation that involved his Turkish leading hand. Apparently she started to giggle when four of her workers presented her with a work-related problem. As the workers became more agitated and more annoyed, so the Turkish leading hand began to giggle more. As the situation became more intense, she could no longer control herself, much to the annoyance of her workers who simply could not see the joke.
On another occasion, at the same factory, the male Philippino office worker was met by several angry female workers who had a pay query. Just as the Turkish leading hand had giggled, as described in the previous example, so too did the Philippino office worker. Again the female workers were annoyed, as they felt that they had been very much insulted.

Subsequently an attempt was made by the production manager to explain to the Turkish leading hand and Philippino office worker that their giggling could be misinterpreted by others, who did not realise that they were under stress. He found it a very difficult task. He did not think to implement any program or training which might overcome the problem in a systematic way.

4.2 The workers are the problem

The company

This company 'JB Sportswear' is located in the inner northern suburbs of Melbourne. It makes sportswear for women.

The workforce

The company is a small one, with 15 workers on the shop floor. All the workers are women, three are Australian, six Greek, five Italian and one is Chinese.

The company owner and manager

Jim is Australian and 45 years old. He is the owner of the factory as well as its manager.

Jim had very clear ideas on who was to blame for any problems at the workplace.

When asked to comment on his employees' attitude to work, he replied that they were not contributing, as they "do not really feel for the company". He stated that they don't see themselves as Australians and therefore don't really care.

In relation to the issue of teamwork he thought that they refused to work as a team, but didn't give any reason why he believed that.

His discontent with his workforce became clear when he mentioned that most had taken up all their sick leave within the first six months of their employment.

These comments from Jim indicate his dissatisfaction with his workers, but also his inability to see the matter from the point of view of the workers.
He was unable to see beyond stereotypes and look at underlying problems which may have resulted in a lack of team work and time lost through sick leave. He was also unable to see that his own attitude may have had some impact on the situation.

This situation is contrasted with Nicos who sees workers in a much more subtle context than Jim does. Nicos' own understanding of different cultural backgrounds is a guide to the approach he uses.

This is in stark contrast to Jim's lack of understanding. Jim does not want to change and believes if anyone is to change it has to be his workers, for they are the ones with the 'problem'.

It is clear that the NESB workers' own cultural backgrounds and positions in the workforce may make them react in very different ways from what the manager expects of them.

The question to ask here is:

How well does the manager know his workers and their reasons for such behaviour? Clearly a lesson may be learnt here from the case study of Nicos at Automach, or of Vito's approach at 'Eze-shoe'.

4.3 A story of success

The company

'Eze-shoe' footwear company is located in the south-eastern suburb of Clayton.

The workforce

There are 30 workers on the shop floor of this factory. Thirty six per cent of the workers are Australian, 16 of the workers (53%) are women. Apart from Australians, the company has eight nationalities represented amongst its workforce – all from non-English-speaking countries.

The training manager

Vito is in his 50s and he is Hungarian. He has no formal training or qualifications, but has come up through the ranks from the shop floor.

Vito's company had experienced similar problems to those of Jim in the previous example. However Vito's company decided that 'training' was the solution. Vito arranged for Eze-shoe's management team to attend a number of TAFE training courses.

The training mainly involved topics such as human resource management and team building.
Ese-shoe holds the view that the workers are the company's main asset, and so to build on this asset a number of workshops were conducted for the workers, as management wanted to introduce team building and team work.

During teamwork sessions supervisors stressed the point with the workers "If you don't know, it is okay to ask".

Workers, despite their language problems, became more confident as these workshops were conducted regularly. They then started to discuss issues freely with their supervisor and the monthly newsletter published the suggestions made by the workers. Workers also were rewarded with a doubling of their week's wage, plus an annual bonus if they increased their productivity. This incentive motivated more participation and team work.

It would have been easy for the training manager to have followed the strategy used by Jim and simply blame his workforce and so remain ignorant of the obvious problems his workers faced.

Vito, the training manager, has taken the opposite point of view and has started from the same premise as that used by Nicos in case study 3.3. Workers were seen as an asset, and a strategy developed on the basis of that premise.

We can, therefore, conclude that both Nicos and Vito have cared enough to encourage confidence within their workforce, so that the reasons behind problems, such as attitude to work, may be drawn out.

### Summary of all case study approaches

What purpose have the case studies in this report served and what can industry, government bodies and TAFE colleges learn from them?

The case studies reflect, in microcosm, the range of attitudes and experiences which TAFE teachers are likely to encounter when providing supervision training.

On the one hand we have seen that Jim, the company manager at JB Sportswear and Andros, the supervisor at Merino's, did not express any deep understanding of issues confronting their workforce. They both saw any change as either unlikely or undesirable.

They showed no sense of their own part in the interaction with workers, had no positive strategies for improvement and no desire to try to understand or respect their workers as individuals.

Barbara, in the first case study and Brian, the production manager at Outback, saw the value of teamwork and
encouragement of workers, but were still struggling with trial and error solutions to problems as they arose on the shop floor.

Nicos also used trial and error methods of problem solving, but he brought a more sophisticated approach to the understanding of the problems and implemented regular team meetings in order to adopt a more pro-active approach to the success of his teams.

A pro-active approach would seem to be the ideal. Both Nicos and Vito saw workers as the company's most valuable asset. They focussed on a positive, team-building approach. They would most likely concur with the Industry Supervision Articulation Project (1991) that the most important functions of a supervisor are communication, team building, cohesion and conflict resolution.

In both Nicos' and Vitos' cases team building was expressly adopted and promoted as a priority company goal. In Vito's case, in particular, it was given real substance with policies of openness, and with time and effort directed to developing group cohesion, communication and participation.

In the pro-active approach, management made it known that people were expected to communicate their views, and that supervisors and management would listen and respond. This incentive to participate supported the invitation to contribute and gave encouragement to other workers.

When income benefits were provided as reward for productivity improvements, this was a further concrete incentive to co-operation and team building.

This coherent and comprehensive package of positive measures succeeded where negative, partial or rhetorical approaches failed.
5 Conclusions

5.1 From the preliminary investigation

It was found when interviewing companies during phase one, that the majority of current NESB supervisors had no formal supervision training but became supervisors as a result of long years of employment with the company. When asked about attending supervision training courses, NESB supervisors indicated that technical language training, with terminology relevant to their industry, would be a priority.

In particular newly arrived NESB supervisors believed that they had all the practical skills necessary to perform the duties of a supervisor, but had insufficient command of the English language.

It was found that eight of the 15 companies wanted to implement the idea of team work. However most found it to be very difficult, giving as the main reason that people do not speak the same language. The issue of a simple cultural difference and therefore variations in attitude or perception was not taken into account. This has affected most companies’ operations in terms of productivity.

In 1989, the National Labour Consultative Council, produced a handbook called Managing a Multicultural Workforce. The handbook suggests that sound personnel practices, and cooperation between workers and management, can lead to lower staff turnover and increased productivity. These are especially important, the handbook says, in the complex environment of a multicultural workplace.

The NESB supervisor experiences the same problems in communicating instructions as the supervisor of NESB workers when the language of instruction is English.

The task of communicating to a multicultural workforce is complex, regardless of the language spoken by the supervisor.

It was also found in this study that communication breakdown can occur if the supervisor is not aware of certain customs and attitudes of one particular group of workers.

As mentioned above, the attitude to authority, the questioning or criticising of work practices or the experience of working as a team might vary from culture to culture. It cannot, therefore, simply be assumed that workers who do not adapt to Australian concepts are merely ‘lazy or don’t care’.

This fact is corroborated by the case of Australian Consolidated Industries (in Krupinski and Berry, 1980) which
found success with including ‘ethnic relations’ training in on-the-job training for foremen.

The supervisor was ‘encouraged to check his own behaviour and beliefs to assess whether they were conducive to an effective work environment’ (p. 8).

5.2 From detailed case studies

Language barrier

From the observations made and the individual case studies it becomes apparent that the three key problem areas identified are handled in a range of ways.

The obvious problem of communication difficulties due to non-English-speaking background was commonly recognised in all case studies, but in most cases no formal steps were taken to rectify the existing situation.

The ‘solutions’ employed to cope with a multicultural, multi-lingual workforce were often more or less ‘band-aid’ measures, such as using other workers as interpreters or explaining the task slowly to small groups.

Even the use of non-verbal communication through demonstrations and graphic explanations cannot be considered a long-term solution. At the same time these non-verbal techniques often provided a useful short-term solution.

It was clear that the problem worsens if the supervisor is not able to express the instruction in clear, plain English, to assist those with limited English to understand. This is so regardless of whether the supervisor is a native speaker or a NESB supervisor.

However, the short-term solutions used on the shop floor are inadequate in a formal training situation.

For example, Nicos (case study 3)) tended to have a good rapport with his workers, but discovered appropriate behaviour only by trial and error. Unfortunately, Nicos told the researchers, on one occasion his friendliness and helpfulness was misinterpreted by two Philippino female workers as harassment. They complained to the leading hand and a meeting was held to untangle the cultural confusion. The negative results that occur with trial and error can be overcome with more formal instruction on cultural issues.

Multicultural issues

As the case studies illustrate, Barbara, Andros and Nicos were partly aware of the fact that, alongside the language barrier are various cultural barriers or misunderstandings. In particular Barbara and Nicos used their intuition to handle this kind of problem. Both operated on a more or less trial and error basis to find out which strategy would be most suitable to make themselves understood. Although they seem
to have succeeded in their task, it was with a lot of effort and was also very time consuming. At times their methods led to negative results which caused even greater confusion.

This study leads to the conclusion that management and supervisors in multicultural workplaces must understand broad multicultural issues in order to enhance communication in the workplace and to promote teamwork. Management and supervisors need to have specific information about the customs, attitudes, and common forms of verbal and non-verbal expression of the ethnic groups which they are employing or supervising.

The best ways to provide this information would seem to be:

1 The development of a module on crosscultural communication, which could be used as part of any appropriate TAFE course, in particular in the TAFE Supervision Course. This module would include examples of various workplace situations and the different interpretations of them made by workers of varied backgrounds.

   The function of such a module in a supervision course would ensure that not only the lecturer or trainer, but the participants too (whether NESB or native speakers) would be able to familiarise themselves with the customs of other cultures represented at their workplace.

   The module should go further and prepare students in the course for the fact that Vietnamese people may react differently from Chinese, and indeed individual Chinese people may react differently from others of the same culture.

   As John Bottomley in his report on *Occupational Health and Safety Information for NESB Workers* (1989) writes, ‘There must be a recognition that the nature of ethnic groups differ in important ways. These differences are not only from cultural, linguistic, religious or national characteristics, but also in terms of class and their location as a group in the labour market’ (p. 49).

2 The production of a series of training aids, e.g. videos, showing examples of communication problems occurring in the workplace, due to a cultural misunderstanding.

   Course participants would analyse and discuss each case, which, in connection with the module, would enhance the understanding of this problem and would be transferable to their workplace.
In getting a message across to a multicultural workforce, many other researchers (for example, Bottomley 1989) emphasise the need for face-to-face presentation of information and simulated work situations for people to work through and resolve. Too often emphasis is on written information, which is complex and in English only.

Kraft (in Krupinski, 1980) introduced an on-the-job English course and handbook in both Greek and English. Audio-visual material accompanied the handbook. A decrease in labour turnover was noted following introduction of the course.
6 Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations to trainers and teachers in TAFE supervision course 'Tips for the Trainer'

In a TAFE supervision course the multicultural workforce is usually represented as a microcosm of the workplace; that is, usually half the class is from a non-English-speaking background. To solve the language problem in this set up it is recommended that:

1 The lecturer/trainer uses group activities, mixing the groups so that they contain mixed abilities in terms of the English language. The aim of this approach is to promote the co-operation of the native speaker to support the less able participant to express him/herself. In a formal learning situation, a mixed language ability group may also engender a sense of team work.

2 It is also recommended that the lecturer/trainer includes reading/writing activities (possibly in the form of an assignment) to give NESB participants who feel they are orally 'weak' the opportunity to work at their own pace and prepare at home.

3 Lecturers/trainers should also allow NESB participants to tape the sessions to further their oral comprehension.

4 Provision should be made for part of the course to be carried out in the workplace in order for participants to be able to relate to issues arising in the workplace. This would also allow the strategy of demonstration to be implemented as a teaching mode.

This report has shown that there is a need for both industry (i.e. management, supervisors) and TAFE curriculum designers, trainers and teachers to be aware of the cultural barriers that exist in the multicultural workforce and the multicultural student trainee population. The outcome of this project has shown the need for a detailed Tips for the Trainer booklet to be produced.

Further research could, therefore, look into problems that create cultural barriers and show what the most effective training strategies would be to overcome them. Further research could also inform and advise supervisors and TAFE teachers of the different attitudes of the various cultures.

The aims of the research might be to investigate the most common problem areas that result in 'cultural barriers' within industry (management, supervisors, employees) and TAFE colleges.
Documenting the different customs and attitudes of the various cultures could also be an important aim of the research.

In order to achieve these aims an investigation into the multicultural composition of the various industries would need to be carried out.

The outcomes for such a project or projects could see the development of a detailed booklet which would outline the relevant issues on the various ethnic backgrounds.

A training video could accompany the booklet.

There may also be a need for ‘in-house seminars’ provided by TAFE colleges, in order to inform and advise trainers and teachers.

6.2 Further research

It would be beneficial to the Supervision Certificate and other TAFE courses to undertake further research in the following directions.

1 English for supervisors
   Research is needed into specific language requirements of supervisors of a multicultural workforce.

   The linguistic areas to be focussed on would be:
   - instructing
   - appraising
   - paraphrasing
   - glossary of technical terms relevant for a specific workplace or industry.

   Language material specifically covering the above mentioned areas should be developed and compiled as a module. Participants would receive a workbook containing English language exercises and a glossary.

2 Crosscultural communication
   Extensive research could be undertaken to compile a ‘catalogue’ of typical cultural traits of various ethnic groups.

   Such research could be beneficial to trainers in TAFE in general, if the results were disseminated in a readily understandable form.

3 Training videos
   The co-operation of various companies and workers would be needed, to make shopfloor scenarios as authentic as possible. However, further research on crosscultural communication may need to precede the development of training videos.
Appendix I

Bibliography


Northern Metropolitan College of TAFE Research and Development Department 1991, *Certificate in Supervision/Case Study*.
Appendix II

Companies visited

Aero Clothing Company (Clothing)
571 Victoria Street
Abbotsford 3067

Australian Defence Industries Ltd (Clothing)
Clothing Division
Coburg Facility
14 Gaffney Street
Coburg 3058

Australian Dyeing Company (Dyeworks)
Synthetic Dyeeworks Industries Pty Ltd
169 Noone Street
Clifton Hill 3068

EMMART Australia Pty Ltd
PO Box 50
Thomastown 3074

Ford Motor Company of Australia Ltd (Cars)
Assembly Plant 1
1727 Sydney Road
Campbellfield 3061

Hilton Hosiery Company Ltd (Hosiery)
23-49 Maffra Street
Coolaroo
Broadmeadows 3047

Kortex Australia (Holdings) Ltd (Clothing)
135 Nicholson Street
East Brunswick 3057

Masons Boutique Pty Ltd (Jackets)
112 High Street
Northcote 3070

Outgear Down to Earth Products (Canvas and synthetic products)
11 Mephan Street
Footscray 3001

Pacemaker Sportswear Pty Ltd (Men's wear)
731 Heidelberg Road
Fairfield 3078

J Robins Pty Ltd (Footwear)
13-19 Coora Road
Huntingdale 3166

P & G Sole Cutters & Distributors (Soles)
147 Victoria Street
Brunswick 3056

St Albans Textiles Company Pty Ltd (Mohair products)
44 Hargreaves Street
Huntingdale 3166

A H Willis Footwear (Footwear)
45-47 Hotham Street
Collingwood 3166

Yakka Pty Ltd (Clothing)
26 William Street
Broadmeadows 3047

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Appendix III

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Appendix III

Questionnaires

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TRAINING NEEDS OF 2ND LANGUAGE SPEAKING SUPERVISORS

TRAINER'S QUESTIONNAIRE

Company/College ________________________________

Position _____________________________________

Population make-up ______________________________
(% of migrants, number of language groups, languages)

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

Description of supervisor training

Where _________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

SUPERVISORS

* List five main differences you find between 2nd language speaking supervisors and 1st language speaking supervisors:

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

* Does the course make allowances in these differences?

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

(1)
• What do you perceive to be the learning needs of 2nd language speaking supervisors in training as distinct from 1st language speaking supervisors?

• Is duration long enough to enhance the needs of 2nd language speaking supervisor students?

• Is the teaching material (print/language) pitched at the appropriate level for 2nd language speaking supervisor students?

• In terms of delivery mode, tick what is appropriate to the 2nd language speaking supervisor students:
  
  one-to-one  seminar
  small group  self pace
  lecture  informal discussion
  workshop  teacher directed

• From your teaching, state what type of delivery mode is beyond the capabilities of 2nd language speaking supervisor students:

(2)
In terms of participation expectations, tick what is appropriate to the 2nd language speaking supervisor students:

- note taking
- blackboard/overhead projection
- reading
- dictation
- listening
- discussion
- homework
- oral presentation
- essay/assignment writing
- reading texts/notes
- research

From your teaching, state what type of participation expectation is beyond the capabilities of 2nd language speaking supervisor students:

- What time do students prefer to attend classes?
  - day: am/pm
  - evening
  - work time
  - other

Is the course flexible in terms of time?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Current work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### COURSE

* Do you find the course easy, difficult, fair?

Comment:

---

* Is it helping with your job?

**How?**

---

* Is it making you understand the role of supervisor? **YES** **NO**

* Is there a difference in how a supervisor works in your country/other country to the way they work in Australia? **YES** **NO**

**What?**

---

(1)

---

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LEARNING

* Do you like your class?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

* Are you learning new things?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

* What have you learnt best?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Why? _____________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

* In class, how do you get your information?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

* Do you understand what the teachers say in class? YES NO

If not, why? __________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
• How do you find the reading of the PRINT of your learning materials?

(Please circle)

easy to read hard to read adequate

• How do you find the language of your learning materials?

(Please circle)

hard to understand easy to understand adequate

• Are there times in class when asked to do something, you feel uncomfortable?

YES NO

If YES, when? ____________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

• How can the teacher help you feel comfortable?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

• Do you like the teacher's teaching style? YES NO

If NO, why? ____________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

• How do you like to learn?

(Please circle)

one-to-one small groups class

any other? ____________________________________________

(3)

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ASSESSMENT

* On a scale from 1 - 10 what would your score:

I know a lot more now than when I started the course

I feel confident about a supervisor's role

* Do you think there were aspects that should have been covered on the course, but weren't?

YES  NO

If YES, what? __________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

* Do you think you were given the opportunity to show your teachers what you know?

YES  NO

If YES, what? __________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

* Did you experience any difficulty in the reading of the course?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

* Would you prefer (prompts)? __________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

* Did you experience any difficulty in the writing of the course?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________
* Would you prefer (prompts)?

* What part of training has helped you to be a supervisor. 
(Please circle)

  content of the course
  confidence gained through contact

  managing behaviour
  relationship with employees

* In what way(s) has the course made a difference to how you do your job?

* Any other comments?

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TAFE SUPERVISION COURSES FOR NESB SUPERVISORS/SUPERVISORS OF NESB WORKERS

SUPERVISOR'S QUESTIONNAIRE

This survey is being conducted to ascertain the training of NESB workers in TCF supervision training. To assist this investigation can you please answer the following questions? If you wish this information can be treated anonymously.

1 Company: ____________________________________________________________

2 To which of the industries do you belong?

(Please circle)

TCF NON-TCF AUTOMOTIVE OTHER

Specify your product: ____________________________________________________

3 Country of origin? _____________________________________________________

4 How long have you worked for the company? ______________________________

5 How long have you been a supervisor? _________________________________

6 How did you come to be a supervisor? _________________________________

7 Did you have formal training YES NO

8 What do you think makes a good supervisor?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

9 Do differences in language cause differences in how people do things?

Give examples:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

(1)
10 Do you use an interpreter to help you explain to NESB workers their job instructions?  
YES  NO

11 What other strategies do you use when there are difficulties with language?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

12 In what ways can companies/TAFE colleges help?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

13 How has your knowledge of cultures helped you in your role as supervisor?

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

14 Do differences in customs/attitudes cause differences in how people do things?  
Give examples:

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________

(2)

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• What strategies do you use when there are differences in customs/attitudes? List them:


16 How do you think companies and TAFE colleges can help?


17 Are your workers encouraged to be involved in work activities such as union/OH&S meetings? 
YES 
NO

18 How are they encouraged? Please list strategies:


19 What have been the main obstacles in NESB workers not involving themselves in such work activities? Please list:


(3)
20 How do you think companies and TAFE colleges help to alleviate this problem? Please specify: